

REPORT TO SHEVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL POLICY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE 1ST SEPTEMBER 2016

THE BUS SERVICES BILL

The Bus Services Bill is currently making its way through Parliament. It provides Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) with a wider set of tools to address inefficiencies in the local bus markets and to work with commercial bus operators to provide better local bus services.

The devolution agreement with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority includes a commitment to introduce a simpler route to bus franchising than currently exists. The bill provides the powers for TfGM to implement bus franchising.

The bill also delivers a variety of partnership options by strengthening the current Quality Partnership schemes and introducing new enhanced partnerships.

The proposed legislation also makes it easier for bus passengers to access information about routes, fares and timetables and to ensure ticketing schemes meet passengers needs.

There is some way to go before the intentions of this bill become reality. Not only has the wording to be scrutinised, but much of its implementation will be through secondary legislation..

Transport Focus(see note at end) research indicates where legislation could make a difference. They conducted research into passengers' trust in the bus industry and also the priorities for improvement. The top ten priorities that emerged were:

- 1 Better value for money from bus journeys
- 2 More buses arriving on time at their bus stop
- 3 More journeys on buses running to time
- 4 Buses running more often than they do now
- 5 More effort should be made to tackle anti-social behaviour
- 6 Buses should go to more places than currently.
- 7 There should be more stops with next bus displays
- 8 There should be better information about delays occurring on journeys
- 9 Buses should be cleaner and better maintained.
- 10 Tickets should allow travel on all bus company's services.

The overriding priority is that passengers want better value for money from their tickets. The bill should make it far easier for local authorities and operators to work together to achieve new deals such as smart ticketing.

Passengers gave high priority to buses arriving at the bus stop and running on time. Other Transport Focus research has found that punctuality is a key driver of satisfaction. It is possible that the specifications for agreements will include setting targets which will be part of performance measures. But punctuality is susceptible to other factors, particularly traffic and congestion on the roads. The bill may inspire a spirit of greater co-operation

between TfGM and bus operators so they tackle problems like this.. Providing the data to monitor service performance could help and improve clarity.

The fourth priority was for buses to run more often than they do currently. Again, this could be included in the specification for any agreement between TfGM and bus operators.

The fifth priority required more effort in tackling anti-social behaviour. If the regulations and agreements were so inclined, this could be included in the specification and measured to assess compliance.

Passengers wanted buses to serve more places than currently.. Again, the specifications for the agreements could require this. Operators could also consult with passengers and the community.

At seventh and eighth place, passengers were keen to have better information, at bus stops showing when the next buses would arrive, and about delays to journeys. A key part of the bill is a requirement on bus companies to make available data, which should help passengers' access to such information. The agreement specification could help with this. It could also help with the cleanliness and maintenance of the bus (the ninth priority). Finally passengers wanted tickets that would allow them to travel on buses from all companies.

The Bus Services Bill could help achieve the ambitions of improving services and increasing bus use.. The latest bus use statistics for January to March this year are disappointing, showing a decrease in bus use of 3.2% in England and as high as 4.1% in London, compared with the same period last year.

Transport Focus's work on trust shows that passengers trust their bus companies relatively highly. Bus operators could do more to improve customer care by helping their passengers understand who runs the bus and where any complaints can be made and by showing that they have a connection with the community.

If bus operators really want to attract more passengers and get good satisfaction scores, they need to provide punctual services that go where people want to go. They also need to put passengers at the heart of their service, and make them feel valued.

Transport Focus is an independent watchdog representing the interests of Britain's rail bus and tram passengers in England (outside of London) and passengers on scheduled coach services in England. It also represents users of England's major roads (the 'strategic road network'). Complaints are also taken up that train companies fail to resolve. It has offices in London and Manchester.

Barry King-August 25th 2016