

North Somerset Council 2025 Bus-User Forum

May 2025

Document purpose

This document:

- Provides a record of:
 - the questions raised by residents that were addressed by North Somerset Council and First Bus representatives, either verbally or in the chat function
 - the responses and suggestions provided by residents through the services prioritisation activity.
- Notes actions that North Somerset Council has committed to take in response to forum feedback.

For a record of the presentations shared in our Bus Forums you can watch the recording on our website.

Promotions, communications, and branding:

Engage NHS, Weston College, Bristol Uni, Somerset County Council, Stagecoach, National Express, and Weston Hospital in the discussion and invite them to participate in the bus forums.

North Somerset Council:

We actively engage with key stakeholders including the NHS, Weston College, University of Bristol, Somerset County Council, and active bus operators in North Somerset, and invite them to participate in our bus forums to ensure their input helps shape local services.

A coordinated approach from North Somerset Council is needed for Weston's development and economic regeneration, including initiatives such as night buses and train services to support the local economy.

North Somerset Council:

North Somerset Council is taking a coordinated approach to Weston's development and economic regeneration. This includes services such as night bus services (X14) and improved train connections to support access to employment, education, and the local economy.

There should be broader promotion and awareness of cross-operator tickets, such as the Avon Rider, to ensure more people know about these options.



North Somerset Council:

We are working to increase promotion and awareness of cross-operator tickets, such as the Avon Rider and PlusBus, to ensure more passengers are aware of these convenient travel options.

Paper timetables and leaflets needed.**North Somerset Council:**

New guides have been produced to provide up-to-date information and maps.

Badgerline branding**North Somerset Council:**

North Somerset Council has taken the lead on this work. A commercial branding strategy is in place to align all materials under the regional 'West' brand however, this approach still requires agreement and funding to proceed.

Bus stops, shelters, information boards and hubs:**Is there still a temporary bus stop on Alfred Street?****North Somerset Council:**

There is an official bus stop on Alfred Street which will remain in its current location.

Make bus stops more attractive and accessible, with real-time information screens to support hearing and visually impaired passengers; involve Disabled Access Groups.**North Somerset Council:**

As part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan, over 150 priority bus stops and shelters are currently being upgraded in North Somerset. The improvements vary depending on the type of shelter or stop, with some including extra space for wheelchairs, mobility scooters, and pushchairs, high-contrast Real Time Information displays and text-to-speech announcements to support visually impaired passengers. Bench-style seating with armrests (where space allows) and improved visibility are also included, with shelters positioned to face the road along with enhanced signage and layouts to ensure ease of use for all passengers. We have also been working with the Disabled Access Group to ensure these upgrades meet the needs of all users.

Prioritise the development of integrated transport hubs, including facilities that allow people to access bus and rail services

North Somerset Council:

We are prioritising the development of transport hubs in North Somerset, offering passengers more travel options. These hubs will feature improved waiting areas, essential facilities, and local information. Cycling facilities could include cycle stands, maintenance stations, and potentially secure cycle lockers, supporting easy connections between bus, rail, and active travel modes.

Better maintenance of bus stops and shelters

North Somerset Council:

A maintenance provision is already in place to ensure bus stops and shelters are properly maintained.

Enhanced interchange with toilets and enclosed waiting room in Weston

North Somerset Council:

We are exploring potential funding opportunities to further improve the Weston Interchange.

Bus flags needed on the side of Atlantic Road heading east. They were removed for one way loop 5, so people are still parking in the bus cages on those stops.

North Somerset Council:

As part of our Rebranding Project, the bus flag was reinstalled, and no-parking clearway plates were installed on both sides of the road to ensure that no vehicles park within the bus cages at this location.

All bus stops should have RTI but retain paper timetables

North Somerset Council:

We are rolling out over 100 E-Ink displays, using an evidence-based approach based on patronage data to identify the most suitable solution for each stop. Due to staff time and reduced budgets, we're unable to also retain paper timetables at all stops.

Bus fares and ticketing:

Reduce council subsidy for the fare cap and encourage the government to introduce fare increases gradually at a national level

North Somerset Council:

The government is balancing the implementation of a national fare cap with local funding needs and is leading this strategy. Bus subsidies remain significantly more cost-effective than those for other modes of transport.

Develop attractive multi-modal ticketing options to make travel between buses, trains, and other transport modes more convenient

North Somerset Council:

A national project (project Coral) will be implementing these over the next 24 months, and we are working with partners to introduce this locally as soon as possible. Please note that regional bus and train tickets, known as 'PlusBus' is already available, which is a discounted bus pass that can be added to a train ticket for unlimited bus travel in a specific area.

Government and local councils should provide full funding for concessionary travel passes

North Somerset Council:

The council is legally required to provide full funding and already exceeds national standards by offering extended travel entitlement hours. However, the current funding formulas need to be updated to reflect the national fare cap and demographic changes since the pandemic.

Introduce a small fare for bus pass users to reduce the cost of this scheme to the council

North Somerset Council:

Legislation prohibits this unless the service is considered an amenity-based service, such as access to an airport or demand-responsive transport.

The government has set a national fare cap, but with bus operating costs having increased by 50% due to inflation over the past five years, it is essential to balance grant funding with ticket prices.

Planning and delivery of bus services

Reductions in rural bus services would have the greatest impact on older, isolated residents – bus provision is a more affordable way to keep people connected than alternatives like rehoming

North Somerset Council:

The council recognises the importance of providing services to all communities while balancing cost considerations with passenger demand.

Maintain a consistent, stable network; avoid frequent changes (every 6 months)

North Somerset Council:

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the network, requiring us to work carefully and influence operators to balance finances, staffing, and resources to restore a sustainable and reliable service. This has necessitated an unusually high level of change, which operators are looking to reduce change and boost passenger confidence. However, for the services we support, we remain dependent on external funding and overall network stability.

Prioritise key routes: X1, X4, X7, 7, 9, X11

North Somerset Council:

The West of England has a strategy to support this, and we have worked to successfully deliver on it.

Maintain or reinstate services to Long Ashton, Yatton, Claverham, and Weston villages

North Somerset Council:

We have been able to increase frequency and expand coverage in many of these areas; however, some services remain at risk and are unsustainable due to low patronage.

Retain school bus services and prioritise access to schools.

North Somerset Council:

This is a key part of our policy, and we have significantly improved access to education wherever possible. Routes such as the 126, X5, and 125 are good examples of this.

Ensure rural areas and elderly/less able passengers remain connected.

North Somerset Council:

The council acknowledges the need to serve all communities while carefully balancing costs with passenger demand for the services we support. For other routes, we try to influence operators to encourage these connected services.

Airport, University and employment-focused services suggested.

North Somerset Council:

In partnership with the airport and university, we are working to introduce improved coverage, with the 126 route being a recent example of North Somerset Council influence, actions and commitments.

Route specific feedback

X1: High priority; double-decker preferred; turn-up-and-go frequency; survey patronage; ensure connections at Backwell, Long Ashton, and Hotwells for hospitals and employment.

North Somerset Council:

The X1 service primarily operates with Zebra double-decker buses, with almost all journeys using double-deck vehicles. The service runs at a high frequency to match demand, reflecting both the high patronage and the length of the journey.

X4: Include screens for disabled space info.

North Somerset Council:

The Zebra buses include an information screen facing passengers with disabilities, and operators intend for this to become the standard across the fleet.

X7 / X7a: Direct A370 service; reinstate service through Long Ashton; balance Sunday service across weekend; weekday frequency improvements suggested.

North Somerset Council:

In response to public feedback, the X7 service now includes stops in Long Ashton.

Route 7: reinstate stops at Boulevard/Seafront; Locking Parklands access; improve timetable coordination; consider double-decker buses.

North Somerset Council:

The Route 7 service was adjusted to provide a more direct route for most users and to keep delivery costs manageable. To reduce the impact of these changes, Route 9 has been rerouted to cover Weston Seafront and The Boulevard stops, and the Westlink zone has been extended to include these locations. Route 7 typically operates with double-decker buses.

Route 9: Maintain later journeys in Weston; hail-and-ride appreciated; two-way stops needed.

North Somerset Council:

Bus stop flags have now been installed in both directions. The timetable gets reviewed ahead of the April 2026 service changes, although any adjustments will depend on passenger usage and available funding.

X11: Maintain service; link to Worle interchange and X1; higher frequency desired.

North Somerset Council:

The service has been maintained, and operators will review the proposed changes ahead of the April 2026 service updates.

Service frequency and coverage

Reduce frequency only on marginal services (e.g., X6/X7 off-peak).

North Somerset Council:

We will work with First Bus to identify where services can be adjusted to improve efficiency.

Extend evening/night services and late journeys for key routes.

North Somerset Council:

The X14 service has been operating on Friday and Saturday evenings since April. We are continuing discussions with First Bus to explore the possibility of adding further services.

Avoid reducing coverage in under-served areas.

North Somerset Council:

To maintain coverage in under-served areas, demand-responsive services such as WESTlink are being considered for rural locations or routes with lower passenger demand.

Smaller buses/minibuses on low-patronage routes preferred for cost efficiency.

North Somerset Council:

Although smaller vehicles might seem more cost-efficient, the savings are minimal compared to larger buses, which provide greater flexibility when passenger numbers are higher. For example, the Service 9 bus is also used on Service 1s, which requires a larger vehicle to transport schoolchildren.

Bus infrastructure and reliability

Improve reliability and punctuality across all routes. GPS traffic light recognition for buses suggested.

North Somerset Council:

We have been working closely with key partners to improve the traffic light system, giving buses priority and enhancing reliability and punctuality. This is a direct outcome of investment through the Bus Service Improvement Plan. We also hold regular meetings with bus operators to identify specific reliability issues and explore ways to address them.

Real-time information displays must reflect actual service.

North Somerset Council:

We are currently rolling out new E-Ink displays at the updated shelters, which provide real-time information as well as general timetable details. We are also exploring ways to improve the system to more accurately reflect cancellations and delays, in collaboration with real-time providers, bus operators, and other local authorities.

Avoid overcrowding at stops; stagger arrivals to reduce congestion.

North Somerset Council:

First Bus strives to minimise overcrowding at bus stops, although this can be challenging on busy routes.

Funding and commercial considerations

Reduce funding for high-frequency services that should operate commercially.

North Somerset Council:

With the anticipated reduction in government funding from April 2026, North Somerset Council is in discussions with First Bus about which service frequencies can be operated commercially. The council will need to carefully assess and prioritise funding allocations.

Collaborate with local businesses, hospitals, airports, and Town/Parish Councils to support services.

North Somerset Council:

The U2 service operates under a University of Bristol contract, and we have partnered with them to extend the route to Weston from this September. We also

work closely with Bristol Airport to ensure they provide suitable services that meet passenger needs.

Encourage more diversified bus market and community transport to supplement services.

North Somerset Council:

We are exploring ways to integrate community transport providers into the public transport network, for example through the West Local initiative. Regarding the wider bus market, we will ensure all operators are informed about the upcoming tender process ahead of April 2026.

Accessibility

Monitor and address vehicles parking in lay-bys and bus stops to prevent obstruction.

North Somerset Council:

Civil Enforcement Officers perform regular patrols within North Somerset and will adjust patrols based on customer feedback to focus on repeated problem areas. Vehicles parking in contravention of the regulations could receive a PCN.

Improve accessibility at Worle High Street and other key stops.

North Somerset Council:

There are plans in place to improve accessibility and safety on Worle High Street, including upgrading pedestrian crossing points throughout the High Street, introducing a 20mph speed limit and adding a new pedestrian crossing on Station Road.

New electric buses should ensure adequate space for buggies and wheelchairs and should include a 'bus is stopping' sign on the lower deck for safety and accessibility.

North Somerset Council:

The wheelchair bay on the new electric buses is the same size as on older, non-electric buses, though the space may feel different due to fixed seating opposite the bay rather than fold-down seats. By law, all buses built since 2014 are required to have audio announcements and screens displaying the next stop and destination. From October 2026, this requirement will extend to older buses as well. Most First Bus services in North Somerset already have these features.

Disability awareness training for staff.

North Somerset Council:

We will raise this matter with our bus operators to ensure staff receive appropriate disability awareness training.

Environment and sustainability

Promote electric buses; expand fleet to attract passengers.

North Somerset Council:

The addition of more electric buses depends on the availability of government funding and operators.

Consider climate impacts and reduce reliance on cars.

North Somerset Council:

We are committed to reducing climate impacts by encouraging the use of public transport and other sustainable travel options, helping to decrease reliance on private cars.

Passenger experience and information

Improve information at interchanges, e.g., Weston-super-Mare, including paper and electronic timetables. Maintain a simple, easy-to-understand network with good interchange.

North Somerset Council:

We are planning to create four transport hubs in North Somerset: Portishead, Clevedon, Nailsea, and an upgrade to Worle Interchange in Weston-super-Mare. These hubs will provide access to multiple types of transport, enhance the waiting environment with essential facilities and local information, and act as community focal points that make public spaces more attractive and boost town centres.

Designed to encourage sustainable and active travel such as walking, cycling, wheeling, and using buses, each hub will feature high-quality bus shelters, seating, real-time information displays, cycle parking, and landscaping, tailored to the needs of each town.

Offer an alternative to car travel and support retail, healthcare, education, and night-time economy access.

North Somerset Council:

The X14 service has been running on Friday and Saturday evenings since April to provide an alternative to car travel. We are continuing discussions with First Bus to explore options for additional evening services to support access to retail, healthcare, education, and the night-time economy.