

# Bus passengers' priorities for improvement

February 2020



## Introduction

This work to better understand bus passengers' priorities for improvement is the third of its kind carried out by Transport Focus over the past ten years.

The previous work (2009 and 2016) showed that better value for money from bus journeys was the number one highest priority for improvement. Other key areas for improvement were similarly 'basic' essentials:

- more buses arriving on time
- more journeys on buses running to time
- buses going to more places you want to go to.

Getting the basics right has never been more important to bus passengers. Bus passengers now want services running more often and going to more places that are on time at their bus stop. Better value for money is still important, as are buses arriving at their destination on time.

Tackling antisocial behaviour, faster journey times and next bus displays are the other items that need attention.

Through the Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey, we know that the single most important factor that delivers a satisfactory journey for passengers is the timeliness of the trip.

Improving value for money is also important. This could be tackled through fare deals to match the more flexible way we live and work now, meeting the demands of those who simply don't travel five days per week. Improving the quality of service provided and the basic cost for distance travelled would also help.

Aligning what we know from this latest work on bus passengers' priorities for improvement, and what we already know drives up levels of bus passenger satisfaction, it is clear that now is the time to really focus on getting the basics of a punctual and reliable service right.

## Findings

### Overall priorities for improvement: getting the basics right

Our 2019 research looked at improvement priorities for three main groups: bus users, non-users of bus, and young people aged 14-19 years old.

This summary report explores the views of 5000 people across England, outside of London, who used buses at least once every three months at the time of the survey. A separate summary report will look more specifically at the views of the non-users and young people.

Passengers were asked to rank their priorities for improvement in all aspects of their local bus services. The research reveals the basic requirements of punctuality, frequency and locations served are even more important to passengers than value for money.

There are opportunities to increase bus usage if these basic improvement needs can be met and help challenge negative perceptions that using the bus is a 'last resort' or a 'distress purchase'. There is also an opportunity for people to be better educated on the environmental and associated health benefits of taking the bus.

### Passengers' priorities for improvement

We asked bus passengers where they felt most need for improvement in their bus service, selecting from a list of more than 30 individual options across these groupings:

- the bus itself
- tickets and payment
- bus information
- the service and driver
- the bus stop
- the bus network.

Improving the bus network is by far the biggest priority. A clear and consistent need, it informs four of the top five priorities. Passengers want buses to run more often, go to more places, be on time at the bus stop and more bus journeys on time. The other priority in the top five (in fourth place) is better value for money.

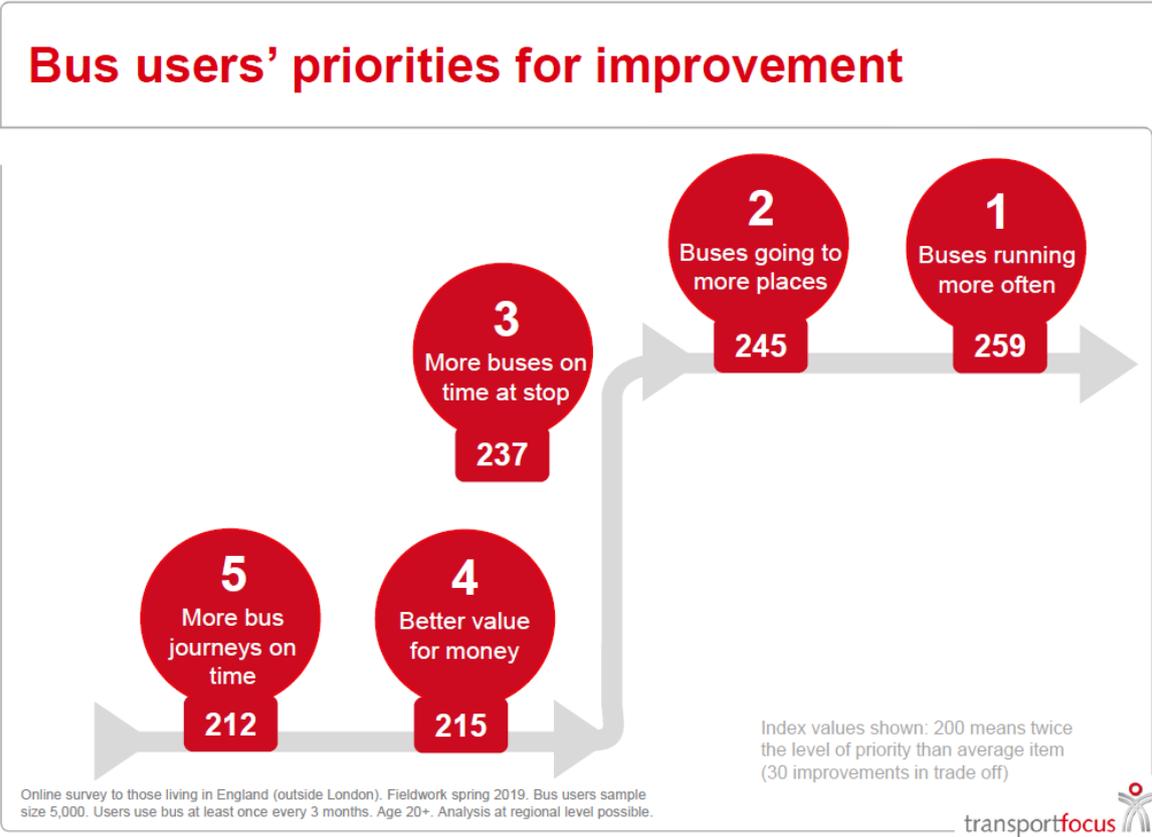
Outside the top five, tackling antisocial behaviour leads the longer list of priorities for improvement, reflecting a concern seen in previous years. This is followed by faster journey times, an improvement that's particularly important to young people.

More 'next bus' displays as well as better-quality information at bus stops were the next most important features for passengers. More space for wheelchairs and buggies completes the 'top ten' priorities. Maintenance of bus stops and driver communications were felt to be least in need of improvement.

Overall, different types of bus passenger share the same improvement priorities. However, convenience is king and there are differences in the relative priorities expressed by users, non-users and young people, as shown in both the ranking and index scores.

Time is key for commuters who are most concerned with frequency and punctuality. Young people's top priority is the number of places buses go to, and faster journey times also makes the top five for this group.

Priorities also vary across different age groups. Younger passengers are most keen to see punctuality improved, followed by an increase in the number of places served by the bus, and more frequency. For 35 to 64 year olds, better value for money comes first, followed by frequency of buses and an increase in places served. Potentially reflecting the pace of life and ticket concessions available in retirement, those aged 65 and over prioritise the frequency of their service and increasing the number of places served, ahead of punctuality and journey times. For this age group, next bus displays at bus stops makes their top five.



## Opportunities to increase bus use

More than half of all bus passengers have access to a car most of the time and almost two thirds travel by car at least a few times per week. The bus is their most commonly used means of public transport with just 13 per cent of bus passengers also regularly travelling by train or tram.

Commuters are the passenger type with least car access while leisure passengers have most. Those aged 25-34 years were most likely to be able to access a car some of the time while older age groups were more likely to be able to access a car all of the time. Bus passengers with a disability were less likely to have access to a car.

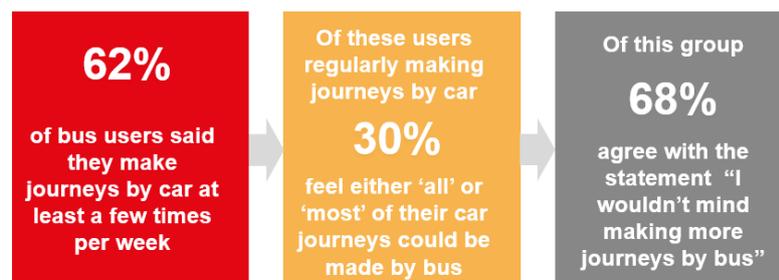
Those two thirds (62 per cent) of bus users who often travel by car as well as by bus, estimate that around a fifth of their car journeys could be made by bus instead.

Commuters and younger passengers are most likely to feel this way. However, they have stronger views that 'I only use buses (instead of other means of transport) if I have to', and 'people like me don't use buses'. This is a challenge for bus companies and local transport planners to address the convenience and negative perceptions of the service.

The conditions exist to grow bus use among users. A majority of passengers (68 per cent) say they 'wouldn't mind making more journeys by bus'.

A little over half of the survey respondents believe buses could play a 'large' or 'reasonable' part in reducing air pollution; male, older users and less frequent users are more likely to hold this view. On the flip side just over two in five bus passengers think buses have only 'some' or 'no' impact in reducing air pollution. There is a clear opportunity for bus operators and authorities to educate people on the environmental and associated health benefits of taking the bus.

### Scope for users to make more journeys by bus



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