

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Bus Franchising Consultation

Response from Transport Focus

Introduction

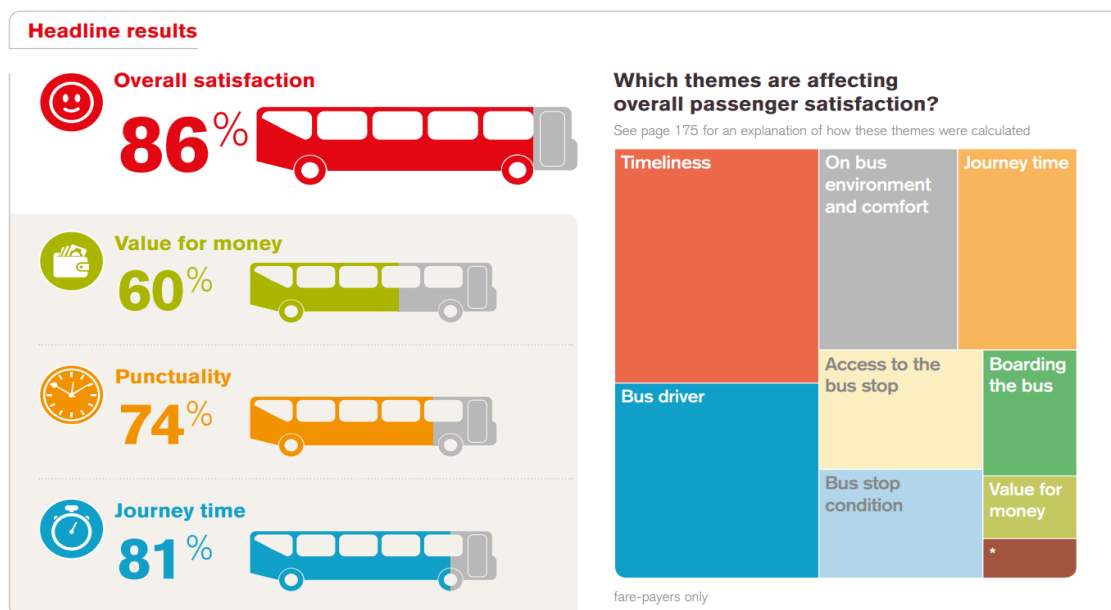
Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog promoting the interests of bus, coach, and tram passengers across England, outside London; rail passengers throughout Great Britain; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. This submission specifically responds to the plans for bus franchising in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and is based around the assessment, the consultation document, and the short questionnaire. This should not be used to infer views on franchising plans or proposals in other areas.

S1. Do you have any comments generally on how well bus services are currently performing in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough?

Transport Focus has conducted extensive research into passengers' and non-users' needs and priorities for local bus services and their attitudes towards them. The consultation refers to research undertaken in 2019. This time frame aligns with Transport Focus's own [Bus Passenger Survey](#) which included results for Cambridge and Peterborough

The key headlines from this research are as follows

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough



Key results

Satisfaction (%)	2016 all satisfied	2017 all satisfied	2018 all satisfied	2019 all satisfied	2019 very satisfied	2019 fairly satisfied	2019 neither /nor	2019 all dissatisfied	2019 base size
Overall journey satisfaction									
All passengers	-	-	-	86	47	39	9	5	1231

Satisfaction (%)	2016 all satisfied	2017 all satisfied	2018 all satisfied	2019 all satisfied	2019 very satisfied	2019 fairly satisfied	2019 neither /nor	2019 all dissatisfied	2019 base size
The bus stop									
Overall satisfaction with the bus stop	-	-	-	80	31	48	11	9	1177
Its distance from the journey start	-	-	-	84	50	33	10	6	1153
The convenience/accessibility of its location	-	-	-	91	51	40	5	4	1105
Its condition/standard of maintenance	-	-	-	72	30	43	16	12	1104
Its freedom from graffiti/vandalism	-	-	-	78	45	33	13	8	1077
Its freedom from litter	-	-	-	77	39	38	14	9	1092
The information provided at the stop	-	-	-	66	29	37	16	18	1099
Your personal safety whilst at the stop	-	-	-	79	46	34	16	5	1122
On the bus									
Route/destination information on the outside of the bus	-	-	-	86	54	32	9	4	1175
The cleanliness and condition of the outside of the bus	-	-	-	78	40	38	13	8	1162
The ease of getting onto the bus*	-	-	-	94	62	32	5	1	1218
The length of time it took to board	-	-	-	90	59	31	7	3	1198
The cleanliness and condition of the inside of the bus	-	-	-	81	41	40	11	8	1219
The information provided inside the bus	-	-	-	62	31	31	31	8	1082
The availability of seating or space to stand	-	-	-	89	54	35	6	5	1205
The comfort of the seats	-	-	-	76	38	38	15	9	1185
The amount of personal space you had around you	-	-	-	78	39	39	14	8	1186
Provision of grab rails to stand/move within the bus	-	-	-	84	46	38	11	5	1161
The temperature inside the bus	-	-	-	78	38	41	12	9	1189
Your personal security whilst on the bus	-	-	-	87	52	35	10	3	1181
Ease of getting off the bus*	-	-	-	90	54	35	7	3	1201
The bus driver									
How near to the kerb the driver stopped	-	-	-	93	66	27	6	1	1190
The driver's appearance	-	-	-	91	64	28	7	2	1153
The greeting/welcome you got from the driver	-	-	-	81	51	29	13	6	1195
The helpfulness and attitude of the driver	-	-	-	80	52	29	15	5	1173
The time the driver gave you to get to your seat	-	-	-	85	53	32	10	5	1172
Smoothness/freedom from jolting during the journey	-	-	-	79	45	35	13	8	1193
Safety of the driving (i.e. speed, driver concentrating)	-	-	-	90	57	33	7	3	1197

Factors affecting journey time

Occurrence (%)	2016	2017	2018	2019
Congestion/traffic jams	-	-	-	29
Road works	-	-	-	23
Bus driver driving too slowly	-	-	-	2

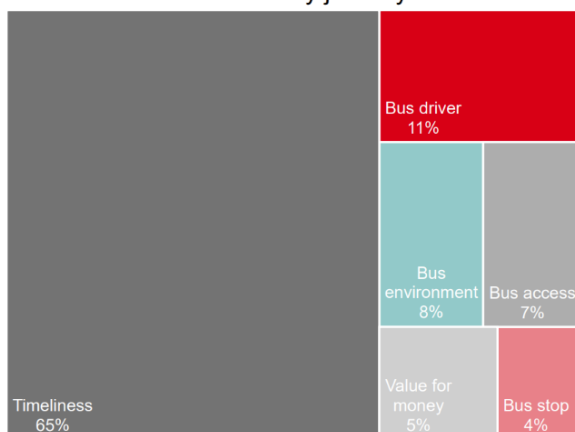
Anti-social behaviour

'Yes' (%)	2016	2017	2018	2019
Other passengers' behaviour giving cause to worry or feel uncomfortable	-	-	-	5

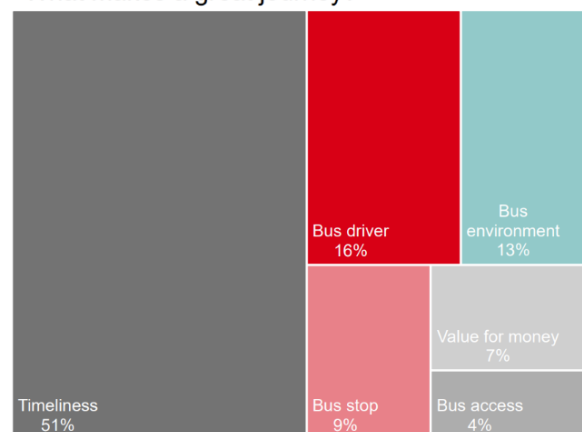
More recently, Transport Focus' [‘Your Bus Journey’](#) survey (2023) looked at what made a good journey for passengers. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have not participated in this survey so far, so whilst not covered specifically, the findings offer an overview of different regions across England (excluding London). We would be pleased to discuss future participation with you.

What makes a satisfactory or a great journey for fare-payers in England (outside London)?

What makes a satisfactory journey?



What makes a great journey?



"Key driver analysis" looks at passengers' overall journey satisfaction response and their response to the 22 individual satisfaction/rating measures in the survey (including value for money for fare-payers), which have been grouped into 6 themes based upon a statistical analysis of the responses.

The left hand chart shows which themes most differentiate between those not satisfied and satisfied overall – making a journey 'satisfactory'.

The right hand chart shows which themes most differentiate between those fairly and very satisfied overall – making a 'great' journey.

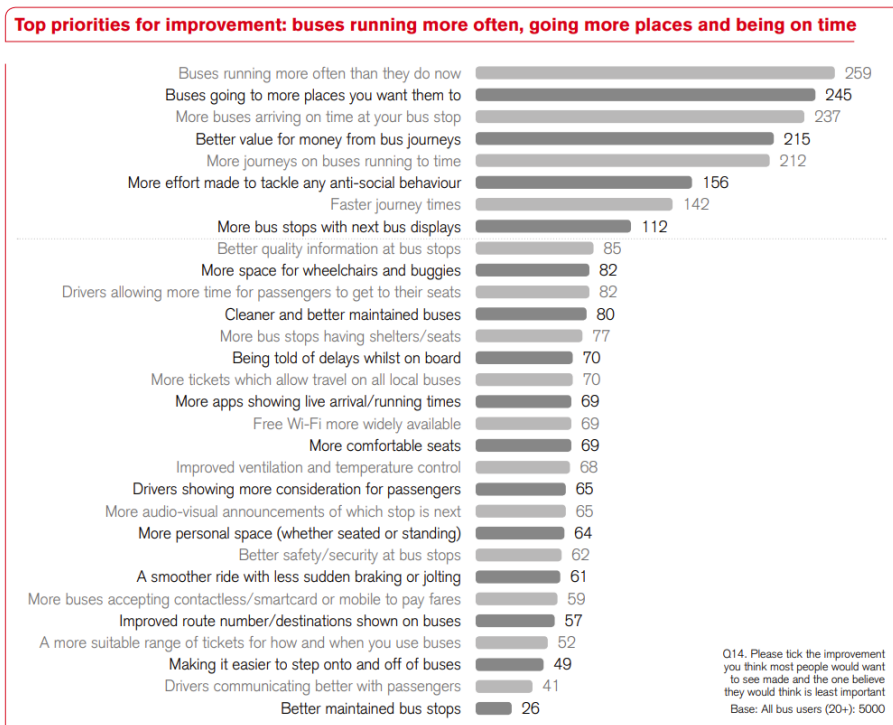
On the left are themes which make the difference between 'not satisfied' and 'satisfied' overall – making a journey 'satisfactory.' On the right are themes which make the difference between 'fairly' and 'very' satisfied overall – making a 'great' journey. This analysis demonstrates that the primary factor for a satisfactory journey experience is timeliness. This factor remains consistent when assessing factors on how to make a great journey. Factors such as bus driver, bus environment and bus stop also having a contributing factor.

We have had feedback from a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough resident who raised the following question: passengers using bus services that are already operating a reliable, high-quality service may be concerned that franchising will worsen the quality of an already excellent bus service rather than enhance it. CPCA will need to demonstrate how it would avoid that situation materialising.

S2. The Strategic Case says that reforming the bus market is appropriate to address the challenges facing the local bus market. Do you have any comments on this?

From Transport Focus's perspective the key challenge is whether the 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 released some national research (published in 2020) on the priorities of bus services for bus users, information can be seen below (full report found on our website – [here](#)). This is at a national level but when Transport Focus conducted similar research at a regional level, we found little variation between passengers' main priorities for improvement from one area to the next. As a result, we believe it to be useful indicator of likely user concerns within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area.



The research presented above shows most of all bus users want a frequent, reliable bus service traveling to a wide range of destinations. This is consistent with research completed in 2023 by CPCA, referenced in paragraph 7.39, showing users within CPCA want to see an increase in services along with quicker more reliable journey times. In addition, we note the CPCA research emphasises on the provision of more rural services and better integration – these were not criteria assessed in Transport Focus's research. These are the key factors Cambridgeshire and Peterborough should focus on when addressing both bus satisfaction and bus usership across the combined authorities. If buses are dependable and timely, bus usership has a better chance of increasing.

S3. The Economic Case says that Franchising offers better value for money to the Combined Authority than an Enhanced Partnership. Do you have any comments on this?

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, given the wide range of scenarios explored, and the high levels of

uncertainty surrounding them. 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. Additionally, what the bus operators are prepared to offer under an enhanced partnership is not yet known. As a result, it has been difficult for us to make a full and proper assessment of value for money on both Franchising and Enhanced Partnerships.

From Transport Focus's perspective the key challenge is whether the CPCA'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.

S4. The Commercial Case says that the Combined Authority would be better able to meet its commercial objectives (success factors) through Franchising compared to an Enhanced Partnership? Do you have any comments on this?

We note that the assessment states that the Franchising model offers the Combined Authority advantages over an Enhanced Partnership. We also note that franchising will give the Combined Authority more control over the design and implementation of the bus network, ensuring that benefits from investment and enhancement target those who are likely to gain most.

Whichever option is chosen Transport Focus would be interested to understand how CPCA plans to minimise any disruption to bus users whilst negotiations and changes to the network are being carried out. How would users be informed of any potential changes, and would they have the opportunity to be consulted on specific changes to routes and pricing?

We note that rather than controlling and managing all aspects and assuming all risks, the CA will look to share responsibilities and risks with operators, working collaboratively to define and design provision and incentivising operators to increase usage and benefit from increasing revenue. This appears to be pragmatic, although presumably will result in less control than would be the case if the model of franchising pursued by the other combined authorities had been adopted.

We note that, under the proposal, operators would continue to be responsible for the provision of buses and depots, with the Combined Authority providing some additional depot capacity. We hope that such an approach will encourage competition, will not present a barrier to entry to new market entrants and will thus present a challenge to the current market dominance of Stagecoach East.

S5. The Financial Case says that Franchising carries more financial risk for the Combined Authority than an Enhanced Partnership, but offers greater control, resulting in greater benefits. Do you have any comments on the Combined Authority taking on this risk?

As referenced within the consultation document, improving local bus services will require an increase in funding in order to grow and improve services. Transport Focus would like to understand what contingency plans are in place if the revenue stream from ridership or funding does not increase in line with increased costs. How does CPCA plan to intervene if a gap in funding is created? Have methods such as promotional activities been considered?

Additionally, the document outlines the combined authorities' ambition to double bus usership by 2030 as part of the bus strategy. An increase in bus ridership is something that Transport Focus

welcomes and is a bold ambition, if somewhat surprising. We note that the other mayoral combined authorities who have consulted on franchising proposals have all forecast a decline in patronage, based on long-term historic trends and other factors. This generates some questions from Transport Focus' perspective:

A) What plans are in place to ensure new riders will not affect the level of service and satisfaction to existing users?

B) From a financial perspective, it is assumed that CPCA will see an increase in revenue as a result of the expected increase in ridership. Are there plans in place in the event that this increase in revenue does not arise? How will this affect the user experience?

Having said that, based on the 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.

S6. The Management Case sets out how the Combined Authority would manage the bus network under Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership. Do you have any comments on these plans? (see also question L17 Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to consulting on how well Franchising is operating?)

Under both franchising and enhanced partnerships, it is stated that CPCA would manage customer relations, 'managing the relationship with customers, receiving feedback and engagement with them to improve customer experience.' We note that paragraph 7.193 promises to undertake an initial consultation within 24 months of entering into the first contracts looking at how well the scheme is operating. Transport Focus welcomes this. We have a diverse range of expertise in this area and would be happy to discuss with CPCA on how to best engage with bus users.

Within this plan, it also states that additional capacity and capability will be required. Transport Focus welcomes increased efforts to improve relationships with bus users.

Trust is an important concept in any business as it can bring loyalty and repeat purchase. Transport is no exception. In a piece of national research carried out in 2015, we asked passengers about their relationship with their bus company and how much they trusted them.

The [research](#) found that building a relationship with passengers has both a rational and an emotional element. At the rational level it means running the buses on time, being reliable, coping with disruption, resolving problems and offering value for money. Service delivery (in other words delivering the essentials) is at the heart of this rational element. 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.

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.

We found that bus travel at present is more focussed on the rational elements. There are currently few, if any, emotional benefits experienced by passengers. This occurs for a variety of reasons – and underpins many of our conclusions above:

- Under 'business as usual' conditions bus companies show little desire to interact with passengers. Passengers believe that bus companies are not particularly interested in their views on the service – they make themselves remote and aloof. There seems no dialogue at the corporate level, no way to have a conversation (whether complaining or not) and a general view that complaints get 'fobbed off'.
- Passengers have little understanding about how their bus services are determined and want their views to carry more weight in local decision-making. They feel that more should be done to consult them and their representatives.
- When things don't go to plan, bus companies don't communicate particularly well, either while on the bus or for passengers at the stop. The 'radio silence' approach leaves passengers unable to assess the alternatives, update work/family on amended arrival times and not feeling in control of the situation.

To this end we believe it important that the proposal contains an engagement strategy setting out how CPCA will engage with passengers and how they will use the information gathered through this. This engagement would include:

- Gathering passenger satisfaction data
- Consulting on changes to timetables and routes
- Providing performance data. Our [research](#) in 2014 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.
- A good complaints handling system. To that end we would be interested to see:
 - 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?

S7. The Combined Authority's draft Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) identifies the potential impacts of the proposed Franchising Scheme or Enhanced Partnership on people with protected characteristics. Do you have any comments on it?

Transport Focus has undertaken national research on the effect of disabilities of bus users. Our findings show one roughly one fifth of passengers said they had a disability. The prevalence of disability increases with age; mental health had a high proportion within middle age and younger people. People with disabilities need greater support when accessing transport networks. Our ['Your Bus Survey'](#) found that those with a disability are generally less satisfied. Key points from their experience were;

- Greater dissatisfaction with the smoothness of ride and personal safety and security
- More concern about other passengers' behaviour – particularly the younger age groups and in peak travel hours.
- Passengers' comments also highlight the importance of, allowing time to get a seat, lowering access ramps, seats for disabled travelling being used by other passengers.

Many of the above concerns can be addressed by the actions of bus drivers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In recent years the role of the driver has become even more prominent. Challenges to retain and recruit in areas has been a significant challenge for the industry. In turn the shortage of drivers, at times, has impacted on the reliability of services for passengers. Effective recruitment and retention of drivers will be essential to support effective service delivery. The bus driver must also consider the comfort and safety of diverse groups of passengers, who may have a variety of needs. And while many passengers may have limited interaction with drivers, they do observe how drivers handle requests for such help from fellow passengers. The role of the driver is often under the microscope and noted by passengers. Our research shows differences in satisfaction levels for passengers with a disability that for some is markedly lower. To improve this, there must be a focus on support and training for drivers, particularly for passengers with a seen or unseen disability.

Staff travel training for disabled people is noted within both the franchising and enhanced partnership models. Transport Focus would like to see clarification on the driver training that would be rolled out or suggested to bus companies. How would this driver training directly help to improve the journeys of disabled users across the bus network system throughout CPCA?

Additionally, Transport Focus would be interested to learn what further work CPCA are planning to undertake to develop your Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and to test your initial judgements. Action to make bus services more accessible should be closely defined.

S8. To what extent do you support or oppose the introduction of the proposed Franchising Scheme?

Transport Focus is the independent passenger watchdog for travellers across the country, putting the interest of passengers at the heart of what we do. Our research has shown that key priorities for bus passengers are an affordable, frequent and reliable bus service. As a result, we support the structure that would best deliver bus passengers with an improved service across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

We believe that the proposal could have a transformative effect on local bus services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Franchising 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. It 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.

We can see that franchising could help CPCA to meet at least some of your objectives, one change of interest would be the ability to including that of providing simplified ticketing and fares.

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

S9. Are there any changes that you think would improve the proposed Franchising Scheme?

As mentioned above, Transport Focus would like to understand how CPCA will build engagement with passengers into future proposed changes to the bus network across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This would include changes such as: timetable updates and changes to bus routes.

Transport Focus has a strong knowledge base of evidence from passenger research which informs changes to the way the passenger experience of bus services is delivered. We would encourage both CPCA and bus operators to engage and consult with Transport Focus as part of any bidding process to maximise their customer related offer in their bids.

Additionally, Transport Focus would be interested to understand how bus users' views will be integrated into the design of new vehicles onto the network? What sorts of travelling groups would CPCA engage with in the development of plans? How would the view of disabled passengers be considered within the design and delivery of new vehicles to the network?

S10. Do you have any further comments?

The proposed scheme has the potential to improve the bus journey experience, through new arrangements – and hence satisfaction for bus passengers, alongside making the bus network more attractive, driving up demand amongst current non-users. Transport Focus naturally welcomes these sorts of improvements across the network, if they can be realised.

In conclusion, we believe that there is much in the proposed scheme that aligns with the needs and aspirations for transport in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority area. It focuses on many of the outputs that matter to passengers. We would, however like to see more clarity about the key areas of performance, punctuality and reliability. The true acid test for the options and plans set out in the consultation document is to see if the policies implemented lead to an uptick in passenger numbers across the network.

Additionally, Transport Focus' research can help realise the potential benefits referenced. Our research has highlighted how local authorities can design their services to make buses easier to use as a form on transport for travellers, in turn increasing ridership. This research can be found in the Annexes below (Annex A). Passengers are clear and consistent with how they would like bus services to be improved; it is up to CPCA to deliver upon these asks.

ANNEXES *(The below annexes relation to national research undertaken by Transport Focus, and do not relate specifically to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough).*

Annex A

Making buses easier to use – Actions for bus passengers

People depend on buses to get them to place of work and education, to important appointments and to give them access to shops and leisure. Inadequate bus services can also act as a check on economic growth. However, our research^{1 2} shows they face a number of barriers, such as convenience and availability of services, frequency, reliability and cost. There are differences between areas and passenger types reflected in varying priorities³, however these issues deter passengers and pose challenges and opportunities for the industry.

Here we set out the actions for outcomes which could be delivered through partnerships or franchising, to address the barriers and provide motivation for encouraging greater bus use, alongside results from the Your Bus Journey survey⁴. Many would benefit from stability of funding to support attractive networks and stimulate growth in patronage through modal shift.

Joined-up network with good source of information.

Your Bus Journey 2023: 62% satisfaction with information about bus services in general; 81% satisfaction with journey time; 77% satisfaction with connections with other public transport

- Buses running more often than they do now, during daytime and evening, including weekends.
- Buses going to more destinations and direct buses to main destinations, making places that I want to visit available to me.
- Improved connections to other forms of transport, such as train stations, tram stops and ferry terminals and support for active travel with cycle hubs and good walking and wheeling routes to and from bus stops.
- Promote where bus routes run and check walking distance to stops meets acceptable standards.
- Provide a central source of information and raise awareness, to give more confidence about local bus routes, timetables, fares and tickets, using a range of channels including online apps and alternative non-digital formats.
- Stable network with a limited number of fixed change dates and good advance information.

More buses on time and more reliable

Your Bus Journey 2023: 72% satisfaction with punctuality; 69% satisfaction with waiting time; 57% satisfaction with reliability of bus services in general

- Action to improve punctuality and achieve targets, such as bus priority measures with enforcement and management of roadworks.
- Speed up journeys, so buses arrive more quickly to destinations.
- More reliable bus services, with fewer short-notice cancellations.

Better value for money

Your Bus Journey 2023: 67% satisfaction with value for money

- Affordable fares and ticketing, with better value for money from bus journeys
- Special fares and discounts for particular groups such as young people, jobseekers, families and groups
- Best fare guarantee to support travelling with confidence, with measures such as flat fares, tap-in tap-out, fare capping, tickets for travel on all local buses.

- Retain cash as an option and were paying by card on a 'pay as you go' basis brings benefits of fare capping; passengers should not be unfairly penalised for paying by cash.

Good waiting environment

Your Bus Journey 2023: 77% satisfaction with the bus stop overall; 72% satisfaction with information at the stop; 70% satisfaction with standard of maintenance; 73% satisfaction with personal safety at the stop.

- Better quality information at bus stops, with at least major stops and key corridors having next bus displays.
- Up to date timetable at every stop, fares and network connections maps at major stops
- Bus stop is accessible with facilities such as seating and shelter, particularly in areas exposed to severe weather and easier to walk or wheel to bus stops.
- Improve personal security, with effective safety design guidelines, including good standards of lighting and CCTV, particularly at major stops and hotspots.
- Measures and actions to deter anti-social behaviour and address any vandalism or graffiti.

Good on-board experience

Your Bus Journey 2023: 85% satisfaction with the driver; 81% satisfaction with personal security on the bus; 73% satisfaction with audio announcements; 76% satisfaction with electronic display

- Commitment to customer care training for bus drivers, boosting their skills and confidence to assist passengers.
- Accessible buses, with sufficient space for wheelchairs and buggies
- Provide alternative transport, such as a taxi, where wheelchair space in use
- Clean buses, with comfortable seats, sufficient time to get to your seat and good ventilation/heating.
- On-board audio visual next-stop announcements on every bus, with information about delays and diversions.
- Better on-board technology on all new buses, such as wi-fi and charging points.
- Measures and actions to deter anti-social behaviour on the bus, including CCTV on all buses.
- Communicating environmental credentials, especially around electric/hydrogen buses.

Building trust through better engagement and understanding the passenger experience

- Engagement and consultation with passengers and non-users – especially on significant changes to routes and frequencies, or fares, ticketing and information
- Measure passenger satisfaction, monitor passenger feedback and make corresponding improvements to services.
- Charter giving passengers rights to standards of service, with effective mechanisms for redress.
- Make performance information available to passengers.