



Your Vision for Buses

Moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East

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Foreword

Bus services are hugely important to people in the North East and help thousands of passengers travel every day to access work, education or leisure. We know that bus use in our region is bouncing back amongst the fastest in the UK, our network is responsible for over a staggering 160 million journeys each year, so it's clear to see the critical role buses play in the lives of local people.

When we consulted on the North East Transport Plan, the public asked loud and clear for a local bus strategy; people want to know what our plans are to improve the bus network. Working closely with regional bus operators, we are developing an enhanced partnership which will help to secure future Government funding and reshape our bus network, making it better, more efficient and user-friendly for passengers.

We want to know what the public think about our plans so far and I urge people to get involved in the Big Bus Conversation to join this important discussion. We need to take action to encourage people out of their cars and onto sustainable public transport as the region recovers from the impact of the pandemic. Tell us how we can help you to do that. We are listening and now is the time to let us know what you'd like to see.



Cllr Martin Gannon
Chair of the North East Joint
Transport Committee

Bus operators across the region have been investing to transform and improve services for a number of years, seeing the first growth in passenger numbers in a decade just before the pandemic hit. Covid 19 has had a dramatic impact on the region, changing the ways people think and travel. A deep collaborative effort between the region's bus operators, the Metro and Local Transport Authorities has steered our public transport network through the depths of the pandemic, showing what can be achieved by working together in partnership and delivering for the changing needs of customers.

The National Bus Strategy gives a pathway to the ambition of much stronger alignment between the highway network, bus services and their users, considerably raising the profile of the role of buses and enabling them to provide even better standards of service to keep the region moving and support its economic, air quality and active travel needs.

The development of Bus Service Improvement Plans for the North East is a partnership effort between the bus operators and local authorities, focused on the outcomes for passengers. Brave and bold decisions will need to be taken by all parties but, with the right supporting measures in place, we are optimistic about the future of bus services and stand ready to deliver this plan with our partners.



Martijn Gilbert
Chair, NEbus – bus
operators association

Executive Summary

What's Your Vision for Buses?

Buses are at the heart of the North East Transport Network, important to people at every stage of their lives and in every place. Working together, our local and combined authorities and our bus operators have developed some big ideas for how to make the bus play an even greater role.

Are they the right ideas? That's for you to say. What's the most important? That's for you to say.

This document describes the background to buses in the North East and then asks you to set the priorities for the future. This is your invitation to join in the Big Bus Conversation.

Over 160 million journeys a year were made by bus in the North East before the Covid pandemic. There have been big changes in the way people live and travel over the past year or so. Buses provided essential services during the pandemic, and bus ridership is making a rapid recovery as things open up again.

We want the bus network to play an even greater role in bringing healthy and fair economic growth across the region. The government is willing to back that, with funding through Bus Back Better, their strategy to make the bus a key part of the Covid recovery and 'Levelling-Up'.

We know that there is a lot to do. People living and working in our cities, towns, villages and countryside all need bus access, as do the visitors who come to this historic region. The consultation for the North East Transport Plan told us that people don't have equal access: the service offer

is very different; fares can vary a lot and can be confusing; the buses are more reliable here than in the rest of England, but could be better... and all of these factors and more contributed to a gradual decline in bus use in recent decades.

The work that has gone into this document found many ways in which the North East is well placed to grow bus use within a total transport network: harnessing technology, simplifying ticketing, improving information, and providing better integration with better walking routes to bus and better link-ups between buses, taxis, ferries, metro and rail.

Buses are essential to delivering our North East Transport Plan objective: a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East. Increasing the share of all transport that is by bus will support the Strategic Economic Plan for a growing and decarbonised economy, because an increasing proportion of the North East bus network is run by low emission vehicles, and since a bus takes the space of just 3 cars but carries many more people we can free up road space for essential trips by getting more people on buses.

The bus is uniquely well placed to give access to work and training opportunities for everyone, because it is so flexible and services can be created quickly and easily, once the funding is in place. And the more people that use the buses, the less funding they need.

Did you know that in the North East we have the lowest life expectancy of all the English regions? There are many ways in which the bus can help shift that: walking to and from the bus stop can be the difference in activity that makes someone healthier; reaching communities that are isolated can help improve mental health and stress; our buses are easily accessible and friendly for people who have extra physical or learning needs; buses help older people to get to health and social services and to travel independently for

the full range of economic and social services; buses also give young people and teenagers greater independence. The North East Transport Plan makes the commitment that we will leave no-one behind. And, of course, reducing car use can reduce traffic accidents as well as improving the poor air quality that causes so many illnesses and deaths.

We have committed to a carbon-neutral North East, overcoming inequality and growing our economy, a healthier population, through sustainable transport – bus and cycle and walk – on a network that is safe and secure.

Overall, a clear Bus Network that is easy to understand and gives confidence you can get anywhere, anytime.

We are working with bus operators to set minimum standards for each type of route, for reliability and for frequency, every five minutes on the busiest routes, every ten on urban core routes outside the very busiest; express service fast links from towns and villages into cities or connecting with rail or Metro; good bus links between towns; and more rural routes, with on-demand services where the area is so rural that regular bus routes wouldn't be used.

The great news is that we now have the opportunity to fix all of them. Our Transport Plan committed to having a Bus Strategy by April 2022



**A double decker bus can take
75 cars off the road**

(Greener Journeys)

and the government has indicated that funding for bus improvement is available providing our strategy is a good one. We want your input to tell us what good looks like. We have the partnership in place to deliver the Vision for Buses. We're asking here for your input to make it Your Vision for Buses.

Do you think good bus services are the fair way to give every adult access to education, skills and higher value jobs?

Do you think a car dominated recovery would be a disaster for our environment?

Did you know that modern buses have high-backed, comfortable seats, free wifi on board, providing comfortable journeys that with bus priorities can be a lot quicker than the car?

Tell us Your Vision for Buses and email your thoughts to buses@transportnortheast.gov.uk

With a new bus strategy we can:

- Simplify fares
- Make buses more regular, with even-spaced intervals
- Increase the rural network
- Put on more early and late services
- Improve reliability
- Recruit more drivers, creating jobs
- Improve access for people who have difficulty getting around
- Open up job sites to more people
- And much, much more...

Tell us Your Vision for Buses

Introduction

Let's think about the stories behind those who travel on the North East bus network everyday. In rural Northumberland a pensioner can travel into the nearest town to meet friends in a cafe, his lifeline to company and the highlight he builds his whole week around. In a suburb of one of our great cities, the young professional takes the bus into town; it's faster along the bus lane than it is in a car saving time; and the fact this professional doesn't need a car, adds up towards the cost of a holiday.



The Government's new 'Bus Back Better' strategy was published in March 2021, detailing how the UK's buses will bounce back post covid.

Students are travelling across Tyne and Wear to college, linking them to apprenticeships and skills which will tee them up for life. Were it not for the bus, they wouldn't be able to access the course they need to. They can't afford cars, it's too far to cycle, and their parents can't drop them at course times. In County Durham, Nana is taking the grandchildren to Beamish Museum. It will be a great day out which the kids will remember fondly for their whole lives.

Just a few of almost 450 thousand stories which are lived out on our region's network each day. If the network wasn't there, how would those stories end; and could they even be written?

Our vision for buses in the North East is simple: it is to grow bus patronage, and welcome as many people on board as we can. So many great things can flow from that. Firstly, a significant shift to bus will cut congestion on our roads. From that we can enjoy cleaner air and more reliable journeys for essential road trips for which there is no alternative to the car. It allows different choices over how we use space in our towns, villages and cities for a better and healthier standard of living and more prosperous communities. Attractive, sustainable journey options help our communities too. Family expenditure tied into a car reduces the opportunity to spend on other things. Some families have to drive to foodbanks, imagine there was an alternative so they didn't need to meet the cost of running a vehicle.

An integrated, simple, affordable bus network is essential to prevent a car-dominated recovery

Better buses will create a virtuous cycle, offering more people greater connectivity. More people can travel further to jobs and training; and the opportunity to get out and enjoy our region will be enhanced, helping our local economy and securing the mental and physical health benefits which life in a specular region such as ours can offer.

To achieve these things we need to make bus a more attractive and sustainable transport option. In this vision, bus will move to be the centrepiece of our region's transport network. It will become the network of choice because it is greener, healthier and more accessible. It will be a network that our region can be proud of.

Now is the time to act to secure the benefits of a better bus network. The Government has announced 'Bus Back Better' – a big fund to improve bus services dramatically. Through this, we can win funding. The main condition of the Government funding is that we work in collaboration with the bus operators and that they work together. We've been doing that in the North East for some time, turning round the old commercial-versus-public-sector split to improve services for people who live and work here and for visitors. Now is the time to agree and deliver an enhanced Network for greener travel choices, a more equal society, economic growth and a healthier North East.

Tell us Your Vision for Buses

That Vision for Buses should be Your Vision. You'll see at the side ten solutions that we have worked up from what you told us in 'The Big Transport Conversation' that let to our North East Transport Plan. Now it's time for 'The Big Bus Conversation'. Can you do our 'Ten Solutions Challenge'? And have we missed anything? What else is important to you? Please complete our [survey](#) or email us at buses@transportnortheast.gov.uk. And please keep an eye out for public events in your area. We want Your ideas to create Your Vision for Buses.

Ten Solutions Challenge: Can you make difficult choices?

Assume we can only do some of this. What's most important to improve? Rank the 5 most important of these to you. Give the most important a rank of 1, the next most important a rank of 2 and so on down to 5.



An enhanced network that is simple and easy to understand



Faster and more reliable journey times



A simple and flexible fares structure



Better integration between modes



More early morning and evening services



Clear and consistent information that is easy to access



Improved safety and security



Cleaner and greener vehicles



Improved connectivity beyond our boundaries



A first-class customer experience

What do you think?

People are passionate about buses – the cost of a ticket, what time it arrives, how you find out bus information and everything in between.

As part of the Big Bus Conversation, we want to hear from people across the North East on how the bus network works or doesn't work for them, and what we need to do to make buses even better. We want you to tell us what will get you out of the car and onto our bus network, helping to reduce pollution and congestion on our region's roads and increase the use of green public transport. This is just a small selection of what people have to say...

"I used to use the Q2 and Q3 all the time when I lived on the Quayside because of the lack of parking spaces in the city centre. Now we both work from home we hardly use any public transport. When we do go out it's by car. Overall the buses in the North East could be updated, more electric vehicles would be great!"



Maoge Hou, translator, Newcastle

"I don't get the bus until it is an absolute last resort. I find it difficult to know where and when to get one, depending on where I need to go. I find driving and the Metro much easier. Getting a bus usually takes a lot longer to travel indirect routes."



Emma Staw, teaching assistant, South Shields

"I haven't used a bus for some years now. Opting more to use the car purely for convenience. I live around 5 minutes' walk from a bus stop but don't have the slightest idea about frequency or cost. I would consider using the bus more if I had this information readily available – maybe even an Uber style tracker of buses, that way you can gauge if you have time to make the bus or not. I feel protection for passengers could also be addressed."



Kevin Sung, marketing professional, North Tyneside

"Living out in Corbridge I always opt for the train. I know where the station is at both ends. With the bus it's always hard to know which stop to use and where you'll end up. I know there's an express route between Corbridge and Newcastle but I never use it. Same with going to Hexham, I always use the car. The bus is ridiculously expensive for the short distance travelled. The cost used to infuriate me when my kids where young adults and needed cheap reliable public transport."



Ros Haverson, designer, Corbridge

"Buses in Durham are reasonably frequent, reliable and very affordable - even more so now with the wrinkly pass!"



Eric Sampson, retired, Durham

"The buses I use are lovely and comfortable and the drivers are helpful and chatty. My journeys are fairly pleasant but are impacted by the behaviour of other passengers, particularly those not wearing masks correctly. I use the Metro for part of my journey and connections are easy and reliable."



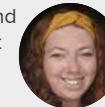
Hannah Storey, Digital Marketer, Chester-le-Street

"As a commuter living in County Durham and travelling to Heaton, my journey by bus is too slow and would increase my journey time from 30 minutes to over an hour. The perfect system for me would be a super-fast bus service from my local village to the heart of Newcastle, that carries my bicycle, and that is achievable with minimal investment. The extensive network of bus lanes through our region's population centres has already improved bus journey times, but the service needs to change to further speed up the journey times so that commuter habits will change."



John Davidson, optician, Durham

"If we are going out for a meal and drinks in town, we use a bus as it is much cheaper than a taxi and almost as convenient - we just live a short walk from a bus stop. As a family of five, a taxi can be tricky as we don't all fit in one 'normal' taxi and I love the ease and cost of being able to buy one family ticket."



Sam Rickelton, blogger, Cramlington

"I enjoy getting the bus into Newcastle. It is much easier than trying to find a parking space and I don't really like the experience of driving in town nowadays. The bus is cheaper than parking which is a bonus. The 22 is a good service in my area, fast and reliable."



Sonia Graham, retired, Walkergate

"I really like the buses I use. They're reliable, accessible and get me where I need to be. I use the key card and really like that it's easy to use. I can top up by card and don't have to use cash. The frequency is spot on and is really handy."



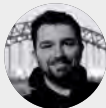
Claire, community midwife, Washington

"I use my car not the bus, it's the convenience of going door to door for me. Being elderly and having walking difficulties, I need to get as close to a place as possible. I used to love going about on the buses using my pass but it's not just doable anymore."



Raymond Wylie, retired, Whickham

"Some hours when I finish work I would have two minutes to catch a bus and others I'd have 20 minutes to wait, that's why I got my motorbike as it makes being a shift worker easier. Buses need to be cheaper."



Robert Hinds, rail employee, Gateshead

Buses – the heart of our network

North East England – Our region

Home to almost two million people, our region is distinct and diverse. It consists of urban and rural communities all with a rich history and positive people who want to contribute to moving our country forward.

Our cities, towns, villages and countryside are home to a wide range of leisure, cultural, sporting and historical attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites (Hadrian's Wall and Durham Cathedral and Castle). The region also boasts miles of unspoilt coastline as well as Northumberland National Park. **All of these assets are supported by our bus network run by many operators.**

This mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities results in a range of transport challenges, from rural isolation in more remote areas to poor air quality and congestion in parts of our cities, along with pockets of 'transport poverty' across the entire region.

Buses already play a key role in alleviating these problems. This is because they are at the heart of our well-established public and sustainable transport system. Buses are our most used form of public transport and make a real difference to people's everyday lives, allowing them to get to work, to visit friends and family, to the shops, get to essential services such as schools and hospitals, onward national transport and more.

Buses reach and connect communities where other types of transport can't – providing a lifeline for people across the North East in both rural and urban areas.

However, the bus network varies across our region; in large towns and cities it is much sparser at night-time and on Sundays than during the

162.4 million bus passenger journeys in 2018/19

making buses our region's most-used form of public transport.

75% of North East public transport trips are by bus

daytime, while many smaller towns have fewer buses and our smallest rural villages have infrequent or no service.

Customer facilities range widely from high quality Interchanges in both rural and urban areas such as Hexham bus station and South Shields interchange, to bus stops in both urban and rural areas with no timetable, signpost or road markings. All this combined shows that we have a significant opportunity to build on our strong existing assets.

From mid 2018/19 to the end of 2019/20 there was an increase of

1 million passenger journeys

We are facing significant challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause for reflection and also a call to action. We need solutions to live with, recover and renew from the pandemic, while restoring faith in our bus network and improving it further. We know there is room for improvement, and we are going to do this by working collaboratively in partnership.

We want to deliver a bus network where buses are more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better coordinated and cheaper, providing a fully integrated service with simple, multi-modal tickets, more bus priority measures, high-quality information for all passengers in more places, and better turn-up-and-go frequencies that keep running into the evenings and at weekends.

Delivering high quality, sustainable public transport is a shared responsibility between operators, Local Authorities and government.

As part of our Enhanced Partnership, Local Highway Authorities in the region will also need to bring forward infrastructure to help buses such as prioritised traffic signals and bus lanes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, bus operators have adapted well by introducing emergency timetables to ensure that key workers can get to work, introducing extra cleaning, including the use of hospital grade products, and on board hand sanitisers to make buses clean and safe.

Go North East introduced one of the UK's first dedicated vaccination shuttle bus services, serving the NHS Nightingale Hospital North East in Sunderland. The service was arranged with just two working days' notice by the operator following dialogue with the local NHS Trust and Nexus. Stagecoach also worked with NHS Newcastle to shuttle patients from doctors surgeries predominantly in the East of Newcastle

to the vaccination centres. This shows what can be achieved by partnership working.

Now North East bus operators are playing a key role in our recovery by helping to reconnect our towns, cities and local communities by running full timetables and supporting the region's night-time economy with promotional fare offers to encourage even more people back onto buses.

Co-operation between our local and combined authorities and bus operators has been constructive and positive throughout the pandemic. Along with the establishment of NEbus – the bus operators' association – we want to build upon this close co-operation to help all partners transform and develop the region's transport network as we begin our recovery and look towards the future.

We want buses to play an even greater part in enabling economic growth, achieving better and more equal outcomes for communities, and contributing to healthy and vibrant places to live and work in our region.

With the National Bus Strategy and the North East Transport Plan now in place, this document sets out our vision for buses as we look towards improving bus travel and attracting people back and getting more people to use buses. And it asks you to tell us Your Vision for Buses.

We will now use these opportunities to start delivering, helping buses to play an even greater part in enabling economic growth, achieving better and more equal outcomes for communities and contributing to healthy and vibrant places to live and work in our region by moving towards an Enhanced Partnership.

Strong foundations of development

The North East Transport Plan makes clear that we will embrace new technologies to meet our transport objectives and set innovation challenges to industry creating new opportunities with our network as the testbed.

Our region, well placed through its academic, clean energy and advance manufacturing sectors, can influence this evolution, potentially using its transport assets as a test bed.

Continuous change in customer preferences, transport technology and development mean we need to adopt the best innovations available elsewhere and develop new transport products and services of our own to improve our transport network.

We have a very strong platform as a base line of the customer experience which we can work together to improve further.

The majority of buses in the region accept contactless payments:

8% of payments are made on apps (NEbus)

27% of payments are made using contactless (NEbus)

Every bus in the North East has been fitted with an ITS0 (the international ticketing standard) smartcard enabled ticket machine for a number of years now and most of these machines have

GPS telematics to help improve road safety performance and provide live tracking data to provide live service information at bus stops. All operators' services can be tracked online and on mobile devices to provide up to the minute journey time information.

3rd Party free apps, such as CityMapper, are already being used in the region. These display transport options between any two locations, usually with live timing. They integrate data for all forms of transport, so show how bus links to other transport as a network.

There are already all operator tickets in the region through the SmartZone products and the Network One ticket provides an any bus, Metro and Ferry integrated travel solution. All major operators provide ticketing options direct to customer's mobile phones and today's modern buses are fitted with USB charging points, free Wi-Fi and next stop audio visual customer information systems.

We all share the ambition for funding to upgrade our existing assets to help take tickets like the existing Network One Tyne and Wear integrated bus, metro and rail product to the next level of modernisation and ease of use for more and more passengers, through greater integration.

Integration

Our region currently has the basis of a fully integrated public transport network. Presently, our ticketing offer does include some products that allow interchange between different operators and types of transport.

An integrated, simple, affordable bus network is essential to prevent a car-dominated recovery.

We do know that there are problems. The complex range of brands, fare offers, and timetables has significant limitations – for example not all the tickets valid on different forms of public transport in Tyne and Wear currently extend across the whole of our region in Durham and Northumberland.

In addition, some types of ticket still exist only in paper versions rather than using smarter forms of payment, while there is room for improvement at many interchange points.

Progress is being made. In June 2021, Network One season tickets were moved to a digital format allowing travel on bus, Metro, rail, and ferry trips, including in Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham.

The new ticket option 'All Zones Plus' can be bought on any mobile app of the region's main bus companies, Go North East, Stagecoach and Arriva, for travel on bus and Metro services – and the Shields Ferry. At the same time, existing Tyne and Wear Network One 'All Zones' tickets can now be purchased on a Pop smartcard which means that people can use one smartcard for multi-modal travel across the region regardless of which operators they are travelling with.

This significant development is one example of what can be achieved as a direct result of close partnership working between the North East Joint Transport Committee and local bus operators.

This could be just the start of what the Partnership can achieve. We will look to further modernise and expand ticketing offers into the future, with contactless bankcard ticketing now available on all of the region's main bus operators. 'Tap on Tap off' bankcard ticketing is now in trial operation on three local bus routes.

New technology has also helped make clear information more easily available, but it could be provided in more places. We want to create a



North Shields Ferry Landing



Quaylink - Newcastle Central Station

properly integrated and efficient public transport network across the whole of our region, including simpler ticketing and payment, easily available and accurate travel information and seamless interchange between different forms of transport.

This won't be just limited to some transport types, **our ambition is to create one, total network approach**, aligning different types of transport together. We want to create a transport network where walking, cycling, bus, ferry, taxi, rail and Metro are integrated to better connect all our communities.

How people travel now

Getting passengers back on the network is our first priority

Transport North East and NE bus can draw on a range of data sources to identify and understand the challenges and opportunities for bus in our region. Analysis of bus patronage data, when viewed along road use, shows that the recovery of bus passenger numbers is slower than the recovery of road traffic levels. Whilst bus passenger levels have recovered to 66% of pre-Covid levels in June 2021, we need to encourage more people onto public transport, driving a green, sustainable recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

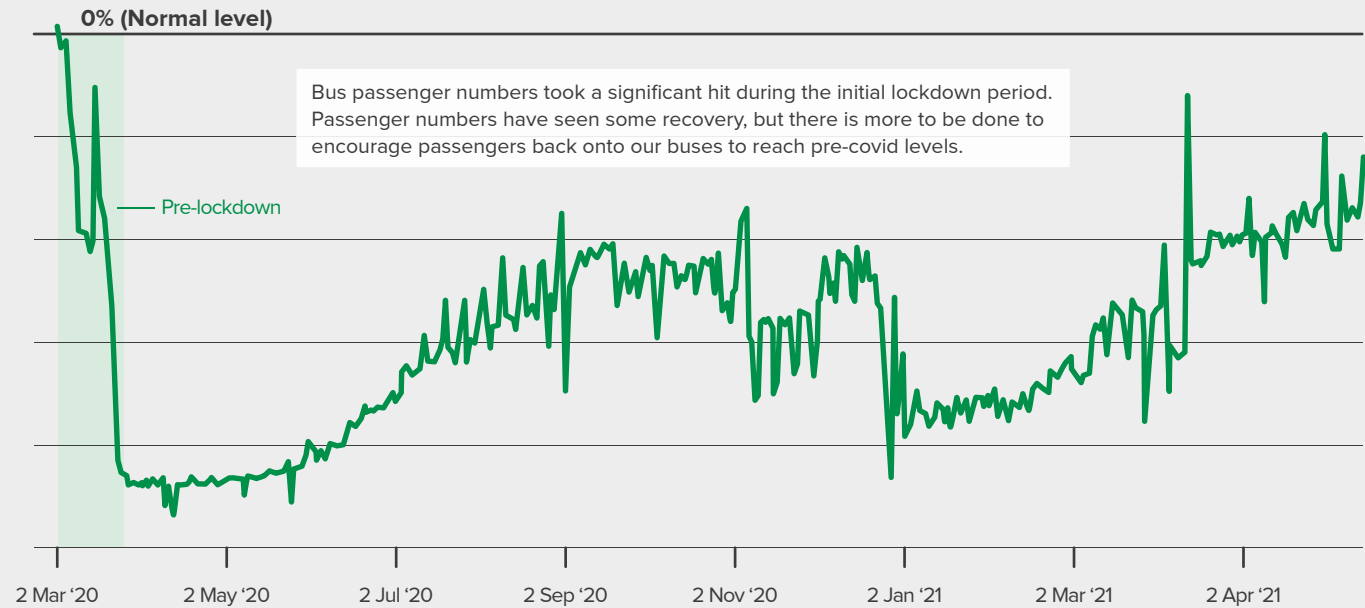
In order to avoid a car dominated recovery from Covid and to increase bus passenger numbers, it is important to look at the reasons why people are choosing not to use buses. A Transport Focus Bus passenger survey highlighted journey satisfaction levels in the North East exceeding those for England.

89% overall journey satisfaction with buses in the North East

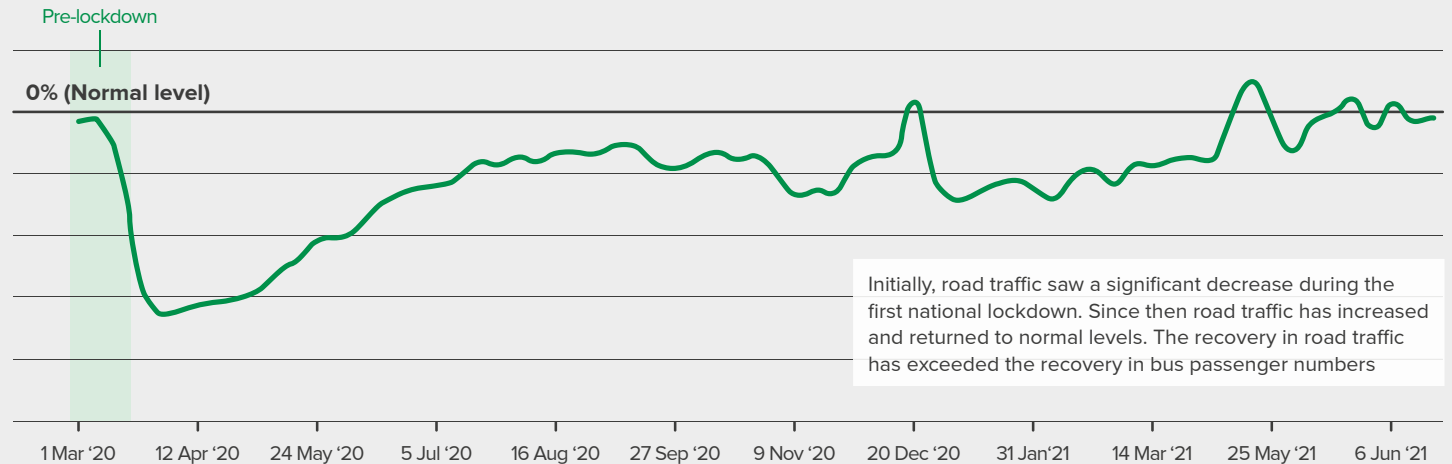
3% higher than England overall

(Transport Focus – Bus Passenger Survey 2019, North East LA7 area)

Bus Passenger Journeys



Road Traffic



How people travel now

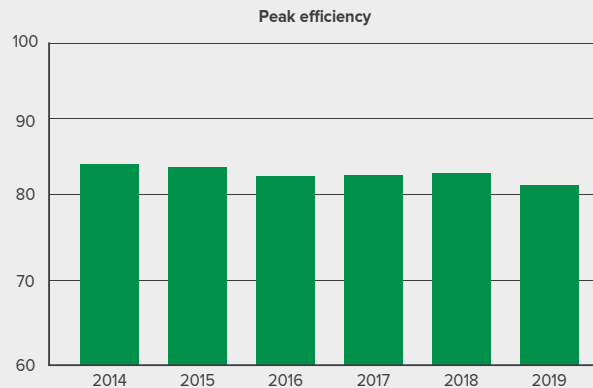
Barriers to Bus Use

We know that in order to increase bus use in the North East, we need to overcome barriers to using buses. Recent research from Transport Focus has found that in 2021 cleanliness and maintenance is now much more important for both bus users and non-users as a result of Covid-19. A 2019 Nexus Insight Panel Survey found these were the top 3 barriers to using buses:

“Buses take too long” Stated by 46%

Road congestion in North East

Efficiency is the speed of traffic during peak hours compared in compared to free flow speed. Efficient movement of buses is key to reliable timetables and journey times.

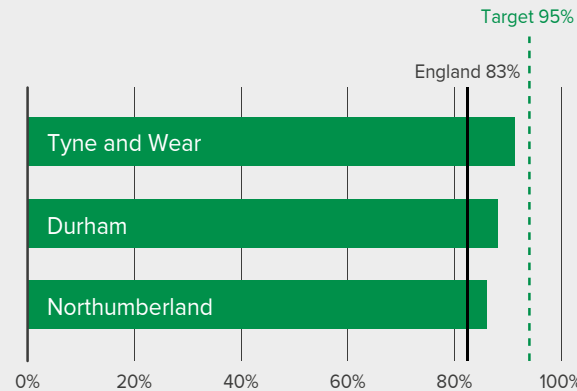


“Buses are unreliable” Stated by 37%

Bus punctuality

Punctual bus services are essential in providing a reliable passenger experience. Punctuality in our region is better than the average for England but we need to do better to reach the target of 95%

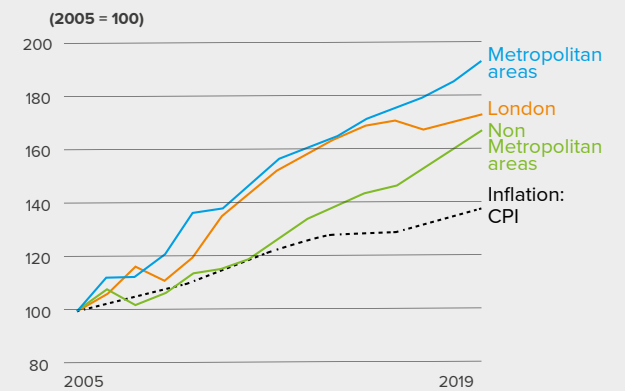
(Punctual = between 1 minute early and 5:59 late)



“Buses cost too much” Stated by 34%

Bus fares index

Nationally, bus fares have risen above inflation. An affordable network tackles transport poverty and provides an equity of opportunity to travel, connecting people to essential services, employment and leisure.



In addition to these three key barriers, non-users and lapsed users also highlighted the following barriers to using buses:



Buses not running at the right times



Behaviour of other passengers



Not enough information



Buses not going to the right places



Not enough frequency



Covid-19

1 in 5 people who are avoiding public transport are doing so because they don't feel safe to use it at the moment. Cleanliness and maintenance are much more important now and are likely to be legacies of Covid with increased user expectations in these areas.

Transport Focus - Travel during Covid-19

Shaping a green recovery

Buses play a central role in helping us achieve our wider regional objectives of working to create and sustain 100,000 more and better jobs in a growing and decarbonised economy, where social and health inequalities in our distinctive and unique region are greatly reduced.

An integrated, simple, affordable bus network is essential in preventing a car-dominated recovery.

The North East Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) identifies four areas of strategic importance, where our region has a distinct opportunity to improve its economic competitiveness. Buses can play a key role in connecting communities to these opportunities at employment sites and business parks: Digital; Advanced manufacturing; Health and life sciences; and Offshore, subsea and energy technology.

Buses are better placed than other modes of transport to adapt quickly to revised commuting patterns. For example, bus timetables have been revised for routes serving business parks like Cobalt and Quorum in North Tyneside.

Jobs

Our region's bus and coach sector employs around 8,000 people, which makes a further vital contribution to our economy. The region's major bus operators all have successful apprenticeship training programmes.

We need to deliver greater access to opportunities, enabling people in all parts of our region to have a fair chance to access opportunities for employment, skills, and higher value jobs, which would increase our region's productivity. This will help to move people off Universal Credit and into gainful employment, education and training. Buses also allow college students can get to their place of education cheaply and safely.

In total, just over 313,000 people in the North East LEP area have been furloughed at some point since March 2020.

In 2020, about 53,000 people mainly worked at home, about 5.6% of workers, less than the England level of 8.7%, In total, 243,000 worked from home at some point in their main job (26.8%), down from the England percentage of 38%.

In May 2021 6.5% of the North East's working age population was claiming Universal Credit, compared to 5.7% across England excluding London. High levels universal credit claims are evidence that our workforce and young people will be seeking opportunities. Buses help people reach further education and training across the North East, preventing, a car-dominated recovery.

Leisure and Tourism

This is an area where buses can really assist our clean recovery. The Leisure market was the quickest to bounce back from the first COVID-19 lockdown.

High-quality and integrated transport links can also help promote and strengthen tourism, leisure and regional development. Buses and coaches can also strengthen the region's visitor and tourism offer. Alnwick has a coach friendly accreditation from the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT). Beamish, the Living Museum of the North in County Durham also has this accreditation. NEbus member operators also provide bus services to key tourism destinations as well as seasonal staycation services such as the AD122 route along UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hadrian's Wall.



Arriva X18 Northumberland Coast and Castles sightseeing bus. Photo credit: Gavin Duthie

Case Study – Boosting Leisure Travel along the North Northumberland Coast

Northumberland County Council has worked with Arriva, Travelsure and other stakeholders for several years to encourage more leisure travel by bus along the North Northumberland coast.

The work is part of a drive towards more sustainable tourism and has delivered simple and easy to understand routes, co-ordinated schedules for both the summer and winter seasons, joint marketing using a common 'Coast and Castles' brand and a unique multi-operator Travelcard scheme covering a dedicated range of tickets. There is also regular liaison with customers, tourism groups and representatives from the North Northumberland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to ensure that services continue to meet local needs.

Before the organisations started working together, services and tickets were very complicated and passenger numbers were in long-term decline. However, pre-COVID the bus operators were consistently recording growth of 1-2% per annum, allowing investment in new or refurbished vehicles and more journeys to be added to timetables (especially on Sundays and Bank Holidays).

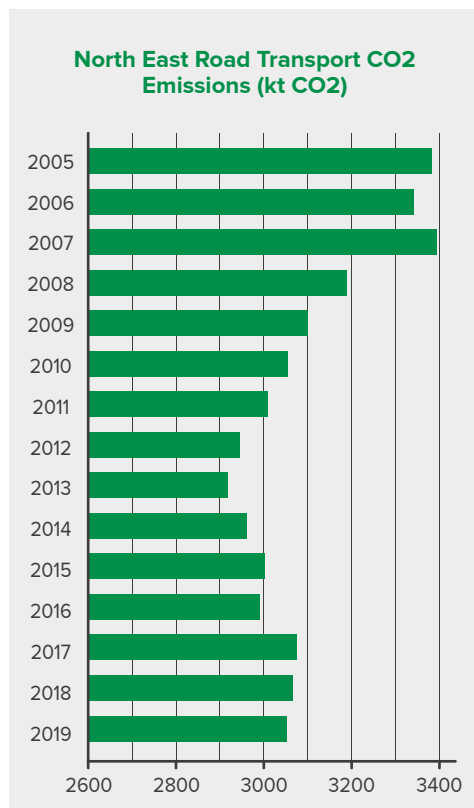
Experience here shows that people will leave their cars behind for leisure trips if the product is right, and this type of partnership can be used as a blueprint for other parts of our region.

Shaping a green recovery

Decarbonisation

In June 2019 the UK Government became the first major global economy to pass a law that requires the UK to achieve 'net zero' greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050.

Reducing road transport emissions is key to improving the quality of our air. Bus travel has a low carbon footprint by its very nature due to efficient use of road space and the numbers of passengers they carry.



Bus operators are working to bring lower emissions to the region. Go North East has introduced fully electric buses, and all major operators in the region are rolling out Euro 6 vehicles. However, so much more can be achieved as only around 32% of the commercial bus fleet in our region had the latest "Euro 6" standard engines at the end of 2020.

The single largest source of energy consumption in the North East is road transport. In the transition to clean growth and low emission road transport.

Road transport contributes

37% to the North East's carbon emissions

– the most out of any sector.

Whilst we have a number of assets in this area, including the Government's Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme which has helped support Go North East's £2m electric bus investment, we must continue to develop and deliver on our plans to improve in this area.

Key insight

A journey from Chester-le-Street to Newcastle (around 14 miles) with Go North East would save 2,665g of CO2 compared to driving – that's the equivalent of keeping a light bulb on for 250 hours.

An increase in the uptake of electric cars will not enable us to achieve our objectives alone, as it will not fully resolve health impacts, make efficient use of road space

We need to increase the volume and proportion of journeys made by low-carbon, sustainable transport types. However, a major barrier to greater bus use is congestion. Peak-hour congestion, particularly at city centre river crossings, is leading to poor air quality and unreliable bus journeys. This can impact on the reliability and therefore attractiveness of bus services.

Key insight

While 28% of households in the North East do not own a car – the highest proportion outside of London – this has shrunk from 37% in 2002/3. The proportion of households owning two or more cars has increased from 20% to 32% over the same period.

As with the rest of the UK, recent decades have seen rising levels of car use and ownership in the North East, albeit in our region it remains lower than elsewhere.

Demand for higher levels of car ownership in the coming years suggests increased future traffic congestion. We therefore need to ease passage of the buses to further improve the dependability of services, and playing an important part in tackling the climate emergency by providing more low carbon journeys which will help improve air quality, enabling the region to play its role in meeting the UK's net zero greenhouse gas emissions targets by 2050.



Peak-hour congestion, particularly at city centre river crossings, is leading to poor air quality and unreliable bus journeys.

Fares and Tickets

Fares and Tickets are key area where buses can contribute to the recovery. Working with employers to support sustainable travel for shift working and night-time employment will also enable bus services to be even more aligned with the local economy. Fares reform could also enable fares to be set at levels relevant to local economies and the post-Covid recovery.

Case Study

Working in partnership is key to realising the potential of buses in the North East. For example, in recent years, the NHS has worked closely with Arriva and Go North East on staff transport, which has also helped to improve the overall bus network. The recent introduction of carnet tickets by Go North East and Stagecoach are recent examples of what can be done to respond to revised work patterns post-Covid.

North East Transport Plan - our guiding objectives

In March 2021, the North East Transport Plan was formally adopted by the leaders of our 7 local authorities. The Plan provides the strategic framework to enable us to deliver an improved, more seamless, co-ordinated and integrated transport system across the region.

The overarching vision of the Transport Plan is:

‘Moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East’.

The five key objectives of the Transport Plan are:

-  **Carbon-neutral transport**
-  **Overcome inequality and grow our economy**
-  **Healthier North East**
-  **Appealing, sustainable transport choices**
-  **Safe, secure network**

The vision and objectives for the Transport Plan set the standard of what we want to achieve and where we want our region to be by 2035. Buses have a central role to play in helping us achieve our vision and objectives. The Plan identifies the immediate task of securing the survival of the region’s bus network through financial support from government and local authorities as the UK emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond this, it sets out the need to make buses more attractive and more efficient by helping them to travel faster and more reliably around the region, through tackling pinch points in our towns and cities. As part of our Enhanced Bus Partnership, Local Highway Authorities in the region will also need to bring forward infrastructure to help buses such as prioritised traffic signals and bus lanes.

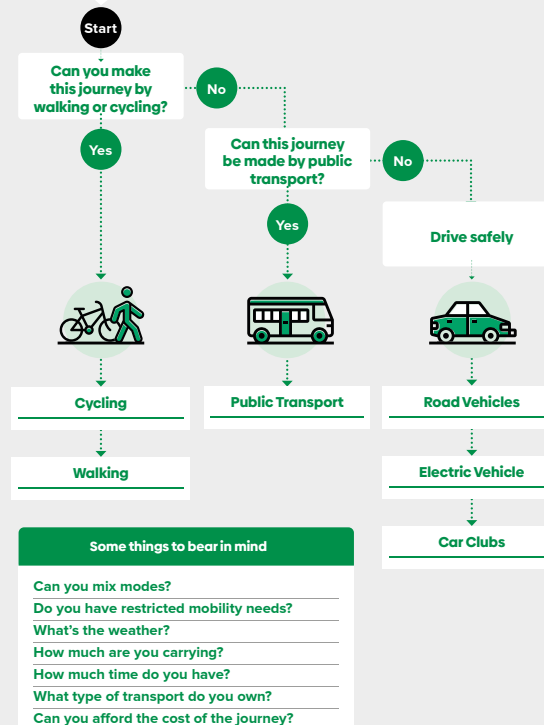
A Transport Plan for our regions' diverse geography

Our Transport Plan includes initiatives to support all of our region’s communities including those in rural settings. Your Vision for Buses needs to consider how we support rural communities too. During the forthcoming Big Bus Conversation, we will be reaching out to as many people in the region as we can; and keen to hear how an enhanced bus network can support people and businesses in rural areas.



Buses reach and connect communities where other types of transport can't – providing a lifeline for people across the North East in both rural and urban areas.

How to make the right travel choice



Our transport plans' overarching policy is about “Making the right travel choice”

We will enable people to make greener and healthier travel choices whenever they can and ensure our sustainable network takes everyone where they need to go at a price they can afford. We must ensure all our actions improve transport across the region and deliver to the objectives of this Plan so we are greener, more inclusive, healthier, safer and our economy thrives

The following section sets out how an Enhanced Partnership could enable buses to achieve our 5 Transport Plan objectives:



Creating a Carbon Neutral North East

Buses have a central role to play in helping the region to become greener and healthier.

Most current vehicles on our roads significantly contribute to carbon emissions. Dominance of the private car for commuting trips is a big problem for the region that we must address.

We want to ensure that bus use grows to help prevent increased road traffic levels as part of the post-pandemic recovery, reducing emissions and general congestion levels as a result.

Reduced reliance on cars will lead to lower congestion, fewer road traffic accidents and reduced air pollution across the region, making the region a greener and healthier place to live, work and visit.

Problems we face

Congestion

Our region has significant road congestion problems. High proportions of car use in the region is continuing to result in road corridors into the centres of Durham, Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland being regularly congested, especially at peak times and particularly at city centre river crossings. This is leading to poor air quality and unreliable bus journeys, so urgent action is needed.

Car use

Car use is continuing to rise and remains the most common mode of transport for commuting. As with the rest of the UK, recent decades have seen rising levels of car use and ownership in the North East. Commuting to workplaces is dominated by car travel, which causes congestion and increases vehicle emissions.

Commuting data suggests that rural residents

are more dependent on a car than people living in urban areas and make less use of buses, largely as a result of service provision and levels of density.

Demand for higher levels of car ownership in the coming years suggests increased future traffic congestion and poorer air quality if we do not take action.

Air Quality

As a result of car use and congestion, our region has hotspots of poor air quality in cities and towns. We face environmental directions from Government to improve air quality in parts of the region as soon as possible to reduce excessive pollution levels to within legal limits.

Although 92% of days were classed as 'low emissions' on the Air Quality Index in the North East in 2019, it is estimated that poor air quality is responsible for around 360 deaths each year in Central Tyneside alone.

A key theme from the 2019 Tyneside Air Quality Public Consultation was that improvements to public transport and walking and cycling routes are needed before many people, who said they rely on their cars for essential journeys, would feel able to change their travel behaviour.



The Voltra buses serving Gateshead and Newcastle are fully electric and the electricity used to power them comes from zero emissions sources like solar, wind and hydro power.

How can bus contribute?

Our aim is to grow bus patronage and reduce reliance on private car use. Greener travel through modal shift will enable long-term decarbonisation.

Buses are a leading solution in helping to tackle the climate emergency declared by our two Combined and seven Local Authorities, addressing our air quality challenges, and helping to achieve the UK's net zero by 2050 commitment.

With 56% of commuting trips under 10km and 37% under 5km, there is a significant opportunity to encourage greater use of buses across the region, particularly in urban areas.

Bus operators in the North East continue to renew or retrofit their fleet with greater levels of technology and reduced emissions. Recent successes include the deployment of biomethane operated buses in Sunderland by Stagecoach, and Go North East launching the region's first fully electric bus fleet in the North East, which are capable of all-day service with a single overnight charge. Bus monitoring systems can track driver performance and also reduce engine idling and improve miles per gallon (MPG).

Over £80m

invested in new North East buses since 2015

(NEbus Successful buses for a successful region 2019)

We need to continue working in partnership with operators on emission standards for buses and to further enable the use of cleaner vehicles. We will therefore seek and support continued investment in zero and low-emission vehicles, as well as other traction technology such as battery, hydrogen, and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) where appropriate.

The region also has an established Park and Ride offer with our current sites providing over 4,300 spaces. Park and Ride provision removes car traffic from town and city centres and residential areas where congestion and pollution are highest. We want to upgrade and improve our Park and Ride offer and increase the use of existing facilities in our region to encourage more people to continue their journeys by bus.

As buses take up less space than cars, there is the opportunity to free up road capacity for essential trips, making junctions and pinch points flow better and reducing emissions associated with car engines idling in congestion.

Our Enhanced Partnership could enable us to deliver targeted improvements to network efficiency through investing in a series of measures on our roads by working together. For example, introducing new rapid bus corridors can improve bus travel and attract more passengers. They will change how road space is used to help buses move more quickly.

An Enhanced Bus Partnership could enable improved rural connectivity. Using buses to target journey types and specific markets which cars are used for, such as home to school, commuting trips, and leisure trips, as well as working with employers could further ensure buses improve air quality.



Overcoming inequality and growing our economy

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of our regions' longstanding economic inequalities and challenges have now re-emerged. It took until 2016 for North East employment to return to 2008 levels following the last recession.

Challenges

Our economy is performing below the national average. In 2018, the GVA per head of the North East was £20,617 – well below the GVA per head of England excluding London (£25,346).

Productivity

Average productivity in our region remains 16% per head below the output for England. (GVA terms). Reducing road congestion and journey times by bus could help to increase productivity

Economic inactivity

23.4% of the North East's working age population (16-64) were not in work or actively seeking employment in the year to June 2020. This was above the England outside London rate of 20.2

Furlough

About 39% of eligible North East workers had been furloughed at some point as of April 2021. Each of the North East's 22 Parliamentary constituency areas had 3,200 or more furloughed employments at the end of March 2021, showing that the effects of COVID-19 have been felt right across the region.

Universal Credit (UC)

In May 2021 in the North East LEP area, just over 81,000 people were claiming UC. This is the lowest total since before the pandemic began in March 2020, suggesting that the recovery has already begun. The North East LEP area total was 6.5% of the 16-64 population, compared to 5.7% across England excluding London.

Low levels of working from home

Home working in the North East has been significantly lower than nationally. In total around 243,000 people worked at home at some point (North East 26.8%, England 38.0%). The fact that people in the North East are or have been working at home far less than other regions in England means that we must ensure that bus travel is attractive and feasible for journeys to work.

Deprivation and Inequality

Our mix of urban, suburban and rural landscapes results in complex demands for travel and is reflected in our varied transport challenges, from rural isolation in our remoter areas to poor air quality and congestion in parts of our cities. Transport and socio-economic inequality are linked. Inequalities in the provision of transport services are strongly linked with where people live, and the associated differences in access to employment, healthcare, education, and local shops. A social marketing profile of Tyne and Wear bus users found that 57% of bus users are in 'financial hardship' or 'urban adversity'.

How will Bus contribute?

Achieving our 100,000 'more and better jobs' target as set out in the North East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) will rely on better accessibility and connectivity levels an improved and expanded transport network will bring, helping improve access to labour markets, new education and skills.

Buses enable easier access to education, skills, and higher value jobs. New and improved connectivity in both urban and rural areas will allow people to access more and better jobs, stimulate increased inward investment, bring businesses closer together and can help promote social inclusion if targeted in deprived areas.

In order to overcome inequality, increasing the coverage of the bus network through greater use

of "on demand" services could offer alternatives for more isolated communities. Working with employers to support sustainable travel for shift working and night-time employment will also enable bus services to be even more aligned with the local economy.

We also recognise that the North East bus industry itself employs several thousand people across the region and can create direct job opportunities in the transport and infrastructure sectors.

**Every £1 invested
in bus infrastructure
can generate more than
£8 of economic benefit**

(Greener Journeys)

Supporting our region's key employment sectors as set out in the SEP are critical to harnessing future growth, and our bus network has a role to play in facilitating that potential, connecting people to them.

Buses will play a key role in enabling the recovery and growth of the region's tourism sector. We will also work with partners to explore ticketing initiatives and work with transport operators and tourism venues to promote sustainable travel. We will consider future schemes which could improve interchange and integration between bus and coaches and other modes of transport linking tourism assets.

Approximately 110,00 new homes are planned in the region by 2036. Transport investment can be transformational in the way that people choose to live and work across the region.

The North East Transport Plan states that we will increase the proportion of people within 25 minutes of key employment and education sites, reducing journey times and increasing productivity.

Excellent accessibility to an integrated public transport network that enhances employment and education opportunities is vital in the Covid-19 recovery.



Arriva Quorum Shuttle Bus

Buses Contribute to Economic Growth at Quorum Park

Quorum Park (developed as part of the North Tyneside Enterprise Zone) merits buses as having been key to its growth. The park entrance is served by frequent buses to Newcastle, Killingworth, Cramlington, Blyth and many other places in Tyne & Wear and South Northumberland. Quorum also part funds the 'Quorum Shuttle' service, which is run by Arriva and provides a dedicated 'peak time' link between Four Lane Ends Metro Interchange and all areas of the park.

The park has a dedicated Tenant and Travel Advisor who works in partnership with bus operators Arriva, Go North East and Stagecoach to provide free travel planning services, a central hub for ticket sales and discounts through the Quorum Qcard (which is a bespoke scheme for employees).

Over the last ten years, Quorum has seen up to 25% of people using buses to travel to work and many services have been enhanced on a commercial basis to cater for traffic to/from the park, especially in the early morning and evening. Sustainability is a cornerstone of operations at Quorum and the current bus partnership model can be used to stimulate further growth.



Buses for a healthier North East

The North East currently has the lowest life expectancy of all the English regions. Our vision for buses is to ensure that they play their part in helping us achieve better health outcomes for everyone in the region.


By working in partnership to deliver schemes and initiatives which encourage bus travel and getting people to travel by more sustainably will improve local air quality, will all help our region move towards attaining health levels at least equal to other regions in the UK.

Challenges

Life expectancy at birth for both men and women is about one year lower in the region compared with England. Similarly, healthy life expectancy is about four years lower.



Two million people



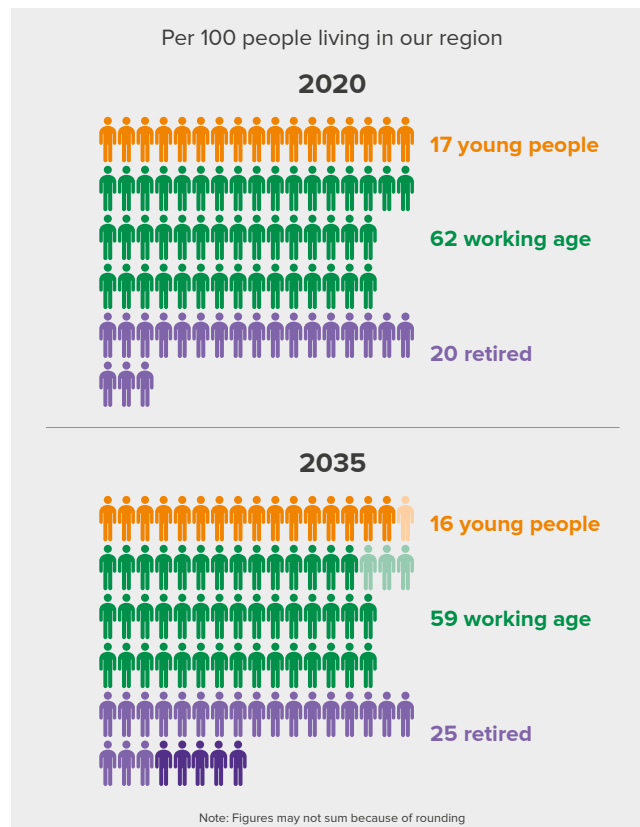
Diverse urban / rural mix



Ageing population

Age profile

We have a larger proportion of our population aged 50 to 64 and 65+ and a smaller proportion of people aged 0 to 15 and 25 to 49 compared to the national average. By 2035 more of our residents are expected to be of retirement age and fewer will be of working age.



Disability

The incidence of disability is higher in the North East region than England, with 28% of the North East population having a disability in 2018/19, compared to 21% across England.

How will Buses contribute?

Greater bus use can help improve health and wellbeing outcomes for local people, enabling the North East to attain health levels at least equal to other regions in the UK.

More people travelling by Bus in the region could result in personal health and fitness benefits resulting from increased exercise levels relative to car use. Fewer car journeys could make roads safer and less congested.

Buses reach and connect communities where other types of transport can't – providing a lifeline for people across the North East in both rural and urban areas. Improved connectivity can help promote social inclusion, reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Using buses is more social, bringing people into direct contact with their neighbours and their local community.

The region's bus operators have achieved a number of accolades through connecting communities with mobility, health and wellbeing benefits that include helping combat loneliness. In 2018 Go North East won Silver in the Inclusive Tourism category at the North East England Tourism Awards for initiatives such as 'Dementia Friends'. Stagecoach North East won Bronze in the 'Bus and the Community' category at the 2018 UK Bus Awards, following successful fundraising efforts.

Working alongside stakeholders such as disability groups across the region will ensure that the region's bus services and information continues to be made even more accessible, regardless of people's age and mobility.

Buses are the solution to enable an ageing society to be more independent for longer by connecting people to the essential services they need such as health and social care and access to outdoor spaces, if and when access to a private vehicle is no longer possible.

The North East Transport Plan makes clear that ensuring our transport network leaves no one behind by being accessible to all is a key priority, through working with stakeholders to address accessibility issues.

If we do not address our carbon emissions from transport, then the locations of emission exceedance in several urban communities will continue to have a significant detrimental impact not only on the environment but on the health of the people living and working in our region.



Appealing, Sustainable Choices

The region must introduce further measures which make sustainable travel (including bus travel) a more attractive, convenient and easy alternative to getting around by car.

Challenges

Punctuality

In 2019, overall journey satisfaction for buses in the North East was high at 89%. However, punctuality scored much lower (73%).

A 2021 Transport Focus 'getting passengers back on bus' survey from current and lapsed users found that **although COVID-19 measures are important, ensuring punctuality of buses is crucial to ensure higher use.**

Barriers

Affordability

Pricing and affordability can also be a barrier to sustainable transport. People may consider that the cost of a ticket on public transport is too expensive or may own a car and want to get maximum use out of it and cannot afford not to use it.

Transport poverty

Transport poverty refers to households and individuals who struggle or are unable to make the journeys that they need. This can be the result of low income, poor availability of public transport and needing a long time to access essential services. The impacts of transport poverty are worst for disadvantaged people in rural areas according to a recent Evidence Review for the Department for Transport.

Barriers to use in Tyne and Wear

48% of bus users say there are not enough bus lanes. Car users are split on whether there are too many or too few.

49% of bus users find the different ticket options difficult to understand, increasing to 69% among non-users.

Nexus Insight Panel, 2019
– barriers to use in Tyne and Wear

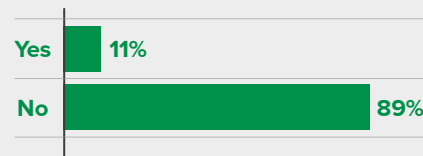
'Design a Bus'

80% want to be able to pay contactless card/phone

50% want to be able to pay with a smartcard with capping

Nexus – Insight Panel Survey
'Design a Bus' – April 2021

Bus passenger car availability Tyne and Wear



Nexus Continuous Monitoring Surveys, Bus Passenger Profile 2018/19 'Design a Bus' – April 2021

How will Buses contribute?

We need to make buses more attractive by making them faster and more reliable throughout our region and beyond for both existing and potential users.

The introduction of appropriate COVID-19 safety measures is the starting point for getting people back on buses. 2021 Research from Transport Focus found that proof of deep cleaning of the buses/new hygiene measures would have a significant effect on lapsed users if it can be evidenced.

The National Bus Strategy highlights the important role of local highway authorities in the delivery of infrastructure measures needed to speed buses through congested areas.

In recent years, North East bus operator investment has seen new vehicles that feature emissions controls, dynamic and digital onboard information announcements, wi-fi and charging sockets, and new depot facilities to ensure effective, up to date maintenance. Continuing this will make bus use more appealing.

Around a third of respondents to the 2019 Nexus Insight Panel said they used the internet while travelling on the bus, showing the importance of making sure transport is digitally connected.

Integrated multi-operator and multi-modal ticketing needs to be available for passengers across the whole of the region. Better information, joined up real-time and journey planning systems can support bus use and help to encourage car users away from their vehicles.

Partnership working to deal with anti-social behaviour and reviewing security for buses and stops could also make use more appealing.

Working closely with Local Highway Authorities to bring forward infrastructure to help buses such as prioritised traffic signals and bus lanes will make buses faster and more appealing.

We also know there are parts of our region with little or no access to a bus so we need to look at increasing the coverage of the bus network through greater use of "on demand" services, which could offer alternatives for more isolated communities, enabling improved rural connectivity.

We must also work to understand and address attitudinal reasons for non-use in the region. 2016 research from Transport Focus found that a main reason why current non users don't use buses was the failure to provide services when people want to travel (such as for work or a night out).

Central to the North East Transport Plan is our ambition to provide solutions to help people make greener travel choices where it is appropriate to do so and at a price they can afford.

Case Study

Go North East has improved bus access to Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK in Sunderland, offering later journeys after the last shift finishes. This makes sure that people aren't cut off from job opportunities because their shift ends before the last bus.



Safe and Secure Public Transport

For the region to deliver on this objective, we need to continue improving both actual and perceived of safety and security on buses, at stations, interchanges and stops and on walking routes. This will be achieved by ensuring people are confident and reassured whilst travelling by bus around the North East.

Current situation

Perceptions of safety on buses in our region is high. 88% of bus passengers are very or fairly satisfied with their personal safety when on a bus. This is higher than the national figure of 81%.

The region's main bus operators have invested in safety measures including onboard CCTV and a vehicle location system using mobile technology is also used on many buses which immediately pinpoints the location of any bus or incident in real time, improving response times and passenger support.

All major North East bus operators, including nearly all independent operators' fleets are fitted with CCTV cameras inside and out to provide a safe and secure environment and operators continue to invest as CCTV technology improves.

The 2019 Nexus Insight Panel found that 17% of people surveyed said that the behaviour of other passengers on a bus was a barrier to bus travel.

Major operators in the region have fitted buses with ITSO (the international ticketing standard) smartcard enabled ticket machines for a number of years now and most of these machines have GPS telematics to help improve road safety performance.

COVID-19

Passenger confidence in safety on board the bus has never been more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October 2020, North East's bus operators, working with the local authorities, established 'Face Covering Awareness Week' to highlight the importance of wearing a face covering on public transport. Random sampling of 671 bus passengers found that 93% were wearing a face covering and of those that were not, 70% had a valid exemption and were carrying an exemption card.

Measures that keep passengers safe and maintain their confidence in the service are crucial in ensuring that bus use recovers and grows.

Case Study

Go North East have recently launched 24-hour services on three key routes, which operate seven days a week. These buses are vital for encouraging people to use public transport again and avoid taking the car. 24-hour services can add extra reassurance of getting home safely and securely after a shift.

Case Study

In October 2017 Nexus, Gateshead Council and Go North East signed an agreement to form a new East Gateshead Bus Alliance in order to demonstrate a commitment to providing quality bus services and information. Together they made a number of commitments, such as improving safety and security.

How will Bus contribute?

We must always work to improve safety and security. An Enhanced Partnership could look at how the safety and security, and perceptions of our region's transport system can be improved,

so our residents are confident that wherever, whenever and how often they travel they can do so without fear.

Our forthcoming Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership could address issues of safety and security to ensure that bus services are safe and perceived to be safe by all.

We will review safety and security such as lighting and CCTV, around bus stops, interchange points, as well as Park and Ride locations, ensuring that people feel safe at all times of day or night. This could also enable greater uptake and use of Park and Ride sites.

We aim to grow the proportion of people travelling using sustainable modes, to improve road safety, to reduce traffic congestion, and to meet climate change targets. Continuing investment in transport connectivity is required such as upgrading bus corridors and providing a total transport Network.



We want more people using the bus network around the North East and for them to travel by bus confidently and feel reassured that they are safe and will have a pleasant journey.

Buses are Key to Delivering our Transport Ambitions

Our Vision

Create a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East.

Our Aims and Objectives

The North East Transport Plan, published in 2021, reflects this vision. It sets out clear aims and objectives, and buses are integral to achieving them.



Carbon-neutral North East

We will initiate actions to make travel in the North East net carbon zero, addressing our air quality challenges and helping to tackle the climate emergency.



Overcome inequality and grow our economy

We will return the region to pre COVID-19 levels of employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), then move forward in pursuit of the ambitions set out in the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).



Healthier North East

We will encourage active and sustainable travel to help our region attain health levels that are at least equal to other parts of the UK.



Appealing, sustainable transport choices

We will introduce measures that make sustainable modes of transport more attractive and an easy alternative for getting around the North East



Safe, secure network

We will ensure that people are confident about their safety and security when travelling around the North East.

Our Plan for Buses

Our plan will create a network that can take everyone where they need to go for work, education, healthcare, shopping and leisure activities at a price they can afford. Our proposals are designed to ensure that buses are safe and reliable, and work alongside Metro, National Rail and Ferry services to create an integrated system where people can transfer easily between modes. Our plans also encompass the whole of our diverse region, from the pre-dominantly urban centre of Tyne & Wear to the most rural parts of County Durham and Northumberland. We propose ten key solutions, based on market analysis, feedback from customers, lessons learnt in our region and best practice from elsewhere.



An enhanced network that is simple and easy to understand



Faster and more reliable journey times



A simple and flexible fares structure



Better integration between modes



More early morning, evening and weekend services



Clear and consistent information that is easy to access



Improved safety and security



Cleaner and greener vehicles



Improved connectivity beyond our boundaries



A first-class customer experience

Buses are Key to Delivering our Transport Ambitions

An enhanced network that is simple and easy to understand

We will enhance the network and make it simpler and easier to understand. We will segment the network by route and area to provide minimum standards of frequency and length of operating day, so everyone knows what to expect from their service. Buses will run to 'standard pattern timetables' with no variations to routes in the evening and/or on Sundays.

Category	Monday to Saturday Daytime	Monday to Saturday Evening	Sunday Daytime	Sunday Evening	Example Areas
Urban 'Super Core'	5	15	7-8	15	Coast Road, North Tyneside Old Durham Road, Gateshead
Urban 'Core'	10	30	15	30	Great North Road, Newcastle Sunderland – South Shields Durham – Arnison Centre
Interurban 'Express'	15	30	30	30	Newcastle – Morpeth Newcastle – Consett
Interurban 'Connect'	30	60	60	60	South East Northumberland Bishop Auckland – Crook
Rural	60-120		120		Crook – Stanhope Morpeth – Rothbury – Thropton
Deep Rural	DRT, Special		DRT, Special		Kielder, Coquetdale, Upper Teesdale and Weardale

Urban 'Super Core'

The most frequent services with buses running at least every five minutes on Monday to Saturday daytimes allowing customers to simply 'turn up and go'. Some high frequency corridors currently have several overlapping services, and we will look to simplify these to better meet customers' needs and free up resources to invest in other parts of the network.

Urban 'Core'

The backbone of the network in urban areas, with buses running at least every ten minutes on Monday to Saturday daytimes, every 15 minutes on Sunday daytimes and every 30 minutes in the evening.

Interurban 'Express'

Fast links into our cities from the surrounding towns and villages. Buses run up to every 15 minutes on Monday to Saturday daytimes and every 30 minutes in the evening and on Sundays. They operate on a limited stop basis in the city regions to minimise journey times, complementing the Metro and National Rail networks.

Interurban 'Connect'

Links between the towns in our region, complementing Metro, National Rail and Interurban 'Express' services. Buses run at least every 30 minutes on Monday to Saturday daytimes, hourly in the evening and on Sundays.

Rural

A network of routes, tailored to the specific requirements of the communities they serve, with buses running at least every two hours on Monday to Saturday daytimes. In some places it may be possible to provide a better level of service, for example where there is seasonal demand or an innovative way of delivering enhancements.

Deep Rural

We will explore the potential for Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in areas where it might be feasible to invest in dedicated resources. We will consider special measures for other places, including community-based solutions and better utilising vehicles that are already deployed at 'commuter' times on 'home to school' transport.

Urban 'Super Core' Example

Newcastle Coast Road

Arriva and Go North East currently run five services along the Coast Road, which together provide up to 17 buses per hour on Monday to Saturday daytimes between Newcastle City Centre, Sandyford, Cradlewell, Heaton and Battle Hill. Services then extend to Hadrian Park, North Shields, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and/or Blyth up to every 15 minutes. However, the times are not co-ordinated anywhere on the route.

Our aim is to streamline this network, and we would work with the bus operators to create a simple co-ordinated high frequency 'turn up and go' service between Newcastle City Centre, Sandyford, Cradlewell, Heaton and Battle Hill. Buses would then extend less frequently to Hadrian Park, North Shields, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and/or Blyth, forming co-ordinated headways where the routes overlap.

This work would be part of a wider joint network planning exercise on high frequency routes to provide a simpler service to customers and better match capacity with post-COVID demand. Any resources released by doing this would fund improvements to other services.

Interurban 'Connect' Example

South Northumberland Superbus Network

The National Bus Strategy identifies South Northumberland as a possible Superbus network because of its demographics and its patchwork of small industrial towns and large villages, including Ashington, Bedlington, Bedlington Station, Blyth, Cramlington and Morpeth.

The area already has good bus links, as many of the towns and villages lie on frequent interurban express routes to/from Newcastle. However, our aim is to link all of them with services that run at least every 30 minutes on Monday to Saturday daytimes and hourly in the evening and on Sundays. This would be a big improvement in some places, not least between Cramlington and Morpeth where buses only run hourly on Monday to Saturday daytimes and there is no service at all in the evening or on Sundays.

The enhanced network would complement existing National Rail services at Cramlington and Morpeth as well as the proposed Northumberland Line, and would improve access to work, education and leisure facilities across the area.

Faster and more reliable journey times

We know that journey time and reliability are the biggest barriers to bus travel. Reducing journey times will not only increase the attractiveness of services and drive up demand, but also improve efficiency and help bus operators to reduce costs.

At a network planning level, we will ensure that all Interurban 'Express' services follow direct routes and run on a truly limited stop basis, minimising journey times between our towns and cities. We will also increase limited stop 'express' services where alternative local buses are available. This will build on positive experience from the Arriva 'MAX' and Go North East 'X Lines' networks, where direct routes and faster journey times have helped to re-invigorate a range of inter-urban services across our region and attract new passengers.

We will also change how road space is used to allow buses to move more quickly, particularly in city centres.

From 2018 to 2020, bus operators and local authorities worked with AECOM to identify opportunities for improving bus speeds and reliability in corridors across our region through capital investment in physical priority measures and technology. The study took a data led approach, tempered by local knowledge and experiences of the operators, and produced a package of 91 possible interventions to benefit buses, which together had a combined benefit to cost ratio of 1.93.

We will build on this by working with local highway authorities to deliver infrastructure improvements that will create a network of highly visual 'rapid bus corridors'. These will



We will build on the success of Network One to create simple zone-based multi-journey tickets for the whole region.

feature continuous 'through route' bus lanes and priority at traffic signals, supported by clear road markings, red routes and better parking controls (including powers to issue penalties, for example where vehicles block yellow boxes). They will also complement existing walking and cycling schemes.

Our region is fortunate to have an Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) overseeing our roads. We will enhance the role of the UTMC to better manage buses and make them more reliable for users. Through improved road network management, the UTMC will also co-ordinate diversionary routes, produce information and protect the interests of passengers whenever there is disruption caused by highway works.

Our initial target is to bring 'peak' bus operating speeds and journey times into line with 'off-peak' periods, making services more attractive for commuting to work, school or college. We will then look to improve on this to deliver benefits throughout the day, ensuring that 95% of all buses run on time (which is the target set by the Traffic Commissioner). We will monitor performance with bus operators and highway authorities to optimise schedules and inform decisions about future investment.

A simple and flexible fares structure

We know that simple fares and low ticket prices attract passengers. We will make ticket options easier to understand and improve the affordability of bus travel across the region, but we need to do it in a way that grows demand without undermining the viability of services.

Network One already offers a range of multi-journey tickets covering all operators and modes of transport across five zones in Tyne & Wear. This was extended at the beginning of 2021 to include a regionwide weekly bus ticket, but it is the only option that exists for multi-operator journeys in many places outside of Tyne & Wear. Network One effectively caps individual operators' fares, and prices are agreed by a Board that is compliant with the Competition Act.

We will build on the success of Network One to create simple zone-based multi-journey tickets for the whole region. A simple range of 'bus only' tickets will replace the current plethora of individual operators' products, ensuring more consistency in fares levels between different places. We will expand the current range of multi-modal tickets to fully integrate buses with the Metro, National Rail and Ferry services across the region, ensuring that people can always choose the best option for their journey. There will be dedicated tickets for children, young people and adults, as well as flexible options for commuters and tourists.

We recognise that not everyone is a frequent bus user, so we will explore the potential for simple flat fares in our towns and cities. These will make it easier for current and new users to find out the price of their journey, improve value for money



We will also change how road space is used to allow buses to move more quickly, particularly in city centres.

and help to reduce boarding times. We will review other inter-urban and long-distance fares to make them more consistent, so for example a journey of 15 miles in one area will be priced the same as a similar trip elsewhere.

Most buses in our region are already fitted with smart ticket machines that accept contactless payments. We will complete the roll out of this technology, embracing the growing popularity of contactless transactions, but we will retain cash payment facilities for those who need or prefer them. We will also bring Metro, Rail and Ferry services up to the same standard to enable inter-operability of smart, digital and contactless ticketing, with a pathway to a shared back office for regionwide 'capping' of prices.

Better integration between modes

Two-way integration between Bus, Metro, National Rail and Ferry services is key to getting people to choose public transport for their whole journey. This doesn't simply mean diverting buses to serve railway stations, and we will take a pragmatic approach to do what is right for different places across our region.

Our fares plan will deliver fully integrated tickets, so we will start here by working with partners to overhaul infrastructure in city centres, town centres and other interchanges to deliver better waiting facilities, signage and information. In rural areas, where services run less frequently, we will look to optimise connection times so that buses meet trains. This will build on positive experience from places like Alnmouth, where timed connections and clear signage have helped grow the number of people accessing the station by bus.

We will also explore the potential for more Park & Ride schemes, building on the success of the three sites at Belmont, Howlands and Sniperley in Durham. Our initial focus will be on Newcastle, as Park & Ride could help reduce traffic

congestion on key routes around the city centre, which would also have a positive impact on conventional bus services.

More early morning, evening and weekend services

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes in travel patterns, especially for work and leisure, and this will continue in the future. There will be more early morning, evening and weekend buses, creating a more consistent length of operating day for services across the region. Saturdays will have the same service level as Mondays to Fridays and routes that run half-hourly or more frequently during the daytime will have buses at least hourly in the evening and on Sundays. We will also explore the potential for more night services, building on recent improvements by Go North East in Tyne & Wear.

Clear and consistent information that is easy to access

Accurate, high quality and easy to access information is critical to attracting new people to buses and retaining the

confidence of existing users. We will create a single identity for buses across the region, covering all aspects of their operation and complementing other modes of transport so that people know they are part of an integrated network. This will not be a 'one size fits all' colour scheme for buses, as we know that local and route-specific branding helps promote services and generate demand. We will introduce a standard design for all publicity (including timetables, maps and posters) and create a single website and Mobile App for buying tickets and planning multi-operator and multi-modal journeys. We will also invest in a new Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system to feed all digital outputs.

Improved safety and security

We know that safety and security doesn't start and finish when people get on and off buses. We will therefore invest in modern, comfortable, secure and well-connected waiting facilities, more staff will be on hand at key places across the network (for longer every day) and vehicles will be fitted with CCTV as standard.

Better integration between modes Buses meet Trains in Alnmouth

In 2015, Arriva worked with Northumberland County Council to improve the bus service between Amble, Warkworth, Alnmouth and Alnwick from hourly to half-hourly on Monday to Saturday daytimes. Adding an hourly X20 to the already hourly X18 created a dedicated link for Alnmouth railway station and allowed buses to be timed to meet trains. Since then, the number of people using buses to access the station has more than trebled, reducing traffic congestion at the station and helping to make the enhanced bus service more sustainable.



More early morning, evening and weekend services Go North East 24-Hour Services

Go North East runs daily 24-hour services on three routes from Newcastle to Chester-le-Street, Durham, Washington and Sunderland, and from Sunderland to Ryhope and Seaham. Most of the night-time journeys mirror established daytime services, using the same numbers and following the same routes to assist marketing and avoid confusion amongst customers. They have been very successful, improving access to jobs that involve shift work and supporting the night-time economy by giving people a safe way of getting home after work or going out with friends. There have been similar experiences in other cities with much bigger night-time networks (for example, Liverpool and Edinburgh) suggesting there is scope for growth in our region.



Buses are Key to Delivering our Transport Ambitions

A first-class customer experience

We will offer a first-class customer experience, built on seamless 'single source' real time information and delivered by well trained staff using vehicles that are fitted with comfortable seats, Wi-Fi, charging points and next stop announcements as standard. A customers' charter will tell people what they can expect and what to do when things go wrong.

Cleaner and greener buses

We will invest in new or modified vehicles to help achieve our target for net zero emission transport and tackle the climate emergency declared by our two combined and seven local authorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the amount of capital available to many bus operators for new vehicles, so we will work with them to speed up fleet replacement programmes. This will focus on maximising the use of zero emission technology and replacing the most polluting buses as quickly as possible.

Improved connectivity beyond our boundaries

Our region already has strong transport links with neighbouring areas and other parts of the UK. Many are provided by National Rail services and our plan to better integrate all modes of transport will make it easier to access railway stations by bus. However, we also have important cross-boundary bus routes linking our region with places in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, the Scottish Borders and the Tees Valley. We will work with local authorities and bus operators outside of our region to strengthen these links, many of which have unique challenges associated with the boundaries they cross. Recent work on the Cross Pennine route shows that cross-boundary partnerships can help turn around the fortunes of services like this.



Cleaner and greener buses

Go North East Voltra, Zero Emission Electric Buses for Gateshead and Newcastle

In 2020, Go North East introduced a fleet of seven zero emission electric buses to its service between Newcastle, Gateshead and Saltwell Park. The vehicles were partly funded by the Ultra Low Emission Bus Scheme and are powered by electricity from zero emission sources, including solar, wind and hydro. They have been very popular with passengers too, as they have Wi-Fi, USB charging points, air conditioning and next stop announcements as well as departure boards for Metro services. The project will also provide valuable data on the performance, range, efficiency and maintenance needs of zero emission electric vehicles, as we look to invest in more equipment like this for the future.



Improved connectivity beyond our boundaries Cross Pennine Qualifying Agreement

In 2016, Arriva and Stagecoach teamed up with Nexus, Northumberland County Council and Cumbria County Council to create a Qualifying Agreement (QA) for service 685 between Newcastle, Hexham, Haltwhistle, Brampton and Carlisle. Before this, the operators planned every aspect of the service independently, which was inefficient and had created a sub-optimal product for customers. The QA allowed everyone to work together to deliver an enhanced timetable, simpler fares and a single brand image for the route that helped to turn the tide on long-term decline in patronage and revenue. This model can be adopted for similar schemes elsewhere in the region.

Our route map for delivery

The North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) and NEbus are coming together in partnership to create a better bus network in the North East as we look to recover and grow from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Co-operation between our local and combined authorities and bus operators has been constructive and positive throughout the pandemic. We want to build upon this close co-operation to help all partners transform and develop the region's transport network as we begin our recovery and look towards the future.

Buses provide a solution to many of our region's long-standing challenges and will help us meet our regional objectives of working to create and sustain 100,000 more and better jobs in a growing and decarbonised economy, where social and health inequalities in our distinctive and unique region are greatly reduced, as set out in our Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and Transport Plan.

It took until 2016 for North East employment to return to 2008 levels following the last recession – the speed of this recovery must be faster, and buses will need to play a significant role.

An integrated, simple, affordable bus network is essential in preventing a car-dominated recovery.

With a National Bus Strategy for England now in place and the North East Transport Plan, the region has major opportunity to receive funding to improve bus travel getting more people to use buses.

The National Bus Strategy states that from the beginning of July 2021, only local authorities and bus operators who have committed to work in an Enhanced Partnership (EP) will continue to receive Coronavirus Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) or any financial support from the new £3 billion budget.



In June 2021, we agreed to enter an 'Enhanced Partnership' As part of this, we have to meet the following key milestones:

Date	Milestone	Status
June 2021	JTC and Bus operator confirmation submitted to government to develop an Enhanced Partnership (EP) in line with the National Bus Strategy requirements.	✓
July – September 2021	Working with operators and other stakeholders, and listening to people across the region to develop our plans	
October 2021	North East Bus Service Improvement Plan submitted to Government	
November 2021	Heads of Terms of Enhanced Partnership Agreed	
December 2021	Draft Enhanced Partnership Agreed for Public Consultation	
March 2022	Enhanced Partnership is officially signed	
April 2022	Enhanced Partnership begins	

We need your feedback

As we continue to develop our Enhanced Bus Partnership, we want to hear from people across the region who use and don't use buses to ensure that everyone is able to have a real say on how things should be improved.

Please get in touch and help us shape and deliver our vision for buses: info@transportnortheast.gov.uk

Delivery

Now is the time to act and secure the benefits of a better bus network. 'Bus back better' the Government's bus strategy offers us the opportunity to secure funding and the operational structures to deliver.

Under an Enhanced Partnership (EP), North East authorities will work closely with regional bus operators to deliver many developments for customers, such as simpler ticketing and network improvements.

However, all options are still on the table for the longer-term to get the very best bus system for our region. The EP is a highly complex project and the North East Joint Transport Committee will continue to work closely with bus operators to deliver the very best solution for the region.

We have developed ten key solutions, based on market analysis, feedback from customers, lessons learnt in our region and best practice from elsewhere:

-  **An enhanced network that is simple and easy to understand**
-  **Faster and more reliable journey times**
-  **A simple and flexible fares structure**
-  **Better integration between modes**
-  **More early morning and evening services**
-  **Clear and consistent information that is easy to access**
-  **Improved safety and security**
-  **Cleaner and greener vehicles**
-  **Improved connectivity beyond our boundaries**
-  **A first-class customer experience**

What do you think? Are these the right priorities? Join in the Big Bus Conversation to tell us Your Vision for Buses

We're on a mission to make buses better
for the people of the North East.

transportnortheast.gov.uk



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OF TYNE
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