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Foreword

Buses are the lifeblood of our communities. In the Liverpool City Region they are responsible for millions of journeys, getting people to work, to the shops, and to school or college. They help older people stay active, and are a cost effective way of making sure that a growing economy doesn’t come at a cost to our natural environment.

However, there is a lot more we can do to build on their potential. Whilst 80% of public transport journeys in our City Region are made by bus, only 10% of these are commuter journeys, so there is a greater role they can play in growing the City Region’s economy, better linking people with jobs and opportunities. Bus is flexible. It doesn’t necessarily demand some of the major infrastructure developments of other modes so, with the right focus, improvements can be made quickly.

Working with operators we’ve already achieved a lot, not least the best ticketing offer for young people outside of London. But this Bus Strategy is about how we achieve a ‘ground-shift’ in bus, from offering an improved, clearer network to simple ticketing and value for money fares. Not only do we want to make the experience better for those who already use it, but remove those perceived barriers for people who may otherwise give it a try. We want bus to be the mode of choice. We also recognise our responsibilities as a major direct provider of transport services. We will continue to put safety first in the operation of the Mersey Ferries and the Mersey Tunnels and ensure that our services deliver value for money, both for our customers and for the City Region’s council tax payers.

The vision for the Liverpool City Region is ambitious, and our plans have to be ambitious to match this. This document sets out how we intend to deliver our ambitions for bus and how we will measure, monitor and report our progress through our comprehensive performance management, risk management and financial management arrangements.

Cllr Rob Polhill
Leader of Halton Borough Council and LCRCA Transport Lead

Cllr Liam Robinson
Chair of the Liverpool City Region’s Merseytravel Committee

Frank Rogers
Interim Chief Executive and Lead Officer for Transport in the Liverpool City Region
Introduction

The Liverpool City Region Transport Plan for Growth (TPfG) sets out how transport will enable the social, environmental and economic aspirations of the Liverpool City Region. This Bus Strategy directly supports this, outlining the specific role of the bus and our vision and plans for services.

Buses are critical to the economic success and social capacity of the Liverpool City Region (LCR), with over 136 million passenger journeys each year accounting for almost eight out of ten trips by public transport. However, we have witnessed a long term decline in bus patronage spanning decades. Although the reasons for this trend are varied, it is clear that if the LCR is going to achieve its social, economic and environmental objectives this cannot continue. A vibrant and continuously improving bus offer is central to achieving passenger growth.

Public sector support for bus services will be increasingly important to achieving this aspiration. The benefits of public support for bus services are wide ranging and include:

- The direct and indirect economic benefits to local economies, including road decongestion, increased agglomeration, spending power of bus users, facilitation of employment and as a support function to other modes of transport;
- Social and health benefits such as access to healthcare, access to education and tackling isolation; and
- The direct economic contribution that the bus sector makes via its workforce and supply chain.

Merseytravel provides a key role in providing infrastructure and information, multi-operator and multi-modal ticketing, leveraging funding and delivering improvement projects, coordinating and facilitating network change and management, and providing financial support for non-commercial services.

The Bus Strategy will allow factors to be considered in a co-ordinated way, in order to maximise efficiency and deliver better outcomes for customers, drawing together the many and varied components of the bus network in Liverpool City Region. It is needed to provide a single point of reference to guide the development of bus, through the implementation and maturity of devolution and to bring together the ideas and opportunities identified by industry partners and stakeholders alike to create an improved customer offer, which leads to sustainable patronage growth.

This strategy will be reviewed three years after adoption.
Why Buses Matter

This Bus Strategy focuses on the needs of customers and is aligned with the aspirations of the Liverpool City Region, in particular economic growth.

The development of a renewed Bus Strategy and a step change in the way in which we approach the delivery of bus in the LCR will enable us to accelerate the pace of improvements to the bus offer, unlock investment and grow patronage.

Buses are vital to the economy of the LCR. Every day, buses take around 100,000 people to their place of work. The bus industry accounts for over 3,000 local jobs. They are also important to the visitor economy, giving visitors access to the tourist offer across the LCR. The bus provides exceptional value for money in generating economic benefits for urban areas. In areas such as the LCR, research has demonstrated that bus networks are estimated to generate over £2.5bn in economic benefits against public funding of £0.5bn – an estimated £1.3bn reflects user benefits from access to jobs, training, shopping and leisure opportunities. The remaining benefits accrue to other transport users and society as a whole through decongestion, reduced pollution, lower accident rates, improved productivity and the standby value of bus networks.

Buses are also vital to the social capacity of the LCR. The most vulnerable in society are the most reliant on bus services, and as such services offer a way for many out of social isolation. In addition, 70% of bus passengers come from households with incomes below £20,000 per year and 84% from households with no access to a private car.

The bus is a unique and effective tool of social policy. Vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups in society are most reliant on bus networks. This includes low income households; young people in education, or trying to enter the job market; older people; disabled people; jobseekers; and women.

Bus services are key to providing access to opportunity including taking over 60,000 young people to education and training every day, providing the jobless with opportunities to access work; and providing a way out of social isolation for older and disabled people. As such, buses can make a huge difference not only to economic growth but also to people’s everyday lives.

1 pteg: The case for the Urban Bus (February 2013)
2 Census 2011
Devolution and the Liverpool City Region

Decentralisation, Devolution and the Buses Bill

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 allows for the introduction of directly-elected mayors to Combined Authority areas, and to devolve housing, transport, planning and policing powers to them. The Act requires negotiations between the UK government and local authorities, known as devolution deals, to bring any transfer of budgets and powers into effect.

The Buses Bill, announced by the government in May 2015, is intended to complement the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act, making it easier for local transport authorities to franchise networks of bus services, or introduce Enhanced Partnerships. Under the provisions of the Local Transport Act 2008, local transport authorities can already control bus networks, through the introduction of Quality Contract Schemes, but it is a convoluted and difficult legal process, including complex public interest tests, and an independent assessment as to whether those public interest tests have been met.

Franchising powers under the new Buses Bill will give Mayoral Combined Authorities responsibility for the specification of the bus network and delivery of bus services, subject to assessment of such a regime and public consultation. Enhanced Partnership powers will enable such authorities to introduce measures which improve bus services, in partnership with commercial bus operators in the deregulated market.
The Liverpool City Region Devolution Deal

The Liverpool City Region Devolution Deal\(^1\) was signed by the five LCR local authority leaders, the Mayor of Liverpool, the Chairman of Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and Government Ministers in November 2015. The Deal, which heralds a new era for the City Region, said:

“The ability to franchise bus services in the city region, subject to necessary legislation and local consultation. This will be enabled through a specific Buses Bill...which will provide for the necessary functions to be devolved. This will support the Combined Authority’s ambitions in delivering its Bus Strategy and in enhancing the local bus offer. This includes the delivery of smart and integrated ticketing, working as part of Transport for the North on their plans for smart ticketing across the North.”

From May 2017, the Mayoral Combined Authority will exercise powers over a devolved and consolidated local transport budget, including all relevant devolved highways funding, with a multi-year settlement to be agreed at the next Spending Review. This funding source will be utilised to fund a wide range of local transport improvements including bus service and network improvements, projects relating to integrated ticketing and the further development of the Walrus smartcard platform, and projects related to the Key Routes Network of highways. The powers afforded through the Buses Bill will also be unlocked with the installation of an elected Mayor for the LCR.

A Transport Plan for Growth

The Combined Authority has responsibility for transport policy and strategy. Since it was established in 2014, the legacy of co-ordination and partnership working has seen transport become the most developed and structured of its thematic functions, making the transport sector well-placed to deliver the Bus Strategy.

The creation of the Combined Authority has simplified transport governance, both operationally and contractually, by amalgamating the transport planning powers previously assigned to a range of authorities. The Combined Authority is the statutory body that sets the strategic transport agenda, allocates funding, and makes the links to other policy areas.

Our transport priorities are set out in the Transport Plan for Growth\(^2\):

- ‘Growth’ supporting economic growth in the City Region, through increasing employment, levels of productivity and investment;
- ‘Low Carbon’ – we want to live and work in a City Region that draws its energy from a range of sustainable energy sources, where travel is in vehicles powered by alternatives to fossil fuels, and with increased active travel opportunities; and
- ‘Access to Opportunity’ – supporting those who wish to access employment, training, education and further learning opportunities, and the wider work in supporting the whole City Region in access to fresh food, leisure and healthcare.

The aims and objectives of the Transport Plan for Growth and the Bus Strategy align closely, and are fully in line with on-going transport policy and delivery development work undertaken within Merseytravel and the wider Combined Authority. In this way, the Bus Strategy complements the wider LCR strategic growth agenda. This Bus Strategy also has cross-cutting influence into the wider transport and economic agenda as envisioned within the Transport Plan for Growth.
Challenges and Opportunities

A New Approach to Bus

Bus networks, both in the Liverpool City Region and across the UK, have seen a long term decline in bus patronage. While the reasons for this are varied and open to debate, this trend must be reversed. Initiatives that have been customer driven, rather than organisationally driven across different public and private sector bodies, have shown potential to arrest further decline in recent years; for example smart and multi-operator ticketing, coordinated timetables on key corridors, young person’s ticketing and new vehicle investment. Capturing and enhancing this through a new approach to bus is the starting point for our Bus Strategy.

In understanding this approach we have learnt lessons from industry best practice. Significant work has been undertaken in recent years to build up and underpin this good practice in relation to the delivery of successful bus networks. A number of high profile national research programmes have been undertaken to highlight this, including Good Practice Guide (Bus Users UK, 2014), Driving Modal Shift From Car to Bus (Greener Journeys, 2014), Buses, Devolution and the Growth Agenda (KPMG/Greener Journeys, 2015). These documents are highly consistent in stressing the importance of:

- **Joined up** whole journey provision
- **Locally** appropriate evidenced and monitored solutions
- **High quality, consistent and readily available information**
- **Punctual and reliable** services

Similarly, ‘Buses and the Economy II’ (ITS Leeds/Greener Journeys, 2014) and ‘Costs and Benefits of the Bus Service Operators Grant’ (KPMG/Greener Journeys 2014) have developed the industry’s understanding of the economic benefits of bus travel and have found, for instance, that bus users spend up to £50 per head in shopping trips to city centres; a figure similar to that of car users.

A renewed focus on local needs highlighted through devolution is clearly aligned with this new approach to bus.

A Mode of Choice

Perceptions of bus service quality and accessibility are of critical importance to the likelihood that people will use the bus out of choice rather than because there is no other option. In general, the issues associated with bus use in Liverpool City Region are common to other areas and are well understood on an industry level. For a variety of reasons bus suffers from an on-going image problem when compared with other modes of transport. Research has shown that bus is currently a mode of last resort for many, and is used predominantly by people without access to a car. This is a key problem for the Bus Strategy to address, since it aims to grow the market for fare paying customers and to make bus a mode of choice.

Research from 2014 has highlighted that the most important factors that relate to the decision on whether to use the bus include:

- Frequency of services
- Overall journey times, punctuality and reliability
- Value for money, quality and comfort of vehicles

These are also key issues for the Bus Strategy to address, since they are the likely factors which may discourage fare paying passenger use in future. Value for money in particular is an area of huge concern to the public, and statistics show that over time bus fares have risen at a faster rate than the relative cost of other modes of transport. The complex nature of bus ticketing across ticket types and different operators can also lead to perceptions of lower value for money.

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[iv] JRA (August 2014)
Barriers to Bus Travel

Perhaps the most significant issue encountered by new or infrequent users is the lack of legibility of the system. Information on how to pay for a journey, where to catch the bus, how to tell when to get off and what to ask for may seem straightforward to regular users but can be a significant source of apprehension for new users. Couple this with variable levels of helpfulness from drivers and the barriers to use become significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convenience</th>
<th>Cost/Value</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get Going Info</td>
<td>Routes</td>
<td>Ticketing</td>
<td>Schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter Connects</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Undesirables</td>
<td>Not For People Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful Drivers</td>
<td>Car Is Quicker</td>
<td>Dirty/Smelly</td>
<td>Juddery Journey</td>
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Opportunities for Improvement

Improvement should be focused on addressing the drivers of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction that are present within the existing system, along with removing barriers to bus travel for new users. There are clearly substantial opportunities for improvement in existing bus practice and infrastructure as described by existing customers. Transport Focus conducted research in autumn 2015\(^\text{vi}\), which measured passengers’ satisfaction with their local bus service for a wide range of aspects including the waiting experience, bus exterior, the experience on board and the service delivered by bus drivers, as well as their overall satisfaction with that bus journey and their rating of value for money. The table below shows the headline findings for the LCR, compared with the results for all the former metropolitan counties (PTEs) and against those travelling on one of the routes on our Quality Bus Network:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LCR</th>
<th>QBN</th>
<th>All PTEs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Journey</strong></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value for Money</strong></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuality</strong></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journey Time (On the bus)</strong></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard of the bus stop/shelter</strong></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cleanliness of the inside of the bus</strong></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>76</td>
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These results show that the LCR, particularly where services are delivered through the QBN, is achieving good levels of satisfaction for existing customers in relation to other PTE areas. Continuous improvement in these measures will be achieved through targeted and coordinated intervention.

\(^\text{vi}\) Transport Focus: Bus Passenger Survey (Autumn 2015)
Attracting New Customers

Significant research has been undertaken by Merseytravel\textsuperscript{vii} examining the underlying motivation behind infrequent and non-bus users. The research found that the reasons for not using the bus were predominately driven by perceptions of bus travel compared to car travel. Car travel, for instance, was seen as offering quicker journeys, convenience and comfort.

Bus was seen in a poor light against these criteria and in addition perceived cost and unreliability barriers also existed. The difficulty of carrying shopping was also cited as a significant barrier. These findings closely matched national research\textsuperscript{viii} undertaken by the Department for Transport. The research also asked respondents to identify the key measures that would attract them to use the bus network more. The majority of responses suggested measures that related to:

- Control issues (real time information, express services, and effective bus priority)
- Cost (both actual and perceived, addressing difficult issues where new users, and infrequent users can often pay the highest per journey fares)
- Targeted promotion and marketing
- Information improvements; and
- Doing more, particularly with younger age groups, to sustain bus use through different life stages

Further research undertaken by Transport Focus\textsuperscript{ix} has highlighted the need to improve passengers’ trust in the bus industry, and the need for those involved in delivering bus services to get the basics of a bus service right and to build better relationships with passengers. The research concluded that bus passengers have a right to expect a reliable, frequent bus service that is value for money, and that they are more likely to trust their bus company if they feel their custom is valued.

Key findings include:

- 41% of bus passengers trust their company highly, but being treated more like a valued customer would greatly increase trust
- Value for money is passengers’ highest priority for improvement, followed by reliability and punctuality. Tackling anti-social behaviour was rated passengers’ fifth priority
- 28% of non-users would consider making more journeys by bus highlighting the opportunity for further growth in the industry
- Unlocking the potential of the driver as the face of the industry presents huge opportunity for increasing passenger trust
- A clear sense of who is in charge and where complaints should be directed is needed to improve passengers feeling like a valued customer. Passengers have little understanding of who actually runs the buses; and
- Levels of high trust vary, with a difference amongst the five largest bus companies.

In short, the issues outlined above must be tackled in a systematic way in order to make modal shift, particularly from car to bus, an attractive option.

\textsuperscript{vii} Mott MacDonald: Bus Non Users Merseyside (2011)
\textsuperscript{viii} Department for Transport: Public attitudes towards buses (March 2011)
\textsuperscript{ix} Transport Focus: Bus passengers have their say (March 2016)
Our Vision for Bus in the Liverpool City Region

Every stage of the bus customer/potential customer’s journey has been considered in our vision for a thriving, affordable and sustainable bus network that offers the customer a value for money and hassle-free journey experience. In essence, an end-to-end, whole journey approach:

In practical terms this means:

- Bus as a mode of transport for all
- A comprehensive, integrated and easy to understand bus network that connects the LCR and makes it easier to get around
- Attractive journey times and a more punctual service, that people can rely on
- Affordable, straightforward tickets
- Accessible, simple and contemporary information about bus travel
- A good on board experience – the vehicle, the driver and the journey
- A good waiting experience at the stop
- High quality, professional and safe operations
- Continued investment in the bus offer

In order to meet this vision, six thematic areas have been identified. The following sections detail aspiration and action required under each of these themes.
Developing the Network

Individual bus routes come together in the LCR to form a network of linked services. The development and optimisation of this network is a cornerstone of this strategy. For the LCR to have a bus network that enables us to achieve our strategic aims, we must:

- Ensure there is a simple, easy to understand network for new and existing customers
- Recognise factors such as housing, hospitals, shops, educational and employment sites – ensuring they are linked by bus
- Optimise multi-modal integration, particularly with rail and air
- Ensure we have a more stable bus network with changes, particularly reductions, minimised, consulted on and communicated in advance to customers and stakeholders
- Ensure the bus network enables passenger growth
- Improve the identity and brand of buses, bus routes and networks

In order to achieve all this, our starting point is identifying exactly what the bus network needs to “do”. It isn’t practical for buses to run along every road of the LCR; however it is vital that people can access the network and that it can get them to where they need to be with interchanges minimised as far as possible. Therefore, although the bus network will be focused on key corridors and centres, cross links will remain essential in knitting the network together. The policy document Guidelines for the Provision of Bus Services provides the framework for assessing the bus network to ensure that it retains appropriate links for the LCR.
The bus network in the LCR has origins that can be traced back in some cases to the early 20th century. Whilst this doesn’t mean the network is outdated, we should always ensure that services meet contemporary needs. Bus services have incredible flexibility to react to changing circumstances in a way that is much more difficult to achieve through other modes. For this strategy, it means we will review the bus network on a regular basis, either when something significant changes (such as a new housing development or employment site) or on a planned basis (at least every 3 years) with networks and routes planned in line with Guidelines for the Provision of Bus Services. These network reviews can often be completed in a more manageable way by undertaking the task on an area by area basis rather than reviewing the network in its entirety.

Through this process it is essential that communities, businesses and stakeholders are consulted and their views taken into account. Network planning will address issues relating to multi-modal interchange, ensuring that as far as possible bus and rail services work alongside each other, enabling connections to be made, and supporting the aims of the Surface Access Strategy at Liverpool John Lennon Airport. We recognise that multi-modal integration goes beyond network planning and design, so action is identified elsewhere in this document to improve facilities and ticketing to support this further.

Network developments at rail stations will improve the quality of the service offer and reduce the real and perceived inconvenience of having to interchange. We recognise that rail stations are in themselves interchange locations not only for bus-rail movements, but also for bus-bus movements. It is this latter aspect which has the potential to be expanded upon so that the whole facility can become a focal point for bus services in the locality as well as rail services.

In Liverpool City Centre it is important that bus routes, termini and layover are planned and delivered as efficiently as possible and with the aspirations of the city in mind. It is the hub of the bus network in the LCR, one of the most congested areas of the LCR, and an area with air quality issues. Bus must play its part in addressing these issues, both by enabling modal shift from car to public transport but also by operating efficiently.

A joint strategy with Liverpool City Council and bus operators will identify short, medium and long term options for bus in Liverpool City Centre. This will set out a vision which will address the routes buses use, improve quality of place, reduce emissions and inefficiency by removing unnecessary bus mileage in the city centre, establish requirements for new off street bus layover, introduce city centre shuttle buses, speed up bus journeys, make bus journeys more comfortable and develop long term plans for multi-modal interchange at Lime Street Station. This work will be an enabler to Liverpool’s Strategic Investment Framework and City Centre Connectivity schemes.
It is recognised that employment shift patterns and the night-time economy mean there is a desire for public transport outside of historic core hours and so we will revisit the potential for developing 24/7 bus routes. Also linked to enhancing employment opportunities, expanded provision of express services could deliver significant improvements for longer-distance commuters in the LCR.

In order to deliver a more stable network the number of timetable changes that passengers experience must be coordinated and reduced. Initially we will do this by having no more than four coordinated changes per year with an expected reduction to two changes per year, in line with rail, as network stability improves.

Our final aspiration is for clearer and more consistent identity and branding of buses, bus routes and networks in order to improve the clarity and understanding of the network for customers and reduce potential confusion. This, in addition to delivering network-related enhancements can also play a role in changing the image of bus and so should be aspirational in nature.

Optimising Bus Punctuality and Reliability

One of the most basic requirements of a bus service is that it operates on time and with attractive journey times alongside other modes. Through the LCR’s Devolution Agreement, a Key Route Network (KRN) of roads will be defined and developed which will take into account the Key Bus Network. Longer term, it is through this framework that improvements to bus punctuality and reliability can be delivered. Shorter term and outside of the KRN, public sector partners should work together to deliver interventions which improve bus punctuality.

A number of schemes have been identified for delivery in 2016/17 with more significant schemes being fed into the LCR Pipeline process. Signalling upgrades will be delivered with bus priority technology enabled and a strategy will be set to roll this out more widely and more intelligently over the short to medium term.

Operational management and driver behaviour is an important factor in delivering punctual bus services and a relentless focus on operational performance will be required in order to fully meet the aspiration for punctual and reliable bus services. Aligned to this is a ticketing strategy which supports the quick boarding of passengers by reducing cash transactions.

Over time, greater intelligence on bus performance will play an increasingly important role in informing interventions required to improve the journey for customers and ensuring optimum operational performance. Work to develop this intelligence will be on-going throughout the delivery of this strategy but it is expected that route and corridor level data will give an appropriate level of detail.
Improving Customer Experience On-Bus

The experience that customers have and the perception of customer service on board the bus is of vital importance with the critical elements being journey safety, the on board environment, the level of customer service experienced and the associated emotional factors of travelling on a bus to complete a journey.

The starting point for bus services is that they are delivered safely, both for users and non users. There should be a relentless focus on reducing and removing the potential for harm to be caused through the delivery of bus services.

Our strategic vision is one which ensures continued investment in bus fleets across the LCR to ensure investment in high quality eye-catching vehicles, low average age of bus fleets, 100% accessible bus fleets, the latest on board technology including the use of audio/visual announcements and technology to improve safety and increased seating capacity by utilising double-deck vehicles where possible. By association, new vehicles also mean greener engines and lower emissions and future aspirations for the LCR should see the phasing out of vehicles with poor emissions standards and the introduction of low or zero emission vehicles.

Over time, average fleet ages should be at a maximum of seven years in order to inform sustainable vehicle investment plans. Our aim is that no vehicles should operate that are older than 15 years and that this maximum age should reduce over time. Although investment plans will vary dependent on exact age profiles of fleets, this approach requires around 60–70 new vehicles to be deployed on the LCR’s bus network in an average year.

Useful and perception changing technology such as charging points and WiFi should become standard with new vehicles and should increasingly become an expected minimum standard on buses.

Levels of on-board cleanliness are noticeable to all customers. As a minimum all buses should enter service in a clean state with a fresh aroma, with in-service cleaning regimes in place to ensure this remains the case throughout the day.

Finally, drivers are the face of the bus network and are often the only staff representative that customers will interact with. It is vital that these interactions are helpful, friendly and efficient and that passengers are made to feel like valued customers. Our expectation is that all bus drivers will be well trained in customer service in order that standards and customer satisfaction increase. The level of customer service given by a driver is of particular importance to new customers who may have more questions, or need more reassurance about their journey – this will be crucial in delivering patronage growth.
Improving Customer Experience Off-Bus

Our primary objectives in this area are to increase customers’ confidence by enhancing information provision, customer interaction and facilities. Our Customer Interactions Strategy and Bus Stop Infrastructure Policy will provide the frameworks for this.

The approach to information interaction will be self-serve and digital first, whilst recognising the importance of human interaction (for example over the phone or at a bus station).

Digital and web development will ensure increasingly user friendly and useful information is presented to customers to make the bus choice an easier one, and to support self-serve. Developments required include improved fare and journey planning.

The increasing importance of social media as a place where customers can interact or where service information can be quickly presented will be reflected in our aims to improve digital communication.

Real Time Information (RTI) is used to provide bus customers with information on the operation of buses which is displayed electronically on information boards at some bus stops and via mobile apps. Our aim is to improve the availability and reliability of these systems, whilst developing our future approach (over a five year horizon) to RTI – this should take into account the best RTI technology available, balancing this with operational costs and customer impact.

Refreshed customer information has already been rolled out across the bus network with clearer, simpler information delivered in a more contemporary style now available. It is important that this is continually assessed to ensure that information available is useful to existing and new bus customers, making it easier to plan journeys.

Customers are often presented with a confusing range of options in terms of how they obtain information or give feedback. This should be simplified, with one point of contact for customers.

A customer focused Bus Stop Infrastructure Policy will provide a framework to shape decision making in relation to what locations require stops as opposed to shelters and, where a shelter is appropriate, what style and type of shelter should it be. Linked to this work, the opportunity will be taken to replace all bus stop flags ensuring that they are more customer-friendly and support bus users with key information along with a 10 year bus station investment programme.
Growing the Market

In order to address the long term trend of bus patronage decline, we must grow the bus market by making bus a mode of choice rather than a mode of last resort. This strategy will focus on doing this in four key ways:

- Attracting new customers to bus, highlighting the removal of barriers to travel and the unique selling points of bus
- Retain current customers by promoting its benefits and ensuring straight forward and targeted communications
- Increase use of bus services in key market segments through benefit led marketing campaigns and approaches that are innovative and fresh
- Identify and deliver ways of reaching new markets (for example business travel or visitor economy)

Marketing and communications are critical in supporting patronage growth and in changing perceptions of bus. Marketing and communications articulate and demonstrate what’s different about bus in the product and service offering.

Using segmentation and insight we gain a far greater understanding of potential and existing customer markets to enable targeted activity to take place. Linked to this a fresh and innovative approach to marketing the bus offer is an important part of this strategy.

A marketing plan geared towards the delivery of patronage growth should be in place covering the whole of the bus offer, to include targeted and measurable activities and regular monitoring of performance.

Linked to a new approach to marketing, focused activity should take place with key new groups to exploit opportunities, such as in the business sector and the visitor economy. How we incentivise and encourage such groups, along with car users, to try the bus is an important consideration.

Young people, students and young professionals will also be a key market to develop to increase and sustain usage as young people make educational and employment transitions.

Work will be undertaken in those hard to reach groups where affordability is a barrier to travel (for example job seekers).

A large proportion of marketing resource should be focused on factors that will encourage a change in behaviour – to start using bus or to use bus more often. Activities to encourage behaviour change will focus on the following themes:

- Bus will be enhanced in other communications to differentiate from other modes and to change the image and perceptions of bus, to make the bus the mode of choice
- We will not only exploit existing channels, resources and relationships but identify new mediums to explore to support the passenger growth targets. Digital solutions will require investment to enhance the website and journey applications, creating a one stop shop for bus information
- Customer focused communications, highlighting new and improved services that promote one point of contact for all customer queries, will be at the heart of the Customer Interaction Strategy
Ticketing and Fares

Our strategic vision for ticketing is a simpler, easier to understand, customer focused, and smarter offer. Crucially, this should also include affordable fares which customers increasingly feel offer value for money. This approach is underpinned until 2019 by a Walrus Smarter Ticketing Programme which sets out in a planned way the enhancements to be made to ticketing across all modes of transport.

The Walrus Smarter Ticketing Programme will work towards ticketing that is easy to understand for new and existing customers with one smart ticketing platform and a simplified ticketing offer that enables customers to work out what is the best ticket offer for them. Aligned with this will be value for money products that are available to the customer in a smarter and easier to purchase format, ensuring that customers are paying the right fare for their journey.

On fares, the cost of bus travel has historically risen at a higher rate than other modes. Our aspiration is that rare rises are typically delivered in line with RPI or a similar measure.

Ensuring that it is easy for customers to understand the best value tickets for their travel, a simple zonal structure that is easy to understand and which supports the delivery of better value for money tickets is critical. To achieve this, the current arrangement of areas and zones for bus travel will be removed and replaced with a single zone.

The lack of a multi-operator adult day ticket has been identified as an important product gap which will be filled. The introduction of carnet (multiple) format tickets, will enable occasional users and workers who do not work consecutive days to have an appropriate convenient ticket offer that meets their needs.

Walrus is the most active smart ticketing scheme in the UK outside London. Building on this success, it will be developed as the sole smart ticketing platform for the City Region with additional products continuing to be added over time.

In the medium and longer term, the approach taken by Transport for the North in the smart ticketing arena, along with the increased use of new payment methods such as mobile phone and contactless payments will influence our local approach.

For young people we will continue to promote ticketing initiatives such as MyTicket which deliver simple and affordable travel, and for older and disabled users we will develop a contemporary and sustainable concessionary travel scheme.
## Delivering the Strategy

### Alignment with the Transport Plan for Growth

The Bus Strategy for Liverpool City Region takes critical context from the strategic direction and vision of the Transport Plan for Growth (TPfG). Bus has a key role to play in helping the City Region to achieve its strategic aims and direction. The following table illustrates, for each of the themes of the TPfG, the ways in which the bus strategy will contribute to delivery against the themes.

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<tr>
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<th>Growth</th>
<th>Access to Opportunity</th>
<th>Low Carbon</th>
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<td>Supporting disadvantaged communities by improving accessibility</td>
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<td>Enhanced Partnerships</td>
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<td>Key Route Network</td>
<td>Smart Ticketing</td>
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<td>Employment and Skills</td>
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<td>Ticketing</td>
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<td>Health and Wellbeing</td>
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<td>Visitor Economy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Highways Improvements</td>
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**Table Notes:**
- ULEV: Ultra Low Emission Vehicles
- TPfG: Transport Plan for Growth
- Growth
- Access to Opportunity
- Low Carbon
Funding our Ambition

Major Schemes

In 2014, the government announced the allocations of Local Growth Funds (LGF) to schemes put forward by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in their Growth Plans. The Liverpool City Region was allocated £232m of Local Growth Fund monies alongside other project investments, to deliver its Growth Plan.4

In the LCR’s Growth Deal, £51.6m is allocated to specific schemes which are designed to support key corridor gateways into (and within) the City Centre, helping to improve the connectivity and attractiveness of Liverpool City Centre as a place to visit, do business and live. The North Liverpool Key Corridor scheme will receive £13.3m of this allocation. It is a package of measures aimed at facilitating unlocking development in north Liverpool. Acting as a catalyst and enabler for economic growth, the scheme will reduce congestion, improve local access and east-west movements, and strengthen connections between Liverpool and Sefton. This will not only improve access to opportunities in these areas, but improve the flow of traffic for all vehicles including buses.

A further £41.4m has been allocated to support the City Region’s Sustainable Transport Enhancement Package (STEP). STEP is a package of sustainable transport measures which support and enable growth across the City Region. STEP schemes include walking and cycling infrastructure improvements, junction improvements aimed to help traffic flow and public realm schemes designed to support access and promotion of sustainable modes of travel. Key schemes which support the delivery of the Bus Strategy include:

- Queens Drive City Centre Connectivity – a package of works to improve bus interchanges along Queens Drive, to improve the ability of pedestrians to change buses easily between bus stops
- Knowledge Quarter Portal – a package of public transport improvements along the A57 corridor, including bus priority measures, crossing upgrades and junction improvements in order to improve journey times

In addition, a “pipeline” of potential projects has been developed to ensure the LCR is ready to match developed schemes to investment opportunities. For example, Childwall Fiveways Roundabout bus reliability improvements would deliver capacity improvements at the roundabout, with a focus on improving reliability for bus services using the roundabout.

Collectively, this funding package provides a powerful platform for transport to facilitate the aspirations of the LCR Growth Plan and set out a long term transport investment strategy that is fully aligned with the priorities of key stakeholders and is able to respond to the future transport needs of the City Region.
Local Transport Schemes

Merseytravel, along with bus operator partners, has also been successful in securing £4.2m worth of funding in 2012 under the Better Bus Area Fund which has delivered a range of measures to support an uptake in bus use across the region.

The Liverpool City Region has a long held commitment to securing and delivering funding for improvements to air quality and sustainable travel. As such, we have been successful in securing funds through both the Clean Bus Technology Fund (CBTF) and the Clean Vehicle Technology Fund. In 2013, funding was secured to retrofit 59 buses with NOx abatement technology and in 2014 a further 37 buses were retrofitted. The 2015 CBTF bid brought in an additional £497,000 which allowed an additional 31 buses to be retrofitted.

The LCR has also been awarded Green Bus Funding, which resulted in 33 new hybrid buses being introduced in the region, each with 30% lower emissions than equivalent standard diesel vehicles.

We have also submitted a Low Emission Bus bid, through which a range of alternatively fuelled buses are planned including 12 fully electric buses; nine Biomethane gas buses; and 51 hybrid buses, which will all operate within designated AQMAs.

Funding through future bids will be sought in order to support the aims of the Bus Strategy, with greener vehicles increasingly adopted as the standard for buses in the LCR.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important to ensure that we invest our money wisely and get the maximum value from it, by building on evidence of “what works”. Monitoring and evaluation evidence is therefore central to decision making about where best to target public spending, demonstrating the value for money and benefits which are generated by investment in transport, and learning about how we can most effectively deliver on the aims and objectives set out in our Bus Strategy.

The baseline – where we are now, is comprehensively set out in a supplement to the strategy. Our approach to outcome monitoring is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. A primarily quantitative approach will allow us to efficiently collect the large amount of data needed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the work areas outlined previously. It will also enable us to derive changes in terms of passenger satisfaction, awareness of bus services and mode shift.

Quantitative analysis will be supported by the collection of qualitative evidence. Whilst surveys enable us to gather a quantitative snapshot of the user population at a particular time and place, qualitative focus groups will give us feedback and opinions on interventions. The qualitative information we gather will support numerical evaluation by verifying the trends identified, filling any gaps where quantitative data is not applicable and providing context where quantitative data does not give us enough information on its own.

Merseytravel’s bus capital programme will be focused on delivering capital investments which align with the Bus Strategy. These will predominantly focus on optimising punctuality and reliability and improving the customer experience off bus.
The Bus Strategy for Liverpool City Region will seek to address the challenges facing the network, building on its strengths, creating a simplified product for which the local travelling public can have a new confidence and pride.

This Bus Strategy is being put in place at a critical time in the evolution of the bus industry, both locally and nationally, and the forthcoming Buses Bill supports positive change for the travelling public.

It will help us put a successful bus offer at the heart of an economically vibrant connected City Region, securing a better future as envisaged by the Transport Plan for Growth.

Key Documents

1 Liverpool City Region Devolution Agreement

2 A Transport Plan for Growth

3 Guidelines for the Provision of Bus Services

4 Liverpool City Region Growth Deal
   https://www.liverpoollep.org/economic-strategy/growth-deal/
We welcome your comments and feedback which will help us improve our future planning.

For more information visit www.merseytravel.gov.uk

We can provide this information in other formats. Please contact us to discuss your requirements.