

ADEPT President's Awards 2023

Entry form

Main contact name	Mike ODowd-Jones
Email	mike.odowdjones@somerset.gov.uk
Award category	Delivering Clean Growth
Project Title	Taunton Bus Town and £1 Fare
Local authority entrant	Somerset Council
Partner/s if applicable	Buses of Somerset

Headline summary (150 characters max.)

Bold and creative use of funding in partnership with bus operators to deliver infrastructure and low fares which have driven a 24% patronage increase.

Delivering clean growth: How is this project delivering clean growth, not just now but into the future – demonstrating ambition and vision, anticipating future challenges and future proofing growth including developing the workforce for the future? (150 words max)

Somerset Council submitted an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan to Government. We were one of few authorities to be awarded funding totalling £11.9m to implement proposals due to the level of ambition including a willingness to implement significant bus priority infrastructure and imaginative fares proposals. We faced a difficult decision as a large rural county about how best to use the limited funding, given the scale of investment needed to transform our extensive rural bus network. Through discussion with our Bus Advisory Board and Bus User and Stakeholder Group we agreed a bold plan to focus most of the investment in one place (Taunton) to show how significant capital and revenue investment in one place could truly transform services; and make a strong case for future funding. In a rural county good bus access is key to maintaining access to learning, skills training and employment, developing the future workforce.

Delivering clean growth: How is this project working across boundaries and with different partners to achieve long lasting clean growth? (150 words max)

Somerset has ambitious growth proposals and in order to deliver clean growth we need to ensure a robust public transport offer to reduce the car reliance of new development. We have set up a new Bus Advisory Board to develop and implement these proposals and hold each other to account. This is underpinned by a legally formulated enhanced partnership plan and scheme. The advisory board comprises the Council (transport and planning reps), bus operators, rail operators, and stakeholder representatives including neighbouring transport authorities to consider cross-boundary services. We have set up a bus user and stakeholder group which reports in to the advisory board to represent the views of passengers and have agreed a passenger charter by which we are held to account. The stakeholder group includes passenger reps, community transport groups, disability groups, business groups including the Local Enterprise Partnership, key developers, and other destination representatives.

Delivering clean growth: How is this project proactively engaging with business to tackle

problems and find solutions, stimulating the clean growth sector at the same time? (150 words max.)

We are now implementing bus priority on key corridors, two mobility hubs, new fare products, trial late night services on routes into Taunton to support the night-time economy, and additional demand responsive services. A major element has been a three year trial for a £1 bus fare within Taunton. Customers now pay £1 for a single fare anywhere within the zone including on park and ride services, and we are finalising a multi-operator agreement to support this. The £1 fare has delivered a 24% increase in patronage in Taunton over its first 4 months. We are engaging with businesses through our economic development function to ensure the new services create a genuine uplift in the nighttime economy making sure that destination events take advantage of the enhanced transport offer, and linking event and business promotion with marketing of the transport services.

Delivering clean growth: How is this project going beyond the 3-5 year budget cycle to prepare for future challenges including the use or consideration of innovative funding solutions? (150 words max.)

The programme currently uses DfT bus service improvement plan funding. This is designed to stimulate more commercial operation of bus services beyond the three year trial which will lead to a financially self-sustaining business model for transport reducing reliance on public subsidy. In planning and approving new development we also seek to channel funding into the system via planning obligations. We are seeking to demonstrate a high return for government investment and influence future rounds of bus service improvement funding so that the same virtuous circle of initial investment can stimulate demand more widely around the county. Transport will also form a key strand of any future devolution deal for Somerset and this work will form a strong evidence base for devolution discussions including consideration of more freedom and flexibility on setting concessionary fares which underpin a great deal of the cost of operating rural services.

All categories: please add anything else that supports your award entry

We would be happy to supply further information as required.