BIG CHOICES ON BUSES

BiG choices

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West of England
METRO MAYOR

Thank you

to everyone, from youth groups to residents associations, who organised "Big Choices on buses events", and to everyone who came along to the meetings and who completed surveys. Your comments and ideas have been really useful.

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 are around 75% of what they were pre-pandemic. This matters because fewer passenger journeys means lower fare income. But there's a bigger problem: the severe bus driver shortage. There are over 250 vacancies in the West of England. The bus companies and the West of England Combined Authority are investing in recruitment campaigns and training.

What's been really helpful about "Big Choices on buses" is that so many people have been open to new ideas, are willing to take difficult decisions and trade offs and make big choices.

From the thousands of submissions there are some themes emerging:

Reliability

Across both urban and rural areas a more reliable service is more important to most people than a more frequent service.

Accessibility

Buses are seen as essential for accessing local services such as the doctors, shops and schools. Where there aren't buses people can feel isolated, especially if they are old or young. This is more acute in rural areas.

Evening services

Evening services finish too early or don't operate at all. Younger people highlighted this as being a safety concern, others mentioned the impact on shift workers and being cut off from theatres and nightclubs.

"I can plan my day if I know the bus is coming. What is a disaster is when they don't show up and I'm late for work. I have to catch the bus before the one I need to be sure."

Brislington resident

When the last bus home is cancelled I don't feel safe. So I end up getting an Uber and that's really expensive. Also I can't use my return ticket or get a refund."

Bradley Stoke resident

"My brother left being a bus driver. Abuse for doing his job and no loos"

Chew Valley resident

"I get a detention if the bus is late and so I'm last to school. That's not my fault and not fair."

Bristol student

Information

There are too many last minute cancellations which are poorly communicated; a lack of information at bus stops; and, the information on the bus company's app is unreliable. "Ghost buses" which appear on information screens and then just disappear are very frustrating.

Tickets and prices

Some thought fares were too high, while others were willing to pay more. There was majority support for allowing the Mayor to raise tax to fund public transport if the money was spent wisely and well. Tickets need to work on all buses. Mobile phone tickets can cause issues if you run out of charge.

On the buses... and waiting for one

There were some comments on the cleanliness of buses. Drivers have a really tough job so they need to be treated with respect and have good terms and conditions. Drivers also need to be sensitive to the needs of passengers with disabilities. Bus stops need to be improved so they are a betterand safer place to wait for the bus.

Mini buses and community transport

Community mini buses and on-demand (bookable) services were generally popular amongst rural respondents. They were seen as a good way to provide links to onward services into Bristol and Bath and to link up local communities. Many people had some fantastic ideas on new routes for buses or mini buses in their area.

> "The buses don't stop at the right place, they need to go into town not the Park and Ride"
>
> **Yate resident**

> "People need to say thank you to the bus drivers."
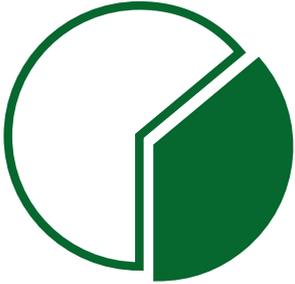>
> **Chipping Sodbury resident**

> "There aren't any buses round here. I'd use any type of bus like a mini bus to get to where I need to go."
>
> **Chew Valley resident**

> "I want to be able to do work on the bus, so I need Wifi and it to be clean and tidy and not too bumpy."
>
> **Bristol – Filton commuter**

You told us in numbers:

64%
agreed with our target to tackle the climate emergency and cut congestion by encouraging more people to use the bus

2
More than two changes would put you off using the bus

84%
want local councils to invest more towards subsiding bus services

£98
is how much you say on average councils should spend on buses per passenger per year. (£77.51 more than the current level)

What next?

All your ideas have been looked at and considered, discussions have taken place with parish councils, unitary councils and transport experts.

Using your feedback, some decisions have been taken including **an immediate reduction in single and return fares** to help with the cost of living crisis.

Ideas of specific routes have been passed to the bus companies and the independent expert running a review of buses in the West of England.

Some of your fantastic ideas make complete sense. No one should feel unsafe because their bus is cancelled at night so we are working with the bus companies to introduce a last bus home guarantee.

We plan a step change in mini bus services. That will mean finding companies to run them and buying minibuses so it can't

happen overnight. But we know the direction of travel. We are also exploring a Community Innovation Fund for local communities to trial new ideas.

We need more bus drivers if you are going to get the services you need and deserve. The West of England Combined Authority is launching a driver training scheme and the bus companies are investing in recruitment and training.

The West of England Combined Authority, as the local transport authority, in partnership with the commercial bus companies is seeking to bring in some new services from late Spring.

This is only the beginning. As more people use the buses, we can invest more into the services. It is never going to be easy. We still need more buses, more drivers, more money and more ideas. But from the summer we hope many of you will start to see some changes for the better. And together we need to keep making big choices.