travelwest

West of England Bus Strategy

Adopted June 2020

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Bristol City Council

North Somerset Council

South Gloucestershire Council

West of England Combined Authority

West of England Bus Strategy

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Buses matter

The West of England is one of the UK's most successful, innovative and desirable places to live and work. But our successes bring challenges. Our population is growing at a faster rate than other city-regions, and so the strain on our transport network is growing. And some of our residents and communities are disconnected from the broader success of the region.

We undertook a public consultation on this bus strategy in February and March 2020.

Since the Bus Strategy consultation, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed how people move around the region and think about public transport. We will consider how travel patterns have changed as a result of Covid-19, what that means for the future, and how to reflect this in the final Bus Strategy.

We are also facing a climate change emergency, and we need to urgently reduce carbon emissions, tackle traffic congestion and improve air quality. But, over time, our dependency on the private car to make many of our journeys has grown substantially and, whilst the real cost of driving has remained broadly the same, the cost of catching the bus has increased.

The transport sector is the largest single source of carbon emissions contributing to climate change in the south west. All four local authorities and WECA have now declared climate emergencies. We need to work towards ensuring that transport is carbon neutral by 2030. To do this vehicle use has to fall substantially. The answer therefore involves all of us using more sustainable, types of transport in the future, by walking and cycling more and using public transport.

Promoting zero carbon transport will mean rethinking how we use our existing transport corridors including reallocating road space to buses, pedestrians and cyclists.

We need to transform public transport by making it more user friendly, affordable, convenient, safe and attractive, linking key destinations to make sure that everyone can use it.

We want the West of England to be a leader in public transport provision. Buses carry more people with less demand on road space. To ensure buses are not caught in congestion we need to provide new infrastructure. It is essential that we make progress in the reallocation of road space to more efficient travel choices, ensuring that people can travel around the network safely, efficiently and sustainably.

The West of England Bus Strategy has been prepared by the West of England Combined Authority, working with its constituent councils of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire, as well as neighbouring North Somerset Council. It looks at how bus services could help us to tackle traffic congestion and reduce carbon emissions at a regional level.

We want to create a bus network that people want, and are able to use, so that, as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we see a doubling of bus passenger journeys by 2036.

Based on passenger research, we propose to do this by improving the quality and reliability of bus services, so that people can get to more destinations quickly and comfortably.

This strategy sets out some principles that can help us increase passenger numbers; as well as a headline programme for how we plan to achieve it.

Implementing this strategy will require some difficult choices to be made, both in terms of where investment is made and changes to how roads are used. It will also require additional funding, from both central government and through our councils to make the vision a reality. We also need to work closely with operators to make this happen.

The Strategy will be reviewed every 18 months years, to reflect changing circumstances and ensure that objectives and targets remain appropriate and ambitious.

West of England Bus Strategy

Setting the scene

Since 1986, bus operators choose which services to run and how frequently they operate (Transport Act 1985). Local Authorities can pay bus operators to run additional services on routes that are not commercially viable but are considered a priority for public funding.

In 2017, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) was formed to champion the region and drive clean and inclusive economic growth.

In the West of England, bus services are provided by operators on a commercial basis. The councils provide infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters, timetable displays, bus priority measures and real time information screens. Services that are not commercially viable, but socially necessary, can be funded by the councils.

WECA now has a number of transport functions including information on bus services, the administration of the English national concessionary travel scheme, co-ordination of community transport and paying bus operators to provide non-commercial bus services (this duty is shared with its constituent councils).

The West of England Mayor has additional powers, including stronger operator partnership arrangements and the ability to assume control of the bus network, under certain conditions, through a franchising scheme.

WECA in partnership with North Somerset Council has already consulted on a new Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4). This Bus Strategy is a supporting document to JLTP4 and reflects a shared ambition to reduce carbon emissions and provide a sustainable transport network.

We've already taken some very positive steps to support bus services in the West of England. Over £300m in the last 10 years has been invested in bus infrastructure; our councils launched the high quality, highly successful metrobus service; our councils reallocated road space on some of our key routes to buses; we've introduced wider residents' parking zones to encourage commuters out of their cars, and we've worked with the bus operators to ensure that they are investing in the quality and environmental aspects of their services.

In the West of England, prior to the Covid-19 travel restrictions, we bucked the national trend of decline in the use of buses. They are the most used form of public transport and over 70 million bus passenger journeys were made in the West of England in 2018/19.

This was an increase of nearly 40% since 2011/12, compared to equivalent city regions and represents a significant achievement and a growing market. However, before travel restrictions were imposed, only about 9% of workers commute by bus in our area which is still significantly lower than other core city regions.
In addition, whilst passenger numbers have grown, operating costs have also increased.

On 25 March the Coronavirus Act 2020 led to travel restrictions that have dramatically reduced bus passenger journeys. The ensuing travel restrictions have dramatically reduced bus passenger journeys and reduced the size of the network, and the government has effectively underwritten the cost of operating a core network.

The West of England authorities are working with bus operators to formulate a recovery plan for the bus network once travel restrictions and social distancing are relaxed. At the time of writing (May 2020), the recovery plan is work in progress, but is likely to feature a phased re-introduction of services as passenger levels start to grow again. However, the longer term vision, objectives and themes in the bus strategy are considered to remain valid, particularly in the context of the need to achieve carbon neutrality in the transport sector and the critical part that bus services will play in reducing car dependency.

We still need to improve our bus network and address some key challenges if we are going to make taking the bus a more practical option get more people onto the bus:

- Bus services do not provide a practical option for many journeys within the region, either because the destination is not served by bus, services have a low frequency and hence are unattractive, different services are not co- ordinated and hence transfer between services is not practical, or that services are slow and unreliable, and are perceived as not providing value for money.
- The attractiveness of bus travel is also undermined in many cases by poor information, difficult-to-understand networks (with services from different operators not always shown on maps and timetable information), complex ticket 'offers' which passengers generally cannot use on all buses in their area, and variable standard of the quality of buses and bus stop/ waiting facilities.

Passenger satisfaction, which is measured independently by Transport Focus has varied year to year. Delivering sustained improvement, based on passenger priorities is therefore central to our bus strategy. In the West of England passengers priorities for improvement include; punctuality, improving the frequency and routes served, and the design, comfort and condition of the buses. 86% of bus users answering the survey were satisfied with bus services in the region. This is in contrast with the 2019 JLTP4 consultation, where residents overall felt that bus services were not reliable, easy to plan or good value for money.

What is WECA?

The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) works to drive clean economic growth that benefits all residents. This means supporting our residents to have better skills, more job opportunities and a better standard of living. As a result of devolution, significant powers and funding have been transferred to our region through WECA and the West of England Mayor. Working with our councils, Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire, we are making decisions about transport, homes, jobs and skills here in our region, decisions previously made by central Government. Although not part of WECA, North Somerset Council is recognised as a key partner in meeting the West of England's transport and housing challenges and is also included in this plan. By working together as a region, we can achieve so much more.

West of England Bus Strategy

Our Vision

Our vision is for bus services people can depend on, are quick and reliable, combine to form a simple to understand and easy to use network, are accessible for everyone, are safe and comfortable, and offer value for money to passengers and to the public purse.

We aim to create a connected region, fit for the future, which will promote active and sustainable travel, improve community health and reduce private vehicle journeys.

Success in delivering this vision will mean more travel by bus, less reliance on car travel, which is essential to achieving the West of England's economic, environmental and quality of life ambitions.

To realise our vision this Strategy seeks to achieve the following:

- A comprehensive and joined-up bus network which maximises the range of journeys able to be made by bus, thereby improving access to key employment, health and leisure destinations for everyone.
- A doubling in bus passenger numbers by 2036.
- For rural areas, whilst the bus mode share will remain relatively low, an improved and easy-to-understand network will provide a practical alternative to the car for many journeys and a reliable means to accessing services for those without access to a car.
- To maximise bus service reliability and reduce journey times.
- To provide simplified ticketing which allows all bus users to travel on a single ticket (on one or more buses), with fares capped to a daily maximum.
- Accessible passenger waiting facilities and vehicles, and better integration with other modes.
- Address congestion and delays due to car travel by attracting car users to use buses for some or all of their journeys.
- Continue to improve passengers satisfaction with bus services and their value for money.

85.2%
agreed with our strategy objectives

76%

agreed with the concept of an interchange-based network

- Reduce overall emissions due to general road traffic by persuading car drivers

  to travel by bus, and by improving the bus fleet to low or zero emission buses. Maximise service quality, in terms of vehicle comfort and ease of boarding and alighting, reliable and real-time information, and an attractive, safe and accessible bus stop environment.
- Improve the public domain through the reduction in car traffic and transfer of highway space to buses, bicycles and pedestrians.
- Better access to places for public transport, and better design for bus services in new developments.
- To increase the proportion of bus passengers satisfied or very satisfied with bus services overall.

Achieving these outcomes will require the delivery of some key improvements, many of which will require challenging decisions.

West of England Bus Strategy

Bus Strategy

A well-designed network that is simple, coherent and efficient across the region

Autumn 2019

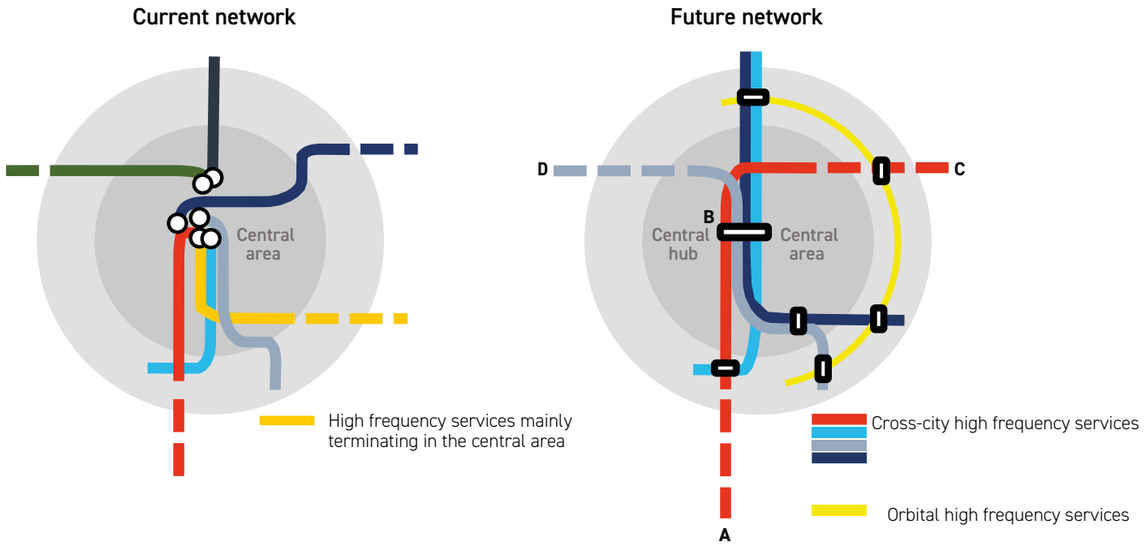
Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the West of England bus network covered a wide area with urban, inter-urban and rural services. Many of the main bus routes in the urban areas had service frequencies of at least every ten minutes throughout the day. The key inter-urban corridors generally had service frequencies of at least every half- hour in the daytime. However, there are gaps in the coverage of the network, which can make it difficult to travel by bus to more outlying employment and retail centres. Also, bus services to rural areas tend to be infrequent and indirect because of the need to serve a dispersed population.

A high proportion of travellers use the bus on our core corridors, comparable with other equivalent city regions.

However, journey times and reliability are severely affected by traffic congestion, and as a consequence most routes in Bristol and Bath terminate in the city centres rather than cross the city, to mitigate the impact of traffic congestion on either side of the centres. Despite recent progress, bus lanes can be discontinuous or not practical in some places where they are needed. Also, there are competing demands for limited road space on many key radial roads (such as parking and loading for adjacent shops). Bus priorities and parking restrictions also require effective enforcement.

Future network design

There is potential to change how the network is provided to enable new journey opportunities for passengers and make the network more efficient. Core urban routes would reduce in number but could operate at high frequencies of every 5-6 minutes, and where possible run as cross-city services to increase the range of direct destinations. Establishing a small number of frequent orbital services (by rationalising and combining existing services) would effectively provide a better integrated network of radial and orbital routes. Well-designed neighbourhood bus interchanges would then provide safe and easy-to-use transfer locations for journeys which require use of more than one bus. Rationalising the number of services could result in some passengers needing to walk further to their nearest stop. The scale and impact will need to be carefully considered in any network redesign.



48%

would be prepared to walk further to a better, more reliable bus service

Better interchange

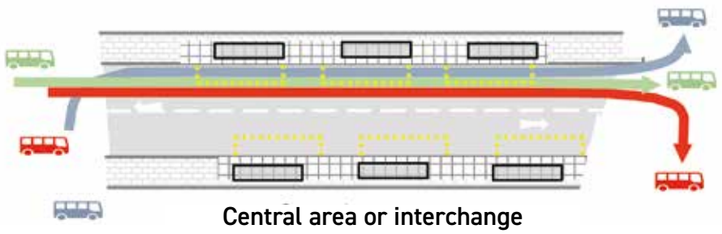
A co-ordinated and unified bus network would significantly increase the range of different places which people could travel to by bus.

This principle has been followed in a number of European cities and particular features of a network structured around interchange could include:

- The co-ordination of services to function together as a network - including the reintroduction of cross-city service operation and a 'cross-subsidised' network approach (where routes that cover their costs would help support those that don't).
- Upgrade to the quality of the facilities, information and branding.
- The new network to be used by passengers as a network, via interchange.
- Careful consideration of city centre's bus routes and bus stopping arrangements.

Most interchanges would be accommodated on existing roads, by moving bus stops closer together, providing good walking routes between them and better signing and information.

An interchange-based approach will require a major improvement in bus service reliability for cross-city services to function effectively. At present, bus operators strike a balance between the operational efficiency of cross-city operation (which removes the need for layover and use of road space for bus stands) and the risk of transferring delays occurring on one side of a city centre to bus routes on the other side. Effective operation of an efficient cross-city bus network will be reliant on new bus lanes and other bus priority measures along the route corridors and in the city centres. This is likely to require further, substantial transfer of road space to bus services with some sensitive decisions to be made around parking/loading provision and general traffic access on key radial routes.



Central area or interchange

West of England Bus Strategy

Park & Ride

New and existing Park & Ride services will be reviewed in the context of their role in the wider network, considering low frequency stopping patterns on route, similar to the rapid transit principles adopted by the metrobus network. Providing Park & Ride services remain a key element of the transport strategy for the region, closely linked to the management and pricing of parking spaces within our key centres. Bus based Park & Ride will be the core of this provision, with a high frequency offer on key radial routes into our towns and cities. Existing sites will be expanded and new sites provided. These sites will be designed to fit the emerging strategic network, and operate as transfer locations for connecting bus services and key interchanges between other transport modes. Historically, bus based Park & Ride has provided non-stop journeys from the sites to the City Centres.

School services

The strategy will include the investigation of the opportunity to extend concessionary travel to those in education or training. A comprehensive network needs to ensure that it considers the requirements of travel to education and training. An interchange based network will by its nature provide increased opportunity for travel but it should be designed to reflect the importance of access for school age people, whose options may be otherwise limited. The long terms benefits of getting young people familiar with the bus network is both good for building independence and a society where sustainable travel options are the norm.

Longer distance bus and coach travel

The strategy is to improve the connectivity of these services as part of our wider network. The growth of scheduled inter urban bus and coach travel has seen significant growth in the last 10 years, and they play an important role in reducing longer car journeys, as well as making connections to other major transport hubs, such as Bristol Airport. These services require their own stopping facilities,that have good connections with the local bus networks to ensure that coherent and simple end to end journeys can be provided.

metrobus

Through the JLTP4 we propose to expand the metrobus network. Metrobus will continue to be promoted as a separate arm of the bus network, but will be closely integrated with background bus services including shared ticketing and dual use of certain stops and interchanges. In 2019, as part of a £235 million infrastructure investment, the West of England authorities completed the first stages of a bus-based rapid transit network, known as metrobus. Metrobus offers faster, limited stop journeys, with an emphasis on quality and reliability including where possible the provision of segregated operation.

Mass transit

The West of England Combined Authority has also commenced the assessment of a proposed Mass Transit network for the city region. Covering four corridors from Bristol city centre to Bath, Bristol Airport, and Bristol's North and East Fringes, the routes will feature a high capacity, limited stop, and physically-segregated public transport mode, of a bus-based, tram or metro specification, for completion over the next twenty years. The network will integrate with the background bus network which will be adjusted to fully integrate with the new network.

Bath

Bus passenger journeys in Bath grew rapidly from 2012 to 2019 and per capita bus use in Bath and North East Somerset is in the top ten of places in the UK.

However, the combination of limited radial corridors, narrow roads and pinch points means that relatively minor incidents on the highway can give rise

to significant traffic congestion and so bus services are prone to unpredictable and lengthy delays. Bus punctuality in Bath remains stubbornly below the target set by the Traffic Commissioner – despite the introduction of various bus priority measures and access controls. More bus priority measures will be needed on the radial corridors and in Bath city centre to recreate the conditions under which bus operators can meet the punctuality target consistently and re-establish cross-city links with confidence. Installing new bus priority measures may not be easy or uncontroversial though.

Bath Bus Station, and Dorchester Street alongside it, are the focus of the majority of bus services in Bath and interchange with train services at Bath Spa station is very good. Where we have intensive operation of bus services, such as in Dorchester Street, we need to ensure that these spaces are well designed to cater for larger numbers of pedestrian movement to and through the areas between the Bus and Rail Stations to the city centre and shopping areas. There is scope for creating interchanges at termini on the end of the city centre.

Transformational Opportunities

Funding for bus operation has historically been limited, coming largely from ticket sales revenue.

To meet our targets for bus use and provide services which are a more practical "turn up and go" travel option would require significant extra funding from the West of England authorities.

If funding were to be available, this would enable a more transformational network to be provided, combining principles around interchange and integration with higher frequencies. It would also enable a more comprehensive route network to be provided in those urban areas away from the main roads and in rural areas. WECA and its constituent Councils will investigate the funding opportunities and sources that could support a more transformational network.

Delivery

The changes to the network will be delivered over the coming years, to ensure that it continues to deliver for existing passengers. The effectiveness of the network will depend on the delivery of measures that can promote service punctuality. Bus Priority measures, as well as other policy decisions will be delivered along public transport corridors through a jointly managed infrastructure programme.

Stages for delivery are:

- Discuss and refine network design with operators
- Complementary policy implementation
- Identify and design bus priority measures
- Identify and upgrade a phased hierarchy of interchange locations
- Production of operating framework documentation
- Engagement and consultation
- Phased construction
- Phased introduction of new network

Bus Strategy

Better services for people in rural areas

Accessibility for rural communities is critical, including the provision of bus services to enable access to jobs and education, as well as leisure and retail destinations.

Consistent with the national picture, services to rural areas have been reliant on funding from councils because operators are generally unable to operate them on a commercial basis.

Pressure on council budgets continues to increase which affects their ability to keep these services going with taxpayers' money.

Rural and inter-urban services will inevitably have much less frequency than urban services and hence attracting passengers to use these services will require measures which rely less on frequency and more on providing an easy-to-understand and consistent network. We need to get rural services to operate more effectively, whilst increasing the number of destinations available to passengers. Options include:

- Some rationalisation of services to provide more consistent routes, consistent start and end points, and easy-to-understand clock-face departure time - to aid passenger understanding i.e. a service always operates the same route and leaves a bus stop at the same time past each hour (or every half hour, or every 2 or 3 hours – according to the service demand).
- Build interchange into the way the inter-urban bus services are arranged: The number of destinations available via inter-urban bus services will be significantly increased if interchange opportunities with other bus services and rail services are encouraged. The timetables of services should thus be specifically designed to ensure that passengers are able to transfer to other services.
- 'Transfer Hubs': inter-urban services should connect with a small number of key interchanges/transfer hubs en-route to the central areas of Bristol and Bath – such as peripheral shopping centres, Park & Ride sites, and other major public destination points. Peripheral transfer hubs will also serve as locations where low-frequency rural services can operate as feeders into longer-distance inter-urban services.
- Inter-urban and other rural services should aim for operating hours which align well with other urban services they connect to – to ensure that, for example, passengers are not left 'high and dry' at a transfer hub in late evening.

80%

agreed that rural communities could be better served by connections to transfer hubs

82%

agreed that we should explore other transport solutions to serve rural communities rather than conventional bus services

With a network of inter-urban services between peripheral towns and Bristol or Bath, and with well-defined transfer hubs, it will be feasible to operate lower frequency rural services which meet with other services at these hubs – to allow rural services to maximise their frequency without needing to enter congested central areas. A rural/inter-urban network with a small number of 'hubs' in towns and other destination points, could also be connected by demand responsive and community transport services (discussed further on in this document). These transfer trips would offer a means for rural and village inhabitants to reach key services such as hospitals and shopping centres by bus.

Inter-urban services could be operated as a mix of 'express' and 'local stop' services along similar routes. Local stop services would divert from main roads into local communities, and selected local services could operate to and from Park and Ride sites on the edge of Bristol or Bath – allowing these services to operate at higher frequency than they could if they travelled into the central area, and also allowing passengers to be the able to take advantage of frequent 'bus priority' Park & Ride services into the city centre.

The availability of transfer opportunities should be highlighted through improved information/mapping e.g. on- shelter signage, on-board automated announcements, and waiting facilities (e.g. shelter) should be provided at all interchange points, to maximise the convenience and comfort of transferring passengers.

The network options need to include a detailed assessment of their impact on rural communities. This may include recommendations on more rural services and funding opportunities.

Delivery

Changes to the rural bus network will need to be undertaken carefully and, due to the interdependencies with the wider network, this will need to be brought forward as relevant changes are made to radial or inter urban services. Any potential changes will involve local community engagement.

Identify suitable locations for transfer hubs and discuss the concept further with bus operators over the next two years.

Existing rural bus services already funded by the authorities will also be reviewed as part of this approach to improve their accessibility for passengers and value for money.

Bus Strategy

Giving passengers more reliable and faster buses through priority infrastructure and wider policy

Delivering punctual bus services that make the bus an option that passengers can rely on is at the heart of this strategy. Improved bus priority measures, such as bus lanes and bus-only roads, will play a critical role in the successful remodelling of the network and improving reliability. In particular, the provision of cross-city services will be dependent on a package of new, effective and well-enforced bus priorities to operate punctually.

We plan to invest heavily in such measures. In some places this will require challenging decisions around parking, loading and through traffic movement (such as reserving part of a corridor for buses and cyclists, and diverting through-traffic onto an alternative route).

Delivery of schemes on the highway can impact on bus operation during their construction. These works, and any other highway works, need to be carefully managed by the local authorities to ensure that bus services are not negatively impacted during the construction period.

Wider transport and planning policies will continue to have a significant influence on bus passenger numbers. In particular, the management and pricing of parking provision will directly impact on people's tendency to use the bus and our ability to grow passenger numbers. Our councils will review policies on car parks and on-street parking, to encourage use of alternative modes to the car as well as improving bus service reliability.

Going further, our JLTP has already highlighted that the delivery of traffic restraint mechanisms such as congestion charging and a workplace parking levy would increase the number of people taking the bus or train, or cycling as well as greatly assisting in the funding of more frequent services and bus priority infrastructure.

New housing estates also need to be carefully designed to ensure that bus routes are fully accessible and prioritised over general traffic. Key routes need to be wide enough for two buses to pass without disruption and unencumbered by parked vehicles. Public transport information should be promoted to maximise bus mode share, and where possible routes provided at an early stage of the development to encourage sustainable travel habits.

The adoption of this Bus Strategy containing key principles and our vision for the region, helps to support the role of the local planning authorities in challenging developers to bring forward these types of solutions.

84%

agree with the re-allocation of road space in favour of buses to ensure services run punctually

76%

agree with diverting traffic away from certain public transport corridors

The provision of a comprehensive network, and the infrastructure required to support its operation will still require significant financial support from the West of England authorities. Raising additional local income will involve some joined up thinking and maybe a change in priorities in some parts of the West of England in terms of the way that we view our highway and public transport networks.

Our Joint Local Transport Plan provides more detail about potential local funding options and steps that could help to support and encourage public transport usage.

Delivery

The delivery of bus priority infrastructure will be undertaken in a phased manner, with initial identification and design to be undertaken over the next two years. This will includes systematic review of each bus corridor to identify existing congestion hot spots, and refine measures for segregation or priority of buses.

This will be followed by the identification and allocation of funding for the delivery of bus priority schemes and their phased rollout of infrastructure packages up to 2026/27.

Alongside this, the authorities will review parking policy across the area to clarify its impacts on bus passenger numbers and where appropriate amend restrictions to encourage sustainable travel patterns. The planning authorities will also further embed good working practices and standards in the outline design of new housing and employment developments to improve public transport accessibility and reliability to and through these areas.

The Joint Local Transport Plan also highlights the need to consider traffic constraint measures that could generate funding for investment into bus services and other sustainable transport interventions.

81%

agreed that buses should have extra 'green time' at traffic signals to help services run punctually

West of England Bus Strategy

Bus Strategy

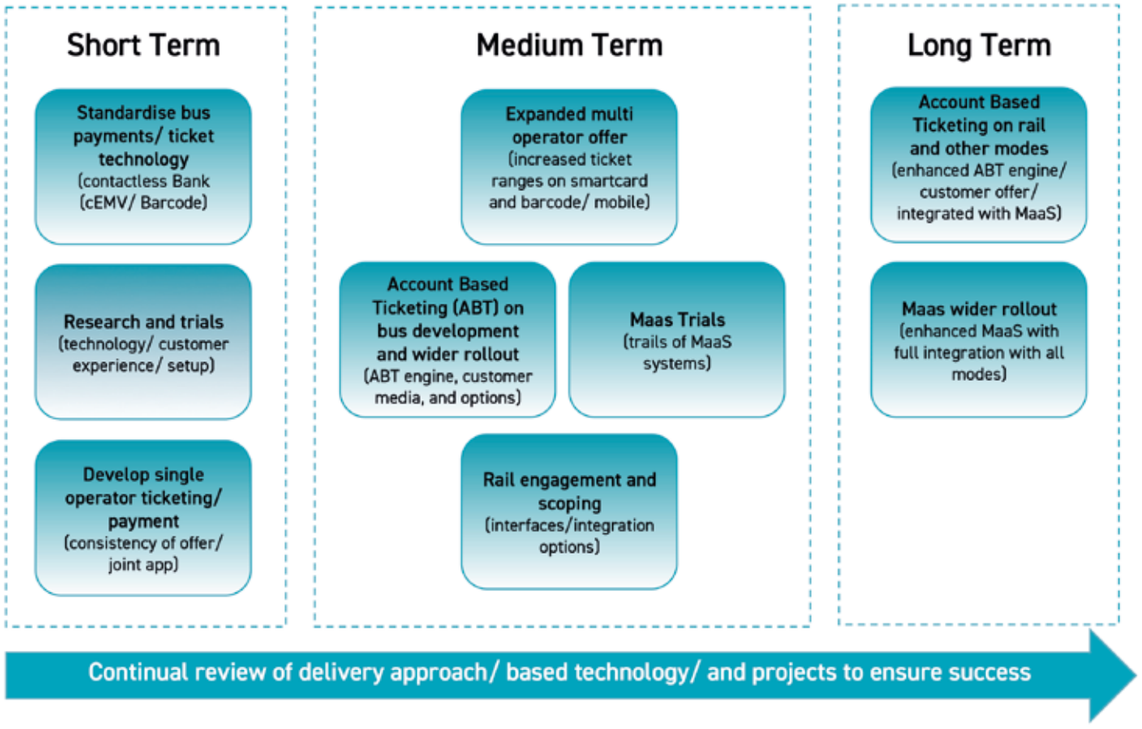
Simple, smart and convenient ticketing

Improving value for money is key for both passengers and those that don't currently choose to use the bus. Smart payments and ticketing that can automatically choose the best value fare will play a crucial role in improving the passenger experience and growing bus passenger numbers. Convenient ticketing arrangements can reduce bus boarding times, speed up journeys and increase access to public transport in the area and is already the norm in many urban areas.

The large growth in the availability of smart phones and development of contactless payments has transformed the wider retail sector and are driving changes in fare payments. Whilst this has already begun to move the sector away from on-bus cash payments there is no consistent cashless payment or mobile ticket offer across bus operators resulting in the continued need for cash and different apps for different bus operators.

Integration of payments and ticketing across bus operators will be essential to ensure the seamless operation of the network. Whilst there are some integrated tickets, they are limited in both their range and attractiveness. The strategy is to develop smarter payments and ticketing options. This will provide a consistent customer offer across all buses. that is easily available and well promoted. It could also ensure that passengers are not unfairly impacted by using the proposed 'interchange' network.

Smarter payments and ticketing roadmap



The simplicity of ticketing and payments in areas such as London, where customers do not need to purchase a ticket before travel and are charged the best value fare based on the journeys they are made, are often viewed as the ideal that should be aspired to.

While the London model would be challenging to replicate in a deregulated bus market, the West of England will work with other city regions to learn from and share best practice.

The West of England's aspiration for ticketing and payments is to provide a consistent, high quality, and coherent offer where customers have convenient purchasing opportunities and and it is trusted to charge the best value fares.

As a principle smart payments and ticketing should include:

- Tickets and payments using the latest contactless technology.
- The same experience on all buses.
- A Pay-As-You-Go system automatically charging the best fare available with daily and weekly caps.

82%
agree with our ticketing principles

- Customers only needing 1 account/1 app for bus tickets, payment, journey planning, and real time information across the area.
- The ability for customers without contactless bank cards or smart phones to be able to access the same benefits (e.g. children and people without a bank account).
- Integrated with public transport modes (e.g. Rail/ Ferry) to enable seamless travel.

Bus Strategy

High quality, consistent and easily understood information

People need clear and accessible service information to give them confidence in using bus services.

Providing a single accessible place for clear, comprehensive and reliable information on travel options is essential for achieving seamless door-to-door journeys. It provides people with the confidence to travel by public transport and active travel modes, particularly for journeys made less regularly. It will also help to overcome misconceptions relating to service frequency, fares and journey times by public transport, bicycle or foot. We will further use our existing Travelwest website as the foundation for public transport information across the West of England.

Information needs to be available in advance of the journey, as well as being updated regularly 'on the move'.

We will prepare a Bus Information Strategy to develop proposals in more detail but will be based on the following principles:

- Customers are able to easily access high quality, accurate and impartial information which is simple to use.
- Bus information meets the needs of existing passengers as well as encouraging new passengers to use bus services.
- Customers should be able to access information anywhere and personalise it to meet their needs.
- To provide real-time information on services and alerts on disruption and service changes.
- To use customer insight and information to improve performance and reliability of information systems and bus services.
- To improve access to passenger transport information by making data openly available in formats that can be utilised by third parties.
- To develop with bus operators the value and scope of social media in public transport information

Delivery

The authorities will develop a specific Bus Information strategy for the West of England and continue to maintain and develop Travelwest as the foundation for public transport information.

Bus Strategy

A safe, pleasant and comfortable customer experience

We have worked closely with Transport Focus, the independent passenger group, on this strategy.

The group's annual survey looks at passenger satisfaction and priorities, comparing bus services across the country.

The 2019 survey shows that 86% of current bus users are satisfied with services, as illustrated below. The key areas for improvement in the West of England are: bus service punctuality; journey time and value for money.

The survey also shows that other factors such as on-bus environment and comfort; the bus driver, and the timeliness of the journey, are important to passengers in our region.

In some cases, the perception of bus travel is poor. Of those who don't currently use buses, particularly young adults, issues around feeling uncomfortable in a possibly unwelcoming environment may put them off.

Improving trust with the bus companies, value for money and offering facilities such as WIFi can greatly improve young people's perception and capture a future market that will use buses in years to come.

In some parts of our region, the survey reports a lower standard of passenger experience than others, due to varying facilities at bus stops and the quality of the buses on some routes.

We recognise the views of passengers represented in this annual survey and we have been working hard with bus operators to make changes. This has led to some significant improvements, raising standards and expectations.

We know that there is still room for improvement, and will continue to work with operators on ways of improving a passenger's whole journey.

The strategy will aim to focus on improving various aspects of the end to end passenger journey, including the following:

- Passenger safety both at the bus stop and on bus through provision of CCTV.
- Driver training – we recognise from Transport Focus surveys that a good bus journey can significantly affect overall passenger satisfaction. We propose to work with operators to build on the quality and success we've seen from schemes like metrobus and look to develop a gold standard for drivers in the West of England.
- Enhanced facilities such as Wi- Fi and USB charging.
- Accessibility to and from bus stops - improving the direct walking routes.
- Well laid out stopping facilities with generous weather protection, lighting and information.

The continuing development and delivery of the strategy will seek to reflect the ongoing results and passenger priorities evidenced

in the Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey.

Delivery

- Upgrade of bus stop infrastructure
- Develop a gold standard for drivers in the West of England with all bus operators
- Identify and develop plans for improved accessibility to bus stops
- Annual review of Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey to identify areas for improvement

Bus Strategy

Modern, clean and accessible buses that contribute to reducing transport's harmful emissions

Buses can carry many more people than a single car reducing the number of cars being used to go into city centres and polluted urban areas. But it is important to reinforce their role as part of the solution to air quality issues by ensuring buses have as near as possible zero tailpipe emissions in the West of England.

Investment in high quality buses will play a crucial role in the successful delivery of the Bus Strategy. Modern, clean vehicles help increase passenger numbers through a more pleasant and comfortable journey experience, as well as the provision of on board facilities like WiFi and USB charging points. Although there is significant upfront investment, they can also reduce operator costs through better fuel efficiency, and assist with the promotion of the network.

The changes to the West of England bus network being considered as part of this strategy may require an increase in the overall fleet size, driver numbers and depot capacity. It will be important to make this change a positive one for air quality in the West of England and to provide a positive contribution to the strategy objectives.

Increased passenger numbers, bus lanes and other infrastructure will play a key role in supporting the commercial case for bringing forward fleet investment.

It should be emphasised that buses, by their very nature, are part of the solution in tackling congestion and reducing car dependency, thereby improving air quality.

Also, new buses emit far lower tailpipe emissions than those they replace. In the West of England we have made significant progress in reducing vehicle emissions, such as through the use of biofuel for the metrobus and East Bristol fleets and hybrid vehicles on Bath Park & Ride services.

Fleet investment will therefore play a significant role in improving air quality and meeting the air quality thresholds with in Bath and Bristol city centres as part of the Clean Air Zones.

61%

feel that modern vehicles are important to the passenger experience

Delivery

Operators will progressively bring forward fleet investment alongside the infrastructure investment which will help support the commercial case for the new vehicles. The authorities will also work with operators to clarify funding opportunities to further reduce tailpipe emissions and progress bio-gas and electric fleet investment.

The councils are separately progressing Clean Air Zones in Bath and Bristol. Depot capacity will be increased with the councils assessing potential new locations for depots, including potential new facilities at park and ride sites.

However, it should be noted that vehicle investment will be very much dependent on the speed of recovery from the current Covid-19 crisis.

West of England Bus Strategy

Bus Strategy

A network complemented by Community and Demand Responsive Transport

Community transport encompasses a range of transport services - such as `Dial-a-Ride', community-owned buses, group minibus hire schemes and voluntary car schemes – that supplement commercial public transport services. Most community transport is demand-responsive and offers door-to-door transport for people who have signed up to be members of the schemes. It relies heavily on volunteers and is predominantly focused on local communities. Most schemes were set up as local initiatives to meet local transport needs.

There is no legal duty on local authorities to support community transport, but it is widely recognised that the sector plays a vital role in helping people to live independently and play an active part in community life – particularly those who find it difficult to access mainstream public transport. Local authorities provide guidance, assistance and funding to schemes, but administration and service delivery are carried out by the schemes themselves. Local and central government can also make grants available occasionally for new vehicles.

In addition, community-owned buses can operate scheduled bus services within the scope of regulations that protect commercial operations.

Community transport operations in rural areas are faced with the same dilemma that rural bus operators face, i.e. the sparsity of population and dispersed nature of settlements give rise to higher operating costs and lower revenue than urban operations.

Another well-established form of demand-responsive transport is a shared taxi scheme, under which travel in specific areas can be co-ordinated and tailored more to specific needs than is possible with a fixed bus route. The growth in app-based taxi booking creates tremendous opportunities for expanding the role of shared taxi services in urban and rural areas - although trials so far have not generated the volume necessary for a sustainable commercial operation.

We will continue to support and encourage community and demand-responsive transport schemes, working with providers and the voluntary sector to improve information and facilities, and to co-ordinate service provision. Subject to funding, we will support new initiatives that make use of emerging technologies to develop community and demand-responsive transport.

66%

are open to using a shared taxi/mini bus to connect to the wider network

Delivery

The authorities will develop a specific Community and Demand Responsive transport strategy. This will explore innovation in delivery of Demand Responsive Transport and develop the role of this sector to complement the bus network. The authorities will work with providers to develop and coordinate services, and identify funding opportunities to develop access to transfer hubs and interchanges.

Operational framework

Bus services in the West of England, as for the rest of Great Britain outside London, are largely provided by operators on a commercial basis. To date, we have used existing legislation to improve the quality of bus services, through formal and informal partnership approaches. Initiatives such as the metrobus Quality Partnership Scheme (QPS) where maximum fares and minimum frequencies can be specified by the councils, and where a very high quality bar was set for the vehicle specification.

Subsequent legislation (the 2017 Bus Services Act) has provided further opportunities to increase the Councils' influence on local bus service operation standards.

An area-based, statutory partnership, where the councils would invest in improved facilities along bus routes, as well as other measures such as increasing parking charges. The scope of required operator contribution can increase further to include (for example) smart ticketing. An AQPS would last for at least five years.

An Enhanced Partnership Scheme goes further by not requiring local authorities to provide further facilities. Councils can also prescribe further requirements around information, branding and ticketing.

The West of England Mayor and North Somerset Council have new powers to franchise local bus services. Franchising effectively means that the authorities would specify routes, frequencies and ticketing arrangements, and invite tenders from operators to provide them. Franchising can take a number of forms in relation to bus and could be used to address specific issues or focus on particular areas. The experience to date of some authorities considering franchising is that it presents a number of challenges including cost which would have to be evaluated before initiating this strategy.

This would be similar to the way bus services are provided in London, and would have to be subject to an appraisal, and a consultation, demonstrating that this would be the best way to deliver improvements to the network.

It is important to emphasise that franchising, of itself, will not generate new services, lower fares or greater reliability. These issues are delivered through investment in the bus network. Franchising could, however, lead to greater network stability, although this may require more subsidy and the need to raise additional funding. In other words, it is important to be clear what the problem is that we are trying to solve before deciding that franchising is the best way to solve it.

The highest ranked priorities for supported bus services are access to employment, hospitals and education.

But with or without franchising a network, the need to subsidise some bus services will remain. These are services which don't make a profit but are considered socially necessary.

We are considering what services need to be provided in the future, against a backdrop of limited funding. This has historically included a mix of the following:

- Park and Ride services; which have the ability to intercept large numbers of car journeys.
- Demand Responsive and Community Transport; which have the ability to support accessibility issues for individuals at comparatively lower costs.
- Local shopping services; which can support local communities and help individuals to support themselves in their homes.
- Rural services; which improve accessibility and reduce rural isolation.
- Access to education; reducing the need to travel by car or providing support to younger adults who would otherwise struggle to access higher education.
- Evening and Sunday services; which increase access to entertainment and leisure opportunities or can support weekend or shift workers.
- Services to Hospitals; which help improve access to healthcare and reduce the need for supported hospital transport.
- Access to employment opportunities; which can help particularly in areas of high unemployment or where travel is highlighted as a particular barrier to employment.

Delivery and prioritisation

Delivery

Since the Bus Strategy consultation, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed how people move around the region and think about public transport. We will to consider how travel patterns have changed as a result of Covid-19, what that means for the future, and how to reflect this in the final Bus Strategy.

In determining which services to financially supports we will consider we will prioritise services based on a range of criteria including:

- Supports new and existing employment, especially in Enterprise Areas
- Supports new housing (occupied in the last 3 years), especially affordable housing
- Seek to maintain a core strategic public transport network linking residential areas with employment sites and local services
- Enable disadvantage groups and communities to access employment sites and key local services.
- Reduction in traffic congestion
- Offers significant interchange opportunities onto bus and/or rail network including major transport hubs
- No, or little, alternative to travel by sustainable means
- Access for disabled persons

Prioritisation

Respond to the emerging circumstances of bus travel arising from Covid 19, and utilising public funding to achieve the sustained recovery of the bus industry:

- Review and retender supported services
- Develop prioritisation methodology
- Shape supported network to complement phased network review
- Further investigation into additional funding sources
- Develop partnership approach for furthering strategy aims and objectives

West of England Bus Strategy

Delivery Programme

The delivery of the themes set out in this strategy will be undertaken in a carefully phased manner, integrating the delivery of infrastructure with progressive and complementary changes to routes and frequencies. A strategic programme is shown below.

Close engagement with, and investment by, bus operators will be a key feature of the programme, alongside an initial recovery plan to get back to passenger levels experienced before the Covid-19 lockdown, which itself may take some time.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Recovery Plan and achieve pre-lockdown passenger levels								
Discuss and refine network designs with operators, for both urban and rural areas								
Complementary policy development and implementation								
Identify and design bus priority measures								
Identify and upgrade a phased hierarchy of Interchange locations								
Production of operating framework documentation								
Phased construction								
Confirm and prioritise revenue funding sources and revenue raising opportunities								
Vehicle investment by operators								
Identify new / expanded depot capacity								
Community and Demand Responsive Transport Strategy								
Phased introduction of new network								