



Local bus services in England: brief overview

Buses are the most used public transport option for local journeys. The Government's overall aim is to drive up standards to provide a better quality service for those who already use buses and an attractive alternative for those who currently drive for short journeys. It has set itself a target of increased bus use.

The majority of bus services outside London - some 83% - are provided on a commercial basis by private operators. Decisions on the extent and frequency of services are mainly a matter for the commercial judgement of the operator concerned. Local authorities do have powers to subsidise services where needs are not being met by a commercial service.

The Transport Act 2000 brought in a package of measures to help secure better quality bus travel. This package includes the introduction of statutory quality partnerships to enable local authorities to enforce quality standards on routes where there has been investment on improving facilities for buses and measures to improve integrated ticketing (including bus/rail ticketing) and provide better passenger information. A key provision in the Act is that local authorities are required to prepare a local transport plan (LTP) and a bus strategy, addressing the needs of their area. There are also powers for local authorities to be given more comprehensive control over bus services under quality contracts, including control over timetables and fares, where a case can be made. The Act also guarantees a minimum half-fare concessionary fare for the elderly and disabled on local bus journeys.

Funding for local authority capital expenditure on infrastructure schemes has been greatly increased to help bus services, such as bus lanes to make services become more reliable and quicker. And funding for many new services has been made available through the rural bus grants and urban bus challenge schemes. Support for bus services is given by means of the Government's Bus Service Operators Grant. Public funding for buses has been reviewed to ensure that it contributes as effectively as possible to the achievement of Government objectives; this work is continuing as part of the review of the Ten-Year Transport Plan.

The Bus Partnership Forum has been established, bringing together the bus industry, central and local government into a real working partnership to help achieve the improvements in bus services all parties seek. The work of the forum is helping to identify and promulgate examples of good practice for others to follow in order to deliver better quality bus services for all of us.