

## Doing Buses Differently: Greater Manchester Bus Consultation

### Response from Transport Focus

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#### 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 Greater Manchester and is based around the consultation document short questionnaire. This should not be used to infer views on franchising plans or proposals in other areas.

#### Response to questions

1 The Strategic Case sets out the challenges facing the local bus market and says that it is not performing as well as it could. Do you have any comments on this?

2 The Strategic Case says that reforming the bus market is the right thing to do to address the challenges facing the local bus market. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this? Why do you say 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's research gives good understanding of the expectations and aspirations of transport users against which the proposal can be reviewed.

#### 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 research<sup>1</sup> 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 top 20 aspects of service and their order of importance nationally. From this we can see that value for money, punctuality and frequency are particularly high priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> [Bus passengers have their say: Trust, what to improve and using buses more](#). Transport Focus. March 2016

Passengers in Greater Manchester have similar priorities for core service improvements, however there are also differences. Feeling safer at bus stops ranks higher, as do having a more suitable range of tickets and free wi-fi being more widely available.

### Top 20 passenger priorities for improvement – overall total and Greater Manchester

Attribute	Overall index	Overall Priority	GM Index	GM Priority
Better value for money from bus journeys	258	1	269	1
More buses arriving on time at your bus stop	247	2	233	2
More journeys on buses running to time	228	3	218	3
Buses running more often than they do now	224	4	205	4
More effort made to tackle any anti-social behaviour	174	5	197	5
Buses going to more places you want to go	158	6	153	6
More bus stops with next bus displays	121	7	117	8
Being given more/better information when delays occur on journeys	110	8	111	10
Cleaner and better maintained buses	107	9	107	11
Tickets which better allow travel on all local bus companies	107	10	111	9
Better security at bus stops so people feel safer waiting for buses	104	11	121	7
Drivers allowing more time for passengers to get to their seats	103	12	91	12
Better quality information at bus stops	87	13	86	13
Drivers showing more consideration to passengers	86	14	83	15
A smoother ride with less sudden braking or jolting	86	15	74	18
A more suitable range of tickets for how and when you use buses	78	16	83	14
More buses having next stop announcements/displays	74	17	75	17
More personal space on buses (whether seated or standing)	74	18	71	19
Free wi-fi being more widely available	72	19	78	16
Seats being more comfortable	69	20	65	21

Note that we are updating these priorities for improvement and will be publishing an updated set during early 2020, across:

- Bus passengers
- Non-users
- Young people (aged 14 to 19)

We will be pleased to discuss this updated set with you, once published. Also to provide advice on variations in emphasis that would be advocated by the refreshed picture.

### Bus passenger trust

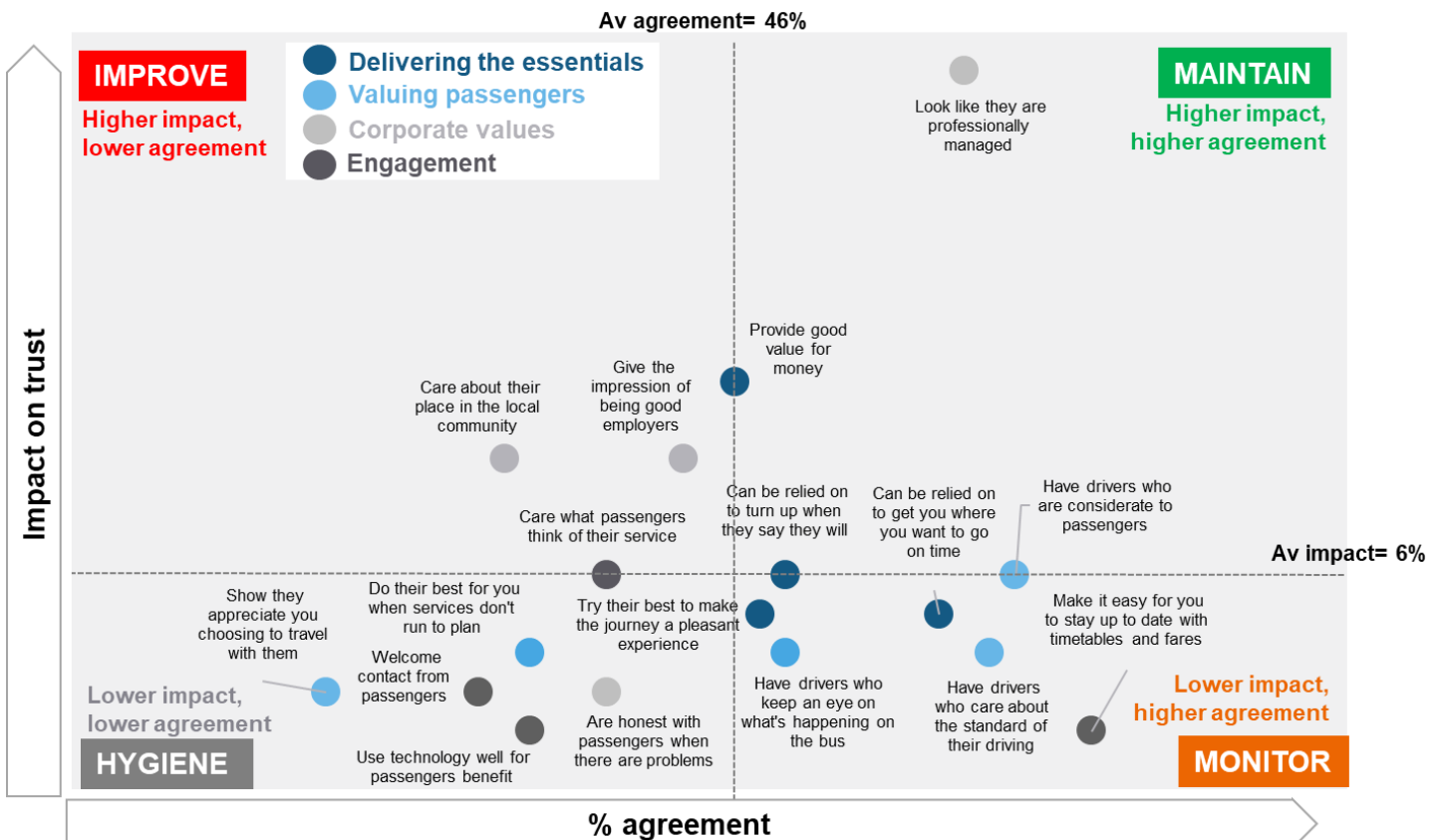
Research<sup>2</sup> into the levels of trust passengers have with the bus company they mainly use, shows attitudes in Greater Manchester being broadly similar to the overall picture. Overall scores are not particularly high, especially for aspects such as providing value for money, doing the best when things don't run to plan and appreciating passengers. However bus drivers score positively for being considerate. In Greater Manchester, scores are mostly slightly lower. The biggest negative difference is for drivers being considerate and keeping an eye on what's happening. Keeping up to date with timetables and fares has the biggest positive difference.

<sup>2</sup> See note 1

### Levels of passenger trust with the bus company they mainly use

	Overall	Greater Manchester
<b>Delivering the essentials</b>		
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%	48%
Try their best to make the journey a pleasant experience	51%	47%
Provide good value for money	44%	46%
<b>Identity/ organisation</b>		
Look like they are professionally managed	57%	55%
Give the impression of being good employers	42%	44%
Are honest with passengers when there are problems	44%	41%
Care about their place in the local community	39%	37%
<b>Valuing passengers</b>		
Have drivers who care about the standard of their driving	60%	56%
Have drivers who are considerate to passengers	63%	57%
Have drivers who keep an eye on what's happening on the bus	56%	48%
Do their best for you when services don't run to plan	36%	38%
Show they appreciate you choosing to travel with them	30%	30%
<b>Engagement</b>		
Make it easy for you to stay up to date with timetables and fares	53%	60%
Care what passengers think of their service	44%	41%
Use technology well for passengers benefit	44%	38%
Welcome contact from passengers	38%	36%

### Priority matrix for improving bus company trust in Greater Manchester:



## 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 research<sup>3</sup> shows that for infrequent/non-users in general the main reasons were very practical; they don't run where or when people want them to (36 per cent), journeys take too long (34 per cent), and cost (23 per cent).

Those practical reasons assume even more significance for those infrequent/nonusers who would consider using buses more. Exactly half of them put this mainly down to buses not running where and when they wanted and 38 per cent said that door-to-door journeys take too long. They still feature most for infrequent/non-users who were not minded to use bus more, but notably things to do with the 'on-bus experience', although still secondary, do feature more prominently for this group of people.

### Reasons for not using the bus

		Would consider %	Would not consider %
Don't run where or when I want them to go	36	50	30
Door-to-door journeys would take too long by bus	34	38	32
The cost compared to the alternatives	23	24	23
I do not enjoy time spent on buses	20	8	25
I don't think they are reliable enough	12	9	13
I prefer to travel by car	11	8	12
I am concerned by other passengers' behaviour	7	5	8
I am unable to use buses due to disability	6	4	7
I feel there is insufficient space/comfort on board	6	2	7
No buses/ bus stops in my area	2	4	2
Prefer other forms of transport	1	1	1
Other	5	5	5

Q9. What are your top two reasons for not using buses? Please select up to 2 answers.

Base: all non-users n = 2382. All non-users who would consider n = 671, would not consider n = 1711

## Network stability

Having standardised change dates throughout the year has provided some approach to containing the level of alterations. However scope still remains for frequent changes to bus services across Greater Manchester – changing routes, times or withdrawing services. Users are faced with constant churn and very little advance information or prompt for when their service is changing.

We also know from the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS)<sup>4</sup> results that around 40 per cent of passengers in Greater Manchester 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.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1

<sup>4</sup> [Bus Passenger Survey](#). Transport Focus

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<sup>5</sup> report we reported on 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.

Limiting timetable changes to agreed dates and sufficient 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.

We have also reported on the impact on passengers of cuts to rural services. In 'Bus service reductions – the impact on passengers'<sup>6</sup> 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 research<sup>7</sup> 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 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 time<sup>8</sup>. Our case studies highlighted the challenge of setting timetables to

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<sup>5</sup> [Bus Service Changes](#). Passenger Focus. September 2010

<sup>6</sup> [Bus service reductions – the impact on passengers](#) Passenger Focus. September 2012

<sup>7</sup> [What's the holdup? Exploring bus service punctuality](#). Passenger Focus. December 2014

<sup>8</sup> [How late is late – What bus passengers think about punctuality and timetables](#). Passenger Focus. January 2014

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 passengers' highest priority for improvement. It is also linked to getting a punctual, reliable service and a seat in return for payment. Our research<sup>9</sup> has found that passengers often have poor information on fares and ticketing and types of tickets, often relying on word of 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 money<sup>10</sup> 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 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<sup>11 12</sup> 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

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<sup>9</sup> [Bus passenger views on value for money](#). Passenger Focus. October 2013

<sup>10</sup> See note 9

<sup>11</sup> [Smart Ticketing: Oxford SmartZone](#). Passenger Focus. September 2013;

<sup>12</sup> [Smart ticketing in Norfolk: what do passengers think?](#) Passenger Focus. March 2015

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.

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 - it will be important that this doesn't create a new barrier to travel.

## **Customer experience**

### **Young people's experience**

More young people use the bus than any other single group of passengers. Yet despite the importance of bus to younger people we know from our Bus Passenger Survey (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 people<sup>13</sup> 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 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.

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<sup>13</sup> [Using the bus: what young people think](#). Transport Focus. February 2018

We are pleased to see many of these many of these conclusions reflected within the consultation. We agree that the evidence base does set out the key challenges from a passenger perspective, in particular:

- The need for a simplified, easy to use fares and ticketing structure, including greater interoperability
- The importance of punctual and reliable services that go where passengers want them to go
- Greater focus on customer service: integrated and consistent journey information, personal security at the stop and on board, and driver attitudes and conduct.

3 The Economic Case concludes that the Proposed Franchising Scheme provides the best value for money compared to the partnership options because it would:

- offer a 'high' ratio of benefit to the cost to GMCA, one which is broadly comparable with the partnership options,
- provide the most economic value (Net Present Value), and
- create the best platform from which further economic value could be delivered.

Do you have any comments on this?

4 The Financial Case concludes that GMCA could afford to introduce and operate the Proposed Franchising Scheme. After completing the Assessment and in advance of this consultation, GMCA has proposed how it would fund the introduction of a fully franchised system. Do you have any comments on these matters?

Any review of the factors affecting bus use will also need to consider potential changes to the way that people want to travel. The rise of on demand services, typically using uber-style apps, presents a new model of demand which, in some areas, offers an alternative to conventional bus services. When looking at changes in bus use it will increasingly be important to determine whether this has been driven by a fall in demand or whether it represents a change in demand (i.e. a shift to new forms of public transport).

5 Taking everything into account, the Assessment concludes that the Proposed Franchising Scheme is the best way to achieve GMCA's objectives to improve bus services. Do you have any comments on this?

6 To what extent do you support or oppose the introduction of the Proposed Franchising Scheme? Why do you say this?

To assess this point, we have set out passengers' expectations and aspirations from our research. These will then need to be mapped against measures in the proposed scheme.

### **Bus Passenger Survey**

Transport Focus consults almost 50,000 passengers a year to produce the Bus Passenger Survey<sup>14</sup>. This measures passengers' satisfaction with their local bus service for a representative sample of journeys. Passengers are asked to rate their satisfaction with the bus journey they are making, across a wide range of aspects.

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<sup>14</sup> See note 4



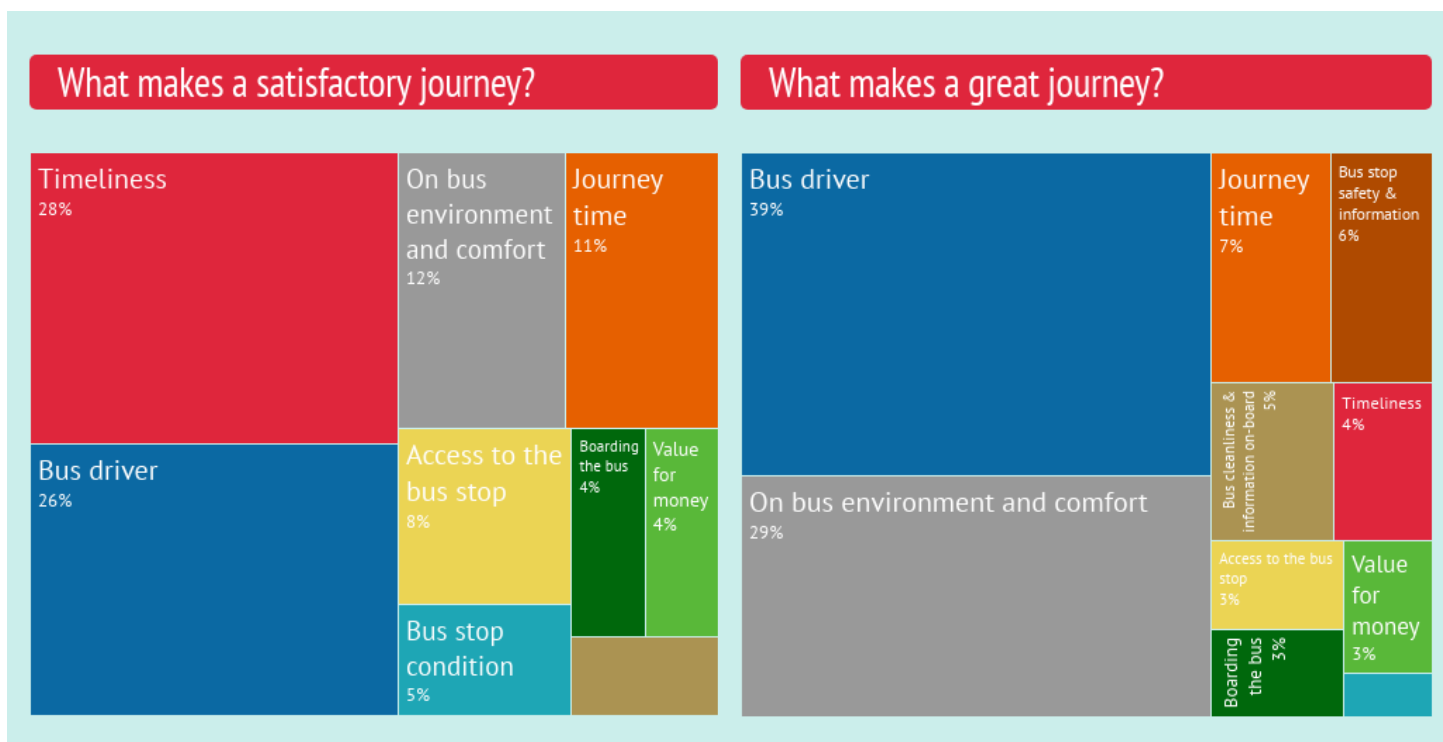
Results in Greater Manchester over the past eight years are in the table below:

Passenger satisfaction: Greater Manchester		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Journey	Overall satisfaction with the journey	84	84	86	85	82	83	86	87
	Punctuality of the bus	71	70	74	76	71	67	73	70
	Length of time of the journey	-	82	83	85	81	79	84	83
	Value for money (fare payers)	60	53	68	73	66	70	75	66
Bus stop	Bus stop - overall satisfaction	72	79	80	81	76	80	82	81
	Information at the bus stop	-	67	72	72	67	70	75	70
	Personal safety at the bus stop	72	71	75	78	75	77	82	76
On-board	Bus driver helpfulness	67	62	68	73	67	67	73	72
	Information inside the bus	57	57	61	63	63	62	62	64
	Comfort of the seats	74	72	75	77	73	76	82	79
	Personal security on the bus	82	81	80	82	79	83	87	84

These results show that for key aspects, passenger satisfaction has had a gradual increase. However the 2017 results followed a number of traffic schemes being completed, easing congestion and improving journey speed and punctuality – which had a ‘halo effect’ on satisfaction levels. The most recent results show a slight decline again, due to the effects not being sustained. Key to these effects are passengers’ satisfaction with the core service elements of punctuality, journey time and value for money, which are looked at in more detail below.

### 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 Greater Manchester 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.

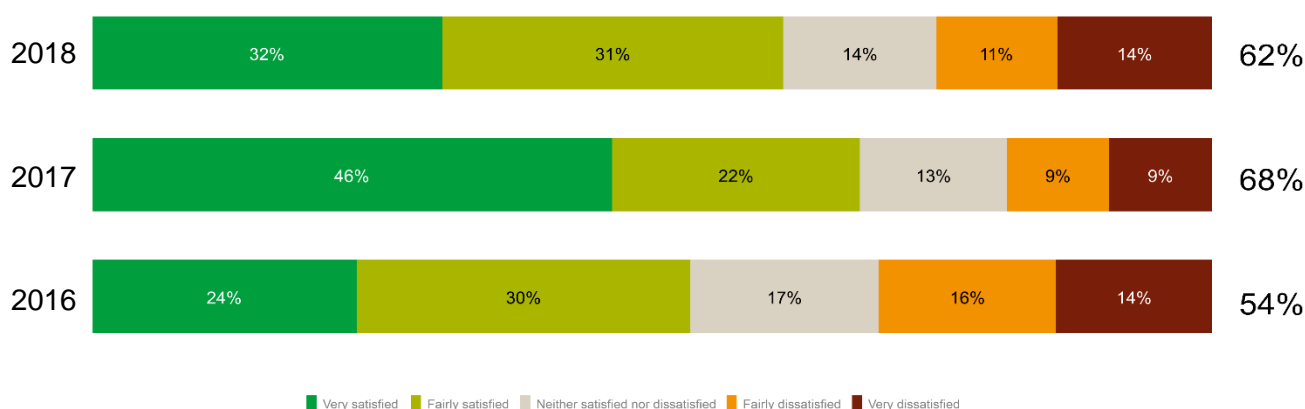
### *Punctuality and journey time*

Buses arriving on time at the stop is the second highest priority for improvement.

Passengers put congestion at the top of the list of factors affecting punctuality and journey time. Nowhere is this more evident than during the weekday peak periods.

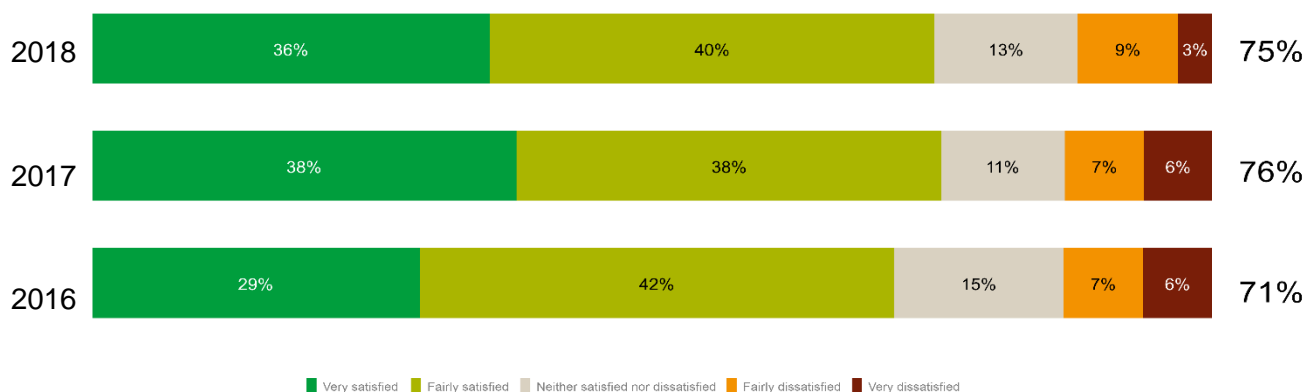
The effect of the 2017 results on punctuality can be seen best in the afternoon peak time. Although satisfaction levels during the peak are lower than the rest of the day, the improvement in congestion levels gave a significant boost to the proportion of passengers who were very satisfied – 46 per cent in 2017, compared with 24 per cent in 2016 and 32 per cent in 2018:

#### **Punctuality comparison – weekday PM peak (15.30-18.29)**



For journey time in the same afternoon peak, the proportion of passengers who were very satisfied in 2017 was 38 per cent, compared with 29 per cent in 2016 and 36 per cent in 2018:

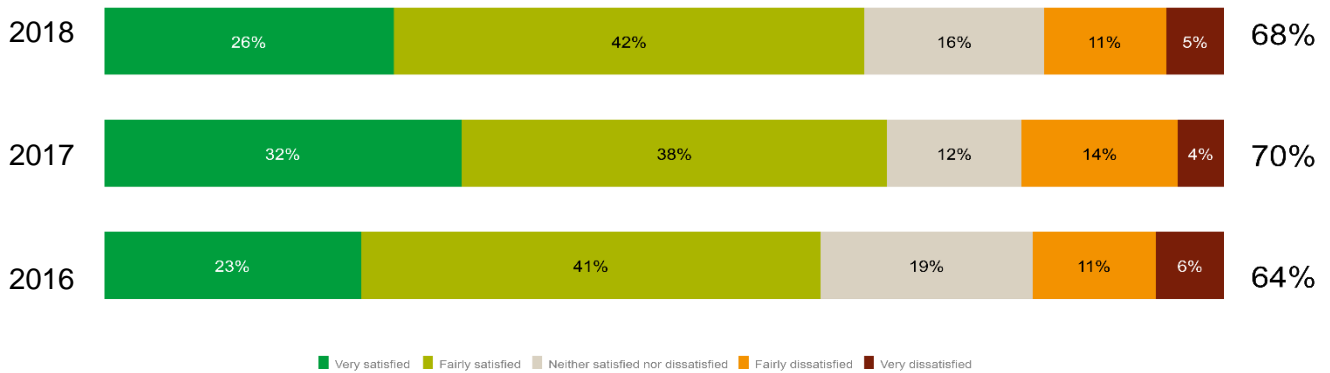
#### **Journey time comparison – weekday PM peak (15.30-18.29)**



### 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. The same afternoon peak saw the very satisfied proportion at 32 per cent in 2017, compared with 23 per cent in 2016 and 26 per cent in 2018:

#### Value for money comparison – weekday PM peak (15.30-18.29)



Transport Focus agrees that the proposed franchising scheme would 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.

**7 Are there any changes that you think would improve the Proposed Franchising Scheme? Please provide further details as to the changes you think would improve the Proposed Franchising Scheme.**

### *Passenger representation*

The proposed scheme draws attention to improved passenger representation being vital. We welcome the commitment to consult organisations representing bus users immediately after the expiry of the first franchise contracts and at 'other appropriate times' to evaluate how well the proposed scheme is working (Q9 in the full consultation). We also welcome the fact that GMCA would report on its response to these consultations – such accountability is important in building trust with users.

Transport users must have a voice that is heard and holds providers to account in a more focused, sustained way. Transport Focus has built an enviable reputation for independent, multi-modal representation, built on top quality insight and policy work which is useful to transport decision makers, together with experience of building alliances in various partnership models with authorities, operators and governments. Key examples are the well-established West Midlands Bus Alliance, chaired by Transport Focus – and the location for our recent *Give Bus a Go* campaign<sup>15</sup>. We are also working in close partnership with alliances in Liverpool City Region, West Yorkshire and emerging schemes in South Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire/Peterborough. We would be keen to discuss investment in a 'critical friend' role, to strongly articulate the passenger voice.

### *Passenger promise*

We would also advocate a 'passenger promise' to be put in place, underpinning and explaining the measures and provisions for passengers and including compensation for delays and disruption to journeys.

Operations should also comply with EU Passenger Rights regulations<sup>16</sup>:

- Non-discrimination against passengers on the grounds of nationality, disability or reduced mobility
- Compulsory disability awareness training for personnel of carriers and terminal managing bodies (except drivers) who deal directly with the travelling public
- Compensation in respect of damage caused to wheelchairs and other mobility equipment
- Right to travel information throughout a journey and information on passenger rights at designated terminals
- All carriers to have a complaints handling mechanism and passengers able to make complaints.

### *Bus priority measures*

Buses make much more efficient use of the road space and connect people to jobs, customers to businesses, provide access to essential services and reduce barriers that non-car ownership creates. Sensible traffic management focused around providing good facilities to aid people movement, rather than cars, can really help. One double decker bus can take more than 60 cars off the road. Key priority measures, such as bus lanes and traffic light technology, can speed up buses and make them more competitive than the car

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<sup>15</sup> [Give Bus a Go](#). Transport Focus. November 2019

<sup>16</sup> EU Bus and Coach Passenger Rights Regulation (EU Reg 181/2011)

as well as improving bus reliability. If designed well, and kept under review as traffic conditions change, they should be part of the solution to congestion, be part of a wider coherent plan and provided with their fair share of funding to improve operational performance but also to help tackle the air quality and congestion challenges facing the Greater Manchester region.

8 If you oppose the introduction of the Proposed Franchising Scheme, how likely would you be to support it if the changes you suggested in answer to the previous question were made?

9 Finally, do you have any other comments you want to make?

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's research can help realise that potential.

In conclusion, we believe that there is much in the proposed scheme that aligns with the needs and aspirations for transport in Greater Manchester. 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 acid test for the proposal will be in terms of the benefits it brings to passengers and how it will improve the delivery of services. We would pull together and summarise the points made across our submission in **ten actions to benefit passengers**, set out in Appendix 1, as a checklist for matching against proposed scheme specifications and targets and as the key measure of any successful model for delivery – in the outputs and how they measure up.

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

**January 2020**

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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<sup>17</sup>. 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<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup> 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 Bus Passenger Survey<sup>20</sup> provides such an independent assessment which could be used providing vital feedback on critical factors such as punctuality and cleanliness. A similar measure is used in rail to assess the passenger experience during a franchise. 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<sup>21</sup>.

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

<sup>17</sup> [Bus punctuality and timetables](#). Transport Focus. January 2014,

<sup>18</sup> See note 5

<sup>19</sup> See note 1

<sup>20</sup> See note 4

<sup>21</sup> [Bus passengers' experience of delays and disruption](#). Passenger Focus. April 2013,

## **6. Improving fares and ticketing**

Better value for money is passengers' highest priority for improvement. It is also linked to getting a punctual, reliable service and a seat in return for payment. Our research<sup>22</sup> 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<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup>. 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**

A key aim of the Act is to increase bus use. Our research<sup>25</sup> 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.

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<sup>22</sup> See note 9

<sup>23</sup> [Handling complaints and appeals from bus passengers](#). Passenger Focus. October 2009,

<sup>24</sup> Analysis of bus passenger satisfaction for those who have a disability. Transport Focus. 2016,

<sup>25</sup> See note 1