

Date: 18 December 2023  
My Ref: JW/jk  
Your Ref:

**Contact:** jo.walker@n-somerset.gov.uk  
**Direct dial:** 01934 634972



Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Jo Walker  
North Somerset Council  
Town Hall  
Weston-super-Mare  
BS23 1UJ

[Via email](#)

[www.n-somerset.gov.uk](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk)

Dear Dr Fox

Thank you for your letter dated 29 November, where you refer to a number of North Somerset Council transport schemes, of which I am keen to respond. I apologise for the delay however, I wanted to ensure I provided you with all the latest information and updates and unfortunately key members of the team have been unwell over the last week.

As you are aware, North Somerset Council is currently actively engaging with communities on its corporate plan and priorities for the next four years. We've also consulted on the Local Plan which sets out our housing plans over the next 15 years and have recently launched a bus services consultation asking for views on current bus services and improvements. We value our communities feedback which will help shape our decision-making going forward.

North Somerset is growing at pace and its important our infrastructure is fit to support communities now and in future. We are also keen to become carbon neutral by 2030, which means an emphasis on sustainable travel – encouraging walking or wheeling wherever possible and improving public transport routes. In this vein, it is no surprise we were awarded the second largest bus service improvement fund in the country.

Each scheme collectively will save vital bus travel minutes, whilst increasing reliability, frequency and long-term sustainability of services. We know we haven't always got our engagement right, but we've listened and we've learned. We're currently engaging with a range of Parish and Town Councils, businesses, community groups and members of the community on a number of transport schemes and listening to their views and comments before shaping the best way forward

### **Clevedon Seafront and Hill Road**

As you are aware an Independent Review of the Clevedon Seafront/Hill Road scheme was commissioned by the council in July and has recently reported back. The council's Executive considered the next steps on the recommendations of the review at its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The Executive report and the draft

minutes are attached. The meeting determined that the recommendations of the Stage 3 Road Safety Audit would be implemented as per usual practice, and that the recommendations of the independent review would be further explored, designed and costed to return to a future executive meeting for decision.

## **Bus Lanes**

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding that was awarded to North Somerset was based on an evidenced bus service improvement plan (BSIP) and funding application which was approved by the Department for Transport. Providing bus priority and improving journey times is an essential part of future-proofing the bus services that many residents of North Somerset rely on across the whole district. The suite of funded initiatives in North Somerset, which includes new bus lanes, fares promotions and enhanced routes has seen bus usage return to pre-pandemic levels already. Initial monitoring and evaluation indications show that the patronage and improvements in journey times already realised will support the ongoing viability of essential services that connect different parts of North Somerset and the wider region, for example the X1 and the X5 services.

## **Long Ashton Bus Lane BSIP scheme**

I refer you to previous correspondence on this matter. The Bus Back Better national strategy specified that 24 hour bus lanes were to be implemented by default and North Somerset followed this national strategy, which was supplemented by the direction provided by Baroness De Vere when the indicative allocations of BSIP funding were announced. This was subsequently changed by ministers to become a local decision rather than a blanket national strategy, which was after our briefing on the matter. As part of our monitoring and evaluation of completed schemes, our first evaluation of the designation of the Long Ashton Bus Lane will take place around 12 months after implementation – so mid-next year. We can feedback our findings after this review.

## **Brockley Coombe BSIP scheme**

Brockley was one of the first four BSIP infrastructure schemes to be delivered. Because of the condensed timescale available to deliver the infrastructure programme the council needed to start working on the schemes while also building the team required to deliver the work. Unfortunately, this meant that there were some elements of the delivery that were not fully resourced such as communications and engagement. The council has worked hard to ensure that these areas have been recruited for future schemes with community engagement prior to schemes starting being paramount. It's important we hear thoughts and opinions on draft proposals before final decisions are made and the works start. The information available to town and parish councils and local ward members has also been expanded and improved as the works have progressed.

The council are in ongoing dialogue with Brockley Parish Council and local stakeholders about works undertaken in the area with meetings taking place between the Parish Council, officers and members to discuss the concerns. In this

specific scheme, the traffic management measures were in place for some preliminary works that were required while the engagement continued with the parish council and the lights were not an indication that the scheme was progressing in full without more engagement about the concerns that were highlighted in the consultation. The council recognises that in order to deliver bus priority there will be some changes to existing infrastructure that may be of concern to local people, and we are committed to understanding and mitigating these concerns while still delivering as much of the BSIP as possible. The BSIP report that was recently considered by the Executive in October sets out the sign-off process between the design and build elements of BSIP infrastructure works to ensure that the way that decisions are made is transparent.

### **Backwell BSIP scheme**

The Backwell BSIP scheme is currently under consultation with feedback to be considered in the new year. The decision-making process includes a formal milestone after design and consultation phase prior to delivery phase where the evidence will be analysed –and the consultation feedback alongside technical data and evidence will help to inform whether the scheme will proceed, and if it does, whether significant design changes will be made. We will continue to engage and consult with the community as our plans take shape, listening and including them as part of our decision-making process.

I hope the above answers all your key points. I am more than happy to discuss them in further detail at our next meeting.

We all want the same thing for North Somerset residents – we want to make it a great place to live, work and visit. Not just for now but for future generations to come. In order to do this, transport improvements need to happen in key locations across North Somerset identified as part of our transport and bus service improvement plans.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Walker', written in a cursive style.

**Jo Walker**  
**Chief Executive**

C: Cllr Mike Bell  
Cllr Hannah Young