

Response from Bus Users UK to the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy 2023

Bus Users UK welcomes the proposals outlined in the ‘Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy’ which are designed to support the wider objectives of making the planning system work better for communities as well as supporting levelling-up more generally, with particular focus on infrastructure that improves access to transport.

1. Building beautiful and refusing ugliness:

In supporting this objective, Bus Users UK would like to see equitable highway design at the forefront of planners’ thinking. Our town and city centres are dominated by the car, which leaves little space for public transport and active travel. Recognising the need for fairly shared space at the point of planning and design will prevent the need for ugly, costly and often ineffective modifications post-build.

2. Securing the infrastructure needed to support development:

Implementing this objective and updating the framework to support it is key to developing communities that are accessible for all. As mentioned in the policy, good infrastructure is critical to supporting a changing and competitive economy.

The infrastructure levy will bring the necessary funds to do this, but it must be available during the planning and design phase, so that it can be implemented from the start.

Any levy should not be solely available to buy transport options, it should be available to support design.

If the developer plans to offer car parking outside the home, thought should be given to sustainable car or bike sharing schemes and road space allocation for public transport and active travel.

To ensure neighbourhoods are well-served by good bus services it is critical that consideration is given to the following areas:

- Bus stops and shelter location
- Bus stop lighting
- Travel to and from bus stops
- Access to the bus – dropped kerbs etc
- Pavement parking
- Opportunity to change modes at bus stops
- Route planning – ensuring the bus or transport option goes to the destination that people need, at the time and on the days they need it
- Sensible interchange planning with other modes such as rail must be built in from the start.

3. More democratic engagement with communities on local plans:

Community engagement in all areas is paramount. Communities need to be able to have a say in how they will live, work and travel in any community.

Transport options are vital in ensuring people can access work, education, healthcare, shops and leisure activities.

4. Better environmental outcomes:

Prioritising public, shared and active travel options over the private car will support all aims within the Government's Net Zero Strategy and Environment Act.

Up to 75 people can be carried on a bus, generating far lower emissions than the equivalent 75 cars traveling to and from a neighbourhood.

While electric and hydrogen vehicles do much to support clean air, they still generate particulate waste and create their own problems around charging infrastructure and battery production and disposal.

A policy of prioritising public, shared and active travel will produce far better environmental outcomes more quickly than supposedly green cars.

5. Empowering communities to shape their neighbourhoods:

This policy is vital to the design and delivery of transport services as it will generate real-life information on people's travel habits. The information should be reviewed annually to monitor and respond to any changes in transport needs.

6. All this is needed to deliver more homes in the right places, supported by sustainable and integrated infrastructure for our communities and our economy:

If access to public, shared and active travel is not built into the planning, design and development of new neighbourhoods we risk creating more isolated communities reliant on private cars. Those people unable to drive will be denied access to all the things that allow them to lead full and active lives including work, education, healthcare, shops and leisure activities. This will have a direct impact on local economies and lead to poor physical and mental health outcomes for those affected, increasing the pressure on health and social care budgets.

Planning must be equitable to ensure that everyone has the same access to life's opportunities.

About Bus Users

Bus Users UK is a charity that 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 the 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 22 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PR
Tel: 0300 111 0001 | enquiries@bususers.org | www.bususers.org