



Call for Evidence: Bus Network in London CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT

Date of Issue: July 2022

Executive Summary:

- The bus network in London provides efficient coverage across the city at an affordable price, however increasing levels of congestion and reallocation of road space is slowing bus speeds and reducing journey reliability, making bus travel less attractive to passengers.
- Most buses in London are fully accessible, with an effective maintenance process in place to ensure accessibility aids are functional on every service. Poorly positioned street furniture, such as bins and lampposts, and inappropriate parking of cars and trucks often hinder the successful deployment of accessibility aids which risks injury to vulnerable passengers.
- Bus operators are committed to ensuring all passengers reach their destination safely, and have taken measures to address any safety and security concerns upon discovery including redesigning the front of buses to be safer, providing driver training for smoother journeys and taking steps to reduce the occurrence of pedal confusion
- We welcome the extension of TfL's consultation which shows a willingness to listen and gives greater opportunities for stakeholders to respond, however the online nature of the consultation risks the exclusion of those who are less familiar with or have limited access to the internet
- Whilst TfL's bus action plan is ambitious, without significant investment in bus priority measures to increase bus journey reliability times and increase patronage levels there is a risk increased car usage could become embedded
- Reductions in bus services will have a significant impact on bus operators and the passengers they serve
 - The removal of services will make it difficult for passengers to access employment, education, medical appointments and leisure activities and could further increase car use
 - The bus sector is a huge employer; a reduction in bus services would place a huge number of jobs at risk

About CPT:

We help a dynamic bus and coach industry to provide better journeys for all, creating greener communities and delivering economic growth.

We do this by representing around 900 members from across the industry be they large or small, bus or coach, operator or supplier. We use our influence



to campaign for a supportive policy environment, give our members practical advice and support to run their businesses safely, compliantly and efficiently and bring the industry together to share ideas and best practice. We are ambitious to make things better for passengers, inclusive in seeking out different perspectives and we are always there when our members need us.

CPT Response

1. Is the bus network in London currently fit for purpose?

In a very broad sense, we think the bus network in London is fit for purpose, the services currently delivered provide good coverage across the whole of the city at an affordable price, and enable passengers to access employment, education and leisure activities. The average age of a bus operated in London is typically younger than the rest of the country, they have the latest on board technology and are better for the environment. Additionally, London has a higher proportion of electric buses, and their numbers have been increasing consistently over the past few years.


However, high levels of traffic in London have always posed a challenge for the bus network, and the car led recovery following the pandemic has only worsened the issue. High levels of congestion caused by car use leads to an increase in bus journey times and reduces bus reliability. This not only causes delays for the passengers on board the bus, but also increases the waiting times of passengers who are waiting at bus stops further along the route.

Additionally, in some areas road space has been reallocated to pedestrians and cyclists. Whilst we are supportive of these modes, this has meant the bus network as a result is getting slower, with some routes now quicker to walk, which has made the bus less attractive to many passengers.

2. To what extent are bus services in London inclusive and accessible? What, if anything, can be done to improve this?

Buses are more accessible now than they have ever been and most buses in London are fully accessible and are used regularly by passengers with accessibility needs. Additionally, bus operators have a system in place that ensures any faulty ramp is fixed or replaced as soon as the fault is reported, meaning that the ramp is out of action for the least amount of time possible.

However, the use of accessibility aids is often hindered by inappropriate positioning of street furniture, such as a bin or a

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of three overlapping, stylized arrow shapes pointing to the right. The arrows are in shades of teal and dark blue.

lamppost, and parking of cars or delivery trucks at bus stops. Whilst TfL has taken actions to reduce inappropriate parking and to protect bus stops, this issue is still happening. This prevents buses from deploying their ramp correctly and can result in injury as the passenger is leaving the vehicle. This is extremely stressful for the passenger and poses an immediate risk to their safety whilst also disincentivising any future bus use, removing an accessible and affordable travel option for these passengers. More action is needed to ensure that bus stops are kept clear so that passengers can board and disembark the vehicles safely.

The extra space on board created for wheelchair users also provides an additional benefit for passengers with pushchairs. Whilst it is great to deliver an additional benefit to these passengers, problems often arise when the bus collects a wheelchair user and the allocated space is occupied by push chairs. This creates a difficult situation due to many passengers being reluctant to collapse the pushchairs to make room for the wheelchair user.

3. What are the most critical safety and security concerns on the bus network? What more can be done to improve safety and security on the bus?

One of the key safety concerns is the number of injuries that happen on board, it is important to point out that these are very low numbers and overall safety numbers are high however bus operators are committed to ensuring all passengers reach their destinations safely and that injury numbers are kept as low as possible. Bus operators have found that injuries caused by slips, trips and falls have been stubbornly persistent and have made up most injuries recorded. This is believed to be due to a reluctance to hold onto handrails following the covid pandemic. Operators have taken steps to reduce these including redesigning handrails and providing additional training for drivers to ensure that the vehicles do not pull away until all passengers are seated, softer breaking and avoiding bumps in the road where possible to ensure a smoother ride for passengers.

There have been several instances of 'pedal confusion' which happens when the driver is confused over which pedal he is pressing. Several high profile cases have led to a collaborative piece of work between TfL and bus operators to understand the physiological reason for this and introduce measures that can prevent future occurrences, such as audible warnings and additional training.

Bus operators provide a service that is open to everyone who wants to use it, however occasionally this means drivers encounter passengers who are abusive or under the influence. Bus operators have ensured that their drivers are prepared to welcome anyone on board and to



prioritise the safety of other passengers and themselves in the event a passenger is aggressive or refuses to pay.

Bus operators are aware that the terrorist threat level remains severe, which suggests a potential attack could be imminent. Operators have taken necessary steps to ensure their fleet is secure. Start inhibitors have been fitted into buses to make the vehicle harder for someone other than the driver to operate the vehicle. Operators have also ensured that their drivers are familiar with security protocols.

Outside of the bus, there is a concern over the lack of awareness from other road users, particularly more vulnerable users such as cyclists and pedestrians. Drivers have reported increasing situations where pedestrians are increasingly distracted by their mobile devices and not giving their surroundings their full attention. Operators have introduced additional measures to increase the safety of their vehicles, including speed limiters set to 20mph and changing the front of the vehicle from flat to curved so that in the event a pedestrian steps out and the driver does not have time to come to a complete stop, the pedestrian is safely pushed to either side of the vehicle, reducing their risk of going under the vehicle. Additionally, buses are fitted with autonomous emergency braking systems and 21 cameras, inside and outside of the vehicle.

4. How well are particular demographic or social groups in London consulted on network changes?

There is a perception that proposed changes are often consulted on when the outcome has already been decided, meaning the consultation is nothing more than 'tick box' exercise. However, TfL's recent consultation which proposes significant changes to bus services in London, including the potential removal of up to 16 bus routes has received a lot of media coverage and responses. TfL has therefore decided to extend the deadline, giving stakeholders additional opportunity to respond and demonstrates they are listening to responses. However, their resource for engaging with focus groups has been diminished, meaning their consultation is predominantly held online. This risks excluding groups, particularly the older generation, who are less familiar with online platforms, may have limited access to the internet and may not speak English as their first language.

5. Does TfL's Bus Action Plan from March 2022 address the key challenges of the bus network in London? How will it help to improve London's bus services?



TfL's Bus Action Plan is ambitious, we believe it identifies the correct priority areas and is a welcome step forward in improving bus services. However, the deliverables outlined are predominantly long term, with little focus given to what will deliver improvements to bus services in the short term. Whilst we appreciate that any plan must allow for planning and implementation, the recovery from the pandemic has been led by private car use and there is a risk that if improvements take too long to deliver, increased level of car use will become embedded.

For the plan to achieve its ambitious patronage and emissions targets, more must be done in the short term to encourage more passengers to travel by bus. We know that bus journey times are a key reason for people choosing not to travel by bus, research carried out by Greener Journeys found that nearly a quarter of car users would consider switching to the bus if journey times were quicker and more reliable¹. Our buses therefore must be protected from the congestion caused by other road users and to ensure their services are punctual, predictable and gives confidence to their passengers.

The implementation of bus priority measures will have a significant improvement on bus journey times. Reading has the second highest level of bus user per head of population outside of London and has recorded significant patronage growth in recent years, compared to the national average. Reading has implemented multiple bus priority measures on its roads including dedicated bus links and access, contraflow bus lanes which enable buses to run in both directions, traffic light priority, bus only gates, width restrictions and dedicated access to the Black Boy Roundabout. All of which have reduced bus journey times and increased bus reliability which has led to a consistent increase in patronage.

Additional measures that disincentivise car travel and encourage bus use must also be considered; road space could be allocated away from cars and given to buses that will enable buses to travel freely around the city, without sitting in congestion caused by high, car traffic levels. We know that road pricing measures are one way of discouraging private car use and in London there is currently a congestion charge in place. However, the roads in London are still heavily congested which would suggest the charge does not go far enough. The charge could be expanded to cover a wider area or the cost to enter the zone in a private car could be increased to further disincentivise car use and encourage more people to travel on the bus.

6. What will be the impact on your life, or the people you represent, if cuts in routes or frequencies are made to the bus services you depend upon?

Reductions to bus services will have a significant impact on bus operators, not only on the passengers they serve but also the staff they employ.

The removal of bus services will greatly restrict passengers access to jobs, education, medical services, leisure activities, and retail facilities, particularly those located in more rural areas. Passengers that have access to a private car may opt to drive instead, which will have a direct, negative impact on congestion levels which in turn increases carbon emissions and reduces air quality.

Cuts to bus routes and frequencies will have an even greater impact on those who do not have access to a car and will remove an accessible and affordable transport mode from passengers who need it the most. In Hackney, 67% of people do not have access to a car, they are reliant on bus services to take them to where they need to go.

Many passengers in London do not know when the bus is going to arrive, and for the most part they don't need to, 80% of bus services in London operate at high frequency, offering a 'turn up and go' service. Reductions to frequencies may disincentivise the use of public transport and force passengers to seek other alternatives.

The population in London is continuing to increase, and our existing road network does not have the capacity to cope with the increase in traffic levels that inevitably comes with population growth. It is therefore vital that a sustainable and reliable transport system is in place to support the workforce and visitors to the city. A double deck bus can carry up to 70 people at a time and takes up the same amount of road space as 3 cars and 16 bikes. Buses therefore have an important role to play in delivering a sustainable and efficient transport network.

The bus industry is a major employer, local bus operators employ an estimated 95,000 full time equivalent staff, 30,000 of which are in London². Cuts to services could place a significant number of jobs at risk. Whilst in the short term reducing services will temporarily reduce the sector's current driver shortage, we anticipate the shortage of labour to only be a short term issue. However, if in the meantime the bus network has been significantly reduced, this will have a long term



impact on the industry and will result in a reduction of work, less available jobs and less services for passengers.

Cuts to bus services could also result in the closure of multiple bus garages and depots. Currently, bus garages are in areas that are well suited for bus operations and are affordable to run. Bus staff also tend to live locally to the depot they are based, within a 15 minute radius, due to the nature of their shift patterns. The loss of these locations could result in a longer commute for staff and could force them to seek other employment. Additionally, these locations risk being developed for other purposes, such as housing. If a bus depot needs to be established in the future, these locations will no longer be available. This will force operators to seek locations that are further out of the city centre, resulting in dead mileage, increased running costs and environmental impacts.

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