‘Back on course: how to level up buses and enhance transport options for everyone’

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Transport Planning Society Bursary Competition: ***'Buses – how do we ensure they take their rightful place as a key player in the UK’s public transport network?'***

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Contents

Introduction

This paper aims to pose questions and offer the reader insight into how buses can take their rightful place in the Public Transport Network of the United Kingdom[1]. Specifically, I am interested in the idea that if buses could successfully 'level up' to use the parlance of the current government, what would this entail? Recent political turmoil looked like it could have finished off the 2019 manifesto commitment of 'Levelling up', however as of late October 2022, with the reinstatement of Michael Gove in cabinet as 'Levelling Up' minister and an upcoming announcement of successful bidders for the second round of a multi-billion-pound package of funding, 'levelling up' seems back on course. Firstly, we will attempt to define as clearly as we can, what we mean by 'levelling up'.

Transport in 'leveling up' terms has not yet been defined through primary legislation, so for official characterisation we need to look at the 'Technical Annex' to the white paper from February 2022. This has the definition of

"By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing"[2].

As to how this will be measured, we have a headline metric of the DfT regional travel to work mode split figure -starkly illustrated by figures showing London has almost 60% of journeys to work by public transport but the Southwest region and the East Midlands are as low as 6%. Supported by a co-headline metric of:

"…the average journey time to centers of employment, with the data broken down by modes of transport and at lower tier local authority level in England"[3].

We can thus infer the 'levelling up' mission is to see a substantial increase in the use of the bus and an improvement in journey times to employment centers for all road users. With the aid of the white paper, we have seen what the mission and metrics of levelling up are, the objectives remain to be considered. These are stated to be:

[1] Whilst I will refer to the UK, I will concede I am mostly talking more narrowly about England and the Metropolitan Districts in particular.

[2] (DLUHC, 2022)

[3] (DLUHC, 2022)

“Boosting productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging”[4].

For UK businesses, “Recruitment is incredibly difficult right now, and the forward-looking indicators in this report suggest it will remain so…”[5]. Given the almost unprecedented tightness in the UK labour market, the contribution buses can play to meet the levelling up objectives seem of key importance.

For employers, what role does public transport accessibility play in causing roles to be hard to fill? Considering West Yorkshire as an example, from the Combined Authorities latest ‘Labour Market Report’ we are told that overwhelmingly the problem is a lack of suitable staff, “The picture for West Yorkshire is a distinctive one: quality of applicants is more likely to be an issue for West Yorkshire employers than nationally, both in terms of skills and more general factors relating to attitude and personality”[6].

But for our purposes apparently “poor public transport is a less commonly cited problem than nationally”[7], with the labour market survey showing that whilst nationally poor public transport is a main cause of hard to fill vacancies for over 10% of businesses, but in West Yorkshire this is only the case for around 5% of companies. If this is true that only a very small proportion of business are suffering from poor public transport accessibility, in an area in apparent urgent need of being ‘levelled up’, then this would suggest the role of improving public transport might be overstated as a leveling up mission. Later I will return to this apparent paradox.

In this paper I hope to combine the overarching theme of levelling up with more focused considerations of the UK Bus industry itself. This will require considering the structure and governance of the industry. Broadly, when considering the bus industry in the UK or globally we see a dichotomy between virtuous circles and vicious circles. I will not make a claim that any one model of bus regulation or operation is the best way to deliver the virtuous circles across the UK, that will be necessary to ‘level up’; but will through consideration of case studies, attempt to draw out some recommendations.

This paper begins with an initial chapter that gives a brief history and synopsis of the current state of the bus industry to set the scene. I will then present case studies of a mixture of themes and places, this section draws on primary research of telephone interviews with 10 key figures in both policy and operational roles in the bus industry. These interviews followed a general principle of trying to better understand key issues including franchising, network design, operational matters and links to wider economic and social policy. Summaries of these discussions are included in an Appendix.

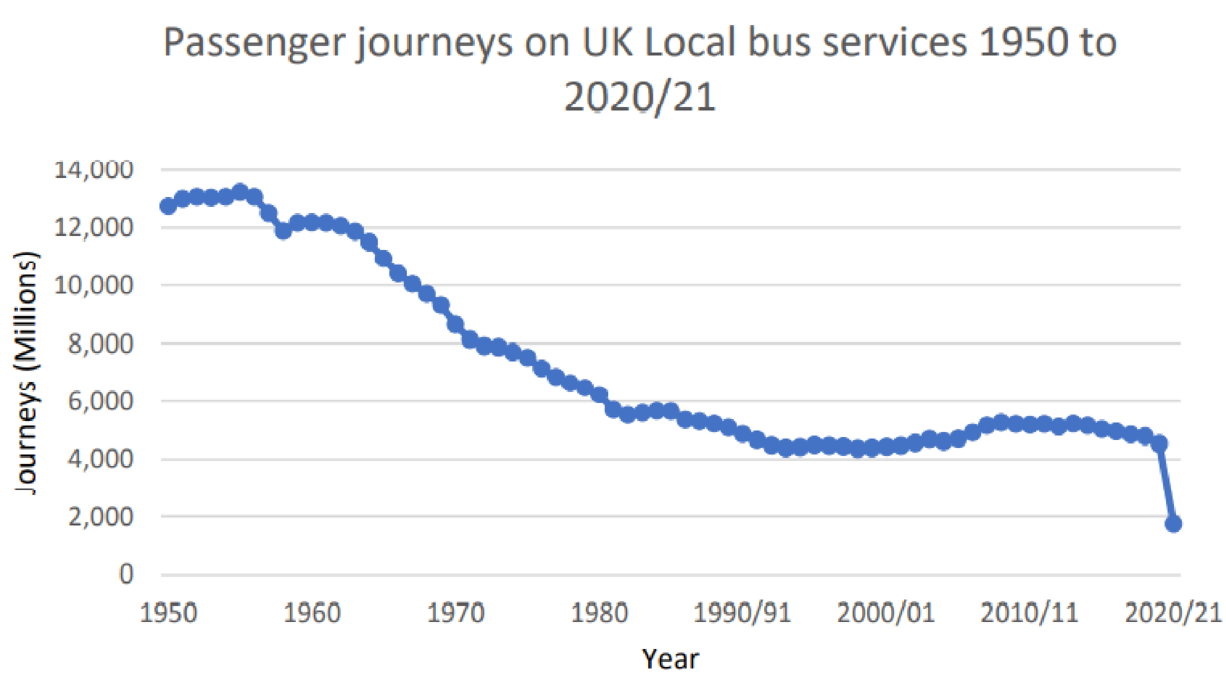
[4] (DLUHC, 2022)
[5] (CIPD, 22)
[6] (WYCA, 21)
[7] (WYCA, 21)

Following these case studies, I will offer some conclusions and finally present recommendations for transport practitioners.

Section One: Overview

In this chapter I will seek to explain the legislative background and outline trends in bus patronage to establish a picture of where the bus industry is currently at. Key legislation is 'The Transport Act 1985' that both de-regulated and made provision for the privatisation of bus services outside London. Generally, to summarise views expressed to the author in research interviews, the overriding sense is of fragmentation and the notion of 'managed decline' with the bus really struggling to retain passengers in competition with the private car. The general picture of patronage since 1950 is shown in the below table:

Table 1 -Adapted from DfT dataset: Bus0101



Confirming one interviewee's view that the 1960's was the pivotal moment of change that saw buses start to slip from their rightful place in the UK's public transport network.

The situation in 1985 in England was a higher use of buses per person, in the metropolitan areas (185 bus trips per head) compared to London (170 bus trips per head a year).[8]

[8] (UTG, 2016)

One geographic disparity to note of privatisation, that is still relevant today, is the different forms this took in different cities. For example, in the West Midlands and in West Yorkshire[9] the municipal bus company was sold off wholesale, in Manchester though the municipal operator instead fought what became known as a bus war (*Figures 1 and 2 below*), and when privatisation did come to Manchester, GM Buses was split into several different entities.

Figure 1 - Screenshot from Bus Wars (1987) Solent Blue Line, (now Bluestar owned by Go-Ahead Group) are catching up to City Bus, (then Southampton's municipal operator) until February 2023 run by First Bus. And Figure 2 - Screenshot from 'High Interest (1993)' of Wilmslow Road in Manchester –epicenter of the Manchester Bus War.

A more recent legal context is that of the most recent Census conducted in March 2021, of which the 'travel to work' dataset is a crucial transport planning resource, this was conducted at a time when official government advice was to avoid the use of public transport.

Since the pandemic the bus industry has received financial support to maintain services, currently under the guise of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG).

This funding expires in March 2023 (as does a national £2 flat fare scheme running from January to March - with explicit aims of support for post-covid recovery and the cost-of-living crisis[10]) and in combination with wider changes to travel patterns and wider economic and social turbulence; means that the present time could be a pivotal moment of change in the industry.

[9] And actually, the situation in West Yorkshire is in a sense little changed today -First run the old municipal PTE Yorkshire Rider operation and Arriva and Transdev, run their respective regional subsidiary bus operating companies of the former National Bus Company.

[10] (Deakin, 2022)

Section Two: Case Studies

London

Is a natural starting point in this paper; from a bus and 'levelling up' perspective, London towers over the rest of the UK. Since 1985 London bus patronage has left behind that of England's other leading cities.

Key Features

Franchising Crucially London was excepted from the process of de-regulation referred to above. However, London did not escape privatisation, as London through the lesser referenced London Regional Transport Act 1984, replaced the provision of services by the municipally owned London Transport with the current system of tendering by private operators for franchise contracts.

Transport for London specify routes, services, quality standards, and only the very minutiae of detailed timetable planning are left to companies, who bid for contracts under a best value contract system.

Off bus ticketing and Double door boarding Full off-bus ticketing and over 99% of buses[11] use multi-door boarding that gives journey time benefits by minimising dwell times.

Bus Priority Infrastructure Extensive network of bus lanes and signal priorities, minimising journey times.

Extensive free travel Policy of people over 60, people with disabilities and under young people under 18, all travelling for free with concessionary passes.

Educational Travel Policy of carrying schoolchildren on regular service buses as opposed to a network of school buses.

Key Takeaways

Takeaway 1: Guidelines

TfL in their 'Guidelines for planning bus services' set out a range of aims and principles that TfL want from their network to best serve London.

Cost is a key determinant for any bus service as TfL recognise:

[11] The X26 a former Greenline coaches' route, is one rare example of a route that does not currently use multi-door boarding

“The aim is to provide the best value to passengers from the resources which fare revenue and subsidy can purchase. … by appropriate resource allocation”

“Proposals that increase benefits for passengers and reduce costs will be recommended. Those that reduce benefits … and increase cost will not”

“The current threshold for spending proposals is 2.0 to 1[12].” [13]

Discussion with TfL confirmed that the current guidelines were not in place from the outset of competitive tendering, but were introduced in the mid to late 2000s, as it was felt necessary to set out clearly what the trade-offs are that had been considered on a more ad-hoc basis and put them together into a set of guiding principles.

And that since having these in place they have usefully informed bus network reviews since then. Notable recent applications including recasting services in response to new travel patterns associated with the opening of the Elizabeth Line and in planning for cross-river services after the opening of the Silvertown Tunnel.

Takeaway 2: Bus Speed is vital

Discussion with TfL highlighted that bus speeds have been falling in recent years and extra investment in more extensive bus priority will be needed to improve this situation. TfL cautioned that although the picture might look rosy in London from the rest of the country, demands on road space are very high and London does have considerable challenges of its own.

Takeaway 3: Pathway to Decarbonisation

TfL confirmed that battery electric buses and the use of opportunity charging where needed and possible, is primarily how they plan to reach their goal of a zero-emission bus fleet. They concede this could have some impact on operations, as if battery electric buses need topping up mid-shift this increases the required PVR[14] to operate the agreed timetable.

[12] TfL give an example as follows: “…a scheme to increase frequency on a route may cost £1m per year. The threshold might be reached if there were: extra travel generating £400,000 of revenue and benefits to passengers worth £1.2m. The net cost of this scheme is £600,000 per year and the benefit to net cost ratio is 2.0 to 1.”

[13] (TfL, 2012)

[14] Peak Vehicle Requirement. Largely comprised of a calculation of the timetabled end to end journey time divided by the frequency or headway between buses. Needing to factor in time spent running back to depot or opportunity charging point will necessarily increase the PVR. PVR Is used in the bus industry to determine costs of provision.

On the question of do they expect to consider using trolleybuses? TfL suggested this has not been considered and that regulations and planning policies, make it hard to envisage turning to catenary to supply electricity for bus propulsion.

Dublin

The 'levelling up' white paper encourages a look across Europe for examples of high ambition for public transport[15]. Dublin with their recent bus network review stand out.

Key Features

Network Review The review proposed wholesale change to the entire network, it was undertaken by Jarrett Walker associates a North American transit consultancy. In his book *Human Transit* Jarret Walker gives two key principles that are worth repeating. Firstly, the concept of Ridership vs Coverage[16]:

"You cannot simultaneously prioritize ridership on a transportation system and the expansion of that transportation system to serve all areas."[17]

And secondly, seven key demands passengers make on public transport that bus networks should strive to meet:

1) **It takes me *where* I want to go.**
2) **It takes me *when* I want to go.**
3) **It is a good use of my *time*.**
4) **It is a good use of my *money*.**
5) **It *respects* me in the level of safety, comfort, and amenity it provides.**
6) **I can *trust* it.**
7) **It gives me *freedom* to change my plans.[18]**

As the below network maps show, what was proposed was both a major streamlining of services and a changed approach to network design.

[15] "In some cases, cities will need to look to the standards and solutions seen in European counterparts to measure ambition." (DHLUC, 2022)

[16] To explain with an example, if we seek to satisfy the goal of coverage the same level of service (say 2 buses per hour) could be provided to a village (perhaps carrying 5 passengers each) as a high density inner city (carrying 100 passengers each), a ridership goal would recognise the much greater potential for public transport in the inner-city area and allocate, 3 or even all 4 buses we have resources for to the inner city.

[17] (Walker, 2012)

[18] (Walker, 2012)

Although the first map (*figure 3*) looks much busier than the latter map (*figure 4*), due to the focus on frequency and the geometrical principle that a grid of services is the most efficient way for facilitating passengers to be able to go from any point to any point in the city; the latter map actually represents a much greater degree of mobility or access offered by public transport.

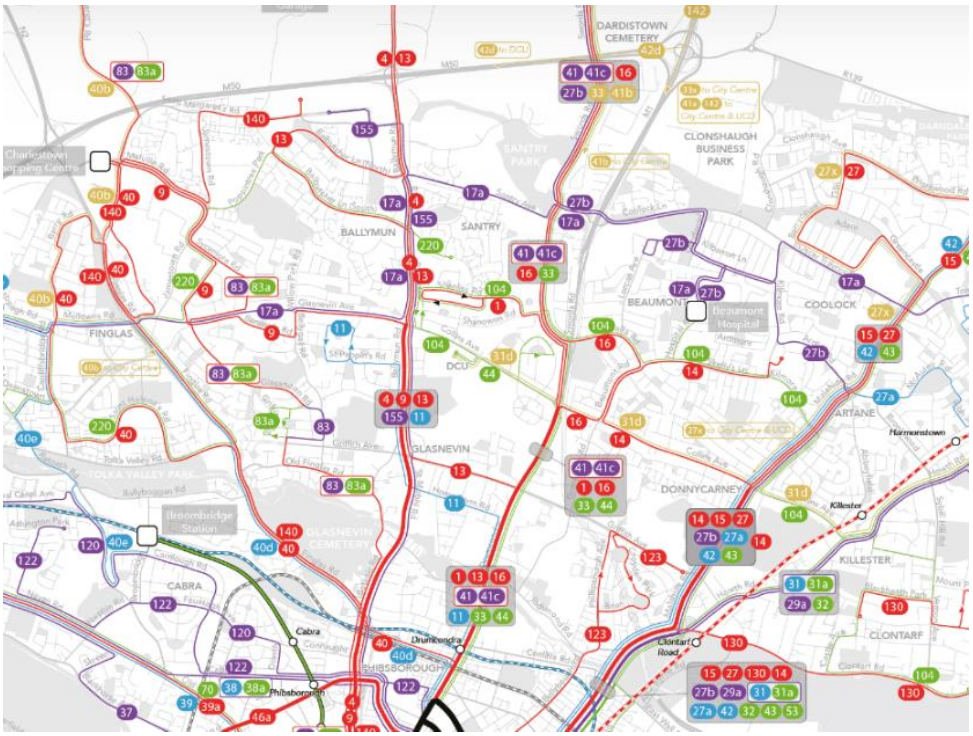


Figure 3 - Existing From http://kevin.ie/sandbox/busconnects_compare/

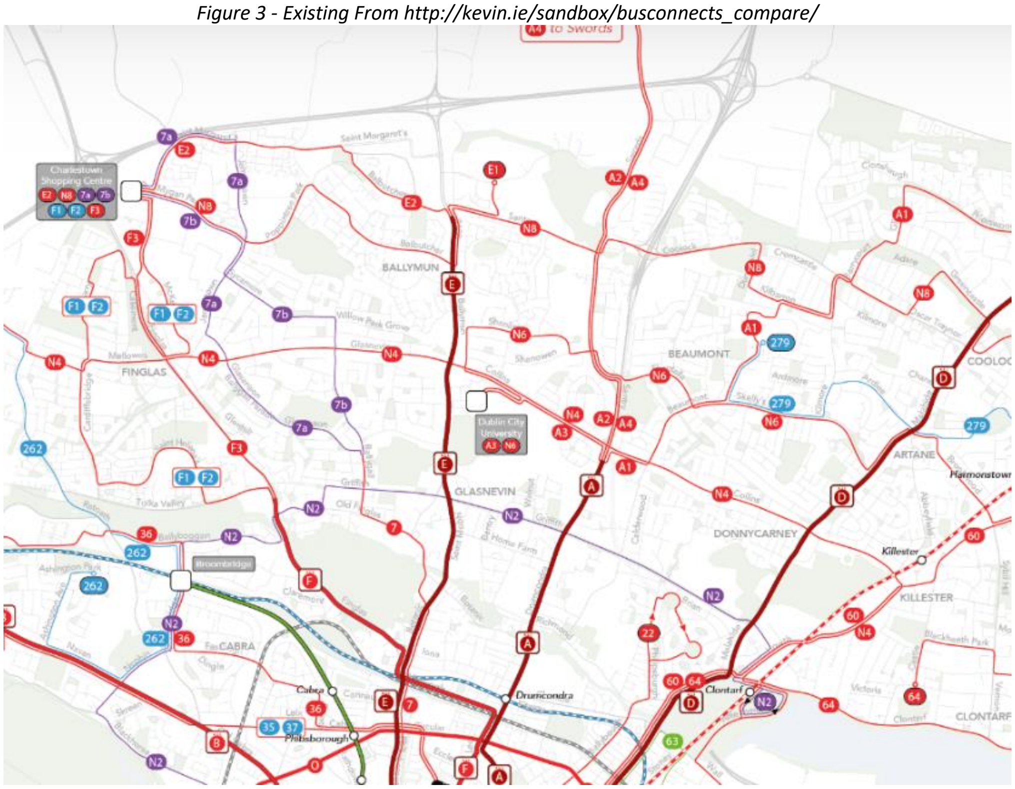


Figure 4 -Initial proposal -From http://kevin.ie/sandbox/busconnects_compare/

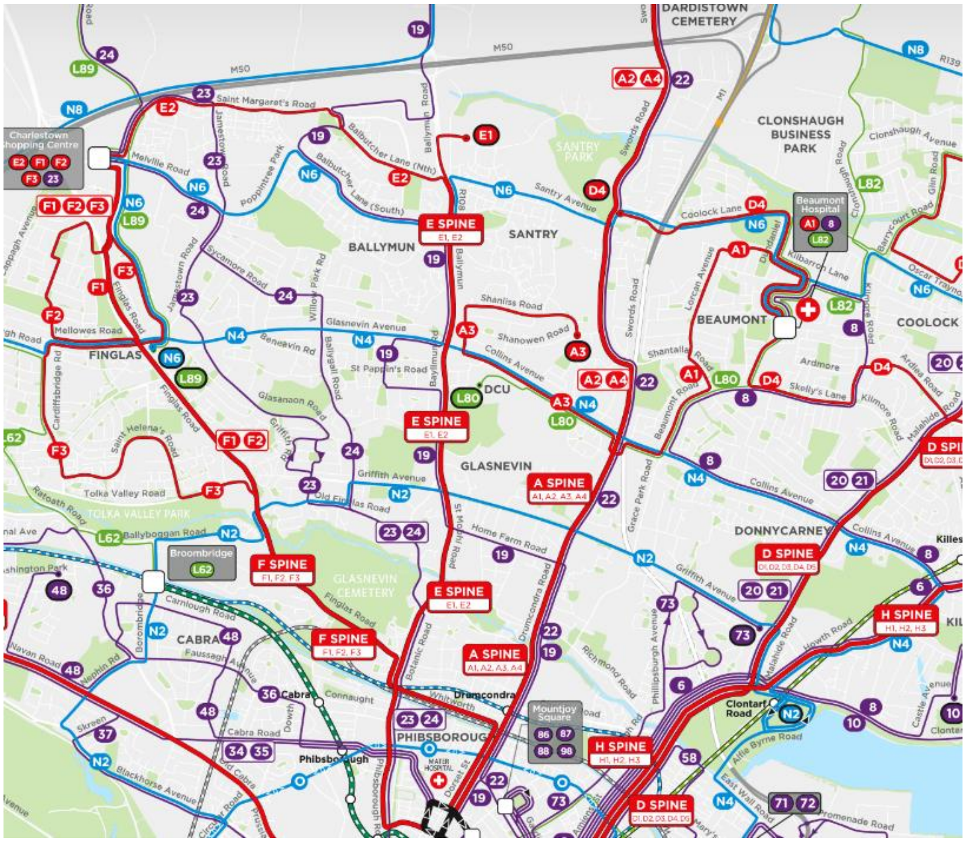


Figure 5 -Final network design - From http://kevin.ie/sandbox/busconnects_compare/

National Programme Looking more broadly at Ireland, discussion with the NTA highlighted the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan, that has established principles of guaranteed service levels based on settlement sizes and hierarchies.

Key Takeaways

Change is Hard

Discussion with the NTA elucidated that public consultation showed that although there was enthusiasm generally for the aims of the review, but many existing passengers and stakeholders responded in a mixed manner to the consultation, as they felt it represented too much of a change to their existing service, and even if their existing service level was low, potential change was seen in a negative light.

However, this has been mitigated by an approach of front-loading of new and improved orbital services first, with generally consolidation of services into ‘spines’ left, till later in the process.

Change is Expensive

A knock-on effect of the final design that diluted elements of the principles put forward by Jarrett Walker but sought to better reflect stakeholder input, are that the improved services have required a significant uplift in funding.

Rural Mobility

In some cases, the connecting Ireland plan has provided rural settlements with a service for the first time in recent memory and has widely proved popular. Fare recovery is apparently in some cases as low as 15%, which does show the cost of pursuing geographic coverage above all else. But more so shows that what is going to work for rural areas[19] will need to differ from urban solutions.

Manchester

Key Features

Franchising is to begin in 2023 with an initial roll out in the northwest of Greater Manchester. An interviewee noted a challenge in introducing phased delivery, is how to ensure a continuity in the other areas of the city, that will in the interim continue to be reliant on the de-regulated market.

Delivering franchising has required a substantial 5 case business case to be developed. Within the business case the benefits of franchising are measured against the inefficiencies of the fragmented bus market in Manchester.

Key Takeaways

Means to an end

Manchester are clear that integrated transport is not an end in itself - franchising is a means to meet economic and social goals of the city.

Politics

Franchising will ensure to make the combined authority and the elected mayor much more prominent, and the public will be able to expect to directly hold the authority to account. Which will be a significant change to the current system that can lead to bus users feeling there is a lack of accountability.

Leeds

Key Features

Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme was delivered by the City council in partnership with the combined authority and the bus operators. The core deliverables were increased bus priority on key corridors, extensive upgrade of public realm and bus waiting areas in the city center and enhanced Park and Ride facilities. The program was funded by the DfT, after a judicial review led to the cancellation of scheme for trolleybuses known as Next Generation Transit, a key factor was the agreed

[19] The all-electric coach service Ember in Scotland which uses a system of running on main roads, and only diverting if customers in villages or hamlets have pre-paid their fare, is a service that will be interesting to monitor to see if this could be a wider model for rural mobility.

short timescales for delivery with the department. Overall, the key deliverable was improvement in bus journey times.

Franchising the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (of which Leeds are a constituent member) are undertaking a franchising assessment, this will assess the benefits of franchising against the Enhanced Partnership currently in place.

Key Takeaways

Approach to Risk

Interviewees believed Leeds was willing to take risks, for instance often proceeding at risk, and that this allowed for much more to be achieved than if a risk-adverse approach had been chosen.

Partnership Working

Also, they believed that the programme demonstrated meaningful partnership working with bus operators can generate significant value.

Orbitals

A key demand for residents is for more buses running orbitally - an interviewee suggested at least 2/3rds of Leeds residents he speaks with, their main ask of the Leeds Bus network is to not always have to go into the city center. How to provision this will be a key question for the city moving forwards.

Figure 6 demonstrates with reference to designated local centers the potential the current route 91 should have to be a crucial part of Leeds's mobility, as it connects 8 designated 'Town Centers' across the city.

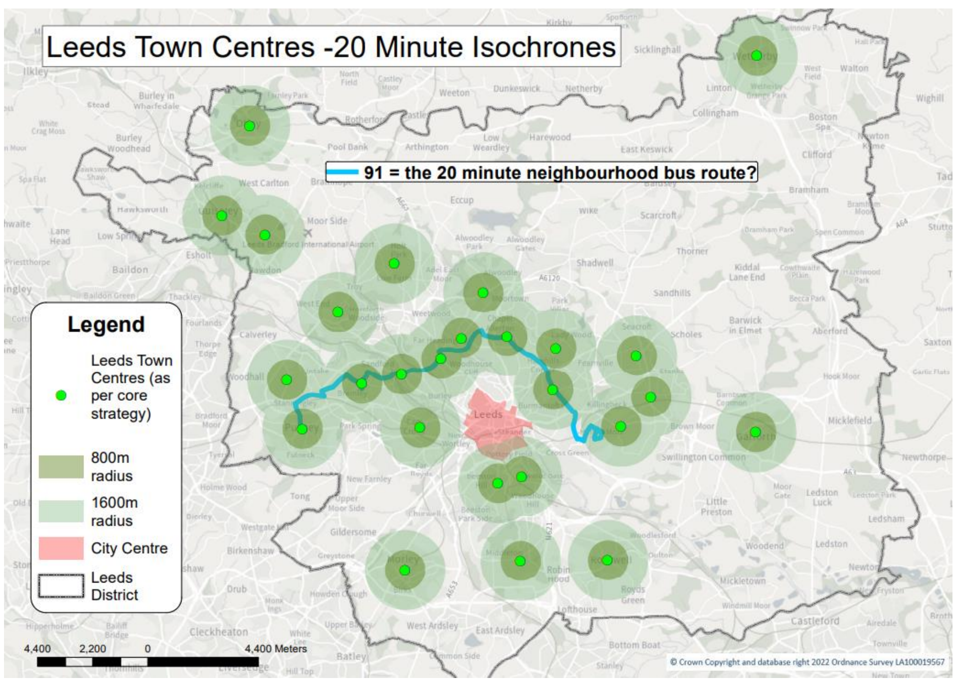
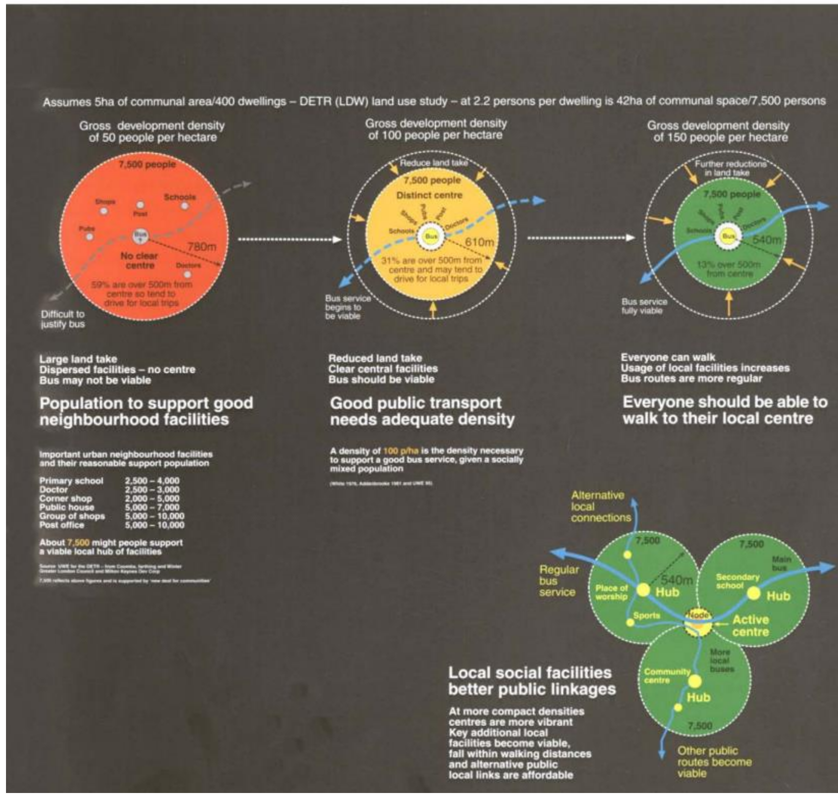


Figure 7 reproduced from the 'Rogers Report' demonstrates that thinking about 20-minute neighborhoods is not new. However as one interviewee noted, productively linking land-use and transport planning since 1999, to deliver sustainable bus services has been a challenge.

Figure 2.5: Models of urban capacity



[20]

Post -Covid Recovery

The city has a modal share target of 19% for bus by 2030[21]. *Figures 8 and 9* show a comparison between areas of the city that achieved this for travel to work in 2011 and 2021 censuses.

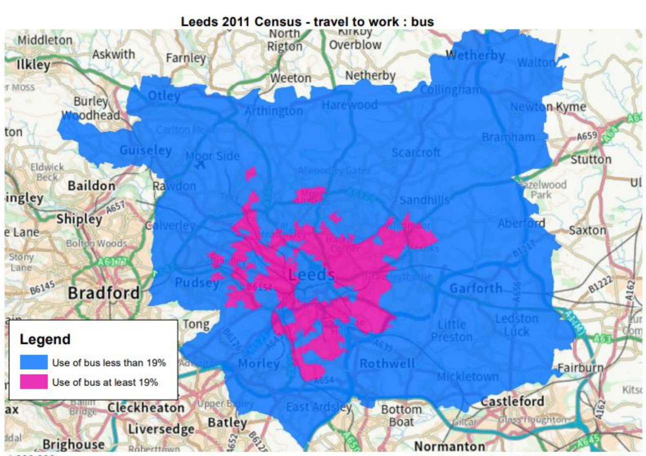


Figure 8

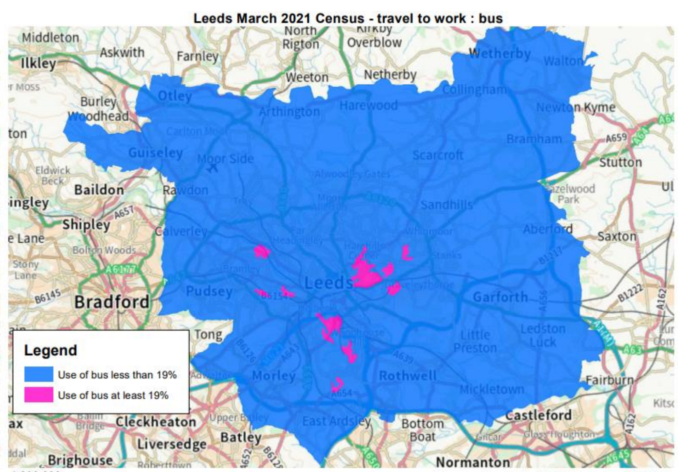


Figure 9

[20] (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999)
[21] (Connecting Leeds, 2021)

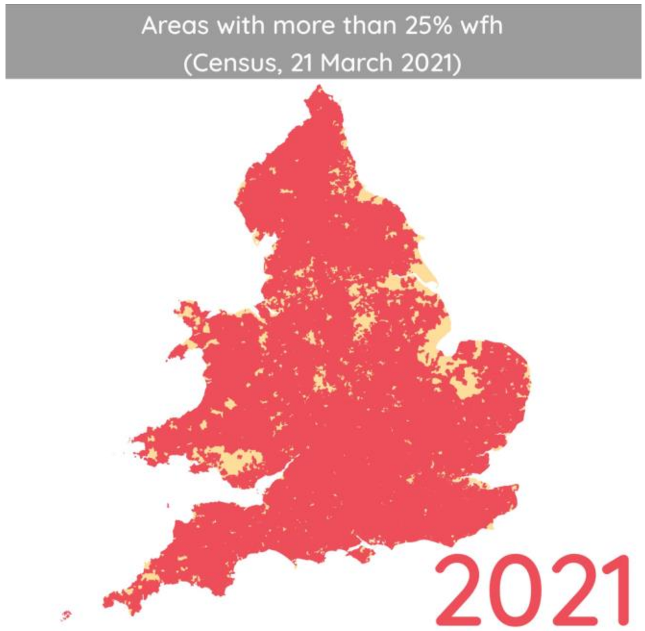


Figure 10 -From Alasdair Rae (@undertheraedar) https://twitter.com/undertheraedar/status/1601542538149908480/photo/2

The national picture above (*figure 10*) of working from home is very clear; what is notable is that every LSOA in Leeds that achieved the cities 19% mode share target in the March 2021 census, had a working from home proportion of no higher than 21%. These areas of low home working rates are plotted below (*figure 11*) and happen to coincide strongly with areas that in 2011 previously achieved the modal split target.

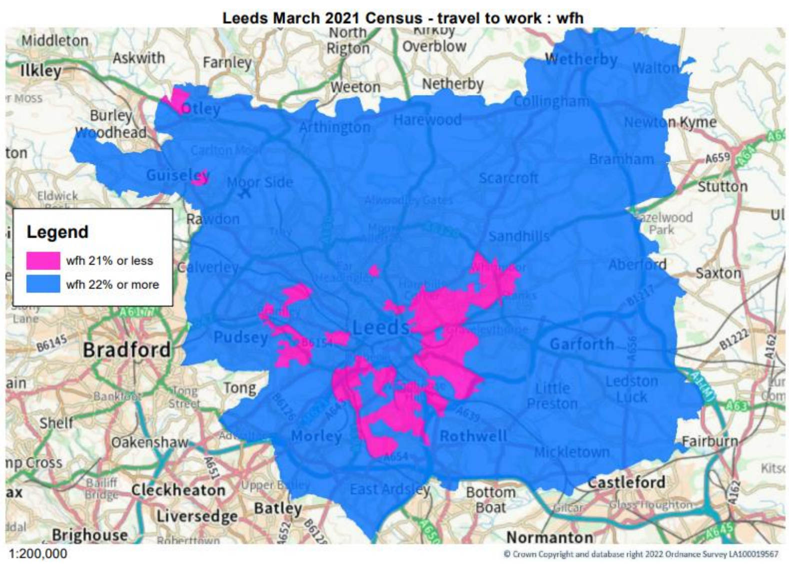


Figure 11

Municipals

Key Features

Potential for increased trust One interviewee expressed that a key for any successful bus operation is that trust is critical between the politicians, officers and the bus company. Whilst Municipals do not guarantee this, they can offer substantial benefits in this respect.

Not an Option The 1985 act prohibited any new municipal operators from being established.

Key Takeaways

Clarity of inherent trade-offs

The tradeoffs that always must be made between coverage and ridership can become a lot more tangible when the bottom line of the bus company is a public asset.

Potential in Wales

One interviewee noted that the Welsh Government is considering allowing new municipal operators to be set up[22][23].

Cycling

Key Features

Integration Discussions with interviews confirmed that projects even when they include both bus and cycling provision do not meaningfully consider how these modes can complement the other. One interviewee stated that Bus Rapid Transit and cycling should theoretically be a perfect fit. TfL stated it is not possible for their data analysis teams to use contactless payment data to see interchanges made between Santander hire bikes and the TfL bus network.

Key Takeaways

Industry attitudes

One interviewee expressed that in a previous job role they had suggested providing cycle parking at rural or semi-rural bus stops, but colleagues had essentially written this off as ludicrous. In the Netherlands on the other hand, cycle parking is a familiar sight at peri-urban and rural bus stop locations.

[22] (Welsh Government, 2022)

[23] One idea contained in the consultation documents, is for Municipal Operators to be an option to step into the market in a manner similar to the 'Operator of Last Resort' in the Rail Industry. With First Bus withdrawing from Southampton, and tenders for supported services attracting very few bids across the country - this idea of the potential necessity of Bus Operator of the Last Resort is perhaps rather pertinent.

Perhaps more research is needed to determine if English cultural norms really make trying to integrate cycling and buses a futile endeavor, or if attitudes in Transport Planning need to change to be more willing to see cycling and the bus as complementary rather than competing modes.

Section Three: Conclusions

Bus Operations

Frequency, speed and reliability of service is what more than anything delivers the seven demands of passengers discussed already; therefore operational techniques that assist with these goals are particularly important to understand.

Double door boarding is used in London with the front door used for alighting only and the middle door for disembarking only, in combination with off-bus ticketing and no compulsory driver interaction, this significantly increases operational efficiencies. As can be appreciated with dwell times apparently almost three times longer in Leeds, per *Table 2*:

TfL double door buses[24] 'Average Dwell Time'	**Leeds** single door buses[25] 'Average Dwell Time'
11.3 Seconds	**33.1 Seconds**

Table 2

TfL noted double-door boarding is efficient for them due to the large amount of 'churn' but that elsewhere in the country, the provincial pattern is generally buses filling up inbound to a centre and then emptying outbound, with limited points of passenger 'churn'.

In Manchester, discussion suggested that operational aspects such as double door-boarding had not been considered within franchise planning. A new fleet of 50 (single door) buses for the first tranche of franchising in the North-West of the conurbation has been purchased[26] to be operated by the winning bidder[27](s).

On the other hand, in the West Midlands, their Enhanced Partnership schemes, commits to upgrading numerous bus stops, to allow for double-door operation to maximise journey time benefits on their BRT offer marketed as 'Sprint'.[28]

[24] Average of Standard Double Decker with two doors 12.1 seconds and standard Single deck bus with two doors 10.5 seconds. Data from published FOI (TfL, 2022)

[25] Average from AVL data for a bus corridor in Leeds obtained by the author. This figure is not an official statistic and has been calculated from available AVL data for comparative purposes, but due to inconsistencies within AVL data whilst strongly indicative is not guaranteed to be 100% accurate. (C.f. Ghost Buses (RTIG, 2022))

[26] (Route One, 2022)

[27] (Passenger Transport, 2022)

[28] (WMCA, 2022)

Stop spacing is also key to operational performance, although in common discourse a picture is painted in which private operators have got to do as they please since de-regulation, this really is not true. Jarrett Walker articulates that

> **"…if you want to maximise ridership, you'll worry more about the duplicate coverage area, because closer stop spacing means slower operations, which are both more expensive to operate and less useful to riders. So, you'll …want to push stops further apart."[29]**

Bus companies have not been able to pursue this goal of ridership[30] because authorities[31] have dictated this, and almost always have chosen[32] to keep stop spacing as close as possible arguably generally seeing themselves as the protector of people they consider bus reliant and captive.

Ultimately, this has resulted in slower, less frequent, less reliable services harming all bus users, (and non-users through the negative externalities anytime anyone chooses to drive a car instead of taking the non-competitive bus).

Clearly a major attraction of Franchising is precisely to be in control – how this is excised and how much room is left for drivers, schedulers, managing directors et al, to effectively go up the chain of command to decide on operational matters? or in other words will devolution stop at TfGM towers, or will there be devolution to those on the ground? Time will tell but as franchising does not come with extra subsidy, and its financial benefits are predicated on being more efficient than the free market - how this plays out could well play a role in determining the success of franchising outside of London.

Links to wider social policy will be needed to 'level up'

'Levelling Up' is comprised of ten separate missions of which Transport is just one, considering the interaction with other areas of policy is key to a fully comprehensive outlook.

The TfL cost benefit ratio outlined above, is not always rigidly applied, an example given would be in order to serve a hospital, here the strategic and social benefits could justify using a lower ratio for instance 1.8 to 1. Travel for access to health perhaps reflects how the guidelines acknowledge

"Demand for travel changes over time…There is a constant check that resources are being allocated to the service pattern that best reflects overall travel needs…"

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[29] (Walker, 2012)
[30] Likewise with double-door boarding -as this requires longer bus stops -thus requiring an authority to want to accept the cost and potential risk incumbent in changing from accustomed operations. Granted some bus companies may consider the trade-off of increased fare evasion not worth the risk, but the point still stands that such a change cannot be made by those in operations alone.
[31] Whether PTEs or MCAs or LAs
[32] Again, there are exceptions, with 'Sprint' being one.

Conversation with TfL touched on the challenges brought about by organisations like the NHS increasingly centralising health provision, which then has the result of reshaping travel demands on the bus network.

The link between Transport and wider social policy can arguably be appreciated likewise in Education. The below *Table 3* demonstrates that the 10 Local Authorities nationwide, that have the lowest gap in educational attainment between children eligible for Free School Meals[33] and non-eligible; happen to A) all be in London and B) 9 of these 10 are in the top 10 Local Authorities with the highest use of sustainable transport in London,[34] (and by proxy) almost certainly in the UK.

Table 3 - Social mobility and public transport

Local authorities with the smallest education gaps 'Education gaps between the most and least deprived sons '[35] (Adapted from Table 3.1)	Top Ten 'Trip-based active, efficient and sustainable mode share by borough of residence', LTDS 3-year average, 2017/18-2019/20.[36] (Adapted from Figure 8.20 excluding the City of London as not an LA)
1)Camden	1. Hackney
2) Lambeth	2. Islington
3)Hackney	3. Camden
4)Southwark	4. Westminster
5)Hammersmith and Fulham	5. Tower Hamlets
6)Tower Hamlets	6. Kensington & Chelsea
7)Islington	7. Lambeth
8)Wandsworth	8. Hammersmith & Fulham
9)Kensington and Chelsea	9. Southwark
10)Westminster	10. Newham* (not in top ten for smallest educational gap)
	11. Wandsworth*

I don't claim that we can know if this is more than correlation; or if a causal relationship exists, and if so in which direction the causality applies, (although it is tempting to wonder about the link between a society in which almost everybody is happy to use the bus or encourage their children to use the bus - and a society with low inequality and high social mobility). However, we can observe that the 'London Miracle' that transformed educational achievement, coincided with the renaissance in bus, public transport and active modes, that stemmed in governance terms from London gaining a mayoral system in the year 2000. The scale of the educational transformation also highlights that nothing is set in stone – demonstrating effective policy backed up by sufficient investment[37] can deliver 'levelling up'.

[33] Generally considered to be the best metric for measuring the effect of deprivation on educational performance.
[34] And the other is 11th
[35] (Social Mobility Commission, 2020)
[36] (TfL, 2020)
[37] See e.g., (Dorrell, 2014) or (Herrmann, 2022)

And to go back to the paradox of why in West Yorkshire, employers do not seem to think when surveyed that public transport accessibility is a major contributing factor to their labour shortages. Most likely this is a combination of poor skills because regions like West Yorkshire do need an educational 'leveling up',[38] but also because public transport is delivering businesses a pool of candidates for jobs (thus it's maybe intuitive to not report it is not a problem), but public transport accessibility is just not good enough, to effectively match the people with the right skills to the right jobs. Thus, highlighting the overlap between different but complementary levelling up missions.

Applicability of models from elsewhere

As noted previously the 'levelling up' white paper encourages a look to Europe for successful approaches to bus networks. Deciding on the appropriate models will be important.
From looking at baseline data from Leeds and Dublin before the Dublin Bus Network review work started, we can see from *Table 4*[39] *and Table 5* [40] the bus mode share for journeys into the centers of Dublin and Leeds was very similar.

Percentage mode share of people crossing the canal cordon

Table 2.3 gives the percentage mode share for all modes of travel used by people crossing the canal cordon inbound between 0700 and 1000 for the years 2006 to 2015

Mode	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Bus	28.9%	28.1%	30.3%	29.8%	27.9%	29.6%	28.0%	29.2%	29.4%	28.8%
Rail	16.2%	17.5%	16.2%	13.6%	13.0%	12.5%	12.9%	13.0%	12.9%	14.8%
LUAS	4.4%	4.5%	4.6%	4.7%	5.0%	5.4%	5.4%	5.6%	6.1%	6.3%
Public Transport	49.4%	50.0%	51.1%	48.1%	45.9%	47.5%	46.4%	47.9%	48.4%	49.8%
Car	37.1%	35.1%	33.9%	37.7%	39.8%	38.0%	37.0%	35.4%	33.3%	32.6%
Taxi	0.7%	1.1%	1.0%	1.5%	1.3%	1.5%	1.8%	1.6%	1.4%	1.5%
Walk	8.3%	9.1%	9.2%	7.8%	8.3%	7.9%	9.2%	9.1%	10.2%	9.4%
Cycle	2.3%	2.8%	3.1%	3.4%	3.3%	3.7%	4.3%	4.7%	5.4%	5.4%
Goods	1.1%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%
Motor Bike	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Total Pers. Trips	207,379	203,959	199,767	188,540	181,042	183,569	185,481	192,188	192,670	199,943

Table 2.3 – Mode share of people crossing the Canal Cordon by mode of travel 2006-2015

Table 4 -Mode Share in Dublin

TABLE 4.14 EXTRACT **Modal Split – AM Peak (0730-0930) Inbound to Leeds as % of Total for years 2006 to 2015**

Mode	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Bus	26.4%	24.9%	24.3%	23.2%	22.6%	22.8%	21.2%	23.7%	24.7%	26.2%
Train	11.7%	13.3%	14.8%	15.1%	14.2%	14.8%	14.6%	14.2%	14.5%	14.3%
Public Transport	38.1%	38.2%	39.1%	38.3%	36.9%	37.6%	35.7%	37.9%	39.2%	40.6%
Car	57.5%	57.8%	56.6%	57.0%	57.3%	56.8%	58.4%	56.1%	53.8%	52.8%
Cycle	0.6%	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%	1.1%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%	1.5%
Walk	3.4%	2.8%	3.0%	3.2%	4.3%	4.0%	4.1%	4.4%	5.1%	4.7%
Active Travel	3.9%	3.5%	3.9%	4.2%	5.4%	5.1%	5.4%	5.6%	6.5%	6.2%
Motor Bike	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Sustainable Transport	42.0%	41.7%	42.9%	42.5%	42.2%	42.7%	41.1%	43.5%	45.8%	46.7%
Total Persons Crossing Cordon	122,387	114,339	113,595	115,671	116,341	113,360	109,354	118,685	123,496	127,434

Table 5 - Mode share in Leeds

[38] (Social Mobility Commission, 2020) highlights the need for levelling up. Sons who were born in 1986-88 eligible for FSM schooled in Bradford, at the age of 28 after 10 years in the labour market, had average annual earnings of £9,500
[39] (Dublin City Council & National Transport Authority, 2016)
[40] Adapted by author from Leeds City Council data

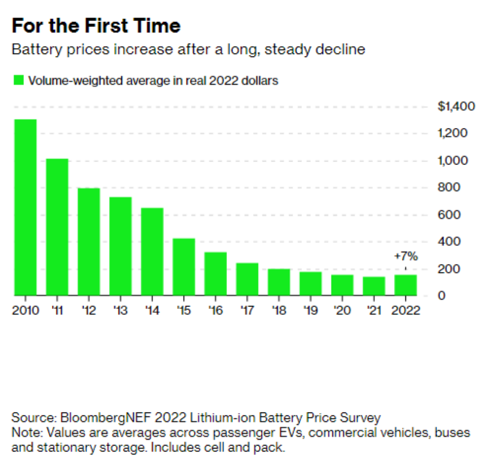
As noted, the principles Dublin worked from should allow more with less – they have been fortunate to able essentially to do more with more. With the uncertainty over future funding and the clear appetite for a less city-center focused network in Leeds. Given these factors; attempting to apply a similar network re-design seems worth further consideration.

In London TfL are clear that the Bus has a lot of potential to decarbonize journeys that are too long to be cycled but too dispersed for mass transit (tube and heavy rail)

"**Bus services are the only mode of public transport that can cater for the switch in car trips that are too long to walk or cycle needed in inner and outer London, as buses can cater for the more dispersed nature of these trips**."

I think the cautionary element here, for other cities without mass transit (or limited networks), is to recognise that bus will be critical to decarbonising almost all journeys, both more traditional journeys to centers that produce peaks (which are best suited to mass transit), and more unique and dispersed journeys. So, in a sense to 'level up' may mean a level of ambition for the bus beyond that of London.

Trolleybuses may epitomise the scale of ambition needed for cities that do not have mass transit. Looking to European cities for models, those cities that have high use of trolleybuses are arguably best placed to decarbonise their mobility. A recent paper (Gómez Vilchez et al, 2022) considers what would be likely to happen in the case of a supply crunch in the battery sector, they present a convincing scenario, in which scarce battery resources are exclusively allocated to SUV sector of the vehicle market. After the publication of this paper, data (*table 4*) has been published[41] showing this year is the first-year battery prices have risen, after a 10-year continuous decline in batteries prices. I posit this shows there is risk to the UK bus industry expecting decarbonisation, to be simply a matter of more of the same, but with batteries.



[41] (McKerracher, 2022)

Section Four: Recommendations

- Everyone in the Transport Sector must recognise how pivotal the bus is. **For all four critical agendas of post-covid recovery, cost of living crisis, climate crisis and tackling inequality - no other mode can produce the same scale of benefits.**

- **Bus speeds are critical regardless of operating models**. A tentative recommendation would be, as funding is becoming tied to compliance to cycling guidance[42] (Active Travel England) –likewise consideration of the monitoring of bus journey times and possible independent evaluation of how well authorities are meeting their Network Management duties; this could be linked to funding allocations.

- **Cambridge and Oxford** (outside the scope of this paper) are **the cities in England arguably demonstrating the biggest ambition for bus** though being willing to **tackle congestion**[43] and private car use head on. They are the two most successful cities economically outside of London.

  My recommendation here is that cities elsewhere need to urgently dispense with narratives that buses are the preserve of their more disadvantaged communities. Instead, **an acknowledgement that economic success will drive bus use and bus use can drive economic success in a virtuous circle is key.** And that an ambition for everyone to choose to use the bus, is what results in the best service for everyone[44] including those most in need of support.

- Franchising looks like it will have clear benefits for many places, but the business case process and challenge of taking on substantial financial commitment will make it hard to deliver benefits as quickly as needed. **In the shorter term, flexibility and the willingness to embrace risk and uncertainty is likely to be needed to get through some uncertain times ahead.**

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[42] One area of cycling guidance where a big gap currently exists is around the point bus passengers and cyclists come into contact at bus stops. The arrangement known as a 'Bus Stop Boarder' arguably in LTN 1/20 has an insufficient level of guidance for engineers to be confident in creating positive spaces when implementing segregated cycling facilities.

[43] Cambridge have consulted on an ambitious plan to raise revenue locally through a congestion charge to invest in radically improved bus services. Oxford where a combination of bus priority and innovation from operators grew patronage after 1985, are proposing to filter general traffic via ANPR filters to free up roadspace for buses and active modes.

[44] Frequency is the one thing above all else that all passengers value – this can only be achieved by as many people using the bus for as many journeys as possible.

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Section Six: Appendix

Introduction and methodology

The author of this paper conducted 10 interviews with figures in both policy and operational roles in the bus industry. These interviews followed a general principle of trying to better understand key issues including franchising, network design, operational matters and links to wider economic and social policy.

The methodology was to use broadly similar questions and interview format across the 10 interviews; however, it was important to tailor questions and interview style at times for different interviewees. For that reason, the results of these interviews have been left as qualitative data, and I have not attempted to analytically code the responses, instead their value to me in my research was more in the breadth of the discussions.

This appendix begins with a list of the ten interviewees who are identified by their general job role. It should be noted their views should not be taken as strictly representative of their organisations, but as views expressed to help me further my understanding. I then give bullet pointed summaries of the interviews. I would like to thank all interviewees for generously giving up their time and the patience they showed in trying to further my understanding of transport planning.

1. **Senior officer in bus planning with TfL**
2. **Senior officer with NTA Ireland**
3. **Senior consultant with NTA Ireland**
4. **Highly experienced bus industry professional with experience leading a Municipal Bus Company**
5. **Senior officer on the LPTIP project with Leeds City Council**
6. **Senior transport planner at a consultancy with experience of working in a leading role at a PTE**
7. **Senior policy officer with a Combined Authority**
8. **Senior transport planning consultant with experience of working on the delivery of the LPTIP project in West Yorkshire**
9. **Senior policy officer at a representative body of the former PTEs**
10. **Senior policy officer with a Combined Authority**

Interviewee **1**

- Q) about TfL bus service guidelines? A) They were introduced in mid to late 2000s as it was recognised it would be useful to have a way to quantify trade-offs and priorities.

  They are used for when services are re-let or varied mid-contract. Is part of the TfL business case process. TfL run over 600 bus routes, and these are often packaged up into geographical bundles to be bid for.

- Contracts are normally for 7 years and awarded on best price (not necessarily lowest cost)
- 2-1 generally used but can be lower (e.g., for services serving a hospital -sometimes this links to wider national policy e.g. when NHS trusts centralise hospitals and services this can lead to changed passenger demand that needs to be accommodated).
- About 75% cost recovery has been normal in London before the pandemic. With cross subsidy from e.g., the Tube being used to meet the other 25%.
- London has an extensive number of concessionary fares, with this staring at 60 unlike the rest of the country and under 18s carried for free.
- London also different in generally not having dedicated school bus routes and schoolchildren travelling on regular service buses.
- Q) about link between social mix and bus usage A) Large amounts of social housing in the outer suburbs helps bus patronage even in the outer areas.
- Q) about the potential for limited stop services in London A) due to lack of urban motorways that constrain opportunities, but some services like the x140 are being introduced to provide quicker options for passengers.
- Q) about electrification A) No intention to use trolleybuses -should be able to electrify using battery electric buses with opportunity charging. If buses need to return to the depot mid shift this does introduce some operational disbenefit but only slightly increasing the PVR.
- Q) about dwell times A) in London double door buses are efficient due to the amount of churn of passengers getting on and off at the same stop, this generally isn’t true in the rest of the country with a pattern of passengers getting on the bus on the way to a local centre and that disembarking on the outbound journey. Fast boarding is universally important, in London the use of oyster like cards by concessionary fare users is one example not always followed in the rest of the country that is crucial for the volume of passengers that London carries.

Interviewee **2**

- Q) about the overall picture of buses in Ireland A) Roll out of ambitious coverage offer across Ireland. Based on settlement hierarchies (like OAs in UK). So, a minimum offer of at least 3 services a day. Consistency of provision. Very popular in some cases, people have responded well to having a bus service for the first time in recent memory.

- Up until 2009 NTA was like BR or similar in that it ran everything regulator and operator. (Interpretation of an EU 2007 law necessitated a change) -Was then split to have separate regulatory and service roles.
- Bus Erin and Bus Dublin publicly owned bus companies.
- However, in new development in Ireland some services have been tendered and so Go-Ahead now run 10% of routes in Dublin.
- Regulated system but private operators can apply for a licence but need to prove social benefit will outweigh the disbenefit.
- Q) About if the NTA have something in place like the TfL service guidelines. Answer of nothing similar -business cases for individual projects but not general CBR to work from.
- Some rural bus services only 15% fare recovery.

Interviewee **3**

- Sense that between the creation of the NTA which coincided with the financial crisis and the Dublin Bus Network project in 2017, that this was something of a period of limbo, due to the effects of the crash. (e.g. the public sector hiring moratorium meant a lack of capacity)
- Therefore, the Bus Network project was a chance for the NTA to be able to create a network in a way that wasn't possible in the initial setting up of the NTA.
- The starting conditions for the review were bus playing an integral part in Dublin life -with a very high mode share of for trips into the core of Dublin (e.g., within the canals)
- Extensive consultation process saw a dilution of the original vision.
- Currently completed 4 of 11 steps in the process. Phased approach to introduce most of the orbitals first with consolidation of services into spines to come later
- Considered that as Dublin has large network approx. 1000 pvr requirement. That a big-bang all at once implementation was not possible. Logistically and in terms of resource of authorities and operators this was not feasible.
- 90-minute fare crucial to win public support for the changes -unthinkable to propose without this.
- Concept to impose a grid onto Dublin.
- N4 and N6 orbitals in North Dublin example of changed network being well receive with little or no complaints.
- Dublin shows that change is hard, and people really do not like losing what they already have even if it is only a relatively poor service offering.

Interviewee **4**

- Importance of joint partnership. E.g., politicians need to know bus companies are trustworthy and need to be able to trust rather than try and control the bus company. (And vice versa)
- Municipals 2 key ingredients. Political desire and good delivery.
- No guarantee of trust. E.g., some authorities have in as sense expected bus companies to operate as a cash cow and then been sold off.
- The Welsh government are considering the lifting the ban on new municipals
- Covid radically changed the balance of power in the bus sector

- Need to re-recruit passengers but challenges of very high costs and staff shortages
- Opportunity: potential for new set of rules
- When running a municipal bus company, cross party understanding and support was important and showed broad support is possible for the concept of municipal operation.
- And that the tradeoffs between councilors wanting social dividends for their areas but were able to see the trade-offs to the bottom line of *their bus company.* E.g. the municipal ownership seemed to make the trade-offs become more apparent.
- Buses in a sense were a license to print money up until the late 1960's. E.g., in that era buses with 3-minute headways were not uncommon.
- Better for decisions to be flowing upwards instead of downward pointing fingers (e.g., elsewhere in the transport sector of DfT specifying train seats)
- Reading and Brighton different models but common to both is the way in which no-one interferes in operations -bus operators are trusted to deliver in a devolved manner.
- BRT has a lot of potential (e.g., France) but has to be done properly. Leaving gaps in priority is not workable, therefore politicians do need to be brave and consistent.
- Cycling to hubs in combination with BRT should work

Interviewee **5**

- Saw Leeds's appetite to take risk as really key to the success of the LPTIP program. A lot of LAs are very risk adverse, but Leeds was prepared to in multiple instances begin construction at risk.
- Collaboration worked really well at a lower level. E.g., bus operators working directly with designers/engineers.
- Business cases were developed very strongly at OBC so could be fast tracked through FBC,
- The local bus company were very good at supporting infrastructure delivery with comms and engagement.
- Reliability as key as journey time improvements. Both will be measured after a year and after 5 years.
- When talking to those in industry about the potential for cycle parking at bus stops people's response is that's crazy.
- Suggestion that 2/3rds of those who talk about buses in Leeds want to talk about why we do not have buses that don't go the centre.
- Central bus station a constraint -why not several bus stations e.g., North, West, East, South.

Interviewee **6**

- Question what is franchising for? A) very important question for anyone wanting to explore franchising to be clear on this. Just wanting control is not enough -it's key to know specifically what one wants to do with this control.
- Full integration of modes is only possible with franchising
- Integration should achieve new passengers and in combination with keeping hold of profits operators would have made, will give new funding streams.
- Important to simplify fares and arrest the decline in bus usage.

- Question would franchising benefit those in the most or least deprived areas the most? A) The benefit franchising can have over the current system is providing a functional system that people can plan their lives around. And this could drive higher bus use in the wealthier who have the option of using car. For those who do not have a car a franchised network could open up a broader spectrum options of times and places, that can be travelled too.
- Question about two tier authorities? A) Some correlation between strong unitary authorities and high bus usage. Different places have different priorities on how they want to use the highway.
- Question about the role of planning and quote from roger's report /20 min neighbourhoods. A) The market has largely dictated the opposite e.g., new low-density suburbs on the edges of towns/cities. Possible need to look to Europe for successful examples of cities with more apartment type living and more use of PT

Interviewee **7**

- Clear that franchising is not an end to achieve an integrated transport system, but a means to achieve the economic goals/policies of the Combined Authority.
- Need to move away from being car orientated to reduce economic constraints of congestion. Whilst achieving other objectives of reducing carbon and health challenges linked to physical inactivity.
- Ability for people in the region to break free of current barriers and have more opportunities, e.g., underemployment, low wages, lack of connectivity to jobs and fares too high.
- Belief that buses operators are not good at marketing and the consistent marketing to be done by the Combined Authority will be much more effective.
- Question of use of something like TfL bus service guidelines? A) Not considered at this stage - note franchising as a whole has gone through a rigorous 5-piece business case, but not individual routes and note the aim initially is to stabilise the network rather than introduce new services from day one.
- Question of possibly moving to double-door buses for possible efficiencies? A) not considered within the franchising process.
- Major advantage of franchising is talking competition off the road and into competitive bidding for franchises.
- Main scope for efficiencies is in wasteful over-provision because of competing operators and ability to cross-subsidise
- Initially franchising will seek to stabilise the network being careful to change existing systems.
- Franchising does not come with extra money so need to make better use of current resources.
- Has potential to address the downward spiral and will need to create a virtuous circle from the current vacuous circle. Growing the market for bus will be part of that. This will in part be informed through data on who's likely to change mode in response to nudges.
- Franchising and public control will lead to the Mayor and the Combined authority being under greater scrutiny and issues around buses will have greater prominence.
- Local Rail will not initially be within the scope of integrated ticketing, as not possible within current framework.

Interviewee **8**

- Q) In your opinion should Leeds (or insert any other authority) be wanting to use franchising for? e.g., to simply generally make the bus offer better? or are there specific elements?
- A) Control of specifications of services networks, Control to match aims and objectives, Social needs, Naïve to believe too much in operators creaming off profits
- Franchising makes the service more political mayor taking ownership of success/failures
- Q) Will it be possible to decipher which parts of the package are bring the most benefit? What do you consider to be the most important parts of LPTIP other than bus priority?
- A) LPTIP partnership worked well -shared data well -operators really invested their own money.
- Gateways -massive success. P+R also success
- Corridors - comprehensive treatment -most effective
- Lesson learnt that stronger leadership -could have pulled it together even better.
- Q) What if in a counter factual situation London had opted for de-regulation could this actually have had benefits?
- A)Right decision by London
- London and transport investment unique
- London broader demographic
- Q) Do you perceive the nature of local government in the Metro areas to be a barrier in some way in holding back buses? e.g. the split between Highways Authorities and CAs being the Transport authority.
- A) Current system -complain to private operator. -Complain to public sector with Mayor as head -makes a difference. Franchise makes the service more political [mayor taking ownership]
- Highways Authorities -close to communities CAs -man in street doesn't know what it is.
- Change to Mayor -Brabin/Burnham
- In Manchester a longer tradition of speaking with one voice.
- In West Yorkshire more competing priorities of districts.

Interviewee **9**

- Q) What is franchising for? A) To have control in order to be able to cross subsidise to meet authorities' strategies and policy goals.
- Franchising can address the parts of the network that are missing, e.g., links to non-city centre jobs, social and education trips, and can contribute to addressing congestion with benefits for air-quality and time savings.
- There is a possibility of devolving BSOG to Metro areas to give more control of how to allocate resources.
- Explained that most authorities do have guidelines that set out how they allocate their subsidy for tendered services and that an increasing problem is a lack of bus companies willing to bid for contracts. The two types of contracts being Net Cost and Gross Cost.

- Q) about Planning/20-minute Neighbourhoods A) Touched on the role that Active Travel England will have as a statutory consultee. Clear need to improve the challenges that the planning system can pose to bus services for instance employment sites located in the middle of nowhere.
- Q) about challenges of two-tier authorities and local government arrangements? A) Important to be able to have a holistic plan. Cycle infrastructure can be a good example of the disjointedness that can come from different Highway authorities across a Combined/Transport Authority area. E.g., in GM going from Red to Green tarmac across authority areas or in Leeds/Bradford -differing approaches to junctions when going cross-border on the cycle superhighway. Clear advantages in London of having red routes across borough boundaries on TfL controlled roads.
- Nottingham was noted as an example of a city/operator that mostly stick to main road routes and go less round the houses, which provides operational efficiencies. The city council only has 1 seat on the board, that allows for operational independence of the bus company.

Interviewee **10**

- Noted the pandemic created the need for a lot of partnership working which was successful.
- And this suspended the commercial nature of bus services.
- The combined authority is not ready for franchising -when given the choice in Bus Back Better of committing to either EP or Franchising. Only recently became a Mayoral Combined Authority and not developed enough to take on Franchising so soon after the change.
- Exploring different models of Franchising.
- Q) about TfL Bus service Guidelines. A) Too early in the franchising process to have need to consider something like either TfL's bus service guidelines or the guidelines used by authorities to determine if tendered bus services are supportable.

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