



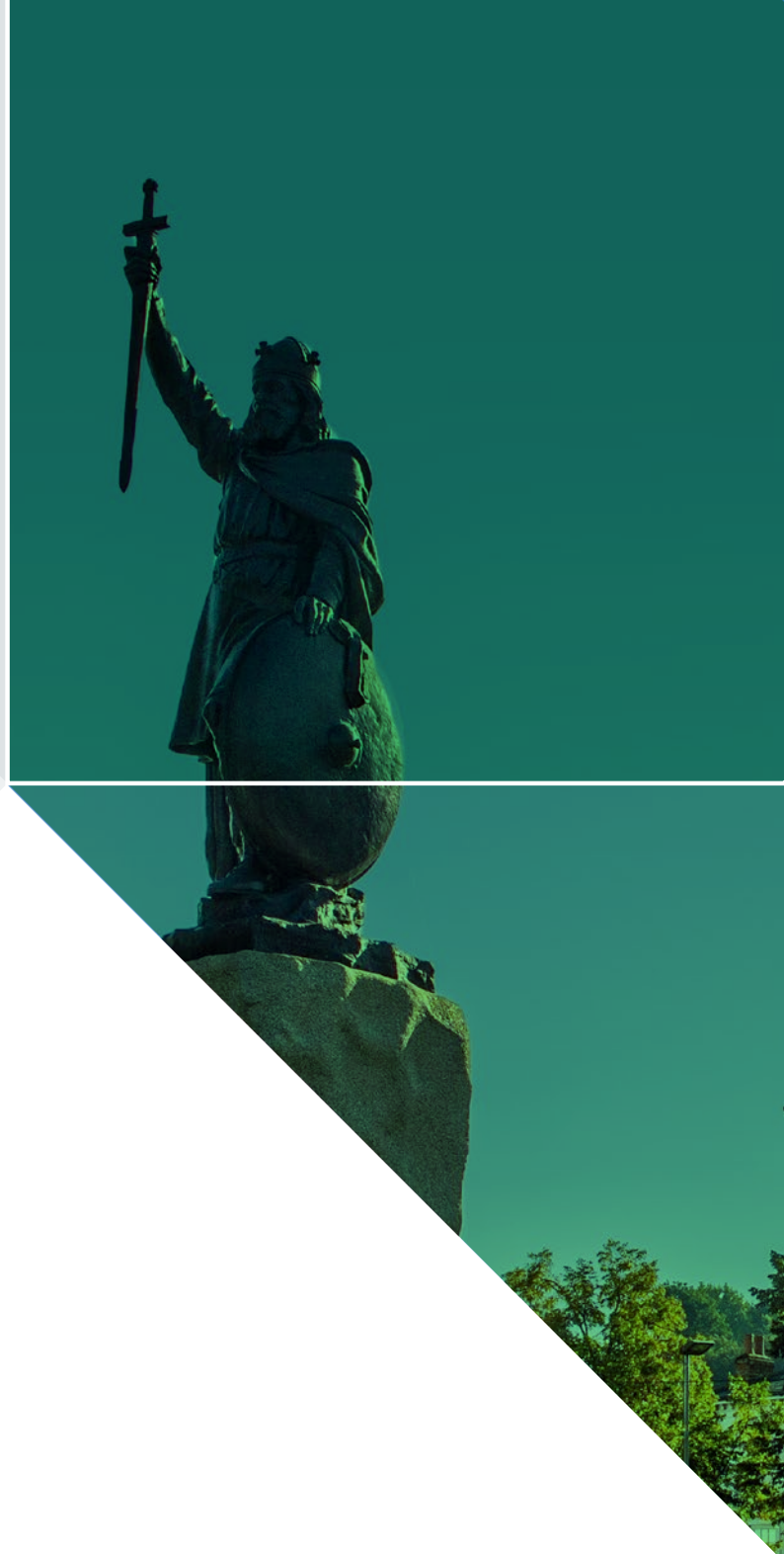
Department
for Transport

Bus Back Better



National
BUS

Strategy
for England



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Prime Minister's Foreword

I love buses, and I have never quite understood why so few governments before mine have felt the same way. A couple of years ago, I unintentionally broke the internet with the widely-mocked, but true, statement that one of my hobbies is making models of buses. As mayor of London, I was proud to evict from the capital that mobile roadblock, the bendy bus, and to replace it with a thousand sleek, green, street-gracing New Routemasters.

Buses are the country's favourite mode of public transport too – used for twice as many journeys as trains, from thousands more stopping-places across the country. They get teenagers to college. They drive pensioners to see their friends. They connect people to jobs they couldn't otherwise take. They sustain town centres, they strengthen communities and they protect the environment. They are lifelines and they are liberators.

Some people ask what levelling-up means in practice, and what difference it will really make to people's lives. This is part of what it means. As we build back from the pandemic, better buses will be one of our major acts of levelling-up.

As successive mayors showed in London, buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way to improve transport. In only a few years, policies started by my Labour predecessor and which I built on transformed the service. With frequent buses, low fares, and priority lanes to glide past traffic, we made London's bus network a natural choice for everyone, not just those without cars. Usage rose by more than half.

Outside London, with a few exceptions, that lesson has not been learned. For governments of all colours before this one, the bus has been last in the queue, with a fraction of the investment and political attention given to other, shinier things. Traffic has increased, but bus priority has stagnated, and some councils are actually taking bus lanes out. As services get slower, they become more expensive to run and less attractive to passengers. It is a classic vicious circle, which we intend to break.

Last year, we announced £3bn of new funding to level up buses across England towards London standards. This strategy describes how we will use that money. Just as we already have in the capital, we want main road services in cities and towns to run so often that you don't need a timetable. We want better services in the evenings and weekends, to reflect people's 24-hour lives and to provide safe, reliable transport for key workers. In places unserved or barely served by conventional buses, such as rural villages and out-of-town business parks, we want more demand responsive services with smaller vehicles.



We want simple, cheap flat fares that you can pay with a contactless card, with daily and weekly price capping across operators, rail and tram too. We want a network that feels like a network, with easy-to-understand services, consistent high standards and comprehensive information at the touch of a phone. We want 4,000 new green buses, and many others, running faster and more reliably in special lanes. As in London, all that will need councils, who control the roads, and bus operators to work together.

Our job has changed because of Covid. In some ways it is harder. Bus use has dropped, though by less than on the railways. In some ways it is easier. The industry has had almost £1bn in emergency funding, and will need significant public support for some time to come. The deal for operators is that we will give you that support, and the measures to unstick traffic that you have wanted for years – but in return, we need your cooperation and partnership to deliver the policies in this strategy.

In every way, the pandemic has made our job more urgent. We must build back greener, minimising pollution and tackling the congestion that clogs up our towns and cities. But as the country recovers, this strategy looks to the long term.

Bois Johnson

Introduction

Our vision for the future of buses





Buses are at the centre of the public transport network, making 4.07 billion journeys in England in 2019/20¹, more than twice as many as the railways.

They bring people to jobs, study and local services; they liberate people who are old, young, disabled and isolated; they save millions of tonnes of carbon and pollution, and thousands of miles of traffic jams. The double-decker bus is a symbol of Britain.

Yet for decades, buses have been largely ignored by policymakers. Unlike rail, road aviation, cycling or walking, there was not – until now – a national strategy for buses. And unlike rail or road, buses have never – until now – had long-term funding commitments. Almost uniquely in the developed world, bus operators themselves, outside London, decide where most services are run and what to charge.

Services can be confusing, split between different companies who do not accept each other's tickets or, in some cases, acknowledge each other's existence. Traffic congestion has made buses slower, less reliable and costlier to run. Public subsidy has fallen. The industry faces new structural challenges which it cannot meet alone, such as the rise of ride-hailing. Usage in most places keeps falling.

And then came COVID-19. Bus use has held up more strongly than rail in the pandemic, but as with the railways it has accelerated the challenges to an operating model that was already in trouble. Few services could now survive without emergency state support. If we are not to abandon entire communities, services cannot be planned purely on a commercial basis.

COVID-19 has caused a significant shift from public transport to the private car. To avoid the worst effects of a car-led recovery – cities and towns grinding to a halt; pollution, road injuries, respiratory illness and carbon emissions all rising – we need to shift back quickly, by making radical improvements to local public transport as normal life returns. Buses are the quickest, easiest and cheapest way to do that.

Even before the pandemic started, the Government had committed £3bn of new money during the current Parliament to improve buses outside London. Armed with that transformational funding, this National Bus Strategy will build back better. Its central aim is to get more people travelling by bus – first, to get overall patronage back to its pre-COVID-19 level, and then to exceed it. We will only achieve this if we can make buses a practical and attractive alternative to the car for more people.

To achieve our goal, this strategy will make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper: in other words, more like London's, where these type of improvements dramatically increased passenger numbers, reduced congestion, carbon and pollution, helped the disadvantaged and got motorists out of their cars.

We want the same fully integrated service, the same simple, multi-modal tickets, the same increases in bus priority measures, the same high-quality information for passengers and, in larger places, the same turn-up-and-go frequencies. We want services that keep running into the evenings and at weekends.

We want buses to be both tools of inclusion and the transport of choice. We want to demystify buses for non-users, tackle misconceptions about bus travel and address the negative perceptions some still hold about it.

But London is only a partial role model. Its population density is greater than elsewhere; costs and subsidy remain stubbornly high; and its success is eroding as its bus ridership has been falling.



Wherever and whenever bus patronage grows, there are likely to be bus operators and local government working together to deliver improvements for passengers.

Buses in London, unlike the rest of England, are franchised. Transport for London determines the network of services which are provided, under contracts for specific routes, by private sector operators. Franchising does not necessarily have to replicate this route-by route tendering. Less onerously, contracts can be let for different parts of a city or to a single operator for a whole network, with significant co-design opportunities for that operator. This is the model of the successful LibertyBus franchise in Jersey. Franchising powers are only available automatically to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) but can be provided to other Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) through secondary legislation. We will support any LTA which wishes to access franchising powers, and which has the capability and intention to use them at pace to deliver improvements for passengers.

But franchising is not the only route to better and more locally accountable bus services. An Enhanced Partnership is a statutory arrangement under the 2017 Bus Services Act which can specify, for example, timetables and multi-operator ticketing, and allows the LTA to take over the role of registering bus services from the Traffic Commissioners. The main difference versus franchising is that operators in an Enhanced Partnership have a much greater role, working with LTAs to both develop and deliver improvements for passengers and having a real say on how bus services should be improved. Enhanced Partnerships also offer significantly more flexibility than franchising.



By the end of June 2021, we expect all LTAs, except MCAs which have started the statutory process of franchising bus services, to commit to establishing Enhanced Partnerships across their entire areas under the Bus Services Act, and all operators to co-operate with the LTA throughout the process. LTAs which also wish to pursue franchising may do so – but they should commit to implementing Enhanced Partnerships in the meantime until the franchising process, which can be lengthy, is complete. LTAs which are not mayoral combined authorities and wish to pursue franchising will need to satisfy the Secretary of State that they have the capability and resources to do so, and that it will better deliver service improvements for passengers.

From 1 July 2021, only LTAs and operators who meet these requirements will continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) or any new sources of bus funding from the Government's £3bn budget. The terms and conditions of CBSSG already make clear that it is discretionary. The new funding will also be discretionary. As part of wider reform of the Bus Service Operators Grant – see below – we will consult on linking payment of that reformed grant to these commitments. By the end of October 2021, we expect all LTAs to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan, detailing how they propose to use their powers to improve services. We expect actual delivery of Enhanced Partnerships by April 2022. From that date, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an Enhanced Partnership or where a franchising scheme has been made. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant, subject to consultation. The Secretary of State may disapply these rules or the deadline of April 2022 in individual cases, on an exceptional basis; we will also ensure that no operator is disadvantaged through any failure to establish an Enhanced Partnership due to actions beyond their control.



We expect that the majority of LTAs will choose these Enhanced Partnerships rather than franchising as their end state, though others will proceed to franchising. We value the crucial role that bus operators have and believe that partnerships will allow LTAs to harness their knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. As we describe later, partnerships will work best if they deliver benefits and incentives to both sides. We will publish updated guidance on Enhanced Partnerships in the coming weeks.

Just as important as new operating models, are other measures to drive quality and efficiency. We want to create a virtuous circle: increasing usage, but also reducing operating costs so better services can be sustained without permanently higher subsidy. In cities and other congested places, the key intervention will be significantly more ambitious bus priority schemes, making services faster, more reliable, more attractive to passengers and cheaper to run.

To benefit from the funding in this strategy, LTAs in such places will be expected to implement ambitious bus priority schemes and draw up ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans. Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to make promoting bus reliability an integral part of highway authorities' Network Management Duty. As we have already announced, the remaining elements of Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 – which allow local authorities to enforce moving traffic offences – will be commenced this year and we will consult shortly on increasing MCAs' powers over key roads in their areas, where they are not already the highway authority.

To further our commitments in the Government's green ten-point plan, we will support the purchase of at least 4,000 new zero emission buses, more than a tenth of the fleet². We will also set a date for ending the sale of new diesel buses in the UK. This, too, will reduce costs, since an electric bus is much cheaper to operate than a conventional one.

And in lower-density, often rural areas, not served or barely served by conventional buses, we will support new forms of provision, such as demand responsive travel in smaller vehicles. These innovations in service may be how we improve evening and Sunday services in places which currently lack them, integrated with conventional buses during the day.

As well as spending more money, we will fundamentally reform how it is spent. The main current funding stream, the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), is a fossil fuel subsidy. The new funding regime will take a holistic approach targeted at the delivery of the policies in this strategy and other specific benefits: growing patronage, increasing efficiency, improving the environment and securing modal shift from the private car.

Much of the work to improve services and manage the new funding streams will be done by local authorities, whose capacity varies significantly. We will therefore provide £25 million in 2021/22 to support partnership and franchising development, including a Bus Centre of Excellence.

Just as buses are central to the public transport network, bus reform is central to this Government's objectives. We are acting not just because buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way of improving transport – but because the bus is key to two of our wider priorities: net zero and levelling up.

During a challenging time for public transport, it might seem strange to predict a prosperous future for the bus. From crisis, however, comes opportunity.

1

Chapter 1

The opportunity





Buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way to improve transport. Building a new railway or road takes years, if not decades. Better bus services can be delivered in months. Experience shows that relatively small sums of money, by the standards of transport spending, can deliver significant benefits.



Since COVID-19, the need has become more urgent. In many places, roads already operated at or close to capacity before the pandemic. There is a risk that when full economic life returns, the move away from public transport during the crisis will cause unmanageable levels of car traffic, slowing some areas to a crawl, holding back the economic recovery and creating a severe risk to health. Bus services can be improved relatively quickly to draw people back to public transport. They can also be reconfigured more easily than railways to meet any post-COVID change in travel patterns, such as a greater number of suburban, local and orbital journeys in cities.

The bus sector includes many examples of success and innovation. Despite years of decline, the quantity of bus services in many places remains quite good, at least during the working day. But because buses have been neglected, their future is fragile and there remains substantial scope for improvement. Our task is both to unlock the substantial untapped potential in the existing service, by making it easier to understand and use; and to improve it, making it more reliable, more frequent and cheaper, and making more use of new forms of provision such as demand responsive transport.

Buses are key to delivering wider government priorities

Buses can play a greater role in enabling access to work or more productive work. 44% of bus trips are for work or education, compared with 27% of solo car journeys³. Buses can help drive better employment outcomes for disabled people, and in cities outside London, 77% of jobseekers do not have regular access to a car, van or motorbike. Having found employment, affordable bus travel helps ensure that work pays and can be sustained for everyone⁴. But local bus fares have risen by 1.4% a year in real terms since 2010⁵.

Buses can improve productivity more widely, for instance by reducing congestion which affects all road users and costs urban economies at least £11bn a year⁶.

Buses can be key to levelling-up; users are disproportionately from less advantaged social groups and places. Improved services will strengthen communities, sustain town centres and connect disabled and isolated people. But buses should not be seen, or promoted, only as transport for those without an alternative. There is clear evidence that they can be made attractive enough to draw people away from their cars.

For this reason, buses are vital to ensuring the economy meets Net Zero carbon emissions and driving the green transformation. In congested areas, substantial modal shift away from the car will soon be needed if clean air targets and the Government's broader climate goals are to be met. The only mode capable of sufficient expansion in the time available is the bus. We need more people to choose the bus for their journeys; we need to reverse the declines of the past.

Bus spending works and is high value for money

A Department for Transport (DfT) analysis of 33 major bus schemes found an average benefit-cost ratio of 4.2; in other words, they delivered benefits worth more than four times their cost⁷. Buses generate a significant proportion of benefits which accrue to other road users and to society at large.

The challenge: a cycle of decline

Our system isn't working. With some encouraging exceptions, bus services have been in decline for a long time, as we have become an increasingly car-focused society. In many areas, we are stuck in a vicious cycle where ever-increasing congestion slows down buses and makes them less attractive, pushing people further towards the car and compounding the problem.

The way the bus industry works, with few incentives for operators and local authorities to work together, has made it harder to cope with these trends, or to act strategically. Since 1986, almost uniquely in the developed world, buses in Britain (outside London) have been organised on a predominantly commercial basis, with operators themselves deciding where to run and what to charge.

Following that change, profitable routes and times of day were flooded with buses at the expense of other routes and times; services became unstable and confusing; the quality of vehicles fell and fares in many places rose sharply. Services which could not be run commercially, previously cross-subsidised from the profits of busier routes, now had to be supported by the taxpayer. The money available for this fell substantially over the last ten years, causing severe cuts to supported services; some councils now spend nothing at all. The worst excesses of the "bus wars," which saw streets choked with rival vehicles, are long over, but the legacy remains.



Examples of some barriers to delivering better bus services



Limited cooperation

In a busy seaside resort, there are two sizeable **rival bus networks** that **don't acknowledge each other's existence**. They:

- publish **separate city maps**, showing only their own services, giving potential users including visitors the impression that **some areas of the city are completely unserved**;
- they use the **same route numbers for entirely different routes**; and
- on the busiest routes, served by both operators, there can be **overcapacity at certain times of the day**.

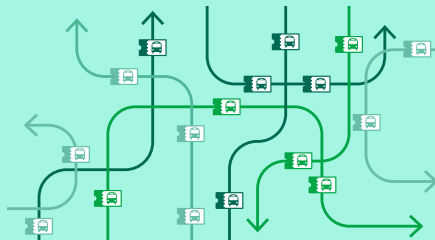
There is a multi-operator ticket, but it is **more expensive** and **hard** to find out about.

On numerous routes across the country, evening and daytime services are operated by different bus companies, many of which **do not acknowledge each other's existence** or even accept each other's tickets. Some operator timetables **don't display each other's services**, which gives the impression there are **no services** at different times of the day.



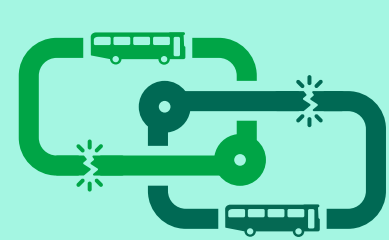
Lack of evening services

Large areas of even major cities have **only one or two buses an hour in the evenings**, even though late-night and shift-working are becoming commonplace. Lots of bus services in **rural areas cease as early as 5 or 6pm**.



Complex ticketing

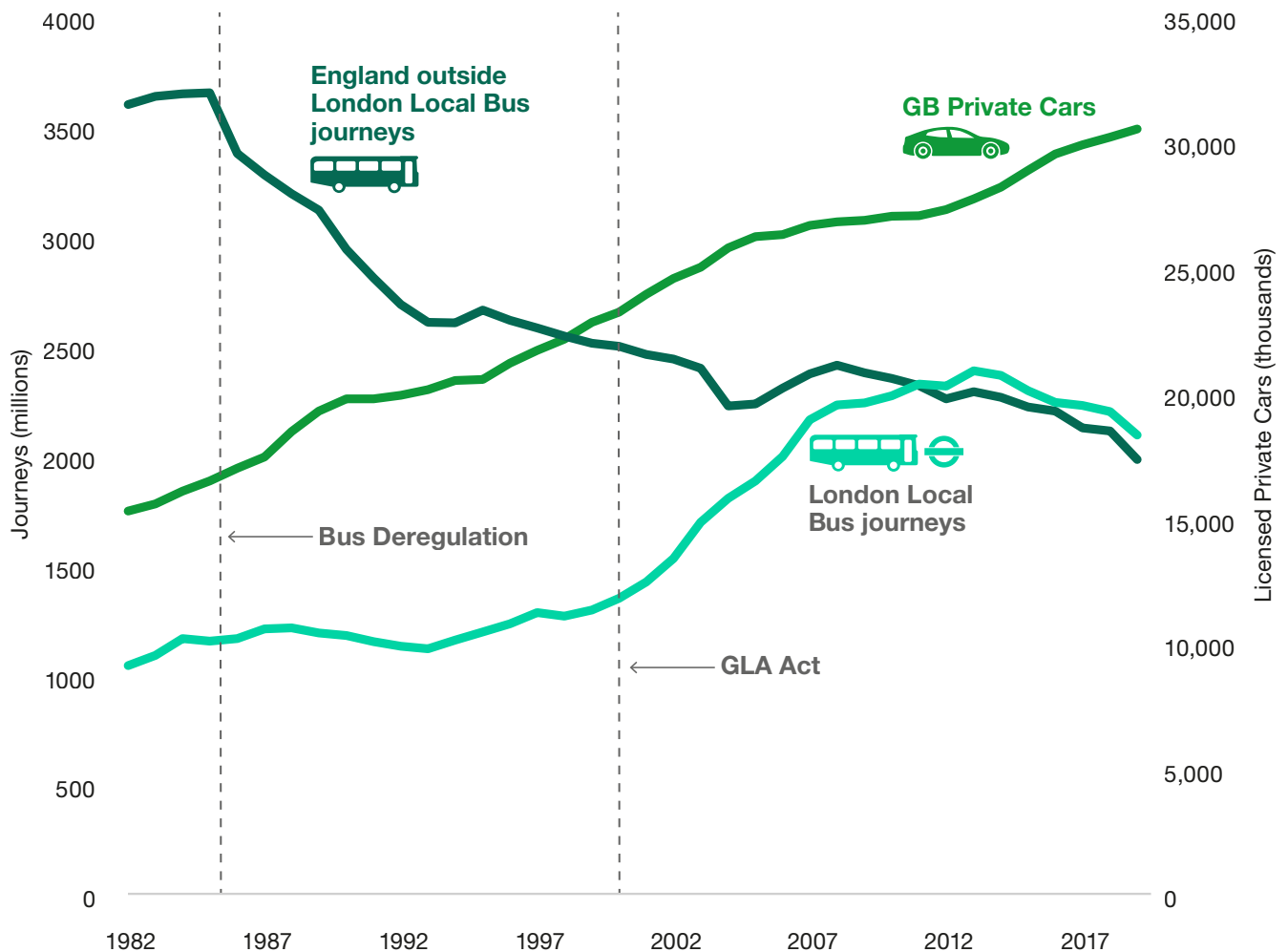
In a major northern city, bus passengers are faced with the choice of **many different weekly or monthly tickets**, which have different names and conditions attached to them. This can be **confusing** and makes it **difficult for passengers to choose** the best option for them. There are six different weekly tickets but none that gives travel on all the city's public transport networks.



Poor integration

In one Home Counties town with generally excellent bus services, **misguided landscaping and redevelopment** around the railway station **moved bus stops further away**.

Bus Use and Car Ownership 1982–2019⁸



GLA (Greater London Authority) Act 1999 established authority for the Greater London Authority, the Mayor of London and the London Assembly to make provision about transport and road traffic in and around Greater London.

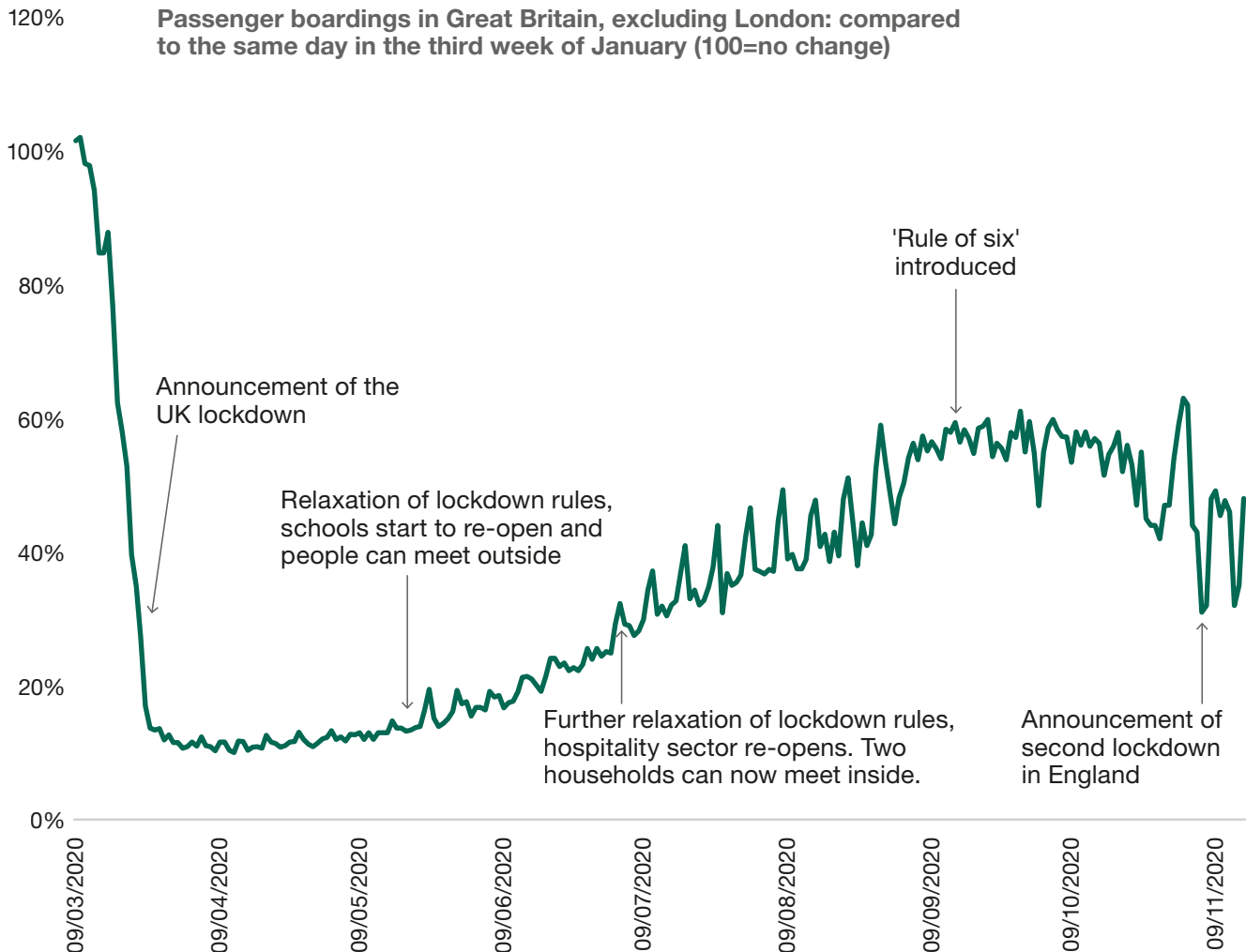
In rural areas, more dispersed, lower density populations make it challenging to deliver widespread timetabled services run by traditional buses. Services often take long and indirect routes, to serve as many people as possible, but they become an unattractive alternative for passengers with access to a car. Services invariably need funding from LTAs and, when money is tight, funding for bus services is deprioritised. Services get cut, and people are even more likely to buy a car, reducing the potential demand for buses even further.

If we are to meet our legal obligation to deliver Net Zero carbon emissions and have thriving communities, we have to reverse these cycles.

This is made more challenging by the impact of COVID-19 on the bus sector. With over £1bn of financial support provided by the Government during the pandemic so far, the sector has provided the essential services for people who have needed to keep using public transport, including key workers. But the lasting impact on bus use remains unknown, with passenger numbers expected to fall from pre-COVID levels – at least initially.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on bus use in 2020

During the first lockdown passenger boardings fell to approximately 10% of those on the same day in the third week of January. As restrictions were eased passenger boardings increased⁹.



The impact of COVID-19 is both a significant risk and an opportunity. It has meant much greater co-operation between many LTAs and bus operators which we cannot afford to lose. While relationships and capacity still need to be built and improved, there can simply be no return to the situation, seen in too many parts of England, where services were planned on a purely commercial basis with little or no engagement with, or support from, LTAs.

The next year provides a unique chance to change the way in which local authorities and operators work together and deliver significant improvements for passengers. That is why we are seeking urgent action.

Examples of success

Across England there are pockets of hope – places where significant growth has been seen despite the national trends. We know what can work and how the cycle can be broken. It needs LTAs and bus operators to work together to put passengers first. Where operators understand their passengers, offer great customer service and have clean, modern fleets; and LTAs invest to give buses priority on busy roads and junctions, and put buses at the heart of their local transport planning.

Brighton & Hove

Partnership working between Brighton and Hove Council and local operators is cited as a key reason why the area has the highest bus use per head in England outside of London, with 167 journeys per person made between 2019–2020¹⁰. It has created a platform for co-operation and innovation, and shared initiatives on greening fleets and modernising the passenger experience.

Within the partnership, the council has focused on bus priority measures, improved passenger waiting areas and real-time information displays. The operators have focused on improving service frequencies, creating value for money fares and tickets, investing in new buses and improving customer training and marketing.



Picture:
Brighton and Hove Buses



Picture: The Harrogate Bus Company

The Harrogate Bus Company

The 36, a premium bus route linking Ripon and Harrogate with the City of Leeds, offers a sophisticated and comfortable service which has transformed the passenger experience and encouraged people to make the switch to bus. Achieving consistent growth, the number of passengers using the 36 has nearly doubled over 15 years.

Along with a high frequency timetable, the spacious and comfortable buses, which include USB power outlets, superfast WiFi and a glazed panoramic roof, have earned the route 36 service a customer satisfaction score of 97% and more than 50% of customers, who have a car available, choose to use the 36 instead¹¹.



Picture: Bristol's Metrobus

Bristol's Metrobus

The metrobus network was built with an investment of £235m – including £113m from the Department for Transport. Metrobus is a bus rapid transit system comprising three limited-stop routes in the Bristol urban area that use bus lanes and segregated busways.

There are 90 metrobus stops with new high-profile shelters and 'iPoints' that provide real-time information and sell tickets. The network uses new low-emission biomethane buses in a bespoke livery, and all ticket sales take place off-bus to ensure quick boarding. Minimum frequencies and maximum fares are specified.

Projects which have grown patronage

The West Midlands is a good recent example of how revenue and capital subsidy by operators and government can arrest general decline. Bus use has been stabilised by a series of corridor and route enhancement schemes:

- 2.5km of bus lanes on B425 Lode Lane, Solihull, was an investment of £4.5m and delivered a 11% boost to patronage.
- £800k of route enhancements on Harborne Road delivered a 4% rise in patronage.

In addition, half-price travel for under-18s and low-fare zones for all, including cutting the price of a DaySaver ticket by c.25%, brought an extra 4,000 journeys a day¹².

In Crawley, West Sussex, the Fastway scheme – a series of bus priority measures along two core routes, linking Horley, Gatwick airport and Crawley, has delivered patronage growth of 160% over ten years as well as an increase to customer satisfaction and reduced journey times. Assessments estimate a benefit-cost ratio of at least 4.67¹³.

So the cornerstone of this strategy is a roll out of this model for success – bringing together LTAs and their bus operators in every part of England to set out plans to improve local bus services and break the vicious cycle of decline.

Our plan is backed by transformative, long-term funding. The £3bn for buses in England outside London, which was announced by the Prime Minister in February 2020, will initially be invested in:

- Supporting new and increased services – with at least £300m of funding to support the sector recover from the pandemic in 2021/22.
- Giving LTAs the skills and people they need to deliver this strategy – with £25m of the £300m allocated in 2021/22.
- Bus priority schemes to speed up journeys – with the first schemes delivered in 2021/22.
- Accelerating the delivery of zero emission buses with £120m in 2021/22.

The bulk of the £3bn transformation funding will be paid after the transformational changes begin in April 2022.

Chapter 2

The buses we want

2







Our goal is to get bus use back to what it was before the pandemic. Then we want to increase patronage and raise buses' mode share. We can only do these things by ensuring that buses are an attractive alternative to the car for far more people.



That means making them:

- **More frequent:** Turn up and go services, where passengers don't need a timetable, should be provided on major urban routes. Feeder services, using conventional buses or smaller vehicles, can boost the frequency of connections from places away from main roads, connecting to the major routes with integrated ticketing. In low-density areas and at low-demand times of day, demand responsive vehicles can provide much higher levels of service than conventional fixed bus routes.
- **Faster and more reliable:** Buses must have greater priority on urban roads. LTAs will be given new powers to enforce traffic regulations. They will be expected to promote bus reliability, and to implement ambitious bus priority schemes, to receive new funding. These must be planned to complement walking and cycling schemes. We will consult shortly on increasing Metro Mayors' powers over key roads in their areas, where they are not already the highway authority.
- **Cheaper:** We want to see more low, flat fares in towns and cities, lower point-to-point fares elsewhere, and more daily price capping everywhere.
- **More comprehensive:** Overprovision on a few urban corridors with dozens of competing buses every hour should be reduced to boost under provision elsewhere. More services should operate in the evenings, weekends, and at night, and to smaller towns and villages, sometimes using new forms of demand responsive transport.
- **Easier to understand:** All public transport across England – bus, light rail and conventional rail – should be easy to access via journey planning websites and apps, with everything passengers need to know at their fingertips, including times, accessibility information, fares and live running. The data is already available; we want to see it used. Additionally:
 - Bus stops should show accurate information about the services stopping there. Every town, city and rural area should have easy to access, up to date maps, showing all local bus services.
 - Each local area should have a common numbering system, to avoid two routes with the same number in the same place, and bus stops should be named consistently by operators running the same bus routes.
 - Local branding that reflects the community and not the operator should be adopted, though successful existing brands such as Harrogate's 36 should not be sacrificed.
 - Routes should, as far as possible, be the same in the evenings and weekends as they are in the daytime.
 - Routes should be as easy as possible to understand, with simple, high-frequency trunk services rather than lots of low-frequency services combining together.
 - All operators which run the same route should accept the same tickets, use the same route number and be shown on the same timetable.
 - Timetable changes should be minimised and co-ordinated across operators, so they happen at the same time.
 - There should be heavy promotion and marketing to familiarise non-users with their local buses, to demystify the service for non-users, and introductory offers to promote the service to them.



- **Easier to use:** Common tickets, passes and daily capping should be available on all services irrespective of operator, at little or no premium to single-operator fares. All buses should accept contactless payment. Tickets and fares should be simple; flat fares should increasingly be standard in urban areas. Bus stations should be protected from closure and redevelopment and improved.
- **Better to ride in:** Comfortable, high-spec, modern buses will help make using the bus more appealing. Passengers should feel safe on board. Buses should offer end to end accessibility and provide ample areas for pushchairs and luggage in addition to the wheelchair space, so that everybody can travel with confidence. They should also offer audible and visible information, in addition to WIFI and charging as standard – allowing people to work and interact online whilst they travel, and make better use of their time. In holiday and scenic areas, much more should be done to promote buses to visitors, with the views from the top deck an attraction in themselves.
- **Better integrated with other modes and each other:** More bus routes should serve railway stations, as is standard in most European countries, and integrate with cycling and walking routes and networks. Additionally:
 - Railway stations should be hubs for connecting services with high quality stops close to station entrances. Schemes that move buses further away from stations should not be allowed.
 - Passengers should not have to buy a new ticket when changing buses. Easy through ticketing should be available between bus operators and other transport modes.
 - Our ambition is for an integrated ticketing approach to allow you to buy a through journey for local bus, rail and metro with a single tap on your smartphone.
- Full information on local bus services should be posted in railway stations, and the rail industry should promote bus links.
- Park-and-ride schemes should be expanded, and more rural bus services should carry bikes.
- **Greener:** We will support the introduction of at least 4,000 more zero emission buses.
- **Accessible and inclusive by design:** Disabled people must be able to use bus services as easily as other passengers. Making buses more accessible (not just the vehicles themselves, but also bus stops, bus stations, and by providing excellent customer service) will benefit other passengers too. Next stop announcements, for example, will help everyone know where the bus is going and when they've reached their stop.
- **Innovative:** We want to harness the entrepreneurial skills of the best operators to constantly strive for innovation in the market.
- **Seen as a safe mode of transport:** The sector must strive for the highest safety standards, upheld by the Traffic Commissioners. Marketing should emphasise the features that support personal safety, for example CCTV onboard and at bus stops and data that allows passengers to know when a bus is arriving so they do not have to wait in the street. This should be supported by more demand responsive services in the evenings and late at night.

We want bus services that mean fewer journeys are needed by private car. We want buses across the country to become the transport of choice for people with other options, as they already are in some places. Our changes therefore need to tackle negative perceptions by non-users. We will have failed if we do not address the perceptions which deter people from buses:

Passenger Satisfaction

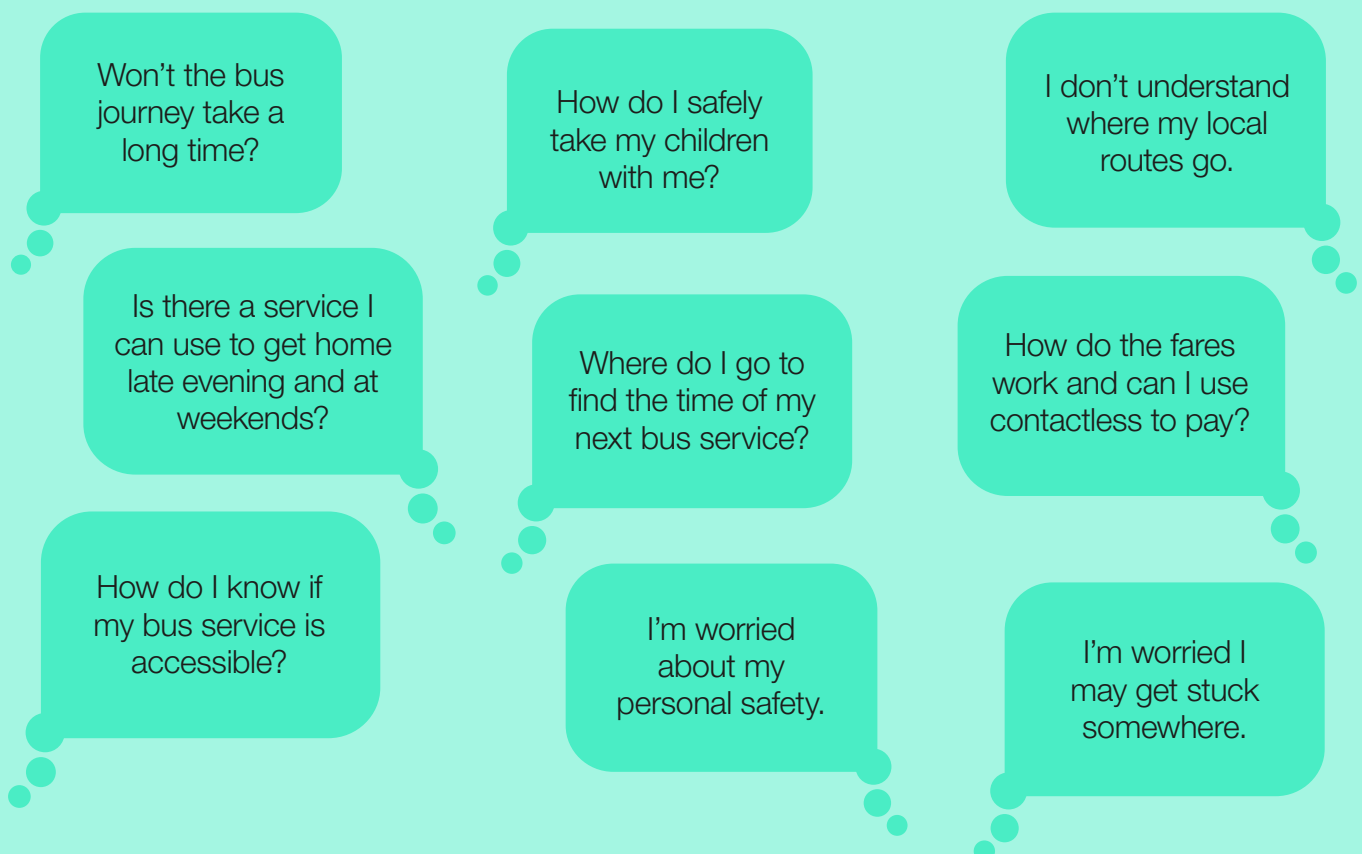
The latest Transport Focus ‘Annual Bus Passenger Survey’ gives headline satisfaction figures of between 76% and 95% for local bus services in England outside London¹⁴.

We know that people’s top priorities for improvement – from among people who both do and don’t use buses – include:



Source: Transport Focus, Bus Passengers’ priorities for improvement survey, published September 2020.

We want to see any negative views and misconceptions surrounding bus use, which include the examples below, addressed by up to date and easy to access information about local bus services.



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Chapter 3

Delivering better bus services



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M3	Hersons Green	Due		
T1	Penbury	13:18		
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M3	Hersons Green	13 min		
M3	Hersons Green	13:41		
T1	Penbury	40 min		
S	Penhend	42 min		
77	Penbury	52 min		
M3	Hersons Green	14:01		
T1	Penbury	14:18		
S	Penhend	14:20		
Tuesday 29 May		13:07		

Litter



Strong bus networks connect our communities, getting people to jobs and services, giving them opportunities, and boosting economic growth and inclusion. This chapter sets out the collaborative approach that will give us stronger, better planned networks, and how Government will support local transport authorities and operators to deliver.



Today's bus sector

Since 1986, the bus market in England outside London has been deregulated. Prior to COVID-19, around 87% of local bus service mileage outside London was run on a commercial basis by hundreds of private sector bus operators¹⁵. These operators decide where and when to run commercial services, invest in the buses and facilities, and set their own fares, with only a very limited role for LTAs*.

Before the pandemic, the 20% of services which were not run commercially were 'tendered' for and subsidised by LTAs if they considered them 'socially necessary'. Prior to COVID-19, the sector received funding from central Government through concessionary fares funding, the Bus Service Operators Grant, community transport grants and support to subsidise socially necessary services.

This model doesn't always work for passengers. There is often no incentive for integrated ticketing, or for operators to run services that are not profitable outside of peak hours. LTAs may not have the budget to provide additional or replacement services, or the skills and resources to understand where they are needed. And there is little or no visibility for the public of the role that LTAs play in supporting buses or data by which the local electorate can hold their councillors or Mayor to account for their part in improving bus services.

LTAs can do something about this. Over the past 20 years they have been given increasing powers to work with bus operators to improve services and ensure that they work for passengers and local communities. Most recently the Bus Services Act 2017 gave LTAs the potential for much greater influence over bus services in their area –underpinned by new types of statutory partnerships with operators and the ability to franchise services. Franchising powers are automatically available to Mayors of Combined Authorities and can be made available to other types of local authority, where needed, through secondary legislation.

COVID-19 has meant greater co-operation between LTAs and bus operators and a more transparent approach to the costs and revenues of running bus services. We want to build on this close working to drive the recovery of the bus sector.

Building back better – recovering from the pandemic

The Government has provided an unprecedented amount of support for the bus sector during the pandemic. Through the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) and the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), the Government had announced over £1 billion of support by the end of 2020. CBSSG will remain in place as long as it is needed. We are clear that we will continue to support the sector to run the services needed to get our economy back on track.

CBSSG is discretionary, as will be future bus funding from the £3bn. From 1 July 2021, CBSSG and any successor funding to it; funding to transform services as outlined in this Strategy; and potentially, subject to consultation on wider reform, the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant, will only be available to LTAs, outside of London, who have committed to entering into Enhanced Partnerships or started the statutory process of franchising services, and to operators who co-operate with the process. Since franchising can take several years, we expect those LTAs who want to start down that road to commit to establishing an Enhanced Partnership in the meantime, unless they have begun the process of implementing franchising already (as in Greater Manchester, for instance).

* Upper tier local authorities (usually combined authorities and county councils) and unitary authorities. Combined authorities are local government entities set up by two or more neighbouring councils wishing to co-ordinate responsibilities and powers over services, including aspects of transport, housing and social care. If the authority has a directly elected Mayor it is a Mayoral Combined Authority.

We want to see the commitment to these partnerships realised, so from April 2022 only LTAs with an Enhanced Partnership or who have begun following the statutory process to decide whether to implement franchising, will be able to access the new discretionary streams of Government bus funding. From that date, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an Enhanced Partnership or where a franchising scheme has been made. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant, subject to consultation. The Secretary of State may disapply these rules or the deadline of April 2022 in individual cases, on an exceptional basis; we will also ensure that no operator is disadvantaged through any failure to establish an Enhanced Partnership due to actions beyond their control. We will also take into account an LTA's performance with respect to the policies set out in this strategy when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.

By the end of October 2021, we expect all LTAs to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan. These new plans must set out how they will use their Enhanced Partnership or franchising scheme to deliver an ambitious vision for travel by bus, meeting the goals and expectations in this strategy and driven by what passengers and would-be passengers want in their area.

Hertfordshire's Enhanced Partnership

Hertfordshire County Council introduced 'Intalink', England's first Enhanced Partnership agreement in April 2020.

The partnership's objectives include prioritising bus services in traffic, closer integration of the bus network including upgrading bus infrastructure; improving the image of bus travel and using data and information.

These objectives aim to keep passengers informed about available services, increase service frequencies and improve reliability and co-ordination with other modes to encourage residents to make bus their first choice to get around their local area.



Plans must be developed in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people. They will be living, transparent documents, with targets. LTAs will need to routinely publish six-monthly progress reports against these targets. Plans will demonstrate how bus services are integrated with other types of transport in their area such as connectivity to train stations, making journeys simple and stress-free for customers. They must take account of cycling and walking schemes, complementing these forms of travel and not competing with them. We will publish detailed guidance on preparing a Bus Service Improvement Plan shortly, and update our existing guidance on Enhanced Partnerships and franchising.

LTAs may also join together to produce joint plans and partnership or franchising arrangements and should be looking to do so where local economies and travel to work areas overlap significantly. We would expect to see shared arrangements across any areas wishing to become new or expanded Mayoral Combined Authorities in the future.

To support LTAs in forming partnerships and developing plans, we will make £25m available in financial year 2021–22.

Summary of what LTAs and bus operators must do to access CBSSG from 1 July and transformational funding from April 2022

- **By the end of June 2021** LTAs will need to commit to establishing Enhanced Partnerships under the Bus Services Act or the LTA should begin the statutory process of franchising services. Operators in those areas should cooperate with those processes.
- Those LTAs who do not have access to franchising powers at present, but consider that it is the best route to adopt in the interest of passengers and that they have the capability and resources to deliver it, should progress with the implementation of an Enhanced Partnership alongside applying to the Secretary of State for access to franchising powers.
- **By the end of October 2021** each LTA will need to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan. Each plan will need to be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan* and in other relevant local plans such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).
- **From April 2022**, LTAs will need to have an Enhanced Partnership in place, or be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme, to access the new discretionary streams of bus funding. Only services operated or measures taken under an Enhanced Partnership or where a franchising scheme has been made will be eligible to receive the new funding streams.



Bus Service Improvement Plans will:

- Be developed by LTAs in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people.
- Cover the LTA's full area, all local bus services within it, and the differing needs of any parts of that area (e.g. urban and rural elements).
- Focus on delivering the bus network that LTAs (in consultation with operators) want to see, including how to address the under provision and overprovision of bus services and buses integrating with other modes.
- Set out how they will achieve the objectives in this strategy, including growing bus use, and include a detailed plan for delivery.
- Be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan.
- Influence the share of the £3bn of transformation funding each LTA receives.

We expect Bus Service Improvement Plans to:

- Set targets for journey times and reliability improvements (for the LTA as a whole and in each of the largest cities and towns in its area) – to be reported against publicly at least every six months.
- Identify where bus priority measures are needed, including consideration of Bus Rapid Transit routes to transform key corridors and how traffic management can be improved to benefit buses.
- Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues and carbon reduction targets which improved bus services could address, and set out actions working with operators to transform the local bus fleet to zero emission.
- Drive improvements for passengers by:
 - Setting targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction (to be reported against publicly at least every six months).
 - Setting out plans and costs for fares, ticketing and modal integration. Initially, we expect LTAs and bus operators to develop plans to enable multi-operator ticketing, where plans do not exist. Over time we will expect LTAs to work across transport modes towards enabling a multi-modal ticketing scheme.
 - Considering the impact of roadside infrastructure (e.g. bus stops and shelters) on passenger safety, security and accessibility.
 - Considering how a coherent and integrated network should serve schools, health, social care, employment and other services.
 - Taking into account the views of local people.
 - Committing to a Bus Passenger Charter (BPC) that sets out what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across their area. BPC's should include commitments on the accessibility of bus services.

* All local transport authorities in England are required to have a Local Transport Plan (LTP) relating to transport to, from and within their area. It is a practical document which sets out in detail the authority's transport policies over a given period. This includes local objectives, strategy and an implementation plan highlighting what measures will be taken to achieve local plans.

Bus Service Improvement Plans will need to explain:

- How current services meet or fall short of the expectations listed above.
- How the improvements needed will be delivered through the Enhanced Partnership/franchising schemes and the LTA's and operators' investment plans.
- The financial support that the LTA is providing for subsidised public bus services, listing the numbers of routes and route mileage supported.
- How traffic management and investment are used to prioritise buses. In Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) this will include the extent of the MCA's role over a Key Route Network and how that is used to prioritise bus services.

Franchising

Franchising can be an effective way of correcting a market failure and we support its use where it is in the best interests of passengers. Used well, franchising can harness the knowledge and expertise of the private sector and improve service levels, customer satisfaction and overall patronage.

Franchising does not always require the scale of LTA resource and planning seen in London. There are also strong models of franchising in the Channel Islands and other countries which capitalise on the strengths of private sector route planning, marketing and investment as part of the tendering process whilst ensuring stronger local accountability and financial incentives to prioritise bus services for the local authority.

The franchising powers within the Bus Services Act can currently be used by MCAs at any time, but only by other LTAs with the Secretary of State's consent and new secondary legislation. We support the use of franchising and will allow any LTA which has the capability to do so to pursue franchising where it would not needlessly delay the provision of better services.

This will include demonstrating the capability in traffic management necessary to ensure buses are prioritised appropriately.

The Secretary of State will reserve the right to refuse an application for franchising if he believes a LTA does not, or will not, have the capability and resources to deliver the franchised model chosen; or that an Enhanced Partnership would deliver the improvements proposed more quickly and cost-effectively.

Those LTAs which do not have access to franchising powers at present, but consider that it is the best route to adopt in the interest of passengers and that they have the capability and resources to deliver it, should progress with the implementation of an Enhanced Partnership alongside applying to the Secretary of State for access to franchising powers. An LTA may move from an Enhanced Partnership to franchising later, subject to the conditions above.

We will also strengthen our statutory guidance on Enhanced Partnerships and franchising – making it easier for operators and LTAs to focus on what they want to achieve.

LibertyBus Franchise in Jersey

The Government of Jersey introduced a new bus franchising model in 2013 which was awarded to LibertyBus, a subsidiary of the HCT Group. LibertyBus is responsible for all routes, which call at approximately 800 stops around the island.

The franchise has created a long-term partnership which both parties can invest in, bringing together local authority and industry knowledge and skills with the aim of improving customer service to achieve better passenger satisfaction, which as of February 2020 scored 8.3 out of 10. Between 2012 and 2017 ridership has increased by 38% and the contract price has decreased by 11%¹⁶.



Picture: HCT LibertyBus

The offer for bus operators and LTAs

Operators will gain things they have long sought: first, the certainty of continued support through what are likely to be several years of recovery; and second a commitment by councils and Government to tackle some of the biggest threats to the future of their operations, above all traffic congestion.

LTAs will have access to significant new Government funding streams and powers to make a difference in their areas, and significant assistance to build up their capabilities to exercise those powers. LTAs' performance in exercising these new responsibilities will be taken into account when allocating this and other DfT funding.

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course, detailing how the UK government will partner with places across the UK to build a sustainable economic recovery.

We are clear that successful partnerships should work for both parties, with incentives and benefits for both, and that where new franchising proposals are developed, they should harness the commercial skills and expertise of bus operators, such as seen in Jersey.

We will use part of the £25m fund for supporting LTAs to establish England's first Bus Centre of Excellence (BCoE), enabling the delivery of a long-term programme of activities and support. The centre will be co-sponsored by the Department, and training will be managed and delivered by experts from across the bus sector. This will focus on: public transport service planning and network design, performance oversight, contract procurement and competitive tendering, design and development of bus priority measures, and wider traffic management measures to improve local bus performance.

We will tailor our approach to ensure that the needs of differing LTAs, their officers and elected members of local authorities, are sufficiently met, recognising that a single approach will not work everywhere. Our approach will be based on evidence: we will work with stakeholders in local government, the bus industry and professional institutions to ensure we understand the gaps in capacity and capabilities across the sector. We want to ensure that all parties are well placed to develop and deliver Enhanced Partnerships, franchising and Bus Service Improvement Plans and drive forward the productive partnerships needed to make a step change in bus services.

We will also support a peer network of senior leaders working to deliver bus transformation, to support the sharing of experience and solutions across the private and public sector.

Partnership guidance will also clarify how unexpected circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, should be handled – to minimise the additional work that LTAs need to take to reach a franchising decision.

Devolution

In line with previous devolution of bus funding to Transport for London and Transport for Greater Manchester, we will work to devolve Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), including once it has been reformed, to MCAs and other LTAs who request it. This will form part of wider work to reform BSOG (see page 48) and will not be in place for financial year 2021–22.

In return, we expect all LTAs to:

- agree Enhanced Partnerships or to be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement franchising;
- commit to significant improvements in traffic management, including bus priority measures, active travel measures and control of roadworks.
- drive forward other relevant Government policies such as air quality improvement and, where relevant, the implementation of Clean Air Zones; and
- in addition, MCAs should develop (along with their constituent member authorities) a Key Route Network, subject to consultation and legislation, to include development of bus priority measures and improved bus performance.

Delivering better bus services

This investment and changes to how the bus sector works will drive improvements for passengers. These are set out on the following pages.

Intensive services and investment on key corridors

In densely populated areas, Enhanced Partnerships and franchising agreements should ensure that key radial roads have buses so often – every few minutes – that passengers never need a timetable. Evening services on these roads should be at least every 15 minutes. On these routes, wherever physically possible, there should be significant investment in bus priority – bus lanes, at a minimum. See below for more about bus lanes and priority measures.

Bus Service Improvement Plans should also carefully consider network design – for example, whether local needs are best met through infrequent “branch” services of main routes which provide through journeys at the expense of frequency, or through high-frequency feeder routes connecting to the main line service instead, with through ticketing at no extra charge.

On a few corridors, the legacy of the 1980s “bus wars” is overprovision, with dozens of buses per hour, including with duplicate competing services which do not accept each other’s tickets. This is wasteful, polluting and can paradoxically make services slower and less attractive. Planning should make sure that services are appropriately spread between corridors, avoiding significant over and under provision.

There must be significant increases in bus priority

The key to making buses more attractive is making them faster and more reliable.

In Bus Service Improvement Plans, we expect to see plans for bus lane on any roads where there is a frequent bus service, congestion, and physical space to install one. Bus lanes should be full-time and as continuous as possible. They should be part of a whole-corridor approach, including other physical measures such as:

- Traffic signal priority;
- Bus gates, which allow buses to enter a road that prohibits access to other traffic; and;
- Clear and consistent signage.

We will not support opening bus lanes to electric cars or vans, which would quickly erode their benefits to bus users. Intensive and granular focus on the precise conditions of each road can pay dividends, as some places have shown. Issues such as bus stop locations and spacing, residential parking policy, and removal of buildouts and pinchpoints should all be considered. Non-residential parking will not generally be an efficient use of roadspace on such routes.

Loading's impact on bus lanes must be minimised, and to achieve this hours should be restricted, or loading bays inset or re-provided close by, away from the main carriageway. LTAs should consider physical changes to roads' footprints to allow the provision of continuous bus lanes. Where there is insufficient space for a bus lane, LTAs should consider point closures of some main roads to private cars, allowing through traffic on other main roads nearby.

Robust enforcement of traffic restrictions can bring benefits for buses through less congestion. As we have already announced in *Gear Change: A Bold Vision for Cycling and Walking*, we will this year commence authorities' enforcement powers under the remaining elements of Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. These powers will allow local authorities, rather than the police, to enforce against a range of moving traffic offences which can help ease congestion and help buses make progress more quickly. We will issue guidance to local authorities about the powers, including on the importance of ensuring citizens are properly informed about them, and the need for traffic signing to be properly designed and placed, so that it is clear to drivers what restrictions are in force. As we stated in *Gear Change*, we will consider issuing warnings for a limited period after introduction or for a first offence.

The Government will refresh its statutory guidance to local authorities on traffic management, to provide up to date and relevant advice. Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to expect enhanced bus reliability as an integral part of highway authorities' Network Management Duty. We will also consider how to facilitate sharing of good practice and experience in delivering bus priority schemes.

As set out in "A Better Deal for Bus Users" in September 2019, all new road investments in England which receive central UK government funding are now required to either support bus priority measures or explain why doing so would not be necessary or appropriate in that instance. All funding bids now need to explicitly address this issue.

We will also support bus rapid transit and other such schemes which lie between conventional bus and light rail, aiming to bring the benefits and user experience of light rail to bus corridors at significantly lower cost. See page 66.

Key Route Networks

Most Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) now have a Key Route Network (KRN) of the most important local roads for which they share powers to operate and manage with Local Highways Authorities. The Government plans to consult on strengthening the KRN approach. Whilst some KRN designations exist at present, Mayors are limited in their powers, particularly over the allocation of road space.

Our intention is to increase their powers over their KRN, similar to the powers that apply already in London and enable integrated highways and transport authority status at Combined Authority level for these roads, and we will consult on this. As with other local authorities, MCAs and their constituent members will be expected to implement ambitious bus priority programmes and other roadspace reallocation measures, using all relevant powers available to them. As explained earlier in the section about Bus Service Improvement Plans, future Government funding will recognise the level of ambition demonstrated by local authorities.

Superbus networks for “intermediate” areas – neither fully urbanised nor deeply rural

A Superbus network provides higher frequency, lower fare services; it can deliver the type of change we want to see. Places such as South Northumberland, County Durham, Lancashire, and the East Midlands, with their patchworks of small industrial towns and large villages, have not had the advantages of metropolitan transport authorities but are ideal bus territories that could really benefit from the Superbus concept. We particularly encourage ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans in these types of places and remain committed to supporting the first, low fare Superbus network in Cornwall.

More comprehensive ‘socially necessary’ services

Currently, LTAs can step in to ensure that ‘socially necessary’ services are provided where there are gaps in the commercial network. But outside specific categories, there is no obligation on LTAs to fund these crucial services. Across England, there are significant differences in provision, from reasonably generous to almost nothing, but the trend is sharply downward. Many communities have lost their daily bus services altogether. Others have services for only a few hours a day, suitable perhaps for a short shopping trip but not for work or longer-distance journeys. Others might have relatively good services in the daytime but no service at all in the evenings. This has a serious impact on people’s ability to find and travel for work.

Partnerships and franchising arrangements must deliver more comprehensive services, including those which are socially or economically necessary. This includes services to smaller and more isolated places, and more services in the evenings and at weekends. Without services at the times people want, people will not use the bus. Lack of a whole-day service reduces the number of passengers in the daytime too, preventing people from using the bus if they are unable to get back in the evening.

We will issue new guidance on the meaning and role of ‘socially necessary’ services, expanding the category to include ‘economically necessary’ services for the first time. This recognises the vital role that buses have in getting people to work at all times of the day and night. This guidance will set clear expectations of what we want to see. To drive forward the levelling-up agenda, this will include provision for economically disadvantaged areas. Making sure that people are connected to centres of employment, broadening their choice of work and education, is both socially and economically important.

Through Bus Service Improvement Plans we expect LTAs to work with operators to set the daytime, evening and Sunday service levels that different communities need. In some cases, these services could be provided by demand responsive transport, integrated with the conventional buses, where they exist. Places that are economically disadvantaged, including smaller industrial towns and isolated housing estates, should also be included in that thinking to connect them better to centres of employment, broadening opportunities and the choice of work, education and leisure for those who live there. We will also expect to see better services being provided to places of employment off existing main bus routes, such as out-of-town industrial estates and factories. Again, this could be done with integrated demand responsive transport geared to shift times. There is a role to play for employers in helping with this.

If this cannot be achieved by agreement, we will consider statutorily requiring the provision of socially necessary bus services, including those which improve people's access to employment.

We will modernise the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG)

Almost £260 million per year is paid in BSOG to operators of eligible bus services and community transport organisations. This includes a core element to recover some of their fuel costs, and incentive-related payments. It benefits passengers by helping operators keep fares down, and enabling operators to run services that might otherwise be unprofitable, particularly in rural areas. It is cost effective, delivering high value for money¹⁷ with each £1 spent generating between £2.70 and £3.70 in benefits, including wider economic and social impacts.

However, the outcomes incentivised by a fuel-based subsidy are not right for the twenty-first century and the environmental challenges we face; and the BSOG incentive payments are outdated, focusing on delivering outcomes that should have become standard many years ago. We will reform BSOG to better meet Government priorities, which will support environmental objectives, levelling up the country, and provide better passenger journeys.

We will consult in 2021 on the details of a modernised BSOG. We will set out our detailed plans in that consultation, but we are considering:

- moving the main element of BSOG from fuel consumption to a distance rate which would address the current problem where base BSOG is not paid to electric vehicles (except for a small incentive payment);
- updating the low carbon incentive to better meet environmental objectives. The existing incentive started in 2009 so is based on comparisons to a Euro III bus;
- an additional amount for rural bus services;
- new incentives for demand responsive transport, which could encourage the delivery of services, and bus use, in rural areas;
- efficiencies from administrative changes such as payments in arrears; and
- ending payments for 'dead' mileage between depots and the start or finish of passenger services; and
- making the reformed BSOG available only to LTAs and operators in an Enhanced Partnership, or where franchising is being actively pursued.

We will make sure that future local transport is joined up

We are committed to reforming future local transport funding to better support local leaders deliver their priorities and achieve key objectives, such as levelling up and decarbonisation. We will better coordinate local transport funding by engaging local areas about their investment priorities in the round and their overall strategy for improving transport infrastructure. This will enable better strategic planning and more joined up infrastructure projects across local transport networks.

Local Transport Plans (LTPs) will become the focus of transport funding discussions between central and local government. LTPs should set out holistic place-based strategies for improving transport networks, proposed projects for investment and ultimately how key objectives will be achieved. In particular, LTPs should include clear plans for how interventions across local transport modes will drive decarbonisation in their area. To ensure investments achieve their intended aims, LTPs and business cases in future will need to demonstrate local commitment to deliver certain measures. For example, this strategy sets out what we require of Bus Service Improvement Plans and local commitment to bus franchises or Enhanced Partnerships. Bus Service Improvement Plans must be fully aligned with wider Local Transport Plans.

Reading Buses

Reading Buses is owned by Reading Borough Council and has been transporting passengers for over one hundred years. It has one of the youngest and most environmentally friendly fleets in the UK, and in the Autumn 2019 Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey, Reading Buses' passenger satisfaction score was 92%¹⁸.

Bus usage has grown through consistent partnership working between the Council and bus company, resulting in Reading having the second highest bus use in England, outside London, per head of population in 2019/20 – with an average of 137.5 annual bus trips per person¹⁹. Total bus use in Reading borough had grown to over 22m journeys in 2018/19 before the pandemic, an increase of almost 40% in the last 6 years²⁰.



Picture: Reading Buses

The Government is committed to transforming local transport, and its recent publication “Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking” sets out its plans to transform the role cycling and walking play in our transport system. “Gear Change” and this strategy complement each other. Cycling, walking and using the bus are all part of the Government’s agenda to deliver a transport system that works for everyone, where walking cycling and taking the bus are a natural choice for shorter journeys.

As set out in Gear Change, we will carry bikes on more bus routes. Buses and cycles together can allow more journeys which are otherwise only possible by car, recognising that far more people live near a bus stop than a rail station. In many rural areas, where demand is lower, we will work with bus operators to allow a limited number of bikes on board, in addition to onboard wheelchair space, on appropriate routes, as a few rural bus routes already do. A handful of urban routes also allow bikes, using external racks. We will investigate extending this provision further. The Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Investment Model also reveals that bus route enhancements also have an impact in generating additional walking trips.

We will review whether it remains right that local authorities cannot set up new bus companies

The Bus Services Act 2017 prevents further municipal (that is, local authority-owned) bus companies being set up from scratch. While this is not an absolute barrier, as Local Authorities can already purchase an existing bus or coach company, we believe this part of the legislation is ripe for review. There are only a handful of municipal bus companies at present, but there are some strongly performing examples among them.

Future-proofing our regulatory framework for more flexible services

The Future of Transport Regulatory Review aims to address the opportunities and challenges that technology is having on our traditional concepts of transport. The first Call for Evidence²¹ of the Regulatory Review examined the legislative framework around on-demand, flexible bus services which currently pre-dates the advent of the smartphone. The key findings from this were published in December 2020, and many responses emphasised the need for regulation to be focused on the desired outcomes for the user rather than the service itself. Learnings from the bus sector must feed into the review.

The Law Commissions have been undertaking a review of Automated Vehicles (AVs),²² looking at the regulatory framework for the safe deployment of automated vehicles in the UK. The second consultation of this review, the findings of which were published in May 2020, specifically considered how highly automated vehicles might be used for passenger transport. In their third consultation paper in December 2020, the Law Commissions proposed a system that unifies passenger and freight licensing to reflect the modular design of highly automated vehicles (with no human on-board). Passenger AVs would be subject to stricter requirements than freight AVs but both would be founded on the same requirements necessary for a vehicle with no responsible person on-board. We will review how legislation that separately covers buses, taxis, private hire vehicles and light rail may be brought together to reflect the blurring boundaries between these forms of travel, within the Future of Transport Regulatory Review. This will give service providers a clear, long-term, regulatory framework, which will allow new forms of service to be provided to passengers by removing obstacles to innovation and allowing greater flexibility.

We want to stimulate innovation and enable it to thrive. Regulation itself will change, as it always has. But our goals will not change. We want transport to be cleaner, safer, healthier, greener, cheaper, more convenient, and more inclusive. Our approach will be underpinned as far as possible by the following Future of Transport principles:

1. New modes of transport and new mobility services must be safe and secure by design.
2. The benefits of innovation in mobility must be available to all parts of the UK and all segments of society.
3. Walking, cycling and active travel must remain the best options for short urban journeys.
4. Mass transit must remain fundamental to an efficient transport system.
5. New mobility services must lead the transition to zero emissions.
6. Mobility innovation must help to reduce congestion through more efficient use of limited road space, for example through sharing rides, increasing occupancy or consolidating freight.
7. The marketplace for mobility must be open to stimulate innovation and give the best deal to consumers.
8. New mobility services must be designed to operate as part of an integrated transport system combining public, private and multiple modes for transport users.
9. Data from new mobility services must be shared where appropriate to improve choice and the operation of the transport system.

Emergency Covid Measures in the Next Few Months

In many places, roads already operated at or close to capacity before the pandemic. There is a risk that when full economic life returns, the move away from public transport during the crisis will lead to unmanageable levels of car traffic, slowing some places to a crawl. Traffic congestion will damage the economic recovery and cause an increased pollution risk to human health.

As the crisis abates, therefore, we must urgently encourage people to return to public transport. We will do so, as social distancing on transport is withdrawn, by selectively expediting a number of the policies in this strategy.

We will expect LTAs in areas of high traffic stress to install bus lanes swiftly, subject to proper consultation with local residents and local firms, and to make more existing bus lanes full-time. Implementing these measures will improve bus services by making them quicker and more reliable and cheaper to run. (See page 46 for more on bus priority)

We will work with operators and local authorities with the aim of introducing targeted fares cuts swiftly in some areas, starting with Cornwall. (See page 59 onwards for more on what we would like to see Bus Service Improvement Plans cover on bus fares)





Chapter 4

Delivering for passengers

4





**Buses for Everyone:
We will set a high bar for
standards enabling buses
to be used by all.**



In 2018, the Government consulted on proposals to use powers introduced by the Bus Services Act 2017 to mandate the provision of audible and visible route and next stop announcements on local bus services, in order to help disabled passengers to travel with greater confidence. Subject to final analysis, we will make these Accessible Information Regulations by summer 2022, ensuring passengers can board any bus with confidence and that they will know when to alight when their destination is reached. We will increase the funding for the smallest bus companies to ensure their passengers benefit from improved onboard information by at least £1.5m in 2021–22.

We will make sure that apps can provide passengers with accessibility data about bus stations and stops so they can make informed travel choices regarding accessibility of services. Recognising roadside information and hard copy formats are also important for many passengers.

We will expect LTAs to explicitly consider inclusivity and to review the impact of roadside infrastructure on passenger safety, security and accessibility as part of their Bus Service Improvement Plans.

We will also review the impact of roadside infrastructure on passenger convenience, comfort, safety, security and accessibility, seeking to understand the factors which permit or encourage greater bus usage, and those which turn potential passengers away. We will also consider how we can use this understanding to empower passengers to make informed journey choices, and to support LTAs to provide facilities which encourage greater bus use.

We will ensure that buses funded by Government provide an enhanced level of accessibility: including additional flexible space for a second wheelchair user or passengers with pushchairs, hearing loops, space for assistance dogs, and audible and visible information.

We will review eligibility for free bus travel for disabled people to ensure that we are improving equality of opportunity and helping disabled people participate fully in public life. We will also look to digitalise the concessionary bus pass for older and disabled people in England, giving passengers the option to store their permit on a smartphone.

We will digitally transform the bus service registration process, ensuring it is optimised for passenger information purposes and is suitable for the provision of new innovative services. In addition, we will consider setting minimum standards for registration in the future to ensure buses are providing what passengers want. We will deliver a comprehensive review of the Public Service Vehicle Registration Regulations under which operators register their services, to ensure they are fit for purpose for the 21st century.

We will review key regulations to improve accessibility. This includes the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR) by the end of 2023, ensuring that future decisions on accessibility standards are based on an up-to-date understanding of passenger need. We will consult in 2021 on draft amendments to the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) Regulations 1990, to ensure that the wheelchair space and priority seats are made available for passengers who need them. We will continue to work with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) to ensure that non-compliance is identified, and effective action is taken in response.

Accountability for local services also means accountability for promoting access for all. We expect each Local Transport Plan to include measures that improve accessibility for older and disabled people, including: designing appropriate networks which minimise walking distances to key destinations and streamline inter-connectivity, promoting high-quality customer service through appropriate and consistent training, modernising vehicles and upgrading supporting infrastructure to facilitate independent accessible journeys.

The design of bus infrastructure improvements should be informed by the experience of disabled people and consulted on with a range of passengers; particular care should be taken when implementing bus priority measures to ensure that they do not impede access for disabled people reliant on private motor vehicles, taxis and private hire vehicles.

We will continue to fund free off-peak bus travel for disabled people, free off-peak travel for pensioners and free travel to and from school for children who live beyond walking distance. We will not fund travel for people who are not necessarily disadvantaged, such as blanket free travel for unaccompanied children or older people below the state pension age.

Fares must be lower and simpler

Average bus fares have risen by 403% since 1987*, compared to 325% for rail fares and 163% for motoring costs²³. Lower and simpler fares attract passengers. They should be seen as an investment not just in transport but in town centres, in social inclusion and in a greener future. We will expect to see fares policy as an integral part of Bus Service Improvement Plans.

Within cities and towns, we want low flat fares (or maximum fares and daily price caps) to be the norm, as in London. Flat fares speed boarding and are easier for passengers and potential passengers to understand. We want to see lower single fares and more low daily price capping. We will also expect Bus Service Improvement Plans to consider youth fares; initiatives such as the youth fares implemented in Merseyside had a positive impact on patronage and we want to see this replicated across the country.

There must be seamless, integrated local ticketing between operators and we want to see this across all types of transport

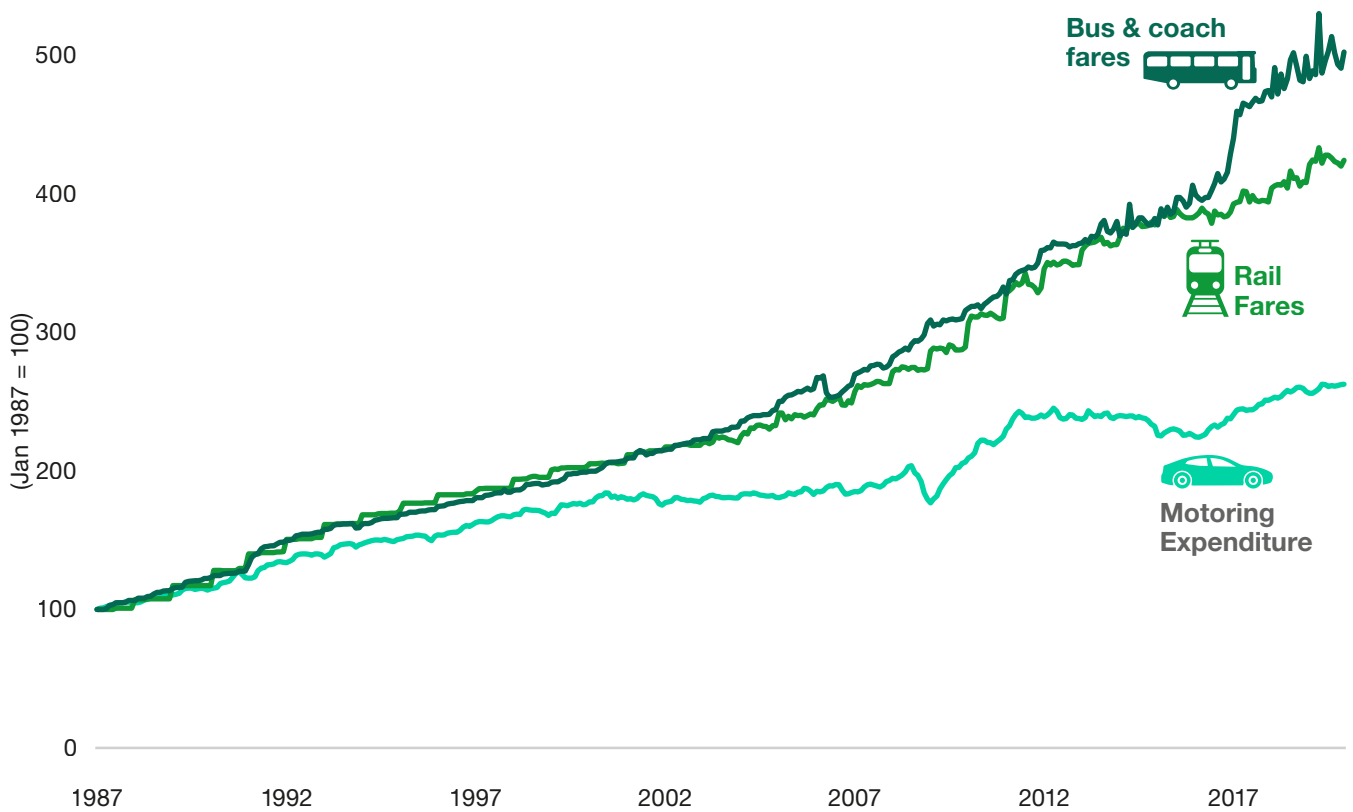
We know that passengers value the integrated and simplified service found in London, with no fuss multi-modal and multi-operator tickets and the same high-quality information for passengers – and we want LTAs to work towards replicating this seamless experience everywhere. There are many places where we can see that integrated multimodal ticketing drives up use of public transport. In the West Midlands, the SWIFT scheme which connects bus, tram and train has enabled passengers to travel on public transport in a seamless manner. The West Midlands is one of the few areas nationally, that pre-pandemic, had reported significant increases in ridership.

Merseyside – ‘MyTicket’

Across the Liverpool City Region, the introduction in 2014 of ‘MyTicket’ priced at £2.20, which allows under 19s unlimited day travel on any bus, has been one of the key drivers of fare paying passenger growth. By 2019, the number of bus journeys made by young people had increased by 168%²⁴. Initiatives like this give young people a great value and easy to understand ticketing offer, which can encourage bus use from an early age and increase the likelihood of these people remaining bus users throughout their adulthood.

* DfT buses fares data weighted together with coach fares data collected by the Office for National Statistics.

Retail Prices Index (RPI): Bus and coach fares, rail fares and motoring expenditure, 1987–2019²⁵



We want to see multi-operator ticketing everywhere, covering all bus services at a price little if at all higher than single-operator tickets, then to extend this to tickets that cover all travel modes (bus, light rail/metro, rail). Approximately 75% of places do now have multi-operator tickets allowing travel on all bus services in the area but they are not always well advertised and can be significantly more expensive than single-operator tickets.

Nowhere outside London has multi-modal daily and weekly price capping using contactless debit or credit cards, and only a few places have multi-operator daily price capping using contactless. We want partnerships and franchising agreements to change this. We expect to see all Bus Service Improvement Plans setting out how they will deliver no-fuss, multi-operator tickets and price caps on contactless credit and debit cards, at little or no premium to single operator fares. We will expect all operators to work with LTAs to deliver this.

We will work with transport technology providers, app developers, bus operators and LTAs to ensure that any technology to support this is developed strategically, and money is not wasted on different technology solutions for different places. As rail ticketing and fares systems are updated, we will also consider opportunities for facilitating integrated electronic ticketing with buses.

84% of buses in England already accept contactless payment²⁶. To drive even greater adoption of contactless across the industry, we will use CBSSG to incentivise operators to adopt the technology. In the longer term, to ensure the industry reaches, and then maintains the standard of 100% contactless, we will consider making it a condition of bus service registration and BSOG eligibility.

Given the growing importance of contactless on buses, we do not believe that there is any need to integrate or unify the many existing bus smartcard products. Their usage will decline as contactless uptake rises. But we also believe that operators should continue to accept cash for now: there is a risk that otherwise we will deter or exclude passengers who, for any reason, may not have usable debit or credit cards. Price-capping will obviously not be available to those who pay cash, but paper day tickets should be.

Through ticketing should also be easier. A degree of through ticketing between bus and rail is already available under the PlusBus scheme, although its coverage and availability are limited. We will promote PlusBus better, and work towards extending the range of destinations available under it and making PlusBus tickets available as e-tickets and mobile tickets, so users can start their journey with a bus trip without needing to have paper tickets posted out or collected in advance from a railway station.

We want to see through fares for any journey across England involving bus, rail and light rail easily available, not only on journey planning websites, but also on smartphones as standard, and will work with industry to secure this.

Service patterns must be integrated with other modes

More bus routes and demand responsive services should serve railway stations and for easy connections between modes, bus services should be timed to connect with trains. For example, in Cornwall, the railway line running through the county will act as the spine of the transport network and the new Superbus services will align with it. We will work towards the inclusion of bus services in rail journey planners as standard.

Buses must also work better with each other. There are many instances of poor connections and uncoordinated timetables. Bus Service Improvement Plans should detail plans for ensuring that in places (often rural) where services are regular, but not frequent, connectivity is maximised. Hub models can connect services, with buses all arriving and departing at the hub town within the same ten or fifteen-minute window each hour, ideally all servicing the same centrally located bus or railway station.

We will support people into work

Currently, only some bus operators accept the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount Card. This card is provided by Jobcentre Plus advisers to those unemployed claiming Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit, and it gives 50 per cent off selected rail tickets and some operators' bus fares. We want to make the card accepted by all operators and will work with them to deliver this. We will also explore relaxing the eligibility criteria so the card is available to more claimants.

Services must be simpler and easier to understand

A key deterrent to using buses is that they are, or are perceived as, confusing. We have already described some negative features of the market, such as rival networks which do not acknowledge each other's existence, and which use the same route numbers for wholly different services. Bus Service Improvement Plans must eradicate this. We want to see common numbering systems, and routes that are as far as possible the same in the evenings and weekends as they are in the daytime. All operators which run the same route should accept the same tickets, use the same route number and be shown on the same timetable. Timetable changes should wherever possible be co-ordinated, and at set, relatively infrequent points in the year.

Bus Service Improvement Plans should consider whether to simplify routes; for example, considering whether networks should have more high-frequency major route services rather than lots of low-frequency services combining. Route variations and letter suffix routes should be reduced.

Networks often try to provide infrequent through services to everywhere or divert buses away from the main route to serve smaller places, reducing speed and convenience for people travelling between a route's major points. As described, on high-frequency services more use could instead be made of good hub-and-spoke connections, with frequent feeder buses connecting into frequent major routes and through ticketing. This becomes possible if frequency and reliability improve.

Bus Service Improvement Plans should consider questions of network design like this – and as with all elements of the plan, show how stakeholders and communities will be engaged in the thinking.

Bus information

It is too difficult for non-users to find where buses go. Information online is often incomplete, misleading or hard to locate. But bus operators now have a legal obligation to publish timetable and running data, and we will be providing funding for predictions information which will inform the passenger how many minutes away their bus is from the bus stop and on average how long the journey will take.

Nottingham's Hucknall Connect

The Hucknall Connect service operated by Trent Barton offers local Hucknall residents in Nottingham an easy route into the city centre by connecting them to their local tram station and the main bus routes.

Their connect ticket option includes a full day's travel on Connect in Hucknall and the tram.



Bus Journey Information

Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM) is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority, chaired by the Mayor of the West Midlands. It is the UK's third largest public transportation authority, responsible for a region encompassing the major cities of Birmingham and Coventry, with a population of 2.9 million people and in 2019/20 accounted for 246.6 million passenger journeys.²⁷

To improve customer experience and increase use of public transport, TfWM has invested significantly in the provision of accurate passenger information, supporting operators and the developer community to include timetable and location data for bus tram and rail delivered to journey planning applications, websites and third-party developers as well as to 1,800 real time information displays at bus stops and stations.

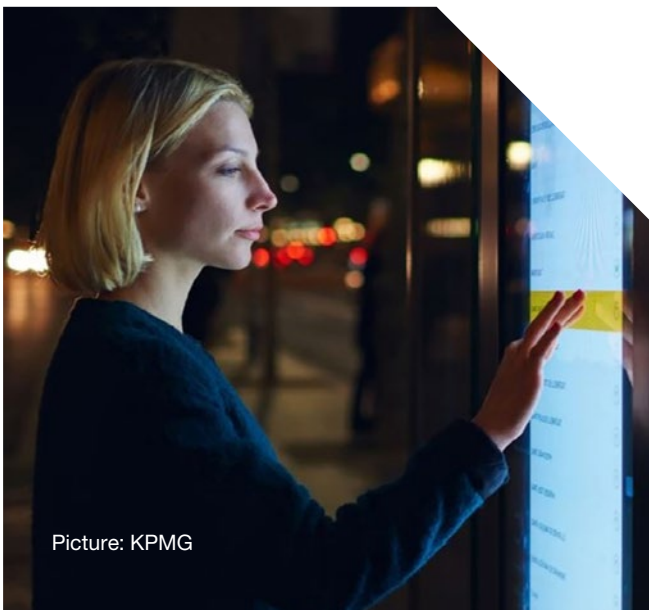
However, this is a challenging task, with more than thirty bus operators, six train operators as well as a tram operator running services they use many different systems each providing data in different forms and formats, at different frequencies and with varying levels of accuracy.

The Bus Open Data Service was launched in November 2020 and the statutory obligation to publish data was introduced on 1 January 2021, with national datasets currently being built for timetables, fares and location. None of the most commonly-used public transport journey planning apps and websites yet provide comprehensive, accurate, England-wide local bus information and there are many other apps that only include some operators.

This may mislead potential passengers into thinking that there are no services to the place they want to go. A number of apps and websites give inaccurate information when tested. Web searches for particular routes often also bring up old timetable PDFs which have since changed. Every town, city and rural area should have published, up to date maps.

We will continue to work with app providers and search engines to support the creation of transport apps using this data. We will aim for the apps to show every service, including fares and running information, and support inclusive and accessible journey planning, and will provide guidance through our upcoming Mobility as a Service Code of Practice. We want passengers to be able to plan, buy and show tickets on their smartphone for any journey, including through trips on buses and other transport modes, though this will not be achievable immediately.

Information at bus stops is often poor. They should be viewed as free advertising sites for the bus, including the opportunity to promote services' frequency and price, and should include full timetable information.



Picture: KPMG

Networks must feel like a whole system which works together

One of the distinguishing features of London's bus network is that it feels like a network, a coherent, consistent, strongly-branded operation which gives people confidence in using it. Passengers know that a bus will be along in a few minutes, what the fare will be and what the experience will be like. They know that at an interchange there will be a poster guiding them to the next bus or a train. Typefaces, liveries, logos create an impression of unity. Most successful consumer businesses, such as retailers and airlines, aim to create similar levels of consistency and brand identity. LTAs, in their Bus Service Improvement Plans, should consider strong network identities. There are already successful examples of individual, eye-catching route branding in different parts of the country. Route branding can still work well as part of a wider network identity.

We will promote buses, aiming to demystify them and improve their image

Research shows that many people have negative perceptions about buses but are often pleasantly surprised when they try them. We, as Government, have a role to play in promoting the use of buses, to attract both previous and new users onto buses, working closely with the LTA, bus operators and trade bodies to reverse the decades of decline in customer numbers. To do this, we will support an industry led Back to Bus campaign this year to promote the reformed network and address misconceptions, encouraging people to use the bus. This may include signposting people to apps and websites, targeted local promotions encouraging non-users to give buses a try, such as free day vouchers, try-before-you-buy, refund guarantees if a passenger is dissatisfied and a period of free travel for people who have started new jobs or bought new homes. We will also showcase services focussing on the quality of experience for commuters, including charging points, comfortable seats and other perks.

In popular tourist areas such as the West Country and the national parks, often blighted and congested by too many cars, we want Bus Service Improvement Plans to show how far more will be done to promote buses to visitors, with improved services, easily accessible information, park-and-ride sites and special tickets. Scenic railways, such as the Settle-Carlisle and West Highland lines, are now significant tourist attractions and wealth generators in their own right. We see no reason why several of Britain's equally splendid bus routes should not be marketed in the same way.

We will give bus passengers more of a voice and a say

Bus Service Improvement Plans must include a passengers' charter giving bus users rights to certain standards of service, including punctuality, vehicle cleanliness, proportion of services operated, information and redress.

We want to see mechanisms for redress at a local level and means to ensure these standards are met, which could include forums such as Bus Advisory Boards being set up. At a national level, we will consult on the appropriate standards and mechanisms by which these can be enforced, and a review of the consumer landscape to determine the appropriate body to supervise them.

We will continue to work with the bus industry to increase awareness of bus passenger rights including those specific to disabled passengers, and how complaints can be made. We will also continue to promote the adoption of best practice in disability awareness training: we will publish the high-level training framework to drive up standards of customer service of drivers and on-board staff who seek to understand passengers' access needs, and who tailor the support they provide accordingly.



Picture: Tees Flex Service

Tees Valley – Tees Flex Service

The new Tees Flex service, which has been funded by the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority, was introduced in February 2020. It is operated by fully accessible minibus vehicles and caters for on-demand and pre-bookable journeys for residents in more isolated communities across Darlington & Stockton, Hartlepool, and Redcar & Cleveland.

The service has created new links which can now be accessed for the cost of a bus fare and passenger numbers have remained strong even during the COVID-19 outbreak. The service can be easily pre-booked via a smartphone app, website or over the telephone. Passengers can request pick-up and drop-off points within the serviced area, and to destinations including train and bus stations, along with hospitals outside of the area.

More demand responsive services

In lower-density areas and at less popular times, conventional fixed-route buses can never compete with the attractiveness or flexibility of the car. But now, aided by technology, demand responsive services can – offering a more personal, on-demand service, taking people from their doors or closer to their doors than a regular bus.

Demand responsive services are not a perfect solution to every challenge. Several of the large operators have tried and failed to operate them commercially. They must strike a balance: on the one hand, providing a service which is responsive and frequent enough to be useful and on the other, not running too much mileage, with little environmental advantage over the car or subsidy advantage over conventional buses.

They will never replace frequent urban and inter-urban routes, as too many vehicles would be needed.

But they could be particularly useful to improve provision in the countryside and in the evenings and on Sundays, including serving large workplaces with anti-social hours, such as hospitals, tackling the bugbear of hospital car parking. Because they are more door-to-door, they can overcome the concerns of some users, particularly women, about taking public transport at night.

We have already established a Rural Mobility Fund to trial more demand responsive services and have awarded funding to 17 pilot projects. We will consider expanding this work, including piloting non-rural services. We expect all demand responsive services to be fully integrated with the mainstream network, accepting the same tickets and passes, using the same or similar branding and shown on timetables and journey planning apps and websites. We also expect them to be provided using accessible vehicles, including provision for a wheelchair user.

On demand bus services in Sevenoaks

In Sevenoaks, Kent, an area with very high car ownership but also high levels of rail commuting, some local bus services have been replaced by demand responsive vehicles during the COVID-19 outbreak, while demand for services has been lower and social distancing in force.

These services have improved passengers' access to buses, which are easily bookable via a smartphone app, so residents can continue to make essential journeys to shops, work and medical facilities at no extra cost beyond a regular bus fare.



Picture: Go Coach

We want to ensure that the needs of rural transport users are given equal consideration to those in urban areas. We have piloted projects targeting rural areas specifically. We are committed to improving the connectivity of isolated rural communities and those with infrequent and unreliable services. We have been seeking views and evidence on what could be incorporated into a Future of Transport: rural strategy. This strategy will set out how innovations and technological developments in transport can be harnessed in rural communities. We want improved rural transport to support economic growth and development in rural communities.

Rural Mobility Fund

We have awarded funding to 17 pilot projects of this £20m funding scheme: the successful schemes will trial innovative, demand responsive solutions to transport challenges that rural, and suburban, areas often face.

“Total Transport”²⁸

In 2016 we allocated £7.6 million to 37 separate schemes run by 36 local authorities to pilot Total Transport solutions; these were focussed on rural areas. “Total Transport” is about finding ways of commissioning public sector funded transport so that passengers get a better service with less duplication of resources. This can include services like non-emergency patient transport, adult social care transport and home to school transport. Considering all these streams together can allow networks to be designed so they complement each other, reduce administrative overheads by centralising commissioning, and achieve overall cost efficiencies.

We will support more Bus Rapid Transport networks

Bus Service Improvement Plans should include consideration of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) networks on key corridors. BRT is a hybrid between bus and light rail, using high-capacity buses on segregated, bus-only roadways with stops more like light rail stations. Unlike light rail, however, buses can leave the segregated busways and use conventional roads. BRT could be a game-changer for bus networks. It can deliver a large proportion of the benefits of rail-based schemes at much lower cost, as demonstrated in schemes such as Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, Belfast Glider and Leigh-Salford-Manchester Busway.

BRT systems feature comfortable vehicles, fast journey times, real time passenger information and high-quality waiting environments. Costs are typically much lower than for rail-based schemes, owing to fewer engineering, planning and land acquisition constraints.

Passenger journey times can be lower than those on rail-based systems due to increased frequencies. In a number of large South American cities, they can carry tens of thousands of passengers per direction, per hour, equivalent to conventional rail lines. Journey times are optimised when travelling on segregated infrastructure. However, buses are able to run on conventional roads and are therefore not constrained by the infrastructure: they can steer around roadworks and are not dependent on the provision of a fully-segregated alignment. The Cambridgeshire system is a good example of mixed operation.

We think Glider-style BRT has great potential, and our ambition is to see the development of proposals for up to five Glider-style systems in England’s towns and cities. We will work with local authorities and operators as local Bus Service Improvement Plans are produced to identify potential locations for system trials. These services could be protected from other competition through bus franchising powers (which are flexible and can cover routes at a local level not just wider geographies) – so they could be tendered like rail or light rail services.



Picture: Translink Glider

Bus Rapid Transport – Belfast's Glider

Translink's cross-city Glider services are operated by tram-style vehicles, which have three sets of doors on each vehicle for speedy alighting and boarding. The Glider provides an inclusive environment, including separate areas for wheelchair users and passengers with pushchairs, step free boarding and audible and visible stop announcements.

Key Features:

- Tram style stops with a shelter, benches and perches.
- Dedicated bus lanes throughout the route.
- Real time passenger information at all stops.
- 30% fewer stops than conventional bus, on average 400m apart to improve predictability and reliability of the service.
- Services spaced apart for maximum frequency and reliability, arriving every 7–8 minutes in either direction, so that passengers know they will never have long to wait.
- Additional facilities at the terminus, including a waiting room with seating and toilets.
- Sheltered bike storage to encourage cycling and free parking for cars to encourage park & ride into the city centre.
- Priority road maintenance – ensuring a high quality of surface for the bus lanes and improving drainage all along the route.

Construction costs for Bus Rapid Transit systems, such as Glider, are typically at least 50% lower than traditional light rail/tram schemes.

5

Chapter 5

A green bus revolution







The UK has one of the most ambitious approaches in the world to achieving net zero by 2050. Our Transport Decarbonisation Plan (to be published shortly) will set out measures to help achieve this, with significant local air quality improvements preventing thousands of early deaths each year.



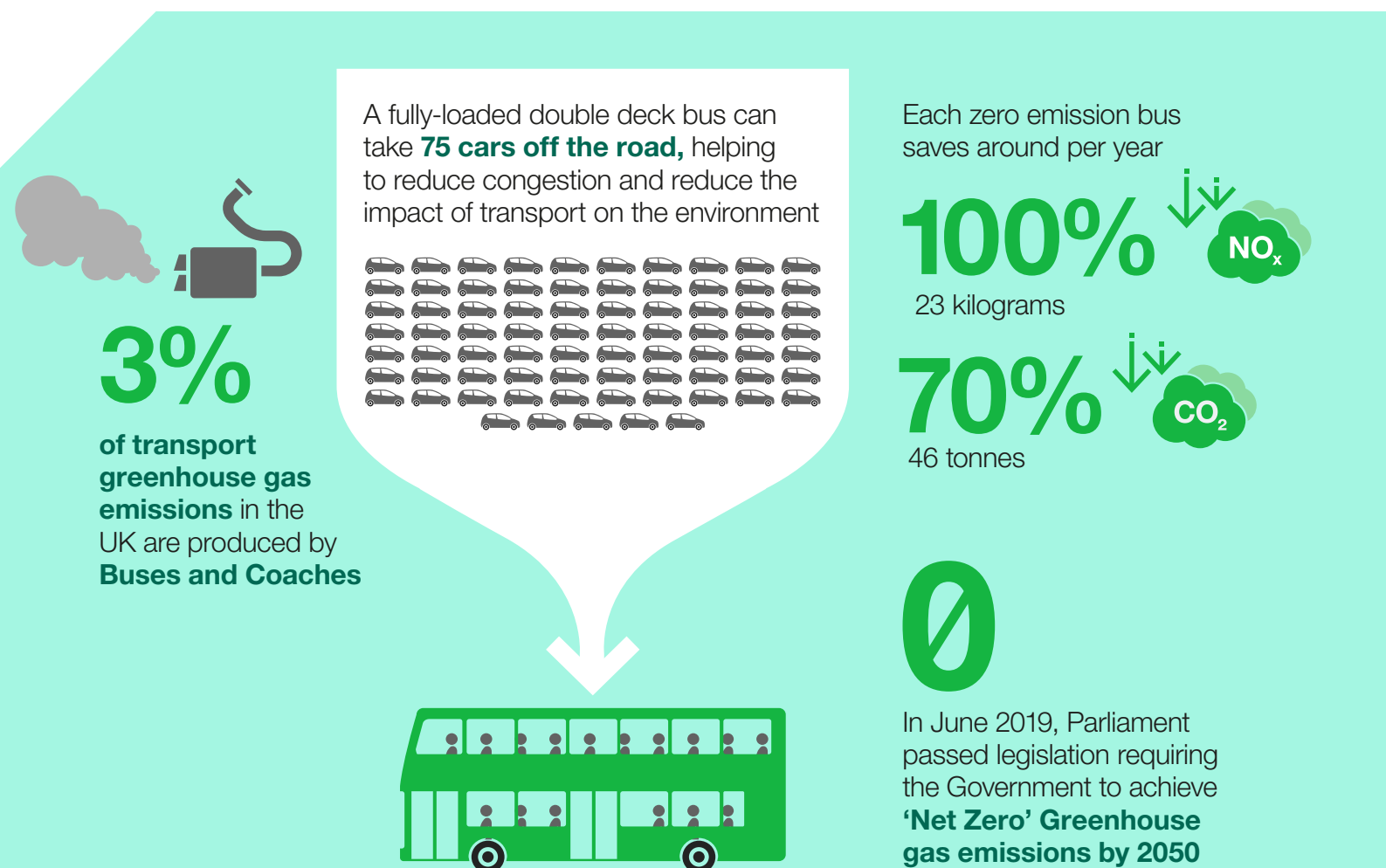
Zero emission bus services, that meet the needs of passengers and communities, and attract passengers from other forms of transport, are at the heart of our plans.

New vehicles offer more than environmental benefits – with more comfortable journeys and a reduction in vehicle noise and vibration they provide an opportunity to attract new users. The added incentive is that we expect that zero emission buses will achieve operating cost savings in the longer term, which can be reinvested in more frequent services, lower fares and other improvements for passengers.

Where we are

UK bus operators have invested over £1.3bn in cleaner and greener buses over the last five years, supported by £89m funding through the Government's Low and Ultra-Low Emission bus schemes*. However, there is much more to do. The majority of these vehicles are hybrid or gas-powered and only around 2% of England's bus fleet is fully zero emission today²⁹. This represents 4% of London's fleet and 1% of the fleet in England outside of London³⁰

Bus operators share our ambitions to achieve a zero emission bus fleet. Many have committed to purchase only ultra-low or zero emission buses from 2025, and to start this process by 2023 in some urban areas, if there is continued Government support towards the extra purchase and fuel infrastructure costs³¹.



The Roadmap to Net Zero Bus Services

Five principles underpin our roadmap to a zero emission fleet. They are:

- We will consider all technologies fairly, assessing their cost, contribution to decarbonisation and utility.
- We will provide the financial support and incentives needed for the market to scale up quickly.
- We will take a place-based approach to investment wherever appropriate.
- Both operators and LTAs must play their part.
- We will ensure our plans for buses lead to overall carbon reductions.

We will consider all technologies fairly

Zero-emission buses can run on electric batteries or hydrogen fuel-cells. Battery-electric has dominated zero emission bus purchases to date, but both technologies have strengths in different circumstances. On current technology, battery-electric is a more efficient user of energy, but hydrogen can lend itself better to longer journeys in rural areas. We will consider all technologies fairly and our ambition is that:

- Fuel must be green: in the future we want to see carbon-free fuel being used;
- Zero emission first: low or ultra-low emission vehicles should only be purchased where a zero emission vehicle is not a viable operational alternative.

We also understand that local decarbonisation roadmaps may include transitional technologies such as biofuels and hybrids, which can help support decarbonisation of fleets while zero emission technology develops its capability.

This work will be aligned to the consultation on the date for the phase out on the sale of diesel buses. See page 75.

We will provide the financial support to scale up quickly

The high upfront capital costs of vehicles and energy infrastructure can act as a barrier to the rapid adoption of new zero emission buses. In the short term we will play our part by providing funding to address this challenge.

We will support the market to scale up by:

- giving the certainty to create a sustained pipeline of vehicle orders, allowing British bus manufacturers to invest, production volumes to increase and the costs of vehicles to fall.
- ensuring that we support new funding and financing models needed to deliver our ambition, including new types of vehicle leasing and maintenance arrangements, as part of a vibrant financing strategy.

As a first step we will invest an unprecedented £120m in zero emission buses in 2021/22. This is in addition to £50m from 2020/21 to deliver the first All-Electric Bus Town or City.

It will also launch the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) scheme, bringing together LTAs, bus operators, energy companies and other stakeholders to develop financial and commercial models of delivering zero emission buses at scale, with government and non-government funding.

Based on experience in these pathfinder areas, we will then scale up to deliver the Prime Minister's commitment to 4,000 new zero emission buses. This unprecedented investment, the single biggest of its kind for zero emission buses, will also help safeguard thousands of jobs in Britain's bus manufacturing industry.

We are clear that our support must focus on green vehicles and as such Government funding will not incentivise the continued use of diesel buses. As a principle, our reform of grant funding for bus services* will ensure it is no longer paid on the basis of fuel used and instead will incentivise the take up of zero emission vehicles.

We will take a place-based approach to investment wherever appropriate

De-carbonising the bus fleet requires investment in both fuelling infrastructure and vehicles. Taking an area-based approach to infrastructure investment allows more innovative solutions to be considered – such as:

- allowing for more effective land use and spatial planning;
- adopting plans to address local issues such as air quality; and
- utilising the technology solutions that work for the economies and topography of the area.

This approach allows a more strategic approach to energy networks which can provide longer term savings.

The All-Electric Bus Town or City competition demonstrated significant interest across England in rolling out zero emission buses quickly and at scale. The Department expect to announce funding for the first All Electric Bus Town or City by the end of 2020/21.

We will build on existing interest to identify locations that are ready this year deliver hundreds more zero emission buses. This will utilise the £120m announced at the Spending Review for the roll-out of zero emission buses. To drive forward our ambitions, we will learn from this early investment to inform models that will support scaling up of investment, exploring private financing and leasing options. This aligns with the work on the UK Government's new national infrastructure bank.

As we committed in “Gear Change” we will create at least one zero emission city. We are looking for at least one small or medium-sized city which wants to create a zero emission transport system, with extensive bike lanes, a zero emission bus fleet, and a ban on nearly all petrol and diesel vehicles in the city centre, with deliveries made to consolidation hubs and the last mile being done by cargo bike or electric van.

We will shortly announce details of the ZEBRA scheme and how this can be part of local areas' decarbonisation plans.

Both operators and LTAs must play their part

We expect decisions on the local transition to zero emission fleets to be taken collaboratively through local bus partnerships.

Local authorities:

- will have expectations for the outcomes they want to see and when;
- will work with energy providers to integrate the needs of buses into wider fuel infrastructure plans and identify best energy provision solutions; and
- may play a central part in funding and financing arrangements.

Bus operators:

- should always take the lead in specifying the technical requirements for vehicles – ensuring that they meet passengers' needs;
- should develop an understanding of the energy requirements of decarbonising their fleet so that the best energy provision solutions can be identified; and
- will often provide or secure the majority of the investment required.

We will ensure our plans for buses lead to overall carbon reductions

We are committed to achieving an all zero emission bus fleet in the future and will set a legal end date for the sale of new diesel buses, and set an expectation for when the entire bus fleet will be zero emission. We will consult on potential dates this year. A key factor will be ensuring these ambitions do not make bus services more expensive to operate overall, otherwise fares will rise or services will be cut – potentially leading to greater overall carbon emissions as more journeys are made by car.

At a local level we will expect every LTA that wishes to receive funding from the Department for local transport projects to develop ambitious strategies, targets and measures for cutting carbon from transport in their area. We will expect all LTAs to work with bus operators and energy providers to include ambitions to decarbonise the local bus fleet in their Bus Service Improvement Plans. We want to see local standards for zero emissions set in partnership and franchising schemes ensuring that commitments to invest are delivered.

Bus2Grid – An example of a smart charging approach

In January 2018, the Office for Low Emission Vehicles and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy awarded almost £30 million, through an Innovate UK vehicle-to-grid programme, where electric vehicles can supply electricity to the grid at times of high energy demand.

Bus2Grid is part of this programme and is exploring the commercial value and social benefits to the energy and passenger transportation systems. The project will develop services to support National Grid, local Distribution Network Operators (DNOs), bus operators and transport authorities and at the same time will consider bus fleet consumer engagement approaches necessary for its commercial implementation. Bus2Grid claims to be developing the “world’s largest bus to grid site” and is bolstered by a diverse project consortium, including: SSE Enterprise, automotive manufacturer Build Your Dreams (BYD), the Distribution Network Operator UK Power Networks (UKPN) and the University of Leeds.

The project is a first of a kind large scale, multi-megawatt, demonstration of vehicle-to-grid technology in electric bus depots located in London. This process is managed by an aggregation platform that enables the 28 e-bus batteries to interact with the energy system by charging or exporting energy to support the grid in times of high energy demand.

Appendix

COVID recovery 2021–22

I wear this to
protect you.

Please wear yours
to protect me.

Verings help keep
public transport.

STAY ALERT
CONTROL
THE VIRUS
SAVE LIVES



In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to severely impact and reduce the bus network. Both the request to travel less and the new social distancing requirements posed significant questions of viability on the bus network across the country. During the first lockdown, passenger numbers fell to approximately 10% of those before the pandemic³² However, through the joint efforts of Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), bus operators and central government, vital bus services were supported, enabling frontline workers to get to their jobs, children to return to education and the public to make the essential journeys needed.

To support this effort, the Government has provided an unprecedented amount of support for the bus sector. Through the discretionary COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart, and by continuing to pay out Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) at pre-COVID-19 levels, the Government had announced over £1 billion of support by the end of 2020. This has been essential to keep bus services running when, with reduced capacity due to social distancing, the vast majority of buses would otherwise have operated at a loss or would have stopped running entirely.

The efforts of LTAs and bus operators were also substantial over the year. Together, they have worked flexibly to adapt service levels to work for their local areas, adapted to the challenge of children returning to school in September, and worked to manage sickness absence and conduct winter planning. This, combined with the continued concessionary fare funding support from local government, has been central to the transport response to the pandemic. We will build on these successful partnerships to drive not only recovery of the sector but also to improve services for passengers and bring more people onto buses.

CBSSG Restart

We will continue to provide CBSSG until the funding is no longer needed. To ensure services remain responsive to local demand whilst ensuring social distancing requirements are met, all operators receiving CBSSG are expected to continue to work closely with LTAs to agree service levels.

Local collaboration is a key tenet of this emergency funding. As a condition of receiving CBSSG, DfT can ask operators to demonstrate on request that consultations on service levels have taken place, and that reasonable requests from LTAs for service changes have been considered in good faith. DfT can deny or recover CBSSG payments from operators who have not engaged adequately with LTAs. From 1 July 2021, CBSSG and future funding streams will be available only to LTAs, outside of London, who have committed to entering Enhanced Partnerships or who have started the statutory process of franchising services, as set out in the Bus Services Act 2017; and to operators who are cooperating with those processes.

We also expect operators to run cost-effective services which are delivering value to the local area. As CBSSG has provided financial support for operators that have lost passenger revenue as a result of reduced demand, operators cannot achieve pre-tax profits on their bus services in receipt of CBSSG.

Over the coming months, we will be reviewing the terms and conditions of CBSSG to begin to rapidly deliver the policies set out in this strategy. Initially, we will be using this funding to drive the roll-out of contactless ticketing machines. However, we will also look at how we can encourage engagement on the rest of the strategy, including strengthening the role of LTAs in decisions on the services needed.

We will continue to provide CBSSG as long as necessary. Passenger numbers are likely to remain depressed for some time as confidence in public transport returns and new travel patterns bed-in. Further funding (outside of London) will only be available to LTAs who have committed to entering Enhanced Partnerships, and operators who cooperate with the process. It will also be available to LTAs that have started the statutory process towards franchising, or which have applied to the DfT for powers to do so.

This provides LTAs and operators with a significant opportunity. As service patterns and networks are reset, there is no better time to simplify fares and ticketing or address the traffic bottlenecks which can reduce operating costs on key routes.

What is needed during 2021–22 will be agreed locally, but we expect LTAs and operators to continue to work together to:

- maximise the number of services provided, supporting them and re-growing the customer base;
- prevent a scaling back of services to just the most profitable routes: focusing on the entire network and planning for the longer term;
- work towards agreeing the Bus Services Improvement Plans needed for October 2021 (see Chapter 3);
- ensure bus services meet the changing needs of local communities and do not change suddenly or unexpectedly;
- explore innovative approaches such as demand responsive transport; and
- deliver noticeable improvements for passengers, particularly around bus priority measures, information provision, fares and ticketing.

Funding will be used to achieve the objectives in this strategy, including bus priority measures in areas of high traffic stress, tendered services, support for existing services or set payments to operators similar to CBSSG Restart funding. We expect the majority of the funding will be used to support services, though the funding is not designed to replicate CBSSG and we understand operators and LTAs may need to make difficult decisions about the network they continue to run. Further information will be published once we have greater certainty about any follow-on funding and have confirmed how this will be delivered. Once Bus Service Improvement Plans are in place then the LTA must ensure it is clear how any funding drives delivery of these plans.

We want to see the commitment to these partnerships realised. From April 2022, only LTAs with an Enhanced Partnership in place, or following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme, will be able to access new streams of Government bus funding; and only services operated, or measures taken, under Enhanced Partnerships or where a franchising scheme has been made will be eligible for these discretionary funding schemes. The Secretary of State may disapply these rules or the deadline of April 2022 in individual cases, on an exceptional basis; we will also ensure that no operator is disadvantaged through any failure to establish an Enhanced Partnership due to actions beyond their control.

Concessionary fares funding

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the continued contribution from local authorities to support the bus network in the form of English National Concessionary Travel Scheme payments has ensured that, along with our CBSSG funding, buses have continued to operate full networks and support essential journeys. The vast majority of local authorities have continued to use their pre-existing budgets to pay concessionary fares at pre-COVID levels, despite the significant fall in concessionary travel which has supported operators to maintain routes and service levels. As the pandemic response continues, we are asking local authorities to continue to make these payments in line with the guidance we have issued and we will be laying a statutory instrument to support them to do so, to explicitly strengthen the legal basis for these payments.

Further to this, however, we also expect that once social distancing rules are relaxed, local authority funding to operators will need to remain above the actual level of concessionary patronage for a period of time, in order to protect services and maintain sufficient service levels. While the bus market is recovering, we will still look to Local Authorities to contribute to the operation of their bus markets, though to a decreasing extent. We are working with Local Authority organisations, through the Urban Transport Group, the Association of Transport Coordination Officers, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport and the Local Government Association, and with bus operators, through the Confederation of Passenger Transport and the Association of Local Bus Company Managers, to develop how best we can re-establish the link between concessionary journeys and concessionary fares payments as quickly as possible.

In doing so, we want to ensure that we do so in such a way that concessionary fare payments work effectively for local authorities and bus operators. To this end, we will be reviewing how these payments will work in this recovery period. We will also review the current appeals process, reimbursement guidance and, by extension, the reimbursement calculator, following the impact of COVID-19 on travel patterns.

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