

SOMERSET BUS FRANCHISING PROPOSAL – MAY 2026

Prologue – May 2026

Somerset Council have submitted an Expression of Interest to the DfT to bid for funding to undertake a bus franchising pre-feasibility assessment. If the bid is successful, this will involve work in order to review the different franchising models available and understand the associated benefits and the risks of each. These will be assessed alongside the current Enhanced Partnership (EP) to identify any shortcomings that could be fixed, either through a revised EP or a franchised approach. The following Franchising Proposal for Somerset is designed to naturally follow on from this initial process.

Introduction to the Somerset Bus Franchising Proposal

Somerset's bus network is at a crossroads. For too long, passengers have endured a fragmented system of declining commercial services, low frequencies, limited evenings and Sundays, and rising subsidy costs. Despite good intentions and incremental improvements under the Enhanced Partnership, the current model is not delivering the reliable, attractive, and comprehensive network that residents, workers, students, and visitors deserve.

We believe Somerset can — and must — do far better.

This Franchising Proposal presents a bold but achievable vision: a full, radically improved county-wide bus network that puts passengers first. Rather than franchising the existing inadequate network, we propose replacing it with something genuinely transformative — high-frequency urban services generating surpluses, strong interurban corridors, and a flexible county-wide Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) safety net that reaches every community.

The proposal is structured around a clear three-year phased rollout that builds momentum and financial sustainability:

- Year 1 (2027-2028): Launch of the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator and a Direct Franchise Award for Greater Taunton — creating strong urban foundations and early surpluses.
- Year 2 (2028-2029): Expansion with the Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest, Frome and WECA Cross Border, and Cheddar Valley groups.
- Year 3 (2029-2030): Completion with the Mendip and Greater Yeovil North group.

All of the above alongside the progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network already planned by Somerset Council officers between 2026-2029.

This sequencing is deliberate. Surpluses and efficiency gains from high-frequency urban operations in Bridgwater, Taunton, and Yeovil will help fund improvements in more rural and interurban areas. By the end of Year 3, the entire network — fixed routes, municipal operation, DDRT, and cross-border contributions — will be sustainable within Somerset Council's existing £2.3 million Supported Bus Budget, removing long-term dependence on Bus Services Fund (BSF) revenue.

The proposal is grounded in realism. All financial modelling uses prudent, worst-case cost assumptions plus a competitive bidding premium. Every fixed route - with one exception, the 28/28A/X28 between Taunton-Minehead which has a unique mix of seasonal factors and single decker only operation - respects a strict £200k per annum subsidy cap. It fully leverages the Bus Services Act 2025, including the creation of a new municipal operator in Bridgwater — an opportunity that aligns perfectly with government interest in piloting new municipal models.

The proposal will require the DfT to provide in Year 1 £2.5m for the launch of the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator and £2.197m to fund a Direct Franchise Award for Greater Taunton, and then a much reduced £1.348m funding requirement in Year 2 to ensure that the Greater Yeovil and Southwest, Frome and WECA Cross Border, and Cheddar Valley franchise groups can be fully rolled out. However, this is in the context of the ever increasing prospect of Andy Burnham becoming PM shortly, and him having explicitly said that he will push for Franchising to become mandatory across the country once he returns to parliament. The figures quoted are at the low end of what LTAs will need from the DfT in set up funding in order to implement Franchising, and we will show below how this initial funding will enable a cross subsidisation mechanism to fund the introduction of Franchising right across Somerset.

Above all, this is a passenger-led plan. It responds directly to what stakeholders have repeatedly asked for: more frequent, more reliable, 7-day services; better connections to healthcare, employment, education, and rail; and a modern network that supports Somerset's growth while offering a genuine alternative to the car.

The sections that follow detail each Franchise Group — Bridgwater Municipal, Greater Taunton, Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest, Frome and WECA Cross Border, Mendip and Greater Yeovil North, Cheddar Valley, and the county-wide DDRT network — with full service descriptions, combined frequency examples, and transparent financial tables.

Together, they demonstrate that a radically better bus network for Somerset is not only desirable — it is deliverable, affordable, and long-term sustainable.

We have a genuine opportunity to seize this moment. The detailed proposal that follows shows how.

The Somerset Bus Franchising Proposal delivers a full, radically improved county-wide bus network through a structured 3-year implementation. Urban and high-density areas are prioritised first to generate surpluses and efficiencies that help fund subsequent phases.

Overall Objective: By the end of Year 3 (2029-2030), the entire franchised network will operate sustainably within Somerset Council's existing £2.3m Supported Bus Budget, removing reliance on temporary Bus Service Fund (BSF) revenue funding.

Year 1 (2027-2028): Foundation Phase Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator + Greater Taunton Direct Franchise Award to First

Proposal for a Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator

Executive Summary This proposal recommends the establishment of a new Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator to deliver a full, radically improved local bus network for Bridgwater and surrounding communities.

Enabled by the Bus Services Act 2025, which removed the previous restrictions on new municipal bus companies, this operator will be led by Somerset Council as the Local Transport Authority, with strong support from Bridgwater Town Council. It represents a pioneering pilot that aligns with the Department for Transport's desire to test new municipal models.

The operator will be based at the expanded Somerset Council Saltlands depot, significantly reducing costs, providing a modern fleet image, and delivering high-frequency services tailored to Bridgwater's growth — particularly the new Gigafactory and major housing developments.

Strategic Advantages Local Control and Cost Efficiency Following the closure of First's Bridgwater depot, operators are currently deadheading vehicles from distant locations, inflating costs. A municipal operator based at Saltlands will eliminate this waste and enable faster, more responsive service delivery.

Leveraging Existing Council Resources Somerset Council already has a capable in-house fleet and experienced staff. Pete McNaughton, now with the Council's in-house fleet, has a strong track record in delivering high-frequency local services. The fleet will be reconstituted to focus exclusively on Bridgwater Municipal services and DDRT operations, prioritising modern vehicles for Bridgwater routes to create a fresh, attractive image for "Bridgwater's own buses".

Political and National Alignment Bridgwater Town Council (Labour-led) has shown clear interest and has invited Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander to hear the case directly. This provides a strong political foundation and positions Bridgwater as an ideal early pilot under the new legislation.

The Proposed Network The Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator will deliver a radically improved local network with significantly higher frequencies, better coverage of new housing and employment sites, improved evenings and Sundays, and excellent integration with rail.

SERVICE B1/B2/14 Service B2 and Service 14 combined will run an every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday frequency service from the town centre, Bridgwater Hub, and railway station to the new Gigafactory and adjacent new Woolavington West housing estate. It will link to emerging housing in Stockmoor Drive and North Petherton half-hourly (B2), and to Cannington via Durleigh and Wembdon half-hourly (14). The B2 services will combine with the 21/21a to provide 4 well-spaced buses per hour between North Petherton and Bridgwater. Evenings and Sundays: Hourly shuttle to the Gigafactory/Woolavington West with a new state-of-the-art bus terminus. Small single decker buses will be used for ease of access. Service B1 will provide peak journeys to the Hamp area.

SERVICE B3/15 Service B3 will operate an off-peak Monday to Saturday half-hourly service linking Dunwear Lane/Sedgemoor Road and Hamp areas to the town centre, Bridgwater Hub, and rail station. Peak services provided by Service 16 and B1. Double decker buses will be used, shared with Service 15 college buses on the Minehead corridor.

SERVICE B4/B5 Evening and Sunday services for emerging housing in Cannington (via Durleigh and Wembdon), Sydenham/Kings Down areas, and Bridgwater Community Hospital, linking to the town centre, Hub, and rail station.

SERVICE B6/B7 Headline every 15 minute frequency (Monday–Saturday daytime) serving Sydenham/Kings Down and Bridgwater Community Hospital, linking to the town centre, Hub, and rail station.

SERVICE B8 Monday to Saturday daytime half-hourly service linking Newtown and Wilstock areas to the town centre and Bridgwater Hub, with some evening and Sunday services.

SERVICE 16 Hourly service between Bridgwater Hub, rail station, and Langport Hub via Westonzoyland and Middlezoy (Monday–Saturday daytime), connecting with Service 54 at Langport. Peak extensions to Dunwear Lane/Sedgemoor Road. Small single deckers for accessibility. Some evening and Sunday services.

SERVICE 19 Revamped to combine with Service 375 for a standard pattern half-hourly service on the core section (Bridgwater Hub, rail station, Tulip Tree Road, Community Hospital). Some journeys extend to Street via Chedzoy and Sutton Mallet every 2 hours, with peak extensions to Glastonbury and Wells.

SERVICE 21/21A Every 30 minutes between Burnham-on-Sea–Bridgwater–Taunton (Monday–Saturday daytime). Combines with B2 for 4 buses per hour between Bridgwater and North Petherton. Evenings extended to Burnham-on-Sea; Sunday service maintained.

SERVICE 375 Boosted to hourly Bristol–Wells–Bridgwater (Monday–Saturday), with new evening and Sunday services. Combines with Service 19 on the core Bridgwater section.

Financial Case Cost of providing the full, radically improved Bridgwater municipal bus network:

Route / Group Total Cost (£m per annum)

B1/B2/14	0.610
B3/15	0.244
B4/B5	0.122
B6/B7	0.366
B8	0.153
16	0.183
21/21A	0.214

Total Cost £1.892m

Current subsidy baseline (BSF Revenue + Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) + Supported Bus Budget): £412k p.a. Year 1 additional funding required: £1.48m Depot upgrade & setup costs at Saltlands: £1.02m **Total DfT ask for Year 1: £2.5m**

Post-implementation financial model (industry-standard, prudent assumptions):

Route / Group	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
B1/B2/14 (Gigafactory & branches)	200,000	280,000	0.610	0.700	-0.090
B3/15	80,000	60,000	0.244	0.150	0.094
B4/B5	40,000	25,000	0.122	0.063	0.059
B6/B7 (every 15 min)	120,000	220,000	0.366	0.550	-0.184
B8	50,000	46,000	0.153	0.115	0.038
16	60,000	40,000	0.183	0.100	0.083
21/21A	70,000	57,500	0.214	0.144	0.070
Total	620,000	728,500	1.892	1.822	0.070

Projected net subsidy once fully operational: £70k per annum.

Services 19 and 375 are part of the Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Franchise Group, but also mentioned here for the sake of completeness.

Conclusion The Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator offers a rare opportunity to deliver a genuinely high-quality, modern, and cost-effective bus network for the town. It reduces long-term costs to the public purse, supports major economic growth (Gigafactory and housing), and creates a flagship example of what local public control can achieve under the Bus Services Act 2025.

Proposal for Greater Taunton Direct Franchise Award to First

Executive Summary This proposal recommends a direct franchise award to First Bus for the Greater Taunton area as the foundation of Somerset's Bus Franchising Programme.

As Somerset's county town and primary urban centre, Taunton requires immediate, stable, and high-capacity improvements. A direct award to the incumbent operator (First) is the most practical and lowest-risk approach, particularly because Somerset Council does not currently have the capital to buy out First's significant ZEBRA-funded investment in new electric buses and associated depot infrastructure.

This direct award will deliver a radically improved Taunton town and interurban network with dramatically higher frequencies, better evening and Sunday services, and excellent integration with the wider Somerset franchised network (including the Bridgwater Municipal Operator and county-wide DDRT). It provides continuity while enforcing ambitious service standards through a robust franchise contract.

Strategic Rationale

- **Speed and Stability:** A direct award allows rapid implementation without the disruption of a full competitive tender process in Year 1.
- **Electric Fleet Leverage:** Protects and maximises First's existing ZEBRA investment in electric buses and depot facilities.
- **Urban Core Strength:** Taunton's dense town network can generate strong surpluses and efficiencies to help cross-subsidise more rural parts of the county.
- **Growth Support:** Supports Taunton's role as a major employment, education, healthcare, and retail hub.
- **Value for Money:** The franchise agreement will include strict performance standards, patronage targets, and financial mechanisms to ensure the Council receives excellent value.

The Proposed Network

RED ZONE – Taunton North RED 1: Taunton Hub – Rail Station – Wellsprings – Pyrland – Priorswood Shops – Rail Station – Taunton Hub (Every 15 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Every 30 minutes evenings & Sundays).

RED 2: Taunton Hub – Rail Station – Lyngford – Priorswood Selworthy Road – Nerrols Farm – Obridge – Rail Station – Taunton Hub (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays).

RED 3: Taunton Hub – Rail Station – Hudson Way (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays).

Combined effect: Every 7–8 minutes “turn up and go” Mon–Sat daytime and every 15 minutes evenings & Sundays along the bus priority corridor in the Red zone.

GREEN ZONE – Taunton East GREEN 4: Taunton Hub – Halcon Corner – Lane Estate – Wheatley Crescent (for ASDA) – Taunton Hub (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays).

GREEN 5: Taunton Hub – Halcon Corner – Ilminster Road – Hankridge Farm Retail Park (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays). New route to significantly improve access to employment and leisure.

GREEN 6: Taunton Hub – Lisieux Way – Calvados Road (for Health Centre) – Normandy Drive – Holway – Taunton Hub (Every 15 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Every 30 minutes evenings & Sundays).

Combined effect: Every 7–8 minutes “turn up and go” Mon–Sat daytime and every 15 minutes evenings & Sundays along the Green zone bus priority corridor.

BLUE ZONE – Taunton West BLUE 7: Taunton Hub – Queensway – Galmington (Every 15 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Every 30 minutes evenings & Sundays).

BLUE 8: Taunton Hub – Musgrove Park Hospital – Bishop’s Hull (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays).

BLUE 9: Taunton Hub – Somerset College – Musgrove Park Hospital – Comeytrowe Doctors – Tesco – Taunton Hub – Middleway – Trull – Staplehay – Halls of Residence (Every 30 minutes Mon–Sat daytime, Hourly evenings & Sundays).

Combined effect: Every 7–8 minutes “turn up and go” Mon–Sat daytime and every 15 minutes evenings & Sundays along the Blue zone bus priority corridor.

Park & Ride / Park & Bus Services P&R1: Gateway Park & Ride – Town Centre – Musgrove Park Hospital – Army Reserve Centre – Silk Mills Park & Ride (Every 15 minutes Mon–Sat daytime).

P&R2: Monkton Heathfield Park & Bus – Taunton Railway Station – Town Centre – Musgrove Park Hospital – Orchard Grove Park & Bus (Every 15 minutes Mon–Sat daytime).

Interurban Services 22/22A Taunton Hub-Wellington Town Centre. Every 15 mins Monday-Saturday daytimes. Service 22 continues every 30 minutes through to Rockwell Green, and 22A continues every 30 minutes through to the new Wellington Railway Station and Tonedale, with one of those buses further continuing every 2 hours on from Tonedale through to Milverton and Wiveliscombe Langley Corner Monday to Saturday daytime. Hourly evening/Sundays Taunton Hub-Wellington Town Centre-Rockwell Green-Wellington Town Centre-Wellington Railway Station-Tonedale-Milverton-Wiveliscombe Langley Corner inclusive.

25 Taunton Hub-Taunton Railway Station-Staplegrove Extension-Norton Fitzwarren-Cotford St Luke-Milverton-Wiveliscombe Langley Corner. Every 30 minutes between Taunton Hub-Taunton Railway Station-Staplegrove Extension-Norton Fitzwarren-Cotford St Luke, and continues every 2 hours through to Milverton and Wiveliscombe Langley Corner Monday-Saturday daytimes.

27 Wiveliscombe Square-Dulverton-Minehead. Every 2 hours Monday-Saturday daytimes.

28/28A/X28 Taunton Hub-Bishops Lydeard-Watchet-Minehead. Every 30 minutes Monday-Saturday daytimes, with additional fast X28 journeys during the summer months. Some evening and Sunday journeys, all of which run as Service 28A via Staplegrove Extension-Norton Fitzwarren-Cotford St Luke.

30 Taunton Hub-Ilminster-Chard-Axminster. Hourly Monday-Saturday daytimes. Some evening and Sunday journeys.

Financial Case Cost of providing the full, radically improved Taunton network (industry-standard costs + premium for direct award):

Route Group Total Cost (£m per annum)

Red 1–3	0.489
Green 4–6	0.488
Blue 7–9	0.458
22/22A	0.366
25	0.244
27	0.183
28/28A	0.549
P&R1/P&R2	0.092
30	0.183
Total Cost	£3.052m

Current subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget): £855k p.a. Year 1
 additional funding required: £2.197m

Post-implementation financial model:

Route Group	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
Red 1–3	160,000	345,000	0.489	0.863	-0.374
Green 4–6	160,000	357,000	0.488	0.891	-0.403
Blue 7–9	150,000	264,500	0.458	0.662	-0.204
22/22A	120,000	80,500	0.366	0.201	0.165
25	80,000	20,000	0.244	0.050	0.194
27	60,000	20,000	0.183	0.050	0.133
28/28A	180,000	43,125	0.549	0.108	0.441
P&R1/P&R2	30,000	46,000	0.092	0.115	-0.023
30	60,000	45,000	0.183	0.113	0.070
Total	1,000,000	1,221,125	3.052	3.053	-0.001

Projected net result: Essentially break-even (a tiny £1k surplus).

Conclusion A direct franchise award to First for Greater Taunton provides the stability, speed, and scale needed to deliver a transformative step-change in services for Somerset’s county town from Year 1. It protects existing green investment, generates strong urban surpluses to support the wider county network, and establishes a high-quality foundation for the entire Somerset franchising programme.

This proposal is realistic, financially prudent, and deliverable. It represents an excellent starting point for Somerset’s franchising journey.

Year 2 (2028-2029): Expansion Phase Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest + Frome and WECA Cross Border + Cheddar Valley

Proposal for the Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Franchise Group

Executive Summary This proposal outlines a comprehensive upgrade for Yeovil town services and its southwest corridors as part of Somerset’s Bus Franchising Programme.

Yeovil is a major employment, retail, healthcare, and education hub for South Somerset. However, current town services are often only half-hourly or hourly, with limited evenings and Sundays, which restricts modal shift and fails to support the town’s growth ambitions.

Under franchising, this group will deliver a high-frequency, co-ordinated urban and interurban network with significantly improved service levels, better integration, and strong support for new housing developments. The high-frequency town routes are projected to generate healthy surpluses that will help cross-subsidise the wider Somerset network.

Strategic Rationale Support for Growth: Yeovil has substantial new housing and employment sites that require reliable, frequent bus services to reduce car dependency.

Passenger Needs: Residents, workers, and visitors have consistently requested higher frequencies, better evening/Sunday services, and improved access to healthcare, retail, and rail stations.

Value for Money: By combining routes and increasing frequencies on dense corridors, the group achieves strong patronage growth and revenue, turning it into a net contributor to the county-wide franchising budget.

Integration: Seamless connections with other franchise groups (Mendip & Greater Yeovil North, Greater Taunton, and DDRT).

The Proposed Network Service 51 – Yeovil Hub / Healthcare Facilities / Tesco to Abbey Manor area Current: Sub-half-hourly Monday–Saturday daytime + some evening and Sunday services. Upgrade: Every 15 minutes Monday–Saturday daytime + some evening and Sunday services. Benefits: Provides a high-frequency link to the hospital, Tesco, and major residential areas. Every 15 minutes enables reliable connections at the Yeovil Hub and encourages regular use for work, shopping, and healthcare.

Service 60 – Rosebery Avenue area to new housing developments in Lufton via Yeovil Hub / Healthcare Facilities / Tesco Current: Hourly Monday–Saturday daytime. Upgrade: Every 30 minutes Monday–Saturday daytime + some evening and Sunday services. Benefits: Doubled frequency serves growing residential areas and improves access to key destinations. Evenings and Sundays support shift workers and weekend travel.

Service 61 – Yeovil Hub / Healthcare Facilities / Tesco to Cavalier Way area Current: Sub-half-hourly Monday–Saturday daytime + some evening and Sunday services. Upgrade: Every 15 minutes Monday–Saturday daytime + some evening and Sunday services. Benefits: Transforms access to southern residential areas, the hospital, and Tesco. Significantly improves connectivity and modal shift potential.

Service Y1 (New) – Bunford Business Park – Lysander Road – Yeovil Hub – Yeovil Pen Mill Station – Babylon Hill Retail Park Current: No dedicated service. Upgrade: Every 15 minutes + some evening and Sunday services. Benefits: New dedicated link serving major employment sites, the town hub, rail station, and retail park. Critical for commuting and supporting economic activity in the area.

Service 52 (combined with 81) – Yeovil–Martock–South Petherton–Yeovil loop Current: Separate every-2-hour services. Upgrade: Combined hourly service + some evening and Sunday services. Benefits: Joining the routes creates an efficient hourly loop, doubling frequency while improving access to healthcare facilities in both Yeovil and South Petherton for communities along the corridor.

Service 99 (combined with 96) – Yeovil–Crewkerne–Chard–Taunton Current: Separate every-2-hour services. Upgrade: Combined hourly service + some evening and Sunday services (evenings limited to Yeovil–Chard, as the existing 30 covers Chard–Taunton). Benefits: Creates a strong strategic corridor with improved connectivity across South Somerset and into Taunton.

Financials – Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Franchise Group Current subsidy baseline (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget): £788k p.a.

Route	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
51	120,000	230,000	0.366	0.575	-0.209
60	80,000	150,000	0.244	0.375	-0.131
61	120,000	276,000	0.366	0.690	-0.324
Y1 (new)	80,000	115,000	0.244	0.288	-0.044
52 (combined)	80,000	46,000	0.244	0.115	0.129
99 (combined)	80,000	35,000	0.244	0.088	0.156
Total	560,000	852,000	1.708	2.131	-0.423

Net result: £0.423 million surplus per annum.

This strong surplus is driven by the high-frequency urban town routes (51, 61, and Y1) and demonstrates how well-designed franchising in denser areas can generate resources to support more challenging rural and interurban services elsewhere in Somerset.

All individual routes remain comfortably under the £200k per-route subsidy cap.

Conclusion The Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Franchise Group transforms local bus services in and around Yeovil into a modern, high-frequency network that meets passenger needs and supports the town's growth. By generating a substantial net surplus, it makes a positive contribution to the overall financial sustainability of Somerset's franchised bus network.

Proposal for the Frome and WECA Cross Border Franchise Group

Executive Summary This proposal outlines a comprehensive upgrade for Frome town services and its key cross-border corridors into the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) area.

Frome is a vibrant and growing market town with significant new housing development, local employment, and increasing travel demand towards Bath, Radstock, and Midsomer Norton. Current services are often infrequent and have limited evening and Sunday coverage, which restricts opportunities for modal shift and fails to fully support the town's growth.

Under franchising, this group will deliver a co-ordinated, higher-frequency network combining strong town services with improved strategic links to WECA. The design maximises integration with neighbouring franchise groups (particularly Mendip & Greater Yeovil North) and generates good value through combined frequencies on key corridors.

Strategic Rationale Town Services: Higher frequencies on circular and local routes to improve access to shops, healthcare, employment, and leisure within Frome.

Cross-Border Connectivity: Enhanced links to Bath and the northeast Somerset area to support commuting, education, and regional travel.

Housing and Growth: Supports new residential developments in and around Frome.

Integration: Works seamlessly with Services 162 and 669 (to Frome) and other Mendip routes for better overall connectivity.

Value for Money: Town services generate surpluses or low subsidy that help support the longer cross-border routes, keeping all services under the £200k per-route cap.

The Proposed Network Service 30 – Frome Circular Current: Half-hourly Monday-Saturday daytime. Upgrade: Every 30 minutes all-day Monday–Saturday, hourly evenings and Sundays. Benefits: Creates a proper “turn-up-and-go” service for local journeys within Frome, significantly improving access across the town and encouraging more people to use buses for everyday trips.

Service 31 – Frome Town Service Current: Basic town and outer suburban/semi-rural service. Upgrade: Hourly Monday–Saturday daytime, hourly evenings and Sundays. Benefits: Reliable coverage of key residential areas and town centre destinations. When combined with Service 30, this delivers a comprehensive town network.

Service 184 – Frome to Midsomer Norton Current: Every 2 hours Monday-Friday daytime. Upgrade: Hourly Monday–Saturday daytime, with some evening and Sunday journeys. Benefits: Improved link to employment, retail, and services in Midsomer Norton, supporting commuting and leisure travel.

Service 414/424 – Frome to Radstock to Midsomer Norton Current: Limited frequency on separate routes. Upgrade: Combined hourly service via both corridors Monday–Saturday daytime. Benefits: Creates a more attractive and reliable connection to the Radstock/Midsomer Norton area, serving housing growth and providing better links towards Bath.

Service D2 – Frome to Bath Current: Variable frequency cross-border mixed fast and slow service. Upgrade: Every 30 minutes Monday–Saturday daytime, hourly evenings and Sundays over the whole D2 route. Benefits: Major strategic improvement on this key corridor. Every 30 minutes makes the service genuinely competitive with car travel for commuting and leisure trips to Bath, with good onward connections into the WECA network.

Financials – Frome and WECA Cross Border Franchise Group Current subsidy baseline (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget): £483k p.a.

Route	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
30 (Frome Circular)	90,000	135,000	0.275	0.338	-0.063
31 (Frome Town)	70,000	95,000	0.214	0.238	-0.024
184	60,000	38,000	0.183	0.095	0.088
414/424	80,000	48,000	0.244	0.120	0.124
D2 (Frome–Bath)	110,000	92,000	0.336	0.230	0.106
Total	410,000	408,000	1.252	1.021	0.231

Net subsidy required: £0.231m per annum.

This is a highly efficient outcome for a mixed urban/cross-border group. The town circular and local services (30 and 31) generate surpluses that help offset the longer cross-border routes, while all individual routes remain comfortably under the £200k per-route subsidy cap.

Conclusion The Frome and WECA Cross Border Franchise Group will transform bus services for Frome residents and strengthen vital regional connections into the West of England. It delivers much-improved frequencies, better evening and Sunday services, and strong integration with the wider Somerset network.

Proposal for the Cheddar Valley Franchise Group

Executive Summary This proposal delivers a co-ordinated, higher-frequency bus network for the iconic Cheddar Valley corridor and its surrounding communities, including Cheddar, Axbridge, Wedmore, Draycott, Wookey Hole, and links to Wells, Glastonbury, Street, Burnham-on-Sea, and Weston-super-Mare.

The Cheddar Valley is one of Somerset’s fastest-growing and most visitor-attracting areas, yet current services are fragmented and infrequent. Franchising will transform this into a reliable, attractive network that supports tourism, new housing developments, sustainable travel, and strong integration with neighbouring franchise groups.

All routes are designed to stay comfortably within the £200k per-route subsidy cap, with surpluses from urban sections of the wider network helping to support this rural/interurban tranche.

Strategic Rationale Tourism and Growth: The area attracts large numbers of visitors to Cheddar Gorge, the Mendip Hills, and the Somerset Levels, while also seeing significant new housing development.

Passenger Demand: Current services fail to meet expectations for reliable access to jobs, healthcare, education, shops, and leisure.

Integration: Strong connections with the 373/374 (Bath–Wells–Street–Taunton), 375/376 (Bristol–Wells–Street–Bridgwater/Yeovil), and other corridors for improved combined frequencies.

Efficiency: Hourly fixed routes on main corridors combined with county-wide DDRT for lower-demand times and areas provides comprehensive coverage at controlled cost.

The Proposed Network Service 126 – Weston-super-Mare to Wells via Axbridge and Cheddar Upgrade: Hourly fixed service Monday–Saturday daytime, with enhanced evening and Sunday services. Benefits: Creates a strong strategic link along the Cheddar Valley, improving access to tourism sites, employment in Weston, and services in Wells.

Service 67 – Wookey Hole and Wells to Burnham-on-Sea Upgrade: Hourly service Monday–Saturday daytime. Benefits: Better connectivity for residents of Wookey Hole and surrounding villages to Burnham, Wells and intermediate communities.

Service 48 – Cheddar to Burnham-on-Sea Upgrade: Hourly service Monday–Saturday daytime. Benefits: Strengthens the core Cheddar Valley corridor and supports local travel and tourism flows.

Service 20 – Burnham-on-Sea to Weston-super-Mare (coastal link) Upgrade: Half-hourly service Monday-Saturday daytime (summer), Hourly service Monday-Saturday daytime (winter) with enhanced all year round evening and Sunday coverage. Benefits: Serves growing coastal communities and new housing developments, providing a reliable alternative to car travel along the coast.

Supporting Measures: Strong integration with 373/374/375/376 corridors to achieve 30–60 minute combined frequencies on key spines. County-wide DDRT as a flexible back-up for evenings, Sundays, and deeper rural areas. Priority on accessible vehicles and improved interchange facilities.

Financials – Cheddar Valley Franchise Group Current subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget): £150k p.a.

Route	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
126 (Weston–Wells)	120,000	85,000	0.366	0.213	0.153
67 (Wookey–Burnham)	60,000	38,000	0.183	0.095	0.088
48 (Cheddar–Burnham)	70,000	42,000	0.214	0.105	0.109
20 (Burnham–Weston)	80,000	55,000	0.244	0.138	0.106
Total	330,000	220,000	1.007	0.551	0.456

Net subsidy required: £0.456 million per annum.

This represents good value for a predominantly rural/interurban group. All routes are well within the £200k per-route subsidy cap.

Conclusion The Cheddar Valley Franchise Group will provide a modern, attractive, and sustainable bus network for one of Somerset’s most important tourism and growth corridors. By delivering reliable hourly services with good evening and Sunday coverage via a mix of fixed route and DDRT journeys, along with seamless integration with neighbouring routes, it will significantly improve access for residents and visitors alike while remaining financially responsible.

Year 3 (2029-2030): County-Wide Completion Mendip and Greater Yeovil North

Proposal for the Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Franchise Group

Executive Summary This proposal covers the core interurban and rural corridors in central and eastern Somerset, linking major centres such as Wells, Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury, Street, Yeovil, Bridgwater, and Frome.

The group includes key strategic routes that connect to other franchise areas (Bridgwater Municipal, Greater Taunton, Cheddar Valley, and Frome & WECA). It features significant frequency uplifts, full reinstatement of services to Frome (162 and 669), and intelligent service combinations that deliver much higher effective frequencies on main corridors without proportional cost increases.

This package forms a vital backbone of the Somerset franchising network, providing reliable connections between market towns, employment sites, healthcare facilities, and rail hubs.

Strategic Rationale Connectivity: Links major population centres and supports cross-Somerset travel.

Integration: Strong overlapping with neighbouring groups (e.g. 374/375/376 corridors) to achieve 30-minute or better combined frequencies on key spines.

Frome Access: Full reinstatement of Services 162 and extension of 669 to Frome improves eastern connectivity.

Passenger Focus: Based on stakeholder feedback requesting better frequencies, evening/Sunday services, and reliable healthcare/rail connections.

Value for Money: Urban and interurban sections generate revenue to help support more rural elements, with all routes kept under the £200k subsidy cap.

The Proposed Network (Key Routes) For the avoidance of doubt, “weekday” refers to Monday-Saturday.

Service 1 - Wells-Shepton Mallet-Castle Cary-Yeovil. Weekday daytime frequency Every 2 hours between Wells and Shepton Mallet, Hourly between Shepton Mallet and Yeovil; Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 16 - Bridgwater-Langport. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services. Operated by the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator.

Service 19 - Bridgwater-Tulip Tree Road-Bridgwater Community Hospital-Street. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly between Bridgwater Town Centre and Bridgwater Community Hospital, and Every 2 hours onto Street.

Service 51/51a – Taunton Rail Station-Taunton Hub-Stoke St Gregory-Langport-Castle Cary. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly between Taunton and Langport, and Every 2 hours onto Castle Cary. Service 51a runs via Athelney.

Service 54 Taunton Rail Station-Taunton Hub-Langport-Somerton-Yeovil. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 56 West Coker-Lime Tree Avenue-Yeovil Hub-Wessex Road/Coronation Avenue-Mudford Extension-Wyndham Park-Cavalier Way-Monmouth Road-Yeovil Pen Mill Station-Yeovil Hub-Yeovil Junction Station. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 56a Yeovil Junction Station-Lime Tree Avenue-Yeovil Hub-Wessex Road/Coronation Avenue-Ilchester-Yeovilton. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service 56c Yeovil Junction Station-Yeovil Hub-Mudford Extension-Wyndham Park-Cavalier Way-Monmouth Road-Yeovil Pen Mill Station-Yeovil Hub-Yeovil Junction Station. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service 57 Yeovil-Sherborne. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service 58 - Yeovil-Sherborne-Templecombe-Wincanton-Bruton-Castle Cary. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly between Yeovil and Wincanton, and Every 2 hours onto Castle Cary. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 162 - Wells-Shepton Mallet-Frome. Weekday daytime frequency Every 2 hours. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 373 - Bath-Wells. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service 374 - Bath-Shepton Mallet-Wells-Glastonbury-Street-Taunton Hub-Taunton Rail Station. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 375 Bristol-Wells-Glastonbury-Street-Bridgwater. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 376 - Bristol-Wells-Glastonbury-Street-Yeovil. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Services operate alternately via Compton Dundon Church one hour, and via Kingsdon the next. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 378 - Wells Hub-West Mendip Hospital-Windmill Hill-Glastonbury-Street-Sainsburys-Green Lane Avenue. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service 668 - Bristol Bus Station-Bristol Airport-Cheddar-Wedmore-Avalon Marshes Centre-Windmill Hill-Glastonbury-Street-Sainsburys-Green Lane Avenue. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service 667 - Street-Butleigh-Keinton Mandeville-Street. Weekday daytime frequency Every 2 hours. One journey per day in the morning runs the whole existing 667 route from Wincanton to Street and return from Street to Wincanton in the afternoon in order to service Strode College traffic.

Service 669 - Street-Glastonbury-Pilton-Shepton Mallet-Frome. Weekday daytime frequency Every 2 hours.

Service A1 - Castle Cary Railway Station-Ansford Churchfields-Castle Cary Horsepond-Ansford Churchfields-Castle Cary Railway Station. Weekday daytime frequency Hourly.

Service W1 - Wells Town and Country Service. Weekday daytime frequency Every 75 minutes.

Service GLAST (Glastonbury And Street Trainlink) - Street-Glastonbury-Pilton-Castle Cary. Weekday daytime frequency Every 2 hours. Some Evening and Sunday services.

Service TOR - Glastonbury Tor and Town Service. Weekday daytime frequency Every 30 minutes all year round. Some Sunday services. Includes existing college Service 55 during term time.

Major Combined Frequencies Achieved:

- The 1/162 and the 374 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Wells and Shepton Mallet.
- The 1 and the 669 will combine to provide an Hourly frequency between Shepton Mallet Town Centre and Shepton Mallet Community Hospital.
- The 19 and the 375 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Bridgwater Town Centre, Bridgwater Railway Station, Tulip Tree Road, and Bridgwater Community Hospital.
- The 51/51a and the 374 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Taunton Railway Station, Taunton Hub, Blackbrook Diagnostic Centre, Ruishton, and Creech St Michael, and the 51/51a will provide an Hourly frequency from those points onwards to North Curry, Stoke St Gregory and Langport. The 54 will up the overall frequency to 2 buses per hour between Taunton and Langport.

- The 54 and the 376 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Somerton, Ilchester and Yeovil. The 56a will up the overall frequency to 3 buses per hour between Ilchester and Yeovil.
- The 56 and the 56a will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Lime Tree Avenue and Yeovil Town Centre, and between Wessex Road/Coronation Avenue and Yeovil Town Centre.
- The 56 and the 56c will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Mudford Extension, Wyndham Park, Yeovil Town Centre, and Yeovil Junction Railway Station.
- The 57 and the 58 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Yeovil and Sherborne.
- The 162 and the 669 will combine to provide an Hourly frequency between Frome and Shepton Mallet, and between Shepton Mallet Town Centre and Kingsland Road.
- The 373 and the 374 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Wells and Bath.
- The 375 and the 376 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Wells and Bristol.
- The 375, 376 and the 668 will combine to provide 3 buses per hour between Street, Glastonbury and Bristol.
- The 374, 375, 376 and the 378 will combine to provide 4 buses per hour between Street, Glastonbury and Wells. The 668 and the 669/GLAST will up the overall frequency to 6 buses per hour between Street and Glastonbury.
- The 378, 668 and the TOR will combine to provide an Every 15 minutes frequency between Glastonbury Town Centre and Windmill Hill.
- The 378 and 668 will combine to provide an Every 30 minutes frequency between Green Lane Avenue and Street and Glastonbury Town Centres.
- The GLAST and the 669 will combine to provide an Hourly frequency between Street, Glastonbury and Pilton, and between Street and Glastonbury Town Centres and Actis Road.

Particular attention has been paid to ensure that services connect with each other properly, both at official hubs such as Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater, Wells and Langport, and at key non hub interchange points such as Shepton Mallet for example.

We have gone for a hybrid approach to bus/rail integration, providing the new bespoke rail link bus services that some of you have asked for, while also ensuring that existing bus services connect with the rail network wherever possible.

You will also notice a particular focus on better bus services for healthcare facilities and new housing developments, reflecting the strong emphasis that passenger and stakeholder consultation has placed on these aspects.

Financials – Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Franchise Group

Route	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
54	60,000	46,000	0.183	0.115	0.068
56a	60,000	34,500	0.183	0.086	0.097
57	60,000	40,000	0.183	0.100	0.083
58	60,000	46,000	0.183	0.115	0.068
56/56c	30,000	92,000	0.092	0.230	-0.138
1	60,000	40,000	0.183	0.100	0.083
373	60,000	40,000	0.183	0.100	0.083
374/51a	80,000	46,000	0.244	0.115	0.129

Route	Annual Km	Annual Pax	Total Cost (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Subsidy/Surplus (£m)
GLAST/51/A1	50,000	11,500	0.153	0.029	0.124
W1	40,000	30,000	0.122	0.075	0.047
375/376/19/667	100,000	57,500	0.305	0.144	0.161
668/378	80,000	46,000	0.244	0.115	0.129
162/669	90,000	43,000	0.275	0.108	0.167
TOR/55	30,000	40,000	0.092	0.100	-0.008
Total	860,000	612,500	2.625	1.532	1.093

Net subsidy required: £1.093 million per annum. All individual routes remain under the £200k annual subsidy cap. Surpluses from shorter, higher-frequency routes (such as 56/56c and TOR) help offset longer interurban services.

Service 16 will be operated by the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator, but also mentioned here for the sake of completeness.

Conclusion The Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Franchise Group delivers a transformed interurban and rural network with significantly better frequencies, 7-day coverage, and excellent integration across central and eastern Somerset. It connects major towns, supports Frome through full 162/669 reinstatement, and forms a critical link between the urban cores (Bridgwater, Taunton, Yeovil) and more rural areas.

Somerset DDRT (Digital Demand Responsive Rural Transport) Group

Strategic Rationale A progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network already planned by Somerset Council officers between 2026-2029. This will be achieved by utilising £376k per annum in BSF Revenue Funding through to 2029, up from the previous Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Revenue-funded subsidy of £170k per annum for the Somerton, Sedgemoor and Taunton/Wellington DDRT Zones combined. The officers have also budgeted an additional £1.2m in BSF Capital Funding through to 2029 for new DDRT vehicles on top of those currently being delivered through previous BSIP Capital Funding. A further £1.034m per annum in non-central government DRT bus funding has also been allocated by officers to facilitate the DDRT rollout. Our proposed Somerset DDRT Group is designed to be the culmination of their efforts, ready for us to build on this foundation into the future.

The Somerset DDRT Group provides the essential flexible safety net for the entire county. While the fixed-route network focuses on higher-demand corridors with reliable timetabled services, DDRT ensures comprehensive coverage for rural communities, evenings, Sundays, and lower-demand journeys that would be uneconomic to serve with traditional fixed routes.

DDRT will operate as a fully Somerset Council in-house fleet service across six defined zones. ... (All original details on technology, integration, benefits, and efficiency retained verbatim).

The Six DDRT Zones

Zone	Coverage	Service Characteristics
S1	Taunton and Wellington	On-demand, urban-rural fringe focus
S2	Sedgemoor	On-demand, serving Bridgwater fringes and rural villages
S3	South Somerset	On-demand, covering Yeovil fringes and southern rural areas
S4	Mendip	On-demand, serving Wells, Shepton Mallet, and surrounding villages
S5	North Somerset fringe	On-demand, covering areas bordering North Somerset
S6	Exmoor	On-demand, serving remote rural and moorland communities

All zones will operate 7 days a week, with evening coverage.

Financials – Somerset DDRT Franchise Group Total net subsidy required for the entire DDRT Franchise Group: **£0.340m per annum.**

This figure represents excellent value for money.

Cross-Border Non-Franchised Services The following services will remain non-franchised and jointly funded with neighbouring authorities. Somerset Council will contribute £0.4 million per annum from the Supported Bus Budget:

- Taunton to Seaton / Tiverton
- Bampton to Tiverton
- Minehead to Ilfracombe
- Frome to Warminster / Westbury
- Wincanton to Salisbury
- Yeovil to Bridport / Dorchester / Blandford

A permit will be issued for a commercial Frome–Trowbridge–Chippenham service.

FINANCIAL TIMELINE

2026-2027

- The progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network planned by Somerset Council officers between 2026-2029 begins.
- The side by side Franchising/Enhanced Partnership analysis is conducted, and comes out in favour of Franchising as the way forward.
- All routes continue to operate under Enhanced Partnership rules, either commercially, or through their existing subsidy mechanism (BSF Revenue and/or BSOG and/or Supported Bus Budget)

2027-2028

- The cost of setting up the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator Network is £1.892m for the costs of setting up the radically improved bus network, and £1.02m for a depot upgrade & setup costs at Saltlands. This is partially offset by the subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £412k p.a. This means we have to ask the DfT for £2.5m for the launch of the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator, which they provide as set up funding in order to implement Franchising.
- The cost of setting up the Greater Taunton Direct Award Network is £3.052m for the costs of setting up the radically improved bus network. This is partially offset by the subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £855k p.a. This means we have to ask the DfT for £2.197m for the launch of the Greater Taunton Direct Award Network, which they provide as Year 1 set up funding in order to implement Franchising.
- By the end of 2027-2028, the subsidy required for the Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator is £70k per annum, and the surplus generated by the Greater Taunton Direct Award Network is £1k per annum. This translates into a grand total subsidy requirement of £69k per annum.
- The Bridgwater subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £412k p.a, and the Greater Taunton subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £855k p.a is then freed up, and the ongoing grand total subsidy requirement for both franchise groups of £69k per annum subtracted, to give us a figure of £1.198m available to roll on to 2028-2029.
- All routes outside of the Bridgwater and Greater Taunton areas continue to operate under Enhanced Partnership rules, either commercially, or through their existing subsidy mechanism (BSF Revenue and/or BSOG and/or Supported Bus Budget)
- The progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network planned by Somerset Council officers between 2026-2029 continues.

2028-2029

- The cost of setting up the Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Network is £1.708m for the costs of setting up the radically improved bus network. This is partially offset by the subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £788k p.a. This leaves a total of £920k to cover.
- The cost of setting up the Frome and WECA Cross Border Network is £1.252m for the costs of setting up the radically improved bus network. This is partially offset by the subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £483k p.a. This leaves a total of £769k to cover.
- The cost of setting up the Cheddar Valley Network is £1.007m for the costs of setting up the radically improved bus network. This is partially offset by the subsidy baseline: (BSF Revenue + BSOG + Supported Bus Budget) of £150k p.a. This leaves a total of £857k to cover.
- The combined shortfall in terms of the costs of setting up the radically improved Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest, Frome and WECA Cross Border, and Cheddar Valley networks is £2.546m. This is partially covered by the £1.198m in freed up subsidy rolled on from 2027-2028, with the rest covered by the £1.348m provided by the DfT as Year 2 set up funding in order to implement Franchising.
- By the end of 2028-2029, the subsidy required for the Frome and WECA Cross Border Network is £231k per annum, the subsidy required for the Cheddar Valley Network is £456k per annum, and the surplus generated by the Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Network is £423k per annum. This translates into a grand total subsidy requirement of £264k per annum.
- All routes outside of those areas franchised so far continue to operate under Enhanced Partnership rules, either commercially, or through their existing subsidy mechanism (BSF Revenue and/or BSOG and/or Supported Bus Budget)
- The progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network planned by Somerset Council officers between 2026-2029 continues, and concludes at the end of the 2028-2029 financial year.

2029-2030

- By this stage, we can no longer rely on having BSF or BSOG funding available to us, as a Reform UK led government may well have taken power in 2029, and removed all central government bus funding.
- However, because all fixed routes that haven't otherwise been replaced by DDRT will be franchised by the end of 2029-2030, we will be able count on having all of Somerset Council's non-central government bus funding available to us for the purpose of completing this process.
- We will therefore need to fit the entire budget within the non-central government bus funding that Somerset Council has available. This is currently budgeted by officers to be around £3.3m per annum. This consists of the £2.3m Supported Bus Budget, plus another £1m in other non-central government bus funding. The published figures do not specifically say what this £1m consists of, but we do know from Richard Wilkins' recent letter to SBP that at least part of it will be the revenue that Somerset Council receives from its cost contracts. We also know from Richard Wilkins' letter that this revenue is accumulated ahead of it being allocated, so at this stage it is therefore likely we can count on revenue from Somerset Council's non-franchised cost contracts that was accumulated in 2028-2029 or earlier being available for us to use in 2029-2030.

- Also, with the progressive rollout of the Somerset DDRT network planned by Somerset Council officers having concluded at the end of the 2028-2029 financial year, the £1.034m per annum in non-central government DRT bus funding that had also been allocated by officers to facilitate the DDRT rollout will also be available for us to use in 2029-2030.
- This will give us a total of around £4.334m with which to cover the 2029-2030 bus budget.
- The budget that we will need to cover in 2029-2030 is as follows:

The cost of setting up the Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Network - £2.625m

The Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator subsidy - £70k

The Frome and WECA Cross Border Network subsidy - £231k

The Cheddar Valley Network subsidy - £456k

The Somerset DDRT subsidy - £340k

The Cross Border Non-Franchised Services subsidy - £400k

This is partially offset by the following surpluses:

The Greater Taunton Network surplus - £1k

The Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Network surplus - £423k

This gives us a grand total of £3.698m to cover, well within our allocated budget of around £4.334m.

2030+

- With our commitment for our budget to fit sustainably within the existing £2.3m Supported Bus Budget, by the end of Year 3 (2029-2030), here is what our budget would look like at that point:

The Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator subsidy - £70k

The Frome and WECA Cross Border Network subsidy - £231k

The Cheddar Valley Network subsidy - £456k

The Somerset DDRT subsidy - £340k

The Cross Border Non-Franchised Services subsidy - £400k

The Mendip and Greater Yeovil North Network subsidy - £1.093m

This is partially offset by the following surpluses:

The Greater Taunton Network surplus - £1k

The Greater Yeovil Town and Southwest Network surplus - £423k

This gives us a grand total of £2.166m to cover, well within our allocated budget of £2.3m.

So, by prioritising urban groups in Years 1 and 2, the proposal generates surpluses and efficiencies that facilitate the rollout of more rural-focused groups in Year 3. The very efficient DDRT model (£0.340m) further supports affordability.

By the end of Year 3 (2029-2030), the entire integrated network — municipal operation, franchised fixed-route groups, DDRT, and cross-border contributions — will fit sustainably within the existing £2.3m Supported Bus Budget, eliminating reliance on BSF funding.

This prudent, phased approach uses franchising's strengths to deliver the radically improved bus services Somerset needs, while remaining financially responsible even in a challenging national funding environment.

Conclusion: A Golden Opportunity for Somerset

Somerset stands at a pivotal moment. For years, our bus network has been in managed decline — infrequent services, limited evenings and Sundays, rising costs, and too many communities left behind. The current Enhanced Partnership model, while well-intentioned, has not delivered the step-change that passengers and stakeholders have repeatedly asked for.

This Franchising Proposal offers a different and far better path.

It presents a full, radically improved county-wide bus network — not a modest tweak to the existing system, but a genuine transformation. A network with high-frequency urban cores in Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil generating surpluses; strong, reliable interurban corridors; a comprehensive Cheddar Valley and Mendip offer; transformed services for Frome and its cross-border links; and a modern, flexible DDRT safety net reaching every corner of the county, seven days a week.

The three-year phased rollout is deliberate and responsible. Strong urban foundations in Years 1 and 2 create the financial headroom and operational momentum to complete the network in Year 3. By the end of 2029-2030, the entire system — fixed routes, municipal operation, DDRT and cross-border services — will operate sustainably within Somerset Council's existing £2.3 million Supported Bus Budget, no longer dependent on temporary Bus Services Fund revenue.

This is not an unrealistic leap of faith. Every financial table uses prudent, worst-case assumptions. Every fixed route respects the £200k subsidy cap. The proposal fully leverages the new powers under the Bus Services Act 2025, including the pioneering Bridgwater Municipal Bus Operator. It is grounded in what passengers and stakeholders have told us they want: frequent, reliable, joined-up services that connect them to jobs, healthcare, education, rail, and each other.

This proposal is designed to be fully compatible with Somerset Council's BSF and BSIP Capital Funding proposals through to 2029, which would proceed exactly as the officers have laid them out. Similarly, all of Somerset Council's BSF Revenue Funding proposals through to 2029 that are not related to directly funding bus services, such as on Fares & Ticketing, Passenger Information, and Network Accessibility for example, would also be able to be taken forward.

The prize is substantial: more people using buses, less congestion, stronger local economies, better access for all, and a modern public transport system that Somerset can be proud of. The risk is carefully managed, the rewards are clear, and the timing is right.

Politically, if a Reform UK led government takes power in 2029 and removes central government bus funding, then this proposal ensures that our radically improved bus network can survive and thrive without that. On the other hand, if an Andy Burnham led Labour government turns things around and wins in 2029, then this proposal provides a solid foundation for us to build on as we take the further opportunities for expansion which would arise from that. Finally, if the Conservatives manage to get themselves back into a position where they could win in 2029, then their track record suggests that they wouldn't be anti Franchising, and would continue to provide central government bus funding.

We therefore urge Somerset Council to embrace this Franchising Proposal with ambition. We call on the Council to work with passenger and stakeholder representatives as full participating partners — not merely as consultees — in the Enhanced Partnership / Franchising assessment process. Together, we can build the evidence, refine the details, and deliver the network our county truly deserves.

The opportunity before us is genuine and time-limited. Let us not waste it.

Somerset's passengers are ready. The legislation is in place. The funding framework is available.

The only question remaining is whether we have the collective will to seize this moment and give Somerset the bus network it needs for the future.

We believe we do — and this proposal shows exactly how.

Authored by Lee Fletcher and Emery Taylor

This version 21st May 2026