

West Yorkshire Combined Authority Bus Franchising Consultation 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. This submission specifically responds to the plans for bus franchising in West Yorkshire and is based around the Assessment, the consultation document and the short questionnaire (with one additional question from the long questionnaire). This should not be used to infer views on franchising plans or proposals in other areas.

Q1 The Strategic Case sets out the challenges facing the West Yorkshire bus system and says it is not performing as well as it could. Do you have any comments on this?

Transport Focus has carried out extensive research into passengers' and non-users' needs and priorities for local bus services and their attitudes towards them. While some of this research has been carried out at a national level and some very specific studies were conducted some years ago, we believe they are still valid and we have extensive evidence that relates specifically to West Yorkshire and the way in which local bus services are performing there. We set out below the main conclusions from our evidence base.

Unfortunately, the first set of results from our new *Your Bus Journey* survey will not be available until March. Early indications show an emerging picture of declining passenger satisfaction across headline measures, with improved scores for value for money and the bus driver. Satisfaction levels are generally below the average for all areas in England and several key measures below the average for urban metropolitan areas, including punctuality, with waiting time significantly so. We recommend that WYCA review passenger satisfaction with the performance of local bus services in more detail against the new data once it is available.

Ahead of our new survey results, we have relied on evidence from our Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) which gathered bus passenger satisfaction data for many years up to and including 2019. Transport Focus consulted almost 50,000 passengers annually to produce the BPS¹. This measured passengers' satisfaction with their local bus service for a representative sample of journeys. Passengers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the bus journey they were making, across a wide range of aspects.

Results in West Yorkshire from 2014 to 2019 (including peak and off-peak services, weekdays and weekends) are in the table below:

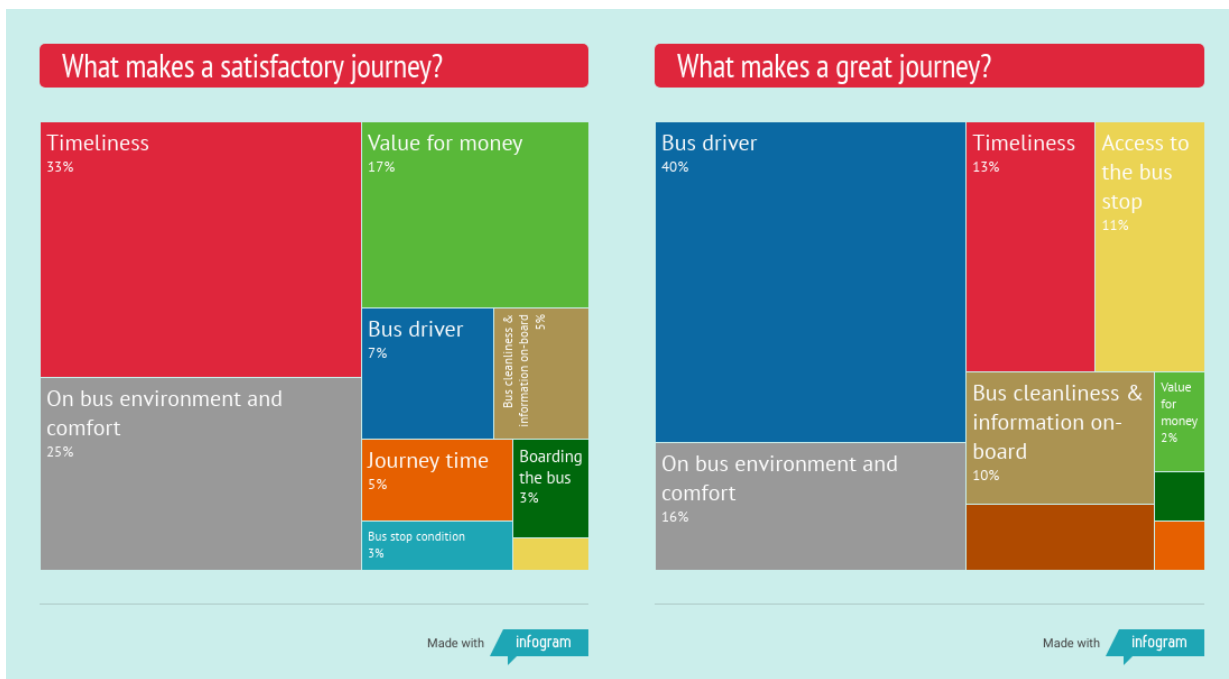
¹ [Bus Passenger Survey](#). Transport Focus

All satisfied %	Year					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Overall satisfaction with journey	86	87	82	83	85	85
Punctuality of bus	77	74	67	71	72	70
Satisfaction with journey time	83	86	81	80	82	82
Satisfaction with value for money (fare-payers only)	63	61	57	62	61	62
Overall satisfaction with bus stop	83	79	77	81	82	81
Information provided at bus stop	76	74	70	75	74	75
Personal safety whilst at bus stop	80	76	74	76	78	77
Bus driver helpfulness / attitude	68	71	69	71	74	72
Information provided inside bus	67	65	61	61	62	64
Comfort of the seats	75	75	74	73	74	74
Personal security whilst on the bus	84	83	81	81	82	81

These results show a slight increase in passenger satisfaction with bus driver helpfulness/attitude, but with most other scores relatively stable across the period, or falling, as with punctuality. The value for money score has remained low throughout. Passenger satisfaction scores for 2023 derived from our new *Your Bus Journey* survey will not be available until mid-March.

Key drivers of satisfaction

Analysis of BPS looks in more depth at the key driving factors behind fare paying passengers' overall journey satisfaction, which have been grouped into 10 themes based upon a statistical analysis of the responses. Analysis for the West Yorkshire area is below:



On the left are themes which make the difference between 'not satisfied' and 'satisfied' overall – making a journey 'satisfactory'. On the right are themes which make the difference between 'fairly' and 'very' satisfied overall – making a 'great' journey.

This analysis demonstrates that the key factor for a satisfactory journey experience is timeliness – satisfaction with punctuality and waiting time. Whilst the key to a great journey is the bus driver – the greeting, helpfulness, time to get to a seat, driving style and safety.

Punctuality and journey time

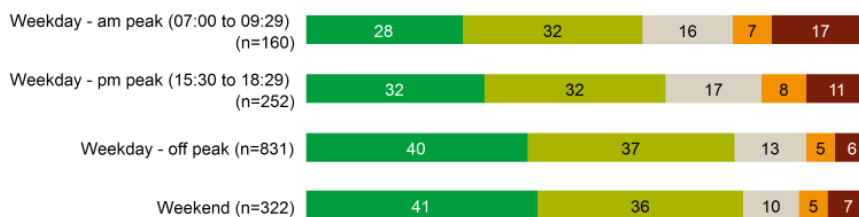
Buses arriving on time at the stop is the third highest priority for improvement. Passenger satisfaction with punctuality remained fairly stable during this period, although it had fallen from higher figures in 2014 and 2015. Looking in more detail shows distinct differences in satisfaction with waiting time and punctuality at different times of day, with lower satisfaction at peak times compared with off-peak and weekends. This was most marked in the morning peak, with a higher level of dissatisfaction particularly for punctuality with 30 per cent of passengers being fairly or very dissatisfied. Set against higher figures in 2015, this suggested increasing pressure from congestion.

Waiting: waiting time and punctuality by travel time



Satisfaction with waiting time

Very satisfied Fairly satisfied Neither sat. nor dissat. Fairly dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

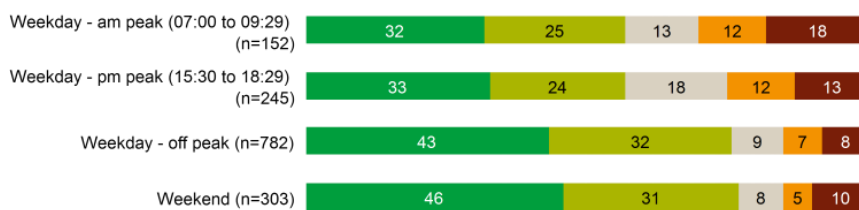


Total very and fairly satisfied

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Weekday - am peak (07:00 to 09:29) (n=160)	60%	68%	69%	60%	72%
Weekday - pm peak (15:30 to 18:29) (n=252)	64%	69%	67%	60%	70%
Weekday - off peak (n=831)	76%	75%	75%	75%	80%
Weekend (n=322)	77%	78%	70%	66%	80%

Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

Satisfaction with punctuality



Total very and fairly satisfied

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Weekday - am peak (07:00 to 09:29) (n=152)	57%	61%	66%	57%	65%
Weekday - pm peak (15:30 to 18:29) (n=245)	58%	67%	66%	57%	65%
Weekday - off peak (n=782)	75%	74%	76%	73%	78%
Weekend (n=303)	77%	81%	73%	73%	81%

Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

Q. How satisfied were you with the following at the bus stop: A) The length of time you had to wait for the bus; B) The punctuality of the bus.

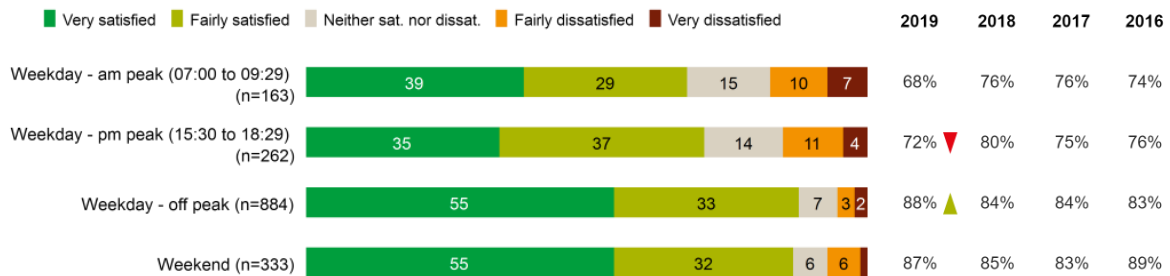
Passenger satisfaction with journey time showed some relative stability over this period, and slightly higher than satisfaction with punctuality. However looking at different times of day, the figures for 2019 show a significant drop in satisfaction in the peak periods and increase in off-peak satisfaction. Passengers told us that congestion was the main contributing factor to the length of time the journey took.

On the bus: journey time by travel time



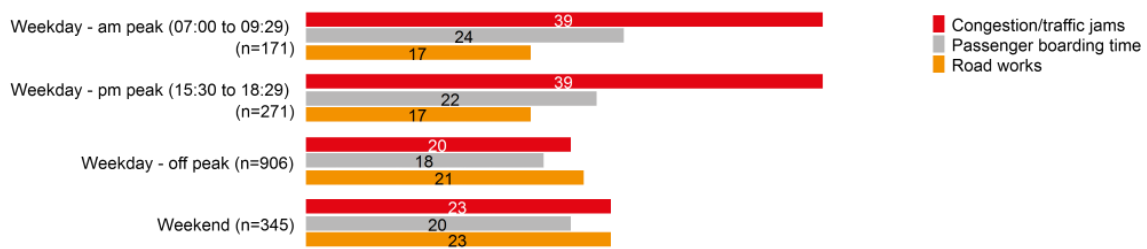
Satisfaction with on-bus journey time

Total very and fairly satisfied



Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

What affected journey time?



Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

Q. How satisfied were you with the length of time your journey took?
 Q. Was the length of time your journey took affected by any of the following? [note: multiple responses permitted]

Value for money

Passengers judge value for money against a range of aspects, especially core service elements, that the service delivers in return for the price of their ticket. Passenger satisfaction with value for money remained low throughout this period.

Post-pandemic, our national research into measures for getting passengers back on buses² looked into priorities for encouraging those who have reduced their bus travel to use the bus more. This found that value for money is towards the top of the priority order for those aged 20 to 64, who are most likely to be fare payers.

The findings continue to show that ticket discounts and special offers will encourage a large share of lapsed users to use the bus more than now, especially the younger ones. Half of lapsed users agreed that special ticket offers would encourage them to use the bus more and a third agreed that they would return to using the bus sooner if their first trip were at a reduced price. This shows value for money being a strong factor for lapsed and non-users, with measures such as 'Mayors fares' being a good initiative in helping to address poor satisfaction and to encourage patronage growth.

² [The route ahead: getting passengers back on buses](#). Transport Focus. June 2021

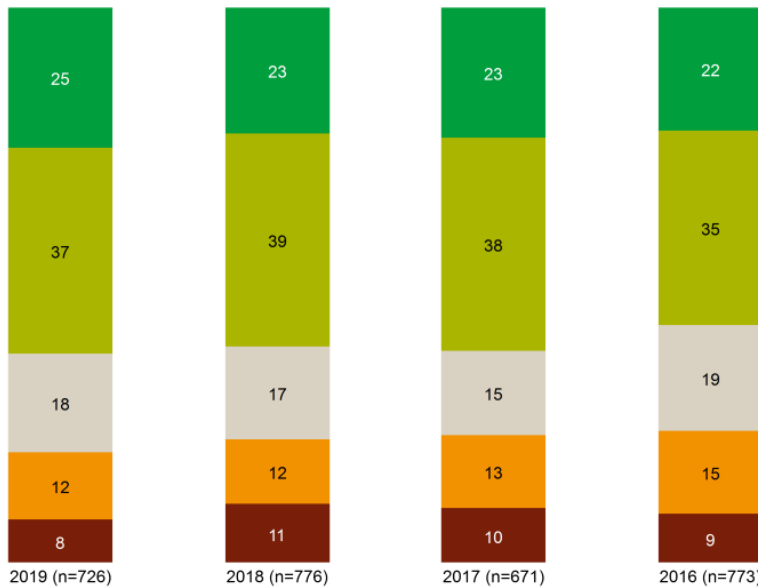
Overall experience: satisfaction with value for money (VFM) trend over time



West Yorkshire

Total very and fairly satisfied

Very satisfied Fairly satisfied Neither sat. nor dissat. Fairly dissatisfied Very dissatisfied



2019	2018	2017	2016
62%	61%	62%	57%

Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire

Q. How satisfied were you with the value for money of your journey?
Base: Fare-payers only

Bus passenger priorities for improvement

Passengers across the country were asked to rank a series of possible improvements to their bus service in order of priority. As well as getting the rank order of priorities, the research³ also gives a sense of relativity – in other words how much more, or less, important is one factor compared to another. The table below shows the relative scores for the different aspects of service and their order of importance nationally and in West Yorkshire. From this we can see that frequency, punctuality, the network and value for money are particularly high priorities. Differences can also be seen against the overall rankings, with passengers in West Yorkshire placing higher importance for aspects including more stops with shelters and seats, more audio-visual next stop announcements and more widely available free wi-fi.

³ [Bus passenger priorities for improvement](#). Transport Focus. September 2020

	West Yorkshire Rank	West Yorkshire importance scores	Overall (all areas) rank	Overall Importance Scores (all areas)	Difference in scores
Buses running more often than they do now	1	255	1	259	-4
More buses arriving on time at your bus stop	2	242	3	237	+5
Buses going to more places you want them to	3	224	2	245	-22
Better value for money from bus journeys	4	222	4	215	+7
More journeys on buses running to time	5	216	5	212	+4
More effort made to tackle any anti-social behaviour	6	158	6	156	+2
Faster journey times	7	149	7	142	+7
More bus stops with next bus displays	8	107	8	112	-5
Better quality information at bus stops	9	84	9	85	-1
More bus stops having shelters/seats	10	80	13	77	+4
Cleaner and better maintained buses	11	78	12	80	-1
Drivers allowing more time for passengers to get to their seats	12	77	11	82	-4
More space for wheelchairs and buggies	13	77	10	82	-5
Being told of delays whilst on board	14	76	14	70	+5
Free Wi-Fi more widely available	15	74	17	69	+5
More tickets which allow travel on all local buses	16	72	15	70	+2
More audio-visual announcements of which stop is next	17	70	21	65	+5
More apps showing live arrival/running times	18	69	16	69	-0
Improved ventilation and temperature control	19	65	19	68	-3
More buses accepting contactless/smartcard or mobile to pay fares	20	65	25	59	+6
More comfortable seats	21	65	18	69	-4
Drivers showing more consideration for passengers	22	63	20	65	-2
Better safety/security at bus stops	23	62	23	62	-0
More personal space (whether seated or standing)	24	62	22	64	-2
Improved route number/destinations shown on buses	25	60	26	57	+3
A smoother ride with less sudden braking or jolting	26	59	24	61	-2
A more suitable range of tickets for how and when you use buses	27	56	27	52	+4
Making it easier to step onto and off of buses	28	47	28	49	-3
Drivers communicating better with passengers	29	41	29	41	-1
Better maintained bus stops	30	27	30	26	+1

Non-users' priorities for improvement

All ages

Aspect of bus service	Overall Importance Scores (all ages all areas)
Buses going to more places people want them to	302
Better value for money from bus journeys	217
Buses running more often than they do now	209
More bus services running on time	169
Buses stops closer to home/destination	158
Faster journey times	157
More effort made to tackle anti-social behaviour on buses	125
Live bus times available on a smartphone	86
Buses running earlier/later in the day	83
Paying fares by mobile/contactless card	57
Easier to get info on bus routes and timetables	50
More comfort on buses	47
Cleaner buses	44
Drivers showing more consideration to passengers	41
Easier to get onto and off buses	40
Easier to get fares information	38
Special fares for teenagers	28
More technology on board (Wifi and charging)	25
Bus companies getting more involved in the local area	25

Ages 20-34

Aspect of bus service (all areas)	Rank age 20-34	Importance Scores age 20-34	All ages rank	All ages importance Scores	Difference
Buses going to more places people want them to	1	266	1	302	-36
Better value for money from bus journeys	2	227	2	217	10
Buses running more often than they do now	3	199	3	209	-11
Faster journey times	4	178	6	157	21
More bus services running on time	5	178	4	169	9
More effort made to tackle anti-social behaviour on buses	6	123	7	125	-2
Buses stops closer to home/destination	7	119	5	158	-39
Live bus times available on a smartphone	8	116	8	86	30
Buses running earlier/later in the day	9	88	9	83	5
Paying fares by mobile/contactless card	10	76	10	57	19
Easier to get info on bus routes and timetables	11	54	11	50	4
Cleaner buses	12	47	13	44	2
More comfort on buses	13	46	12	47	-1
Easier to get fares information	14	40	16	38	2
Drivers showing more consideration to passengers	15	37	14	41	-4
Easier to get onto and off buses	16	32	15	40	-7
More technology on board (Wifi and charging)	17	29	18	25	4
Bus companies getting more involved in the local area	18	23	19	25	-2
Special fares for teenagers	19	22	17	28	-6

Bus passenger trust

In 2016, we researched⁴ the levels of trust passengers have with the bus company they mainly use. This showed attitudes in West Yorkshire were broadly similar to the overall picture. Overall scores were not particularly high, especially for aspects such as providing value for money, caring about their place in the local community, doing the best when things don't run to plan, appreciating passengers, caring what passengers think about the service and welcoming contact from passengers. However, bus drivers scored positively for being considerate. In West Yorkshire, the biggest negative difference was for providing good value for money, drivers who care about the standard of their driving, doing their best for you when services don't run to plan and caring what passengers think of their service. Making it easy for you to stay up to date with timetables and fares was the only element with a positive difference. The relative importance that passengers give to each matter are set out in the second table, with the following chart combining the levels of trust with their importance.

Whilst we understand that the picture may have changed since this research, the key finding is that the better the operator runs the service, the higher the levels of trust generated. Being unreliable or inconsistent has a large detrimental impact on levels of trust. Trust is the base level that must be achieved before a relationship can be built up between passengers and operators. However, it is the more emotionally engaging factors that build real affinity. This includes things like staff going the extra mile, and feeling like the company really does care what happens to you.

Agreement levels

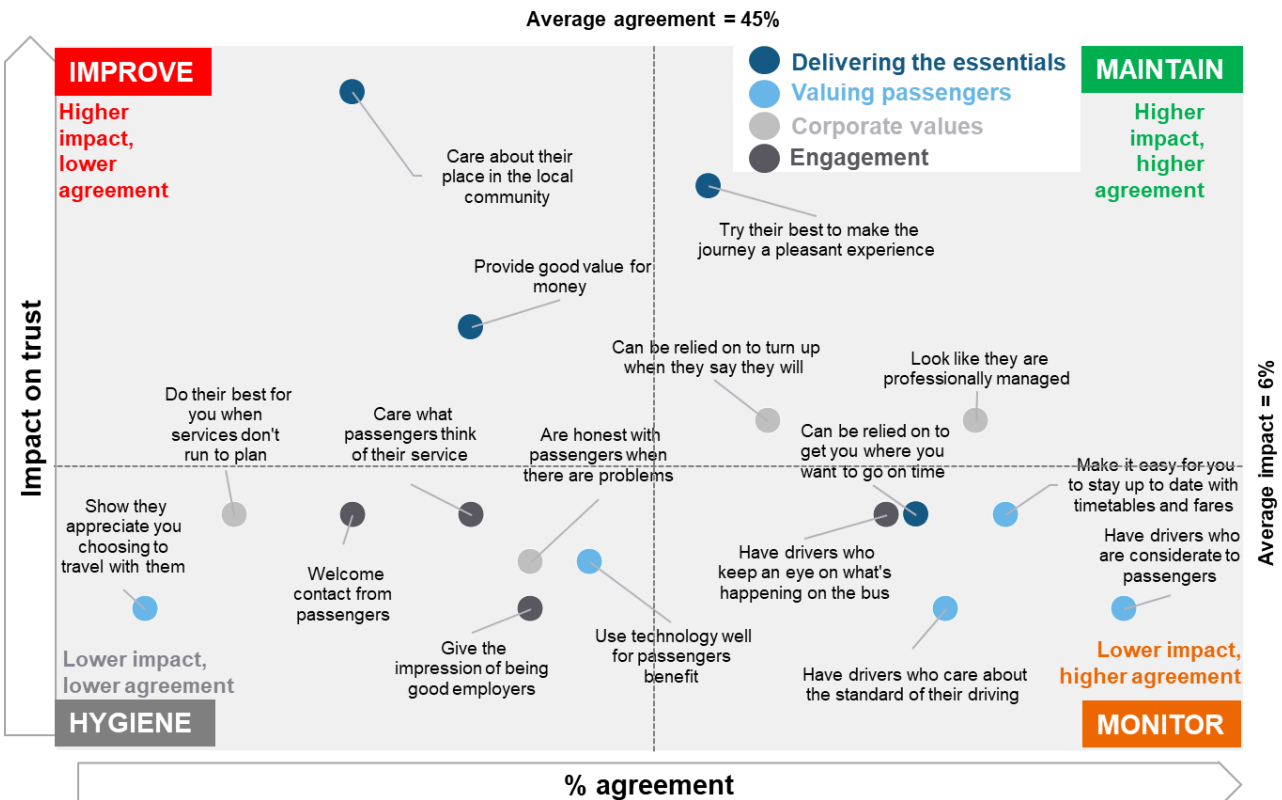
	Overall	West Yorkshire
Delivering the essentials		
Can be relied on to get you where you want to go on time	56%	54%
Can be relied on to turn up when they say they will	52%	49%
Try their best to make the journey a pleasant experience	51%	47%
Provide good value for money	44%	39%
Identity/organisation		
Look like they are professionally managed	57%	56%
Give the impression of being good employers	42%	41%
Are honest with passengers when there are problems	44%	41%
Care about their place in the local community	39%	35%
Valuing passengers		
Have drivers who care about the standard of their driving	60%	55%
Have drivers who are considerate to passengers	63%	61%
Have drivers who keep an eye on what's happening on the bus	56%	53%
Do their best for you when services don't run to plan	36%	31%
Show they appreciate you choosing to travel with them	30%	28%
Engagement		
Make it easy for you to stay up to date with timetables and fares	53%	57%
Care what passengers think of their service	44%	39%
Use technology well for passengers benefit	44%	43%
Welcome contact from passengers	38%	35%

⁴ [Bus passengers have their say: Trust, what to improve and using buses more](#). Transport Focus. March 2016

Trust impact

	Overall	West Yorkshire
Delivering the essentials	36%	34%
Can be relied on to get you where you want to go on time	11%	5%
Can be relied on to turn up when they say they will	9%	7%
Try their best to make the journey a pleasant experience	6%	12%
Provide good value for money	10%	9%
Identity/organisation	28%	28%
Look like they are professionally managed	11%	7%
Give the impression of being good employers	6%	3%
Are honest with passengers when there are problems	4%	4%
Care about their place in the local community	7%	14%
Valuing passengers	19%	20%
Have drivers who care about the standard of their driving	3%	3%
Have drivers who are considerate to passengers	4%	3%
Have drivers who keep an eye on what's happening on the bus	3%	5%
Do their best for you when services don't run to plan	4%	5%
Show they appreciate you choosing to travel with them	5%	3%
Engagement	17%	18%
Make it easy for you to stay up to date with timetables and fares	3%	5%
Care what passengers think of their service	7%	5%
Use technology well for passengers benefit	3%	4%
Welcome contact from passengers	4%	5%

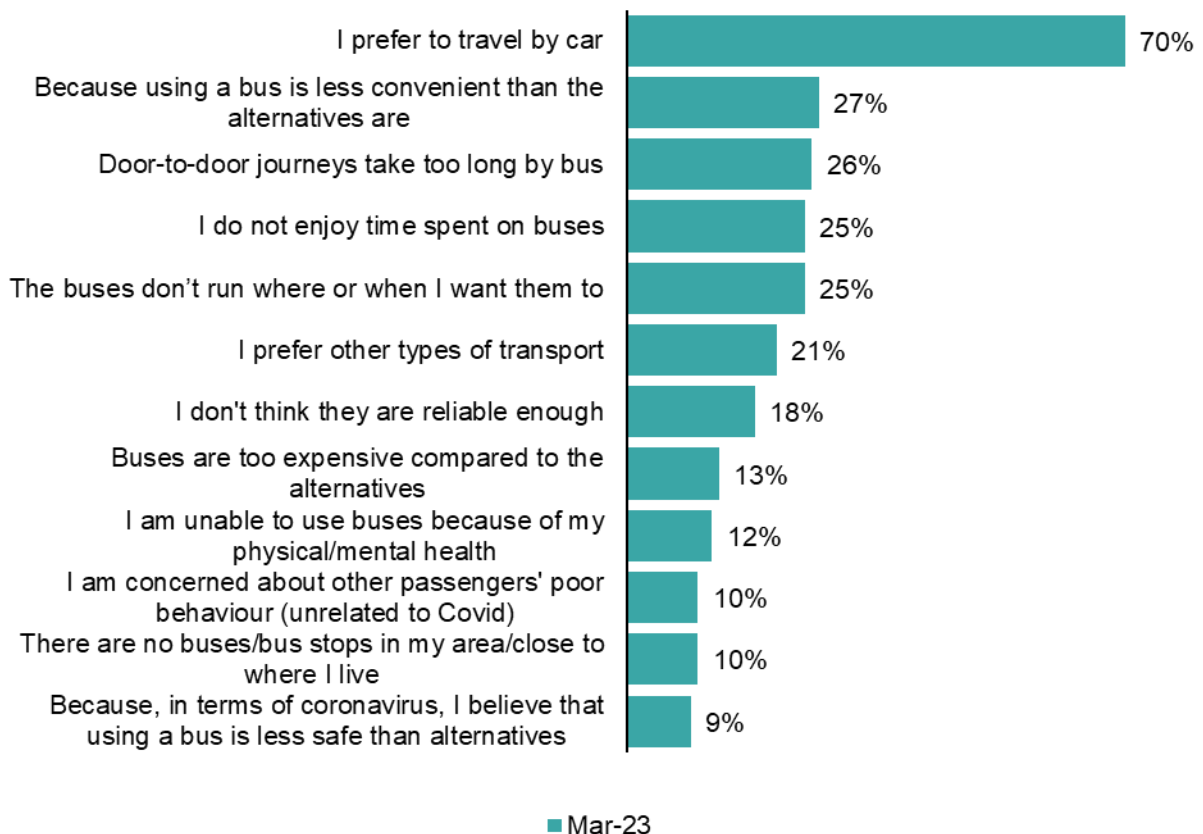
Priority matrix for improving bus company trust: West Yorks bus users



Barriers to using buses more

It is even more important to understand the barriers to making more journeys by bus – what is it that actually prevents people from doing so? Our research⁵ shows that for non-users in general the main reasons are very practical: along with a preference for the car and its relative convenience, their perception is that bus journeys take too long (26 per cent), buses don't run where or when they want them to (25 per cent) and they are too unreliable (18 per cent).

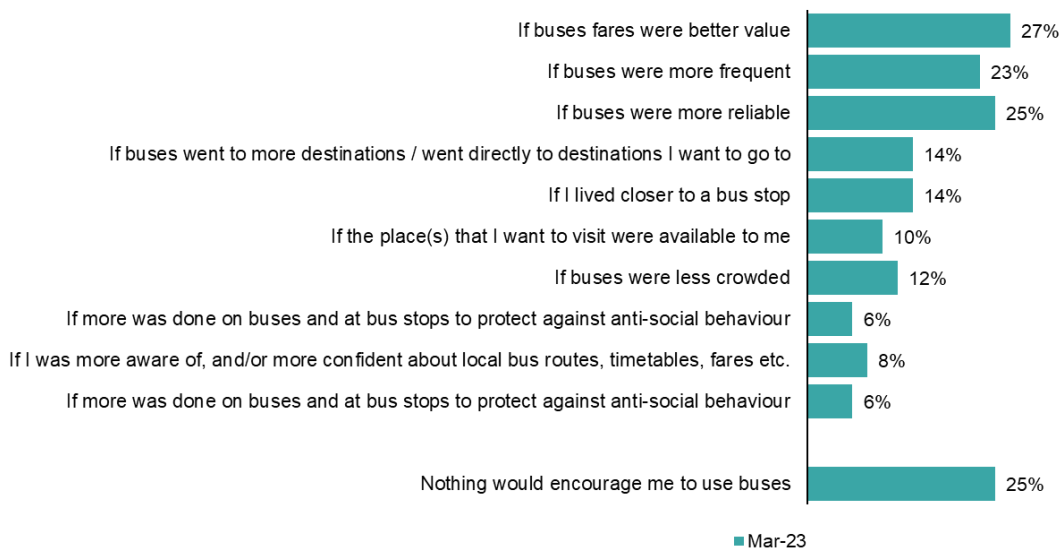
Which of the following reasons best describes why you do not use local buses? (Top 12)



This work also shows the measures that would encourage more bus use. Better value fares, and more frequent and reliable services would encourage former users to use the bus once again. The chart below shows opinions of those who do not currently use buses but used to.

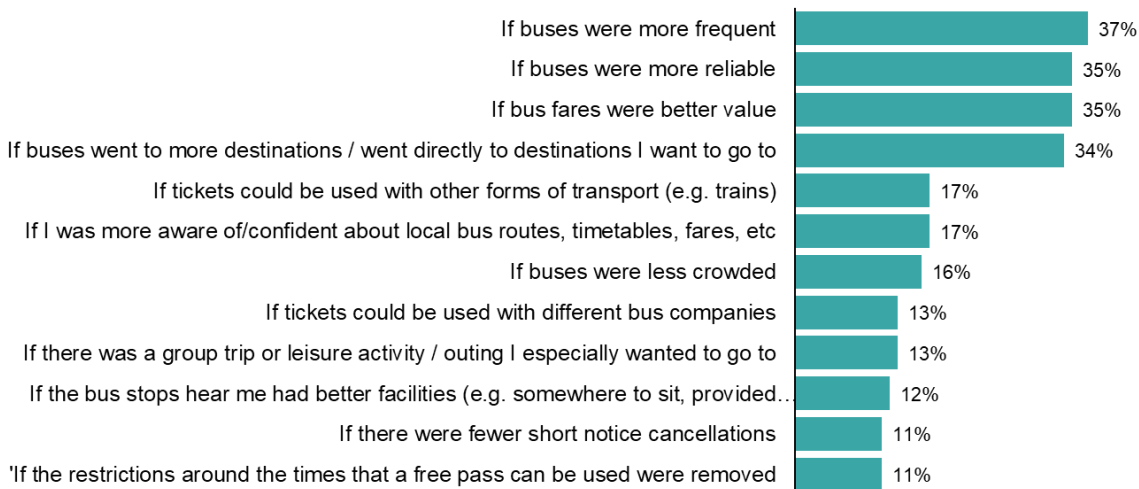
⁵ [Motivations and barriers to bus use](#). Transport Focus. June 2023

Which five of the following would encourage you to use your local bus service once again? (Top 12)
All those who do not use buses but used to



Improved frequency, reliability and value for money would encourage those using the bus less frequently to do so more, along with going to more places. The chart below shows measures for those who are currently using buses less frequently than they did a year ago.

Which five reasons would most encourage you to use buses more in future? (Top 12)



Network stability

We know from the BPS⁶ results that one in five passengers in West Yorkshire do not check timetable information, so are potentially caught out when services do change, which together with the major work required to update information at bus stops, are big issues that will require addressing.

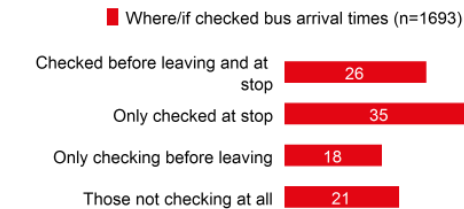
⁶ [Bus Passenger Survey](#). Transport Focus

Heading out: whether passengers checked bus arrival times



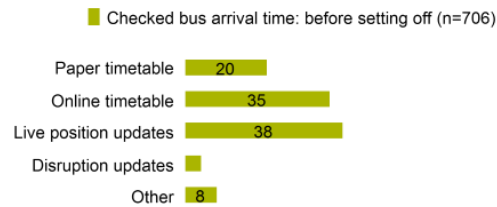
Passengers checking bus arrival times (%)

2019 results



Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

What checked: % of all those checking beforehand

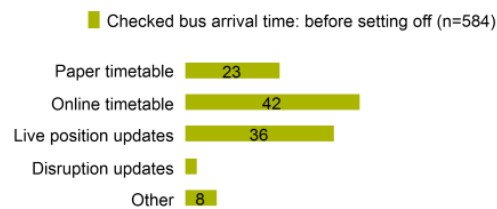


Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2019

2018 results for reference



Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2018



Filter: Hierarchical Filter = West Yorkshire - Year = 2018

Q. Did you check any of the following to find out when the bus was meant to arrive?

It is clear from our research that the 'core product' is very important to passengers – the essence being that they have a stable service that they can depend on. This stability takes two forms: the reliability of the actual services themselves and the frequency with which timetables can be chopped and changed.

Bus priority measures will be instrumental in increasing reliability. It will be important, however, that these measures are enforced/'policed', or else the potential benefits to passengers risk being diluted. We would also ask what steps will be taken to co-ordinate feeder routes into the core area to ensure that end-to-end journeys are equally reliable.

In our Bus Service Changes report⁷ we drew attention to passengers' attitudes to service changes. Two-thirds did not think it acceptable to make changes to bus services more than twice a year and more than six out of ten (62 per cent) wanted to be given at least four weeks' notice of major changes. Our research also showed that the best place to inform passengers of changes is at the bus stop itself: 75 per cent of passengers wanted information at the bus stop, 61 per cent wanted it on board. This research was carried out in 2010 and we accept that passengers' expectations and preferences may have developed in the intervening period – however, the importance of information at bus stops should not be underestimated.

Limiting timetable changes to agreed dates and sufficient providing notice of registration changes are important. So too is restricting the number of times a specific service can be changed in a given period – to avoid the impression of a service constantly being 'tinkered' with – alongside a clear process for consulting with and informing passengers of changes.

⁷ [Bus Service Changes](#). Passenger Focus. September 2010

We have also reported on the impact on passengers of cuts to rural services. In ‘Bus service reductions – the impact on passengers’⁸ we identified four main impacts:

- Passengers could not travel like they used to: they made fewer discretionary trips
- Dependency on others increased: awkwardness to ask for lifts and their travel plans now being contingent on others
- Sometimes the passenger paid instead: passengers bore some of the costs by using taxis or other paid means of transport
- Lack of spontaneity: fewer services on fewer days reduced the opportunity to decide on the day to go out.

Our research⁹ shows a desire from passengers that punctuality and reliability figures are made public. It found that passengers should have access to information about the performance of their bus services and to key actions being taken by operators and local authorities to improve this. The research indicates that publishing this information is regarded as a right in principle and is good for trust because ‘it helps keeps the industry honest’. This was the case even if individuals had little personal appetite in seeking it out – the fact that others are looking at it can often be enough.

Given the importance of punctuality we also conducted further work to build a better understanding about when, where and why buses are delayed and what can be done to help them run on time¹⁰. Our case studies highlighted the challenge of setting timetables to reflect variable patterns of traffic and patronage and threw up a number of recurrent reasons for delays, including traffic and parking, boarding and alighting, inadequate recovery time between services and perhaps most surprisingly, exiting bus stations. This also highlighted the need for robust and consistent monitoring of services.

Simplified and integrated fares

Better value for money is one of passengers’ highest priorities for improvement. It is also linked to getting a punctual, reliable service and a seat in return for payment. Our research¹¹ has found that passengers often have poor information on fares and ticketing and types of tickets, often relying on word or mouth or the bus driver. Younger passengers have distinct needs relying heavily on bus travel. They require service flexibility but also resent paying adult fares. Smart ticketing can help with some of these issues. New arrangements should:

- Provide a central source of pre-journey information on fares, ticket types (including smart ticket availability) and bus routes
- Identify specific policies for 16-18 year olds, such as the range of tickets and price.

Our report on bus passenger views on value for money¹² looked in more depth at what had the biggest influence on value for money perception and, importantly, what might help to improve things. The key findings again emphasise the ‘core’ product. When passengers buy a ticket, they expect a punctual, reliable service and a seat in return. Focusing on performance should further improve perceptions of value for money.

Better access to information on fares and ticketing is also essential. Passengers often relied on word of mouth and the bus driver for information on times, routes and fares. All of which begs the question of how much business is lost because potential passengers simply don’t know how to use the bus or because people can’t find the ideal ticket for their needs. It also found that many passengers didn’t realise what ticket types existed, how they could buy them or where they could

⁸ [Bus service reductions – the impact on passengers](#) Passenger Focus. September 2012

⁹ [What’s the holdup? Exploring bus service punctuality](#). Passenger Focus. December 2014

¹⁰ [How late is late – What bus passengers think about punctuality and timetables](#). Passenger Focus. January 2014

¹¹ [Bus passenger views on value for money](#). Passenger Focus. October 2013

¹² [Bus passenger views on value for money](#). Passenger Focus. October 2013

find out the information they needed. The research found a very strong desire for more centralised sources of information, for example, websites, apps and notices on the bus.

Younger passengers also have very distinct needs. They rely on buses, need more flexibility (to balance work, education and seeing friends) and often take journeys spontaneously. They also resent paying adult fares when they are still at school/college or on low (or no) incomes. They want this reflected in the fares that they pay – with adult fares only kicking in from 18 onwards.

There have been considerable developments in the use of smart ticketing. Our research on smart ticketing^{13 14} demonstrates passenger support for new forms of ticketing – in particular in having to avoid carrying the ‘exact change’ and in reducing the time it takes to pay. It also shows a desire/expectation that smart ticketing facilitates the introduction of new types of tickets – indeed this was felt to be essential to encourage uptake. Will passengers switch from a paper ticket to a plastic version, if the ticket type and cost is the same? We know that one of the key reasons that passengers get a smartcard is that they are able to choose from more flexible types of tickets, which will be better suited to their own travel patterns, so saving money and time. It also stands to reason that facilities and procedures for switching to smart must be easy to use and well explained. Here again, we accept that there have been some significant developments in ticketing since our research was carried out, in particular the introduction of contactless payments.

We would also urge caution when it comes to removing a cash option altogether. There are those who will only travel occasionally and who will not ‘join’ a smartcard scheme or use contactless – it will be important that this doesn’t create a new barrier to travel.

Customer experience

Young people’s experience

Young people use the bus more than any other single group of passengers. Yet despite the importance of bus to younger people we know from our BPS that they are the least satisfied group of passengers. So, for this important group, there is a clear challenge to Government, bus operators and local authorities to make the bus a better experience.

Our research with young people¹⁵ shows they are starting to travel to more places independently but have key concerns. Many of these come from lack of confidence or not understanding ‘the system’ and bring anxieties about ‘getting it right’. The report details key points to address:

- Building confidence – making it stress-free and easy to use, teaching the skills they need, empower and support drivers in their role
- Get the basic service right – young people are put off by poor quality. Focus on the core elements of the journey and ensure consistent reliability
- Engage with them through technology – with a centralised source of information and ticketing and details of fares, discounts and passes widely available. Learn from the successes of other industries and sectors
- Simplify fares, make them consistent and reward loyalty – a young people’s concession, fare deals that are easy to find, with loyalty rewards, more tailored offerings and targeted communication.

People who have a disability

Our analysis of the Bus Passenger Survey shows that almost a quarter of bus journeys are made by those who have a disability. Although the prevalence of disability increased with age, mental health had a high proportion in middle age and in our work with young people, a fifth said they had

¹³ [Smart Ticketing: Oxford SmartZone](#). Passenger Focus. September 2013

¹⁴ [Smart ticketing in Norfolk: what do passengers think?](#) Passenger Focus. March 2015

¹⁵ [Using the bus: what young people think](#). Transport Focus. February 2018

a disability, which may be hidden, needing even more support. Those with a disability were generally less satisfied. Key points from their experience:

- Greater dissatisfaction with smoothness of ride and personal safety and security
- More concern about other passengers' behaviour – particularly the younger age groups and in the peak. Those whose disabilities have a higher impact on travel have much higher levels of concern.
- Passengers' comments also highlight the importance of: allowing time to get to seat; lowering access ramps; seats for the disabled being taken by others; and the wheelchair/buggy contention.

Our research in 2021 dug a little deeper into the views and experiences of disabled passengers with members of our Transport User Panel¹⁶. This found that disabled people don't find it as easy to use public transport in their area. 54 per cent of non-disabled respondents said it was very easy, compared with 37 per cent of disabled respondents. A higher proportion of disabled respondents said it was difficult. The reasons they gave included the distance to the bus stop being too far for them to manage and greater complexity for journeys with more than one part.

We also wanted to understand how public transport affects access to work and other opportunities for disabled people. In our panel 26 per cent of disabled passengers agreed that local public transport provision limited their access to employment opportunities compared with 18 per cent of non-disabled panellists. In addition, a significantly higher proportion of disabled panellists reported that public transport limits their ability to go places. This means that they do not use public transport as often as they would like. They would also go to many more places if public transport was easier for them to use.

Q2 The Strategic Case concludes that the Proposed Franchising Scheme is the best option for the Combined Authority to meet its strategic objectives for bus in the region. Do you have any comments on this?

The objectives set out in section 1.2.1 of the consultation document reflect passengers' concerns: this is a great set of objectives. But that is what they are - objectives. It is suggested that franchising will better enable WYCA to achieve them than other delivery options, such as enhanced partnership. But will you achieve them?

The consultation focuses on a largely theoretical model of franchising compared with a largely theoretical model of an enhanced partnership. Neither has been closely defined in terms of what it is expected to deliver. It is up to the current and future Mayors to determine the degree of priority to give to improving bus services and it is up to the various funding bodies to determine how much support to offer. Demand and funding scenarios have been provided, but they do little to clarify the situation. What the bus operators are prepared to offer under an enhanced partnership, beyond the existing partnership, is not yet known, so a comparison has been made with a notional Enhanced Partnership+.

By way of comparison, we note that under their franchising scheme, Greater Manchester is aiming to provide more frequent services – at least every 12 minutes on key orbital and radial routes and a twice hourly service within 400 metres of 90 per cent of the population. People in the most built-up areas of Greater Manchester would have at least five buses per hour within 400 metres of their front door. They also aim to provide 90 per cent of the entire Greater Manchester population with a 30-minute frequency bus or Metrolink service on weekdays within 400 metres of their home. Proposed infrastructure improvements include creating 500 more accessible stops and installing Real Time Customer Information displays at 300 stops to give people greater confidence when travelling.

¹⁶ [Accessible transport: unlocking a better normal](#). Transport Focus. July 2021

Could you please clarify more precisely what standards of service you are expecting to deliver in the West Yorkshire under (a) franchising, and (b) the enhanced partnership+ comparison?

From Transport Focus's perspective the key challenge is whether the WYCA's proposal reflects the needs and priorities of both existing and potential passengers. The closer that the specifications and targets reflect people's needs, the better the chance that they will deliver the type of services that people want and value and will draw in new users to grow the market. Transport Focus's research gives good understanding of the expectations and aspirations of transport users against which the proposal can be reviewed. We note that the commercial case includes a performance incentive regime (1.2.3). This is welcome, but to have full confidence that it will enable you to achieve your objectives, we would need more information on the details of this regime, any associated monitoring regime and the process for reviewing performance against targets and modifying services to respond to shortcomings.

Q3 Do you have any comments on the conclusion of the Economic Case that the Proposed Franchising Scheme will offer value for money to the public sector?

It is difficult for Transport Focus to form a judgement, as we are reliant on the information provided. Much will depend on what tangible improvements franchising delivers to local services and this is not entirely clear, as explained in our answer to Q2 above.

Q4 The Commercial Case sets out how the Proposed Franchising would be run commercially. Do you have any comments on this?

We have no comments, other than those we made about the performance incentive regime, set out in our answer to Q2 above.

Q5 The Financial Case concludes that the Combined Authority could afford to introduce and operate the Proposed Franchising Scheme, but this carries additional financial risk. Do you have any comments on this?

Improving local services will cost money, and this could present a challenge when seen against the backdrop of falling patronage which WYCA's Assessment predicts.

We are concerned that there is a risk that fares may have to rise to pay for improvements or cuts to services will be needed if patronage falls, as expected. We note the admission that under all options, and reflective of the Economic Case assumptions of passenger decline, a continual reduction in bus services would be required to account for reducing passenger fares revenue and there would be a need to only spend within the limited funds available to run buses. This is disappointing (see our response to Q8 below) and we would urge WYCA to set more ambitious targets for patronage growth.

Having said that, based on your Assessment, we believe one of the 'tests' for the future model is how well it copes with a drop in revenue and its ability to maintain investment and subsidies. To this end it could be argued that the franchising model, with its wider resources and sources of funding, does offer a larger 'safety net' at such time and as a result offers more stability for passengers. In saying this we are talking from a purely passenger perspective – we acknowledge that the risks from a taxpayer perspective are different.

Q6 The Management Case sets out how the Combined Authority would manage the Proposed Franchising Scheme. Do you have any comments?

Table 4 in the Assessment management case suggests that complaints handling functions would transfer from the operators to WYCA. However, there is little detail. Your proposal raises a number of questions:

- what assessment have you done of the performance of the bus operators in complaints handling?
- what do you see as the advantages of taking over complaints handling and what would be the challenges?
- how would appeals be handled?
- how would you analyse and use complaints data to improve services?

Q8 in the long questionnaire poses a more detailed question about one particular aspect of the proposal addressed by the management case: “Do you have any comments on the proposals for how the Combined Authority would consult on how well the Proposed Franchising Scheme is working?”

We welcome the proposal that this would include consultation during transition, and implementation, as well as during ongoing operation and in the event of any proposed changes to the scheme.

There is a little more detail in section 5.3 of the Assessment management case, but it is clear that plans are still at a very early stage. In paragraph 5.3.2 it is stated that “the Combined Authority will undertake regular, in depth, consultations both during Transition, as the lotting strategy is being implemented, and once all franchise agreements have been awarded. Consultation planning and implementation is likely to include:

- The identification of stakeholders to be included within the consultation.
- The consultation approach to be adopted (e.g. written surveys, user groups, on-street surveys, focused meetings with individual stakeholders).
- How the outcomes of consultation will be reported on.”

This is a good start. However, we would welcome an opportunity to work with WYCA as more detailed plans are developed. In particular, we would like more explicit confirmation about how passengers and their representatives can have a say in the standards set out in contracts.

Q7 The Combined Authority’s draft Equality Impact Assessment identifies the potential impact of the Proposed Franchising Scheme on persons with protected characteristics. Do you have any comments on it?

Section 3 of the draft Equality Impact Assessment (analysis of the evidence) indicates that franchising would give control of decisions to WYCA. However, how the Combined Authority would use this control for the benefit of persons with protected characteristics has yet to be determined. The commitment to further consultation with protected groups is welcome.

Action to make bus services more accessible should be closely defined. In Greater Manchester, new buses are to be rolled out across the network over the next few years. They will be fully inclusive, with two wheelchair bays, hearing induction loops, audio and visual announcement systems and anti-slip flooring. The existing bus fleet will also continue to be properly equipped under a comprehensive renewal programme.

Q8 Overall, to what extent do you support or oppose the introduction of the Proposed Franchising Scheme? Why do you say this?

Transport Focus agrees that the proposed franchising scheme could deliver benefits for passengers although the test will be in assessing the delivery of resulting services.

It would seem to provide additional flexibility when specifying routes and times and through this help address 'gaps' in the network that impact on existing users and act as a barrier to new users.

Franchising would also seem to provide the most flexibility when it comes to providing a simplified and integrated fares and ticketing structure – another key passenger aspiration.

The franchising proposal could also deliver benefits when it comes to customer experience – though we acknowledge that some of these could also be provided through the partnership options. The chief benefit of franchising in this regard would be the opportunity of setting a consistent set of standards across all routes and services. It could also facilitate a more unified real-time passenger information service.

However, it is less clear how proposals will influence the key drivers of satisfaction in tackling punctuality and reliability. People see transport as a public service and an enabler for supporting personal mobility. The scheme needs to include robust measures for providing the reassurance of consistently reliable and punctual journeys across modes and from door to door, to be able to deliver an attractive network that fosters growth and trust.

The expected decline in bus patronage set out in the Assessment under all models – franchising, an enhanced partnership+, and the reference case – comes as something of a shock. Table 6 in the Economic Case (page 72) shows passenger journeys under franchising falling to 66 million per annum by 2041/42, compared with 64 million for EP+ and 57 million for the reference case, from around 100 million today.

By way of comparison, a new Bus Strategy in Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) sets out an ambition for a 30 per cent increase in bus patronage by 2030. Could you please explain why you are expecting such a steep decline in patronage over the next 20 years and why franchising appears to make relatively little difference to this decline when compared with the forecasts under an enhanced partnership+ and the reference case?

We can see how the proposed franchising scheme presents opportunities and flexibilities to improve local bus services which are not available through other delivery models. We would like to believe that franchising can have a transformative effect on local bus services in West Yorkshire. We are not yet convinced by the evidence presented in your documentation that this will be the case – the forecast drop in bus patronage set out in your Assessment suggests otherwise.

We also have concerns about the transition period and prospect for further network deterioration, that raise questions about how opportunities to support service provision and modal shift towards an attractive network that promotes growth can best be taken.

Q9 Are there any changes that you think would improve the Proposed Franchising Scheme?

No.

Q10 Do you have any further comments?

Franchising would give WYCA more control over bus services, and provide some opportunity for enhanced public accountability at the ballot box. We welcome the plan to consult users on how well franchising is working. However, a key question for Transport Focus is how will passengers be given more say than they have currently and would have under an enhanced partnership? For example, what mechanisms will there be to enable passengers to comment on the network of routes and frequencies and service standards and feed into the broad content of contracts? Without understanding these in more detail, are consultees being invited to sign a blank cheque?

Transport Focus has been represented on the West Yorkshire Bus Alliance for many years and we would be keen to discuss how we could continue to play a ‘critical friend’ role, to strongly articulate the passenger voice, should a franchising scheme be made. We would be happy to continue to advise WYCA on monitoring of your bus passenger charter and any revisions to it. More widely, we would be happy to advise WYCA on the best ways of capturing the voice of local passengers and non-users as well as commenting directly on behalf of passengers on detailed proposals to improve local bus services.

Conclusion

If properly funded and more closely defined, the proposed scheme has the potential to improve the bus journey experience, making local bus services more attractive to users and non-users and raising satisfaction levels. Transport Focus’s research can prioritise the improvements that are important to passengers and thus realise that potential.

There is much in the proposed scheme that aligns with the needs and aspirations of transport users in West Yorkshire. It focuses on many of the outputs that matter to passengers. We would, however like to see more clarity about what will be delivered. The Enhanced Partnership+ could also potentially deliver some, but not all of the improvements passengers want to see.

We would like to believe that franchising can have a transformative effect on local bus services in West Yorkshire. We are not yet convinced by the evidence presented in your documentation that this will be the case – the forecast drop in bus patronage set out in your Assessment suggests otherwise.

The acid test for the proposal will be what benefits it will bring to passengers and how it will improve the delivery of services. The ten actions to benefit passengers, set out in Appendix 1, represent a checklist for assessing how the proposed scheme specifications and targets measure up to what passengers want and need.

We will be pleased to discuss the points raised in our submission in greater detail and to work with WYCA to support and underpin passengers’ interests.

January 2024

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Ten actions to benefit passengers

1. Improving punctuality and reliability

Bus passengers rank punctuality and running on time highly as priorities for improvement. Lateness of a bus arriving at a stop to start the journey causes more anxiety than a bus arriving late at the destination. Passengers can tolerate the arrival at the bus stop of departure up to five minutes late. After that satisfaction with punctuality decreases markedly, and again after 10 minutes. The new arrangements should:

- Have clear punctuality targets
- Targets for improving average bus journey speeds
- Include a statement on monitoring performance and publishing data.

2. Ensuring frequency and stability of bus times

Alongside punctuality, passengers want to know that the timetable doesn't change too frequently. Our research found that passengers did not think it was acceptable to make changes to services more than twice a year and more than six out of ten wanted to be given at least four weeks' notice of a major change. The new arrangements should ensure:

- There are minimal changes to timetables
- There is a clear process for consulting and informing passengers of changes.

3. Building trust: engagement and consultation

Buses need to run on time, be reliable, deal well with disruption and offer value for money. Our research shows that building a relationship with passengers helps build loyalty and repeated use of services. Passengers should feel that the company really cares about what happens to them, especially during disruption, and is not remote and aloof. Drivers have an important role in showing empathy and care (see 7 below). The new arrangements should require operators to produce a passenger engagement strategy.

4. Monitoring passenger satisfaction to make improvements

It is important for operators and authorities to research (quantitatively and qualitatively) how satisfied passengers are with services both on the bus and at the stop. Transport Focus's *Your Bus Journey* survey provides such an independent assessment which could be used providing vital feedback on critical factors such as punctuality and cleanliness. New arrangements should establish targets for service quality, how they will be measured and results published.

5. Passenger information in real-time

Real-time information displays are valuable in indicating to passengers when their bus will arrive, so reducing stress and anxiety and enabling them to make alternative plans when things go wrong.

The Bus Services Act has made more data available for public use, so new arrangements should set out, through an action plan, how real-time customer information will be provided – especially at bus stops and through developing apps.

6. Improving fares and ticketing

Better value for money is one of passengers' highest priorities for improvement. It is also linked to getting a punctual, reliable service and a seat in return for payment. Our research has found that passengers often have poor information on fares and ticketing and types of tickets, often relying on word or mouth or the bus driver. Younger passengers have distinct needs relying heavily on bus travel. They require service flexibility but also resent paying adult fares. Smart ticketing can help with some of these issues and the new arrangements should:

- Provide a central source of pre-journey information on fares, ticket types (including smart ticket availability) and bus routes
- Identify specific policies for 16-18 year olds, such as the range of tickets and price.

7. Boosting the role of bus drivers

They are the ‘face of the company’ providing the main contact with passengers. For a good passenger experience, they should provide a pleasant and professional service whether by providing information on disruption, delays, or ticket types, or settling disputes. Their role is essential. The new arrangements should therefore:

- Set standards of behaviour for drivers
- Provide training courses programmes that include customer service.

8. Customer care and satisfaction

Despite the best intentions, things will go wrong from time to time. An effective complaints system makes it easy for passengers to know who to contact and a range of ways to do so; has efficient handling systems; and uses the resulting data to make improvements. The new arrangements should set out

- Clear complaint handling processes and lines of responsibility
- How contact details will be publicised
- What response times will be and how they will be reported upon
- Clear guidance on where, when and how compensation will be offered.

9. Improving personal security

This features in our research both on the bus and at the stop, particularly for those with disabilities. The new arrangements should ensure that partners work together to deal with anti-social behaviour and that security is included in design guidelines for buses and stops.

10. Encouraging non and infrequent users

Our research shows why current non-users don’t use the bus: poor punctuality, failure to provide services when people want to travel (such as for work or a night out), length of journey and not knowing ‘the system’. We found that 28 per cent of non-users would support a bus service. Therefore, operators should produce a strategy for boosting bus use.