



**Community
Transport
Association**

Community Transport Association

**Putting access and inclusion at the heart
of the Bus Services Bill: A submission to
the Public Bill Committee**

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Introduction

1. This briefing has been written for members of Public Bill Committee by the Community Transport Association (CTA), a national charity leading and supporting thousands of other charities and community groups across the UK who all provide local passenger transport services on a not-for-profit basis that fulfil a social purpose and community benefit.
2. The Bus Services Bill provides a once in a generation opportunity to create a fundamental shift towards better local passenger transport networks across England that meet a greater range of needs and encourage more people to see public transport as the first and best choice for getting around. Although this legislation is England specific we believe there are lessons and innovations which could be beneficial to all parts of the UK.
3. The deregulation of buses outside London 30 years ago left the needs of passengers to largely be met by the market, with subsidy from local government to incentivise bus companies to meet a greater range of needs through the provision of 'socially necessary services'. It was known then that this would leave gaps in provision and unmet needs and these continue to grow as commercial and subsidised services are withdrawn in the face of cuts to local public spending.
4. The Act of Parliament which deregulated the bus market also provided a legal framework for groups of people to come together with confidence and authority to fill gaps in the market with the creation of their own community led not-for-profit transport solutions. This was not just in addressing the availability of services where commercial routes aren't viable, but also in pioneering accessible and inclusive transport for people who could not use mainstream services, even if there were available. Community transport operators provide a mixture of demand responsive services and services along fixed routes, resembling a mainstream bus service.
5. Thirty years on we have the opportunity to change how local passenger transport works.
6. The Bus Services Bill should provide the impetus for greater integration and more imaginative approaches to organising a local public transport network which meets a greater range of needs and helps those whose lives and choices are diminished because they cannot get to the places they want or need to be.

7. It's important to ensure that the Bus Services Bill hands communities and their local authority commissioners the potential to enable something radically different to take shape under their local leadership and involvement.
8. This document contains our thoughts on key parts of the Bill which present opportunities to create an enabling framework and environment for this. We talk about some of the challenges presented by how things are currently organised, what the solutions may be and how these could form part of the Bus Services Bill.

What will the Bus Services Bill do?

The Bus Services Bill is an enabling bill. This means it introduces new powers to local authorities to reimagine what local services should look like:

Partnership

9. 'Advanced Quality Partnerships' and 'Enhanced Partnerships' facilitate the introduction of new relationships between local authorities, bus operators, and local communities.
10. Under current transport legislation some local authorities and bus operators have entered into a 'Quality Partnership Scheme.' This is where local transport authorities invest in bus infrastructure and local bus operators agree to improve the quality of their service in return. The Bus Services Bill will introduce 'Advanced Quality Partnerships' which will broaden the requirement that can be placed on operators to include marketing of their services, and the tickets and fares available to passengers. Under this legislation local authorities will not be obliged to provide infrastructure investment and may instead choose to invest in 'measures' which include parking or traffic management policies.
11. Enhanced Partnerships will enable a more collaborative approach to transport planning between local authorities and bus operators. Under Enhanced Partnerships, local authorities in partnership with local communities and bus operators will develop standards for local bus services which can include; bus times, frequency of service, vehicle standards and ticketing products.
12. Once the standards are agreed by bus operators and local authorities the formal Enhanced Partnership scheme will come into existence.

Improved Information

13. Under the powers set out in this Bill local bus services will be required to release a cache of data on their service which could include data on; routes, timetables, punctuality and fares. This Bill sets out a staged approach to the release of data with full data sets not being available until 2020.

14. It is also suggested that the powers set out in the Bill will enable greater development of smart ticketing which will include tickets for multiple modes of transport, and tickets which work across local authority boundaries.
15. We hope that the open data could have two distinct advantages. The first is that it should provide a readily available data source for app developers to develop apps that improve the passenger experience. In theory, the data provision should make it much easier for passengers to plan journeys and assess different transport options when planning a journey.
16. The second advantage of open data is that it should better enable community transport operators to show their impact in addressing gaps in the transport system. With a readily available set of data on routes and timetables community transport operators can make a much for evidenced argument on how their service serves an area where people would otherwise be left completely isolated.

Franchising Powers

17. The new franchising powers will likely only be available to Mayoral combined authorities and local authorities who can provide evidence of their suitability to be gifted franchising powers. Franchising powers will enable local authorities to determine and specify bus services and bus operators will bid to provide the service. Additionally, the Bill will enable commercial services which are not part of a franchise to operate in a franchising area with agreement from the franchising authority. It is hoped that these powers may help to address gaps in the franchised network.
18. The franchising powers set out in this Bill provide local authorities with greater control over local bus services in their area. We hope that these measures will give local communities greater opportunity to work with their local authority to establish their transport requirements. In turn, this could mean that operators are bidding for contracts which are more responsive to the needs of service users from the outset.

Developments in the House of Lords

19. The House of Lords passed three key amendments during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

These were:

- The extension of automatic franchising powers to all local authorities in England
- The removal of a ban on the formation of new municipal bus companies
- Empowering the Secretary of state to compel all bus operators to fit audio-visual equipment to all buses

20. The CTA believes that passengers are less interested in the legal form of bus services but are more invested in the quality of service they receive. In spite of this, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to shape their local transport networks, and franchising is a key mechanism for doing this.

21. We are particularly supportive of the provision of audio-visual equipment to all buses. We believe that in order to ensure equality of service this type of provision is vital. There were further legislative steps discussed but not passed that members should be aware of as the debate approaches the House of Commons:

- The provision of data was discussed at length in how it should be phased in and who should access the data.
- It was proposed that Bus Service Operators Grant should be devolved to local authorities and where services were being cut require local authorities to consider funding these services with community transport operators.

22. We believe that it is vital that data is kept open, accessible and free. Only through the provision of open data will it be possible to enhance transport planning within our cities, towns and rural communities. We believe an open data provision is vital to empower local communities to develop local travel networks that are responsive to local needs, and provide more comprehensive route coverage. Any attempt to limit the release of data or assign a monetary value on its release should be resisted.

23. We sympathise with amendments to encourage joint investment with local authorities and community transport operators to preserve vital services. We would be worried about devolving BSOG further and the potential impacts on community transport providers.

How we believe the Bill can be improved

24. We believe there are three areas for development in the Bill that could bring about more accessible and inclusive local passenger transport networks that are more responsive to community needs.

Community Consultation

25. We want to see a strengthening of the local consultation requirements and broadening the range of stakeholders that must be consulted with.

26. We believe that the duty to consult contained within the Bill should include the involvement a broader range of community members beyond existing passengers, including providers of alternatives to the mainstream network (i.e. holders of permits for running not-for-profit transport services) and those members of the public who feel unable to access their local passenger transport network at the moment.

27. The desire to increase accessibility in the network also means there has to be a strengthened role for communities in developing local transport networks. It has always been our view that communities are best placed to work together to design their own transport solutions to problems they collectively face. In light of this there should be greater recognition within the Bill for specific community groups who are impacted by the Bill, including those who rarely or never access transport at the moment.

Quality measures must consider accessibility and inclusion

28. We believe that a measure of success of any quality partnership should include whether it contributes to the overall accessibility of the transport network.

29. The initial readings of the Bill have led to members of the House of Lords discussing the need for enhanced audio-visual equipment on buses, but taking this even further we believe more can be done to make networks accessible and inclusive and measure their success in these terms.

30. This is possible to achieve through broadening the measures of 'quality' laid out in Advanced Quality Partnerships.

31. When we talk about 'quality' in terms of routes, fares and frequency of service, we also believe it's important to talk about it in terms of the accessibility of routes and services.

Opening up innovation in service provision

32. Moving from a commercial network to a publicly commissioned will not necessarily lead to a transformation in the range and quality of provision. We therefore believe the franchising and partnership development process must consider the role of the charity and not-for-profit sector from the outset in order to achieve a more integrated local network that is more resilient to the pressures that a purely commercial network would face. This would include integrating both demand responsive transport services and services operating along fixed routes.
33. Too often community transport is asked to provide a service as a last resort once everyone else has had a go and proved they cannot make it work. In delivering a truly accessible transport network we believe that through the franchising or partnership development process local authorities should consider the role of community transport and the voluntary sector from the outset
34. Finally, whilst we support the idea of 'advanced ticketing' and hope it furthers an advance in flexibility in our transport network, we believe that there needs to be further consideration on the way in which community transport can be integrated as part of the mainstream transport network through flexible ticketing options.

Questions for the Committee to Consider

35. As the Bus Services Bill continues through the House of Commons there are a number of questions believe are important for the Committee to consider.

- 1) At present, does the Bus Services Bill do enough to enable local communities to play an active role in shaping what their local transport networks look like?
- 2) Will the Bus Services Bill improve access to bus services for isolated communities, as well as improving the overall quality of bus services?
- 3) Will the current data provision give local authorities and other relevant agencies the tools and frameworks to develop a bus network that is integrated, and responsive to demand and demographics?
- 4) Outside of the mainstream bus network there will be other passenger transport services that do not fall under the scope of regulations but are nevertheless affected by them, such as community transport. Do the regulations take sufficient account of these impacts?
- 5) Does the Bus Services Bill encourage innovation that leads to improvements for passengers or do we risk creating what we have now, albeit commissioned by public provision?

We are happy to provide oral evidence to the Committee as well as any further written evidence. Please contact James Coe, our Policy and Public Affairs Executive.

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In the meantime you can read our latest updates on the Bus Services Bill on our blog (ctablog.org) or by following our Twitter account ([@CTAUK1](https://twitter.com/CTAUK1))

Further Reading

The Bus Services Bill could help transform transport through better data: <http://bit.ly/2gFDazs>
Inclusion and Access Should be at the Heart of the Bus Services Bill: <http://bit.ly/2ISHVDD>
Where are we up to with the Buses Bill: <http://bit.ly/2aAqR2H>

Appendices:

What is Community Transport?

In every part of the UK, on every day of the year, thousands of community transport staff and volunteers are helping people to stay independent, participate in their communities and to access vital services and employment. Community transport is provided by a diverse range of organisations of all sizes, but a number of common hallmarks stand-out across them all:

- Community transport uses and adapts conventional vehicles to do exceptional things for a social purpose and community benefit.
- Services include voluntary car schemes, community bus services, school transport, hospital transport, dial-a-ride, wheels to work and group hire services.
- Services are started as a response to unmet needs identified by and within communities.
- High levels of volunteer involvement in service delivery, management and governance.
- They do not distribute profits, instead investing any surpluses in furthering their charitable mission.
- Priority given to mobility of most vulnerable and isolated – those whose needs would be unmet by conventional services.

The Community Transport Association

We are for, and about, accessible and inclusive transport.

Our vision is of a world where people can shape and create their own accessible and inclusive transport solutions so everything else in life can be accessible and inclusive too.

We are a national membership body working with charities and community groups across the UK who all provide local transport services on a not-for-profit basis that fulfil a social purpose and community benefit.

Our main activities include:

- Contributing to public policy where community-led transport solutions can improve access and inclusion.
- Gathering and sharing data on the practice, performance and impact of community transport.
- Creating opportunities for our members and supporters to come together, exchange ideas and be inspired.
- Raising standards through advice and training.
- Leading the development of new approaches to service delivery.