

Draft City Centre Transport Strategy to 2040

Response from Transport Focus

Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog promoting the interests of bus, coach and tram passengers across England, outside London; rail passengers throughout Great Britain; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the draft City Centre Transport Strategy and have drawn from the evidence in our research.

Main proposals

From Transport Focus's perspective the key challenge is whether proposals reflect the needs and priorities of existing and potential passengers. The closer that the specifications and targets reflect people's needs, the better the chance that they will deliver an attractive network that people want and value and will draw in new users.

Our Bus

We welcome the proposal for buses to be more efficient and reliable for those travelling into and through the city centre. Our bus passengers' priorities for improvement¹ research shows these are top priorities, along with additional factors. The top half is shown below.

Red Passengers' Priorities for Improvement – top half	England (outside London)				Greater Manchester	
	Priority scores Overall	Rank Overall	Priority scores age 14-19	Rank age 14-19	Priority scores	Rank
Buses running more often than they do now	259	1	247	1	257	1
Buses going to more places you want them to	245	2	187	6	235	2
More buses arriving on time at your bus stop	237	3	217	3	232	3
Better value for money from bus journeys	215	4	197	5	232	3
More journeys on buses running to time	212	5	171	7	209	5
More effort made to tackle any anti-social behaviour	156	6	139	8	180	6
Faster journey times	142	7	215	4	157	7
More bus stops with next bus displays	112	8	86	11	101	8
Better quality information at bus stops	85	9	75	14	78	10
More space for wheelchairs and buggies	82	10	65	20	72	14
Drivers allowing more time for passengers to get to their seats	82	11	56	25	73	13
Cleaner and better maintained buses	80	12	90	10	83	9
More bus stops having shelters/seats	77	13	48	26	68	16
Being told of delays whilst on board	70	14	80	12	91	18
More tickets which allow travel on all local buses	70	15	66	17	78	10
More apps showing live arrival/running times	69	16	95	9	72	14
Free Wi-Fi more widely available	69	17	223	2	75	12

¹ People ranked the things that would most improve their journeys. [Bus passengers' priorities for improvement](#), September 2020, also looks at both youth and non-user priorities.

Main aspects from this research are:

- Frequency, reach of the network and punctuality are the top priorities in England overall and in Greater Manchester, which together with more journeys running to time and faster journey times would support efficiency and reliability
- These are followed by better value for money, which can be coupled with more tickets which allow travel on all local buses to provide a more attractive package. Particularly to open up travel possibilities when multiple operators run services, as well as encouraging inter-service and cross-city connections – although to deliver better value, this should not have to come at a premium for passengers
- Improved information, with better quality at bus stops and more bus stops with next bus displays. Also information during the journey, being told about delays whilst on board and apps showing live arrival and running times
- Supporting a positive experience is crucial, with more effort made to tackle any anti-social behaviour, more stops with shelters and seats and more space for wheelchairs and buggies.

Young people make some clear distinctions, with free W-Fi scoring more highly to support being connected as they travel, along with more apps and faster journey times. Our research with young people² also shows investment is needed in improvements:

- They don't feel that services are designed with them in mind or that enough is being done to make them feel valued
- Not knowing how the system works or what to do is a barrier and a source of anxiety about 'getting it right'
- Improving the journey experience is important; young people notice poor quality provision
- There is a need to design systems better, learning from other industries in the way they appeal to young people
- Fares for young people are confusing and inconsistent.

The Bus Passenger Survey³ results for Greater Manchester provide further evidence. Overall satisfaction with the journey is at 87 per cent, however digging beneath the surface shows much room for improvement:

- Punctuality only scores 68 per cent and is depreciating due to congestion, particularly impacted in the peaks. Satisfaction did have a significant improvement in 2017 (73 per cent), following completion of a number of key traffic schemes and roadworks, however has shown year-on-year reduction as traffic has grown again
- Value for money is lower at 62 per cent. This is judged on the cost for distance travelled, the bus versus other transport and everyday items, as well as the experience in return for the ticket

² [Using the bus: what young people think](#), February 2018 and [Making bus a better choice for young people](#), May 2019.

³ [Bus Passenger Survey – autumn 2019](#), March 2020.

- Key driving factors for a great journey experience show bus driver interaction is most important and also include on-bus environment, value for money, bus cleanliness and information both on-board and at the stop.
- Satisfaction with information at the bus stop (71 per cent) is greatly improved by next bus displays (84 per cent). On board, the rating of information (55 per cent) is significantly increased by digital displays (79 per cent) and audio announcements (88 per cent)
- Just under half (48 per cent) of bus passengers in Greater Manchester have no other means of travel and more than a quarter (27 per cent) say they have a disability.

Questions

- How do the ambitions and proposals deliver passengers' priorities identified by Transport Focus research?
- How is this being differentiated to invest in young people's needs?
- With space being redesigned with potentially less road capacity, more crossings and pedestrian areas, what measures will ensure bus passengers' journey times will improve?
- We note plans to reduce Parker Street and close Oldham Street loop for buses. How will buses still be able to bring passengers to the part of the city they want to reach – especially for more elderly passengers or those with mobility difficulties?
- How will plans encourage a return to travel, night-time economy, cross-city routes and connections and provide confidence through ticketing, information and other measures?

Our Metrolink

We welcome plans for enhancing the network. The Tram Passenger Survey⁴ shows satisfaction levels and experience of the network:

- Overall satisfaction with the journey is at 87 per cent
- Punctuality is at 85 per cent, down against 2018, which was 89 per cent
- Value for money is lower, at 59 per cent.
- Satisfaction with ticket machines scores 79 per cent, but their reliability only scores 69 per cent
- Passengers are moving towards using more electronic ticket formats. 21 per cent use a ticket on their mobile (2018: 20 per cent), with 42 per cent still using a paper ticket (2018: 48 per cent)
- Information both at the stop and inside the tram scores 83 per cent
- Almost half of all passengers (49 per cent) are using Metrolink to commute for work or education
- 13 per cent of passengers said they have a disability

⁴ [Tram Passenger Survey – winter 2019/20](#), June 2020

Top factors for a great journey are on-board environment and comfort, timeliness, value for money and the smoothness and speed of the tram. Summarising passengers' top ten suggestions for improvement:

Improvement	Proportion suggesting
Seating and capacity	35%
Fares/tickets	20%
Frequency/routes	11%
Tram: Design/comfort/condition	9%
Tram staff	8%
Passenger behaviour	8%
Cleanliness of tram (inside or outside)	8%
Security	5%
Tram stop	4%
Journey times	4%

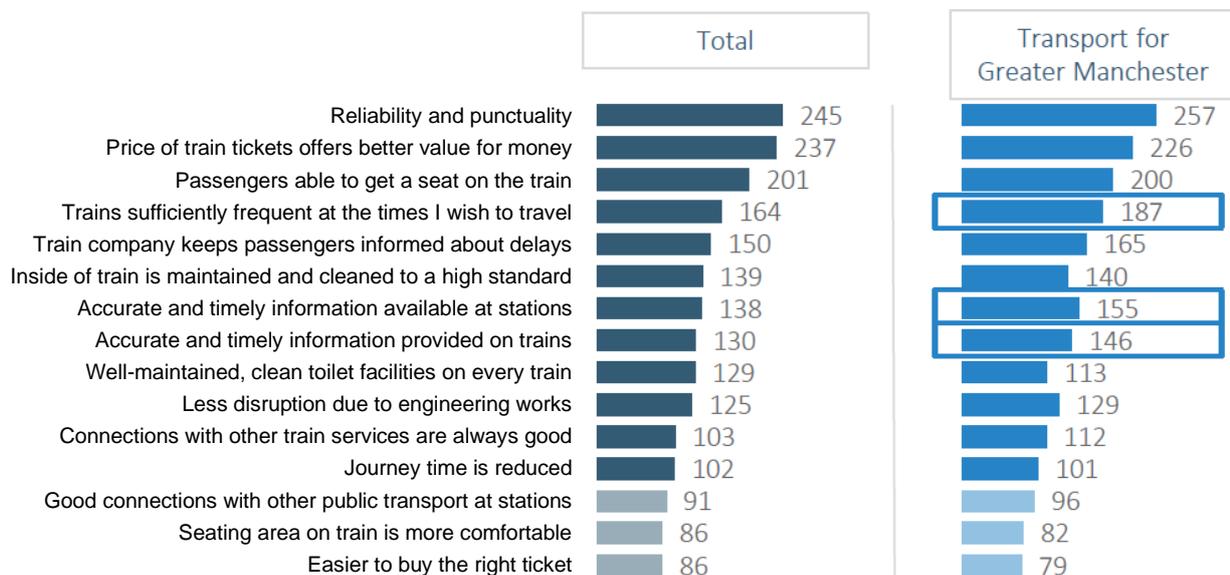
By far the most dominant passenger comment was for more double trams. Passengers also expressed a number of concerns about the behaviour of others, including rowdy behaviour, use of alcohol or drugs and passengers not paying their fares. The proportion of people worried about abusive or threatening behaviour has increased to 23 per cent (2018: 18 per cent).

Questions

- We note the plans for tram-train. How will rail line capacity be managed alongside increases to heavy rail and in light of congested infrastructure?
- How will planned works impact on passenger journeys?
- How will overall ticketing plans incorporate Metrolink in cross-modal offerings?

Our Rail

We welcome plans to improve reliability, facilitate longer trains and transform connectivity and rail capacity. Rail passengers' priorities for improvement⁵ include these key factors:



⁵ [Rail passengers' priorities for improvement](#), July 2020

Comparison shows passengers in Greater Manchester put more emphasis on the top factor of reliability and punctuality, as well as highlighted factors of service frequency and provision of accurate and timely information.

National Rail Passenger Survey⁶ results for Greater Manchester show overall satisfaction with the journey at 76 per cent. Summarising relevant results:

- Overall satisfaction with the station is at 74 per cent and ticket buying facilities is at 75 per cent – both were at 78 per cent in spring 2019
- Punctuality and reliability is at 53 per cent, down from 63 per cent in spring 2019
- Length of time of the journey is at 80 per cent, down from 85 per cent in spring 2019
- Frequency scores 68 per cent, which is up from 66 per cent in spring 2019
- Connections with other forms of transport scores 74 per cent, but connections with other train services is only at 60 per cent
- Facilities for car parking at stations is at 38 per cent and for bicycle parking is at 43 per cent
- At stations, choice of shops, eating and drinking facilities is at 53 per cent and availability of Wi-Fi is only 21 per cent

Rail Fares need to be reformed. With the industry struggling with how to get people back on rail, there is the need to tap into new working practices and a key opportunity to do things differently:

- Carnets and flexible tickets: work from home has given previously captive commuters more choice of whether to travel or not. Rail tickets have to adapt to provide more flexible options in place of season tickets which may no longer be relevant
- Simplify the structure: many passengers see the fares structure as complicated, confusing, illogical and expensive – and split ticketing erodes trust. Single leg pricing, simpler ticket ranges and addressing anomalies will help to give passengers confidence they have bought the best value ticket for their journey
- Rail fares and ticketing reform: prior to the pandemic fares and retailing reform was high on the agenda as part of the Rail Review recommendations. Transport Focus is urging that reform of the complex rail fares system is urgently accelerated, to deliver a better value for money fares system for passengers

HS2 plans will deliver much needed enhancement to rail service provision and connectivity, along with opportunity to transform passenger experience. Our customer community⁷ has explored a range of topics and provided useful insight, used to inform the design of the experience. Key themes:

- Future passengers continue to expect a higher standard across all aspects of the HS2 journey than what they are currently experiencing on rail
- Technology can enhance passengers' journeys

⁶ [National Rail Passenger Survey – spring 2020](#), July 2020

⁷ [High Speed Two passenger panel insights](#), May 2018 and [HS2 Customer Community](#), September 2020

- A staff presence is very important, particularly for those who might feel less confident with technology
- HS2 is expected to deliver a service that is environmentally sustainable, even though choice ultimately comes down to cost and availability
- Journey personalisation is important; future passengers want HS2 to have a good understanding of their individual needs and use this to make their journey easier and better.

Questions

- We are aware of the work of the Manchester Recovery Task Force, to recommend and deliver interventions to improve the performance and capacity of rail services. How effective are plans able to be with the potential for reduced funding and how robust and agile will they be in the face of future challenges and demand?
- Attracting people to return to travel after Covid-19 presents a huge challenge. With a continuing perceptions gap, how can concerns be addressed and measures put in place to restore confidence and encourage a return to public transport?

Measuring performance

The proposed scheme draws attention to monitoring and measuring performance being vital. Transport Focus has built an enviable reputation for independent, multi-modal representation, built on top quality insight and policy work which is useful to transport decision makers. We can support development of user-focused measures and provide an evidence-based approach to ensuring user priorities remain at the heart.

November 2020

Transport Focus, 7th Floor Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
www.transportfocus.org.uk