

House of Commons Bus Services Bill Public Bill Committee ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

We strongly support the Bus Services Bill. The powers in the Bill will make it easier for local authorities to plan their bus services to meet the needs people in their area; and grow passenger numbers.

However, we support giving *all* local authorities the full range of powers in the Bill. Additionally, given the huge cutbacks to bus services over the last several years, we would like the Government (alongside or following the passage of the Bill) to initiate a consultation on a long-term funding strategy for buses. This need not involve new money, but would enable rationalisation of the different strands of bus funding to ensure that bus funding is fair, targeted where it is most needed, and supports environmentally friendly buses.

1. Bus cuts and the need for a long-term sustainable bus funding

Buses have been devastated by cuts over the last few years. Since 2010, over 2900 routes have been withdrawn, altered or cut back. This has led to more people becoming dependent on cars, with the resultant rise in congestion, carbon emissions and air pollution. A quarter of people in the UK have no car and the figure is even higher among older people, people on low incomes and the young. Rural areas have been hardest hit by reductions in bus services.

The powers in the Bill will enable local authorities to improve bus passenger experience and enable integrated transport networks to be planned, and so may help counter the decline in buses in some areas. However, with the pressures on local authority funding, the powers in the Bill will not be enough to protect social necessary bus routes across the country, including in areas which choose not to take up the powers.

Bus funding at the moment is multi-stranded. As well as local authority funding for supported buses, there is funding through the National Concessionary Travel Scheme; via the Green Bus Fund, and via the Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG). BSOG reimburses operators for the fuel that they have burnt. While the income it provides is critical, it is ill-suited to today's proliferation of electric and hybrid buses, and the need to reduce air pollution. Alternative models are being developed elsewhere: for example, a group of councils in South East Wales have developed an award-winning scheme which incentivises high standards, rather than being

based around fuel consumption (<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/News/News-Bulletin/November-2016/Bus-Quality-Standards-wins-at-Wales-National-Trans>)

A government-led review of bus funding need not necessitate new funding. However, it would enable a national discussion of bus funding, and provide the opportunity for passengers, the industry and local authorities to have a conversation about a sustainable way to fund buses for the long term. As local authorities put in place different emissions standards as part of their own partnership and franchising schemes, a national strategy on bus funding would also provide some certainty for the UK's bus vehicle manufacturers. Rail and roads both have a National Investment Strategy, and there is shortly to be a Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy. It therefore seems perverse that the most commonly used form of public transport has no national strategy.

We therefore support amendment NC2

2. Giving local authorities the full range of powers

We believe that devolution should mean that local authorities are able to *choose* which mode of managing their buses which best for their area.

We therefore oppose restricting franchising powers to Mayoral authorities unless a non-Mayoral authority makes a 'compelling case' to the Secretary of State. Indeed, it is in those rural areas where bus services have been decimated that the ability to cross-subsidise socially valuable services could make most difference. Furthermore, automatically giving all local authorities the power to franchise, even if this power is never used, strengthens their hand in negotiating strong partnership schemes.

We also believe that all local authorities should be able to set up a municipal bus company. Municipal bus companies receive high scorings for passenger satisfaction and in recent years have done disproportionately well in national bus awards. Having the possibility of a municipal bus company as an operator of last resort provides a safety net if bus operations ever go badly wrong. The UK rail franchise process has long included the public 'Directly Operated Railways' as an operator of last resort, and though it has only infrequently been called upon, this shows the importance of enabling a local authority to step in to continue a service if all other options have been exhausted.

We therefore oppose amendments 5, 7 and NC1.

3. Traffic management

As David Begg has shown in his report (<http://www.greenerjourneys.com/publication/the-impact-of-congestion-on-bus-passengers/>) congestion has a severe impact on bus services and is responsible for much of the decline in bus passenger numbers. We would the Secretary of State to bring forward the powers in the Traffic Management Act powers so that all local authorities are able to enforce moving traffic offences in their area. This would speed up the flow of bus services and grow passenger numbers. Parliament has already approved this and so there should not be a need for the Bus Services Bill to link the enforcement of these powers to how a

local authority manages its bus services. However, pending the Secretary of State implementing the full Traffic Management Act, we support granting powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities to take up these powers.

We therefore support a new amendment which would grant Traffic Management Act powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities.

4. Review of youth concessions

16-18 year olds must now be in education or training but must pay high fares to get there. As this is the age where many people consider learning to drive and buying a car, and when travel habits are formed, there would be a long benefit to the bus industry to encourage more young people to take the bus. At present, young people are constrained in their choice of college or course by high fares, and some are prevented from taking up the apprenticeship or course of their choice. Where MerseyTravel introduced a £2 youth fare, anecdotally attendance at local colleges improved, and footfall improved.

The allocation of ENCTS funding has been controversial, and a full-scale introduction of youth fares would be expensive, so we support a review of concessionary fares with the aim of working out a sustainable approach that would enable more young people to have the choice of a bus to get to work, education and to see their friends.

We therefore support the introduction of NC2

5. Disability Equality Training and Equality Act

We support introducing mandatory Disability Equality Training. Transport for London has trained their drivers in disability equality. Practices which discourage disabled people from using the buses (e.g. not pulling up to the stop or into the kerb to visually impaired people are aware which bus has arrived and mobility impaired people can step or roll easily onto the bus) are widespread. They not only deter older and disabled people from using the bus but can be unsafe and cause falls – Age UK estimate that 800 older people fall on buses every day (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB-SC/Still%20Waiting%20campaign/Driving%20Change.pdf?dtrk=true>)

Enabling the Traffic Commissioner to enforce bus companies' compliance with the Equality Act would bring the legislation into harmony with case law, following the recent Paulley case. Being refused entry into a bus because the wheelchair space is occupied is staggeringly common (see <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/support-and-information/latest-news/news-and-blogs/research-reveals-difficulty-for-wheelchair-users>) yet difficult to enforce as the Equality Act required the disabled person to bring a case against a bus operator. Everyone should be able to use buses regardless of ability

We support the introduction of NC3 and NC4

6. Improving bus safety

We support making confidential reporting systems mandatory for operators participating in schemes in the Act; and mandating their collection of bus casualty data. Confidential reporting has been in place in the rail industry for years and has improved safety. This amendment would reduce the number of people killed and injured in bus incidents every year.

We support the introduction of NC5

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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