

Southampton Accessibility Forum

Minutes from 12th July 2023

Attending:

- Councillor Eamonn Keogh – Forum Chair, Cabinet Member for Transport at Southampton City Council
- Ruth Magennis - Project Lead for Communities, Sustainable Transport, Southampton City Council
- Dale Hardstaff - Transport Planner, Transport, Southampton City Council
- Emma Baker – Strategic Transport Planner, Southampton City Council
- Alex Iles – Representing Mencap, supporting people with learning disabilities and their carers
- Barbara Hancock - Harefield Bus Campaign
- Jen Davies – Harefield Bus Campaign and visually impaired resident
- Iain Loynes – Chief Executive of SPECTRUM
- David Livermore - campaigning for better access in countryside and city as part of Spectrum.
- Jackie Powers - Chief Exec of Southampton Sight
- Jemma Brown – Southampton resident, disability advocate and campaigner
- John Sanders - Southampton Heritage Federation
- Lyn Brayshaw - Chair of Southampton Cycling Campaign.
- Natalie Martin - representing Sustrans, the charity making it easier for people to walk and wheel.
- Joanna Sparks – Rehabilitation Vision Specialist for Southampton City Council and Solent NHS
- Stephen Manion - Chief Exec of Go! Southampton
- Chris Kerrison - Gosport Access Group, Hampshire County Councillor, Governor for disability on the hospital trust.
- Aimee Deacon
- Katie Dos Santos – See Southampton
- Susan Phillips – resident and Labour party member

Apologies:

- David McKeigue - Chair of Open Sight Hampshire

Bus Service Improvement Plan Update:

- Presented by Emma Baker. Role at Southampton Council is to develop and implement transport policy.
- involved in developing funding bids, so liaising with a range of stakeholders e.g. bus companies, central government, neighbouring authorities.
- March 21, the government published what's known as Bus Back Better - national strategy setting out the long-term vision for buses.
- One element of the strategy one was to encourage local authorities to develop a 'bus service improvement plan'.
- Southampton's plan outlined either working with bus companies through either a franchising agreement, or an enhanced bus partnership.
- Voluntary bus partnership already was in place, so we went down the route of establishing an enhanced partnership. This is a legal agreement, sets out individual and joint obligations of council and bus operators.
- Unfortunately, Southampton didn't secure funding from the Bus Back Better pot offered by the government, as did many authorities due to a small funding amount issued in comparison to need.
- Southampton tried to secure £150 million for their plan, a mixture of government funding and match funding from council/bus company resources.
- Nevertheless, the council is working its way through the ambitions set out in the plan.
- Vision to make buses an attractive choice - bus network is built on reliability, is carbon neutral, integrated, inclusive. Aiming to keep city moving and address future needs of city.
- Key to have long term plans in place to secure funding and indicate to funders that there are clear aspirations - this is the case for walking and cycling improvements too.

- Adopted in October 2021 and is a live document with periodic reviews. First review took place autumn last year.
- In two parts – plan lays out firstly what partnership aims to do, and secondly how stakeholders will work together. Council sets policy and approval through internal approval processes, and bus operators gains approval through stakeholders.
- Enhanced Partnership Board – chaired by Cllr Keogh and overseen by council officers. Supported by working groups with set tasks that make recommendations to the board e.g. if the working group makes a recommendation to move forward with a certain construction project or fare scheme, depending on if funding is available the board will approve.
- Enhanced Partnership Forum - this is an advisory engagement group to support the Board, attended by bus users, but other transport operators, councillors and large businesses etc. First meeting is due in November.
- **Action: date to be shared with members of the Accessibility Forum.**
- The Council will be launching another bus survey in September or October time to enable monitoring of any changes in how people feel about public transport or buses in the city against 2021 survey.
- Overall satisfaction is 89 percent so room for improvement.
- Patronage affected – prior to pandemic it was 7th highest used service across country. During pandemic, bus patronage decreased significantly, and this affected profits, but bus use is now getting back up to pre-pandemic levels.
- Nine overall ambitions for the plan, including improved accessibility and integration with other travel options. Includes delivering of fare and ticketing initiatives to make it more affordable. Using apps such as Breeze to help with integrating other travel options and providing one place for ticket storage.
- Looking at physical environment changes - includes improvements to Central Station interchange, creating a new bus hub at Albion Place and providing greater bus priority within the city centre and around some of the core routes. Also looking to improve bus stop accessibility.
- Have been awarded the Bus Service Plus funding – council area has received £639,000 for this financial year. Will be deciding on use in next few months but will support cost of current routes and supporting exiting discounts – such as considering extension of the national £2 fare offer.
- Bus Service Improvement Plan & Enhanced Bus Partnership – click here for link: [Bus Service Improvement Plan \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/bus-service-improvement-plan).
- Latest transport consultations – click here for link: [Transport and Public Realm | Your City Your Say Southampton](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/transport-and-public-realm-your-city-your-say).
- To get in contact with us, use this email: public.transport@southampton.gov.uk

Questions

- Ian of SPECTRUM CIL – can accessibility be improved to enable two people in wheelchairs to travel together?
Response: Not a plan for immediate changes, with the Bluestar takeover after CityRed dropped their provision, older model buses were brought to the city to cover services but there is aspirations to modernise the fleet – will also be brought back to Bluestar for comment.
- John Sanders, Southampton Heritage Federation – can the awareness of disabilities and more time needed for boarding be given to bus drivers?
Response: This has been noted and will be brought to Bluestar – also flagged by others in the Forum of the Helping Hand scheme, a card to discreetly let bus drivers know you need extra time or assistance. Details here: [Helping Hand Scheme - Bluestar \(bluestarbus.co.uk\)](https://www.bluestarbus.co.uk/helping-hand-scheme) or call 01273 886200.
- Jemma Brown – There are issues getting on double decker buses with the change in lighting levels – makes it hard for people with retinitis pigmentosa to navigate. Also would like to check that the liquid crystal displays at the bus stops showing real time travel info have been redesigned after giving input earlier in the year? In addition, bus timetable boards in city centre and Woolston need big improvements – contrast is too poor to read them, also very difficult to read when shorter or in a wheelchair. Would like a timeframe for these to be updated. Finally, each bus stop has a two letter code, the council has said these have been updated to be bigger and lower down, but still cannot find these.
Response: **action to take away these requests and for Emma to update once known.**

- Barbara Hancock of the Harefield Bus Campaign – is there due to be a review of how the service takeover has been progressing – will there be any more revisions and how will we know about this? Makes a big difference to people in Harefield if there are changes.
Response: Have been no current updates or changes or services yet, have agreed within the Partnership that there will be two a year, aiming to do first one in September with students coming to the city. Next one is February but there is some flexibility to those changes, especially with the Bus Service Plus funding coming into place. **Action – to aim to give prior notice ahead of any changes.**
- David Livermore, SPECTRUM Access Group – one current problem is parents with child buggies taking up wheelchair spaces. Can those bus users use their tickets on the next bus coming along as the wheelchair user should take priority?
Response: This should already be the case that bus drivers can let the next bus driver coming down the route to let people on board but will reiterate this with Bluestar.
- Jen Davies, Harefield Bus Campaign – is there a need for continuation of bus subsidies with the Bus Service Plus funding coming in, can there be audits taken buses short on patronage?
Response: Have yet to decide what is best to do with funding and don't get updates from Bluestar on patronage on particular routes, but blanket updates on passenger levels.
- Jemma Brown – some bus stops are very hard to access, can these be reviewed with a joined-up approach on how bus stops are designed.
Response: As part of as part of the bus service improvement plan, we have committed to undertake a lot of bus stop audits. Any particular locations, please flag by reporting through accessibilityforum@southampton.gov.uk.

Accessibility Improvement Requests:

- Presented by Dale Hardstaff, transport planner within the Transport Delivery Team at Southampton City Council.
- Works on a number of different transport and public realm schemes – looking at cycle routes, bus routes and enhancing provision of transport options, but also things like Member Minor works. (these are elected councillor infrastructure requests.)
- Work very closely with highway service partner, Balfour Beatty - take feedback on the network that comes through various partners. If there are any ways that the council can take those works forward, Balfour Beatty does the delivery of those works on the Council's behalf.
- Best way to get feedback on accessibility issues is directly through the members of the accessibility forum and those that they support.
- Wanting to review the ways that these works and improvements are being prioritised.
- Current process is to review the type of request – for example, a dropped kerb would be part of the Highways Team programme – this team has work that is delivered annually.
- If the request for improvements doesn't fit into the current programme of scheduled works, currently the plan is to put in on an accessibility list of works to do. There isn't a non-exhaustive pot of funding to make improvements with, so need to put in place a series of criteria for deciding what should be prioritised.
- Currently, use other factors to determine if an area should be improved – for example, is it in a deprived area, are there issues with overgrown vegetation, littering, graffiti or high traffic volumes.
- Also consider 'desire lines' – is the current crossing at a good point or is it out of the way? Are there many local facilities that need to be serviced by the highway network, such as a school or library?
- Finally, need to consider deliverability – would any proposed solutions be doable in the given space and what are the costs.
- This is the council's current approach – but would like feedback from the Accessibility Forum members on what other criteria or approach the council should use when considering accessibility improvements.

Questions

- David Livermore, SPECTRUM Access Group – Generally, state of pavements is very poor. Also, the use of corduroy paving to show separation from walkway and cycleway are very uncomfortable for wheelchair

users – like going across cattle grid. Why are we designing in uncomfortable pavements as it doesn't deter cyclists?

Response: this paving is standard and is required to let visually impaired people know which side of the road they should be walking on, so unfortunately can't be changed.

- Jen Davies, Harefield Bus Campaign – issue with shared pedestrian/bike path on Hinkler Road junction with Thornhill Park Road. Bikes are encouraged onto the corners, which people cannot see round. Massive issue for people with visual impairments. Has nearly been hit twice by bikes at this point. Response – **taking away as an action to review this area to make sure it is compliant with design principles or can this be changed.**
- Councillor Keogh – do we have a general reporting link on the website for these types of issues? Response – **taking as an action to review this and report back.**
- Natalie Martin, Sustrans – commenting on the reduction of residential roads to 20 miles per hour. Response: the 20 mile per hour programme is rolling out across city and can share the timetable for this with the forum. In addition, council is reviewing adjacent roads to 20 mile per hour zones to reduce their speeds as well and make whole area safer.
- John Sanders, Southampton Heritage Federation – find the 20 mile per hour areas challenging, would prefer a blanket approach so there is certainty around what zone you are in. Also, are pavements maintained with the same budget that roads are, the pavements are in a very bad state. Can we also keep cyclists and scooters off pavements? Response: 20 mile per hour is being rolled out piecemeal currently as there is a cost involved in a blanket change, and also need to encourage gradual driver behaviour. Pavements are maintained to a monitored schedule with equal budget by the Highways Team, but if members of the forum are struggling with gradient issues or challenges, please report as these aren't always picked up. Regarding cyclists and scooters, we are concerned about this and do work closely with rideshare providers like Beryl and Voi to report bad behaviour and work with police as part of Road Safety Partnership – so currently working on this, any issues or particular locations that cause more issues, keep reporting these.
- Jemma Brown – has a question about how the Transport department liaise with the housing services, because highway issues that occur at her accommodation in Weston turn out to be on housing land – on feedback to what improvements are prioritised, considers public safety and Equality Act compliance to be the indicators that should be considered first. Response: apologies that repairs on housing land have taken so long – transport department cannot make repairs on land that is not part of highway land, but there is a pavements repair budget within the housing team. Budget is tight in this team, can't compel council colleagues to spend their budget.
- Councillor Keogh – just adding point that it's clearly a key takeaway to make sure that scooter riders and cyclists are diverted away from the pavement as much as possible when considering new developments and active travel schemes.

Upcoming Works and Projects

- Presented by Ruth Magennis, Project Lead for Community Engagement in the Transport Team.
- Currently working on improving alt text and descriptive wording for imagery on the transport.southampton.gov.uk website, which is being used for consultation on transport plans. Not currently accessible for those with visual impairments.
- Current website doesn't allow for alt text additions so will have to add in text to the body of website – also does not allow for websites to be viewed before publishing in a 'staging' area, although Council is hoping to update this element of the website in autumn. The council is doing an accessibility review of all its websites in the autumn.
- In the meantime, asking for volunteers to review example text to be added to images and see if they help with descriptions.
- Upcoming projects – a number of projects have already been started in the development process, so it is difficult to change where these have started developing designs. Some of these projects were started before the Accessibility Forum was convened, so these are difficult to influence now.
- However, there are some projects we are trying to get opinions on first before even considering design – one is Bitterne Precinct, which is going to have improved pedestrian access. We have conducted a site

visit with volunteers from Southampton Sight, who have given input into areas of the Precinct that are poor for people with visual impairments, so please do email accessibilityforum@southampton.gov.uk with any input on access issue if using a wheelchair or other mobility aid.

- With the Levelling Up funding being granted to the Outdoor Sports Centre, the council are also looking to improve the pedestrian access areas of the entrances to this facility. Looking to convene some volunteers for a site visit to review these entrances, have already received extensive input from the Cycling Campaign. Will be in touch to inform about this site visit, but also asking for emailed input from Forum Members.
- Jemma Brown – raising the point that the nearest bus stop is 20 mins away so cannot get to the Outdoor Sports Centre via public transport.
- Barbara Hancock – public transport via Hill Lane is very poor anyway – this could be a win-win.
- Response from Councillor Keogh – can certainly consider it, under the Levelling Up funding there is some provision for improving active travel to the Centre. **Action point – look into public transport options to the Sports Centre.** Through the Partnership with Bluestar, can impress upon them the need for a route. Obviously, needs to be commercially viable but with Bluestar being the only provider now and also with this increased investment to the facility, hopefully there will be more people wanting to go this direction that would also use a bus.

Next Steps and Actions:

- Dates for next meeting to be considered quarterly, avoiding the pre-election period. Next date to be in October with communication in between.

AOB:

- Lyn of Cycling Campaign raised the issue of lack of accessible ramps going into train stations with bikes or other wheeled vehicles or over National Rail controlled bridges – using St Denys train station as a prime example.
- Response from Councillor Keogh – there are meetings with the Transport Team with National Rail and there are ambitions to improve this network, but there are limitations to what the council can achieve if the infrastructure is on railway land – sometimes it also belongs to different landowners so can be difficult to achieve any changes. Not always dealing with same organisation so work is joined up. Communications have been improving, especially with projects such as improvements to the south side of the station that is ongoing.
- Ruth Magennis - Hampshire Countryside Access form is looking for members to raise matters on accessibility, so please get in touch via accessibilityforum@southampton.gov.uk if joining this group is of interest to you.