

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE 'BUS BACK BETTER' STRATEGY FOR BUSES IN ENGLAND

... IT COULD TRANSFORM BUS  
TRAVEL IN SOMERSET

PREPARED BY SOMERSET BUS PARTNERSHIP

1. BUS BACK BETTER heralds a most extraordinary policy change from the approach adopted by all governments over the past three decades.

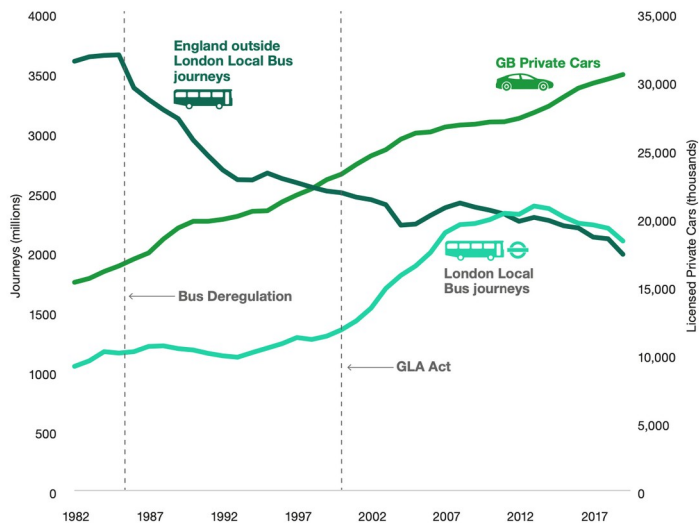
We are experiencing a dramatic policy shift to one that prioritises buses.

This Government recognises that buses can and must play a pivotal role both in their all-important 'Levelling Up' agenda and in their Zero Carbon agenda.

2. This Government has concluded that bus deregulation, introduced in 1986, has failed in its promise to deliver better bus services in England.

Bus deregulation, as applied outside of London, has resulted in a significant fall in bus usage, most especially here in Somerset, whereas in London, locally-regulated buses continue to be very well used .

### Bus Use and Car Ownership 1982–2019<sup>8</sup>



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.

- Even before Covid, bus passenger journeys in Somerset had decreased by 40% over the previous decade. At 10 journeys per annum, Somerset currently has the fourth lowest bus passenger journeys per head of population in England. Somerset is the lowest in the South West.
- Going forward, the Local Transport Authority (LTA) will be tasked to regulate buses.

In Mayoral Combined Authorities (like WECA) this potentially can be done through bus franchising (as happens in London and is likely to be introduced in Manchester).

For local authorities, like Somerset, it is expected they will opt for Enhancement Partnerships working with bus operators.

Our local LTA is Somerset CC but given the importance of cross border buses the LTAs of Wiltshire, Dorset, Devon and WECA could play a very significant role in the future delivery of buses in different parts of Somerset.

- The Government will fund buses with £3 billion of ‘new money’ but LTAs will only get any of that funding for their buses if they embark on an Enhancement Partnership (or, if a MCA, on a proposal to franchise buses).
- The Government states:
 

*“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.”*

Tony Blair gave the go-ahead for Crossrail back in 2005 but he left government long

before Crossrail will finally become fully operational later this year. Boris Johnson may have approved HS2 last year, but it won't be fully operational until 2033 ... at the earliest. Whereas investment in buses can deliver dividends (including a political one) within months. Funding of buses has a far more rapid and immediate payback (that's very attractive for politicians who could be seeking re-election in a couple of years).

7. We assume Somerset will opt to introduce an Enhanced Partnership scheme. Somerset CC hasn't yet announced its plans saying it is currently seeking further clarification on what an Enhanced Partnership could mean for the County. Somerset however did say in a recent email exchange that they have only been given 10 days in which to decide.

The Government has said if a LTA doesn't opt for either bus franchising or Enhanced Partnership, the LTA will get no further funding for their buses.

8. As can be seen below, the timetable set by the Government is exceptionally tight for the introduction and rollout of this radically different bus method of operation for LTAs:

**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.

9. ***"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."***

Undoubtedly to ensure a modal switch from cars to buses, it will need the 'stick' (e.g. congestion charging, removal of on-street car parking and higher priced city and town centre car parking) and that is all mentioned but this strategy document primarily focusses on the elements that are the 'carrot'.

Below are selected sections (*italicised text indicates direct quotations*) from BUS BACK BETTER:

- a. *More frequent services*
- b. *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.*
- c. *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.*
- d. *More comprehensive: More services should operate in the evenings, weekends, and at night, and to smaller towns and villages.*
- e. *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,*
  1. *Timetable changes should be minimised and co-ordinated across operators, so they happen at the same time.*
  2. *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.*
  3. *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.*
  4. *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.*
  5. *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*
  6. *Better integrated with other modes and each other: More bus routes should serve railway stations*
    - a. *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.*
    - b. *Full information on local bus services should be posted in railway stations, and the rail industry should promote bus links.*
    - c. *Park-and-ride schemes should be expanded, and more rural bus services should carry bikes.*
  7. *Greener: We will support the introduction of at least 4,000 more zero emission buses.*

8. *Accessible and inclusive by design: Disabled people must be able to use bus services as easily as other passengers.*
9. *Consider the impact of roadside infrastructure (e.g. bus stops and shelters) on passenger safety, security and accessibility.*

**10. If the LTA doesn't participate then they get no cash for buses.**

*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.*

*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.*

11. *Plans must be developed in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people.*

**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.

12.

13. ***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.*

- e. 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.*

#### **14. More comprehensive 'socially necessary' services**

- a. 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.*
- b. 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.*
- c. 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.*
- d. 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.*

#### **15. Cycling**

- a. 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.*

- b. 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.*

#### **16. We will give bus passengers more of a voice and a say**

- a. 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.*
- b. 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.*
- c. 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.*

#### **17. A green bus revolution**

- a. 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.*
- b. 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.*

#### **18. The Roadmap to Net Zero Bus Services**

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

- a. We will consider all technologies fairly, assessing their cost, contribution to decarbonisation and utility.*
- b. We will provide the financial support and incentives needed for the market to scale up quickly.*
- c. We will take a place-based approach to investment wherever appropriate.*
- d. Both operators and LTAs must play their part.*



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

**This is an edited and interpreted version of the 84pp Government bus strategy as outlined in BUS BACK BETTER.**