



A NEW DEAL FOR BUSES IN LEEDS AND WEST YORKSHIRE

The new *Mayor of West Yorkshire has the power to regulate bus services*. This means that routes, timetables and fares are set by the Mayoral Combined Authority rather than private bus companies.

The government has published a new *National Bus Strategy* which sets out a vision of greatly enhanced bus systems in order to respond to the need to 'Build Back Better' after the pandemic and in response to the implications of the Climate Change challenge.

The new National Bus Strategy requires the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) as the Mayoral Authority to publish a *Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021*.

Leeds and West Yorkshire urgently need a much-improved bus service to provide a viable and attractive alternative for many car journeys and so lower accident rates, reduce the domination of many neighbourhoods by traffic and improve air quality.

Greatly increasing public transport use is a pre-requisite for reducing carbon emissions and for Leeds and West Yorkshire to become carbon neutral.

Comprehensive and affordable bus services (as part of an integrated public transport system) are essential to provide access for all to employment opportunities, a range of good shopping, schools and health services and to social facilities, parks and open countryside.

This is a key moment of opportunity to establish an excellent bus service which meets the needs of people in Leeds and West Yorkshire.

We urge the Mayor, the Combined Authority, City and Metropolitan District Councils to seize this opportunity and to follow the example of Greater Manchester in moving to a publicly controlled franchised bus system as quickly as possible.

This is the only way to control fares and guarantee a long-term integrated network.

Key elements of a ***New Deal for Buses in Leeds and West Yorkshire*** must be:

- an integrated system with routes, timetables, fares, standards set by WYCA
- simple fare structure and cheaper fares relative to car use
- an electric bus (or other Zero emission) fleet as soon as practical
- key corridors to become 'bus rapid transit' with high quality of infrastructure and maximum bus lane provision
- much improved pedestrian access to bus stops and facilities
- many more orbital or inter suburban routes for non-city centre journeys
- more feeder services to core routes or demand responsive opportunities
- single portals of information including web sites and apps
- clear responsibility and accountability

Leeds is the second largest city in England outside London. It is also the biggest city in Europe without a tram, metro or extensive suburban rail network.

Although WYCA is consulting on initial proposals for Mass Rapid Transit across West Yorkshire delivery of this will be medium term at best. For the crucial next 10 years 90% of local public transport journeys will be by bus.

West Yorkshire relies on its bus network but bus services are just not good enough.

Buses are perceived by many as infrequent, unreliable and slow. Fares are complicated, and expensive. They have gone up much faster than inflation and particularly when compared to the cost of driving. Bus routes don't go where many people need to travel and focus largely on the town and city centres. Bus use is in a spiral of decline.

West Yorkshire has the lowest bus patronage of any of the metropolitan areas in England.

In the 10 years before the pandemic, the number of bus passengers declined by over 36 million passengers per annum – a 21% decline. Bus trips per West Yorkshire resident fell by 26%.

Meanwhile Leeds has declared a ***Climate Emergency*** and has launched an ambitious Transport Strategy with the ***aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.***

In order to achieve this the Leeds Transport Strategy has set a target of ***increasing bus patronage by 130% by 2030.*** This would mean 145 million bus trips in Leeds by 2030, an increase of 82 million over the pre-pandemic level. But in the last ten years, bus trips in Leeds fell by over 15 million despite buoyant employment and significant population growth. There was a decline of over 4 million passengers in 2019/20 alone.

However, WYCA's Strategic Bus Network Review concludes that even with proposed improvements the Leeds bus network would carry only 74 million passengers by 2033 - this is half the number the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy requires.

There is a huge gap between the ambition West Yorkshire requires and existing bus provision.

The National Bus Strategy requires West Yorkshire to *start the statutory process of bus franchising* or enter into an 'Enhanced Partnership' with bus operators by July 2022 in order to access government funding for buses.

However, 'Partnership Working' with the private bus companies in West Yorkshire has not delivered the improvements that are required. Despite investment in bus lanes and other infrastructure, in many areas service frequencies have been reduced. Bus companies have resisted integrated ticketing and co-ordination.

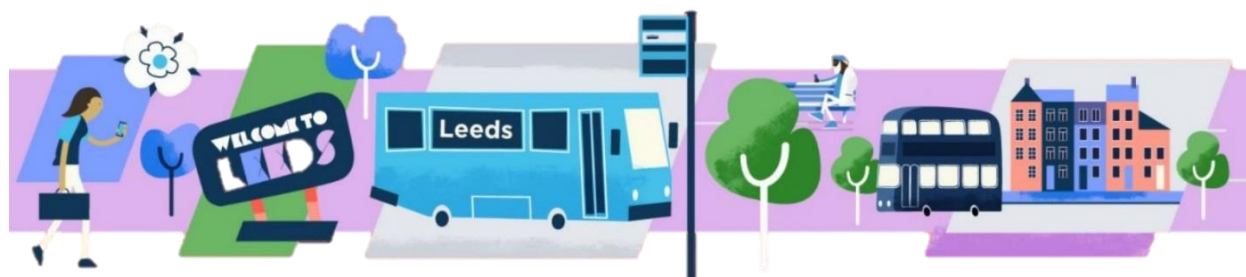
Crucially all Partnership arrangements maintain the fatal split of control and interests between the public transport authority and private bus companies. Although the new Enhanced Partnerships model could deliver more control to local transport authorities there is no convincing evidence that they can deliver the substantial improvements required.

Public opinion strongly supports public control of bus services. This was the top priority for the Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury. Buses are the biggest issue in public responses to the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy.

Leeds and West Yorkshire need an ambitious New Deal for Buses, not managed decline.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan which must be produced by this October is key to how a New Deal can be delivered.

Bus franchising is essential and we need to start the process NOW.



Statistics quoted are from the Department of Transport annual data on local bus journeys by Local Authority, WYCA Strategic Bus Network Review and the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy.