

National Bus Strategy

cta
community transport
association

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What is the National Bus Strategy?

Launched on 15th March, the National Bus Strategy sets out how bus services will be improved and funded in the future.

The 84-page strategy is shared in the report 'Buses back better', which is split into 5 key chapters:

Chapter 1 - The Opportunity – discusses why we should invest in buses and why the previous configuration of buses does not work. It includes analysis of the impact of covid-19, as well as case studies demonstrating good practice

Chapter 2 - The Buses We Want – sets out the vision for how buses can be made an attractive alternative to the private car

Chapter 3 - Delivering better bus services – shares the collaborative approach to delivering better bus services, and the support that the Government will give to LTAs and operators to deliver

Chapter 4 - Delivering for passengers – discusses how plans will work to improve accessibility and inclusion for bus passengers

Chapter 5 - A green bus revolution – shares how bus services will be made more environmentally friendly

Who does the Strategy apply to?

The strategy applies to **Local Transport Authorities (LTAs)** outside of Greater London – these are the six metropolitan combined authorities (such as Merseytravel and Transport for West Midlands), **other newer Combined Authorities (such as West of England and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough), county councils, and unitary authorities** that are not part of combined authorities with responsibilities for transport.

The strategy will be of interest to community transport operators that run **community buses, door-to-door transport and local authority commissioned services.**



Why do we need a bus strategy?

'If we are not to abandon entire communities, services cannot be planned purely on a commercial basis' - Bus Back Better: national bus strategy for England, p. 8.

The strategy document describes how, **for decades, bus services and passenger numbers have declined significantly**, despite their value in providing access to work, education, local services and leisure. These difficulties have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused passengers to shift away from public transport to the private car.

The document states that **the current configuration of bus services outside of London**, whereby services are run by commercial companies, with unprofitable, 'socially necessary' routes subsidised by local authorities, clearly **does not work and creates barriers to better integration of services, ticketing and pricing that would make the bus more attractive to current and potential passengers.**

The Government state that **'this strategy will make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper'**.

What main changes will be introduced?

Demand-responsive transport
DRT in smaller vehicles will be supported for lower-density, often rural areas

EPs and franchising for all
To be eligible for future funding from Government, Local Transport Authorities and operator(s) must collaborate and introduce either an Enhanced Partnership or franchising. Plans must also be developed in collaboration with community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people. Government will provide £25m funding to LTAs in 2021/22 to support partnership and franchising development.

Zero-emission buses
Government will support the purchase of at least 4,000 zero emission buses and set the date for ending the sale of new diesel minibuses

Changes to funding
The Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) will be reviewed and reformed so that it is no longer tied to fuel consumption. This, along with any continuing COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG), will only be provided to services provided under an EP or franchise in the future.

Municipal bus companies
The decision to prevent local authorities from setting up bus companies from scratch will be reviewed

What do Enhanced Partnerships

Enhanced Partnerships are formal **partnerships between local authorities and bus operators** (any may include other interested parties), where parties commit to a set of aims to improve services (set out in an EP Plan), as well as a set of actions to achieve those aims (set out in one or more EP schemes).

Under current guidance, which is being amended in the next few weeks, the **LTA is responsible for making the scheme, but can only proceed with their proposals if a certain proportion of local bus operators agree.**

& franchising involve?

Franchising is an arrangement whereby **a mayoral combined authority defines how services are run and how fares are set. Bus operators then provide services under contract** to the local authority. Franchising is operated extensively across Europe and in London.

The **main difference** between the arrangements is that bus services continue to operate in a deregulated environment under an EP, with operators responsible for planning and designing services.

When will these changes start to happen?

- **June 2021** - LTAs commit to implementing an Enhanced Partnership
- **July 2021** - CBSSG and new sources of funding from the Govt's £3bn budget to be contingent on EP/franchising commitments from this date onwards
- **End Oct 2021** - all LTAs to publish an annual Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) detailing how they propose to use their powers to improve services
- **April 2022** - delivery of EPs

What do these changes mean for passengers?

The Government hope that services will be improved for passengers in several main ways, including:

Service changes

Turn up and go services on major urban routes

More services at evenings, weekends and at night

More services to smaller towns and villages, potentially using new forms of DRT

DRT at low-demand times of day

Improved integration

Better integration across all buses and other modes of transport, so people can easily move between different modes

Feeder services using conventional buses or smaller vehicles to boost frequency of connections away from main roads

Better safety & access

More pushchair, luggage and wheelchair spaces

Audible and visible information, including next stop announcements

CCTV onboard buses, and bus stops that show when a bus is arriving

Greater affordability

Low, flat fares in towns and cities and lower point to point fares elsewhere

Common tickets on all services irrespective of operator so that people can hop onto different services without limits or confusion

Daily price capping so that users can use multiple buses in a day without high accumulated costs

What does this mean for the community transport sector?

The Strategy explicitly states that **'Plans must be developed in collaboration with local bus operators, community transport bodies and local businesses, services and people'**; CT are being seen as an important part of the network as providers of community bus services, demand-responsive transport and commissioned services, such as home to school and special educational needs transport.

It also links strongly with CTA's longstanding asks for more localised power for local transport authorities and communities, greater integration, and improved accessibility.

However, there are still areas that CTA will continue to seek clarity from the Department for Transport, including:

How will permit-based operators integrate with LTAs and commercial operators under franchise and partnership arrangements?

What will the BSOG reform mean for CT funding?

Can existing community transport be included in the development of new demand responsive services?

How will the new plans work in rural areas where there is currently minimal commercial provision?

How might new commercial DRT services affect existing community transport provision?

What does the strategy mean more broadly?

The Strategy is the first step back from the deregulation of buses that began in 1986 and **signifies greater powers for both national and local governments** in planning and running bus services.

The Rural Mobility Fund

When the National Bus Strategy was launched the Government also announced the **17 successful bids from the Rural Mobility Fund**. Councils were asked to bid into it early last year and we encouraged members to contact their local councils to see what services they were bidding to support. **You can see if your area received an award on the published list**. Although it is highly likely they have already agreed how the money will be spent, it may still be worth discussing this with any contacts you have at the Council if you work in any of the successful areas.

What can CTA members do locally?



Contact your LTA:

- **Find out how they are planning to implement changes** locally and how you can be involved.
- **Learn how you can involve different groups in the community.** Your experience of providing for people often excluded from public transport makes you well-placed to advocate for their needs, and to create and support opportunities for them to have a say themselves.



Collaborate:

- **Ask to join EP reference or steering groups** to influence their aims and objectives.
- **Connect with other CT operators** through forums in your LTA area to strengthen the CT voice, or contact **mariana@ctauk.org** to see if we can put you in touch with CTs in your area.
- **Work with local commercial operators or local campaign groups** trying to influence bus service improvements to advocate for CT in the development of plans.



Get in touch with CTA:

- **Fill in our survey** – CTA is gathering information on how CT has evolved over the pandemic. The survey will enable us to build a picture of scheduled services and registered routes so we can provide evidence for how the sector can be integrated in future networks
- **Share your good news stories**
- **Let us know if you have tried to get involved** and have not been able to. This really helps us make the case to Government for addressing problems with sector support and funding.

What are CTA's next steps?



CTA will:

- **Continue to seek clarity from the Department for Transport** on the issues we raised on page 9.
- **Update our resources** when we have the information.
- **Produce new content** from interviews and discussions with members, local authorities and other passenger transport experts to highlight developments and share learning.
- **Publish a report** in May to demonstrate how CT can contribute to the UK's post-covid recovery efforts and therefore why CT should be promoted, developed and strengthened. This will include a call to action for CT to be involved in the implementation of the National Bus Strategy and in local transport improvement plans.
- **Use your feedback and questions to advocate on your behalf** and support your local work.
- **Work with other national bodies** like public transport campaigners and representatives of industry and local government to ensure CT is recognised, valued and included.