



# Milton Keynes Bus Service Improvement Plan

July 2024



Excellent, green and inclusive public transport

# Executive summary.

**Milton Keynes is a great place to live, work, learn and relax. With such attractions, its strong growth will continue, but with this may bring the detrimental impacts of more traffic and pressures on the infrastructure and environment. To maintain the momentum of growth and offset these impacts, Milton Keynes needs excellent public transport.**

In 2020, Milton Keynes City Council established a partnership with all bus operators to consider ways of transforming bus travel and achieving recovery following the pandemic. The publication of the National Bus Strategy in March 2021 provided further impetus and support to develop the public transport offer for the people of Milton Keynes. Our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) sets out how this will be achieved. In parallel, our Enhanced Partnership Scheme, adopted in 2022, sets out commitments and requirements for improving the bus network.

Our BSIP sets out the ambitions of Milton Keynes City Council, bus operators and other partners to deliver an excellent, green and inclusive public transport system, both within the city and rural areas. It gives context to the challenges and opportunities the partnership is seeking to address, to ensure that public transport achieves its full potential in Milton Keynes for the growth of the area and the extensive planned development and renaissance of the city, delivering the groundwork for the 2050 Strategy, including the introduction of a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system.

Milton Keynes is a unique place and needs its own bold solutions. In 2021, we launched MK Connect, a demand responsive transport service across the entire area, offering public transport options where bus services don't exist. This is one step in a plan to build up public transport usage and will establish demands for new conventional bus services. This BSIP sets out our progress to date and our ambitions for the coming years.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been produced by Milton Keynes City Council in association with the Milton Keynes Enhanced Partnership Board, which meets quarterly to discuss all aspects of public transport, consider new initiatives and oversee progress towards the BSIP ambition and delivery of commitments and improvements set out in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme.





## Our bus vision

The Milton Keynes Bus Partnership is keen to see transformation in the bus offer for Milton Keynes' residents and visitors. Our vision, goals and objectives for better bus services are set out below.

### Vision

Our vision for Milton Keynes is that it will have an excellent, green and inclusive public transport system used by all.

### Goals

The overriding goal is to increase the relevance of public transport in the lives of the people of Milton Keynes, reducing the dominance of the car, supporting growth, creating inclusivity of movement and helping to improve health and wellbeing for all.

The aim is to see the public transport system in Milton Keynes acknowledged for excellence – used out of choice by everyone. Success will be driven by innovation and determination to achieve the best quality of service and lowest environmental impact.

### BSIP Objectives

The vision and goals will be achieved by addressing seven objectives:

#### Objective 1

Based on a service hierarchy, provide an attractive, coordinated public transport network, offering high quality services and infrastructure, supporting the potential for the development of rapid transit services.

#### Objective 2

Enhance bus service frequencies and operating times on main corridors and across the city to significantly increase patronage.

#### Objective 3

Provide measures to support bus reliability and improve journey times.

#### Objective 4

Offer integrated ticketing that makes bus travel easier and fares that offer good value.

#### Objective 5

Protect and improve passenger infrastructure and facilitate multi-modal interchange.

#### Objective 6

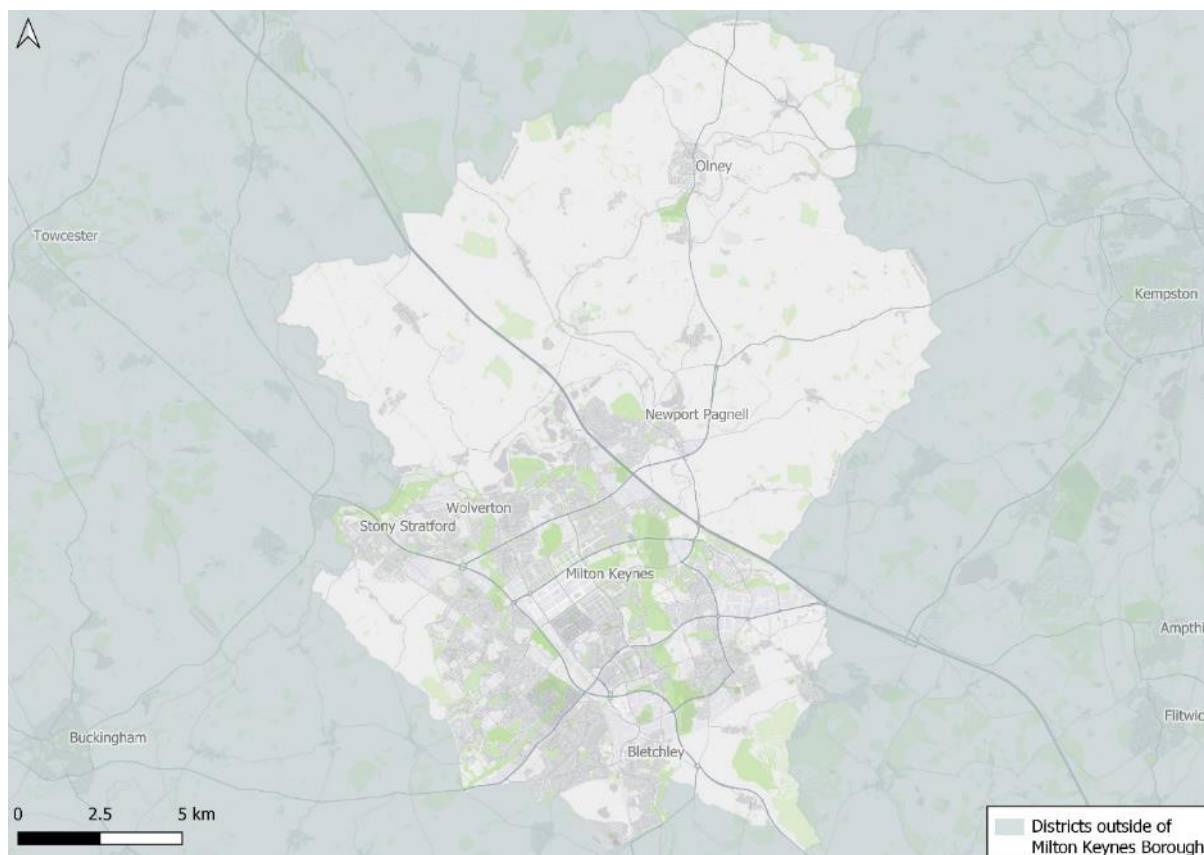
Ensure that planning policies fully support public transport delivery and prioritise more sustainable travel modes.

#### Objective 7

Work with bus operators to help achieve the Council's 'carbon neutral by 2030 ambition' by improving fleet, introducing alternatively fuelled vehicles and trialling innovative technologies.

## Introduction

Our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) covers the Milton Keynes City Council area, which includes the growing city of Milton Keynes, along with its rural hinterland, with a population of over 287,000.



The Plan responds to the **National Bus Strategy**, which sets out 12 objectives for better bus services. The following table shows how our objectives for Milton Keynes align with the those of the National Bus Strategy.

National Bus Strategy objectives	Corresponding Milton Keynes objectives (as numbered above)
<b>More frequent</b> , with turn-up-and-go services on major routes and feeder or demand-responsive services to lower-density places.	2
<b>Faster and more reliable</b> , with bus priority wherever necessary and where there is room.	3
<b>Cheaper</b> , with more low, flat fares in towns and cities, lower point-to-point fares elsewhere, and more daily price capping everywhere.	4
<b>More comprehensive</b> , with overprovision on a few corridors reduced to boost provision elsewhere and better services in the evenings and weekends, not necessarily with conventional buses.	1, 2, 6
<b>Easier to understand</b> , with simpler routes, common numbering, coordinated timetable change dates, good publicity, and comprehensive, accurate information online.	1

<b>Easier to use</b> , with common tickets, passes and daily capping across all operators, simpler fares, contactless payment and protection of bus stations.	4
<b>Better integrated</b> with other modes and each other, including more bus-rail interchange and integration and inter-bus transfers.	5, 6
<b>Better to ride in</b> , with comfortable, high-specification, modern buses.	1, 7
<b>Greener</b> , zero emission buses (zero emissions of carbon at the tailpipe).	7
<b>Accessible and inclusive network</b> , by design, not only bus vehicles but bus stations, bus stops, and access routes to bus stops.	1, 5
<b>Innovative</b> , harnessing entrepreneurship to constantly strive for a better product.	7
<b>A safe mode of transport</b> which is seen as safe, addressing issues of personal safety and security on board and at stops as well as driver and vehicle safety standards.	5

To be eligible for Government funding towards bus service improvements, local authorities are required to produce a BSIP and have an Enhanced Partnership in place to facilitate the delivery of proposed improvements in collaboration with bus operators.

This Milton Keynes BSIP considers all bus services operating wholly within the Council's area, including the extensive provision of demand responsive services (MK Connect), together with those that radiate out and link with neighbouring areas.

The ambitions of the BSIP are reflected in our Enhanced Partnership Plan. The measures and facilities to facilitate delivery of the Plan are set out in an Enhanced Partnership Scheme covering the whole Milton Keynes area.

## Background

Milton Keynes is a vibrant and dynamic place – a great place for business, living and leisure. It is known for its uniqueness and innovation.

Milton Keynes is growing faster than other places. It has a younger age profile, with 27.4% of its population under 19 (compared with 23.7% for England as a whole). 13.1% of the population are 65+ (compared with 17.9% for England). 26% of the population is made up of black and minority ethnic groups.

Its growth and development mean that significant opportunities exist across Milton Keynes. The dispersed pattern of development and network of grid roads means that many people choose to use a car. Milton Keynes is an especially challenging place to plan and provide public transport, meaning that bold and different ways of doing this are needed.

Recognising the detrimental effect of rising traffic levels and the need to ensure good access to opportunities for all, MKCC is committed to developing an effective public transport system. This will support further growth, protect the environment and enhance the health and wellbeing of residents. This has commenced with the introduction of area-wide demand responsive transport (MK Connect) and plans for a mass rapid transit (MRT) system.

The Mobility Strategy 2018-2036 (Local Transport Plan - LTP4) sought to ensure a transport system that would:

- Support growth and provide mobility for all
- Provide an effective network
- Maximise travel choice
- Protect transport users and the environment

The Strategy includes ambitions to improve public transport in partnership with bus operators, in order to reduce journey times by public transport and achieve greater satisfaction with bus services. The overall aim is to increase bus patronage and to achieve a corresponding reduction in the proportion of journeys made by private car.

This will be superseded by LTP5, which will look more directly at the supporting measures and policy changes required to drive **modal shift and behaviour change**, increasing use of public transport as the City grows.

Supportive policies for public transport are also promoted through Plan:MK, the Local Plan for Milton Keynes adopted in 2019. This includes the possibility **that some areas will be designated for higher densities, with a different relationship to grid roads and public transport corridors.**

The desire for public transport enhancement is further supported by the MK Strategy for 2050, which planned for long term growth to a population of 500,000. One of its seven big ambitions is **to make it easier for everyone to travel on foot, by bike and with better public transport.** Central to this is the development of a road-based (rubber-tyred) mass rapid transit (MRT) system, with a network of services operational by 2050. The Strategy highlights the use of an Enhanced Partnership to help facilitate the delivery of MRT.

The greater focus on more sustainable travel options supports the MK Sustainability Strategy (2019), which commits to achieving a carbon neutral position by 2030.

In addition, the work being undertaken on MRT has identified that measures such as increasing build density in some areas, reviewing parking policy and availability of parking and other complementary measures will be essential to the future growth of public transport in Milton Keynes.

## 2. Current offer to bus passengers

### Bus network

The current network consists of 28 fixed route bus services, supplemented by authority-wide DRT (MK Connect).

Seven bus operators provide public services across the area. Arriva operates the majority of services and carries about 85% of passengers. The two key north-south and east-west service corridors in the city account for about 50% of overall passengers. There are several cross-boundary services offering links with surrounding places, along with a number of infrequent services that focus on Milton Keynes as a destination. The DRT service MK Connect carries around 6% of passengers.

Much of the bus network is operated commercially, along with other services such as to Aylesbury and a supported service to Northampton. Stagecoach operates interurban services, including X5 to Oxford and Bedford and MK1 to Luton. Uno, a bus company owned by University of Hertfordshire, provides services on the Milton Keynes to Bedford corridor, centred on Cranfield University. Other operators provide less frequent commercial or supported services.

Milton Keynes City Council financially supports, fully or partially, 6 services, and short-term support is also being given to maintain service levels on 3 services whilst steps are taken to try and boost usage with the aim of them returning to commercial viability.

The bus network has remained relatively stable over the last decade, apart from adjustments to cater for recently developed areas. A Park & Ride facility is available at MK Coachway, offering free parking and the ability to use service 3 to and from Central Milton Keynes.



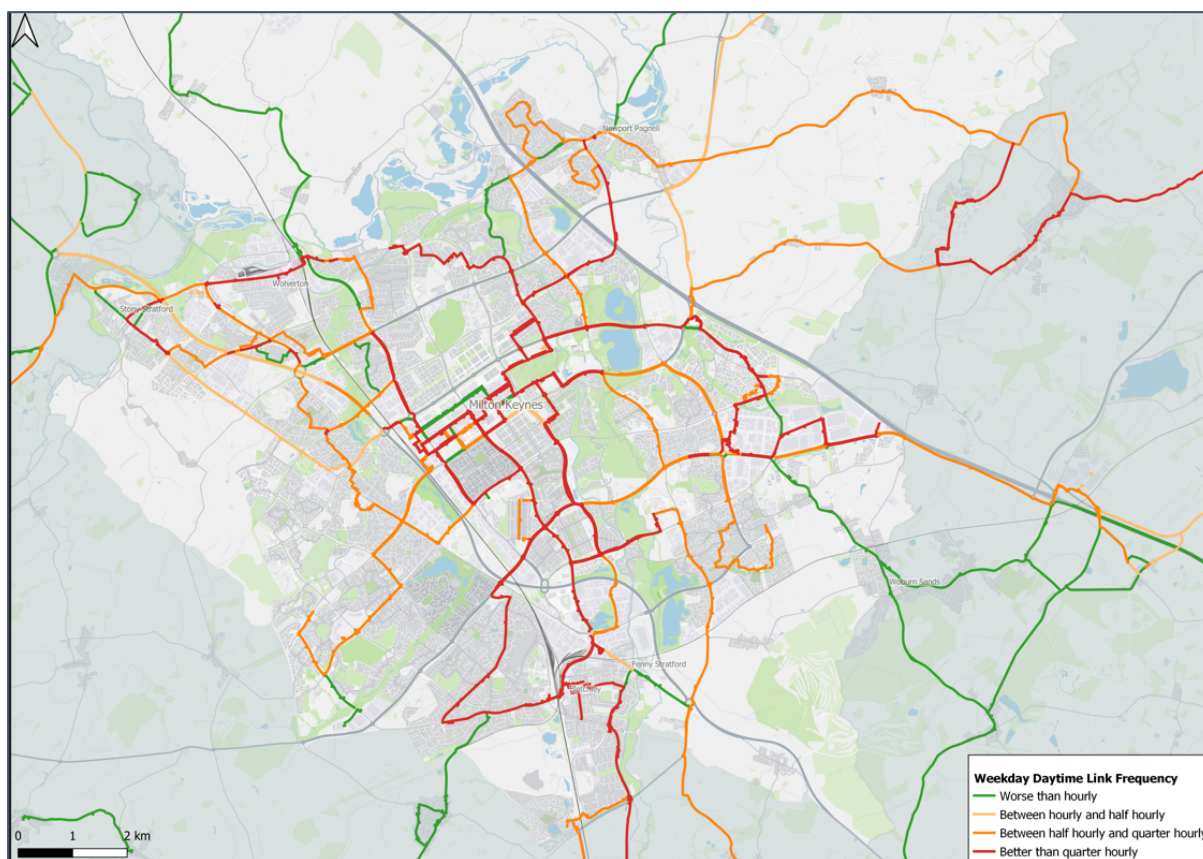


## Service levels

Most bus services operate at intervals of 15 to 60 minutes during the daytime (excluding occasional or peak only services). In some parts of the city, services come together to provide higher combined frequencies, such as services 5 and 6 to provide 10-minute frequency (Wolverton – CMK – Bletchley).

Overall frequencies across the bus network are illustrated below.





There is a lack of consistency in service levels to different parts of the City. Some areas enjoy daytime frequencies of a bus every 10 minutes, whilst others have a bus every 30 minutes or more. Whilst this is dictated by what operators consider viable, based on levels of demand, the lower frequency services are an unattractive alternative to the car.

## MK Connect

In April 2021, many subsidised services ended and city-wide demand responsive transport (DRT), branded as MK Connect, was introduced. MK Connect is integrated with the commercial network to ensure a reasonable transport offer for the area, directing users to a local bus where one is available for the journey requested. It provides greater travel choice and flexibility, closing gaps in connectivity, particularly in rural areas.

Usage of MK Connect has grown to over 9,000 passenger journeys per week, representing an average of 4 passenger journeys per vehicle hour.

The MK Connect fleet is mixed, consisting of at least 50% electric, and 30% wheelchair accessible vehicles. Vehicles are under 10 seats and operate under PHV licenses.

DRT is the first type of public transport introduced into new development areas, allowing the service to respond to the number of residents and their travel patterns, rather than running costly fixed bus service during the early phases of development, when



demand will be low. MKC will continue to ensure that suitable infrastructure is provided in new developments to support fixed route commercial bus services once patronage outgrows DRT.

### **Patronage levels and trends**

Bus passenger journeys were 8m in 2010 and grew to 10m in 2016. Use fell prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to 8.2m in 2019/20. In 2022/23, patronage was 6.5m, some 35% lower than in 2016. Over the same period, journeys by concessionary pass holders reduced by 50%.

Similarly, passenger journeys per head of population fell significantly from 38.1 in 2016 to 22.4 in 2023 (a 41% reduction). This is very low compared with traditional cities, reflecting the high car ownership and use in Milton Keynes and the difficulties for bus to perform well where population densities are lower than traditional centres.

Annual patronage now stands at about 7.7m journeys, of which 6% (0.45m) are on MK Connect.

### **Bus modal share**

Households have above average levels of car ownership in Milton Keynes at 83%, compared with 78% for England (2021 Census).

In 2021, 36% of workers were mainly working from home. Just 3.2% were using the bus to travel to work (compared with 5.5% in 2011).

### **Bus stops**

There are about 1,000 bus stops and 500 shelters across Milton Keynes. The authority has generally bought its bus shelters and been responsible for their maintenance, repair and cleaning through direct contracts.

### **Fares and ticketing**

Operators each provide a range of ticket options, including area-wide day, week, 4-week and annual season tickets. Flexible ticket bundles are also available.

Virtually all operators participate in a multi-operator ticketing agreement, MK Move. This offers both an electronic pay-as-you-go purse and multi-operator period tickets (1, 7 or 28 day). The intention is to extend the arrangement to include travel by MK Connect.

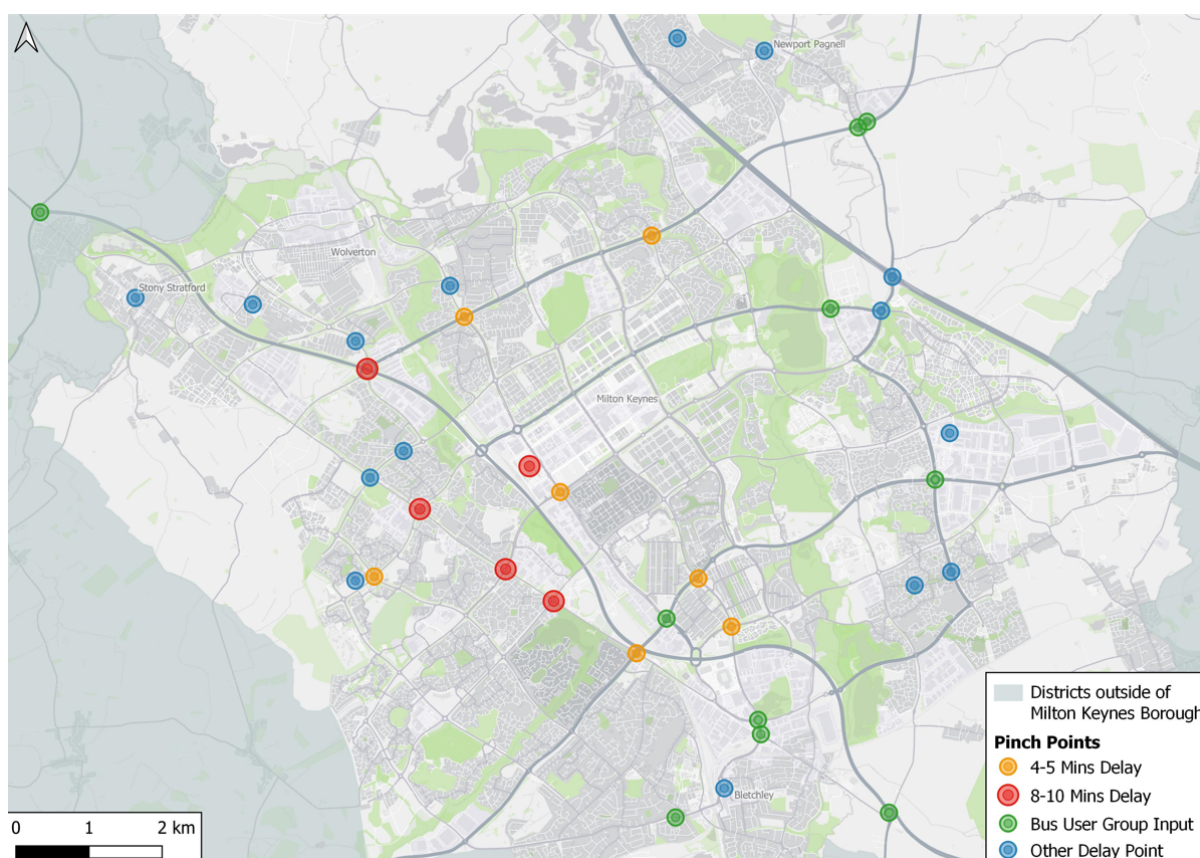
The 'All in 1' card for under 19s, allows discounted travel for £1 single, with further options for one and four week versions of the ticket. This operates as a concessionary travel scheme, funded by MKCC. Work is underway to make the card smart, and it is expected to launch in the next few months.

A further initiative since October 2023 has been the City Hopper, allowing free travel for all on any bus for journeys within the city centre and between the main shopping area and Central Milton Keynes railway station.

### **Congestion and traffic levels**

Whilst the grid road system provides significant capacity and alternative routing for vehicles, levels of traffic have been steadily growing and various junctions see congestion. Between 2009 and 2015, annual average traffic flow increased by 6% and average journey times in the morning peak increased by 12%.

The following map shows the ‘pinch points’ (locations where congestion is delaying bus services) collated from information provided by bus operators, MKC officers and MK Bus User Group. These were generally identified pre-pandemic, so will need reassessing to reflect post-recovery conditions.



The grid roads have fast moving traffic along them, which makes it difficult for buses to turn out onto them or pull away from bus stops and laybys. This causes further variability in bus journey times and in some cases leads to stops not being served.

Comparisons of journey times by bus and car on the key north-south bus corridor highlight some of the differences. Bus times are significantly slower than car, with some journeys taking three or more times as long. This links to the findings of the residents’ survey, where 12% of respondents suggested they were least happy with bus journey times. The table also shows how for some journeys the time taken by bus compared with car has worsened since 2021.

Origin	Destination	Journey time (mins)				2024 Off-peak journey time ratio	2021 Off-peak journey time ratio
		Bus 08:30	Car 08:30	Bus 13:00	Car 13:00	bus/car	bus/car
CMK The Point	Wolverton	27	15	27	14	1.93	2.36
Wolverton	CMK The Point	29	15	29	14	2.07	2.29
CMK The Point	Bletchley Bus Station	29	14	29	14	2.07	1.93
Bletchley Bus Station	CMK The Point	27	14	27	14	1.93	1.71
CMK The Point	Stony Stratford	24	16	22	14	1.57	2.50
Stony Stratford	CMK The Point	23	16	23	14	1.64	2.64

CMK Railway Station	Milton Keynes Hospital	21	10	21	8	2.63	2.22
Milton Keynes Hospital	CMK Railway Station	21	9	21	8	2.63	1.86
Wolverton	Bletchley	68	18	68	14	4.86	2.95
Bletchley	Wolverton	61	20	61	16	3.81	2.85

### Provision of information

Recognising the importance of good information, MKCC hosts a dedicated website [Milton Keynes - Get Around MK](#). This provides a single point for all travel information, including details of all public transport services, timetables and fares.

Operators also provide service and timetable information, with details of day and season tickets on their own websites.

MKCC provides and maintains bus information panels at all bus stops. With an intention to improve on this, a review of what and how it is presented is being undertaken. New timetable cases are being procured and information at city centre stops has been moved so that it is all inside shelters.

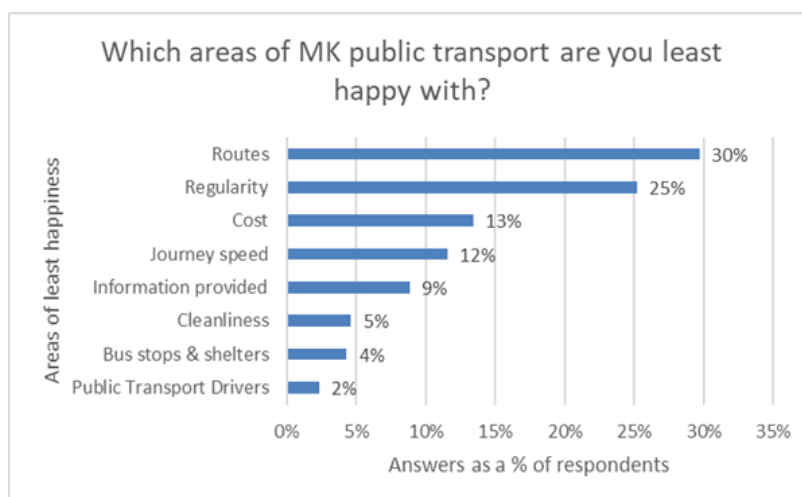
There are just over 100 real time LED signs and 12 larger multi-line LED signs. The Council has 65 battery-powered and 2 solar e-ink displays. The battery displays include an audio announcement facility and there are other screens for which best use is being explored. 50 of the battery powered displays were introduced during 2023/24 as part of the BSIP implementation work. They are flexible in their deployment, being usable in areas where mains power is not available.

### What do people think about buses?

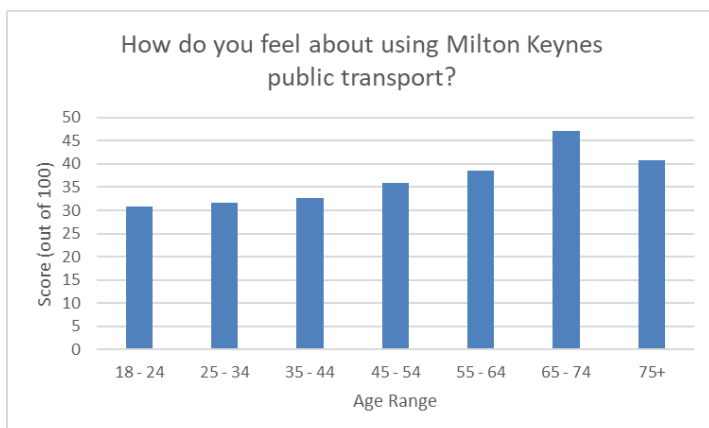
In 2021, a flyer was posted to all 110,000 households, highlighting the new Get Around MK website and inviting people to have their say on public transport in Milton Keynes, both in respect of current provision and what sorts of improvements should be made. A total of 1806 responses were received, of which 57% were from non-bus users.

People were least happy with bus routes and the regularity of services. The priority for improvement was the provision of more frequent services, followed by better interchange and bus stops.

Older age groups showed higher levels of satisfaction than younger ones, probably reflecting the benefit of free concessionary travel.

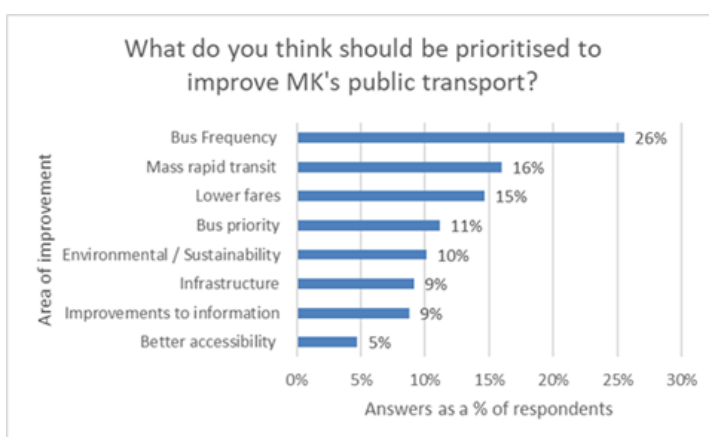






With regard to the top priority for improvement, respondents highlighted more frequent services (26%), followed by mass rapid transit (16%), lower fares (15%) and bus priority (11%).

The MK Bus User Group has on-going engagement with MKCC, with opportunities to comment and make suggestions on services. Furthermore, the Group is involved in the Partnership working groups.



As part of being more transparent and actively engaging with users, data is now provided on the MKC website regarding performance levels. This dashboard will continue to be refined and developed.

There is an online response form to gather comments throughout the year, which is accessed via QR codes at bus stops. This provides continuous

feedback. Overall satisfaction remains low, but to some extent this is as a result of many residents' having high expectations from their experience in travelling in London.

## Stakeholder engagement

A Stakeholder Group was established to inform the development of the original BSIP in 2021. This brings together many different interested parties, including cross party councillor representation, urban and rural parishes, businesses, residents, the bus user group, disability and accessibility groups, along with other council departments and transport providers that are not signatories to the EP, such as rail operators and e-bike providers.

The Group meets quarterly to consider issues relating to public transport provision and to feed ideas to the Bus Partnership.

Business representatives have highlighted the importance of ensuring that major employment areas are well served by bus services, pointing to the importance of frequency and journey time to employees, along with cost. Furthermore, the need to ensure that times of operation fit with shifts and flexible working arrangements. Employers would welcome more information, in order that they can promote public transport use to their staff or potential employees when recruiting.

Opportunities for other stakeholder engagement are also taken, such as liaising with the Parish and Town Councils Forum.

## Summary of issues affecting bus use

The following SWOC analysis summarises the issues affecting bus use in Milton Keynes:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MK Futures 2050 work and evidence on the need to deliver MRT and address transport inequality</li> <li>• Significant commercial bus network that forms a basis on which to build</li> <li>• Cross-city bus services provide direct access to more destinations</li> <li>• Good bus/rail interchange opportunities at Milton Keynes Central station</li> <li>• Easy bus/bus interchange in Central Milton Keynes</li> <li>• Multi-operator ticketing available (MK Move)</li> <li>• All in 1 card available for young people</li> <li>• Road space available to provide bus priority</li> <li>• Good provision of infrastructure – 6 stations, Coachway, Bus hubs at the MKC and The Point.</li> <li>• Real time information and GetAroundMK website</li> <li>• Draw of Central Milton Keynes creates demand</li> <li>• Space for flexible development of MK and continuous growth</li> <li>• Support for technology and innovation</li> <li>• MK Connect supplements conventional bus services</li> <li>• Limited amount of traffic congestion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High car use and dependency</li> <li>• Low density neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Much car parking available</li> <li>• Low bus use per head of population</li> <li>• Unattractive frequencies on some services and lack of evening and Sunday services</li> <li>• Poor bus stop waiting environments</li> <li>• Poor satisfaction with services</li> <li>• Interchange opportunities constrained by relatively low frequencies of some bus services</li> <li>• Lack of priority for buses over other traffic</li> <li>• Grid road bus stops difficult to use</li> <li>• Poor bus facilities at major hubs (Hospital; Kingston; Westcroft; Wolverton)</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong policy support and aspiration for public transport</li> <li>• Growth in population and local economy</li> <li>• Funding via s106, s278 and Tariff income and other external sources</li> <li>• BSIP and EP in place</li> <li>• Potential interchange and transfer network</li> <li>• Car parking management and charging</li> <li>• Densification of land use</li> <li>• Regeneration of older estates</li> <li>• Aim for carbon neutral by 2030</li> <li>• East-West Rail will serve Bletchley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patronage is static or declines</li> <li>• Continued growth in car traffic</li> <li>• Continued poor satisfaction leads to further underlying decline in bus use</li> <li>• Continued dispersed development patterns and low-density housing</li> <li>• DRT and taxi services undermine bus services</li> <li>• Insufficient commitment and resources to achieve step change in bus services</li> <li>• Lack of will to introduce policies that deter car use or reallocate road space for bus priority</li> </ul>

## Funding of public transport in MK over the last two years

Budget head	Source	Purpose	2022-2023		2023-2024	
			Capital £	Revenue £	Capital £	Revenue £
Bus services	MKCC	Service support		222,849		340,497
MK Connect	MKCC	Service support		1,686,493		1,838,099
Concessionary fares	MKCC	Reimbursement to operators		3,533,336		3,732,605
Infrastructure	MKCC	Infrastructure, Stops, shelters, Coachway	310,751	183,081	688,807	202,435
Publicity / information	MKCC	Timetables, information, real time		119,169		136,782
BSIP+	DfT					654,193

### 3. Improvement programme to 2024-25

#### Achievements 2021 – 2024

A range of developments have been undertaken over the last 3 years and are set out below:

#### Bus network and service improvement

Element	Description	Achievement	
Bus network stabilisation	Temporary financial support for otherwise commercial services (Arriva 1,2,3,4,7; Stagecoach 41; Red Rose 21) that are at risk of being unviable and reduced or withdrawn, with the aim of maintaining them whilst they are promoted to encourage greater usage to achieve commercial viability again.	Continuation of services at previous levels of service for set period. The original period of temporary support was too short to see whether usage had increased. Work is currently underway to see whether the services will be commercially sustainable in the future.  Early indications suggest some uplift in patronage on services 1 and 2.	
MK Connect rural zone pilot	Starting April 2024, new rural zone north of Newport Pagnell created, with a dedicated vehicle to serve the area. Travel by MK Connect restricted to journeys within the zone or to Newport Pagnell, for onward travel by bus or second MK Connect vehicle.  This provides a trial for a possible zonal model of DRT provision in the future.  Free travel offered for journeys to/from Newport Pagnell, to compensate for the inconvenience of having to change vehicles.	Improved response times for pick-ups in the rural zone and greater capacity to carry out more local journeys and with less dead mileage. However, some inconvenience for longer journeys to other parts of Milton Keynes. Too early to see whether there has been a positive impact	
Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)	Further work on developing plans for a potential MRT scheme in Milton Keynes. Outline business plan produced that is currently being considered.	Feasibility of road-based MRT being tested, to understand whether there is a case for further work.	



## Bus priority

Element	Description	Achievement	
Corridor assessments	Initial assessment undertaken of some corridors to identify and consider measures for bus priority and ways of improving bus movements.	Identified opportunities for measures to improve conditions for buses, some of which are being modelled to understand the likely impact and to highlight those with potential for further consideration.	
Modelling of potential interventions	Modelling work commissioned to investigate interventions on the road system that might improve the reliability or speed of bus services, including removal of general traffic from certain roads in the city centre.	Findings will be known later in summer 2024.	
Traffic signal priority	Proof of concept work undertaken to consider the impacts of introducing bus priority at traffic signals.	A central junction was upgraded to provide green calls or extensions for buses. This was the first signal priority in Milton Keynes. While this junction does not provide measurable change in journey time it does provide some priority. This will be the minimum standard for future signals, although smarter solutions are also being explored.	

## Fares and ticketing

Element	Description	Achievement	
All in One young people's concession	Transfer current cards (6,600) onto smartcards. This should make the card more accessible to young people, as well as reducing fraud.	Currently under test, in readiness for full implementation in summer 2024.	
City Hopper	Free travel on any bus for journeys made within Central Milton Keynes Zone between railway station and city centre. Introduced October 2023 and running until end July 2024.	Steady month by month growth has been seen since the launch, with about 30,000 passenger journeys per month now being made, which is three times the number making such journeys at the previously discounted £1.20 fare.	

## Passenger experience

Element	Description	Achievement	
<b>Passenger infrastructure</b>			
MK Coachway	Improvements to MK Coachway, including resurfacing, lining, lighting and CCTV, with the aim of promoting it more as a Park & Ride for people travelling to/from Central Milton Keynes.	Improvements completed and car park being used more.	
Bus stations	Refurbishment work at Bletchley Bus Station.	Completed	
Bus stops and shelters	New shelters installed	1 new shelter and 2 replacement / repaired shelters.	
	Shelters upgraded and/or refurbished (including electrical supplies)	59 shelters improved.	
	Raised kerb at stop in Green Park	Completed	
	Bus stop improvement programme, involving deep cleaning and repairs.	Improved image of bus stops and shelters.	
<b>Information and marketing</b>			
Marketing campaigns	Online and at stop campaign to market the City Hopper free travel initiative and encourage people to try the bus while it is free, with the aim of increasing familiarity with bus travel.	30,000 journeys per month currently being made.	
	Targeted campaign to promote those services at risk and receiving temporary support, alerting people that services at risk and encouraging use of them.	<p>Whilst there has been some patronage uplift on a couple of the services, it is not clear how much of this is due to the marketing campaign.</p> <p>The campaign did have high levels of reach and generated contact with people concerned about the possibility of services ceasing in the future.</p>	
Printed information	Printed bus timetable and sustainable travel guide distributed to all households across Milton Keynes in Autumn 2023, encouraging more sustainable travel.	120,000 booklets produced and distributed.	
Bus stop information	e-ink displays introduced at bus stops, offering real time information.	50 new e-ink displays with audio installed at bus stops around the Borough.	

Customer service			
Bus Passenger Charter	Single bus charter covering Milton Keynes, setting out what passengers should expect from bus services.	Charter introduced in 2021 and maintained.	
Service change dates	Through the Enhanced Partnership, set dates for service changes are agreed.		

## Improvements 2024-25

### Bus service levels and network coverage

Element	Description	Impact	
Retendering of DRT contract	Develop specification for Borough-wide provision of DRT, building on the experience of the existing contract. Out to procurement autumn 2024.  Will include the provision of zonal based DRT offering interchange at hubs with fixed route bus network.	New contracted service introduced April 2025.	
Temporary support to stabilise network	Maintenance of unviable commercial services at risk of reduction or withdrawal. Assess the long-term viability of the services and determine whether	Support provided to maintain intact services that remain unviable post-Covid.	
Milton Keynes Hospital	Enable buses to access the hospital site.	Options being considered and concept designs produced for discussion with Hospital.	

### Bus priority

Element	Description	Impact	
Central Milton Keynes junctions	Improve movement of buses through key traffic signal junctions in Central Milton Keynes, particularly at busy times of year (leading up to Christmas) when buses are delayed by traffic blocking junctions.	Junction improvements, box markings and camera enforcement.	

### Fares and ticketing

Element	Description	Impact	
Multi-operator ticketing	Extend existing MK Move ticket to include DRT service, to facilitate journeys on bus and DRT and easy interchange between the two.	Initially, work will be carried out to investigate the ability of existing bus ticketing equipment and	

	This will support moves to a zonal DRT system, where DRT feeds to/from bus interchange points.	DRT bookings systems and back-office platform to link together to enable a joint ticketing solution that can be tested in autumn 2024.  This will inform requirements for a new contract for the provision of DRT services from April 2025.	
All in One young people's ticket	Full introduction of smartcards for young people's concession scheme.		

### Passenger experience

Element	Description	Impact	
<b>Waiting and interchange facilities</b>			
Bletchley Interchange	Improve bus/rail interchange by improving linkage between railway and bus stations, with new eastern rail station entrance and relocation of bus stands.	Options being considered, modelling and early concept design work to be completed by March 2025.	
Milton Keynes Station Square	Remodel bus stands and provide new shelters, to improve movement of buses and better, safer waiting environment for passengers.	Finalise proposals and implement the remodelling of the bus stands and installation of new bus shelters. Completion April 2025.	
Shelter replacement contract	Put dynamic purchasing framework in place to provide flexibility to source appropriate solutions for each stop/area.	Dynamic purchasing system to be in place by end of 2024/25.	
<b>Information, marketing and network identity</b>			
Marketing campaigns	Targeted marketing and social media campaigns.	Promotion of Get around MK brand and targeted campaigns to encourage use of particular services.	
Branding and promotion	Get around MK	On-going promotion of brand.	

### Bus driver recruitment and retention

All operators have reached a more stable situation in terms of driver retention and availability, compared with the situation in the last two years. However, the situation still remains variable, with peaks and troughs resulting from seasonal factors linked to the availability of opportunities in other sectors such as warehousing.

Of greater concern to operators is the shortage of skilled engineers. This is particularly difficult given that it takes 3+ years to train people to required standards.



## 4. Ambitions and proposals 2025-30

The overall ambition for the bus network in the next 5 years is to build on the current position and initiatives undertaken, to increase patronage and improve viability, with a view to investing in service improvements.

### Bus service levels and network coverage

The **Borough-wide DRT service** (MK Connect) has proved popular, with journeys undertaken from anywhere to anywhere. The retendering of the contract in 2024 provides the opportunity to refine how the service operates, with a view to increasing bus use and, for DRT, reducing dead mileage, improving response times to booking requests and increasing the average number of passengers carried per vehicle hour. The intention is to look at introducing greater integration with the bus network, with DRT vehicles operating mainly within designated zones and providing journeys that connect at hubs with the main bus services, for onward travel to destinations such as the city centre.

A zonal scenario has been modelled, to understand the potential impact on current users of MK Connect. Currently, such an approach is being tested in the rural area north of the city.

Such a move will create a more integrated approach to overall public transport across the city, particularly with an intention to introduce combined bus/DRT ticketing solutions to aid seamless interchange.

It is important for DRT to continue to be a feature of overall service provision Milton Keynes, as it is suited to meeting the needs of lower population density where conventional buses are not viable.

### Bus priority

Having introduced **extended green phases** for buses at one junction, such a feature will be the norm for all signalised junctions as opportunities arise to install them.

Through the Bus Partnership, bus operators have identified locations where buses may get delayed, due to congestion, parked or loading vehicles, and difficulty emerging from junctions. From this, a pinchpoints programme has been developed, prioritising those locations where mitigating action could be taken at reasonable cost. These will be further evaluated as part of corridor or area works that are taken forward when funding is available.

### Fares and ticketing

With the introduction of a new contract for Borough-wide DRT services on a zonal basis from April 2025, it is intended to implement a joint ticketing product covering travel by both DRT and bus.

Given the success of the City Hopper free travel initiative, there would be much support for it to continue, if funding was available.

### Passenger experience

It is intended to continue with an ongoing bus stop and shelter improvement programme. This will seek to provide improvements across the area in terms of shelter and information quality. There will be an emphasis on providing MRT-level infrastructure on at least one demonstration corridor.

Green shelters with succulent roofs have been popular where used so far. Therefore, it is the intention to expand the introduction of more sustainable shelters. We will seek to use shelter

suppliers that are able to offer sustainability and green elements to shelters that are appropriate for every different situation. Succulent roofs and solar power struggle under large tree canopies, but shelters can still be recyclable and may be able to make use of other measures such as wind to reduce reliance on mains electric.

Bus stop clusters in Central Milton Keynes (particularly Midsummer Boulevard / Lower Ninth Street) tend to be spaced out, making interchange more difficult and the ability to move from one to another according to which bus is approaching first. Operators have expressed a desire to see some consolidation of these bus stops, where they are located more closely together.

As well as the need for interchange hubs to facilitate transfer between DRT and bus, there is a wider interest in the provision of mobility hubs to help integrate all travel modes, including e-scooters and park and ride.

Passengers appreciate real time information displays, as they provide more confidence in making bus journeys. Having introduced e-ink signs there is a desire to roll these out to more sites, funding becomes available. Equally, again to help facilitate transfer between DRT and bus, we wish to link DRT system data feeds with real time information, such that both DRT and bus information is displayed.

### **Bus fleet**

There is a desire to see the decarbonisation of the bus fleet and the future introduction of zero emission vehicles. However, current usage of services in Milton Keynes would make it difficult for operators to justify the investment. However, as technology continues to develop and the potential for production costs to fall, the economics for conversion will become more favourable and funding opportunities will be sought.

In parallel, MKCC has been identifying its own sources of sustainable energy that would be available to power a bus fleet.

### **Accessibility and inclusion**

Alongside the improvement of bus stops, consideration will be given to the connecting footways and cycleways, to ensure good access and safety. A programme of footway improvements will be developed, including measures such as vegetation reduction and lighting.

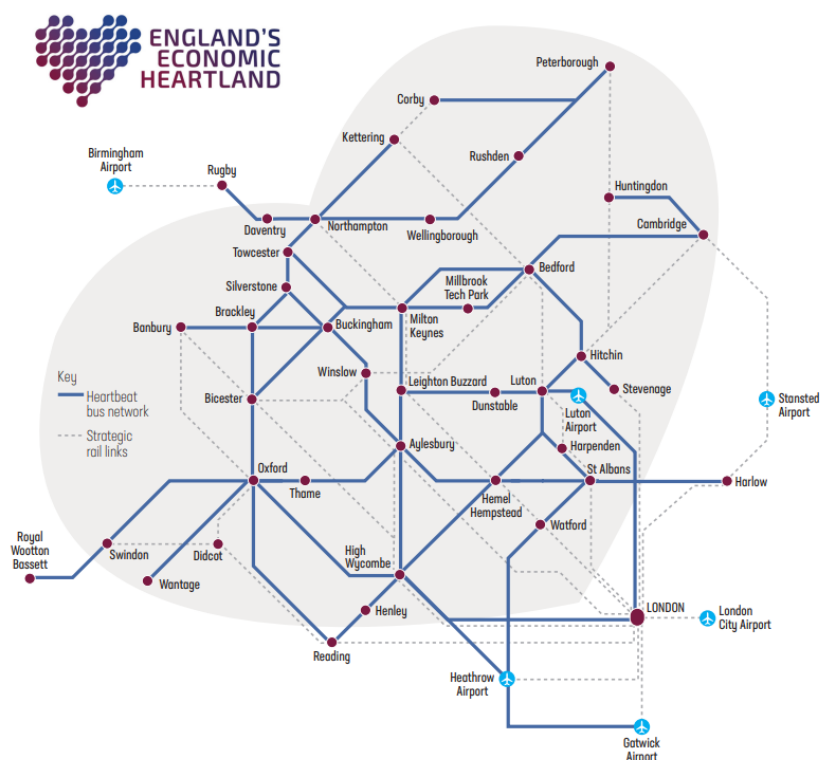
### **Longer term transformation**

The case for MRT services will continue to be developed and an Outline Business Case will be completed this year. Following that more detailed work will be needed to devise options for operating models.

## Regional Bus Network

Buses can play a wider role in providing connectivity across the region. This is already evident through the network of bus services that exist between Milton Keynes, Oxford, Aylesbury, Luton, Bedford and Northampton.

There is scope to develop this further and therefore we will work with England's Economic Heartland (sub-regional transport body) to develop and implement a regional bus service network concept called 'Heartbeat'. The service looks to increase the frequency on key existing routes to 30 minutes or less, as well as suggesting new routes between locations to better connect the region by bus.



## 5. Targets, performance monitoring and reporting

KPIs	Actual						Target	Measure
	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024	2029/30	
Total passenger journeys	8.5m	8.2m	2.9m	5.3m	6.5m	n/a	9.0m	DfT Bus Statistics table BUS01e
Total passenger journeys per head of population	31.8	30.6	10.8	18.3	22.4	n/a	33.0	DfT Bus Statistics table BUS01f
Total ENCTS passenger journeys	2.1m	2.0m	0.6m	1.0m	1.3m	1.4m	2.2m	Journeys originating at MK boarding points
Total passenger journeys on key N-S/E-W city routes	5.26m	5.17m	1.93m	3.63m	4.21m	4.58m	6.5m	Services (3, 4, 5, 6, 8)
Average passengers per vehicle hour on DRT	n/a	n/a	1.1	3.2	3.6	4.2	5.0	Data supplied by operator
Reliability	78%	70%	82%	86%	79%	77%	90%	Proportion of buses running on time (no more than 1 min early or 5 mins later than scheduled), from RTPi observations

There will be continuous monitoring of initiatives to measure impacts and outcomes of measures introduced and various initiatives implemented. This will feed into annual reporting on progress, to inform future developments.

Work is underway to improve ways of engaging with people on public transport schemes and to collate their feedback, as part of MKCC's commitment to clear and open communication with service users.



## 6: Appendices

### Summary of current bus services in Milton Keynes

#### Key

Key services  
Core services  
Supporting services



Service number	Route description (i.e. main places served)	Operator	M-S daytime frequency (mins)	M-S evening frequency	Sunday frequency	Notes	Commercial or supported
1	Newport Pagnell – Willen – CMK	Arriva	30	No service after 1845	No service		Commercial
2/2A	Newport Pagnell - Willen - CMK - Crownhill	Arriva	30	30-60	60		Commercial
3/3A/3S	Snelshall West - Westcroft - CMK - Kingston - Magna Park – Amazon	Arriva	15	30	30		Commercial
4	Wolverton - CMK - Bletchley	Arriva	15/30	30/60	30	Monday – Saturday daytime: 15-minute frequency CMK – Bletchley; 30-minute frequency Wolverton – CMK. Sunday daytime: 30-minute frequency CMK – Bletchley; 60-minutes frequency Wolverton – CMK.	Commercial
5/6	Wolverton - Stony Stratford (6 only) – Bradville (5 only) - CMK - Hospital - Bletchley - Newton Leys (5 only)	Arriva	20	60	30	5 and 6 both operate at a 20-minute frequency at different times. Combined that gives a higher frequency but service 5 doesn't stop at every stop.	Commercial
7	Wolverton - Great Linford – CMK	Arriva	15/20	40	40	20-minute frequency on Saturdays	Commercial
8	Walnut Tree - Kingston - CMK - Westcroft	Arriva	20	60	60		Commercial
21	Lavendon - Olney - Newport Pagnell – CMK	Red Rose	60	No service	No service	some services are irregular but generally follows a 60-minute frequency	Commercial with some support by MKCC
33/33A	Northampton-Road-Hanslope-CMK	Arriva	65-135	No service after 1915	No service	Cross boundary	Supported by MKCC and West Northamptonshire Council
34	CMK - Magna Park Amazon - Ridgmont - Amptill - Flitwick - Amptill Heights	Grant Palmer	60	No service after 1840	No Sunday service		Commercial with some support from Central Bedfordshire Council
41	Bedford - Lavendon - Olney – Northampton	Stagecoach	60-120	No service from Olney after 2010	No service		Commercial with support from MKCC and Bedford Borough Council
50	Great Horwood – Winslow - Newton Longville - Bletchley - CMK	Z&S Transport	5 services a day	No service	No service		Supported by Buckinghamshire Council
83	Silverstone UTC - Wolverton – CMK	Stagecoach	1 journey	No service	No service	Only on college days	Commercial
89	CMK – Deanshanger – Potterspurty -CMK	Arriva	1 service daily	No service	No service	Only on school days	Supported by MKCC and West Northamptonshire Council
100	Aylesbury - Milton Keynes	Red Rose	60	No service after 1900	No service	Cross boundary	Commercial
C1/C11	CMK - Kingston - Cranfield - Kempston - Bedford	Uno	60	60	120		Supported by Cranfield University
C10/CX	CMK - Newport Pagnell - Cranfield - Bedford	Uno	70	No service from CMK after 1830	No service	CX operates 4 times a day directly from CMK to Cranfield Innovation Centre	Supported by Cranfield University
F70/F77	Luton-Dunstable-Leighton Buzzard-Newton Leys-CMK	Arriva	30	30	60	Cross boundary	Commercial
X4	Aylesbury – Leighton Buzzard - Milton Keynes	Arriva	60-150	60 (1 evening journey)	No service	No service Monday – Friday from CMK 0640 – 0900 or 1500-1715	Commercial
X5	Oxford-Buckingham-CMK-Coachway-Bedford	Stagecoach	30	60	60	Cross boundary	Commercial
X6	CMK - Roade - Grange Park - Northampton	Stagecoach	60	60	60	Cross boundary. last service 1943	Commercial
X6	Aylesbury – Buckingham – Milton Keynes	Arriva	60	60 (last journey 1955)	No service	Cross boundary	Commercial
X91	CMK - Towcester - Silverstone	Stagecoach	5 journeys per day	Last service 1750	No service		Supported by West Northamptonshire Council
MK1	CMK – Luton Airport – Bedford	Stagecoach	60	60	60	Cross boundary	Commercial
162	Stewkley - Bletchley	Red Rose	1-2 journeys per day	No service	No service	Services only Monday - Thursday and Saturday	
M5	Wolverton - CMK - Magna Park Amazon	Arriva	2 daytime journeys	1 evening journey	As Monday – Saturday		Commercial
M6	CMK - Bletchley - Magna Park Amazon	Arriva	5 daytime journeys Monday – Friday, 1 extending to Magna Park Amazon. 1 daytime and 1 evening journey on Saturday	2 journeys Monday – Friday, 1 journey extending to Magna Park Amazon	1 daytime and 1 evening journey		Commercial



Milton Keynes City Council  
1 Saxon Gate East  
Central Milton Keynes  
MK9 3EJ

10/06/24

Dear Sirs,

**Ref: Refreshed Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024**

I am pleased to write to confirm Arriva's support for the refreshed Milton Keynes Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which sets out the aligned vision of our Milton Keynes Enhanced Partnership in accordance with the National Bus Strategy for England.

The aims and objectives of the refreshed Milton Keynes Bus Service Improvement Plan echo our strategic vision to help shape a future where passenger transport is the best choice; we welcome the opportunity to continue working through this successful Partnership to make our vehicles greener and ensure our services are more attractive, more convenient, and more reliable to deliver a future where people choose to leave their cars at home, with less congestion on our roads, and cleaner air for the next generation.

As a member of the Enhanced Partnership Board we have had opportunity to feed into the refresh process, review the proposed content, and support the development of the updated BSIP targets.

We look forward to building on the progress to date and continuing to work with the Authority in delivery of the refreshed BSIP.

Kind regards,

**Toby J France CMILT, CMgr MCMI, MCIHT**  
Head of Commercial

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"Arriva Midlands" is the trading name of the following companies, each of which has its registered office address at 1 Admiral Way, Doxford International Business Park, Sunderland SR3 3XP: Arriva Midlands Limited (02141078), Arriva Midlands North Limited (01556305), Arriva The Shires Limited (02116519) and Centrebus Holdings Limited (06544272).





**Milton Keynes  
Bus Service  
Improvement Plan**

July 2024