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PRINCIPLES FOR BETTER BUSES

Good buses drive a strong economy, healthy environment and thriving society. They can accelerate growth and enhance access to opportunity, economic or cultural, while helping clean our air and reduce our carbon emissions. Our research finds that an ambitious modal shift target, accompanied by appropriate funding, can unlock buses' economic, environmental and social value. This requires providing people with a realistic alternative to cars.

Buses are a popular target for investment and improving them is quick and affordable, making it a strong candidate for a policy to raise living standards fast. By the end of this parliament, good buses to be proud of could be found in every community – if they are supported.

Below, we describe what better buses look like. These principles broadly apply to all public transport.

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE: CAN EVERYONE GET THE BUS?

This means buses are **inclusive**, ensuring **easy access, safety and a welcoming environment for all**, especially disabled people, through measures like audio-visual announcements and well-lit stops.

CONNECTED: CAN YOU GET WHERE YOU NEED BY BUS?

This means all communities **can live their lives by bus** and a minimum network connects every place at the right times of day and week.

RELIABLE AND PRIORITISED: CAN YOU DEPEND ON THE BUS FOR YOUR NEEDS?

This means **buses are reliable, frequent and timely**, so you can depend on them for things like work, picking up children from school or getting to a hospital appointment

AFFORDABLE WITH SIMPLE FARES: CAN YOU AFFORD THE BUS FOR EVERYDAY JOURNEYS?

This means that **the price of the bus is not a barrier to opportunity**, being **better value for money than using a car**, and discounted fares are provided for groups that need it.

ATTRACTIVE: DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE USING THE BUS?

This means buses, bus stops and stations are **well-maintained, clean and welcoming to all**. They should be and **feel safe for everyone**, especially women and minoritised communities.

INTEGRATED: ARE BUSES INTEGRATED WITH OTHER TRANSPORT AND LOCAL PRIORITIES?

This means being able to **join up your journey**, even if it involves more than one type of transport – a bus and a hire bike, for example. It also means that buses meet local priorities such as connecting to new homes.

SUSTAINABLE: ARE BUSES FULLY SUPPORTING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND CLEAN ECONOMY?

This means buses are **good enough to help people choose buses over cars**, and keeping **emissions from buses as low as possible** by putting more electric buses on the road, faster.

ACCOUNTABLE: CAN THE PUBLIC SHAPE AND IMPROVE THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

This means the **public feel ownership over local public transport** networks and know who has the power to make things better locally – and how to ask them to do so.

To achieve all this, rebuilding England's local bus networks after decades of neglect and accelerating our journey to a healthier environment, we propose four key changes for how buses are run and funded.



Strengthening local transport authorities' ability to deliver better buses

Its plans should go further by:

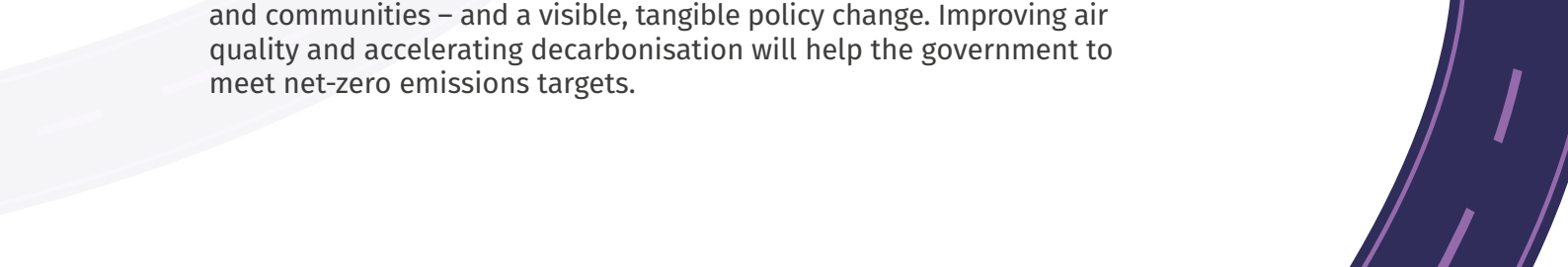
- Strengthening LTAs like this will equip them to build thriving bus networks tailored to local needs, unleash the benefits of re-regulation for passengers, and create strong foundations for better buses.



Accelerating buses' contribution to a green and healthy environment

The government's Bus Services Bill allows the secretary of state for transport to set an end-date for new diesel buses being registered in non-franchised areas after 2030. Transport decarbonisation should be accelerated by:

- A cleaner, greener bus fleet will be more attractive for passengers and communities – and a visible, tangible policy change. Improving air quality and accelerating decarbonisation will help the government to meet net-zero emissions targets.





SUPPORT

Strengthening central government support for local places to improve buses

LTAs need clarity from government about the strategic direction of local transport, reinforced by a corresponding and coherent policy and funding environment to build up local bus networks. After decades of deregulation and the impact of austerity, LTAs need support to develop the capacity to deliver better buses. The Integrated National Transport Strategy is important in this.

Central government can create a supportive environment for LTAs by:

- setting direction with a principle-led Bus Strategy for England within the Integrated National Transport Strategy. This should set principles for good local bus networks, as above
- using this plan to shape the funding and policy environment, including agreeing these principles between the Department for Transport (DfT) and HM Treasury, and consulting LTAs
- set national modal shift targets, giving LTAs confidence to be ambitious about growing public transport in line with the UK's decarbonisation pathway
- building capacity across England's LTAs with a body providing them with support and guidance.



INVEST

Securing the investment needed to unlock better buses

The way buses are funded in England is fragmented, inefficient and uncertain. A longer-term, stable funding environment – focussed on rebuilding networks and accelerating decarbonisation – would be a better use of public funds.

Funding cuts and competition have worsened long-term declines in services. Now, the government is taking steps to simplify and devolve funding. Next, it should go further by:

- consolidating and devolving funding for buses, aligned with the government's devolution framework, through five-year single-pot settlements at the Spending Review (we estimate this pot is currently worth £2.6 billion annually) as part of the shift to Total Transport Authorities
- allocating funding fairly and transparently with a formula considering bus use, need (eg population, rurality, socially necessary provision and deprivation), and local growth ambition
- increasing the annual revenue envelope for buses in line with modal shift ambitions from current levels to £3.1 billion in 2030, an increase of £740 million from 2023 funding levels
- establishing a Franchise Transition Fund of £580 million over five years to support LTAs undertaking franchising and reimbursing those that have started
- investing in local infrastructure to help buses run well, with a 10-year view of local capital requirements to invest in better buses, delivered through the five-year settlements proposed.

Consolidating, devolving and growing investment available for buses will empower LTAs to modernise and expand services in line with passenger priorities and government's core commitments.

The progressive policy think tank

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