



CPT Response to North East Transport Plan Consultation January 2021

Introduction

The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) is recognised by the Government as the UK trade body for bus and coach operators with in excess of 90% of bus fleet, and 55% of coach fleet within its membership numbering around a thousand business members. In the Northern region, CPT represents 50 operators ranging from SMEs to the larger group operators.

CPT also provides the secretariat for the North East Bus Operators Association (NE Bus) and responds on behalf of NE Bus which represents operators of bus services operating within the area of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and North of Tyne Combined Authority. NE Bus represents the major bus groups namely Arriva, Go North East and Stagecoach North East and also represents a large number of smaller, independent operators. Membership is also openly available to all North East bus operators.

Executive Summary

CPT welcomes the ambition in the draft plan and both bus and coach operators share the longer term ambition and the targets on passenger growth and traffic reduction.

In order to reach the stated aims, there are some valid practical concerns and considerations which must be worked through, operators must be seen as a major stakeholder and partner in developing any proposals into reality.

We set out constructive feedback to the policy areas within the document and also set out in broad terms how buses and the wider public transport network can further benefit the economy and people of the region.

The visitor economy in pre and post COVID times has been increasing market for the region. The Coach Industry and Group Travel are major contributors to the visitor economy and should be seen as part of the wider transport mix with supportive facilities.

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Response to the Transport Plan Vision and Objectives

CPT and NE Bus welcome such a comprehensive and ambitious plan based on well thought out and strong context which is linked to economic, health and environmental matters and with a realistic inclusion of the impact of Covid-19 and an increased digital influence. We fully support the vision of 'Moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East' and the objectives of the plan which operators support.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation and acknowledge the ambition of the plan. It is in the interests of all partners to ensure this is delivered collaboratively and with the full support of transport operators to ensure the longer term ambition and the targets on passenger growth and traffic reduction are achieved.

We must collectively actively challenge the reality that commuting in our region is dominated by car use (60.5%) with travel by bus at 10%.

The overall ambition has to be matched with a time related focus on delivery and outcomes and should be challenging in delivering the outcomes to provide real life improvements rather than being a dreary public sector policy document.

This requires acknowledgment and consideration of the points raised by operators, directly and also via CPT in this submission. The response will further set out the role that buses and coaches can play in achieving the vision and objectives and discussing some of the specific proposals set out in the plan.

Response to Individual Policy Areas

Active Travel

CPT supports the aim for more journeys to be made on foot or by bicycle as this will lead to a reduction in car dependency and public transport use can also include active travel.

A key component of promoting active travel, is using limited highway and public realm space efficiently to promote both public transport and active travel.

Any rebalancing intention should take into account the space needed to accommodate buses and passengers safely, sufficiently and comfortably – and also the attractive public realm walking access between key bus stops/interchanges and destinations. It is appreciated that all modes require walking at some stage of the journey, but at the same time not all people can walk great distances so access to good central stopping facilities in Towns and Cities is crucial.

Increased use of cycling can result in reduced numbers of cars on our roads and this ambition is welcomed if progressed in a way which does not negatively affect bus flow or passenger safety and experience. Recent cycle schemes in the region have resulted in a significant deterioration in the waiting environment for bus passengers with loss of shelters the norm, this cannot continue.

Segregated cycle lanes where space is available can be more user friendly and it is appreciated this is not always possible. Using the right highway design, buses (driven by professional and highly trained drivers) and cyclists can safely co-exist and the removal of car traffic further provides a safe and efficient highway for all.

Public transport: travelling by bus, ferry and on demand public transport

We welcome the regular references to partnership working, and the recognition of the recent work by bus operators in investing in and improving services, in turn growing patronage and maintaining high customer satisfaction levels, prior to the pandemic

Buses provide the most flexible means of public transportation and require limited up front infrastructure capital compared to other modes.

To ensure buses are attractive for passengers and fulfilling viable modal shift, it is important buses are able to reach the areas passengers want to travel to.

Even with progression of the transport plan, bus remains the only consistent public transport mode available to all localities. It is important that whilst the rail proposals will bring benefits to some, working with bus operators to support bus will significantly increase the benefits and reach of improved public transport.

The bus sector is committed to working with local authority partners on improving air quality and journey times in a way that is proportionate.

Prioritising road space for buses and coaches to ensure a fast and consistent journey time is essential to encourage people to make the switch to more sustainable and environmentally friendly forms of transport. The plan recognises the detrimental effect of car usage on air quality and congestion.

The consequences of congestion include longer journey times and increased operating costs, thereby putting pressure on fares, both of which reduce travel by bus, and encourage yet worse congestion and worsening air quality.

Overall journey time by bus must be broadly comparable or even better than the journey by car. Bus priority at key points of the City highway network can provide not only an important actual time saving, but a very visible comparison for motorists still waiting in congestion as a bus travels past with priority.

Buses are the most efficient use of road space. Buses are also by far the largest provider of public transport journeys in the Region, so measures which provide greater priority and additionally help tackle congestion are essential and overdue, and they will enable bus operators to deliver even better journeys for passengers and make public transport a viable choice for more users.

It is impossible for any one single organisation (public or private) to eradicate traffic congestion and thus a partnership approach is essential. The economy of local buses is linked to the local high street economy and the local visitor economy is linked to the coach economy.

Operators on a daily basis know and understand the local road network including its issues, inconsistencies and also have the solutions to help reduce congestion. They cannot deliver this in isolation and the local authority must tap into this expertise. Local bus operators are also the largest single user of the local network transporting thousands of passengers on a daily basis.

Buses and their users can be supported in the following ways:

- A Quality Waiting Environment - The waiting environment is an important aspect in the whole journey experience especially during poor weather conditions. Provision of bus

shelters can not only provide refuge in poor weather but also provide seating for disabled and older passengers.

- Bus Priority Schemes - Speeding up bus journeys is an important element in encouraging modal shift and reducing congestion. Bus priority means bus passengers can enjoy faster journey times that can compete and even beat car trips, the visibility of buses moving past traffic jams is also an important image to see in promoting modal shift. In many cases bus priority can be provided inexpensively and quickly, even simple schemes using paint on the road surface can help deliver priority. CPT urge working with operators to identify where bus priority measures could be delivered.
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Private transport: travelling by car and using road infrastructure

Whilst promoting cleaner and greener cars is to be welcomed, even cleaner cars cause congestion and hamper the high capacity modes such as bus.

Congestion is the biggest single factor affecting reliability of bus services, which in turn can lead to the 'bus' being less attractive and discourages modal shift.

Nationally, buses carry more passenger journeys than all other forms of public transport put together (Source: DfT National Travel Survey 2017 Tables NTS 0308, 0313).

Congestion continues to be a major problem. Congestion in the UK's largest cities is 14% worse than five years ago, and Nationally, traffic speeds in city centres are forecast to fall by almost 5mph from 17mph to an average of 12mph by 2030, and significantly slower in peak hours, according to a recent report by Greener Journeys.

The stated ambition of reducing car journeys is welcomed but requires more detail. There appears to be a complete absence of references to car parking costs and levelling up the inequality, and therefore encouragement of poor travel behaviours, between below cost, and at times even free, car parking vs. the cost of providing more sustainable public transport (bus, Metro and Rail).

Reducing on street parking bays reduces the number of potential destination parking opportunities for cars and also frees up valuable highway space for more efficient use of space fulfilling the wider ambitions of the City Centre Strategy.

Market forces and the concept of pricing to drive behaviours must also be appreciated and its logic applied. For example the current lack of modern vehicle age limits and emission standards on taxi/private hire vehicles has led to the offering of very low headline fares which compete with and undermine the public transport network of Metro, rail and buses. It cannot be right that a single occupancy taxi is cheaper than using public transport. This just further compounds both congestion and air quality issues.

The transport plan must drive a more hostile environment to the car and especially where high quality, reliable alternatives exist in the local bus network. Parking must be high cost and on street parking reduced in places to enable wider benefit. An in depth review of parking could consider street by street analysis; in places bus priority, improved waiting experience or improved public realm could be easily and quickly achievable.

Park and Ride has an important role to play in allowing motorists a degree of flexibility outside of congested urban centres, but focus seems to be on initially maximising existing schemes with nothing new mentioned until the 10-year horizon - we need to plan for more and sooner and link it to BRT style bus priority.

Whilst there is some park and ride provision (namely Durham City and at points around the Tyne and Wear Metro network) there is no mass market provision in most of our towns and cities. There is an urgent need for work and invention in this area either with purpose built facilities and dedicated services, or by using strategic locations next to existing major bus corridors.

Such an approach on existing bus networks, would require capital investment and a small ongoing maintenance cost but provided it could be delivered with accompanying bus priority measures to ensure no impact on journey time, there would not be any need for revenue support.

Public transport: travelling by local rail and Metro

Whilst modal shift from car is important, the transport plan should not focus on initiatives encouraging significant modal shift between public transport modes without a balanced approach or support for other public transport modes.

Where Metro or local rail networks are expanded, the overall planning process should seek to prevent a wider deterioration in the local bus network as a result, with counter-productive consequences. Any loss of passengers and resultant loss of bus service will hit hard on communities away from the rail network with no alternative options. If not managed and mitigated, the increase of passenger services could result in unintended consequences including the wider deterioration of the local bus network.

In the North East car ownership is comparatively low when compared with other regions but has been increasing in recent decades. However, for people on low incomes public transport is their only source of travel. We do have major concerns that without further measures to prioritise or promote bus travel any mode shift from bus to rail will result in patronage reductions and bus service reductions across a far larger area, as a result the most socially deprived in the region will suffer the most.

For existing and new rail provision, bus should be promoted as the preferred means of interchange and appropriate facilities to similar levels must promote the overall passenger experience. There are inter-dependencies, for example a medium to longer distance car journey can be replaced by short distance bus and longer distance coach/train use.

Bus operators should be positively included as an equal partner on any rail scheme planning with the following considered:

- Attractive ticketing options to promote interchange with bus need to be considered.

- Financial support or kick start style funding should be made available to support new or diverted links to interchange with the new stations.
- Passenger waiting facilities should be high quality with shelter, information provision and installation of real time displays.
- Bus services providing interchange at railway stations need simple and quick access and egress to avoid inconveniencing through passengers using buses serving stations. This should include (if required) priority access over through traffic back onto main through roads.

Connectivity beyond our own boundaries

Wider National and International connectivity for people, goods and services is essential for the North East economy to thrive.

Due to the nature of the bus and coach industry we focus mostly on the movement of people element but the movement of goods through the full delivery cycle needs to be sufficiently planned until journey end to prevent negative impact and delays on local bus networks.

As mentioned previously, longer distance car journeys can be taken off roads by attractive longer distance coach and rail services. Whilst the local transport plan should focus on wider connectivity, a large element of this in passenger terms is the 'door to station' element in making that journey from home to rail/coach interchange as swift, delay free, reliable and easy as possible.

The Newcastle International Airport 2035 Masterplan, references that bus use to the airport for both passengers and staff is relatively low at 1% of those surveyed. We do acknowledge that the link to the Metro system is more heavily used however the airport acknowledges there is scope and opportunity to increase the number, frequency and geographical scope of bus and coach services serving the airport.

It also acknowledges the need to improve services regionally including the potential for dedicated express services or becoming a stop on longer distance coach routes. We are not aware of any specific discussions in this area but CPT can assist in achieving this ambition which would improve the whole journey experience for those travelling to and from the airport.

Research, Development and Innovation

North East bus operators have invested year on year in low emission buses, including hybrid, biogas and the latest Euro 6 diesel buses meeting very stringent emission standards. Indeed the level of investment between 2015 and 2019 was in excess of £80m and committed new vehicle orders have also been delivered even through the COVID pandemic.

Working with partners, support has been secured to upgrade the exhaust systems of a number of other modern buses across operators fleets with 'CRTs' to the latest Euro 6 standards.

In recent weeks, the region's first fully electric buses have also been introduced between Gateshead and Newcastle thanks to a successful bid to the Government's Ultra Low Emission Bus

Fund which helps support some of the additional premium cost of buying electric buses and installing charging infrastructure.

Buses have continued to evolve with the latest engine propulsion systems, more efficient means of operation, more comfortable interiors and better use of technology.

Contactless bankcards are now accepted for payment on all the major bus operators across the UK and bus operators are increasingly harnessing digital retail platforms to make it easier for customers to transact with them.

Every bus in the North East has been fitted with an ITSO (the international ticketing standard) smartcard enabled ticket machine for a number of years now and most of these machines have GPS telematics to help improve road safety performance and are enabled to provide live tracking data which is consolidated in the Nexus operated Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system.

This enables them to provide live service information through their bus stop and interchange infrastructure where digital information screens are in place. All operators' services can be tracked online and on mobile devices to provide up to the minute journey time information. Arriva's travel planning app, for example, is accessed once every 2.4 seconds.

There are already smart enabled all operator tickets in the region through the SmartZone products and the Network One ticket provides an any bus, Metro and Ferry integrated travel solution.

All operators provide ticketing options direct to customers mobile phones and today's modern buses are fitted with USB charging points, free Wi-Fi and next stop audio visual customer information systems.

The above refers to investment and progressions mostly made from operators, and whilst support is available in parts for greening bus and coach fleets innovation in highways to support this operator led innovation has been sadly lacking.

In many cases there needs to be an innovation of thinking, ambition and approach on highway allocation rather than any technological advancements. However such considerations could be:

- The region's Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) bus system is in desperate need of upgrade and is critical if we are serious about data and technology aiding behavioural change and modal shift.
- There is good recognition of the importance of ITS and UTMC traffic signal technology to increase road capacity and road speeds, but we know there needs to be a more joined up approach to the delegation of traffic signal control and prioritisation on a region wide level through the UTMC. This will be vital if we expect more people to see the bus as a credible alternative to the car. Data is already available from on-bus ticket machines to feed into traffic light controls. Some current systems can additionally apply extra priority to the most delayed buses (versus their scheduled time) along the route.

Making the Right Travel Choice

Resources must be made available for public transport supportive marketing and engagement to target car reduction and increase use of more sustainable modes. We support the establishment of a dedicated Regional Behaviour Change Team.

There could be more on travel planning - Birmingham are building a multi-modal travel app. We would support this and it would be a major boost for multi modal travel, especially based on NTL ticketing.

The word of the proposed team can include working with schools, local authorities, major employers and wider stakeholders who can provide access to commuters and who have the ability to influence change. Rather than just influencing individuals, the team should also lead on the development of key stakeholder relationships in the region to deliver change.

In addition more practical measures should also be considered such as car scrappage schemes (with payment provided with public transport ticketing), further promotion of car clubs which could provide occasional access to people who need a car and could be of value to multiple car owning households. Measures would need to be attractive to motorists and influence behaviour change.

Specific Feedback

We call for greater insight into the detail and formation of the sub plans that will affect us, especially 176a 'North East Bus Strategy' and 268 'Park and Ride Strategy'. We would like to see both detail and timescales.

It would appear that a lot more detail is still required for bus schemes, unlike those for rail and Metro - we continue to stand ready to assist with this.

The statistics and presentation of data to illustrate bus and metro positions across pages 20 and 21 seem unbalanced and confusing. A consistent set of measures/themes would have been more appropriate. Also the fares data chart for buses does not directly relate to our region. A 'real life' example, and comparison to London, is conversely illustrated for the Metro.

We have seen some Authorities elsewhere in the UK set aligned targets to grow bus patronage and also commit to road speeds/journey times - this is something that could energise and focus all parties and be far more ambitious in delivery.

We caution Demand Responsive Transport in its current form as the solution to rural transport needs. It is still in its infancy, comes at a huge cost and has yet to demonstrate substantive growth, but we would welcome the opportunity to work with partners on blended and other solutions, but also recognise that good quality data and technology are key, regardless.

The Role of Coach

It is disappointing to see the word 'coach' or 'coaches' appear only 4 times in the whole document. Local authorities often under estimate the benefits of coach as a specific mode and also under provide in terms of infrastructure.

We acknowledge the reference to a 'Coach Action Plan' and CPT would be keen to work with public sector partners in developing a coach strategy and working towards further unleashing the further benefits of coach.

Understanding the volume of coach travel (irregular services or visits) into and around the region, and knowledge of the economic benefits they bring is an important aspect of considering the positive economic benefit of quality coach parking facilities. The Government's Air Quality Plan makes specific reference to regional coach operators and the benefits they can offer in reducing congestion and associated emissions and this is especially relevant when Tyneside local authorities are considering the implementation of a clean air zone.

Coach travel plays a vital and often underappreciated role in transporting people around the country every day. Coaches provide a comfortable, environmentally sustainable way of transporting huge numbers of visitors around the country. They support our tourism industry, with domestic and international visitors who travel by coach contributing over £6 billion to the UK economy each year. They transport hundreds of thousands of children to school each day, ensure people can still get where they need to go during rail engineering works, and provide those who might otherwise struggle to travel with a safe and easy door-to-door travel option.

The coach is one of the most environmentally friendly ways of travelling, with average carbon dioxide emissions per passenger per journey being around 1.5 times higher for rail, 5 times higher for air and 6 times higher for car travel.

The role of the Coach cannot be underestimated to the regional economy and to improving air quality. Examples include:

- Day trips and Holidays (both incoming and outgoing) providing a valuable means of preventing isolation to typically older members of society. Relatively inexpensive day trips and holidays can be threatened by non-compliance charges or short term investment in newer vehicles in which the market cannot sustain.
- Scheduled services such as Megabus and National Express provide an attractive low cost means of travel particularly to price sensitive markets such as young people, students and people on low incomes. Again, incoming passengers are important to the local visitor economy.
- Educational trips involving schools, colleges and universities are an important means of fulfilling specific curriculum requirements which may include swimming, visiting cultural places of interest and study visits.
- Sporting trips can include transporting sporting teams (including professional and college/university teams) as well as transporting fans for major events. This element is important for the safe transport of fans during periods of significantly increased football and traffic and is a means the Police and football clubs often promote.
- The private hire section of the market is often underestimated by transport planners but provides capacity benefits to a guaranteed number of passengers, and reduce multiple duplicated car journeys.
- Replacement for other modes such as rail and diverted flights often required a quick response.

All too often local authorities are failing to properly consider provision for coach travel as a sustainable form of transport that can ease congestion and air pollution by reducing traffic. Coach travel to visitor attractions is frequently hampered by poor access, lack of suitable drop-off/pick up points, lack of coach parking and general coach facilities.

This can lead to increased car use, with associated congestion, car parking and air pollution issues, and in some cases can even restrict visitor numbers. When coaches have to travel considerable distances away from their destination to park, vehicle emissions and driver hours are increased and driver rest time is curtailed. These factors sometimes result in coaches parking in residential areas with a negative impact on the relationship between coach operators and local people.

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