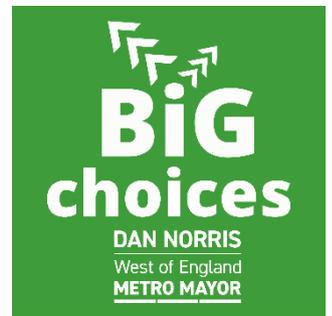


Your guide to running a Big Choices event



Thank you for running a Big Choices on buses event.

Everyone agrees we want a reliable, affordable and safe bus service in the West of England. But there are big challenges. There is a shortage of bus drivers and the cost of running buses is going through the roof.

Together we need to make the difficult but necessary decisions on transport in the West of England.

Before the event

You may be running this event as part of a regular group such as a residents association or a PTA or it may be standalone. Think about the venue. Is it easy to get to? Who is paying to hire the room? How long will your meeting be? How will you advertise it? What materials do you need? Print off the 'introducing key information', 'group work questions' and 'feedback' sheets. And remember to take enough pens!

Keeping everyone safe

When planning your Big Choices meeting you should especially consider the needs of young people or adults at risk. You should request a copy of the fire risk assessment, general risk assessment and public liability insurance from the venue and read through them to ensure that the venue is safe to be used for your meeting. You should familiarise yourself with the fire exits and procedures in case of an evacuation. You may want to share details of the event on social media, but remember don't share people's photos without their permission (or their parents for under 18s). Do not share email addresses or any other personal data of people coming to your meeting – unless you already have their permission.

Introducing the evidence

The facilitator should open the meeting and welcome attendees and explain any housekeeping rules.

It's important to remind people that everyone should be listened to with respect and come with an open mind. There is no need for everyone to go away agreeing – in fact that would be unlikely. But different views should be recorded. There isn't a correct answer on buses as there are lots of trade-offs and compromises to make.

Using the "introducing key information sheet" the facilitator will explain the challenges and opportunities facing buses in the West of England. The facilitator can also explain the facts about transport challenges facing their particular community.

Challenge areas

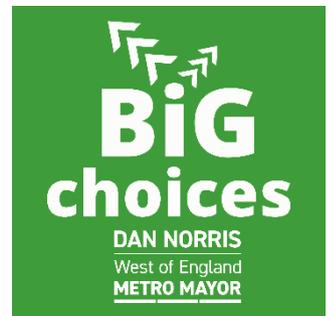
Next, if there are more than about ten people, break people into groups

The groups should allow roughly half the time for the two 'challenge areas': **my community's bus challenge** and **everyone's bus challenge**. Plus allow time at the end of the meeting for feedback.

The facilitator should tell participants when the halfway mark is reached.

In the groups, someone should be appointed to make notes.

Here are some questions you might like to consider, you may have others too:



My community's bus challenge

- Think about the buses you have. What works well? What can be improved? (You may have specific views about routes, timetables and fare zones).
- What's a reasonable amount to pay for your fare? What is too much?
- What if the choice is more frequent or more reliable services?
- Could we use community transport more effectively?

Everyone's bus challenge

- Should there be a focus on urban or rural services?
- How would you deploy the limited number of bus drivers?
- What would encourage more people to choose the bus?
- How much should councils invest in bus services per head?

When discussing the questions, remember the evidence, there isn't enough money for a perfect service or enough drivers. So think about your ideal service and then think what compromises you would be happy to make. There are no right or wrong answers.

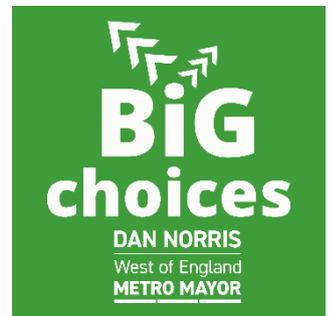
Making big choices together

Finally bring everyone back together and report back on what you have discussed.

The facilitator should thank everyone for their time in making big choices for the West of England.

Any notes should be gathered up and posted to Dan Norris, Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6EW or emailed to mayor@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

Introducing key information



Passenger numbers

Overall, about 95% of people who used to travel by bus pre pandemic are back travelling again. But they are making fewer journeys – so bus passenger numbers is around 75%. This matters because fewer passenger journeys means less fare income.

The bus driver shortage

Even with all the money in the world, bus companies have another problem, a serious bus driver shortage. There are over 100 vacancies in the West of England. The bus companies and the West of England Combined Authority are investing in recruitment campaigns and training.

Who runs the buses?

The bulk of bus services are run commercially by First Bus, others are run by Stagecoach and other providers. Around 60 bus services are subsidised (in full or in part) by the West of England Combined Authority because there is a community need but no company wants to run them as they are not commercially viable. There are government rules for this which say that subsidised services can't compete with commercial routes.

How much do we spend on buses?

Local councils are in charge of supporting bus services. Where there is a Combined Authority they pay a 'transport levy' to the Combined Authority who use the cash (and can get economies of scale) along with money given directly to Combined Authorities from Government. The list shows you how much local councils spend per head:

Greater Manchester £67.58
Liverpool £63.58
North of the Tyne £43.51

West Midlands £39.80
West of England £20.49
Cambridge & Peterborough £15.38

Bus costs

Bus costs, like everything else, are soaring. It is costing 43% more to run bus services than last year.

October timetable changes

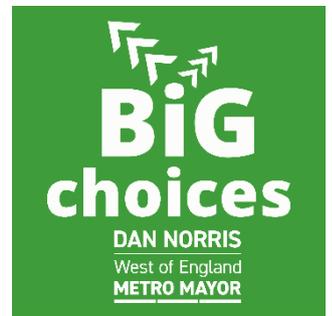
In October, government covid funding for buses runs out. The Combined Authority and the three local councils offered to fund all the buses they support at the moment until April, but that will depend, of course, on if the bus companies choose to continue running them. Given the driver shortage that is highly unlikely and so bus cuts are likely.

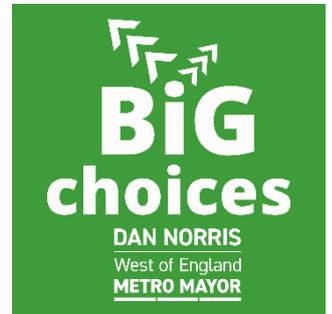
What is community transport

Community transport is anything from minibuses to mopeds and typical services include dial a rides, community bus services, hospital transport, shared minibuses to work and voluntary car schemes. Most are “demand responsive” so run when someone books them rather than too a timetable, but they can also run along fixed routes where conventional bus services aren’t available.

New money for new services

There is good news on the horizon. The West of England Combined Authority secured the second highest amount of money in the country for buses and that will kick in, in April. But this cash cannot be used on existing services – it can only be used on new services. It can also be used on supporting fares and things like community transport and demand responsive schemes with minibuses.





Group work questions

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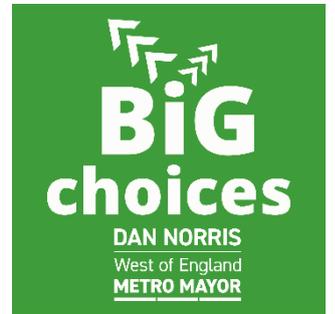
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Feedback sheet

My community's bus challenge



Everyone's bus challenge