

Route 497 Post Implementation Review

TfL Surface Transport – Public Transport Service Planning

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This note looks at what has happened to new route 497 in its first year of operation, following its introduction on 25 January 2020.

Background

- 1.2 The origins of the route began prior to 2007 as part of plans to re-develop the former Harold Wood Hospital site. As part of the planning process, TfL sought to secure a routeing through the site for buses and a contribution towards the cost of operating the service. This was secured within the planning consent and the accompanying s106 agreement dated 2011. The new development would provide for a bus gate to allow bus access through the site but not general traffic. It also allocated £513,873 towards a bus service.



Map 1: Layout of Kings Park development with envisaged bus routeing through

- 1.3 The 2016 review of bus services in Harold Hill <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/review-of-bus-services-in-harold-hill.pdf> identified new route 497 as the preferred option from several

as the means to serve the new development. The routeing sought to bring all the housing in the now renamed Kings Park development to within 400m of the bus network. It also closed a similar 'network hole' in the Chatteris Avenue area of Harold Hill. These homes and other housing along the route would then have a direct link to such trip attractors as Hilldene Avenue shopping centre; Tesco; Harold Wood Polyclinic and Harold Wood station served by the Elizabeth line.

- 1.4 Formal, public consultation was undertaken on the proposed route 497 in 2017 as part of the wider Elizabeth line consultation. <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/buses/elizabeth-line/> 35% of respondents supported the scheme, including LB Havering and a local ward Councillor. 2% opposed the scheme.
- 1.5 There was then a hiatus between the consultation and introduction of the route. In the intervening time, and in recognition of feedback from some residents, LB Havering and local Councillors opposed the introduction of the route.
- 1.6 Despite opposition from the Council and following a number of meetings with relevant Councillors, TfL decided to introduce the route from 25 January 2020. This required it to operate as hail & ride on those roads currently unserved by buses. It also meant that the route operated out of service beyond Gooshays Drive roundabout so as to use the 174 bus stand located on Dagnam Park Square. However the Council did install CCTV in order to enforce the bus gate from rat-running traffic, which was of particular concern for local residents.
- 1.7 On Monday 23 March 2020 the UK entered its first lockdown as Covid 19 continued to spread with London particularly affected in the first wave.

Structure

- 1.8 Section 2 summarises some details regarding the features of route 497. Section 3 summarises the data available on the first year of operation together with some commentary. Section 4 discusses the future of the route.



Map 2: Map of route 497 used in the public consultation

2 ROUTE DETAILS

2.1 Some details regarding the frequency and timetable are provided in table 1.

	Present frequencies & structure			
	AM Peak	Mid day	PM Peak	Eve
<u>Route 497</u>				
<i>MF</i>				
Harold Hill, Gooshays Drive - Harold Wood Station	2	2	2	2/1
<i>Sat</i>				
Harold Hill, Gooshays Drive - Harold Wood Station	2	2	2	2/1
<i>Sun</i>				
Harold Hill, Gooshays Drive - Harold Wood Station	1	1	1	1

Toilets available at Harold Hill, Dagnam Park Square

First Bus towards Harold Wood	05:40
First Bus towards Harold Hill	06:00
Last Bus towards Harold Wood	23:40
Last Bus towards Harold Hill	Midnight
Hourly evening frequency starts 0840 towards Harold Wood and 2100 towards Harold Hill	

Table 1: Timetable details

- 2.2 The route has an approximate catchment area of 17,000 people living within 400m or 5 minutes walk of the bus route.
- 2.3 The route is operated by single deck buses that have a carrying capacity of 60 persons. The vehicles are 9.7m long and were manufactured in 2019.
- 2.4 Some other facts focusing on mileage and journey times are provided in table 2. The 60 minute cycle time coupled with the half hourly frequency means a requirement for two buses to operate the route. When the frequency drops to hourly, only one bus is required.

Distance towards Harold Hill	2.66 miles
Distance towards Harold Wood	2.63 miles
Total return mileage	5.29 miles
Scheduled mileage per annum	58,052 miles
Scheduled run time towards Harold Hill	18 mins
Scheduled run time towards Harold Wood	18 mins
Scheduled time to get to & from stand	10 mins
Scheduled recovery time	14 mins
Contract end date	24-Jan-25

Table 2: Schedule details

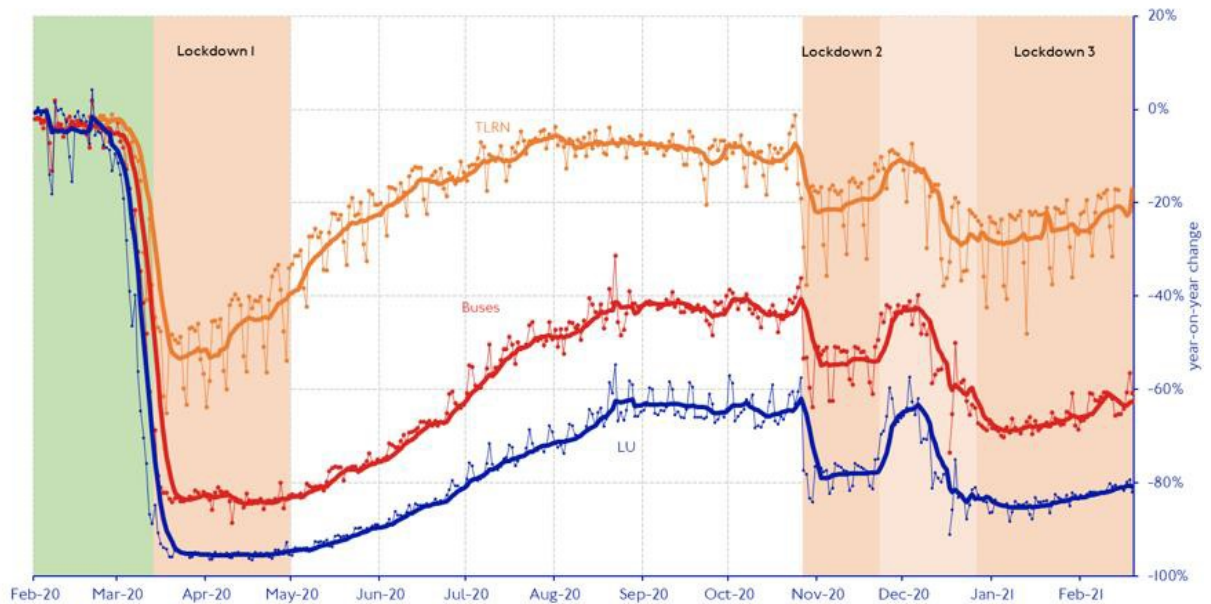
3 DATA REVIEW

Covid-19

- 3.1 The coronavirus pandemic significantly altered day to day life, including travel. The effect of Covid-19 had a significant impact on the data presented below and greatly influences the interpretation of the first year of operation of route 497.
- 3.2 Route 497 commenced on 25 January 2020. In February 2020 Covid-19 was becoming more prevalent with the UK entering its first lockdown on Monday 23 March 2020. London's bus network saw an almost immediate drop in usage of around 80% compared to the previous year. Between the 20 April and 18 May 2020 buses were effectively free while interventions were made to protect the driver's cab. During this period, data is not available on passenger boardings.
- 3.3 After the first wave, restrictions eased progressively through the summer and by autumn 2020 schools had opened again to all students. Network wide, bus usage recovered to around 60% i.e. there were 40% less passengers compared to the same time the previous year. This was reflective of the experience in LB Havering also (see graph 2). From September 2020 restrictions began to be increased again such as the rule of six and the tier system. This culminated in a second lockdown in November / December which saw bus travel around 50% of demand the previous year. A relaxation of the lockdown in the run up to Christmas was then followed by a third lockdown in January 2021. This saw bus usage fall by around 70% compared to the previous year (see graph 1).

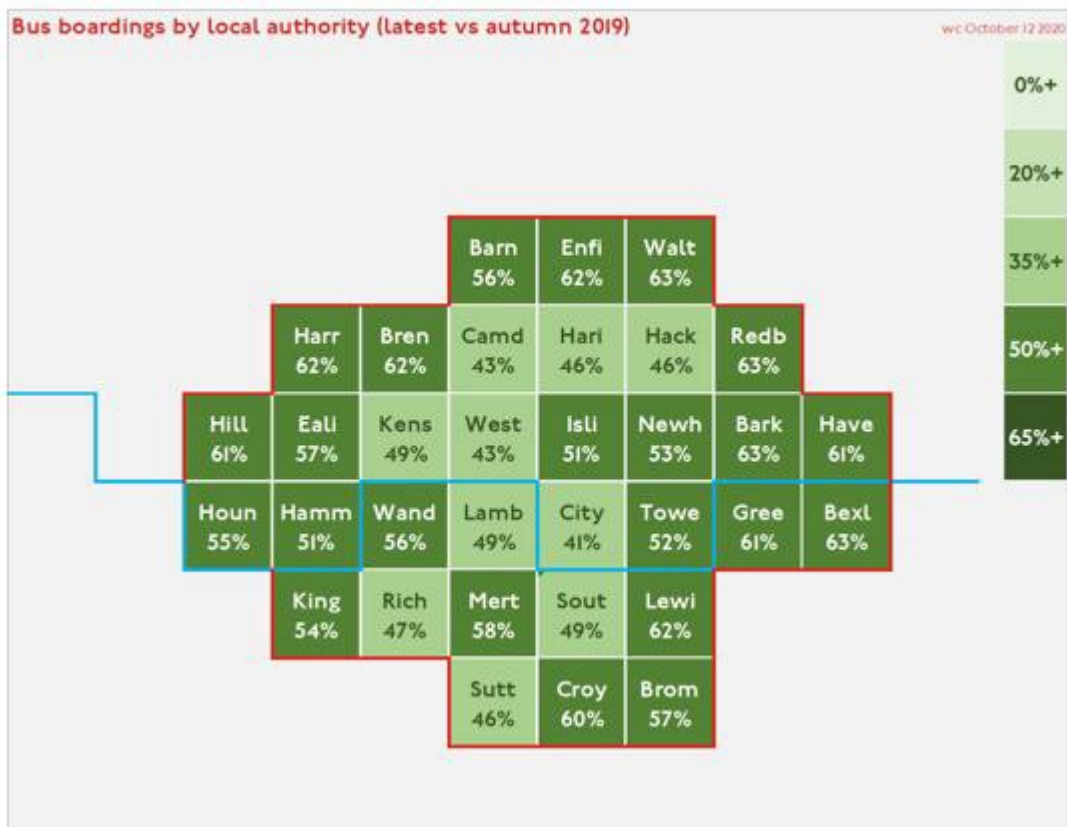
Comparative change by mode (year-on-year)

Smooth line represents the 7-day moving average



Source: Surface Network Management, Tech & Data

Graph 1: Year on Year changes in travel by mode



Graph 2: October 2019 v October 2020 bus boardings by Borough

Reliability

- 3.4 As a low frequency route, service quality is measured as percentage on-time. The higher the percentage on-time, the more punctual the service is. On- time is defined as being within 2 minutes early and 5 minutes late of its timetable.
- 3.5 The contract sets the operator the target of operating the route at 86% on-time or better and less than 1% of buses departing early. There are financial penalties for not meeting the target and rewards for exceeding it.
- 3.6 Table 3 shows the performance of the route for its first year of service. It exceeded its performance standard target in every financial quarter and averaged 96.6% on-time overall.

Route	Q4 2019/20		Q1 2020/21		Q2 2020/21		Q3 2020/21		Current Annual Average		Current QIC Minimum Standard	
	Low Frequency Routes: Buses on Time/Buses Departing Early (percent)											
497	95.6	1.1	97.1	1.3	96.5	1.3	97.1	1.0	96.6	1.2	86.0	1.0

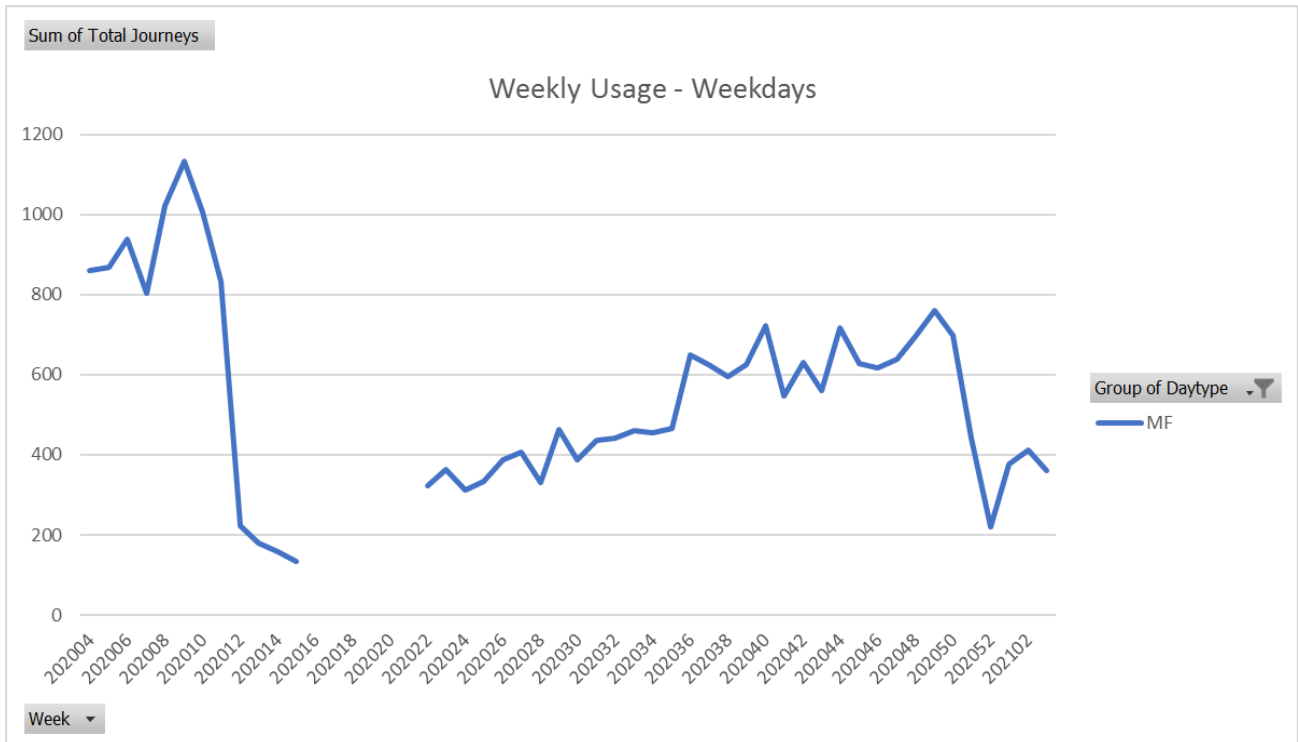
Table 3: Route 497: Percentage of buses arriving on-time & early (2020)

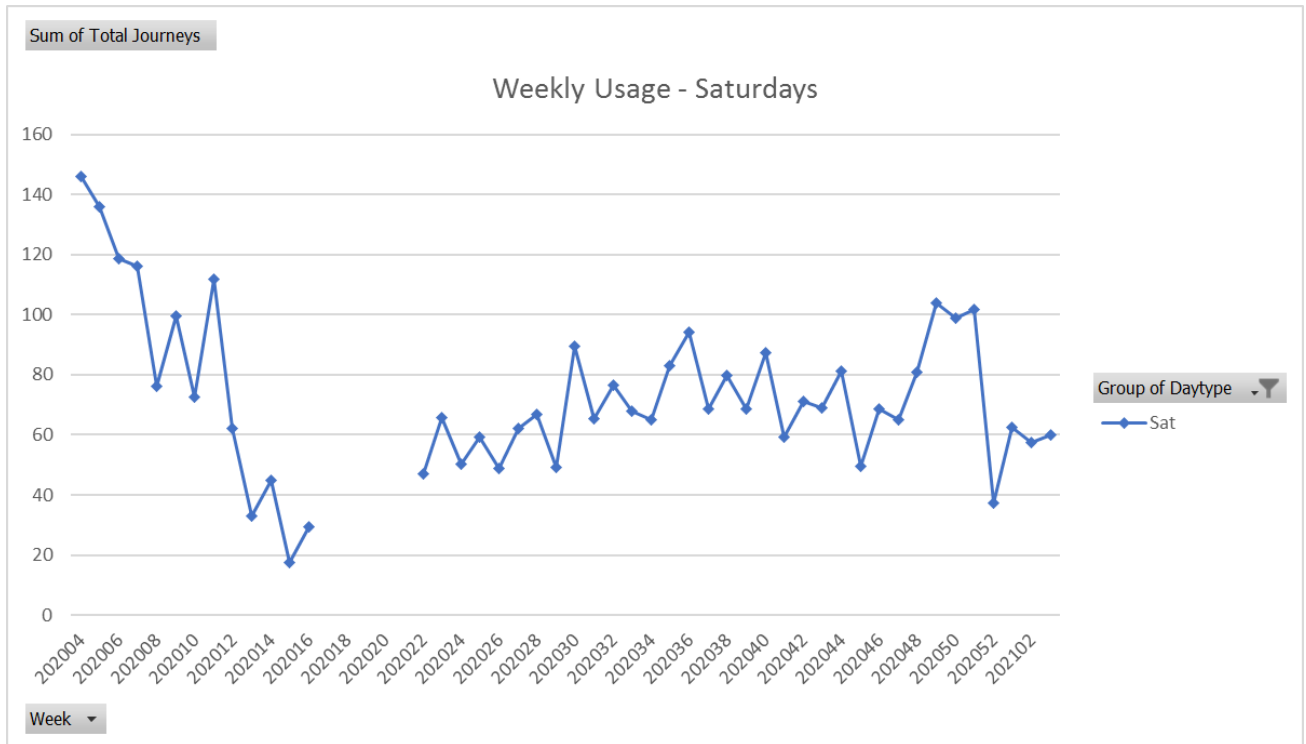
- 3.7 The route is scheduled to operate over 58,000 miles per annum. Measured by four week periods, the level of service actually operated has typically been in excess of 99%. The exception was in the last four weeks of financial year 2019/20 when the first lockdown commenced. In this period 97.4% of service was operated.

Usage

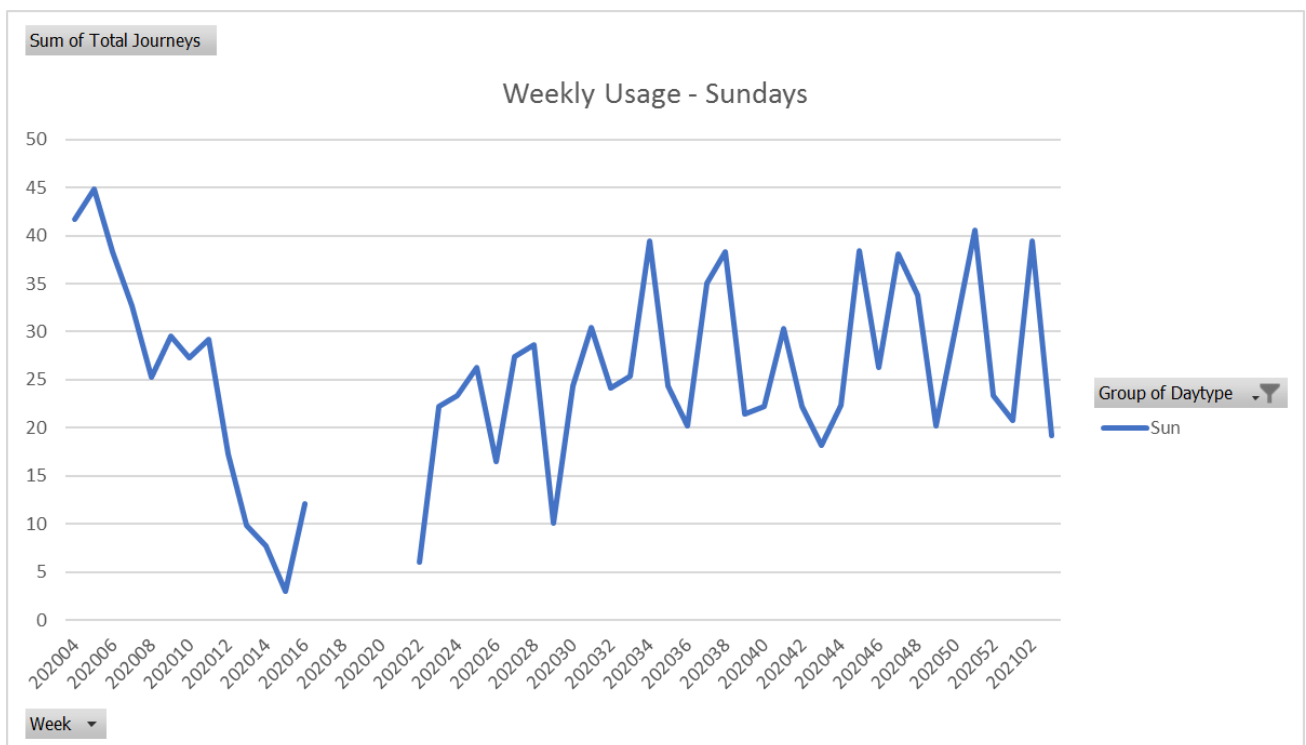
- 3.8 The first year of operation has seen around 30,000 trips recorded on route 497. This number excludes the period when there was no boarding data.
- 3.9 Weekday usage averages out at about 110 trips per day on weekdays; 75 on Saturdays and 25 on Sundays.

3.10 However, these average numbers hide the rollercoaster in passenger demand that occurred in 2020 and which mirrors that experienced network wide. The following graphs show how demand has changed by day type over the year.





Graph 4: Saturday usage for the first year of operation



Graph 5: Sunday usage for the first year of operation (excludes bank holidays)

- 3.11 Weekday demand, in particular, shows usage growing from its first week of introduction reaching a high of 1,134 trips in the first week of March 2020 followed by a precipitous fall when society went into lockdown. Demand then recovered but did not reach the pre-pandemic high water mark before further lockdown reduced demand again.
- 3.12 It was estimated that the route would generate broadly 265,000 trips per annum. Ordinarily it would be expected to take up to 18 months for those demand levels to be reached. This predicted level of demand is akin to similar services in outer London such as the 346, 434, 464, R2 and R6.

Summary and interpretation

- 3.13 A very high quality of service has been delivered day in day out by the operator in a very challenging year for them. The ability to operate the route reliably had been a concern given the extra time and distance needed to travel to the 174 bus stand and the ability to only hesitate at Harold Wood station so as not to impact the operation of route 496. Both these factors reduce the ability for the operator to regulate the service. However less traffic and fewer passengers will inevitably be a significant factor behind the service performance.
- 3.14 Despite the quality of the service, demand on the route has clearly been far below that anticipated. It is equally clear that the coronavirus pandemic has influenced this and prevents an understanding of what demand would have been had Covid-19 not occurred.
- 3.15 It remains to be seen what will happen with demand on the route in the near future. The forecast is that bus demand in Havering will initially be around 13% lower post pandemic assuming a way of life much more similar to pre-2020 returns. However there will also be factors counteracting that lower demand forecast such as continuing to provide a good level of service; a growing population from new developments in Harold Wood and Harold Hill and the opening of the Elizabeth line.

4 SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

Summary

- 4.1 The data for the first year of operation for route 497 shows service quality to be excellent and usage to be extremely low. The coronavirus pandemic has been a significant factor in both those outcomes. Drawing meaningful conclusions is therefore problematic.
- 4.2 It is clear that without a significant improvement in usage, the service provision will have to be greatly altered, if not withdrawn altogether, since the level of subsidy cannot be justified over time.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that from summer 2021, the UK will be largely free from the worst effects of Covid-19. Although it is far from clear how travel demand will be affected and for how long into the future, it is fair to assume that the scale of demand to travel on the 497 will only become apparent from summer 2021. Keeping the route under review will remain necessary.

Further review

- 4.4 London's bus network is kept under regular review. The contractual cycle often provides a good structure on which to time a review. The route contract runs until January 2025 with the potential to extend for a further two years. However, a contract break clause is available on 20 January 2023 subject to the operator being given 10 months' notice (i.e. 20 March 2022). Meeting this deadline could require consultation to be undertaken in late 2021.

Growing demand

- 4.5 Promoting usage through continuing the high quality of service provided will be important. Other factors like new housing and the opening of the Elizabeth line will also generate demand to travel by bus.

- 4.6 Usage might also be promoted through introduction of bus stops as these advertise the existence of the route to local people. In addition, providing shelter and passenger information helps to reassure the passenger that the bus is coming and offer some comfort while they wait. This will be dependent upon the support of LB Havering to provide the necessary highway amendments e.g. provision of hard standing and marking out of bus cages.
- 4.7 The high standard of reliability indicates that the route can be successfully operated from the bus stand on Dagnam Park Square. Subject to further investigation and consultation, this could allow for the route to operate in service beyond Gooshays Drive roundabout at no or minimal additional cost. This would make access to the route available to more people as well as connect to local schools.

Funding

- 4.8 The route benefits from having a fund of over £500,000 available from s106 money. This funding is currently held by LB Havering and will require transferring to TfL.