

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.

North East Bus Operators Association (NE Bus) 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.

Prioritising road space for buses 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.

NE Bus would make the point from the outset that buses are part of the solution both in terms of capacity benefits and in working towards providing cleaner and newer vehicles.

Furthermore, within the City of Newcastle, around 40% of people do not own a car, often people on low incomes and public transport is their only source of travel. We do have major concerns that without further initiatives or measures to prioritise bus and coach travel, which can in turn promote growth in passenger numbers and drive further improvements in services and reduce traffic congestion and pollution, the most socially deprived in the region will suffer the most.

The Role of Buses

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.

Bus commuters nationally generate £64bn worth of goods and services and are essential to the local economy. In the North East region bus operators have invested over £80m in new vehicles since 2015 to serve local people and the regional economy.

We believe that local bus services, delivered in collaboration with a supportive partnership approach from Local Authorities, can provide many wider benefits across the region.

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.

- CPT and operators appreciate the discussions with local authorities on the review of Central Motorway and potential junction changes. CPT would also recommend that this forum is continued and its scope expanded to ensure bus and coach operators work in partnership with the local authorities to achieve the required air quality targets.

- Newcastle has some of the lowest car parking charges in the Country and, peculiarly, offers free car parking from 17:00 on weekdays – right in the middle of the busy evening peak. This situation is not sustainable if we are serious about car constraint and measures to reduce congestion. If the ‘Alive after five’ car parking scheme, supported by tax payer revenue foregone, is designed to keep people already in car parking spaces in the City there for longer then that’s exactly how it should be structured, not the current ‘free for all’ that risks enticing more cars into the City at such a heavily congested, and polluted, time.

Despite this reduction the zone will still impact bus services across the whole region as far as Berwick, Middlesbrough and Carlisle due to the reach of scheduled bus services from Newcastle.

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City Centre Layout and Interdependent Highway Network

To ensure buses are attractive for passengers and fulfilling viable modal shift, it is important buses are able to reach the parts of the City where passengers want to travel to, and that cross city services provide reasonably direct access to, and through the City Centre.

Over recent years for various reasons and often with reasonable cause, bus access has been removed from St Andrews Street, Ridley Place, Neville Street (East and Northbound) and High Level Bridge (Northbound). These changes to City Centre circulation have resulted in bus routes typically all using limited road options and corridors in the City Centre meaning buses congregate on key routes.

The experimental closures of Blakett Street, if made permanent has the potential to further constrain buses on even more limited road space and take passengers further away from Eldon Square potentially making buses less attractive. In addition any accident or incident within the City is likely to affect bus users to a much greater extent if alternative diversion options are significantly limited.

As a mode comparator, car owners parking in Percy Street or Eldon Garden Car Parks have the ability to walk straight into the respective shopping centres whilst removing buses from Blakett Street means a further walking distance for many passengers using local bus services. Eldon Square Bus Station is an attractive facility but does not offer the capacity to accommodate services dispersed from elsewhere.

Interchange more difficult

Perverse that cars (albeit blue badge will have access to blackett sst and access will be maintained to new bridge street car park

Bus stats:

Blakett St westbound – 34 buses per hour

Blakett St westbound – 32 buses per hour

66 buses per hour total

New bridge street west east is 30

New bridge street west west is 9 plus 24 buses n hour who stop on jd street

Market street westbound 46 buses an hour stop

Mark st eastbound 36 buses per hour stop

Pilgrim st south 38 buses per hour

Pilgrim st north 36 buses per hour