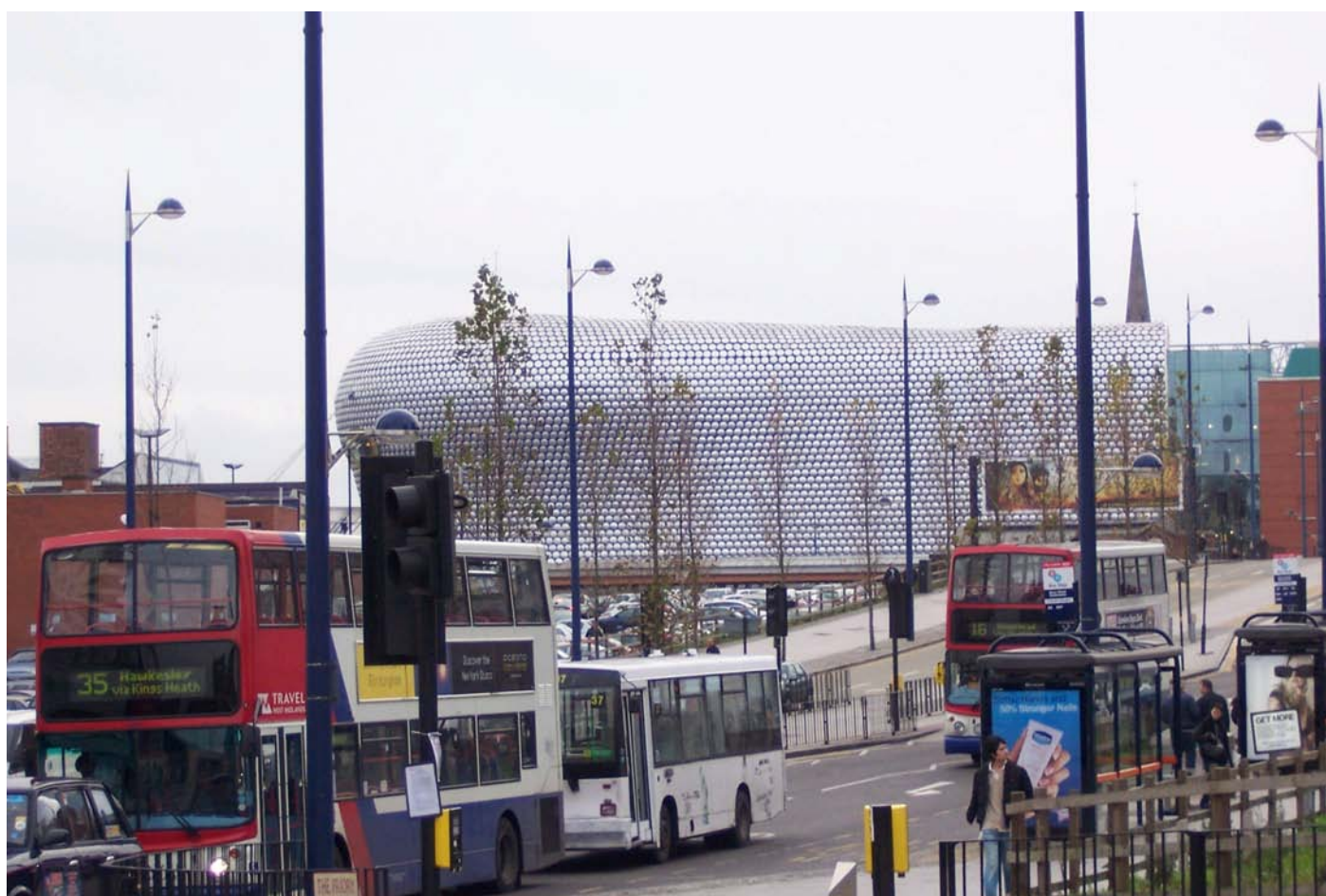




# Building Bus Use



A report from Overview & Scrutiny







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# Preface

**By Councillor Martin Mullaney**

Chair, Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Congestion is one of the biggest problems that we have in this city and the rest of West Midlands. The recent Green Paper, 'Gridlock or Growth' made it clear that this is not something that we can ignore. It isn't going to go away unless we try very hard to fix it.

To reduce congestion we need to encourage people to use public transport, as well as adopting some changes in lifestyle to reduce their dependency on their cars. Buses are the most used form of public transport in the West Midlands. They are cheaper and quicker to improve than different forms of public transport such as rail and metro. Sadly, the level of bus patronage in the West Midlands has been continually falling for some time.

This report shows that it is possible to turn around the falling use of buses - other towns such as Nottingham, Telford and Brighton have achieved dramatic increases. However, to achieve this turnaround requires a lot of work and leadership by the City Council. It also requires difficult and unpopular decisions now to avoid a congestion crisis in the next 20 years.

Improving buses in Birmingham needs the uncertain partnership of Birmingham City Council, Centro and local bus companies to be reinvigorated. The Council needs to take a lead and this report identifies some practical steps to get the partnership working better.

We must be brave enough to admit that our current position isn't tenable for the future. We can't delude ourselves that we can continually squeeze extra capacity from our highways. Building a large number of new roads isn't an option, so to a certain extent, some form of road pricing is inevitable.

It's therefore a case of ensuring that when it happens, it fits the needs of our citizens and businesses. This includes improving public transport, in particular bus services, so that it becomes a viable alternative to the car. The challenge for the City Council is to remain part of the debate and to secure the right level of investment that the city needs in its transport infrastructure.

Ultimately, we all have to have a stake in improving bus travel. We can't ask other people to use the bus so there is more road space for us to drive our cars. Buses have to be a real alternative that all of us are prepared to use.



## Summary

### The Bus Problem

Congestion is one of the key challenges that Birmingham and the West Midlands face. On a typical weekday, the West Midlands transport network carries about 5.2 million trips, the majority of which are by car or commercial vehicle. The total number of journeys being made by all transport modes is also increasing, with traffic levels expected to rise by 11% by 2016.

Buses form a substantial part of the public transport system. Of the approximate 15% of journeys made by public transport, 13% are made by bus, with the remaining 2% by rail and Metro. Bus use in the West Midlands remains the highest of all Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) areas, with around 308 million passenger journeys made every year. However, this is around 60% of the amount made in 1980 (over 500 million) and is indicative of the long-term overall decline of bus use outside London.

Arresting the decline is a national strategic objective. Through the Bus Strategy and the Local Transport Plan (LTP), the City Council is signed up to building bus patronage. However, performance against targets is varied. Although there have been some successes, the bottom line is that patronage has consistently fallen.

Increasing the use of public transport matches with the City Council's aims and objectives on a number of levels. 'Improving the city's transport and tackling congestion' is Priority 7 in the Council Plan 2006+. This comprises:

- Managing congestion by making improvements to the city's transport and infrastructure: measures to improve highways, parking and road congestion; and
- Promoting safer and sustainable travel: measures to improve road safety and encouraging the use of sustainable ways of travelling (walking, cycling, bus, trains and Metro).

Promoting public transport as part of an efficient and effective transport network also contributes to other priorities in the Council Plan:

- Priority 5: Cleaner, greener and safer;
- Priority 6: Investing in regeneration;
- Priority 10: Promoting Birmingham as a great international city.

There is widespread acceptance that the current framework for delivering bus services outside London is part of the problem behind declining patronage. Much has been made of the difference between the delivery models in London and the rest of the country. Transport for London (TfL) regulates and plans services, frequencies, fares and service standards. In contrast, outside London, over 80% of services are provided on an entirely commercial basis, with the remainder being subsidised by PTEs or local councils.



However, aside from having a different delivery model, there are other factors which have helped to increase bus patronage in London:

- The level of political leadership, reflecting the priority afforded to transport by citizens;
- Introduction of the Congestion Charge;
- Levels of funding, which are greater than for the rest of the country; and
- TfL having Highway Authority powers which enable it to implement extensive priority measures.

## Our Conclusions

When we started this review, the key question that we were seeking to answer was:

“How effective are the efforts of the City Council and other stakeholders in encouraging people to switch to bus services?”

The specific outcomes that we set out to achieve were to:

- Identify the measures that have been successful in encouraging people to change from car to bus;
- Provide an evaluation of the progress made by stakeholders in improving bus services in Birmingham;
- Recommend steps that can be taken by stakeholders in the future to make effective improvements to bus services.

## What Makes People Switch From Their Cars?

Many people who already use buses do so because they do not have an alternative. Common reasons why people choose not to use buses stem from entrenched negative attitudes. This is particularly the case among those with middle and high incomes – those who are more likely to own and use a car. Since many of these attitudes result from decisions made on an emotive (rather than rational) basis, it is not surprising that it will take a lot to convince these people to use the bus regularly. Radical measures will be needed if we are to persuade them.

Bus Showcase has clearly had a positive impact in encouraging people to use the bus. Investment in Bus Showcase has been linked to growth in patronage of buses and a shift of approximately 6% from cars. In some cases and at certain points in time, patronage has increased by as much as 25%. Sustaining this effort to avoid customers who have been won over reverting to other modes is important.

Relying solely upon ‘carrot’ measures (as we have largely done so far) will not bring about the degree of change needed. To win over such opposition individual car use will need to be made significantly less attractive and it seems that demand management schemes are the only real solution. However, for such measures to be effective they must temper the inevitable resentment that they will cause by achieving not only a step change in the quality of alternative ways of travelling, but also visibly tackling congestion.





# Building Bus Use

The Government has indicated that it is willing to financially support strong measures to discourage car use and improve bus services. It is important that an appropriate proportion of Government money is secured for the city. To ensure the continued economic success of the city and secure real public buy-in to support the tough measures that will be needed to tackle congestion, there must be significant, visible improvement to bus travel. This means not restricting our thinking to short term measures, but considering the long-term picture.

The recent Green Paper for discussion *Gridlock or Growth* poses these problems to the seven West Midlands authorities. In the longer term the danger is that if we do not take significant action, we will simply be tinkering at the margins of the problem. The question therefore becomes threefold:

- i. Do we need to implement demand management in the long term (and if not, what are we going to do to tackle the issue)?
- ii. How will we take advantage of the quick wins and extend what we are already doing to change lifestyles?; and
- iii. Do we have the political will to take the decisions that will be needed?

## **Are the Partnerships Working?**

The current way of delivering bus services places great emphasis on the need for effective partnership working between the City Council, Centro and bus operators. Our view is that whilst partnerships have delivered some improvement in bus use in the city, they could deliver more, particularly when compared to other cities. Much has been made of the decision to suspend the A38 Tyburn Road bus lanes. Whilst there were initially good reasons for this, the consequence has been a view that the Council is 'negative about buses'. It is important that we now move on from this.

Part of the issue is structural and we accept that there are problems with the delivery model for bus services outside London. The reliance upon voluntary participation in partnerships and the inability of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority to exercise powers in support of the targets it is set conspire to doom it to failure.

However, delivery of bus services in the future will continue to involve some form of partnership working between the City Council, Centro and private operators. It is therefore imperative that such partnerships are productive and are based upon mutually acceptable goals to which all partners are fully committed.

Any kind of partnership is a two-way street. Partners must always be prepared to constructively challenge one another, but they should not have cause to doubt their commitment to the partnership's aims. The current structures of informal partnerships make for an 'uneasy marriage' and one for which a fair degree of counselling will always be necessary. However, whatever structural and legislative changes lie on the horizon, partnership is the basic building block and we must be committed to making it work.





## Determining the Long Term Strategy

First and foremost, the City Council (along with the other six West Midlands authorities) needs to consider how it will respond to the issues that the Green Paper highlights. This decision needs to be taken soon to establish our long term strategy.

It is inconceivable that our approach can be divorced from that of the Government or from the other authorities in the West Midlands. Financially, this is impractical since the levels of investment needed for transport in the region are too high. In addition, to appreciate and accept the difficult decisions that are necessary, the public needs to see local and national government working as one.

This is not purely about how we improve bus use in the city. The strategy needs to be integral to and complementary with that for increasing the capacity of rail and Metro to meet existing and future needs. The aim should be to promote public transport in general i.e. if it proves more difficult to persuade people to transfer from their car to the bus, encourage them to transfer to other modes of public transport instead. However, we must still bear in mind that, irrespective of infrastructure investment, buses will continue to carry a significant majority of public transport passengers in the future.

Consultation must underpin the approach that the City Council takes and is party to. However, it is important that opinions are properly informed and that short-term outlooks do not prevent medium and long term improvement.

## Partnerships

Partnership working in building bus use in Birmingham is in need of reinvigoration if we are to achieve our targets. The City Council should take a lead in rebuilding trust, starting with clear commitments to working in partnership and followed by deeds to demonstrate our support as an active partner.

We feel that the city should be pursuing Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) and Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships (SQBPs). Whilst PIPs focus on punctuality, SQBPs provide a mechanism to raise standards across the board, in terms of on the bus, at the bus stop and on the highway.

Monitoring and enforcement of these partnerships by the Traffic Commissioner is essential if they are to operate successfully. We recognise, however, that Traffic Commissioners are presently under-resourced and need additional resources from Government and better information from operators if they are to carry out their role effectively.

There are examples of effective partnership working in the city, namely the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Its contribution to improving perceptions of safety at city centre bus stops has been positive. It is important that the CSP continues to evaluate the success of and need for further targeted improvements in other parts of the city.



# Building Bus Use

## For Partners – Centro and Travel West Midlands

How Centro leads on public transport in the city and the region is in part a product of the degree to which it can exercise direct influence over the seven authorities. Nevertheless, Centro must establish a lead that local authorities can support. Where the City Council must lead for Birmingham, Centro must do likewise for the achievement of regional transport goals.

Increased marketing and promotional activity provides an opportunity to raise awareness of Showcase routes and their features and attract new users. It will also enable further, route-specific, information on customer and non-user views to be gathered. This can then be used to validate and inform service changes and improvements. We feel that Network West Midlands is a positive step for marketing and information. Centro and operators need to work jointly on improving the level and quality of marketing for Showcase routes in a similar way.

After some delay to the introduction of Real Time Information, many of the improvements being delivered by Centro are now imminent. Alongside the introduction of Network West Midlands, these do represent substantial, visible improvements.

We commend Travel West Midlands for the considerable investment it has made in new buses, Automatic Vehicle Location systems, Operation Safer Travel, CCTV and driver training. These are all positive improvements, but for Travel West Midlands they also make good business sense. Tackling issues relating to cleanliness of buses whilst they are in service and overcrowding may not have a significant commercial benefit, but is important to existing and potential users. Addressing such issues is critical if people are to be successfully wooed from their cars.

## For the City Council

The Council must also play its part in delivering the existing programme of bus reliability improvement measures in the LTP and the Bus Strategy. The introduction of such measures will hopefully enable buses to become a viable alternative to the car. However, there needs to be an understanding that ineffective priority measures cause resentment from other road users. A proactive and balanced approach to managing traffic should include periodic review of the effectiveness of bus priority measures. The willingness to add, remove or modify such measures to ensure priority is focused on problem times is critical.

Recent debate on congestion has centred around whether the West Midlands authorities will introduce road pricing. Irrespective of decisions on participation in a demand management scheme, the City Council can do more to encourage lifestyle changes to reduce congestion. These include efforts to:

- **Change travel behaviour**, such as the availability of parking, its price and viable park and ride options;
- Support the **widespread adoption of travel planning** (such as Corporate Travel Plans and School Travel Plans);



- **Encourage alternatives to the car** and reduced car use in the peak periods (such as High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes).

It is however clear that even if lifestyle and travel planning changes are vigorously promoted, some form of demand management will be necessary to tackle congestion in the long-term. These changes must be balanced carefully against the need to retain a healthy local economy. The benefits of tackling congestion cannot be at the cost of the businesses with whom we intend to share those benefits. However, a firm emphasis on reducing dependency on cars, combined with a viable alternative must underpin our policy.

### **Recommendations**

In response to the issues outlined above, we have made eight recommendations to the Executive, which are designed to improve bus services in the city and encourage people to switch from their cars.



## Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	<p>The Executive should set out how the City Council will play its part in the West Midlands authorities' response to the congestion issues identified in the Green Paper, 'Gridlock or Growth'. This should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify how appropriate funding can be obtained from the Government;</li> <li>• Demonstrate how the Council will support the increased role that bus travel must play in this solution;</li> <li>• Ensure that the city plays a leading role in tackling the problem in the metropolitan area;</li> <li>• Include specific consideration of whether demand management measures such as Road Pricing will be supported by the city, and if they are not, how a comparable projected effect will be achieved.</li> </ul>	The Leader	31 December 2007
R02	<p>The Cabinet Member should identify how the City Council can take a lead in partnership working by bringing forward proposals to work with partners on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punctuality Improvement Partnerships; and</li> <li>• Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 September 2007
R03	<p>The Cabinet Member should identify specific projects to improve bus reliability as part of the work of the Congestion Task Force and as part of the normal activities of the Transportation Strategy and Highways functions, providing details of improvements that have been achieved to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	31 January 2008
R04	<p>Irrespective of regional approaches to tackle congestion, the Executive should make clear how the Council will extend its current efforts to encourage lifestyle changes with respect to travel behaviour. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the Council will raise the proportion of people covered by travel plans;</li> <li>• How the Council will pursue policies that encourage other alternatives to car use.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007



	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<b>R05</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should liaise with the Birmingham Lead Member on the West Midlands PTA, to request that Centro bring forward a plan of how they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with operators to implement a step change in the level of promotional activity on Bus Showcase routes;</li> <li>• Increase awareness of basic and improved route features;</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for non-users to try bus services; and</li> <li>• Get route-specific feedback from customers, new and old.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007
<b>R06</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should lobby the Government to increase resourcing of the Traffic Commissioner role for the West Midlands. This should be with a view to providing the level of monitoring and enforcement needed for greater partnership working on buses in the city.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007
<b>R07</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should, in conjunction with the Community Safety Partnership, review progress with actions to improve actual and perceived safety and security on public transport and evaluate the need to continue funding beyond 2008.</p>	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety	31 January 2008
<b>R08</b>	<p>Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	31 July 2007



## Glossary

<b>APR</b>	Annual Progress Report on the Local Transport Plan published by the Department for Transport (see 2.3.5).
<b>AVL</b>	Automatic Vehicle Location system - allows bus operators to track the position of appropriately equipped buses via satellite (see 4.4.11).
<b>Carnet</b>	A book of bus tickets that can be bought in advance and used over a period of time.
<b>Centro</b>	The West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive - responsible for promoting and developing public transport across the West Midlands metropolitan area.
<b>CEPOG</b>	Chief Engineers and Planning Officers Group, comprised of the Chief Planning Officers and Transportation Officers from the seven West Midlands District Councils.
<b>DfT</b>	Department for Transport.
<b>Excess Waiting Time</b>	Refers to the average time passengers have to wait between buses and the scheduled service interval. For example, if a bus is scheduled to run every 10 minutes, passengers would on average expect to wait 5 minutes. An average wait of 7 minutes equals 2 minutes of Excess Waiting Time.
<b>HOV lane</b>	High Occupancy Vehicle Lane - can be used by vehicles with more than one occupant (see 4.3.6).
<b>LTA</b>	Local Transport Authority.
<b>LTP</b>	Local Transport Plan - sets out the transport strategies and policies for an area and the related bids for Government funding (see 2.30).
<b>Modal Shift</b>	Changing how people travel e.g. from car to bus.
<b>OST</b>	Operation Safer Travel – an initiative led by Travel West Midlands and West Midlands Police and other stakeholders, to “deter and detect crime and anti-social behaviour on bus and Metro” (see 4.4.7).
<b>PIP</b>	Punctuality Improvement Partnership – partnerships between bus operators, local authorities/ PTEs and the Traffic Commissioner to improve bus punctuality.
<b>PTE</b>	Passenger Transport Executive - there are six PTE areas: West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.
<b>PTEG</b>	Passenger Transport Executives Group - a group representing the six PTEs.
<b>Punctuality</b>	Whether a service arrives on time. The definition of ‘on time’ applied by the Traffic Commissioners is between one minute early and five minutes late.
<b>QC</b>	Quality Contract – in essence the franchising of bus services with the public sector specifying and regulating and the private sector delivering (see 5.5).



<b>Reliability</b>	Whether a service runs at all or its consistency of punctuality over a period of time.
<b>RTI</b>	Real Time Information – current running information will be relayed to display screens in bus shelters and stations and be available via the internet and a SMS text messaging service (see 4.4.12).
<b>SQBP</b>	Statutory Quality Bus Partnership – statutory schemes established by LTAs to contribute to the implementation of the Bus Strategy, any bus operators who agree to meet the required standards of service can join the scheme (see 5.4).
<b>SVD</b>	Selective Vehicle Detection equipment – designed to detect the presence of buses and activate traffic lights to give priority to buses at junctions (see 5.6.1).
<b>STP</b>	School Travel Plan – sets out how children and their parents travel to school, with the aim of making the journey safer and more sustainable (see 4.3.18).
<b>TIF</b>	Transport Innovation Fund – a Government fund to support the costs of innovative local transport packages that combine more radical demand management measures (such as road pricing) with improved public transport, leading to modal shift (see 5.7).
<b>Traffic Commissioner</b>	Responsible for licensing bus operators, ensuring that vehicles are road worthy and making sure that the bus operators comply with the details of registered services, including the punctuality of timetabled services (see 2.2.8). Responsible for monitoring PIPs and adherence to SQBPs.
<b>TfL</b>	Transport for London - created in 2000 as the integrated body responsible for the Capital's transport system. Its primary role is to implement the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy and manage transport services across the Capital.
<b>TUAC</b>	Transport Users' Advisory Committee - The TUAC was a formal, public committee created to deal with issues with public transport. The meetings were attended by representatives of the major public transport operators in the region, Centro officers, members of the public and were chaired by elected members from the WMPTA. Birmingham was served by the Birmingham and Solihull TUAC.
<b>TUF</b>	Transport Users' Forum - In 2006, each District of the WMPTA was given the option to either continue with TUAC or change to a TUF. TUFs are a less formal model of meeting. They are open to the public and are held in locations closer to the communities they serve, not in traditional civic venues. Birmingham WMPTA members have determined that there are four meetings per year, one in each of four areas (Perry Barr (North), Stechford (East), Kings Heath (South) and Handsworth (West)).
<b>West Midlands Districts</b>	There are seven metropolitan authorities in the West Midlands Metropolitan area: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. In this report, the terms 'council', 'local authority' and 'district' are used interchangeably..
<b>WMPTA</b>	The West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority is a political body, a joint authority of the seven Metropolitan Councils of the West Midlands. It was established by the Local Government Act 1985 and sets policies and budgets for the public sector transport responsibilities in the County of West Midlands.





## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Why Look at Efforts to Build Bus Use?

- 1.1.1 Transport touches everyone's daily life. It directly affects how we earn and spend our money, get to places of work and learning and spend our leisure time. Indirectly, the things we buy and the materials that we work with must all be transported to or from markets and manufacturers. As transport touches our daily lives so do its negative impacts, no more so than congestion.
- 1.1.2 Everyone wants to use the method of travelling that is most comfortable, flexible and convenient to their own circumstances. The reality is that this cannot always happen for a number of reasons including cost, journey time and accessibility. This creates a need to choose between modes of travel. Interactions with transport networks form a complex system of interrelationships and decisions. Decisions are based on individually differing, often conflicting sets of needs and aspirations, with a range and combination of ways of travelling tailored to meet personal circumstances.
- 1.1.3 The role of government (national and local) is to encourage choices that enable our society and economy as a whole to prosper. It is no different with regard to transport. Developing public transport increases travel choices, especially for those who cannot afford or choose not to own a car, thereby creating the potential for reducing congestion.
- 1.1.4 In an increasingly affluent society, the heart of the problem is to encourage people to use their cars less and to use means of travelling that have less impact upon, and consequences for, society as a whole. Where people are reliant upon their cars and the flexibilities that they bring, this is a tough proposition.
- 1.1.5 Increasing the use of public transport matches with the City Council's aims and objectives on a number of levels and buses form a substantial part of the public transport system. At a regional level, the Local Transport Plan (LTP) of the seven West Midlands Districts is aimed at meeting the four themes of the Government's Transport Shared Priority:
- **Tackling congestion** and therefore improving the effectiveness of the transport network for all;
  - **Delivering improved accessibility**, particularly for those who might not have access to a car, enabling people to earn or spend money;
  - **Improving road safety** to improve health by addressing one of the main dangers of transport;
  - **Producing better air quality** to improve the health and quality of life of communities.



1.1.6 For the City Council itself, **Improving the city's transport and tackling congestion** is priority 7 in the Council Plan 2006+. This comprises:

- Managing congestion by improvements to the city's transport and infrastructure: measures to improve highways, parking and road congestion; and
- Promoting safer and sustainable travel: measures to improve road safety and encouraging the use of sustainable ways of travelling (walking, cycling, bus, trains and Metro).

1.1.7 Similar to how the LTP affects access, health and quality of life, promoting public transport as part of an efficient and effective transport network also contributes to other priorities in the Council Plan:

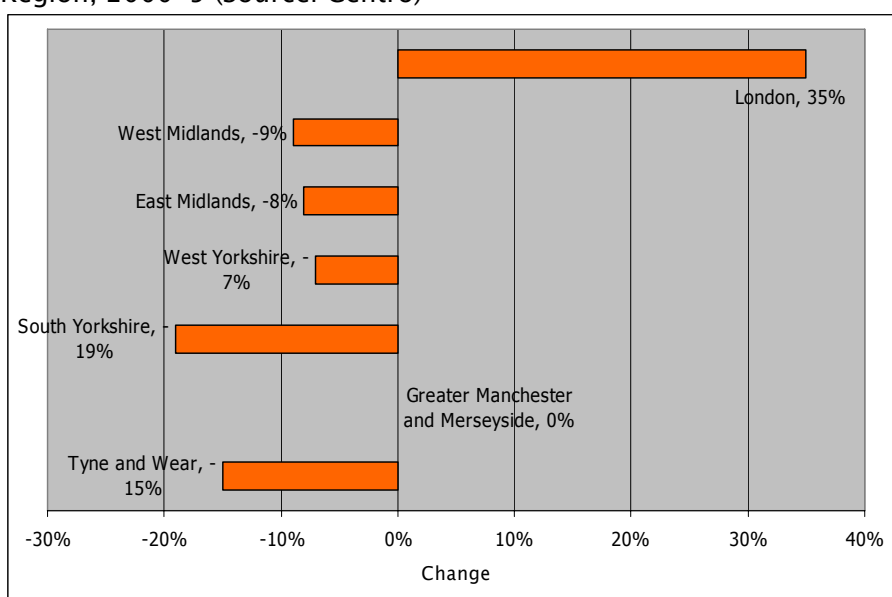
- Priority 5: Cleaner, greener and safer;
- Priority 6: Investing in regeneration;
- Priority 10: Promoting Birmingham as a great international city.

## 1.2 The Bus Problem

1.2.1 These are laudable and clear strategic aims. However, the simplicity of this conceals a complex problem. For a range of reasons, the total number of journeys being made by all transport modes is increasing and is expected to continue to do so. On a typical weekday, the West Midlands transport network presently carries about 5.2 million trips, the majority of which are by car or commercial vehicle. Traffic levels are expected to rise by 11% by 2016<sup>1</sup>.

1.2.2 As part of this, a significant proportion of new journeys are being made by car, alongside a steady and sustained overall decline in bus use. There has also been a transfer of trips made by bus to rail or Metro. This decline is particularly the case in the areas served by Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs – including the West

Figure 1: Reported Use of Buses and Light Rail, Nationally and by Region, 2000–5 (Source: Centro)



<sup>1</sup> West Midlands Transport Authority (2006b)



# Building Bus Use

Midlands PTE), as is shown in Figure 1.

1.2.3 At the heart of the solution is encouraging people to change how they travel ('modal shift'), e.g. from car to bus. In this respect, there are two distinct elements to building bus use:

- Increasing the **number of journeys**: arresting the decline - growth in the total number of journeys made by bus; and
- Increasing the **modal share**: changing the proportion of all journeys made by bus.

Failure to do so is likely to result in increased congestion.

1.2.4 Much work has already been done to examine this issue by both the City Council and its partners, particularly Centro and the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority (WMPTA). The key strategy documents for transportation (the LTP, the Bus Strategy and the City Council's 20-year transport policy document 'Visions') all outline an important role for the bus. Scrutiny has also played its part at both a City Council and PTA level. A list of relevant background documents is shown in Appendix 1.

## 1.3 How We Did the Review

1.3.1 This review was conducted by members of the Council's Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of its overall theme of 'Tackling Congestion'. Evidence was gathered through a combination of methods, including:

- Discussion with witnesses and relevant parties during our Committee meetings;
- Visiting other authorities;
- Travelling on buses in the city and looking at improvement measures made as part of Showcase schemes;
- Seeing first hand how Travel West Midlands operates and monitors performance.

1.3.2 In conducting the review, we worked with:

- The Council's Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services and officers from the Development Directorate of the City Council;
- The Chairman of the WMPTA and officers from the Passenger Transport Executive (PTE), Centro;
- The principal bus operator in Birmingham and the West Midlands, Travel West Midlands;
- The Traffic Commissioner for the West Midlands;
- Representatives of bus and public transport user groups (Bus Users UK and Transport: 2000);
- Other local authorities (Nottingham City Council and Telford and Wrekin Borough Council).



1.3.3 Membership of the Committee over the course of this review and a full list of those who have contributed is shown in Appendix 3.

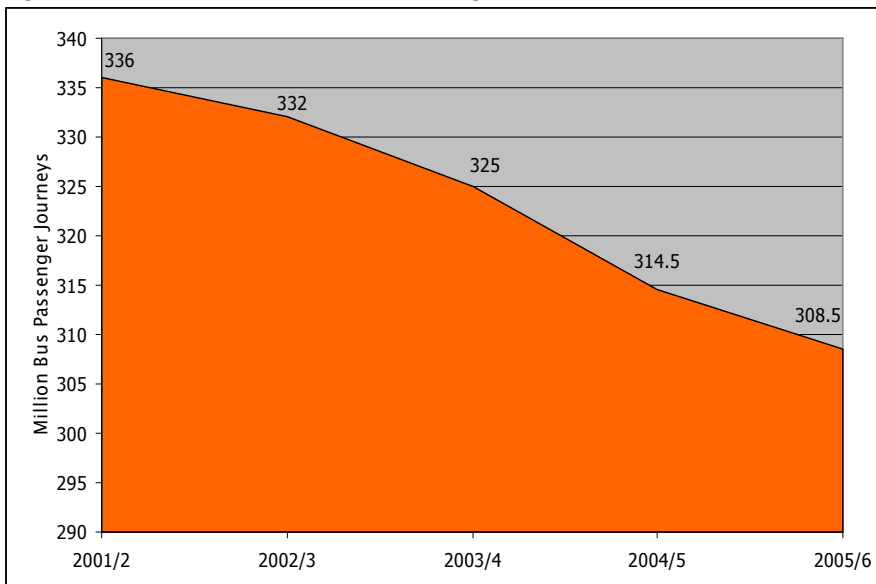


## 2 Background

### 2.1 Bus Services in Birmingham and the West Midlands

2.1.1 Although cars and commercial vehicles account for the overwhelming majority of all journeys made daily, bus journeys comprise the largest element of public transport journeys in the West Midlands. Of the approximate 15% of journeys made by public transport, 13% are made by bus, with the remaining 2% by rail and Metro<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 2: West Midlands Bus Patronage, 2001–6 (Source: Centro)



2.1.2 There are over fifty registered bus operators in the West Midlands. However, despite this high number of operators, Travel West Midlands is by far the largest, with over 80% of all mileage. Of the other operators, no single one has more than 10% of operating mileage.

2.1.3 The challenge that the region faces is that bus patronage is in long-term decline. In 1980, over

500 million passenger journeys per annum were made by bus. More recently, this figure has declined significantly from 336 million in 2001/2 to 308.5 million in 2005/6 (see Figure 2). At the same time, traffic congestion has become a more significant issue. In the Birmingham Residents Survey (MORI 2004/5), 29% felt that the level of congestion in the city needed to be addressed. This was up from 26% in 2004.

2.1.4 However, in comparison with other major urban areas in the country, the West Midlands has relatively high levels of bus use per person. Any changes in patronage in the West Midlands are therefore against what is already a relatively high base. Table 1 below shows that the West Midlands has not only more bus journeys in total than any other PTE area, but also the highest number per person.

<sup>2</sup> West Midlands Transport Authority (2006b)



Table 1: Bus Use in PTE Areas, 2005–6

PTE Area	Total Travel by Bus (Million Journeys)	Journeys per 100,000 Population
Centro (West Midlands)	308.5	12.0
GMPTA (Greater Manchester)	219.4	8.7
Merseytravel (Merseyside)	162.9	11.9
Metro (West Yorkshire)	194.6	9.2
Nexus (Tyne and Wear)	126.6	11.7
SYPTA (South Yorkshire)	112.1	8.8

Source: Centro, 2006

- 2.1.5 The issue is that whilst all PTE areas experienced a decline in patronage from 2001 to 2005, London experienced a 35% increase in bus patronage over the same period<sup>3</sup>. The falls in patronage ranged from 7% (West Yorkshire) to 19% (South Yorkshire). In the West Midlands the decline was 9% (see Figure 1, page 15).
- 2.1.6 Over the last twenty five years, Birmingham has built a reputation as a flourishing city, with a large programme of inward investment into major growth areas. Many of these growth areas have and continue to be coupled with regenerating the fabric of the city – including the transformation of the city centre, Eastside and the development of the Bull Ring.
- 2.1.7 This success in itself creates its own difficulties. For example, some of this development has resulted in reduced road capacity. This has not, however, contributed to an increase in congestion because there has been a 10% decline in journeys made into the city centre. It is hoped that although overall demand may increase, the number of trips made by car will remain the same or even reduce. However, should those trips be made entirely by car, then the result is clearly likely to be increased congestion.

<sup>3</sup> However, the public transport subsidy in London is twenty times more per head of population than it is in the West Midlands.



# Building Bus Use

## 2.2 How Bus Services are Delivered

2.2.1 As shown in Figure 1 (on page 15), London's experience with bus use is completely different to that of the PTE areas. This is no coincidence. The statutory and regulatory framework through which bus services are procured, co-ordinated and delivered in London is entirely different to that in operation in the rest of the country.

2.2.2 Deregulation was the result of the Transport Act 1985. This allowed private sector bus operators to provide services on a commercial basis, but with the advent of Transport for London (TfL), two different ways of delivery have emerged:

- **In London**, where bus services are regulated and planned by TfL (including specifying frequencies, fares and standards of service) and mostly delivered under contract by private companies; and
- **Outside London**, where bus services were 'de-regulated' and private companies determine and provide the majority (over 80%) of bus services on a commercial basis. The remainder are subsidised by PTEs or local councils.

2.2.3 Some of the intended benefits of allowing private companies to operate buses centred on the need to strengthen commercial and competitive factors in the operation of the service:



There are over fifty bus operators in the West Midlands, of different sizes and scales

- The commercial incentive would **encourage operators to be efficient**;
- Competition to provide services would encourage **better value, quality and choice** for customers;
- The **need to innovate** would drive continued improvement from operators as they seek to remain competitive;
- The market as a whole would **respond better to customer demand**, with needs for services being met by operators because it was commercially viable to do so.

2.2.4 However, there is a wide and growing acceptance that the current framework for the delivery of bus services outside London is in part responsible for patronage levels not growing. Despite the aims of deregulation of bus services to provide a free market structure, there are concerns that it served to:

- Simply break up state-owned monopolies and create private monopolies/ oligopolies in their place;





- Create the potential for many smaller operators to be swallowed up by larger businesses through mergers and acquisitions; and
- Cause operators to act in the interests of protecting their profit levels, rather than seeking to grow the bus market.

2.2.5 From the start it was accepted that it would not be possible to operate all bus services on an entirely commercial, free-market basis. Where operators choose not to run services commercially, but where the PTA determines that there is a social need, PTEs may subsidise the operation of those services. In the Centro area in 2005, this comprised around 7% of mileage, with a subsidy of around £5.80 million<sup>4</sup>.

2.2.6 Additionally, similar to other PTEs, Centro also provides concessionary fares for certain groups of West Midlands residents. This is discussed further in 3.6.12.

### The Responsibilities of Partners

2.2.7 There are three principal partners/groups involved in delivering bus services in Birmingham, each with different responsibilities under the delivery model:

- The **City Council**, as the Traffic and Highway Authority has statutory responsibilities for the design and condition of the road network and the effectiveness of its operation;
- **WMPTA/WMPTE (Centro)**, responsible for commissioning subsidised services, information, interchanges and concessionary fares schemes; and
- **Bus operators**, responsible for providing services on a commercial basis and additionally where subsidy has been agreed.

2.2.8 An important fourth element is the Traffic Commissioner. The Traffic Commissioner is responsible for licensing bus operators and making sure that bus operators comply with the details of their registered services (including the punctuality of timetabled services). The Traffic Commissioner's role is to monitor compliance and take enforcement action.

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<sup>4</sup> Centro (2006a)



## 2.3 The Local Transport Plan

- 2.3.1 The Council is required to have a Local Transport Plan (LTP) under the Transport Act 2000. In the West Midlands this is a joint document agreed by all seven District Councils with the WMPTA, with input from key partners including Travel West Midlands. It sets out the strategies and policies relating to transport and the key bids for funding from the Government for schemes to implement the strategies. Accordingly, the Government sets the targets for the LTP.
- 2.3.2 Funding from Government comes via the Annual Capital Settlement and the Revenue Support Grant settlement. From 2006, new Government arrangements have applied to major schemes (over £5 million in value) through the 'Regional Funding Allocation Process'. The West Midlands Regional Assembly agrees priorities and final approval of the business case rests with the Department for Transport (DfT).
- 2.3.3 For schemes under £5 million, the joint authorities receive an Integrated Transport Block Allocation. This covers a range of scheme types, including bus priority measures, cycling, walking and traffic management. Additionally, a further allocation is made for structural and carriageway maintenance through the Single Capital Pot. A local authority may also choose to channel additional resources into transport.
- 2.3.4 Schemes are managed annually within budgets, but funds for major schemes are ring-fenced. Funding sources are expected to remain the same as at present, but some additional funding will be linked to the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF – see 5.7). The Government has stated that this will provide the opportunity for higher funding for areas implementing demand management schemes.
- 2.3.5 Progress against the LTP is assessed by the DfT in an Annual Progress Report (APR). According to performance, authorities may be rewarded or penalised financially under the Local Transport Capital Settlement. These rewards and penalties are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: LTP Performance Adjustments to Integrated Transport Block Funding

Assessment of Provisional LTP		Assessment of APR	
Very Promising	+12.5%	Excellent	+12.5%
Promising	No change	Good	+5%
Needing substantial improvement	No change	Fair	-5%
		Weak	-12.5%



2.3.6 The APR assessment for 2006/7<sup>5</sup> said:

- In 2004/5 the West Midlands authorities were making 'fair' progress in implementing our LTP;
- The second LTP is 'promising';
- The net effect of these two assessments was that the 2006/7 capital allocation would be reduced by 5% (£2.229m).

2.3.7 The requirement for hard targets in the LTP and the way in which they are set is a source of some contention. In the view of the Chief Engineers and Planning Officers Group (CEPOG) it is "regrettable" that neither Centro, nor the Metropolitan Councils have the means to directly influence many of these LTP targets – yet can be penalised under their APR<sup>6</sup>.

2.3.8 The first West Midlands LTP was produced in 2000. As a result of revised guidance from DfT it was superseded by the second LTP (LTP2), adopted in March 2006. Many of the indicators and measures have changed between the two LTPs. Because the current LTP is a relatively new plan, many of its measures are being collected for the first time and a complete year of data is not yet available.

2.3.9 Table 3 below shows the performance against the targets relevant to buses in the first LTP. This shows that there were several areas that were considered to be on track to be achieved by the end of the plan in 2011, including bus network coverage (distance to stops), personal security, bus punctuality and improving speeds relative to the car on Showcase routes. Some areas were not on track, including overall bus use and intervals between services on frequent routes.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from the Transport Director of GOWM to the Director General of Centro, 15 December 2005.

<sup>6</sup> CEPOG (2006)



# Building Bus Use

Table 3: Performance Against key LTP Bus Indicators, 2000–2005 (Source: Centro)

Local Target / Outcome	Baseline	2001/2 (Target)	2002/3 (Target)	2003/4 (Target)	2004/5 (Target)	Assessment
<b>Acc2:</b> Increase the number of journeys made by bus to 380M (representing a 10% increase from the 1998 baseline) by 2011	1998/9: 345M	<b>336M</b> (354M)	<b>332M</b> (356M)	<b>325M</b> (359M)	<b>315M</b> (362M)	Not on track
<b>Acc3:</b> 92% of the metropolitan built-up area to be within 250m of a stop with a weekday, daytime service by 2011	2000: 89%	<b>89%</b> (89%)	<b>89%</b> (90%)	<b>93%</b> (90%)	<b>93%</b> (90%)	On track
<b>Saf4a:</b> Reduce the chance of being involved in a 'criminal' incident while travelling by public transport by 20% by 2011	2000/1: 3.24 bus-related crimes per million bus trips	<b>3.43</b> (3.18)	<b>2.89</b> (3.11)	<b>2.84</b> (3.05)	<b>2.33</b> (2.98)	On track
<b>Acc7:</b> 97% of services to operate within 5 minutes of publicised times by 2011	2002/3: 75.7%		<b>75.7%</b> (75.7%)	<b>75.5%</b> (77.7%)	<b>81.4%</b> (79.7%)	On track
<b>Acc8:</b> On routes where buses run at least every 10 minutes, no more than 5% of service intervals should exceed 1.5 times the published service interval by 2011	2002/3: 20.8%		<b>20.8%</b> (20.8%)	<b>18.8%</b> (19.3%)	<b>20.8%</b> (17.8%)	Not on track
<b>Sus7:</b> Improve morning peak (0800 – 0900) bus speeds relative to private car speeds in completed Bus Showcase corridors	2002/3: On 4 of 6 routes speeds have increased relative to car speeds		<b>4 of 6 routes</b> (4 of 6 routes)	<b>4 of 6 routes</b> (4 of 6 routes)	<b>4 of 6 routes</b> (4 of 6 routes)	On track



2.3.10 The targets relevant to bus use in LTP2 are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Local Transport Plan Targets Relevant to Buses

Measure	Target
<b>LTP1a:</b> Increase the number of people attending job interviews/ year via access initiatives from the 2005 baseline of 1,150 to 2,300 by 2011	2,300 by 2011
<b>LTP1b:</b> Increase the total population within 30 minutes inter-peak travel time of a main NHS hospital by 'accessible' public transport from the 2005 baseline of 580,000 by 50% by 2011	By 50% by 2011
<b>LTP5:</b> Bus services operating between 1 minute early and 5 minutes late (62% in 2005/6) to 83% by 2010/11	83% by 2010/11
<b>LTP6:</b> Increase morning peak proportion of trips by public transport into 9 LTP centres from 2005/6 baseline of 32.73% to 33.8% by 2009/10	33.8% by 2009/10
<b>BVPI 102:</b> Increase bus use from the 2003/4 base of 325 million trips/ year to 355 million trips by 2010/11	355 million trips by 2010/11
<b>BVPI 104:</b> Achieve levels of bus satisfaction greater than 60% by 2009/10	More than 60% by 2009/10
<b>Local Indicator:</b> Improve actual and perceived personal safety while travelling on public transport by 10% between 2005/6 and 2010/11.	By 10% between 2005/6 and 2010/11

2.3.11 Tackling the decline in bus patronage has proven to be a perennial problem. The LTP target set in 2000 for the number of bus journeys was 380 million passenger journeys. Each year as the target has failed to be met, WMPTA has advised that a lower target should be set. This is reflective of national trends in car use and performance against the target. WMPTA's Best Value Performance Plan 2006/7 contains the most recent revision and suggests a target of 315 million.

2.3.12 In December 2003 the then Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services approved an action plan for meeting LTP targets in relation to bus use. This was signed off in conjunction with Centro and Travel West Midlands. However, since the change in administration in the City Council, elements of this action plan have been subject to review.



## 2.4 The Bus Strategy

2.4.1 The Transport Act 2000 also requires the WMPTA to prepare a Bus Strategy in conjunction with Centro and the seven District Councils. Bus operators are consulted during this process. The current Bus Strategy was approved by the seven District Councils and the WMPTA in March 2005 and applies from 2005-11.

2.4.2 The Strategy contains 16 policy areas to deliver the improvements. These policies (shown in Appendix 2) are grouped into three broad themes:

- Service delivery;
- User confidence; and
- Infrastructure and schemes.

2.4.3 The overall target of the Bus Strategy is to increase bus use to 355 million trips per year from the 2003-4 base of 325 million (shown as BVPI 102 in Table 4 above). Other targets within the Strategy that complement this are shown in the table below:

Table 5: Performance Targets in the Bus Strategy

Measure	Target
Improve the percentage of user satisfied with local bus services from a 2001 baseline of 61.5% to 75% by 2011.	75% by 2011
92% of the metropolitan built-up area to be within 250m of a stop with a weekday daytime service by 2006.	92% by 2006
97% of bus services to operate within five minutes of publicised times by 2011.	97% by 2011
On routes where buses run at least every 10 minutes, no more than 5% of service intervals should exceed 1.5 times the published service interval by 2011.	Maximum 5% by 2011
Improve morning peak (08:00–09:00) bus speeds relative to private car speeds on completed Bus Showcase corridors.	Speeds improved (no baseline given)
Reduce the chances of being involved in a ‘criminal’ incident while travelling by public transport by 20% by 2011.	20% reduction by 2011

2.4.4 The Bus Strategy and how it relates to the aspirations of bus users is discussed in more detail in section 4.2.1.



## 2.5 Integration of Targets

2.5.1 It is interesting to note that there are differences between the targets that are in the LTP and the Bus Strategy. The targets are summarised and compared in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Comparison of Targets, LTP and Bus Strategy

LTP Target	Bus Strategy Target
<b>Overall</b>	
Increase bus use from the 2003/4 base of 325 million trips/ year to 355 million trips by 2010/11.	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	
Achieve levels of bus satisfaction greater than 60% by 2009/10.	Improve the percentage of user satisfied with local bus services from a 2001 baseline of 61.5% to 75% by 2011.
<b>Accessibility</b>	
Increase the number of people attending job interviews/ year via access initiatives from the 2005 baseline of 1,150 to 2,300 by 2011.	92% of the metropolitan built-up area to be within 250m of a stop with a weekday daytime service by 2006.
Increase the total population within 30 minutes inter-peak travel time of a main NHS hospital by 'accessible' public transport from the 2005 baseline of 580,000 by 50% by 2011.	
<b>Punctuality</b>	
Bus services operating between 1 minute early and 5 minutes late (62% in 2005/6) to 83% by 2010/11.	97% of bus services to operate within five minutes of publicised times by 2011.
	On routes where buses run at least every 10 minutes, no more than 5% of service intervals should exceed 1.5 times the published service interval by 2011.
<b>Increasing Modal Share</b>	
Increase morning peak proportion of trips by public transport into 9 LTP centres from 2005/6 baseline of 32.73% to 33.8% by 2009/10.	<b>Relative Attractiveness of Bus Travel</b>
	Improve morning peak (08:00-09:00) bus speeds relative to private car speeds on completed Bus Showcase corridors.
<b>Personal Safety</b>	
Improve actual and perceived personal safety while travelling on public transport by 10% between 2005/6 and 2010/11.	Reduce the chances of being involved in a 'criminal' incident while travelling by public transport by 20% by 2011.





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2.5.2 There are a number of reasons why these targets differ:

- The Government has changed guidance on national measures and these need to be reflected in the documents;
- LTP targets are agreed by the West Midlands Districts and Centro/ WMPTA. In contrast, WMPTA takes decisions on its Best Value Performance Plan. This can lead to inconsistencies in the targets;
- The Bus Strategy is a long term strategic document and bus targets are varied in the light of current performance and as part of the annual LTP submissions; and
- Both documents are revised to different timescales and so are not always based on the same statistics and circumstances.

2.5.3 Changing targets create confusion about what we are trying to achieve. For example, WMPTA's Best Value Performance Plan (published June 2006) has a different target for bus patronage to the LTP (published March 2006). Whilst this may reflect the latest, most realistic forecast position, having a stable and achievable target agreed with all seven Districts is imperative.

## 2.6 Summary

2.6.1 Bus patronage outside London is in long term decline. Although levels of use in the West Midlands remain the highest of all PTE areas, the region is experiencing a similar pattern of decline, with bus use standing at just over 60% of the figure that it was in 1980.

2.6.2 Arresting the decline is one of the objectives of the Government. Transport Authorities are required to have a Local Transport Plan, including a Bus Strategy for increasing the use of buses in their area. Accordingly, the City Council is signed up to building bus patronage through both the West Midlands LTP and Bus Strategy. However, despite the strategic focus on addressing this problem, the decline in patronage has continued.

2.6.3 There are a range of performance targets associated with both the LTP and the Bus Strategy. Whilst there are similarities between some of these, there are also notable differences. Performance against these targets varies. There have also been some successes, but the bottom line is that patronage has continued to fall across the metropolitan area.



## 3 Understanding Expectations

### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Influencing people's travel decisions requires a good understanding of the basis of those decisions. To encourage greater use of buses, we need to know:

- What factors are important to those who already use the bus; and
- Why people choose not to use the bus.

3.1.2 To understand the motivating factors behind transport choices we examined four principal sources of information:

- Research by Centro;
- Operator customer comments and complaints and customer surveys;
- Issues raised at formal/ statutory user forums (Transport Users' Advisory Committee (TUAC)/ Transport Users' Forum (TUF);
- Views received through other user groups (Bus Users UK and Transport: 2000).

3.1.3 This section contains a summary of the key priorities identified and concludes with an examination of how effective these sources of information are.

### 3.2 Gathering Information on Priorities

3.2.1 Centro undertakes consultation exercises to underpin major strategies e.g. the Bus Strategy and the Bus Passenger Information Strategic Plan. This can involve:

- Formal consultation with bus operators, highway authorities, planning authorities and members of the public etc.; or
- Focus groups on specific issues e.g. on the relevance and importance of the overall objectives of the Bus Strategy.

3.2.2 Centro also commissions individual pieces of research to inform policy and increase levels of understanding on the issue of bus use. One example of this, which will be discussed in more detail in 3.10, is research undertaken by Vector on the attitudes of people with high and middle incomes to buses.

3.2.3 Travel West Midlands undertakes regular surveys to gauge levels of customer satisfaction. 20,000 questionnaires are handed out to users at popular bus locations (e.g. Colmore Row, Corporation Street and Masshouse) three times a year. Incentives are given to encourage people to complete



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them. However, on average only 5-6% are returned. The same questions are used each time so that opinions can be tracked and the impact of changes measured.

3.2.4 Senior management receive an in-depth debrief on each survey. Headline results are then cascaded through local management teams and staff magazines. The findings are used to inform service improvements. Customers are not given feedback on surveys they have participated in.

3.2.5 In general, research carried out on particular issues is effective in achieving the desired outcomes. Similarly, the customer surveys carried out by Travel West Midlands provide them with the information they need to run their service. What is more difficult is providing users and non-users with a forum whereby they can raise complaints or issues with the relevant people and see some visible outcomes.



Bus Users UK surgeries provide an opportunity for people to discuss issues with bus travel in an informal way

3.2.6 Public 'open forum's' at the start of TUAC meetings (see glossary) were designed to provide members of the public with an opportunity to raise issues regarding public transport, without notice, with service operators being invited to respond.

3.2.7 Some of the difficulties cited with TUACs are those that are found elsewhere with engaging people in civic matters. These include:

- An inability to attract a range of participants more diverse than those that get involved in other committees and other transport matters;
- Meetings held at Centro offices in the city centre or Council offices, rather than out in the community, mean that members of the public have to make a special journey to attend;
- Meetings in this format can become a substitute mechanism for proper customer care systems by operators, or can be used as an alternative when the customer doesn't like the answer that they are given;

- Limited publicity for the meetings.

3.2.8 Due to some of these issues, a new style of meeting has evolved, the TUF (see glossary). These are:

- A less formal model of meeting;
- Open to members of the public; and
- Are held in locations closer to the communities they serve i.e. not in traditional civic venues.



- 3.2.9 The PTA report that public participation has increased since the formation of TUFs. However, the experience of Transport 2000 has been that it is the 'usual suspects' who attend TUFs, rather than the general public (including the only one held in Birmingham so far).<sup>7</sup>
- 3.2.10 Bus Users UK hold bus surgeries as a solution - one in which we found a great deal of merit. Because these surgeries are informal and tend to be accessed by people whilst out shopping, they attract views from a different demographic. However, because of their location and the fact they are held during the day, they still only reach certain groups of people and are unlikely to capture the views of commuters.
- 3.2.11 Attendance at these surgeries by elected members, senior managers and officers across the range of partners is one of the means by which partners can demonstrate that they take such surgeries seriously. Unfortunately, they do not or cannot always attend.

### 3.3 About Bus Users

#### Who Uses Buses?

- 3.3.1 The Travel West Midlands Customer Survey tells us that their bus users are:
- More likely to be female;
  - Typically of working age (18-64);
  - Most likely to be commuting to work or school/college;
  - Most likely to travel during the weekday peak;
  - Most likely to be using a travelcard;
  - Usually travelling by bus every day (six or seven days per week).
- 3.3.2 Since Travel West Midlands is the largest bus operator in Birmingham, it is fair to assume that these characteristics are relatively typical of users of other operators' services.

#### What Are Their Priorities?

In 2000/1, research was undertaken on behalf of Centro to identify the service attributes that were a priority for improvement. These 'Critical Success Factors' are shown in Table 7 below. The 'Very High' priorities are reflected in the delivery of the Bus Strategy. This survey was undertaken again in early 2006 and the same factors were identified as being of 'very high' priority.

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<sup>7</sup> Transport 2000 (2006)



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Table 7: Priorities for Bus Users, 2000/1 Survey (Updated 2004/5)

Very High Priority	High Priority	Low	Very Low
Reliability* Personal Security* Attractiveness and Comfort* Frequency* Affordability* Information*	Accessible Design Customer Care	Responsiveness Promotion Integration	Network Access Direct Services Journey Times Awareness
* Indicates the priority areas for action that are most likely to increase public transport use.			

3.3.3 The following sections discuss what we understand about the main issues within each of the 'very high' priorities.

## 3.4 Reliability

3.4.1 Across all sources of information, reliability clearly and consistently emerges as one of the priorities for bus users and one of the most important factors likely to increase use of buses. For clarity, reliability is the likelihood of a bus (i) operating and (ii) adhering to the published timetable. It therefore includes an element of punctuality.

3.4.2 Travel West Midlands cites reliability and punctuality as the most important factors in terms of impact on their business and people's decisions to travel by bus<sup>8</sup>. From their customer survey they estimate that reliability factors contribute 20.3% of the risk to their market (out of a total percentage risk of 36.4).

3.4.3 Once a timetable has been published, operators are required to adhere to it. Punctuality is defined as being up to one minute early and five minutes late of the scheduled time. The following standards have been set by the Traffic Commissioners:

- 95% of services should start the route 'on time'<sup>9</sup>;
- At other timing points, an absolute minimum of 70% of services should operate within the six minute punctuality window, with graduated decrease of penalties up to 95%; and
- Excess Waiting Time<sup>10</sup> for frequent services (i.e. those that run every 10 minutes or less) should not exceed 1¼ minutes;

<sup>8</sup> Travel West Midlands (2006a). 20.3% is made up of 'Buses unreliable' (13.5%), 'Buses not punctual' (6.1%) and 'Buses held up in general traffic congestion' (0.7%).

<sup>9</sup> For 'Frequent' bus services (where the interval between services is ten minutes or less) on 95% of occasions there should be (i) six or more buses in any 60 minute period, and (ii) an interval between buses of no more than 15 minutes. For 'Timetabled' services (where the interval between services is greater than ten minutes), 95% of buses should depart between one minute early and five minutes late.



- 95% of services to arrive at the final destination no more than five minutes late, with no undue recovery time in the timetable.

3.4.4 Although operators are responsible for delivering the timetable specified, it is important to stress that their ability to do so is dependent upon the general highway conditions that they face. The view of Traffic Commissioners is that routine congestion should be allowed for in timetables, but exceptional congestion (e.g. if a road is closed following an accident) is considered a reasonable excuse for poor punctuality.

3.4.5 VOSA monitor compliance and report the results to the Traffic Commissioners for enforcement action where necessary. However, with one person (with scant additional resources) over-seeing the whole of the West Midlands region it is a difficult task. Little proactive checking is possible and so the Traffic Commissioner has to rely on complaints from users and stakeholders to trigger investigations.

3.4.6 The Traffic Commissioner told us that he does not have sufficient data to comment in detail about the punctuality of buses. However, fewer complaints are received about services in the West Midlands when compared to Wales.

3.4.7 Part of the role of the Traffic Commissioner in terms of monitoring performance and compliance with the published timetable is akin to the role of the Rail Regulator for the Rail Industry. However, there are clear differences with the rail industry:

- Train Operators must report regularly upon their punctuality, reliability and passenger satisfaction to the Rail Regulator;
- The Rail Regulator can establish standards for Train Operators as part of their franchise agreement;
- There is a nationally established compensation scheme through which Train Operators make payments to customers based on delays and performance.

## 3.5 Personal Security

3.5.1 Personal security on public transport is often cited as a reason for not using the buses or using them infrequently, especially at night. People are concerned about their security, not only when they are on-board a bus, but also when they are walking to the bus stop and waiting at the bus stop.

3.5.2 On the whole, women's fear is greater than men's and is more of an issue when considering whether to use public transport. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds also tend to

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<sup>10</sup> This is based on the London concept and measures the average time passengers have to wait between buses and the scheduled service interval. For example, if a bus is scheduled to run every 10 minutes, passengers would on average expect to wait 5 minutes. An average wait of 7 minutes equals 2 minutes of Excess Waiting Time.



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have more fears for their personal safety<sup>11</sup>. These facts suggest much broader social exclusion and equality issues that cannot be tackled in isolation.

3.5.3 The most recent Centro crime survey (November 2004 - January 2005) tells us that:

- 85% of males and 73% of females *had never felt uneasy*;
- 11% of those surveyed *had felt uneasy on public transport in the last six months* (3% in the last week, 4% in the last month and 4% in the last six months);

Out of all those feeling uneasy:

- 28% felt uneasy *waiting at bus stops*;
- 15% felt uneasy *travelling upstairs on a bus*;
- 19% felt uneasy *travelling downstairs on a bus*.

3.5.4 Although these findings indicate that a significant majority had never felt uneasy, personal security remains an important issue, particularly at certain times of day. In response, the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) has focused its efforts not only on addressing the committing of actual offences, but also the perception of safety (see 4.3.7 to 4.3.11).

3.5.5 There is in fact a clear distinction between actual crime and the perception/ fear of crime. Figures on reported crime in the West Midlands<sup>12</sup> illustrate that:

- The main peak for offences is between 1500 and 1800 hours on weekdays;
- Victims were predominantly in the 16-19 age group;
- Perpetrators were predominantly from the under 19 age group.

3.5.6 The number of recorded offences on buses, at bus stops or in bus stations has typically been between 2,500 and 3,000 p.a. in the West Midlands. Since the formation of the Police Safer Travel Team reported crime has increased to an average of 300 incidents per month, although this is felt to be a result of increased recording rather than incidence.

3.5.7 In 2005-6, the most frequently reported crimes were:

- Violent crime – 968 out 3,071 reports;
- Criminal damage to the vehicle – 601 reports ; and
- Robbery of personal property – 585 reports<sup>13</sup>.

This equates to 70% of all bus-related crime for that year.

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<sup>11</sup> Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (2006)

<sup>12</sup> It is important to stress that there are a number of caveats regarding information on 'bus crime'. Although 'bus crime' is not a specific Home Office category under which offences can be recorded, the Police use various other markers to analyse information on offences. However, in all cases the data is entirely reliant upon reported crime.

<sup>13</sup> Force Intelligence GIS Unit, West Midlands Police (2006).





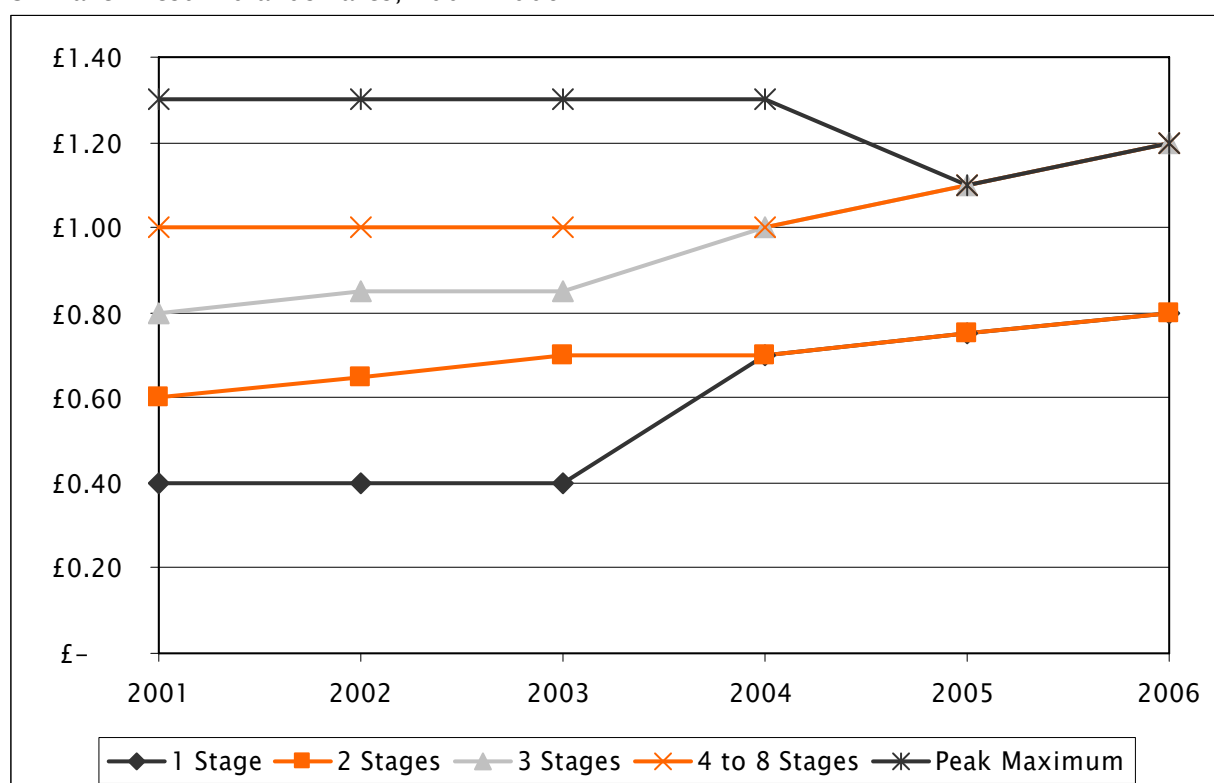
3.5.8 However, it is important to set this in context. Travel West Midlands alone carries around a million passenger journeys every weekday. The chance of a passenger being the victim of an actual crime is therefore relatively low.

## 3.6 Affordability

### Fares

3.6.1 Since de-regulation in 1986, bus fares have been set by bus operators. Since 2000-1, fares have increased in real terms by 11.1%. This followed a period of relative stability from 1994 to 2000 whilst fares rose in other PTE areas<sup>14</sup>. Figure 3 below shows the increase in the majority of fares offered by Travel West Midlands since 2001. It illustrates that the ticket now known as the 'Short Hop' (i.e. up to two fare stages) has seen the greatest increase in price. In contrast, the maximum fare payable has actually decreased<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 3: Travel West Midlands Fares, 2001–2006



3.6.2 It was the view of Travel West Midlands, Centro and also Bus Users UK that fares in the West Midlands are comparatively low in relation to other regions and represent good value for money.

<sup>14</sup> PTEG (2006)

<sup>15</sup> Travel West Midlands fares are used for comparison purposes here. Other operators in the city charge broadly similar fares (with some small undercutting of price) and some also give change.



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This is particularly the case for longer journeys, where the average for PTE areas is more than 40p higher, with a maximum of £2.20 (Greater Manchester). A comparison of fares between PTE areas is shown in Table 8 below.

3.6.3 In contrast, customers believe that public transport fares do not provide value for money. They perceive the cost to be higher than the actual costs and often feel that the journey would be cheaper by car.<sup>16</sup> There is also the issue that although fare structures have been simplified, this has resulted in a higher 'short hop' fare of 80p. In this case, passengers travelling for shorter distances are actually subsidising those making longer journeys.

Table 8: Comparison of Fare Levels Between PTE Areas

PTE (Area)	2 mile Single Journey	5 mile Single Journey	Weekly Pass
Centro (West Midlands)	£ 1.10*	£ 1.10*	£ 12.70
GMPTA (Greater Manchester)	£ 1.10	£ 2.20	£ 11.00
Merseytravel (Merseyside)	£ 1.20	£ 1.50	£ 10.00
Metro (West Yorkshire)	£ 1.20	£ 1.50	£ 13.00
Nexus (Tyne and Wear)	£ 1.15	£ 1.50	£ 14.00
SYPTA (South Yorkshire)	£ 1.50	£ 1.60	£ 15.00
<b>Mean Average</b>	£ 1.21	£ 1.63	£ 12.62

Shaded entries indicate the cheapest for the category.  
 \*Increased to £1.20 in January 2006 and planned to increase to £1.40 in January 2007.  
 Source: PTEG, 2005.

3.6.4 There appears to be some correlation between the fare levels and patronage (Table 1, page 19). The PTE areas with a higher fare level for longer journeys (Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire) have particularly low patronage. However, this is based on one year only and a comparison of just six areas.

3.6.5 It was the view of both Travel West Midlands and Centro that the impact of changes in fares on patronage is difficult to distinguish from the impact of many other complicating factors e.g. concessionary fares (see 3.6.12).<sup>17</sup> However, Centro did say that they felt that the increase in the

<sup>16</sup> Centro (2000/01)

<sup>17</sup> Evidence presented to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (20 June 2006 and 19 September 2006).



'Short Hop' fare by Travel West Midlands had contributed to the continuing decline of patronage in the West Midlands. Nevertheless, the general view expressed by all was that a reduction in fares in the region would not have a significant impact upon demand for bus travel.

## Bus Tickets

3.6.6 There are a number of different bus tickets available for Travel West Midlands services as shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Travel West Midlands Bus Tickets

3.6.7 Travel West Midlands operates a 'no change'/ exact fare policy if tickets are bought on the bus. Although this policy reduces boarding times (they are amongst the quickest in the country<sup>18</sup>), it can discourage people from catching a bus if they do not have the exact money.

3.6.8 Over the past few years, Travel West Midlands has reduced the number of tickets available to try and make things simpler for the user, e.g. having only two single fares (short hop and maximum fare) as opposed to a multitude of tickets (see Table 9). However, when added to the tickets offered by Centro and other bus operators it can still be very confusing, especially for the infrequent user.

3.6.9 Centro operates two ticketing schemes that bus operators participate in on a voluntary basis:

- n-bus (previously Busmaster): a multi-bus operator season ticket - £48.50 for 4 weeks; and
- n-network (previously Centrocard): a season ticket that can be used on rail and Metro in addition to most bus services.

3.6.10 Centro is concerned about the affordability of multi-operator tickets which are more expensive than single operator ones (a 4-weekly N-Bus ticket is £6.25 more expensive than a Travel West Midlands Faresaver for the same period). Those affected tend to be people who travel outside of key operating times and so use services that are subsidised by Centro and run by operators other than Travel West Midlands.

3.6.11 There is a question of whether pricing/ticketing structures have kept pace with customer needs and changes in society and employment generally. There is now more part time working and

Ticket	Fare
Short Hop (2 stages)	80p
Maximum Fare	£1.20
Day Saver	£3.00
Evening Saver	£1.60
Weekly Pass - All Day	£13.70
Weekly Pass - Off Peak	£6.80
Birmingham and Black Country Faresaver (unlimited bus use for 4 weeks)	£42.25

<sup>18</sup> Research by Arup (2004) indicates that the average boarding time of 2.8 seconds in the West Midlands compares well with London (where there is a flat fare, no change given and a two-door bus) of 2.9 seconds. An average timing of 4.5 seconds was recorded in outer London at the time when change was given.



# Building Bus Use

working from home compared to five or ten years ago, yet the financial incentive through having travel cards is geared towards working five days a week. For infrequent users, there is not a simple return fare that is cheaper than two single fares, or a range of carnet tickets (i.e. a book of tickets that can be bought in advance and used over a period of time). Centro's aspiration is also that integrated ticketing will promote greater accessibility to public transport and they would like to see the introduction of Smartcards in the region. These are measures used elsewhere that could support wider use of buses.

## Concessionary Travel

3.6.12 PTEs and District Councils are not able to influence the fares charged by operators, unless they apply for a Quality Contract (see 5.5). However, for certain groups they are permitted/required to operate concessionary fare schemes:

- Senior citizens (a requirement of the Transport Act 2000);
- People with disabilities (a requirement of the Transport Act 2000);
- Children living more than two/three miles from their school (a Government requirement);
- Children and 16-18s in full time education.

3.6.13 Changes to concessionary travel for the over 60s are felt to have had a particular effect:

- From April 2003, those aged 60 or over at the time were given free travel;
- Additionally, those reaching 60 after April 2003 were given a half fare concession;
- From July 2005, all over 60s have been able to travel free.

3.6.14 In 2005/6, 74.6m journeys were undertaken by free concessionary pass holders at a cost to Centro of £53.6m. Centro currently estimates that 89% of over 60s hold a free travel permit whilst 19,367<sup>19</sup> have a free travel permit as a result of their disability.

3.6.15 However, not all permit holders take advantage of the free travel. There is felt to be a particular difficulty with take-up among ethnic minorities where English is not the first language. An officer has been appointed to improve communication and improve the take-up of travel passes.

3.6.16 In recent years the number of journeys made by all pass holders was declining at a rate of 7% p.a. Centro believes that the introduction of the enhanced concessionary fare scheme in July 2005 has arrested this decline to just 0.1%<sup>20</sup>. However, it remains to be seen whether this increase can be sustained and have a real impact in patronage in the long term.

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<sup>19</sup> As of September 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Centro (2005/6)



## 3.7 Attractiveness and Comfort

3.7.1 There are a range of factors that come into play regarding the attractiveness and comfort of bus travel. In terms of impact on their business, Travel West Midlands record a number of factors in their customer survey, totalling 2.9% of risks to their market:

- Buses dirty inside (1.0%);
- Unable to get a seat on a bus (0.5%);
- Bus too cold (0.4%);
- Bus overcrowded (0.3%);
- Litter not collected often enough (0.3%);
- Seats in dirty/poor condition (0.3%)
- Buses dirty outside (0.1%).

3.7.2 Despite 'Attractiveness and Comfort' being categorised as a high priority for improvement for users and non-users in research undertaken by Centro (2000-01), it is of lower importance to Travel West Midlands in terms of the impact it has on their business. Their customer surveys consistently put factors to do with the service (reliability, punctuality etc.) and staff (attitude and quality of driving) ahead of cleanliness. This raises the question of whether bus users simply accept that public transport will not be as clean as a private vehicle and so put up with it.

3.7.3 Whilst attractiveness and comfort are of low importance in terms of the market at risk, they are still important basic standards. People often judge by their first impression and can be reassured that a good service is being provided simply by appearance. For non- or infrequent users, attractiveness and comfort is likely to be a factor in whether they decide to switch modes of transport. To what extent it would be the deciding factor rather than simply a justification for not using public transport is, however, unclear.

3.7.4 The view of CEPOG<sup>21</sup> is that whilst deregulation of bus services does not affect the standard of service provided by operators where they choose to maintain it, the minimum service standards companies are required to demonstrate before operating services are too low. This matches with a general view of the services offered by some smaller private bus operators that they buy old vehicles and 'give them a lick of paint and throw them back into service'. Given the market in the West Midlands, these operators have not necessarily been forced out by the higher quality operators. There is also no incentive for high quality operators to maintain standards at their cost.

3.7.5 One way to increase and enforce service standards is through statutory partnerships or contracts. These are described in more detail from 5.4 to 5.5.

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<sup>21</sup> CEPOG (2006)



## 3.8 Frequency

3.8.1 Bus frequencies are set by the operators and depend on a number of factors:

- Commercial viability of particular routes;
- The operator's current or desired market share; and
- The level of competition.

3.8.2 One of the features of a competitive bus market is that for commercial reasons, some operators may run more services than the market justifies. This is so that the operators can protect their market share, but results in inefficiencies in the market. It is Centro's view that this occurs in Birmingham on the 50, 97, 104 and 11A/C routes (although 11A/ C is not a competitive route)<sup>22</sup>.

3.8.3 The counterpoint from operators is that it is necessary for them to put additional buses onto routes to enable them to maintain the levels of frequency specified in the timetables. The issue then becomes one of reliability: if operators were able to deliver a more reliable service, they could use fewer buses to do so. On routes where there are few priority measures (such as route 50), this can be an issue.

3.8.4 The recent 'bus wars' in Manchester provide a clear example of the problems this can cause. In September 2006, UK North decided to introduce 12 buses an hour on key routes in competition with the 18 already operated by Stagecoach. Bus stands at the station were already at capacity and so the effect of these additional buses was an increase in congestion in the city centre.

3.8.5 In response the North West Traffic Commissioner issued a Traffic Regulation Condition controlling traffic flow around the bus station and limiting the number of departures from specified stops and the number of buses using the street on which the stands are located.

3.8.6 At the other end of the scale, the infrequency of services on particular routes can act as a barrier to usage. Faced with an hourly service, people are unlikely to choose the bus unless they have to.

3.8.7 However, in terms of the percentage of their market at risk from timetabling issues, Travel West Midlands' surveys indicated that:

- Buses do not run often enough (2.3%);
- Buses do not finish running late enough (0.9%); and
- Buses do not start running early enough (0.8%).

It is worth remembering that since services in the early morning and late at night are often subsidised by Centro, they are unlikely to be the target of over-bussing or competition for routes.

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<sup>22</sup> Centro (2006a) and (2006b)



## 3.9 Information

3.9.1 'Information' was classed as a critical success factor because customers felt that it was an area of weakness on the bus network, both in terms of availability of information and ease of use. Interestingly, improvement was seen as of low importance, possibly because customers had learned to live with poor performance.

3.9.2 This could explain the low impact poor information has on Travel West Midlands business:

- Insufficient information about delays/problems/disruptions (0.3% market at risk); and
- Difficult to find timetable information online (0.1%).

3.9.3 Information provision does not just refer to timetables at bus stops, but includes:

- Pre-journey information;
- At-stop information;
- On-bus information; and
- At point of connection or destination.

### Pre-Journey Information

3.9.4 When research was undertaken to inform Centro's Bus Passenger Information Strategic Plan, the most popular source of pre-journey information was the telephone service Traveline. Customers wanted to see an increase in the speed of response to calls and longer opening hours. Whilst the internet may have become a more popular source of information since then, the issue of better advertising of the information sources available remains the same.

### At-Stop Information

3.9.5 The research identified a perception that there was a general lack of information at bus stops and shelters, with vandalism cited as a major problem.

3.9.6 Users wanted up-to-date, easy to read, easy to understand information provided within a secure, well-lit environment. Information on the next scheduled bus and possible delays were cited as being particularly welcomed.

3.9.7 Real-Time Information was heralded as a way of providing this information, with business users, 'upper social class' members and non-users stating that this would be a very helpful development.

### On-Bus Information

3.9.8 For many people, an accurate and clear route number and destination were the most important factors at this stage of their journey. Route branding, fare information and route maps were all regarded as useful. People with special needs found electronic display boards and audible 'next stop' announcements particularly helpful. Bus drivers were also identified as important sources of information.





# Building Bus Use

3.9.9 Centro believes in the importance of correctly branding services and feels that this is not always strictly enforced<sup>23</sup>. An example is where buses are branded with a specific route, but for operational reasons are not allocated to that route. Whilst operators would argue that they only take such steps where they are necessary to ensure that a service is maintained, the counterpoint is that they confuse the situation for customers, especially those least acquainted with using the bus service.

## At Point of Connection or Destination



3.9.10 Problems experienced by customers when interchanging largely relate to knowing which stop they need to catch the bus from and where they need to get off. This can be compounded if bus stops change location. They felt that real-time information displays and on-street interactive kiosks would be helpful, if they worked properly, had accurate information and weren't just a target for vandals. However, the costs of providing information in this way are high.

Introducing Real Time Information is a key part of addressing passenger priorities

3.9.11 As stated in 3.4, it is the responsibility of bus operators to keep accurate and achievable timetables and they can decide what information is provided on buses. They should also inform customers of service alterations.

Travel West Midlands communicate this to customers through:

- Information notices on all buses in the area;
- Press releases;
- The website;
- New timetables; and
- Information Officers when city centre services are affected. They distribute information and answer questions.

3.9.12 The effectiveness of these measures is difficult to assess but anecdotal evidence suggests that the right information does not always get to the people who need it. This issue prompted the WMPTA to undertake a scrutiny review of the problem.

<sup>23</sup> Centro (2006a)





## 3.10 Why People Don't Use Buses

3.10.1 As well as gaining an understanding of the issues relating to existing bus users, it is important to understand why people don't use buses and what would encourage them to do so.

### Middle and High Income Attitudes

3.10.2 One group of people that provide an insight into the views of non-bus users are those on middle and high incomes. The majority own or have regular access to a car, have more choice about how they travel and yet rarely choose the bus. The main source of information regarding this comes from a survey commissioned by Centro in 2004 – *Middle and High Income Attitudes to Bus Travel*.

3.10.3 Middle and high income people were found to:

- Be more comfortable with rail and the concept of Metro than the bus;
- Have fairly well-entrenched negative attitudes towards the bus and so it would take a lot to convince them to start using it; and
- Be potentially willing transfer to bus as the result of the 'carrot' of an improved product, supported by various 'stick' measures.

3.10.4 Costs were found not to be a critical issue in modal choice, with the exception of certain trips e.g. city centre parking.

3.10.5 Overall, five reasons for not using the bus were identified:

1. **Fear and paranoia:** belief that the city is dangerous/anti-social and the bus is a focal point for danger;
2. **Snobbery:** the bus and its users are not regarded as peers;
3. **Heritage:** limited school age bus use, car ownership in late teens etc.;
4. **Lifestyle:** feeling that the bus is irrelevant to their travel needs;
5. **Experience-based:** feeling that the bus provides poor travel experience.

3.10.6 It is clear that people make emotive as well as rational decisions about transport. One of the most influential factors in the future could be bus travelling heritage, i.e. those who regularly travelled on the bus when growing up are more likely to use it now. As the number of households with no bus heritage grows, this could have a real impact on bus patronage.

3.10.7 In contrast to other routes in the city, the Hagley Road and Harborne buses have a greater propensity for upper and middle-income usage. Reasons for this were:

- Journeys are relatively short, the services are direct and connect the middle-income residential areas with the main professional employment area of the city centre (Great Charles Street and Colmore Row);



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- The reassurance of peer presence on the bus;
- Anti-social behaviour was less prevalent;
- Frequency and the resultant space on board.

3.10.8 Along this route, the bus was seen as a viable alternative to the car. Users had cars but they chose to leave them at home. Lessons can surely be learnt from this and used to inform services throughout the city.

## Route 33 And 44 Frequent and Infrequent Users

3.10.9 In 1999, research was carried out by the Department for Transport into why people currently do or do not walk or use public transport to get to a major urban centre. The study focused on two Showcase routes:

- Line 33 which serves a lower income and student area with a high proportion of minority ethnic groups; and
- Line 44 which serves a more affluent area as well as the hospital and university.

3.10.10 Respondents were asked what would encourage them to use buses more often. The results show marked variations by area as well as frequency of bus use. Frequent users on Line 33 felt lower fares were the most important factor (44%), whilst frequent users on Line 44 identified increased frequency (26%). This reflects the difference in the socio-economic catchment of the routes and the fact Line 33 has very high frequencies already.

3.10.11 For infrequent users, shorter journeys times were cited as the most important factor for encouraging bus use (Route 33 – 20% and Route 44 – 22%).

3.10.12 These findings clearly show that there isn't simply one solution for how to increase patronage. The factors that will encourage bus use will depend on a number of things including the individual's circumstances, their perceptions of buses and the bus service that already exists in an area.

## Comments in the Press

3.10.13 Letters in the local press, whilst anecdotal, do illustrate some common complaints and are also indicative of some reasons why people may not use buses:

- Reliability:

“While I usually drive to work, I have on occasion tried the bus. It takes a few minutes longer than going by car, but I could live with that. What puts me off the bus is the fact that, arriving at the bus stop when a bus is due, you may have to wait 20 or 30 minutes before one turns up, and like everyone else, I can't afford to be late for work on a regular basis.”

**Birmingham Post – 09 October 2006**



- Smoking: Beryl Page, aged 69, complained that heavy smoke on the upper deck of buses travelling along the Route 103 sometimes made journeys impossible:

“We know that they are smoking cannabis. It’s not always I must admit, but they aren’t meant to smoke full stop...I have to come straight back down when it is bad because of my asthma and my chest – I just can’t stand it.”

**Halesowen Chronicle (09 February 2006)**

- Cleanliness:

“The inside of the buses...reek of smoke and drugs, are strewn with litter and have two double back seats caked in filth where they are used as a foot rest by adults, as well as school children and teenagers.”

**Birmingham Mail – 25 October 2005**

- Standard of Driving:

“Buses in Birmingham...are so roughly driven that they verge on dangerous. I wonder how elderly people can safely get to their seats...The stop-start-brake-accelerator style of most drivers is the cause.”

**Birmingham Post – 01 July 2005**

- Unpleasant fellow passengers:

“It’s the pits on buses during the summer. It [the bus] reeked because there were so many smelly sweaty passengers in one place.”

**Birmingham Mail – July 2006**

3.10.14 The impact of such comments should not be underestimated. They are not only about the experience of the individual. Infrequent or non-users may be influenced by people sharing their experiences, hearing about them from friends, colleagues or through the press. Although such experiences are not first-hand, they can and do affect perceptions subliminally.

## 3.11 Summary

3.11.1 How customer issues are being addressed will be dealt with in the next section. The question here is whether the right information is being sought from the right people in the most appropriate way.

3.11.2 Centro and Travel West Midlands clearly expressed the view that a lot is already known about priorities for bus users and non-users. For them, the task is now about delivering against those priorities.



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- 3.11.3 There is certainly a wealth of information available, especially in terms of quantitative data. The research clearly points to a number of 'critical success factors' for increasing bus use. However there is an inherent danger in relying purely on this information to find ways of increasing passenger numbers:
- There is often a gap between what people say and do - even if they say they would use the bus if it was cleaner, improved cleanliness would be no guarantee that they would actually change travel mode;
  - Whether the issues mentioned are actually a deterrent needs to be questioned – they could just be an excuse for not using the bus;
  - The way surveys are worded is important. Asking respondents to rate each factor between 1 and 5 depending on how much it needs to be improved could produce very different results to picking the top five factors that need improving and placing them in order of importance. The former is likely to result in each factor being rated as important and so would not illustrate customers' priorities.
- 3.11.4 In light of these points, qualitative research like the Vector survey is actually more useful. It can provide a valuable insight into issues surrounding a particular subject. One way to understand the problems facing individual routes and corridors would therefore be to focus specific consultation exercises on them. In this way, measures to improve patronage are more likely to be effective as they are tailored to the individual circumstances of an area.
- 3.11.5 One method of consultation that still needs to be improved is the formal/ statutory user forum. The problems associated with TUACs in terms of creating barriers to public participation were universally recognised. The move to the more informal TUFs that are held out in the community is welcomed. However, without increased publicity we fear that it will still only be the 'usual suspects' who attend.



## 4 Addressing priorities

### 4.1 The Importance of Partnerships

4.1.1 The way in which bus services are delivered in the West Midlands means that effective partnership working is of critical importance in addressing the issues that are faced in attempting to build bus use. Whilst partners are expected to lead on implementing the different means to increase patronage, it is clear that any one of the partners operating in isolation will not bring about a sustained change.

4.1.2 Indeed, the Audit Commission has found that the areas outside London where bus use has increased are those that have forged successful partnerships. To be fully successful however, it notes that such partnerships require:

“... strong local leadership, stable and adequate funding, commitment to partnership working between local authorities and bus operators, a better matching of supply and demand, and complementary car restraint measures.”

**Audit Commission, 2005<sup>24</sup>**

4.1.3 The following sections examine the key steps being taken by each of the partners to fulfil their role in the partnership. As identified in 2.2.7, these are:

- WMPTA/Centro;
- Birmingham City Council;
- Travel West Midlands (as the predominant operator).

### 4.2 WMPTA/Centro

4.2.1 As explained in 2.4, the Bus Strategy is the means by which Centro and the seven districts in the West Midlands aim to secure the provision of appropriate bus services for the area. As such, the Strategy brings together the initiatives by the PTA/Centro and local authorities and sets out the priorities for all involved (including operators).

4.2.2 The way in which the 16 policy areas of the Bus Strategy are intended to deliver against the priorities and aspirations of bus users is illustrated in Appendix 2. However, there are two particular cornerstones to improving bus use, on which Centro has a leading role: Bus Showcase and Network West Midlands.

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<sup>24</sup> Audit Commission / National Audit Office (2005)



# Building Bus Use

## Bus Showcase

4.2.3 Bus Showcase is the core strategy through which Centro and partners seek to address bus patronage. Showcase brings together a range of measures designed to tackle the experience and perceptions of bus travel on a number of levels relating to the entire journey. It is focused upon providing highly visible improvements on bus corridors.

4.2.4 The first Showcase Route in the West Midlands was Line 33 (Kingstanding Corridor: Birmingham to Pheasey, routes 33/ 34/ 91), introduced in 1997. The following Showcase routes have subsequently been introduced in Birmingham or are in the process of being introduced:

- Route 67/ 67A: Birmingham to Castle Vale (introduced 1998);
- Route 97/ 97A: Birmingham to Chelmsley Wood (introduced 1999);
- Route 9/ 19/ 109/ 139/ 140: Hagley Road Corridor, Birmingham to Stourbridge/ Halesowen (introduced 1999);
- Route 50/ 50A/ 50W/ 50Y: Birmingham to Druids Heath/ Maypole (started in 2000);
- Route 11A/ 11C: Birmingham Outer Circle (introduced 2000).

4.2.5 Under Bus Showcase, there is a commitment from partners to deliver specific improvements, based on a set of common standards set out in Centro's Bus Showcase Handbook:



Making buses more accessible is one of the key themes of Bus Showcase

- Travel West Midlands:
  - Investment in low-floor, easy access, low emission buses;
  - Reduced overcrowding and 'Turn up and go' frequency of at least every 10 minutes;
  - Cleaning standards for buses;
  - Drivers trained to NVQ Level II in Customer Service.
- Birmingham City Council:
  - Highway measures to benefit bus reliability and speed;
  - Enforcement of highway measures;
  - Easy access kerbs and accessible pedestrian links to all stops, including crossings.
- Centro:
  - High quality, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant shelters wherever possible;
  - At-stop passenger information; and



- Real Time Information.

4.2.6 Showcase sets in place many of the partnerships and quality standards that would be necessary to progress to a statutory partnership. However, Showcase schemes are voluntary. Issues relating to statutory partnerships and contracts are discussed further from 5.2.20 to 5.5.

4.2.7 Centro and Travel West Midlands have clearly stated that they believe that the Showcase concept works as a means of encouraging people to use the bus. They cite the 33 and 67 Showcase Routes in Birmingham as examples where the co-operation between partners to provide the package of improvements directly led to improvements in patronage. Line 33 experienced a 50% increase on the route itself and between 10% and 20% on services within the corridor generally. Route 67 initially experienced growth of over 25% on the route itself.

4.2.8 Figure 4 on the following page shows Travel West Midlands' patronage on Birmingham Showcase routes, indexed to the first year for that route. Generally, this indicates that following the introduction of Showcase on the route, patronage increased. However, over time patronage falls. There are a number of factors behind the variations shown:

- The extent to which priority and improvement measures have been introduced under the Showcase scheme varies from route to route;
- All improvements were not necessarily made at the start of the schemes;
- There may have been underlying changes to the overall demand on the corridors;
- Some elements of schemes have not progressed as originally planned and in other cases there are known problems to which a solution has yet to be developed;
- This information is based on raw data and no analysis has been done on the effects of competition, service changes or other factors. For example, it does not include other operators' patronage.

4.2.9 Showcase does provide a significant, visible improvement for users to bus services on a corridor. However, it is important that this momentum is sustained by a consistent message to customers of continued innovation and visible improvement. The first Showcase schemes received relatively high profile launches. This included distributing leaflets explaining the scheme and its features to local residents and businesses along the route and off side streets up to 100m and putting adverts in local newspapers.

4.2.10 However, Centro acknowledges that long-term marketing and publicity is one of the shortcomings of Showcase and that the piecemeal delivery of schemes since the original Line 33 route has meant that it has not been possible to market the product on a whole route basis.<sup>25</sup>. It is the view

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<sup>25</sup> Centro (2006b)

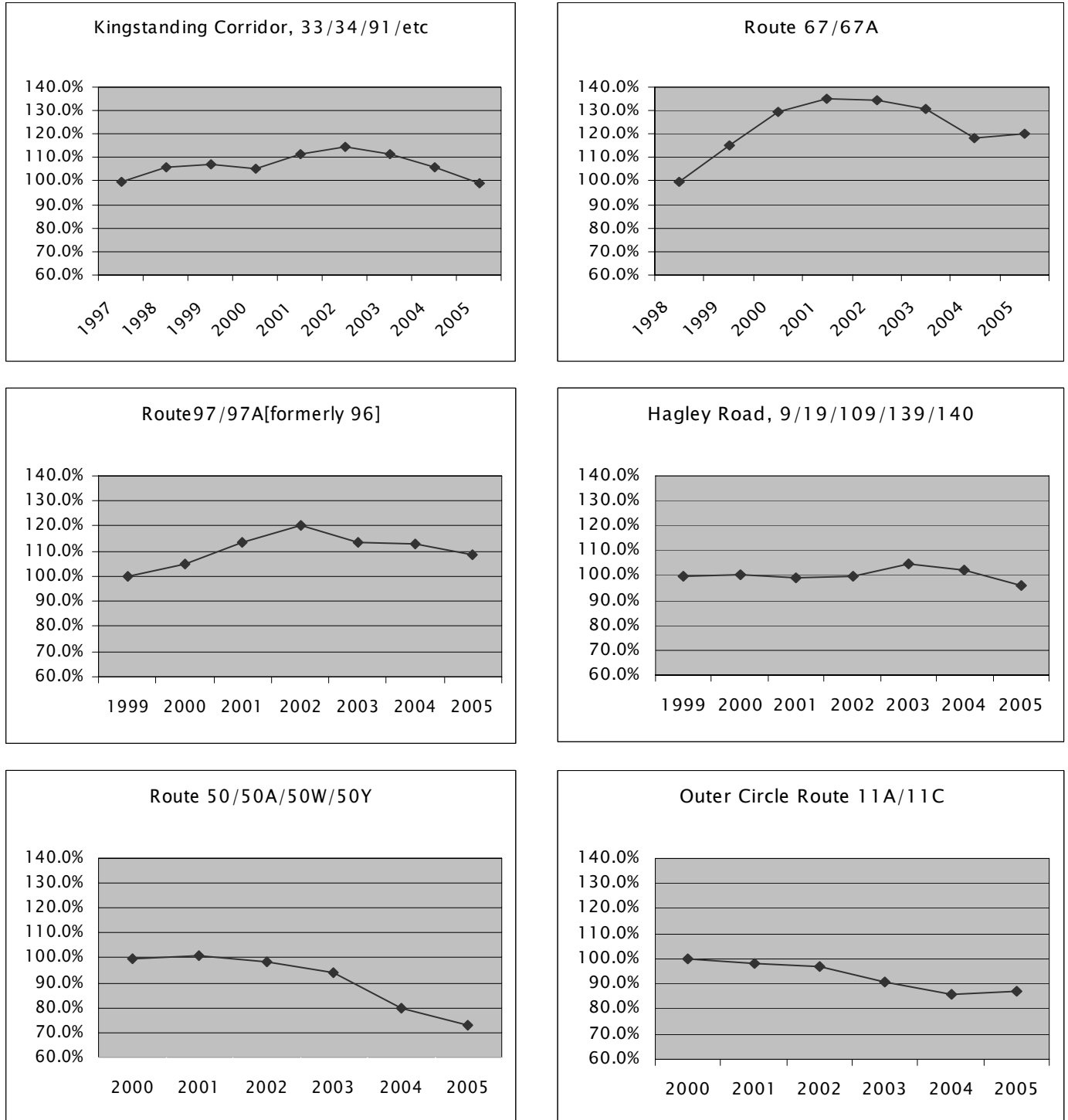




# Building Bus Use

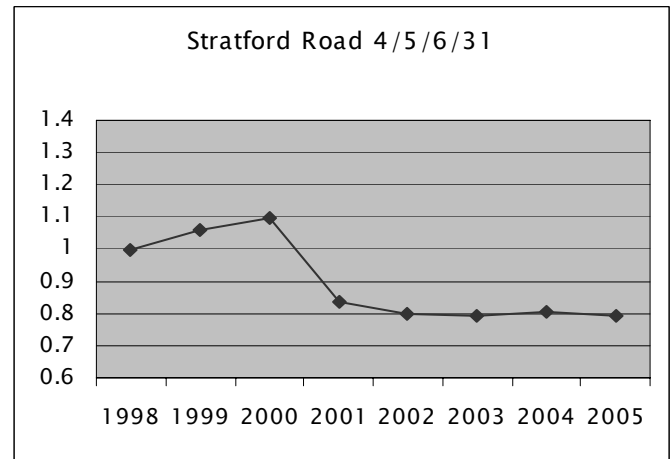
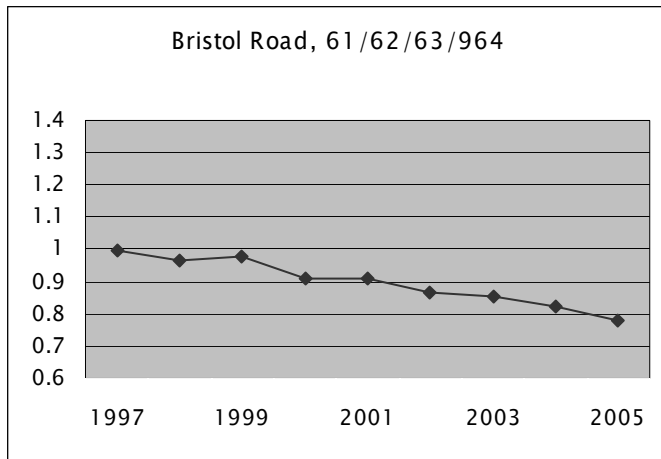
of Travel West Midlands that "as the concept has been diluted over the years, so has the associated publicity"<sup>26</sup>.

Figure 4: Patronage on Birmingham Showcase routes (Source: Travel West Midlands)



<sup>26</sup> Travel West Midlands (2006b)





- 4.2.11 For non-users, ongoing publicity and promotion is needed if modal shift is to occur. For example, research on Routes 33 and 44 showed that between a third and a half of infrequent users had no prior knowledge of the enhanced features, but were very interested when informed of them.
- 4.2.12 Showcase is a clear example where if the efforts of all partners are not whole-hearted then the result can be less than effective. This raises a question about whether conflicting priorities of partners has led to the ambition of Showcase schemes being tempered.
- 4.2.13 Recent research undertaken by PTEG regarding the effectiveness of voluntary partnerships like Showcase states that:

“... the selection of corridors that currently operate quality bus schemes has been based principally upon two concerns: commercial considerations for operators and political considerations for local authorities. The passenger, and importantly the potential passenger, has not been the focus.”

“...Given the difficulties experienced in establishing the current schemes, where routes to upgrade can be cherry-picked so as to achieve the greatest returns (i.e. greatest increase in patronage), it is hard to see how voluntary agreement can be achieved on considerably less commercially attractive routes where business cases for operator investment will be considerably more marginal or where there is no commercial justification for the operator, even where a wider public policy case may exist.”

**PTEG (2006a)**



# Building Bus Use

4.2.14 However, the Chairman of the WMPTA disputes this. He clearly told us that it was his view that Bus Showcase schemes in the West Midlands had not been “watered down” to result in solutions that were agreeable to all partners but essentially ineffective to the customer<sup>27</sup>.

## Network West Midlands

4.2.15 Network West Midlands is part of Centro’s 20-year Public Transport Strategy and is a marketing and branding initiative, launched in October 2006. It aims to develop a cohesive image for public transport in the West Midlands, to support a number of development areas associated with bus travel:

- Journey planning, including information via the internet;
- Information and mapping, including simplification of telephone information;
- Ticketing;
- At stop information;
- Capital works associated with these – principally at bus shelters and stations.

4.2.16 Centro conceded that information at bus stops has been poor historically<sup>28</sup>. These steps are seen as the foundation for establishing basic quality standards for the network, upon which messages regarding high frequency, reliability and quality can be communicated in the future. The network is comprised of a family of networks:

- A regional rail network;
- A multi-modal metropolitan area network; and
- A series of local bus networks.



Network West Midlands aims to simplify information for bus users

4.2.17 Network West Midlands is underpinned by extensive research conducted by Centro between November 2001 and July 2002 and again in 2005. This research concluded that establishing a recognisable brand would have a significant effect on patronage and revenue. In particular, the research indicated that the Network West Midlands brand would appeal to potential middle and high income bus users – as part of the process of changing the perception of bus travel.

4.2.18 The rollout programme for Network West Midlands is area-based, with the aim of full implementation across the West Midlands by December 2007. The key indicator of the success of

<sup>27</sup> Evidence to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (05 September 2006)

<sup>28</sup> Centro (2006a)



the initiative will be measured against user satisfaction with public transport information, but more importantly, against increased bus patronage.

## 4.3 The City Council

### As the Highway Authority

4.3.1 As the local Highway Authority, the City Council is responsible for planning and maintaining the road network. Its ability to do this is principally underpinned by the funding it receives from Central Government. As explained in 2.3, this funding is secured by the West Midlands through the Local Transport Plan, and distributed to the seven District Councils via the Joint Committee.



The City Centre Bus Mall, adjacent to the core shopping area

Around 50% of the money that the West Midlands receives under the Integrated Transport block funding is spent on bus priority measures and infrastructure.

4.3.2 The position of the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services is that whilst the City Council, through its role in land use planning, highways and parking policies may seek to influence individual travel choices, it must also take account of all travel choices. This means that whilst bus travel is important, it is not the only mode of transport. This additionally takes into account the duties placed upon the City Council as the Traffic Authority, responsible for the flow of all traffic in the city.

4.3.3 The Cabinet Member pointed to the fact that the proportion of people arriving in the city centre by all modes of public transport has increased from 46% to 54% since 1996. From 2004/5 to 2005/6 there was a slight increase of 3.9% in bus trips to the city centre. However, this is anomalous and the general trend remains down with increases in general public transport use largely attributable to increases in travel by rail rather than by bus.

4.3.4 One aspect that the Cabinet Member focused upon was the Congestion Task Force. Through this group, the Council is taking forward a number of suggestions for improving the flow of traffic on the city's highways. This includes suggestions made by bus operators that relate to the flow of buses.



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- 4.3.5 Such measures do not necessarily comprise large and visible bus priority measures such as bus lanes, but include adjusting traffic light priorities/timings and relatively minor amendments to junctions. Many of the 'quick wins' identified by the Task Force – those measures which require little funding and have simple implementation processes – are already underway. Whilst individually these quick wins are minor improvements to traffic flow (and so might have little impact on bus patronage overall) they do benefit buses indirectly as one of the many users of the highway.
- 4.3.6 The Cabinet Member is also exploring the options for introducing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in the city. These lanes can be used by vehicles with more than one occupant and are essentially intended to increase efficient use of the network by encouraging greater car occupancy. A consultation has been completed for a trial inbound lane on the A47 Heartlands Parkway.

## The Community Safety Partnership

- 4.3.7 The City Council in its wider role also has responsibility for improving safety in the community. This is exercised principally through the Council being a leading partner with West Midlands Police in the Community Safety Partnership.
- 4.3.8 The City Council has provided £700,000 of specific funding in both 2005/6 and 2006/7 to tackle crime and disorder occurring on buses and at bus stops. Some of this funding has been used to establish the Safer Travel Team, which brings together the Police, Centro, the Community Safety Partnership team, Pupil Watch (the Council's anti-truancy team) and bus operators.
- 4.3.9 The basis of their approach is intelligence-led, with a visible uniformed presence and education programmes to support this. One of its key strengths is its ability to operate across the boundaries of Police Operational Command Units (OCUs). It is comprised of 40 Police Officers and one drug dog.
- 4.3.10 Interventions include:
- Additional Police staffing (including recruitment of Special Constables);
  - Improved intelligence on crime and anti-social/ nuisance behaviour on the bus network;
  - Campaigns to improve behaviour at bus stops among the key group – the under 19s;
  - Work with the Birmingham Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (BASBU) regarding legal action;
  - Taxi and Bus Marshal patrols to tackle anti-social behaviour in key areas of the city centre (around bus stops and taxi ranks);
  - Installation of CCTV and conducting covert surveillance at frequently vandalised shelters;
  - Safer walking routes across the city centre with improvements to lighting; and
  - Working with schools to tackle problems of robbery and anti-social behaviour at bus stops close to schools.



4.3.11 The pilot project for bus marshals ran from November 2005 to March 2006. During this period robberies at city centre bus stops reduced by as much as 53% and violent crime by 24%. A survey of 350 bus users at city centre stops found that 53% felt safer, although 44% already felt safe. The scheme has been reintroduced to run from October 2006 to March 2007.

## Travel Planning

4.3.12 The City Council's involvement in travel planning comes through two routes: company and school travel plans. These form an important part of the City Council using its role as community leader to set a positive example and to have an influence over travel behaviour.

4.3.13 Company Travelwise is the City Council's Company Travel Plan, launched in 1998. It is designed for businesses within the city to encourage them to develop Company Travel Plans, with the aim of contributing to reducing congestion and cutting the costs to the organisation and its employees. This is achieved through encouraging a range of measures to:

- Reduce the need for travel/travel at peak times (e.g. home working and flexible working hours);
- Reduce the number of cars travelling (e.g. car sharing, incentives to use public transport);
- Make sustainable travel more accessible (e.g. better information and opportunities to try methods such as cycling).

4.3.14 Organisations join the Travelwise scheme by signing up to the Travelwise Pledge:

“To work towards reducing the environmental and congestion impacts of our organisations' transport activities with particular references to employee travel.”

4.3.15 There are also designated 'support companies', who offer services to all affiliated Travelwise members at a discounted rate. Such services could include bicycles, cycle parking or equipment, taxi services and alternative fuels. Centro and Travel West Midlands contribute as support companies through the provision of discounted travel passes. There are presently 244 companies in Birmingham affiliated to the Travelwise scheme, with 11 companies who are also support companies.

4.3.16 As the largest employer in the city, there is considerable potential for the City Council to influence travel behaviour as an employer. The Council employs over 63,000 staff in total<sup>29</sup>, with between a quarter and a third of these in the city centre. The City Council's own Travelwise scheme allows employees to purchase discounted annual travel passes via a loan that is collected through payroll deductions. As an additional incentive, staff also receive a 5% discount when renewing their passes (a recommendation from the 2003 Scrutiny Review of *Promoting Public Transport*). Numbers of staff with passes have increased from 1,396 in 2003 to 1,802 in 2005. 2006 figures so far are over 8% higher than for the same period in 2005.

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<sup>29</sup> Equalities and Human Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee: As at 30 September 2006.





# Building Bus Use

4.3.17 One of the reasons that it is important for the Council to play an active part in Travelwise is in setting a positive example for the community. In this respect, Elected Members also have a role to play. Of the 120 Members of the Council, 52 claim for travel expenses, with only three claiming for Travel West Midlands passes. However, 68 Members have either never claimed for travel or no longer claim at present.

4.3.18 School Travel Plans (STPs) are similar in principle to Travelwise and set out how children and their parents travel to school, with the aim of making this safer and more sustainable. Through putting STPs in place, the City Council and its schools unlock funding from the DfT and Department for Education and Skills for capital grants for improvements to support the plans. DfT has set a target that all schools should have a Travel Plan by 2010/1. Presently, there are 181 schools in Birmingham with a Travel Plan – 40% of the total.

## 4.4 Bus Operators

### Operational Management

4.4.1 One of the primary aims of moving bus service operation to the private sector was to improve efficiency. Although they may not be in a position to directly influence the circumstances that they face upon the roads, the competitive element to how bus services are delivered places a clear onus upon the operators to perform.



Investment from bus operators in new buses is a critical part of improving the service

4.4.2 Travel West Midlands is a large operator and we felt it appropriate to look at its detailed business performance management processes. Travel West Midlands monitors all aspects of performance through its standard processes for operational management. These include monitoring mileage covered, customer levels, complaints and financial aspects (operating costs and income). Whilst ultimately the Board of Travel West Midlands is accountable to National Express Group and its shareholders for the level of profit it delivers, these operational indicators underpin the ability to deliver that profit.

4.4.3 One of the criticisms of deregulation is that it has resulted in a number of small operators running services with old buses at a poor standard. However, it is clear that for a company to have any realistic hope of maintaining and increasing its market share in the long term, it must deliver certain standards and invest in its service. Travel West Midlands illustrated to us that it shares this long term view and this is underlined by their investment commitment:

- From 2001-5, 626 new vehicles were acquired at a cost of £87.9m;



- In 2006, 58 vehicles will be acquired at a cost of £7.7m;
- Nearly 80% of their daily fleet is now low-floor, easy access vehicles;
- Travel West Midlands' average fleet age dropped from 8.72 years in 2001 to 8.5 years in 2006.

4.4.4 Travel West Midlands consider that there is a relatively low proportion of their market at risk due to attractiveness and comfort factors (see 3.7.1). However, there is a focus upon this aspect of the service, because where negative perceptions of bus travel exist, these factors are often cited. The view of WMPTA/Centro is that "the external presentation and internal cleanliness of even the newer vehicles is often very poor."<sup>30</sup>

4.4.5 Travel West Midlands is refocusing its efforts in cleaning its buses:

- It has experimented with litter-picking during service at some locations. It reports that initial (albeit anecdotal) evidence from both drivers and customers has been favourable;
- A new weekly cleaning regime, conducting an in-depth clean of windows, ledges, floors, graffiti and chewing gum removal has been introduced;
- Trials are underway using a heavy duty film on windows, which can be easily replaced when etched.

4.4.6 The role of the Route Manager has recently been introduced by Travel West Midlands on key routes with one in each of its garages. The purpose of this is to encourage a focus upon the management of quality across the entire route. As part of this, there is liaison with partners such as Centro and the City Council to resolve operational issues.

## Operation Safer Travel

4.4.7 Operation Safer Travel (OST) is an initiative led by Travel West Midlands, in partnership with West Midlands Police in particular, but also other stakeholders. It was launched in 1999 and aims to "deter and detect crime and anti-social behaviour on bus and Metro". The purpose of this is to address a whole range of problems, including fare evasion, vandalism, theft, abusive behaviour and smoking on buses.

4.4.8 Steps taken by Travel West Midlands include:

- Increased use of CCTV, including investment in new on-board CCTV systems on new buses, but also ensuring that all CCTV cameras on buses work;
- Liaison with the Police and 'Gateway checks';
- Marketing and promotion;
- Community relations.

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<sup>30</sup> Centro (2006a)



# Building Bus Use

- 4.4.9 Gateway checks are one of the key elements of OST. They consist of Travel West Midlands Revenue Protection inspectors stopping all buses on a corridor, boarding and inspecting passes. Police are on hand to:
- Deal with any criminal matters arising from the contact with passengers, including people wanted for offences or committing criminal acts;
  - Provide reassurance for passengers and demonstrate that they are targeting travelling criminals; and
  - Gather intelligence and conduct searches for weapons and drugs.
- 4.4.10 There are multiple benefits of this approach. First and foremost it is a highly visible sign that action is being taken to tackle problems. For Travel West Midlands it is an effective revenue protection activity. However, the associated benefits are also important. Those who are evading fares are also likely to be the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour and crime on buses. Over half a million passengers were checked in the 211 gateway checks conducted in 2005, this resulted in:
- 259 arrests (53 for drug offences);
  - £184k identified for recovery;
  - Withdrawal of 3,715 Travel Cards.

## Automatic Vehicle Location

- 4.4.11 The Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system uses satellite tracking systems to allow operators to track the position of appropriately equipped Travel West Midlands buses. Currently, 350 vehicles are capable of being satellite tracked, with an additional 50 being installed with the equipment by January 2007. The project has been funded Travel West Midlands, Centro and the DfT and has cost Travel West Midlands over £1 million to implement. The initiative is part of the Showcase development programme.
- 4.4.12 The system provides Real Time Information (RTI) to displays at 200 shelters and SMS/ web facilities to these and around 1,500 bus stops. This covers around 15% of the total number of bus stops in the West Midlands. The Outer Circle (11A/C) Real Time Information system is expected to go live from January 2007. This will relay current running information to display screens in bus shelters and stations. Operation will transfer to Travel West Midlands' control room when this opens in the near future, but is presently located at its Birmingham Central Garage.
- 4.4.13 The RTI system predicts the arrival time of the bus at stops along the route, based on satellite communications every 30 seconds and recent journeys made by other buses. It therefore takes account of the current traffic conditions. Once a bus is shown on the display as being 'due', it can be expected in around two minutes.





4.4.14 The benefits of this system are manifold and include:

- Customers can access robust RTI, through either information screens at stops or via SMS text messaging services;
- Accurate performance information on services is collected and can be used for a multitude of purposes, current and future. From Travel West Midlands' perspective this is particularly beneficial because this data may be made available to others on a commercial basis;
- Where there are delays, these are apparent and Travel West Midlands can intervene to get services back on time in a similar way to a rail control room;
- Travel West Midlands (and other partners) can support proposed changes with strong, objective, empirical data on delays, rather than costly manual performance/ running surveys.

## 4.5 Summary

4.5.1 Given the way that bus services are delivered outside London, the only way that improvements in delivery can be made is through a partnership approach. It has to be accepted that partnerships are not always the easiest way for organisations to operate. To be effective they require partners to all pull in the same direction, trust one another and have a significant degree of buy-in to the objectives they are trying to achieve.

4.5.2 Each of the partners involved in delivering bus services in the West Midlands brings a particular area of expertise to the partnership. However, it has to be remembered that each partner wants different outcomes from the partnership. For operators, this is profit; for Centro it is improved patronage; for the City Council, tackling congestion. The key to success lies in making the objectives of the partnership as a whole of higher value to each partner – a shared goal.

4.5.3 The City Council is involved in many different partnerships. The work with the Community Safety Partnership is one example where partnership working has begun to show positive change. However, partnership working is not delivering improved levels of patronage. As will be explored in the next section, the effectiveness of partnership working needs to be evaluated in the context of what *could* be done.



## 5 What *Could* be Done?

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Whilst progress has been made by partners in Birmingham and the West Midlands, the full extent of powers under the available legislation have yet to be used. This is not surprising because it is also the case in other areas of the country.
- 5.1.2 In order to evaluate progress made in the city and the wider region, we felt it was important to examine what other authorities have managed to achieve with the same tools available to them. Some measures are clearly more appropriate in certain circumstances than others, whilst others have been used sparingly, if at all by other authorities. We wanted to understand why that is the case and whether as a city we are missing opportunities.
- 5.1.3 As with many of the subjects in the field of transport, there is constant change and development in relation to buses and public transport generally. Understanding what is in the pipeline, both locally and nationally is also an important part of understanding whether the emerging picture is as positive as it could be.

### 5.2 What We Saw In Other Local Authorities

- 5.2.1 Whilst bus patronage is falling in the West Midlands, it is rising in some local authority areas. Visits were undertaken to two such local authorities to find out how they are managing to 'buck' the national trend. They were chosen for the following reasons:
- Nottingham: A core city with increasing bus use; and
  - Telford and Wrekin: Relatively high car ownership and use but increasing bus use.
- 5.2.2 Although both authorities are different from Birmingham in many respects, not least in terms of size and the fact they don't have a PTE, there is still a lot we can learn from them.
- 5.2.3 The key factors underpinning their success were:
- Effective partnership working;
  - Demonstrable commitment to promoting/improving public transport; and
  - Active promotion.

#### Effective Partnership Working

- 5.2.4 Nottingham City Council does not have a separate PTE – when it became a unitary authority in 1998, it took on PTE responsibilities – i.e. powers over planning, the highway and tendered bus services. There are therefore cross boundary issues which can cause problems. However, these



are ameliorated with the Greater Nottingham Bus Quality Partnership. Under this agreement, operators have committed to invest in:

- High quality, modern, low-floor vehicles;
- Customer care training; and
- Better information provision.

5.2.5 In return, the local authorities have invested LTP capital in:

- Bus priority measures;
- Real-time information;
- Bus boarders/raised kerb stops; and
- Improved interchange facilities.

5.2.6 This approach has resulted in significant journey time improvements, increased patronage and modal share. The bus operators have now identified key locations where congestion has created significant levels of service unreliability. Through this process, a comprehensive programme of bus priority measures has been agreed for the next LTP period, 2006-11.

5.2.7 Telford and Wrekin Borough Council's partnership with Arriva Midlands, the largest bus operator in the area, has resulted in five Quality Bus Routes, all of which have seen increasing patronage. Arriva has:

- Provided new branded, low-floor accessible buses;
- Operated a high frequency service;
- Improved bus shelters; and
- Improved driver training and standards of customer care.

5.2.8 In conjunction with this, the Council has introduced a limited number of bus priority measures that have been very effective e.g. creating a bus gate so that buses can enter the railway station from the north without having to go around one of the busiest roundabouts in the Borough and bus only lanes linking the town centre bus station with the rail station.

5.2.9 One of the five Quality Bus Routes, *Ruraline*, is the result of a partnership between the Council, Arriva Midlands and Staffordshire County Council. This route travels over the border from Stafford to Telford and saw a growth in patronage of 83% in the first year and 26% in the second. It has also helped to address accessibility and social exclusion issues that can be a feature of rural life.

5.2.10 Another example of good partnership working has been with the Council's partnership with Telford FM, the local radio station. In return for allowing the station to advertise on vehicles and access roads, the Council is given free air-time for particular campaigns, e.g. concessionary fares and promoting bus use. This means that instead of paying £2,000+ for primetime slots on the radio, the Council pays £380 for an advert which it can use again and again.



# Building Bus Use

5.2.11 It is difficult to evaluate how successful these radio campaigns are, but when used in conjunction with other media (see 5.2.18) they undoubtedly help to get the message out to residents.

## Demonstrable Commitment

5.2.12 Leadership was cited as a key factor in the successes enjoyed in Nottingham. Without a PTE it is relatively easy for the City Council to push initiatives through; however it is significant that the City Council have taken the lead in a number of initiatives:

- Simplified the bus network: concentrated on radial routes with feeder routes plus high frequency link buses, including services to hospitals and the airport.
- The link buses and park and ride schemes are run by the City Council, which also owns the vehicles. These buses carry 2.5 million passenger journeys per annum, have integrated tickets and information. Nottingham presently scores 100% on all five accessibility indicators.
- The development of park and ride schemes along the main employment corridors. Nottingham has a relatively tight pattern of land use, so out of town developments are often relatively close to a major transport corridor. These schemes are particularly successful as they are used in both directions at all times of the day.
- Reducing the availability of parking – new developments get very limited spaces but are supported by park and ride schemes which have been implemented along the main employment corridors;
- A major focus on a city centre bus priority scheme (linked to implementation of the tram), which also deals with pedestrian and taxi conflicts:
  - First phase (linked to tram) was to establish city centre clear zone and create 'bus only' areas;
  - Second phase (linked to public realm improvements and redevelopment of civic square area) called 'turning point' – attempts to remove through traffic from the central area. Recent changes to the highway have resulted in North-South movements effectively 'transferring'.

5.2.13 Alongside this, two of the main public transport providers, Nottingham City Transport (NCT) and Trent Barton, are both recent holders of the Bus Operator of the Year title. Trent Barton has 20% of the market, with very high frequency, high quality services, and are held to be very progressive and forward looking as an operator – they know their market very well and have patronage growth as an objective (unlike other operator's business plans which focus on efficiency and cost savings). Trent Barton is prepared to take risks with new or amended services as they know the market so well.

5.2.14 When Telford and Wrekin Council became a unitary authority in 1998, extensive consultation and strong political leadership resulted in a revision of the entire bus network and the formation of a Quality Bus Partnership with Arriva Midlands. The introduction of low floor, easy access, branded



buses and the installation of a limited number of bus priority measures has resulted in a 20% increase in patronage, reversing a previous 3% p.a. annual decline during the 1990s.

- 5.2.15 Having increased patronage they are keen not to rest on their laurels and so are in the process of forming Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs). These will be explained in detail in 5.2.20, but the Council has also introduced bus priority measures to reduce journey times by tackling some of the known hot-spot junctions in the Borough that impact on bus reliability.

### **Active Promotion**

- 5.2.16 The Greater Nottingham Transport Partnership has commissioned "The Big Wheel" – a branding company part of the partnership and led by Nottingham City Council. There is a joint promotions group, which produces guides for first time users, employers, hospitals, universities. There is particular focus on markets that are constantly renewed e.g. students or where staff turnover is high.
- 5.2.17 Telford and Wrekin Council and Arriva Midlands regard effective marketing as being central to countering traditional poor perceptions of buses. They believe in using as many media channels as possible to promote bus use including the radio, adverts and high quality, targeted mail-shots.
- 5.2.18 Each of the Quality Bus Routes is branded a particular colour and this is clearly shown on all timetables, adverts and freebies associated with that route. Five mail-shots are undertaken per annum along the Quality Bus Routes to promote the service. This includes money-off vouchers, of which there is a c.9% take-up. This compares favourably with Arriva promotions elsewhere in the country where there is only a 1% take-up.
- 5.2.19 In addition, Christmas cards are sent out to all residents to encourage them to use buses. Once again, money-off vouchers are included and there is a 7% take-up.
- 5.2.20 A one stop mobility management centre - Travelink - has been opened in Telford Town Centre Bus station. This provides journey planning advice to the public as well as the ability to purchase rail and coach tickets, access to the maxi taxi and Journeyshare schemes and information on walking and cycling routes.

## **5.3 Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs)**

- 5.3.1 PIPs are just one of a number of statutory partnerships and contracts that can be used by local authorities/ PTEs to improve bus services and increase bus patronage. Nottingham City Council and Telford and Wrekin Borough Council are just two of the local authorities that are working towards establishing them.



# Building Bus Use

5.3.2 PIPs are partnerships between bus operators, the local authority or PTE and the Traffic Commissioner, designed to improve bus punctuality. They can be implemented on particular routes, specific junctions or whole areas where reliability is a problem. The concept recognises the need for joint-working if punctuality is to be improved:

- Bus operators need to set realistic timetables and recruit, train and retain sufficient staff; whilst
- Local Traffic Authorities (LTAs) have a duty to reduce congestion and the powers to implement bus priority measures.

5.3.3 As outlined in 3.4.3, bus operators are required to adhere to their published timetables. Poor punctuality may lead to enforcement action by the Traffic Commissioner as routine congestion is expected to be factored into timetables. However, exceptional congestion caused by one-off incidents that operators cannot control does not apply. If there are recurrent problems with punctuality, operators may decide to counter this by:



A bus gate in operation: as the bus approaches, the lights change to give the bus priority

- Increasing the scheduled journey time for the route to allow for delays;
- Reducing the frequency of the service; or
- Withdrawing services on routes which are heavily congested.

5.3.4 All of these actions are legitimate commercial responses, but are to the detriment of the theoretical service to customers. The Audit Commission cites incidence of local authorities being unwilling to present performance information about operators to the Traffic Commissioner for fear that the response of operators may be to withdraw services.

5.3.5 It is important to put this in context. Traffic Commissioners use their enforcement powers sparingly for a number of reasons:

- Operators are not required to provide information routinely to the Traffic Commissioners or the public;
- Local authorities may receive information from operators, but may be unwilling to share it or it may be confidential due to its commercial nature;
- Traffic Commissioners rely principally on customer complaints for information, although passengers may not be aware that they can complain to them.



- 5.3.6 Nationally in 2003/4, although there were 18,776 registered bus routes, Traffic Commissioners investigated only 38 cases for poor performance, of which 58% resulted in financial penalties for operators<sup>31</sup>.
- 5.3.7 Although operators do not have any recourse to local authorities with regard to congestion, all of the above actions in 5.3.3 would impact on the bus targets in the LTP and Bus Strategy. It is therefore in everyone's interests to improve bus punctuality.
- 5.3.8 PIPs have the following benefits:
- For operators:
    - Traffic Commissioners, in deciding penalties for poor performance, will give credit for PIPs; and
    - Improved journey time due to the introduction of physical measures.
  - For LTAs:
    - Specific trouble spots can be targeted for action; and
    - Performance against bus targets should improve.
- 5.3.9 Although PIPs are only designed to tackle problems of punctuality (and so could not be used as a tool to address other issues such as cleanliness), their use would be welcomed by both Centro and Travel West Midlands. Centro believes that establishing PIPs for specific locations would be a good way to revitalise partnership working between the City Council, bus operators and themselves. If successful, PIPs could then be expanded into Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships which have a much wider remit.

## 5.4 Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships (SQBPs)

- 5.4.1 As the name suggests, SQBPs are *statutory* schemes with their process, form and content prescribed by the Transport Act 2000. SQBPs are established by LTAs<sup>32</sup> and must contribute to the implementation of the Bus Strategy. They have to set out:
- Particular facilities the LTA will provide e.g. bus lanes, bus gates, enforcement equipment or shelters/stops; and
  - Standards of service to be met by bus operators as a condition of using those facilities e.g. quality of the vehicle, driver qualifications or displayed information.
- 5.4.2 There are currently no SQBPs in the country. The reasons for this are unclear. Instead, all agreements made between LTAs and bus operators are *voluntary*. Although many of them are

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<sup>31</sup> Audit Commission / National Audit Office (2005)

<sup>32</sup> In Birmingham the LTA is Centro. However, as Centro does not have responsibility for highways or traffic, if the SQBP requires a traffic regulation order (which it is likely to), the Scheme must be made jointly with the City Council.





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working very successfully, there are things that can not be done through these agreements. For example, they only tie in the operators that are party to the agreement and so cannot prevent other operators from using the improved facilities provided.

5.4.3 The main differences between SQBPs and voluntary agreements are outlined in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Comparison of Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships and Voluntary Agreements

	<b>SQBP</b>	<b>Voluntary Agreement</b>
<b>Aim of scheme</b>	Must serve to further implement policies set out in the Bus Strategy	Covers whatever issues the parties agree to
<b>Membership</b>	Open to any operators if they agree to provide the required standard of service. In return they have the right to use the facilities provided under the scheme	Open to whomever the parties agree to include
<b>Contents of scheme</b>	Service frequencies and timetables can not be specified	Can cover anything the parties can agree to that is consistent with other legislation
<b>Improvements under the scheme</b>	Requires all facilities to be in place from the outset of the scheme's operation	Often commits each party to a programme of incremental improvement over time
<b>Provision of facilities</b>	LTA must provide and maintain the facilities throughout the life of the SQBP	There is no guarantee that facilities will be provided throughout the life of the Agreement
<b>Length of scheme</b>	Must last for at least five years	Can last for any time period
<b>How is the scheme formed?</b>	"Made" by the LTA(s) after consultation with operators and relevant organisations	"Negotiated" between parties
<b>Competition</b>	Must satisfy the competition test in the Transport Act 2000	N/A
<b>Enforcement</b>	Gives enforcement powers to the Traffic Commissioner against an operator that uses the facilities without complying with the requirements	No mechanism to prevent non-participating operators from the using the improved facilities

5.4.4 There a number of reasons why both bus operators and LTAs might prefer a SQBP to a voluntary agreement. For operators, a SQBP:

- Ensures that effective bus priority measures are actually delivered;
- Guarantees their provision, maintenance and enforcement for the life of the SQBP, even if policies and priorities change;
- Offers some degree of protection for an operator's investment e.g.:
  - If they have invested in a quality vehicle fleet they know the LTA bus infrastructure is guaranteed;





- Prevents other operators that do not meet specified service standards from using the quality facilities.

#### 5.4.5 For LTAs, a SQBP:

- Encourages, protects and enforces quality improvements from operators;
- Ensures that all operators using the facilities abide by the same conditions; and
- Can require a higher quality of service - operators may be more likely to co-operate because of the commitment shown by the LTA.

### **A38 Tyburn Road/Route 67**

5.4.6 Despite these benefits, no LTA has used the powers available to them to make an SQBP. The first SBQP in the country was set to be on the Route 67 in Birmingham. This scheme set out each partner's commitment to improving the quality and effectiveness of the Route 67 corridor, namely:

- WMPTA/ Centro:
  - Co-ordinate and set up a steering group;
  - Maintain shelters and bus stop infrastructure;
  - Work in conjunction with others to improve passenger information; and
  - Monitor all partner obligations.
- Birmingham City Council:
  - Provide bus priority measures, e.g. bus lanes and gates;
  - Improve passenger access to bus stops and interchanges; and
  - Enforce bus priority measures and waiting restrictions.
- West Midlands Police:
  - Provide ongoing enforcement of moving vehicle offences; and
  - Provide safety of users at bus stops and protection for users, staff and equipment on buses using the route.
- Bus operators:
  - Provide low-floor fully accessible vehicles;
  - Ensure drivers are trained in customer care and disability awareness;
  - Ensure vehicles are clean whilst in operation;
  - Limit the number of timetable changes;
  - Improve security on the buses through use of CCTV;



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- Provide real-time information equipment; and
- Ensure drivers dock correctly at bus stops where access kerbs have been provided.

5.4.7 The scheme was formally approved by the West Midlands PTA in June 2004 but, for a number of reasons, was not ratified by the City Council, who are co-signatories. Two stretches of bus lanes on Tyburn Road, which formed part of the scheme, were temporarily suspended in July 2004 at the request of West Midlands Police. The aim was to relieve congestion caused by extensive road works being conducted on the M6, which resulted in the planned diversion of traffic from the A38M Aston Expressway and M6.

5.4.8 However, the bus lane was not reinstated on completion of the roadworks because further research into their effect was necessary. The Cabinet Member cited views expressed that during the suspension of the lanes general traffic flow was significantly improved at only minor detriment to the bus. This was felt to be in part due to:

- The unnecessary duration of the operation of the lanes (for 12 hours, 0700 to 1900 hours Monday to Friday);
- The low volume of bus traffic on the road generally; and
- More effective use of the overall traffic capacity of the route.

5.4.9 Since the suspension of the bus lane, Travel West Midlands has reported decreased patronage and increased delays to their services. Changes in traffic flows and different comparisons of journey times complicate the picture of what has happened since the lanes have been suspended. However, the overall effect is that suspending the lanes has increased capacity on the route for general traffic (which has also grown), whilst bus journey times have increased and service reliability has reduced. Consultation on the future of the lanes began in October 2006 and is expected to report in early 2007.

5.4.10 Although the failure to formally approve the SQBP affected all partners, it was particularly disadvantageous for the bus operators who had already invested substantially to ensure they could deliver the obligations of the agreement to the set timescale. In September 2004, Travel West Midlands introduced a fleet of 11 new articulated buses on the corridor, costing over £2m. Smaller operators were also in the process of investing in new buses to ensure that they could meet their obligations. Without all the bus priority measures, the operators have not seen all the benefits their investments were meant to bring.

5.4.11 The disappointment of partners at the failure to ratify the Route 67 SQBP is still clearly evident. A lot of time and resources were put into drawing up the agreement that everyone hoped would improve bus services and increase patronage. Partnerships are based on trust and this has understandably been damaged by the experience. Partners are willing to try again but Travel West Midlands has voiced concerns that what happened on Tyburn Road is indicative of a wider issue<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Evidence given to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (03 October 2006).



– the willingness of leaders to promote public transport. Tyburn Road was considered one of the more straightforward roads in the city to introduce bus lanes, although it has relatively low bus numbers. If the will to implement priority measures on such routes is not there, what are the chances of it happening elsewhere in the city?

5.4.12 When looking at the proposed Route 67 SQBP, it is easy to focus on the pros and cons of bus lanes on the Tyburn Road. However, the agreement was to be about so much more. SQBPs are about setting higher standards for bus operators and providing facilities to improve journey times, reliability, passenger information and bus shelters. They are therefore a very useful tool to improve the services and increase bus use. In fact, according to Travel West Midlands, the industry is perplexed as to why LTAs are not pushing for SQBPs because of all the benefits they bring. Maybe it is time to lay the ghost of Tyburn Road to rest and concentrate on the issue of whether there are other routes in the city that would benefit from SQBPs?

## 5.5 Quality Contracts (Franchising)

5.5.1 According to the PTEG (which represents the interests of the six PTEs) partnership models have generally failed to deliver the scale and nature of sustained improvements that meet local policy objectives. They believe this is because of the inherent incompatibility between public policy and commercial outcomes. For them, the solution to this conundrum is Quality Contracts (QCs)<sup>34</sup>.

5.5.2 A QC is in essence the franchising of bus services – with the public sector specifying and regulating and the private sector delivering. It is now the norm in public transport provision across Europe and has many similarities to the way buses are run in London.

5.5.3 The main differences between a QC and a SQBP are that:

- Higher quality standards can be specified – under a SQBP bus operators have to agree to the standards but under a QC they can be imposed;
- Bus operator(s) are appointed to deliver services and once appointed face no on-road competition;
- LTAs can take the revenue risk and determine the fares – this is likely to result in higher costs, but if patronage does grow, the extra revenue can be ploughed back through lower fares or better services;
- Exact timetables or frequencies can be specified; and
- Performance regimes with rewards and penalties can be set.

5.5.4 The Transport Act 2000 states that to approve a QC, the Secretary of State has to be convinced that it is the only *practicable* way to implement the bus strategy, i.e. no other option will deliver

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<sup>34</sup> PTEG (2006b)



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the relevant targets. It also needs to be proved that the QC will deliver best value, i.e. be economic, efficient and effective.

- 5.5.5 Once approval is given, the LTA has to invite tenders for the provision of services to which the scheme relates. Tenders last for up to 5 years. At this stage it is important to create a level playing field for bidders so that the current operator does not have a huge advantage. It is the retention of competition in the tendering process that enables franchising to operate against the general principles of competition in providing bus services since the 1985 Act.
- 5.5.6 Recently the minimum statutory period between making a scheme and bringing it into force has been reduced from 21 months to 6 months for schemes entirely in England.
- 5.5.7 To date, no QCs have been formed due to:
- “Cumbersome, bureaucratic and disproportionate process for any QC bid” (PTEG<sup>35</sup>);
  - The difficulty of proving the legislative requirements; and
  - Opposition from operators.
- 5.5.8 Despite this, the concept still has support from PTEs who see it as the only way to achieve a step-change in performance. They are currently lobbying government to relax the legislative requirements to make it easier for QCs to be introduced.
- 5.5.9 Centro believe that QCs should only be used as a method of last resort, i.e. where partnerships have failed. They are committed to partnership working, but will undertake preliminary work on developing a QC so that it is ready to be implemented if the desired results are not achieved through other means.
- 5.5.10 The idea of franchising bus services also has broad support from MPs. In July 2006, a House of Commons Early Day Motion called for local authorities and PTEs to be given the power to plan and regulate bus services. It asked that legislation be changed to make it easier and quicker for Local Authorities and PTEs to introduce franchising where the industry has failed to provide a socially inclusive service and deliver the quality necessary to achieve patronage growth in line with national targets.
- 5.5.11 The motion attracted the support of 100+ backbench MPs, including six from the Transport Select Committee (and eight from the West Midlands). It recognises the success of the franchised bus network in London and the decline in bus patronage, high turnover of staff and continuing reductions in socially necessary services elsewhere.

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<sup>35</sup> PTEG (2005)



5.5.12 Douglas Alexander MP, the Secretary of State for Transport, has acknowledged the failure of the QCs as they currently exist. In a letter to the Leader of the House of Commons, he said:

“I would like to make franchising easier, particularly where, as in London, a local authority is prepared to introduce road pricing and needs first to be able to guarantee good public transport.”

5.5.13 However, QCs should not be seen as a panacea for increasing bus patronage. For example, unlike a SQBP, there is no requirement on an LTA to install bus priority measures and improve the highways under a QC. This means that although cleanliness of buses may improve, the same can not be said for punctuality and reliability.

5.5.14 There is also an issue about how to divide services up. If there is only one contract for the whole of the West Midlands, there are unlikely to be many companies able to bid for it. But if the region is divided into fifty contracts, more operators may put in tenders, but all efficiencies of scale could be lost as boundaries between operating areas would be established.

5.5.15 Finally, there would be significant additional public sector costs associated with the introduction of QCs. Meeting these costs would have to be done through increasing the WMPTA levy on local authorities.

## 5.6 Priority Measures

5.6.1 There are a wide range of bus priority measures, all of which fall within the statutory duties of a Highway Authority (in Birmingham’s case, the City Council). These measures are focused on improving (i) the speed of journeys and (ii) their reliability:

- **Traffic management:** Bus lanes, advance signal stop lines and areas (at roundabouts), parking restrictions (including Red Routes and Bus Stop Clearway orders) and queue relocation;
- **Traffic signal improvements:** Selective Vehicle Detection (SVD) and Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) equipment; and
- **Enforcement activities** to support these, including parking and bus lane enforcement.

5.6.2 Other measures that fall within the remit of a Highway Authority include the provision of improved access at bus stops – usually through raised kerbs that allowing ‘kneeling’ buses to ‘dock’ and provide a level surface for pedestrians. Improved access to bus routes for pedestrians is also the responsibility of the Highway Authority as part of a Showcase scheme.

5.6.3 Although the Highway Authority has a raft of priority measures at its disposal, implementation is prescribed by a number of factors, including the cost of the changes and the availability of land to make the alterations. Land can be purchased compulsorily but this is not always possible or



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practical. Further difficulties also occur when schemes cross local authority boundaries. This can further slow an already long process.

5.6.4 A number of issues underpin the effectiveness of bus priority measures, including:

- **Installing the 'right' measure:** Each 'hot-spot' needs to be looked at individually. What is appropriate and works in one place, may not be suitable elsewhere. This extends to having a clear understanding of the problem – if congestion is tidal and only occurs at peak times, priority measures may not need to be in operation 24 hours a day;
- **Public acceptance:** The need for measures, such as bus lanes, has to be explained to the public. If they appreciate the benefit it will have to a large number of bus users and to tackling the wider issue of congestion they are more likely to support them. However, if car users are stuck in a queue, with an empty bus lane to their left, they are unlikely to back them;
- **Enforcement:** If bus priority measures are not enforced, they are open to abuse. This obviously negates their impact. This is discussed in more detail below.

## Bus Lane Enforcement

5.6.5 Whilst Transport for London has had the powers to enforce bus lanes for a number of years, similar powers given to other local authorities in the Transport Act 2000 have only recently come into effect. These are part of a wider trend of moving enforcement of 'minor' offences such as parking and traffic offences from the Police to civil enforcement. Essex County Council, Reading Borough Council and Manchester City Council have recently become the first authorities to receive clearance from the Secretary of State to enforce bus lane/gates outside of London. Oxford is set to follow suit later in the year, with Nottingham and Brighton the following year.

5.6.6 In Birmingham, bus lane enforcement is currently still the responsibility of the Police. However, similar to the enforcement of parking before it was decriminalised, this activity is no longer a policing priority and so they are not often able to commit resources to it. This is evident by the number of violations that can be witnessed when travelling around the city.

5.6.7 However, work is underway to determine the feasibility of bus lane enforcement in Birmingham. This is funded through West Midlands joint initiatives in the LTP and includes:

- **Pre-Monitoring of Bus Lane Contraventions (Digbeth Bus Lanes):** Further bus lane contravention monitoring has taken place during the Autumn of 2006;
- **Pre-Monitoring of Bus Lane Contraventions (City Wide):** Bus lane contravention monitoring will take place at a further eleven locations<sup>36</sup> during the same time period;

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<sup>36</sup> Prior Queensway/Old Square Colmore Circus; Horton Square/Longmore Street; Moseley Road between Lime Grove and Runcorn Road/Brighton Road; Stratford Road between Catesswell Road to School Road; and Birchfield Road between Livingston Road and Wellington Road and Lichfield Road between Cuckoo Road and Salford Road; Between Tyburn Road and Chester Road; Alcester Road between Sandhurst Road and Queensbridge Road; Stratford Road





- **Camera Installation:** This will be undertaken following the pre-monitoring tasks i.e. December 2006. The process for full system testing and the level of monitoring to be carried out (i.e. am/pm peak times, other time periods and days of the week) needs to be agreed;
- **Procedure Development:** This will be based on the experience of operating and monitoring the system, extant systems and the experience of other authorities attending the DfT Bus Lane Enforcement Working Group.

5.6.8 The results of these trials will inform a report to Cabinet outlining proposals for rolling-out the scheme city-wide. This is scheduled for Spring 2007. Approval will then need to be sought from the DfT before the scheme can be implemented. Bus lane enforcement is therefore unlikely to take place in Birmingham in the near future. Without it, the contraventions will continue, hampering the overall effectiveness of bus lanes and gates.

### Red Route Enforcement

5.6.9 Red Routes are a way of relieving traffic congestion, primarily by the removal of inconsiderate parking. They also use a package of measures including road and traffic signal improvements, better provision for parking and loading dependant on local needs. Benefits include relieving congestion and allowing buses to keep moving which improves journey times.

5.6.10 Red Routes are initially planned in Birmingham along the following roads:

- A34 Stratford Road;
- A34 Walsall Road/ Birchfield Road;
- A38 Tyburn Road/ Lichfield Road;
- A45 Coventry Road; and
- A4540 Ring Road.

5.6.11 For these routes to be effective, as with any traffic measure, visible enforcement is key. This role will be undertaken by the city's parking enforcement contractor who is already responsible for issuing fixed penalty notices for parking infringements.



Bus lanes can be used to improve reliability and reduce journey times

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between Mole Street and Walford Road; Stratford Road between Peteresfield Road and Cole Bank Road; and Coventry Road between Arthur Street and Bordesley Circus.





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## The Debate about Priority Measures

5.6.12 The City Council must strike a delicate balance between its policy priorities. Whilst on the one hand it is a partner with obligations to promote public transport use, on the other it is a Traffic Authority with obligations to take into account the flow of traffic for all road users. Measures such as bus lanes which clearly favour one mode of road transport over others can cause tensions between policy priorities.

5.6.13 However, dismissing bus lanes reflects a simplistic and short term view of their purpose. Increasing the road space available to cars will of course aid traffic flow. The purpose of bus lanes is that they are based on an entirely different set of premises:

- The road space available to cars cannot increase infinitely;
- More efficient uses of road spaces should be encouraged – the same or more people travelling in fewer vehicles;
- By giving priority to such measures, capacity is increased and congestion can be eased without building more road space; and
- Carbon emissions are reduced if more people choose public transport over their car.

5.6.14 There is a balance to be reached. For many, cars are the most convenient mode of travel. It is only natural that people, having invested in buying and maintaining a car want to be able to use it. To restrict that use and win the understanding of the car owner means that restrictions must be fair and focused on the problem.

“A compromise may be possible. Is it really necessary for the bus lanes to operate outside of the morning and afternoon peak periods? Would it not be a good idea to allow HGVs and car-share vehicles to use the bus lanes?”

“Sooner or later however, the council leadership must decide whether or not it believes in bus priority measures.”

**‘Getting Priority’, Comment: Birmingham Post, 28 September 2006**

## 5.7 The Transport Innovation Fund

5.7.1 The *Future of Transport* White Paper (July 2004) outlined the Government’s intention to establish a Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) to support the costs of smarter, innovative local transport packages that combine more radical demand management measures (such as road pricing) with improved public transport, leading to modal shift.

5.7.2 The TIF will become available from 2008/9 and is forecast to grow from £290m to over £2.5bn by 2014/5. In advance of the TIF, the Government allocated pump-priming funding to a number of local authorities to assess the feasibility of schemes designed to tackle congestion. The seven West Midlands authorities and Centro won £2.6m to undertake this preliminary work.



- 5.7.3 They have used part of this funding to commission consultants to produce a Green Paper: *Gridlock or Growth: Choices and Challenges for the Future* (September 2006). This clearly sets out the gravity of the congestion problem facing the region.
- 5.7.4 The Green Paper outlines three possible scenarios for tackling this issue:
- Reference case, i.e. carry on as we are
  - Strategic Package 1 – Lifestyle
  - Strategic Package 2 – Lifestyle plus Road User Charging

### Scenario A. Reference Case, i.e. Carry on as We Are

- 5.7.5 This describes the likely state of the transport system in 2021 if actions in the Local Transport Plan are delivered and the level of funding is maintained. It shows that congestion will increase by 22% by 2012, adding an extra 469,000 car journeys and 330,000 delay hours on the roads. The network in Birmingham will be severely affected by the increased congestion. The costs of traffic delays to businesses and commuters would rise significantly and impact on the competitiveness of the region.
- 5.7.6 Carrying on as we are would also mean that we would not qualify for additional funding from the Government. This could leave the region short of approximately £1bn in necessary transport investment over the next 6 to 8 years. The result would be increased congestion and would inhibit economic growth.

### Scenario B. Strategic Package 1 – Lifestyle

- 5.7.7 This scenario includes the same funding arrangements and infrastructure developments as the Scenario A, but also considers the impact of concerted policies to encourage changes in travel behaviour, e.g. widespread adoption of company travel plans, school travel plans, reduced parking availability and other measures to encourage alternatives to the car during peak periods.
- 5.7.8 The success of these measures would depend on personal lifestyle changes, but could result in an estimated 2.5% drop in car-based travel compared to Scenario A, rising to a potential 10% reduction in heavily congested areas. However, this still equates to a significant increase in the levels of congestion that we experience today and, depending on the pace of implementation of these measures, would only delay the onset of Scenario A traffic trends by a couple of years.

### Scenario C. Strategic Package 2 – Lifestyle Plus Road User Charging

- 5.7.9 This scenario involves some of the aspects of Scenario B, combined with road user charging. Three types of road pricing are outlined:
- **Distance based charging:** Drivers would be charged based on the distance travelled, time of travel and location. Charges would be based on congestion levels. This option would require vehicles to be fitted with satellite navigation equipment;



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- **A zonal system:** Drivers would be charged for travelling between zones. Number-plate recognition cameras would be used to record drivers entering the zone; and
- **A centre based system:** Cordons would be placed around nine town and city centres in the West Midlands. Drivers would be charged for entering the centres as they are in London.

- 5.7.10 Charging could only be implemented in conjunction with improvements to public transport, to give people a viable alternative to the car. Significant investment would therefore be needed to introduce such a scheme. The report suggests that an upfront package of £2bn would be required.
- 5.7.11 The Green Paper does not come to any conclusions about which of the scenarios should be adopted, only that it will get a lot worse if nothing is done. Instead, the Paper was always designed to be the starting point for debate. However, what is certain is that some difficult decisions need to be made in the future if Birmingham is to remain competitive and a desirable place to live.
- 5.7.12 The Government has made it clear that TIF will only be allocated to local authorities who will use it for hard demand management programmes, like road pricing. Choosing Scenario A or B will therefore not qualify for the funding. This begs the question: how can we access the money that we need to improve public transport and tackle congestion without the TIF?
- 5.7.13 Even if the West Midlands was successful, there is no guarantee that we would get sufficient funding. *Gridlock or Growth* highlights the need for £2bn worth of transport improvements linked into the successful introduction of demand management. This may not leave much for other local authorities, as has been pointed out by Transport Minister Stephen Ladyman MP, who said that the region was unlikely to get all the money it had asked for even if it was successful.<sup>37</sup> We also have to compete against other regions – notably Greater Manchester – who have indicated that they too would like to pilot road pricing.
- 5.7.14 The Government has not made it clear how national road charging, if it is rolled out, will be funded. TIF is the only money currently on offer. To give ourselves the best possible chance of securing it, the West Midlands authorities must present a united front behind a strong, feasible policy. However, public opinion must not be ignored. For any scheme to be successful, residents have to recognise that there is a problem, believe that demand management will offer a solution and see public transport as a suitable alternative to the car. For this modal shift to occur, buses in particular, have to improve.

## 5.8 Ongoing Research

- 5.8.1 As Birmingham undergoes continual regeneration and development, it is becoming increasingly difficult for bus services to penetrate the city centre. Economic development and the revitalisation of the city centre through developments such as Broad Street, the Bull Ring, Eastside and the

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<sup>37</sup> Birmingham Post, 24 October 2006



removal of Masshouse Circus has been undeniably good overall for the city. However, they have also made the centre larger, reduced road capacity around it and restricted the ability of buses to get people to its heart – where they need to be for people to choose to use them.

- 5.8.2 The Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services has commissioned a major study to examine the issue of land use and transport policy. This focuses upon the former Inner Ring Road and will take account of the major developments that are proposed in that area over the next decade.
- 5.8.3 The results of this are expected in Spring 2007. However, it is anticipated that this will point to a need for highway improvements to maintain capacity and cope with the additional numbers of people accessing the city. Such improvements can be expected to be the subject of bids for funding through Regional Funding Allocation.
- 5.8.4 In addition, Centro has commissioned a major review of the bus network in the West Midlands. This includes critical issues such as the network in Birmingham city centre. Although there are limited options for how buses access the city centre, Centro are confident that in discussions with operators improvements can be delivered in the next three to four years.

## 5.9 Summary

- 5.9.1 It is clear is that there are advantages and disadvantages to all the mechanisms designed to increase bus use. It is the role of local authorities, PTEs and bus operators to work together to maximise the former and minimise the latter. This will undoubtedly require strong leadership and some difficult decision-making.
- 5.9.2 It is important not to look at any of the measures in isolation. In London, a variety of devices have been used as part of managing the overall demand for car use. This involves using 'carrot' and 'stick' measures to promote bus use. On the one hand, Transport for London have introduced congestion charging, whilst on the other they have improved bus services by raising the quality standards required, introducing the Oyster card to integrate the different modes of public transport and improving journey times by introducing Red Routes and enforcing priority measures.
- 5.9.3 Other local authorities have used other demand management measures such as increasing the cost of city-centre car parking to deter drivers from using the car or have implemented park and ride schemes. Whilst there is a raft of measures available to local authorities and PTEs, not all of them will necessarily be appropriate in Birmingham or may only be suitable in certain parts. However, each should be considered on its own merits.
- 5.9.4 Much has been made of the difference between the delivery models in London and the rest of the country. Whilst there is a different regulatory framework in London, other factors come into play, including:
- The level of political leadership, reflecting the priority afforded to transport by citizens;



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- Levels of funding, which are greater than for the rest of the country; and
- Transport for London has Highway Authority powers, enabling it to implement extensive priority measures.

5.9.5 Some of these changes would need to come from the Government in terms of political steer, money and increased powers/accountability for local authorities and PTEs. However, the strength of leadership and commitment from the partners involved are determined locally.

5.9.6 Fundamental change is required now to prevent the problems that we are currently facing from increasing. This means not restricting our thinking to short term measures, but considering the long-term picture. Such a response is needed by the seven Districts to the issues raised in *Gridlock or Growth*.



## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 As we have established over the previous sections, building the use of bus services in the city is important to delivering many of the objectives that the City Council and its partners have. Congestion is a problem that will clearly continue to grow if unchecked. The unacceptable impact of increased congestion on the economy, health and the environment demand that action must be taken. We must build changes in travel behaviour on strong foundations of improved public transport. Buses must play a significant part in this.

6.1.2 When we set out on this review, the key question that we were seeking to answer was:

“How effective are the efforts of the City Council and other stakeholders in encouraging people to switch to bus services?”

6.1.3 The specific outcomes that we set out to achieve were to:

- Identify the measures that have been successful in encouraging people to change from car to bus;
- Provide an evaluation of the progress made by stakeholders in improving bus services in Birmingham;
- Recommend steps that can be taken by stakeholders in the future to make effective improvements to bus services.

6.1.4 We have set out our conclusions and recommendations to address these points accordingly.

### 6.2 What Makes People Switch From Their Cars?

6.2.1 Negative views of bus travel are strongly held by many of those who don't use it. This is one of the principal barriers that needs to be overcome. That fare reductions would not be expected to significantly increase use is indicative of the level of the problem. Also, most people who use buses do so because they do not have an alternative. Radical measures will be necessary if we are to persuade those who do not currently use buses to do so.

6.2.2 Bus Showcase has been one of the key strategies employed to persuade people to use the bus. It has clearly had a positive impact, particularly at the point in time when each Showcase route was introduced. Centro told us that where there had been investment in Bus Showcase there was evidence of a growth in patronage of buses and a shift of approximately 6% from cars. Travel



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West Midlands added that at one point, following some of the Showcase changes on the 67 route, patronage had increased by as much as 25%<sup>38</sup>.

- 6.2.3 However, it was also clear that a sustained effort by all partners is required to maintain any modal shift that occurs. Where the introduction of Showcase schemes and the pace of innovation have slowed, customers who have been temporarily won over often revert to other modes.
- 6.2.4 Because entrenched views opposing bus travel represent significant barriers, relying solely upon 'carrot' measures as we have largely done so far will not bring about the change. To win over such opposition will require making individual car use significantly less attractive and it seems that demand management schemes are the only real solution. However, for such measures to be effective they must temper the inevitable resentment that they will cause by achieving not only a step change in the quality of alternative ways of travelling, but also visibly tackling congestion.
- 6.2.5 Strong measures to discourage car use and support public transport can be expected to find ready financial support from the Government. The debate initiated by the Green Paper, *Gridlock or Growth*, in this respect is a timely one and is important in ensuring that an appropriate proportion of Government money is secured for the city. Road use is generally increasing and to make headway we need to win over not only those that are currently using their cars for existing trips but also those who will choose to do so for additional trips in the future. We must remember though that despite the pressing need for significant investment in public transport infrastructure, the funding from Government is not without limit.
- 6.2.6 Such significant measures as demand management are not imminent. But there are still some 'quick wins' that we can take to improve traffic flow while we consider such measures. We need to maximise the effect of these to lessen the impact of congestion in the short term. These will not necessarily have a direct impact on bus patronage, but should have an impact on journey times, albeit potentially a small one.
- 6.2.7 In the longer term the danger is that if we do not take significant action, we will simply be tinkering at the margins of the problem. The question therefore becomes threefold:
- i. Do we need to implement demand management in the long term (and if not, what are we going to do to tackle the issue)?
  - ii. How will we take advantage of the quick wins and extend what we are already doing to change lifestyles?; and
  - iii. Do we have the political will to take the decisions that will be needed?

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<sup>38</sup> Evidence to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11 April 2006).





## Our Conclusions

1. To ensure the continued economic success of the city and secure real public buy-in to support the tough measures that will be needed to tackle congestion, there must be significant, visible improvement to bus travel.
2. Schemes for 'hard' demand management will take some time to introduce if the region decides to go down this line. Over the period until such measures can be introduced, we feel that there are still quick wins that can be achieved.
3. Tackling perceptions of buses as a low status mode of travel is important to encouraging middle and high income people to switch from their cars. Cleanliness and driver training are important factors, closely following reliability, punctuality and overall journey time.
4. Whilst bus trips into Birmingham city centre did increase from 2004/5 to 2005/6 we found no evidence that this is as a result of the city putting in place measures to provide a platform for sustained bus patronage growth.
5. Bus Showcase has had a positive effect on use. However, we are concerned that if the message about improvement is not continually pushed and supported by further improvements the impact will be lost.
6. Reliability and journey times are critical factors in attracting new users. A credible approach to building bus use must provide solutions to tackling these issues. Introducing priority measures to improve reliability now will have exponential effects in the future.
7. There will continue to be increasingly tough decisions to be made to tackle congestion effectively. Gaining wide-based understanding and support for such measures is contingent on these being effective.



## 6.3 Are the Partnerships Working?

“If the solution lies in partnership, everybody should look at what it is they are doing, what it is they can do better.”

**Richard Bowker, Chief Executive, National Express Group**

- 6.3.1 Our view is that whilst partnerships have delivered some improvement in bus use in the city, they could deliver more, particularly when compared to other cities. As partners are unlikely to be critical of one another in public, gauging the precise state of the partnership is difficult. However, that we found the partnership to be lukewarm is perhaps indicative of its condition.
- 6.3.2 Any kind of partnership is a two-way street. Partners must always be prepared to constructively challenge one another, but they should not have cause to doubt their commitment to the partnership’s aims. The current structures of informal partnerships make for an ‘uneasy marriage’ and one for which a fair degree of counselling will always be necessary. However, whatever structural and legislative changes lie on the horizon, partnership is the basic building block and we must show that we have used all the tools available to us.
- 6.3.3 Central to the issue is the degree to which partners have a shared objective through the partnership. Presently, their basic focuses are different, with Centro focusing on building patronage, the City Council on congestion and operators on profit. Strengthening the partnership through a common goal is one of the ways to raise the importance of the objectives of the partnership versus those of the individual organisations. This also allows partners to focus on their specific areas of expertise. Ultimately, the goals of the individual organisations can indeed be realised through effective partnership working.
- 6.3.4 We agree that the problem is in part structural and therefore join in the widespread acceptance that there are problems with the delivery model for bus services outside London. The reliance upon voluntary participation in partnerships and the inability of the WMPTA to be able to exercise powers in support of the targets it is set conspire to doom it to failure.
- 6.3.5 Leadership and commitment in partnerships were areas that we wanted to explore. They must come on two levels:
- If **Centro and the WMPTA** are to play a meaningful part in co-ordinating efforts in the region towards a common end, they must exercise strong leadership. This may mean that their ability to exercise influence over partners may need to be increased; and
  - The **City Council** must be prepared to show commitment and leadership in the city. To create positive views and commitment of partners to investment in bus travel in the city, it must back stated commitment with deeds.
- 6.3.6 Irrespective of the long term direction and any changes that may occur in legislation, delivery of bus services will continue to involve some form of partnership working between the City Council,



Centro and private operators. It is therefore imperative that such partnerships are productive and are based upon mutually acceptable goals to which all partners are fully committed.

## **Our Conclusions**

- 8. As we saw in other authorities, effective partnerships are critical if there is to be any improvement in bus patronage given the current delivery model.**
- 9. Although the three main partners (the Council, Centro and Travel West Midlands) have not been directly critical of one another's actions in the course of this review, neither have they been effusive in their praises. Given the lack of improvement in patronage across the West Midlands, we are unconvinced that the current structure of partnerships is working.**
- 10. Much has been made of the decision to suspend the A38 Tyburn Road bus lanes. Whilst there were initially good reasons for this, the consequence has been a view that the Council is 'negative about buses'. However, it is important that we now move on from this.**

## **6.4 Future Improvements by Stakeholders**

### **Determining the Long Term Strategy**

- 6.4.1** First and foremost, as outlined in 6.2.6, the Council (along with the other six West Midlands authorities) needs to consider how it will respond to the issues that the Green Paper highlights. This decision needs to be taken soon to establish our long term strategy.
- 6.4.2** It is inconceivable that our approach can be divorced from that of the Government or from the other authorities in the West Midlands. Financially, this is impractical since the levels of investment needed for transport in the region are too high. In addition, to appreciate and accept the need for the decisions that are necessary, the public needs to see local and national government working as one.
- 6.4.3** This is not purely about how we improve bus use in the city. The strategy needs to be integral to and complementary with that for increasing the capacity of rail and Metro to meet needs. It may prove more difficult to encourage people to transfer from their car to the bus. However, encouraging them to transfer to other modes of public transport supports this end.
- 6.4.4** Basing our future actions on a good understanding of what people want is critical. However, in doing so we must be mindful that we do not allow a preoccupation with short term views to prevent us taking important decisions for the long term. We must still bear in mind that, irrespective of infrastructure investment, buses will continue to carry a significant majority of public transport passengers in the future.



# Building Bus Use

## Our Conclusions

11. **The West Midlands authorities need a clear and unified long term strategy for tackling the congestion problem in the region. Decisions regarding this need to be taken as soon as possible to ensure that we all pull in the same direction.**
12. **Consultation must underpin the approach that the Council takes and is party to. However, it is important that opinions are properly informed and that short-term outlooks do not prevent medium and long term improvement.**

## Partnerships

- 6.4.5 Returning to the issue of partnerships, as we have concluded earlier we feel that some action is necessary to refresh these in support of building bus use. These partnerships will form part of the future structure of bus service provision and they need to be stronger to fulfil this role.
- 6.4.6 Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) are an opportunity for partners to renew their relationships. Demonstrating that we can work together on a PIP would be a good step in reinvigorating partnerships. There are also some potential links here to what we already do. For example, the Congestion Task Force has identified many actions that could work in support of a PIP.
- 6.4.7 We feel that the city should also be pursuing Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships (SQBPs) and PIPs may help with this. SQBPs would provide a mechanism to raise standards across the board, in terms of on the bus, at the bus stop and on the highway.

## Our Conclusions

13. **Partnership working in building bus use in Birmingham is in need of reinvigoration if we are to achieve our targets.**
14. **The Council should take a lead in rebuilding trust, starting with clear commitments to working in partnership and followed by deeds to demonstrate our support as an active partner.**
15. **We feel that PIPs and SQBPs do have benefits and should be considered as a viable way of improving the quality of bus services and thereby increasing patronage.**



## For the City Council

- 6.4.8 Irrespective of whether the West Midlands does participate in a demand management scheme, the 'Gridlock or Growth' paper has illustrated that we can still go further on many of the areas of policy to encourage lifestyle changes. These include efforts to:
- Change travel behaviour, such as the availability of parking, its price and viable park and ride options;
  - Support the widespread adoption of travel planning (such as Corporate Travel Plans and School Travel Plans);
  - Encourage alternatives to the car and reduced car use in the peak periods.
- 6.4.9 These changes must be balanced carefully against the need to retain a healthy local economy. The benefits of tackling congestion cannot be at the cost of the businesses with whom we intend to share those benefits. However, a firm emphasis on reducing dependency on cars, combined with ensuring that an alternative is available must underpin our policy.
- 6.4.10 Park and ride has been used successfully in other authorities and we can learn from Nottingham's experience. Whilst options for this can be limited in a heavily built up environment like Birmingham, we need to make sure that we approach this problem with the same boldness and vision in planning terms with which the city addressed the expansion of the city centre. Whilst the forthcoming study of land use and transport policy in the Spring can be expected to identify a number of needs for improving the capacity of the city's highways, the potential for further park and ride must be explored.
- 6.4.11 The extension of travel planning has been part of the approach of the West Midlands since the first LTP in 2000. However, progress has been slow, with only 24.4% of employees working for an organisation with a travel plan by 2005 against a target of 40%. Quite simply, this is insufficient. The Green Paper has been clear that even with the full extent of the lifestyle and travel planning changes alone, some form of demand management will be necessary to beat congestion. However, if these changes are not delivering their full potential, this places greater emphasis on demand management.
- 6.4.12 Alternatives to car use such as High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes are presently being explored. We need the assurance from pilot schemes that we can make concepts such as this work in Birmingham. Once we have this, proposals to extend their use need to be expedited.

## Our Conclusions

- 16. The City Council must play its part in delivering the programme of bus reliability improvement measures in the LTP and the Bus Strategy, and ensure that considering bus reliability is a normal part of business for the Transportation Strategy and Highways functions.**



# Building Bus Use

17. **Ineffective priority measures cause resentment from other road users. A proactive and balanced approach to managing traffic should include periodic review of the effectiveness of bus priority measures. The willingness to add, remove or modify such measures to ensure priority is focused on problem times is critical.**
18. **The number of people covered by travel planning needs to be extended, but this can only realistically take place in step with planning and business relocation decisions.**
19. **We support the improvements achieved through the Community Safety Partnership in tackling issues of safety at city centre bus stops. We hope that the Partnership can build upon this success and extend this approach to other areas of the city.**

## **For Partners – Centro and Travel West Midlands**

- 6.4.13 The leadership role that Centro takes with regard to public transport in the city and the region is in part a product of the degree to which it can exercise direct influence over its seven authorities. Nevertheless, Centro must establish a lead that local authorities can support. Where the City Council must lead for Birmingham, Centro must do likewise for the achievement of regional transport goals.
- 6.4.14 Maintaining awareness of the changes that are being made to bus services has been a factor that other authorities we have looked at have done well. Building momentum behind projects such as Bus Showcase by strong publicity of the improvements and changes that have and are happening is part of continually ensuring that patronage doesn't drop off. The new Network West Midlands approach is a positive step. Centro needs to work with operators to ensure a similar approach, combined with stronger continuous marketing on Showcase routes.
- 6.4.15 After some delay to the introduction of Real Time Information, many of the improvements being delivered by Centro are now imminent. Alongside the introduction of Network West Midlands, these do represent substantial, visible improvements.
- 6.4.16 Integration between different modes of public transport is a key part of Centro's role. Effective interchanges between modes are critical to increasing flexibility and the ability of public transport to compete with the car. Whilst car users may be more likely to transfer to rail than bus, better interchanges between buses and rail/ Metro increase the likelihood that they might use the bus. Because a multitude of private operators provide transport services, it is important that we push forward with more integrated ticketing and the multiple information benefits that a Smartcard system would bring.





- 6.4.17 Capturing a rounded view in any form of consultation is critical, and we felt that the informal consultation methods such as the surgeries run by Bus Users UK are an excellent way to gather balanced feedback. This is particularly so since they do not rely on 'the usual suspects' that engage with formal processes – one of the drawbacks of TUAC and TUF.
- 6.4.18 Travel West Midlands has made considerable investment in new buses, Operation Safer Travel, CCTV and driver training. These are all positive improvements, but for Travel West Midlands they also make good business sense. Tackling issues relating to cleanliness of buses whilst they are in service may not have a significant commercial benefit, but it is important and more effort needs to be made on this.
- 6.4.19 Accountability must follow leadership and commitment. Although their view is that they are accountable commercially through the fare box, bus operators are not formally accountable to the public for the services that they provide. This is especially the case when compared to other modes of public transport (for example, trains).

## **Our Conclusions**

20. **Centro needs to take a stronger lead in co-ordinating the actions of partners. Legislative support here to give PTEs greater powers (in the same vein as TfL) would be helpful. We welcome the indication that the recent Local Government White Paper brings on this, but are mindful that this must be at an acceptable cost.**
21. **Network West Midlands is a positive step for marketing and information. Centro and operators need to work jointly on improving the level and quality of marketing for Showcase routes in a similar way.**
22. **Increased marketing and promotional activity provides an opportunity to gather further, route-specific, information on customer and non-user views. This can then be used to validate and inform service changes and improvements.**
23. **Improved integration of public transport relies upon effective interchanges between modes and integrated ticketing. We support Centro in pushing for a Smartcard system for the West Midlands although again we recognise the additional costs this might bring.**
24. **We feel that cleanliness is important. Whilst existing customers might not necessarily choose not to use the bus because of cleanliness and appearance, this is one of the fundamental tenets of 'a good service'.**





# Building Bus Use

25. Travel West Midlands is commended for the substantial investment it has made in support of improved services in the city. However, it must also demonstrate that it can consistently tackle issues such as cleanliness and overcrowding to woo people from their cars.
26. We recognise that the Traffic Commissioner is presently under-resourced. However, to play the larger role that is envisaged through SQBPs and PIPs, the Commissioners need additional resources from Government and better information from operators.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	<p>The Executive should set out how the City Council will play its part in the West Midlands authorities' response to the congestion issues identified in the Green Paper, 'Gridlock or Growth'. This should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify how appropriate funding can be obtained from the Government;</li> <li>• Demonstrate how the Council will support the increased role that bus travel must play in this solution;</li> <li>• Ensure that the city plays a leading role in tackling the problem in the metropolitan area;</li> <li>• Include specific consideration of whether demand management measures such as Road Pricing will be supported by the city, and if they are not, how a comparable projected effect will be achieved.</li> </ul>	The Leader	31 December 2007
R02	<p>The Cabinet Member should identify how the City Council can take a lead in partnership working by bringing forward proposals to work with partners on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punctuality Improvement Partnerships; and</li> <li>• Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 September 2007
R03	<p>The Cabinet Member should identify specific projects to improve bus reliability as part of the work of the Congestion Task Force and as part of the normal activities of the Transportation Strategy and Highways functions, providing details of improvements that have been achieved to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	31 January 2008



	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<b>R04</b>	<p>Irrespective of regional approaches to tackle congestion, the Executive should make clear how the Council will extend its current efforts to encourage lifestyle changes with respect to travel behaviour. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the Council will raise the proportion of people covered by travel plans;</li> <li>• How the Council will pursue policies that encourage other alternatives to car use.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007
<b>R05</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should liaise with the Birmingham Lead Member on the West Midlands PTA, to request that Centro bring forward a plan of how they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with operators to implement a step change in the level of promotional activity on Bus Showcase routes;</li> <li>• Increase awareness of basic and improved route features;</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for non-users to try bus services; and</li> <li>• Get route-specific feedback from customers, new and old.</li> </ul>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007
<b>R06</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should lobby the Government to increase resourcing of the Traffic Commissioner role for the West Midlands. This should be with a view to providing the level of monitoring and enforcement needed for greater partnership working on buses in the city.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	30 June 2007
<b>R07</b>	<p>The Cabinet Member should, in conjunction with the Community Safety Partnership, review progress with actions to improve actual and perceived safety and security on public transport and evaluate the need to continue funding beyond 2008.</p>	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety	31 January 2008



## 6.5 Monitoring Progress

6.5.1 To keep the Committee informed of progress in implementing the recommendations within this report, the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services is recommended to report back on progress periodically. This will be carried out through the established tracking process.

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<b>R08</b>	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	31 July 2007



# Appendix 1: Additional Documents

## References

- Audit Commission / National Audit Office (2005) Delivery Chain Analysis for Bus Services in England
- Arup (2004), Guided Busway Design Handbook
- Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (2006), Draft Business Case: Improved Safety and Security on Public Transport in Birmingham
- Centro (2000/1), Customer Perception Survey
- Centro (2004), Middle and High Income Attitudes to Bus Travel, undertaken by Vector
- Centro (2005/6), Annual Statistics
- Centro (2005), West Midlands Bus Strategy 2005-11
- Centro (2006a), Submission to the Transport Select Committee
- Centro (2006b), Additional Evidence Submitted to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- CEPOG (2006), Submission to the Transport Select Committee
- Letter from the Transport Director of GOWM to the Director General of Centro, 15 December 2005.
- Force Intelligent Unit, West Midlands Police (2006)
- PTEG (2005), Better Buses Moving Forward, available at [www.pteg.net](http://www.pteg.net)
- PTEG (2006a), The Decline in Bus Services in English PTE Areas: the Quest for a Solution, undertaken by NERA Economic Consulting
- PTEG (2006b), PTE Quality Contracts: FAQs, available at [www.pteg.net](http://www.pteg.net)
- Travel West Midlands (2006a), Customer Survey Presentation
- Travel West Midlands (2006b), Additional Evidence Submitted to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Transport 2000 (2006), Submission to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- West Midlands Joint Authority (2006a), West Midlands Local Transport Plan 2006-11
- West Midlands Joint Authority (2006b), Gridlock or Growth – Choices and Challenges for the Future, West Midlands Metropolitan Area Congestion Management Study



# Building Bus Use

## Background Documents

### Birmingham City Council Scrutiny Reviews

#### West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority Operations (January 2003)

- Reviewed the entire scope of WMPTA operations, as they affect Birmingham, identifying a range of actions across each area of operation.
- Asked the Leaders of the West Midlands Districts to consider issues relating the ability of the metropolitan area to champion transport issues and lobby for investment.

#### Promoting Public Transport (April 2003)

- Examined how the City Council, Centro and operators can promote and encourage the use of public transport in Birmingham.
- Stressed the need for bus services to be more reliable and that where there has been investment in Bus Showcase, there have been increases in passengers.
- Acknowledged the investment by Travel West Midlands in new buses and staff customer care training.
- In view of its difficulty to achieve, recommended that an action plan be created to achieve the Bus PSA target.
- Recommended extension of Bus Quality Partnerships and the pursuit of Quality Contracts if improvement was insufficient.

#### Travelling to School (December 2005)

- Supported local solutions to the complex problem of travelling to school through School Travel Plans.
- Noted that as a Council we are progressing towards School Travel Plans for all schools by 2010/11.
- Supported School Travel Plans as effective in getting people to change the way that they travel.
- Stressed the need for the Council to get value for money in promoting sustainable modes of travel.

### West Midlands PTA Scrutiny Reviews

#### Access and Special Needs (Centro)

- A regular access audit has been introduced alongside a comprehensive programme of works to bus infrastructure to facilitate access by disabled people and DDA compliance.
- Information on accessible bus services were made available through Hotline and Traveline Enquiry services.
- Network West Midlands will provide improved signage and shelters painted to colour contrast for the visually impaired.
- A pilot tactile signing scheme is now in operation.
- A review of Ring and Ride services currently in progress.

#### Personal Safety and Security (Centro)

- The introduction of the Safer Travel Police Team - Police and Police Community Support Officers presence to deter bus crime on an intelligence led basis.
- A review of security arrangements at bus stations and a new policy for addressing vandalised shelters.
- The increased incorporation of best practice in personal safety and security into new infrastructure and upgrading of current facilities.
- The further development of partnerships and information sharing including work with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Bus Operators.



### **Bus Showcase (Centro)**

- A future routes programme established in the 2004-11 Local Transport.
- The expansion of Real Time Information to over 2000 more bus stops. The creation of Bus Showcase policy and a handbook for implementation agreed between Centro and partners, including Birmingham City Council.

### **Subsidised Bus Services (Centro)**

- A revised Service Specification based on customer feedback, creating new standards, including cleanliness of buses and passenger security.
- The further development of Service Monitoring to ensure reliability and compliance with standards.
- The introduction of a penalty scheme for poor performance . The advertising of service changes in the Metro newspaper.

### **Bus Infrastructure (Centro)**

- New advertising contract that will mean that circa £70m of income will fund bus initiatives over the next 10 years.
- Improvements to sign age and information at the top 100 interchanges to be rolled out from Spring 2006 as part of Network West Midlands.
- The review and development of the specification and design of bus stations and Interchanges in 2006/7.
- The development of a more systematic approach to installing shelters at stops currently without a shelter.
- Installation of lighting in an increasing number of shelters through Bus Showcase and Solar Powered Lighting initiatives.
- The provision of seating in all shelters (except where removed for security reasons).

### **Concessionary Fares (Centro)**

- New processes are being developed for issuing passes to senior citizens are being developed.
- An Ethnic Minorities Officer has been appointed to increase usage of concessions for senior citizens in ethnic minority communities.
- Application forms and guidance notes in ethnic minority languages.
- The introduction of new and revised publicity for children's concessions and redesigned 16-18 Cards.
- Increased liaison with Schools and a Centro Schools Travelwise Officer.
- Introduction of Child Term Busmaster offering a 10% saving to the equivalent TWM product.



## Appendix 2: The Bus Strategy

Policy Area		Opportunity					Quality					Communication				
		Network Access	Integration	Accessible Design	Affordability	Frequency	Reliability	Journey Times	Personal Security	Attractiveness and Comfort	Customer Care	Direct Services	Information	Promotion	Awareness	Responsiveness
Service Delivery	1 Network Operation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	2 Local Area and Estate Services	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓			
	3 Rural Services	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓			
	4 Demand –Responsive Bus Services including Special Needs and Community Transport	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
	5 School Transport and Education	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
	6 Cross Boundary Services	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
	7 Quality Partnerships, Networks and Contracts	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
User Confidence	8 Community Safety and Safer Travel		✓							✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	9 Information	✓	✓		✓					✓			✓			✓
	10 Ticketing		✓							✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	11 Network West Midlands								✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	12 Customer Care								✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Infrastructure and Schemes	13 Bus Stops and Shelters			✓					✓	✓			✓			
	14 Interchanges and Bus Stations	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓			
	15 Showcase		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	16 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				





## Appendix 3: Those Involved in this Review

### Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members

2005-6: Councillors Alistair Dow (Chair), Timothy Huxtable (Vice Chair), Mohammed Azim, Dennis Birbeck, Don Brown, Mohammed Fazal, Kath Hartley, Ray Hassall, Peter Hollingworth, Zoe Hopkins, Martin Mullaney and Neville Summerfield.

2006-7: Councillors Martin Mullaney (Chair), Timothy Huxtable (Vice Chair), Sue Barton, Dennis Birbeck, Jerry Evans, Mohammed Fazal, Kath Hartley, Peter Hollingworth, Mohammed Idrees, Ayoub Khan, Dilawar Khan and Shafique Shah.

**Members of the Committee would like to extend their thanks to those who have given their time to help gather evidence for this review:**

#### **Birmingham City Council**

Councillor Len Gregory, Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services; Neil Dancer, Chief Highway Engineer; David Bull, Assistant Director, Development Strategy; Chris Haynes, Policy Manager, Development Strategy; Alan Lloyd, Traffic Manager; Claire Berry, Senior Policy Officer, Community Safety Partnership; Jenny Inglis, City Centre Manager.

#### **WMPTA**

Councillor Gary Clarke, Chairman of WMPTA.

#### **Centro**

Robert Smith, Services Director; Chris Perry, Assistant Director Customer Services; Rafael Cuesta, Head of Bus Strategy; Stephen Rhodes, Director of Bus Services.

#### **Travel West Midlands**

Phil Bateman, Divisional Corporate Affairs Director; Martin Hancock, Marketing and Development Director; Steve Jasper, Customer Services Director; Richard Rampton, Strategy Director.

#### **West Midlands Police**

Superintendent Neil Gould; Inspector Ian Grundy, Safer Travel Team.

#### **Vehicle Operating and Standards Agency (VOSA)**

David Dixon, Traffic Commissioner for the West Midlands.

#### **Bus Users UK**

Phil Tonks.



# Building Bus Use

## **Transport 2000**

Kevin Chapman.

## **District Audit**

John Gregory, District Auditor; James Aylesbury.

## **Nottingham City Council**

Andy Gibbons, Public Transport Team Leader.

## **Telford and Wrekin Council**

Helen Hill, Development and Promotions Team Leader; Kevin Sutton, Business Unit Manager, Environment and Economy.

Members would also like to thank officers from the Scrutiny Office and Committee Services for co-ordinating the review, arranging evidence taking and producing this report for this review:

Bethan Clemence, Domenic de Bechi, Yasmin Samaraweera, Emma Thornes, Katie Trout and Emma Williamson.