

## **Transport Focus: what passengers want from Bus Service Improvement Plans**

Transport Focus is proposing to use our document on ‘what passengers want from Bus Service Improvement Plans’ as the basis for analysing the Enhanced Partnership Plans and the Bus Service Improvement Plans on which they are based. In doing so we are focusing on the passenger interest as identified through our national passenger research. However, we will adopt a pragmatic approach to doing so and, where BSIPs seek to present an approach based on evidence of robust local passenger research we will consider that a suitable evidence base.

### ***Summary of key issues discussed in Q&A session***

#### **More destinations and more frequent is quite general, can we be more specific?**

Our priorities research where this comes out is quite general at a national level. This asks passengers to grade what’s most important to them. More buses to more destinations is rated most important. Our Bus Passenger Survey mentions how services can be improved – there are quite localised issues such as where the bus goes and where it gets stuck. With non-users you are competing with the car. How do you deal with local issues – new housing or office developments, connections to hospitals and stations? For example, road space might not work for running a regular bus service up to a train station but knowing what the issues are means you can try and fill that gap in the network and your Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) needs to look at options, as well as pointing out any constraints.

This is a local issue so the ways the network can be improved is through engaging with local people. When did you last look at the network as a whole and ask whether it delivers what passengers need? Bus strategy and funding provides a unique opportunity to assess where we are and what passengers need. Some parts of the network are ‘over-bussed’ whereas other areas are ‘under-bussed’. Be pragmatic and look at the places that need to be resourced better and where some can be reduced.

#### **What is the funding going to mean for people? It’s not going to be unlimited. What happens when the funding runs out?**

Clearly things are changing. Buses are a lifeline for many people so there are tough decisions. In taking decisions on cuts or expansion, you must engage and consult with local communities. If there are decisions to be made the best way is through data and evidence, with a need to look at what passengers and non-users want.

Department for Transport people on the call hopefully will have seen those comments.

#### **We’ll do well to keep the existing network going – what happens with inevitable service reductions?**

We’ve done a lot of work on consultation on service reviews – provided [reports and checklists](#). Looking at service reductions is something that needs input from local people.

**Are these top eight priorities equal across the country or do they vary in rank according to region, gender and age?**

They do change according to age and area but broadly they are the same top ten. The key one is where buses go and how often. Value for money is a bigger issue for younger people; it can be critical as they have limited resources money-wise.

[Bus passenger priorities research is on our website](#), along with a simulator and the data can be cut according to various groups.

**How do these relate to our five segments on our travel during Covid-19 research? Anxious and affected versus carefree and carrying on.**

From the [research](#) we've done you won't be surprised that the carefree and carrying on will like more frequent services. Anxious and affected don't want to be on busy services - they are more likely to have to use the bus but more anxious about having to do so. They want to see wearing of face coverings and allowing distance between people. Cleanliness also ranks higher for the anxious groups – continuing the cleaning that's been going on now.

Some, like the Rethinking reducers, are slow to return and fare options need to fit how the return might play out. Some people might use the bus three days a week rather than five days.

**How will the assessment take account of the BSIPs' intent or ambition – things that are planned for the future?**

If you explain in your BSIP what you intend to do in future then that's fine. It is a bid for funding, so if you explain the basis of your plans in your BSIP – what and why you can deliver, this will be more understandable than leaving a gap with no explanation.

This is a new process for us, but we're coming at it from a passenger perspective. We are happy to work with you. BSIPs are about improvements and where we can seize the opportunity let's do that. When the Enhanced Partnership (EP) plans come our way we'll provide feedback based on what passengers want.

We plan to collate our review of EPs in a document to be shared with industry and the Department.

**Providing links to rail stations – what is working now for transport authorities, what are some of the barriers?**

There is the Bus Centre of Excellence – useful area for sharing best practice. West Midlands has a group to ensure links, how the timetables can match with rail and buses go to those key areas. If we start sharing that sort of information we can help break down those barriers.

**Dismaying what was shown in the presentation. What advice do you have for an authority where routes are cut before any EP is agreed? Do you consider that achieving what we had pre-Covid is reasonable rather than looking towards post-Covid?**

The key is to explain the measures in your BSIP, how they link to the targets and how they are influenced by the constraints you are under.

We are still tracking what passengers want from bus services. However, the main things remain the same pre and post Covid. The core essentials are important and getting back to some level of stability. Attracting passengers back might be about the network or it might be about fares. Operators on this call can give examples of what they've done to get passengers back on buses. There's not a one-size fits all from around the country. Both a strength and difficulty of the bus network. It's about knowing your local communities, returning to that level of stability and reflecting that knowledge back in your plans.

The major drivers of patronage are largely out of your control. Identify these scenarios, understanding trends and capitalising on those opportunities/trends. There is the need to have quite a flexible response but we do understand those challenges. Explain that you understand them and try to address them, explaining what you can do in your BSIP.

**Define what are the most important priorities to non-users.**

Number one for non-users is going to more places, then bus services running more often. If it went to that place, then it opens up the option of taking the bus there.

When research was done and when we were discussing it with operators we found part of the issue is people just not knowing where buses go. The network may not have been promoted strongly enough. The more buses are seen as simple to use and people have their hand held through the experience the more incentive they have to use them. When people do give bus a go they do tend to stick to it – our 'Give bus a go' campaign in the West Midlands shows this. Give incentives to get people to use the bus.

Example from Cambridgeshire - a smaller local operator put up the printed timetable at every bus stop served by their service and got 144 new passengers in a week. We mentioned journey time – attracting people back to bus is about how long journeys take. There is a tension and choice between services stopping at all stops versus direct buses, making it attractive versus the car. We can mix and match but need to have both options, otherwise you are missing some of the market.

**On the buses going to more places objective – discuss the role of demand-responsive transport (DRT) delivering to more remote areas and the role of interchange on journey.**

Alternative bus services can fill a gap. West Midlands has been discussing the whole network on where demand-responsive transport can fill in gaps.

We have done some previous work on DRT going back four or five years, but we are currently doing a study in Wales. We recently read an article on a scheme in North Yorkshire which seems to be successful. It can be made to work but we need to look at why it works and we need to understand the ingredients that make it work.

Interchange point – tension, interchange is always a weak link. Always want a direct service. For most there's a tension around the timetable, punctuality and have I got the right ticket. It can work but elements like information and fares are important to get right.

**Future funding – what if it is withdrawn. What can we say about planning ahead?**

Key question! We've heard similar comments from some part of the industry including an MP who made a similar point. Hopefully we can make the best of the BSIPs and Enhanced Partnerships until the rest becomes clear.

**Plans in terms of monitoring those priorities – our plans for insight?**

Currently testing various ways to do our surveys. Pandemic threw up a load of challenges. We're testing different ways of getting views and are keen once we get that feedback to have something in place by 2022. We're keen on consistency and benchmarking, and we want to build on that. We need a consistent measure of passenger satisfaction.