



Doing Buses differently – Proposed franchising scheme for Greater Manchester

January 2021

Bus Users welcomes the continued shared vision of an integrated public transport system for the people living and working in Greater Manchester.

We agree that public transport providers and local authorities across the region need to work together more effectively to deliver the best transport offer possible. We remain unconvinced, however, that franchising is the only and best way to achieve this.

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the way we work, study, socialise and live. Many of these changes are likely to be long-term and will have an effect on any future franchising scheme.

Throughout the pandemic, operators have responded rapidly and with great innovation to changing Government policy and customer needs. They have:

- increased the use of contactless ticketing
- launched new apps to provide passengers with real-time information, service changes and capacity checking
- increased vehicle numbers on busy routes to facilitate social distancing
- introduced more frequent and deeper cleaning regimes.

These changes were introduced at an incredibly difficult time for the country and for the bus industry. The majority of operators, however, have done everything possible to make bus travel safe and to keep services running for all those needing to make essential journeys.

Despite receiving some funding from Government, operators themselves have made a significant financial investment in their Covid-19 response. Many of these measures are likely to bring long-term benefits to the people and communities they serve.

General Comments

In our submission to the first consultation in January 2020, we raised concerns about the strategic case for franchising. The current health crisis makes the projections used in the first consultation even more difficult to predict so we remain unconvinced.

We also have reservations about the economic case for franchising and the financial pressure it could place on the people of Greater Manchester if passenger numbers do not rise.

Bus Users has no view on the framework nor the regulatory structure that delivers bus services. We do know what is important to passengers, however, and that is reliable, affordable and efficient services, regardless of who runs them.

Conclusions

Our aim is for the people of Greater Manchester to have access to the best possible transport and we welcome and support this consultation process.

We know from our work with passengers that they want affordable fares, simpler ticketing and reliable services. They also want professional, well-trained drivers and staff who are able to listen to their concerns and respond to their needs.

The need for buses to be better for the environment is becoming more urgent. Some vehicles are even capable of improving air quality, through the return of clean power to the national grid and cleaning air as they travel. It is essential that these innovations are considered for Greater Manchester.

No final decision should be taken on which scheme to select until the needs of everyone in the communities of Greater Manchester are considered. The scheme should be chosen on the basis of how well it meets those needs.

Covid-19 is likely to have a long-term impact on commuting and retail across Greater Manchester. We strongly recommend, therefore, that the proposal for change is paused until we have a clearer understanding of what the future needs of communities are likely to be.

About Bus Users

Bus Users campaigns for inclusive, accessible transport. We are the only approved Alternative Dispute Resolution Body for the bus and coach industry and the designated body for handling complaints under the Passenger Rights in Bus and Coach Legislation. We are also part of a Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group working to promote the benefits of public, shared and active travel.

Alongside our complaints work we investigate and monitor services and work with operators and transport providers to improve services for everyone. We run events, carry out research, respond to consultations, speak at government select committees and take part in industry events to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard.

Bus Users UK Charitable Trust Ltd is a registered charity (1178677 and SC049144) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (04635458).

Bus Users UK

Victoria Charity Centre
11 Belgrave Road
London SW1V 1RB

Tel: 03000 111 0001
enquiries@bususers.org
www.bususers.org