

RURAL LENS REVIEW



Bus Back Better National bus strategy

Published March 2021



At a glance



Rural Services Network's thoughts on a **Bus Back Better**:

- The full range of rural delivery costs must be fully recognised and reflected in all future funding formulae. Discretionary spend (which includes bus support) in rural councils much greater than urban as statutory services take priority
- Capacity of rural councils is of concern
- In many rural areas broadband and mobile phone infrastructure need to be improved rapidly before the use of technology mentioned can be a reality.
- The methodology to determine 'economically disadvantaged areas' must reflect rural issues and must be publicly available. IMD data has an urban bias (i.e., household income rather than income earned in the rural economy)
- Free access for 16–18-year-olds to further education, skills training and apprenticeships, must be addressed.



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This document is both a Briefing Note on the main points in the National Bus Strategy from a rural perspective and a Rural Lens Review of the Strategy.

The RSN has also issued its initial views this National Bus Strategy which member feedback has supported. RSN comments from that initial review have been repeated here.

A Rural Bus Strategy is due to be produced (timescale uncertain as yet) and the Department for Transport (DfT) has already issued a consultation paper/ call for evidence to which the RSN, after consultation with its members) responded – [to view the response click here](#). The starting point of the Call for Evidence implied that the only challenges/opportunities facing rural people relate to issues concerned with technological innovation and the need for transport to make a substantial contribution to achieving carbon net-zero. Undoubtedly these are important challenges/opportunities and must be addressed over the next 10 to 20 years and there must be a Rural Transport Strategy to do that. However, those issues are only part of the picture.

At the RSN we will be closely monitoring these issues as they move forward and the detail starts to immerge. We will make representations where necessary – this in line with our Revitalising Rural – Realising the Vision ambitions.

For now, we set out what we think, on closer examination, are the key take outs from the National Bus Strategy when viewed through a rural lens and some brief RSN comments.

Whilst we are not suggesting that issues such as congestion do not affect rural buses we have, generally, not included those issues in this review.

We start this review in [Section 2](#) with some overarching comments from the RSN.

There are quite a few general policy intentions and reviews/comments on current policies set out in the Strategy (most impacting on both rural and urban areas) which are spread out across the document – and often repeated!! - and so this document, in [Section 3](#) brings those issues together – in the words used by Government in the Strategy. We then move on in [Section 4](#) to reviewing the specific proposals in the Strategy. We do not include the Prime Minister’s Foreword.

One issue we wish to flag up at the start of this document is that relating to the Decarbonisation of bus. The Strategy does not answer the simple question in the rural context, which is – is the investment affordable?

To quote from the RSN’s response to the recent Rural Transport Strategy Consultation:



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“In that context, the decarbonisation agenda is focusing largely on major urban areas at present and we must ensure that appropriate rural-proofing takes place if the same objective is placed on rural areas. There are practical issues to consider. An electric bus typically costs up to twice as much as its latest clean diesel (Euro VI) equivalent. But whilst there are limited numbers of the latter on the second-hand market, for operators unable to sustain new purchase costs, there are no second-hand electric buses yet available. Charging stations are a cost that needs to be added to the cost of going electric and under the current electricity supply regime, the costs of connecting a depot to the grid, including any necessary additional substation infrastructure to accommodate increased load on the system, is borne by the customer requiring the supply – in this case the bus operator. But, most importantly, the operating range of electric buses is still considerably lower than that of diesel – typically up to 150 miles per day, with diesel vehicles capable of twice that. By their nature, rural bus services generally incur greater daily mileage than urban routes and by no means all are suitable for electrification with current technology. In some cases, a second fleet would be required to take over whilst the main fleet received a mid-day charge.

Outside London, where the increased costs of purchase and operation are picked up by Transport for London in contract prices submitted by operators, new purchase of hybrid diesel electric vehicles is now uncommon. They attract a significant price premium over diesel but offer relatively few advantages, the reduced fuel consumption typically being offset by increased maintenance and the need to replace components mid-life. They are gradually increasing their capability of zero emissions operation but at considerably increased cost. Poor reliability and component failure have led to many first-generation hybrid buses being rebuilt to use the latest Euro VI diesel engines, abandoning the electric hybrid component altogether.

Technology moves rapidly in this field and we can expect to see cheaper, more durable and longer-range electric buses in the next few years. But today, rural electric operation is not viable when so many rural routes are already struggling to survive.

Alternative fuels are also available, and if sufficient supply of biomethane can be secured, this can provide a very clean and environmentally sustainable source of powering buses, with relatively small cost premia compared with diesel. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles are even cleaner – provided the hydrogen is obtained through the use of sustainable energy – but the cost of the vehicles and infrastructure is largely prohibitive even for urban operations, except through heavily subsidised purchasing competitions.

The case for zero emissions bus operation in rural areas is a difficult one to make but if we are to achieve zero carbon for the UK, is one we will be forced into. The difficulty of making a business case for investment is far harder than for an urban environment – not only due to the simple cost differentials, but also practical issues such as vehicle range militate against investment as two vehicles may be required to do the work of one diesel – one having to return to base for a mid-duty recharge. The recent “Electric Town” challenge bidding round announced by DfT requires that all buses in the defined area are zero emissions, meaning that services worked in from rural areas need to be either electric, or equally expensive and technologically less robust extended range hybrid vehicles. A more pragmatic approach to maintaining service whilst meeting the environmental challenges of rural areas needs to be developed, phased to keep pace with technological advancement”.



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SECTION 2: RSN OVERARCHING COMMENTS

1. Inevitably there are many aspects across this Strategy where the ‘devil will be in the detail’ and that detail will need to be available before we can see how the proposals will play out in rural areas. We are left wondering how much of the funding/opportunities will really come into rural areas and benefit rural communities? Will the funding to give “LTAs the skills and people they need to deliver this strategy” be allocated on a fair and proportionate basis to rural Councils? Will rural proofing before the setting of policy details and specific budget allocations actually take place?
2. £3bn is to be invested by Government for buses in England outside London with at least £300m of that funding to support the sector recover from the pandemic in 2021/22. Particular welcome is given to the £25M allocated in 2021/22 to give Giving Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) the skills and people they need to deliver this strategy. Will this be enough? One-off allocations are one thing but guaranteed on-going finance to LTAs to enable them to support essential, but non-commercial, services (including Demand Responsive Transport, across rural areas is essential.
3. There is a real ‘carrot and stick’ approach to funding support throughout the Strategy
4. The budget reductions by rural councils for bus support over the past decade have largely been because such support is discretionary expenditure and government support to meeting the costs of statutory services (adult and children’s social care in particular) has been woefully inadequate. These are issues which the Government must address as a matter of great urgency. The full range of rural delivery costs must be fully recognised and reflected in all future funding formulae.
5. We are concerned about the capacity of many rural authorities to achieve the Strategy’s objectives in the required timescales
6. Throughout the Strategy there are references to Apps etc. In many rural areas broadband and mobile phone infrastructure need to be improved rapidly before the use of such technology can be a reality.
7. There can be no doubting the enormous ambition running throughout this Strategy. Only time will tell how much of can be realised
8. Overarching Statement from The RSN’s Revitalising Rural Policy solutions:

“The paucity of rural transport options is an issue which strikes at the heart of rural disadvantage, impacting people’s access to employment, education and training, health, shops, and a host of other activities. It is a key driver of rural isolation and loneliness. It leaves rural communities highly car dependent, with consequences for the environment and national efforts to reach net zero (for carbon). This situation reflects a long-term lack of strategic policy thinking about what transport provision is needed and appropriate in rural areas”.

9. In our Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision campaign our specific policy asks are:



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Rural Transport and Access to Services

Specific policy asks:

- 1. Covid-19 support:** in the short-term Government must retain its emergency financial support for public transport networks, so that rural bus and rail routes survive whilst pandemic restrictions are in place and whilst passenger confidence remains low. A significant public information campaign is required as soon as social distancing restrictions can be further relaxed to re-assure people about safety and encourage them back onto public transport.
- 2. Bus route provision:** Government must ensure that its planned National Bus Strategy has objectives for rural provision, with ambitions to better serve rural communities and their economic needs on a sustainable basis. A fair share of the extra resources now starting to flow must reach rural areas, to improve existing routes, restore valued lost routes and establish new routes where clear gaps exist. This must be backed up by ensuring predominantly rural local authorities regain and sustain their ability to offer necessary revenue support, which means Government implementing the findings of its Fair Funding Review and taking full account of the costs of rural service delivery.
- 3. Zero emission buses:** as described in the section on decarbonisation, the high costs of introducing electric or hydrogen buses and their fuelling facilities could prove problematic in rural areas. A comprehensive review is needed of the electric grid and, where appropriate, hydrogen supply, to address this risk.
- 4. Community transport:** The Rural Mobility Fund is useful, if modest in its scale. Lessons from that Fund's current round should form the basis for a larger funding pot which is sustained over a longer period. It should, especially, promote the use of community and demand-responsive transport schemes which serve outlying settlements and feed into bus or rail routes. App-based journey planners and booking technologies should be piloted to attract new users, as should through ticketing between transport providers. However, in many rural areas this may require improvements to mobile connectivity.
- 5. Cycling and walking:** Government should recognise the potential to improve cycling and walking infrastructure in rural towns, to nearby villages and in urban fringe areas. This can reduce car dependency and improve access to rural employment, services, and retail centres. Funding streams being made available to develop such infrastructure must reach rural areas and not simply focus on larger urban settlements. The condition of rural roads needs addressing as it can be a barrier to cycling.

[Related policy asks appear in the chapter on Decarbonising Rural Communities and Economies.](#)



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SECTION 3: GENERAL POLICY INTENTIONS AND REVIEWS/COMMENTS ON CURRENT POLICIES

(a) A Description of Franchising and Enhanced Partnerships

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.

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.

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 operators. 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.

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.

We expect that the majority of LTAs will choose these Enhanced Partnerships rather than franchising.



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(b) Current Policies – 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.

(c) Examples of some barriers to better bus services

- Limited cooperation
- Fewer 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
- Poor integration
- Car Ownership and Bus Use

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.



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(d) The buses we want:

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.

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 journeys. 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 everyone.

But local bus fares have risen by 1.4% a year, in real terms, since 2010.

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

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.

Buses/bus journeys should be:

- **More frequent:** Feeder services, using conventional buses or smaller vehicles, can boost the frequency of connections from places away from mainroads, 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.
- **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



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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:
 - Every town, city and rural area should have easy to access, up to date maps, showing all local bus services.
 - 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.
- **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.
 - 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 need to tackle negative perceptions by non-users. We will have failed if we do not alter the perceptions which deter people from buses.



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SECTION 4: KEY PROPOSALS IN THE NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY - RURAL SERVICES NETWORK COMMENTS

NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY statements (using the Government's words)		RSN initial comments
<p>ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS AND FRANCHISING</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>A three - month timetable seems very tight but this is just to establish the Enhanced Partnerships.</p> <p>Total Transport hailed as a success – so must be seen as a way forward – but existing problems with its delivery not addressed.</p>

<p>COVID19 BUS SERVICES SUPPORT GRANT (CBSSG)</p> <p>SEE ALSO LOCAL BUS SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLANS BELOW</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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. Operators cannot achieve pre-tax profits on their bus services in receipt of CBSSG.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>What is needed during 2021–22 will be agreed locally, but we expect LTAs and operators to continue to work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • 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. 	<p>This meets our Policy Ask 1</p> <p>We will need to review this from a rural perspective in due course.</p>
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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Summary of what LTAs and bus operators must do to access CBSSG from 1 July and transformational funding from April 2022.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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).</p>	
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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
LONG TERM FUNDING	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The bulk of the £3bn transformation funding will be paid after the transformational changes begin in April 2022.</p> <p>Local Transport Plans (LTPs) will become the focus of transport funding discussions between central and local government. LTPs should include clear plans for how interventions across local transport modes will drive decarbonisation in their area.</p>	<p>See overarching comments in Section 2</p>
LOCAL BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLANS	<p>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.</p>	<p>This does seem like an incredibly tight timescale especially given the public consultation requirements and with many Councils having elections in May 2021.</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p>Plans must be developed in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people.</p> <p>They will be living, transparent documents, with targets. LTA's 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.</p> <p>We will publish detailed guidance on preparing a Bus Service Improvement Plan shortly, and update our existing guidance on Enhanced Partnerships and franchising.</p> <p>LTA's 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.</p> <p>To support LTA's in forming partnerships and developing plans, we will make £25m available in financial year 2021–22.</p> <p>We expect Bus Service Improvement Plans to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>See our Policy Ask 2</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 <p>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.</p> <p>Bus Service Improvement Plans will need to explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>These existing plans will presumably be the basis for the new Bus Service Improvements Plans. The requirements of this Strategy will need to be factored in.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	
<p>BUS SERVICES OPERATORS GRANT (BSOG)</p>	<p>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 money with each £1 spent generating between £2.70 and £3.70 in benefits, including wider economic and social impacts.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We will consult in 2021 on the details of a modernised BSOG</p> <p>We will set out our detailed plans in that consultation, but we are considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>We will need to consider this Consultation from a rural perspective in due course. There may well be differing views between local government and transport operators.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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 and will not be in place for financial year 2021–22.</p> <p>In return, we expect all LTAs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	
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<p>THE OFFER FOR BUS OPERATORS AND LTA's</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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,</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
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<p>SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN BUS PRIORITY</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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, 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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. 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.</p>	
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<p>MORE COMPREHENSIVE 'SOCIALLY NECESSARY' SERVICES</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>We will need to review this guidance from a rural perspective in due course. Government funding must be provided to meet new requirements.</p> <p>The methodology to determine 'economically disadvantaged areas' must reflect rural issues and must be</p>
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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>publicly available. IMD data has an urban bias (i.e. household income rather than income earned in the rural economy)</p> <p>Free access for 16-18 year olds to further education, skills training and apprenticeships, must be addressed.</p> <p>This must include the needs of rural communities if car usage by rural residents is to be reduced.</p>
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<p>CONCESSIONARY FARES FUNDING</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p>ROADMAP TO A ZERO EMISSION FLEET</p>	<p>Five principles underpin our roadmap to a zero- emission fleet. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel must be green: in the future we want to see carbon-free fuel being used; 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero emission first: low or ultra-low emission vehicles should only be purchased where a zero-emission vehicle is not a viable operational alternative. <p>We will provide the financial support to scale up quickly.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We will support the market to scale up by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We will take a place-based approach to investment wherever appropriate.</p> <p>De-carbonising the bus fleet requires investment in both fuelling infrastructure and vehicles.</p> <p>Taking an area-based approach to infrastructure investment allows more innovative solutions to be considered – such as:</p>	<p>Note this is partial top-up funding, not 100%.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>We will shortly announce details of the ZEBRA scheme and how this can be part of local areas' decarbonisation plans.</p> <p>Both operators and LTAs must play their part</p> <p>We expect decisions on the local transition to zero emission fleets to be taken collaboratively through local bus partnerships.</p> <p>Local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Bus operators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>We will ensure our plans for buses lead to overall carbon reductions.</p> <p>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.</p>	
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<p>MORE DEMAND RESPONSIVE SERVICES</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>They will never replace frequent urban and inter-urban routes, as too many vehicles would be needed.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 want improved rural transport to support economic growth and development in rural communities.</p>	<p>See our Policy Ask 4</p> <p>There should not be a reliance on volunteers in rural areas to provide core services. Community based organisations have a clear role to play but must be properly funded for the roll whilst not distorting competition.</p> <p>This needs to be more than just warm words. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.</p>
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**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 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.

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 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.

	<p>Fares must be lower and simpler:</p> <p>Average bus fares have risen by 403% since 1987, compared to 325% for rail fares and 163% for motoring costs. 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>There must be seamless, integrated local ticketing between operators, and we want to see this across all types of transport.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>There are many instances of poor connections and uncoordinated timetables.</p> <p>Bus Service Improvement Plans should detail plans for ensuring that in places (often rural) where services are regular, but not frequent, connectivity is maximised.</p> <p>Delivering for passengers</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Every town, city and rural area should have published, up to date maps.</p> <p>Networks must feel like a whole system which works together.</p>	<p>It is essential that this issue is addressed in rural areas.</p>
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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We will promote buses, aiming to demystify them and improve their image. 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We will give bus passengers more of a voice and a say.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
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<p>CYCLING AND WALKING</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>See our Policy Ask 5</p>
<p>FUTURE PROOFING THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR MORE FLEXIBLE SERVICES</p>	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	