

Better bus services: good for people, good for the planet



This manifesto has been produced by The Yorkshire and the Humber Pensioners Convention and is based on the views and experiences of our members as passengers and would-be passengers.

We call on all those with responsibility for public transport to work with us to improve bus services for the benefit of all our communities and to contribute to the fight against climate change.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the YHPC Transport Group and in particular to the small group who worked to produce this manifesto.

Special thanks to Jeff Turner, transport consultant from Leeds University, for his knowledge and advice on transport issues.

We are grateful to all the people who contributed their positive and negative experiences of bus travel.

Especial thanks to Unite the Union NE 999/2 retired members branch for printing this manifesto.

Ending the crisis in our bus services

Public transport should be a public service, not a source of private profit. Deregulation needs to be ended and buses returned to public ownership under democratic control. This requires legislation from central government.

However, we believe it is crucial that local and regional bodies use their powers to influence national policies and to improve bus services for the benefit of local communities and to reduce carbon emissions.

Principles for improving bus transport

1. The entire bus network should be welcoming and accessible for all passengers, regardless of age, impairments or frailty.
2. Public transport should be experienced as a co-ordinated and integrated system across the region, removing discrepancies and inequalities and providing the best for everyone.
3. All communities should have access to a frequent and reliable bus service.
4. Routes should enable people to travel to where they want or need to go when they wish to travel, using orbital as well as radial routes where possible.
5. Fares should be cheap and standardised across the region, with a view to creating free bus travel for all.

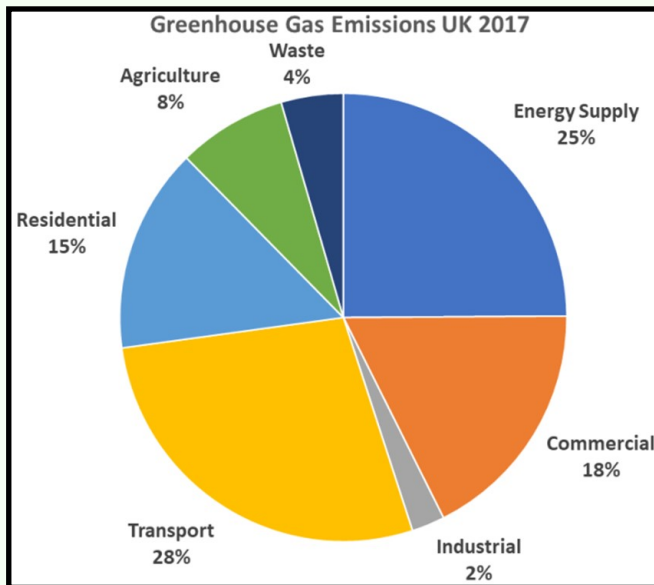
We call on local and regional transport authorities and our elected representatives to join with us in campaigning for national legislation to return bus services to public ownership under democratic control.

We call on all transport authorities across the North to use, or apply for, powers under existing legislation to implement bus franchising in order to control routes, frequency, quality and fares and to facilitate the smooth transfer of people from car to bus use as part of a co-ordinated and integrated bus network.

We will work with all transport authorities across the North to call on central government for a sustained and reliable increase in funding for bus transport in order to address the challenge posed by the climate crisis, introduce and extend the use of zero carbon buses, speed up investment for bus priority measures to counter congestion, and to support free travel for all.

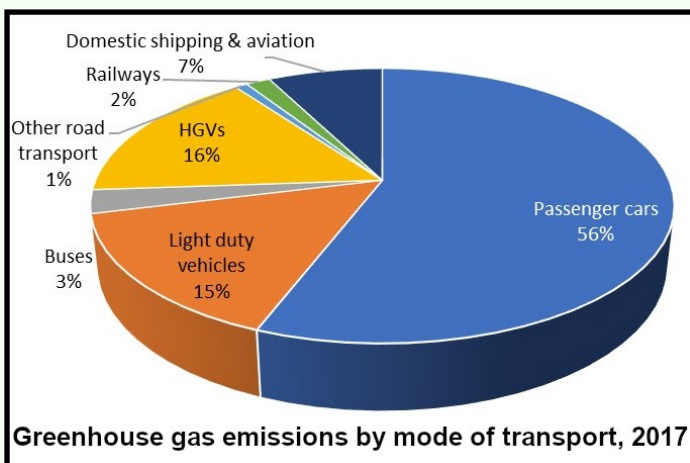
Summary

Central government and many local councils have now declared a climate emergency. This should mean that they recognise that the climate crisis needs addressing as a matter of urgency. Transport is responsible for 28% of CO₂ emissions, as the graph below shows.



A change in transport policies must be central to any attempt to deal effectively with the crisis.

Passenger cars are responsible for over 50% of transport related carbon emissions.



Providing public transport which is well used and attractive to travellers can help to cut carbon emissions, pollution – now a major health hazard in many areas – and congestion in our towns and cities. The bus, not the private car, needs to become the natural first choice when people wish to make a journey.

However, the deregulation of bus services was introduced across Great Britain in the late 1980s, with the exception of London where deregulation was never introduced.

As a result, local authorities outside London have very little ability to deliver high-quality bus services, a central plank of tackling the Climate Emergency and encouraging people out of their cars.

Instead, as the recent Transport Select Committee on the Bus Market described, bus users face rising and complex fares, disappearing routes, unreliable services and lack of clear information. None of this will entice car users onto the bus.



At the same time bus companies are still reporting profit margins of between 7 and 10 percent and noticeably higher for some of the large operators.

Transport should be seen as a Universal Basic Service, like education and health. Universal Basic Services (UBS), as a report by University College London defines, are services that are essential for people to meet their needs and fulfil their potential and to which everyone is entitled, regardless of their ability to pay.

As long as our bus services are run as profit-making enterprises for the benefit of shareholders rather than passengers, the major shift in ownership and democratic control which the climate emergency demands will not happen. However, there are many ways in which even under the present system of deregulation our bus services can be improved and made more attractive for their users and employees.



This manifesto has been produced by the Yorkshire and the Humber Pensioners Convention and is based on our experience of bus travel in our region. It sets out the problems stemming from the current system of deregulation and privatisation and puts forward principles which we believe should underpin how our bus services should be organised and operated.

In the long term we believe that the only way to address the climate emergency is to bring all public transport back into public ownership and to make it free for all transport users – only then will we be able to have a transport system that meets all our needs and have a real chance of reducing private car usage.

As a start, we would like to see transport authorities use the legal powers available to them to regulate all bus services, and gain some control over routes, fares and standards of service.

We hope that Transport for the North, MPs, local councils and Independent Transport Authorities will work with us to ensure that we develop a public transport system fit for the 21st century. Meaningful consultation is essential if we are to meet the needs of our communities.



* between 2003 and 2013

1. The entire bus network should be welcoming and accessible for all passengers regardless of age, impairments or frailty

Transport planners too often assume that all passengers are regular users, are fit and able-bodied, walk at a speed of 3-4mph and are sufficiently well-informed to plan their journey. But the reality for many older or disabled people is that the anxiety and difficulty of travelling puts them off getting around, visiting people and generally being engaged in their communities.

Everyone should be able to use our public transport system for both planned and spontaneous journeys with ease. Designing public transport to meet the needs of frail older people and disabled passengers has benefits for all passengers, creating safer and more comfortable journeys, easier access for parents with buggies and properly planned and resourced waiting areas, bus stops and integrated routes.

We would like transport planners to consider carefully the following areas:

Infrastructure

- Although the distance to the nearest bus stop is meant to be taken into account by local authority planners, the conditions likely to be encountered on the way to and from bus stops are not always considered. The pedestrian environment on the way to bus stops should be level and smooth without too many steps, with no overgrown bushes or trees blocking pavements, and with traffic light controlled pedestrian crossings on busy roads near to bus stops.
- Bus stops should be level with raised kerbs, with well-lit bus shelters and seating. Real time timetable updates should be prominently displayed. At peak times, there should be priority queueing and seated waiting areas for frail elderly and disabled people
- Toilets should be available, accessible and free at key points on journeys.

A pioneering bus shelter in Manchester has free wi-fi, free phone charging and real time travel information.

Bus design

Bus design has improved, but much more progress needs to be made. Further improvements should include:

- All buses to be easy access, with ramps for wheelchair users.
- Priority seating and positions for disabled and frail older people, including storage for walking frames and trolleys.
- Adequate space for Assistance Dogs.
- Prominent notices to ensure that all passengers are aware that priority is given to disabled and older passengers.
- Real time travel information displayed and announced for all passengers, and routinely fitted induction loops.



Additional support

- Travel support cards and badges for passengers with additional needs such as memory loss: 'Please offer me a seat' badges for those with hidden impairments.
- Badges to identify transport buddies – people who are happy to assist and support other passengers.
- Proper training to support disabled and elderly people to use public transport, including those elderly people who have recently stopped driving.

Timetables and information

- Paper timetables should be available, with journeys to hospitals and other health settings highlighted
- Bus routes which pass close to hospitals should serve at least the main entrance to ease access for older and ill passengers.
- Timetabling should ensure that drivers have time to meet the needs of all passengers.

Please offer me a seat

Remember not all disabilities and conditions are visible.



Please offer me a seat



Training for transport staff

Transport staff have a major role to play in ensuring that passengers enjoy rather than endure bus journeys. Some drivers already go out of their way to ensure that older people can access and enjoy bus journeys – staff incentives should focus on customer support rather than speed of journey.

- All staff should receive disability equality training and specific training to understand hidden impairments such as autism and dementia.
- Minimum standards for drivers should include waiting for slower passengers to board safely, not setting off before all passengers are seated and supporting people with memory problems or visual impairments by helping them get off at the right stop.
- Staff should ensure that disabled and frail passengers are given priority at busy times and properly welcomed on and off the bus.
- The re-introduction of conductors on busy routes should be considered to support safe and comfortable journeys for all passengers and to prevent delays when passengers are boarding.

The proposed Accessible Information Regulations (consultation on which took place in 2018) should be fully implemented as a matter of urgency. People should be able to get where they want, when they want, reliably, efficiently and in comfort.

2. Public transport should be experienced as a co-ordinated and integrated system across the region, removing discrepancies and inequalities and providing the best for everyone

Under deregulation, our bus services have become fragmented and inconsistent. Despite a key aim of bus deregulation being to increase bus use, DfT statistics published earlier this year show that the number of bus passenger journeys in England outside of London have fallen by over 4% since March 2005. Over the same period in London, where buses weren't deregulated, the number of passenger journeys has risen by nearly a quarter.

Outside London, five big bus operators have cornered an estimated 70% of the market: Stagecoach, FirstGroup; Arriva; National Express; and Go-Ahead. There are in addition a plethora of smaller operators. For example, in Greater Manchester there are 47 different bus operators. None is under any duty to coordinate with each other and can charge whatever they like.

Fares and fare structures are inconsistent and chaotic. Ticketing systems and fare rates are often not even common between operators in the same area, so that, for example, day rider tickets may not be transferable between operators and special offers may only be available on one operator's service. Travelling from one area to another increases the problems still further.

"Outside London bus operators have created a fragmented, incomplete, over-priced, fragile network of services that can be withdrawn at any time with no consultation, where single fares in some of the most disadvantaged areas cost up to £4.40. Buses are fundamentally not run in the public interest. How do you best illustrate the transport divide north v south? It's as simple as the price of a bus ticket and the price of daily travel. It's massively unfair... Why did everyone else get bus deregulation and London did not?"

Andy Burnham,
Mayor of
Greater Manchester



We argue there should be just one public bus organisation in each area, working together with other areas to enable connectivity, and providing comprehensive services, through contracts with commercial operators if necessary, which will encourage a major shift from car use.

We welcome Burnham's plan to take advantage of a new law that gives mayors of combined authorities the powers to take up bus franchising powers. We urge other metro mayors to do the same and all other authorities to request such powers from central Government.

The national concessionary pass schemes for elderly and disabled passengers offer the same basic concessions, but where you live determines whether you receive additional concessions.

The starting time of 9.30am for the use of the concessionary pass creates particular difficulties in some areas. Similar issues can be created by the 11pm deadline where services are infrequent. It should be noted that 34% of TCAs (Travel Concession Authorities) already offer extensions to the timings in the basic scheme.

Those of pension age in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester have free local train and tram travel in addition to free bus travel;

in both London and Merseyside people of 60 and over can get free bus, train and tram travel; in South and West Yorkshire pensioners get half price local train travel.

Other areas offer no additional concessions at all and in some cases remove even the basic concession by declaring services to be “tourist” routes. Not all Park and Ride schemes allow the use of the concessionary pass.

Similar discrepancies exist for disabled pass holders of working age and their companion.

The recent report by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Transport (October 2019) highlights this postcode lottery in detail.

“I live in North Frodingham in East Yorkshire. The bus goes at 9.15am which I would have to pay to use. The next bus that I can use my pass on isn’t until 12.15pm.”

Kevin

“I live in Hull. I can use my bus pass any time of the day, every day of the week.”

Mel

“I live in Manchester. My bus pass gives me free travel on trams and local trains”

Julie



This inequality and unfairness should end. We call on all ITAs to negotiate changes in start and finishing times for use of concessionary passes for the benefit of elderly and disabled passengers. All eligible passengers should have the same enhanced rights to free travel on trams, trains and other services.

3. All communities should have access to a frequent and reliable bus service

Many people in rural areas – and even in some parts of our towns and cities – have no buses at all or a service which is so infrequent it is of little use. Many communities have no service at all in the evenings and at weekends.

Bus operators respond to low numbers of passengers by cutting services even further, creating a vicious circle of worsening provision.

Department for Transport figures show that there has been a 13% reduction in bus services, represented by bus miles travelled, since 2005. This has been mostly caused by cuts in local authority budgets, resulting in the halving of bus services contracted by local authorities usually for rural routes or evening and weekend services.

The decline in passenger numbers has increased the need for local authorities to step in and subsidise “socially necessary” services that are commercially unviable.

However, local authorities who administer much of this subsidy have found it difficult not to divert resources into other pressing priorities due to wider government cuts. As a result, local authorities’ abilities to support socially necessary services have reduced and

they are increasingly unable to guarantee adequate bus services for all.

There is an urgent need to encourage people with cars to choose bus travel in order to reduce carbon emissions and pollution on our roads. But fewer routes and less frequent buses mean there is little incentive for drivers to leave the car at home when they want to travel.

And for those without their own transport, the lack of a bus service increases loneliness and isolation, with a resulting impact on mental health – and increased costs to the NHS and care system. It becomes difficult to maintain contact with family and friends or to have any kind of social life. People may be forced to use taxis for essential travel, a huge expense for the less affluent. Closure of local facilities like post offices, banks and shops – and the increasing concentration of NHS services in major centres – makes people’s lives even more difficult.

We recognise that even under a publicly owned system some routes and journeys will require specialist provision and smaller bespoke bus services. To effectively meet this need, planners should consider funding services such as Dial a Ride, access buses, community and patient transport and demand-responsive transport.



Planners should accept the principle that all communities need access to public transport. The closure of “unprofitable” routes, leaving villages or estates within our towns without a bus service, is unacceptable. Services need to be frequent and reliable so that travel by bus becomes a convenient and attractive proposition.

4. Routes should enable people to travel to where they want or need to go when they wish to travel, using orbital as well as radial routes where possible.

Bus services should enable people to get as easily and quickly as possible to places they need to access. This means that bus routes should serve leisure & retail destinations, health services, education establishments, the courts and places of work.

A major disincentive to choosing public transport can be the time it takes to reach your destination. This is exacerbated by the emphasis on providing radial routes into town and city centres, and the concentration on commuter services into centres at the expense of other times and routes.

In Leeds, for example, almost all passenger journeys involve travel to and from the city centre which is already grid-locked with slow moving traffic because there are so few bus routes that go round the city. This means it can take a substantial amount of time and distance to travel between suburbs which may be only a few miles apart.

"I live in Chapel Allerton, North East Leeds. I have to get a bus into and another out of Leeds for journeys to York, any of the local hospitals, suburban train stations or to visit my family in North West Leeds."

Lisa

Travel to hospitals can be particularly challenging especially with changes to the NHS provision of specialised services, which may necessitate journeys across transport regions with little connectivity between services.



"When my husband was admitted to Pinderfields hospital after a stroke, I couldn't visit him on an evening because there is no bus service between Wakefield and Barnsley after 6.30pm."

Pat, aged 72

The main hospital for the population of Northallerton is in Middlesborough. However, there are no bus services between these places. The only way to travel by public transport is by train then a bus out of the city. Community transport costs at least £20 each way.

There are many similar examples.

Good bus services to and from hospitals are essential. Routes need to be improved to ensure all passengers can travel as simply and speedily as possible to their destinations.

5. Fares should be cheap and standardised across the region, with a view to creating free bus travel for all.

The high cost of fares is a major disincentive to using buses.

According to the Department for Transport, local bus fares in England between 2005 and 2019 rose by 78%, whereas prices generally went up by less than half as much.

Recent Guardian research found that bus passengers across England are paying “massively unfair” fares of up to £6 for a single journey. Any single journey over half a mile in Leeds now costs at least £2.70.

Yet in London prices of single tickets have improved in value: in 2005, a single zone 1 fare for Oyster card users was £1. Fourteen years later it is £1.50 to travel anywhere in the whole city.

A recent survey by Unite the Union found the high cost of fares to Job Centres means some unemployed people walk miles for appointments and interviews.

There's also the confusing complexity of tickets and choices available. In some areas return fares no longer exist, forcing passengers to buy a day pass. Some of the main companies do not publish prices for single or return tickets, preferring instead to advertise only daily or weekly passes.

Transport costs form the largest single item in household budgets in the UK. In 2018 the average household spent 14% of its budget on transport, two-thirds of which was spent on running a car. Any improvement in public transport that reduces the need to own a car would create big savings, especially for low income households.

“I regularly need to go into Barnsley at 9 o'clock for a meeting. The single fare costs me £3.40 for a 5 mile journey.”

*Doreen,
aged 69*

We argue that fares should be reduced with a view to creating a zero fare system for all.

Bus travel is crucial to tackling the Climate Emergency. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tell us we have only a decade to turn around our societies. With almost one-third of the UK's emissions coming from transport, we need a “modal shift” – a move away from private cars to active transport, walking and cycling, and public transport.

But it is no good suggesting that people move away from private car travel, with all of its carbon emissions, air pollution impacts and congestion contribution, if there isn't a practical, affordable alternative. Free buses can be an important part of that.



We should learn from the experience of several cities in Europe who have introduced a zero fares policy. Notable among these is Dunkirk in northern France which in 2018 introduced completely free bus travel for more than a year, serving around 200,000 people.

In Dunkirk, free public transport has encouraged motorists to change their behaviour.

- 48% of new users of the bus have abandoned their car.*
- There is a shift from the car to the bus of around 24%.*
- 10% of users have put a car on sale or have given up the purchase of a car because of the free bus.*
- People see the gain in purchasing power offered by the free bus.*

“The Dunkerquois we interviewed cited the hidden costs of the car in their purchasing power gains. They refer to the costs not only of fuel but also of insurance, maintenance, parking, renting a garage ...”

Official report September 2019 on the effects of free bus travel in Dunkirk

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There are another 29 free to use or very cheap fare towns in France with many starting their free bus services with a cheap fares policy. More are planned, including Paris.

Tallinn's bus services are free for all residents.

Currently Wales has 11 long distance routes which are free to use at weekends. These are subsidised by the Welsh government.

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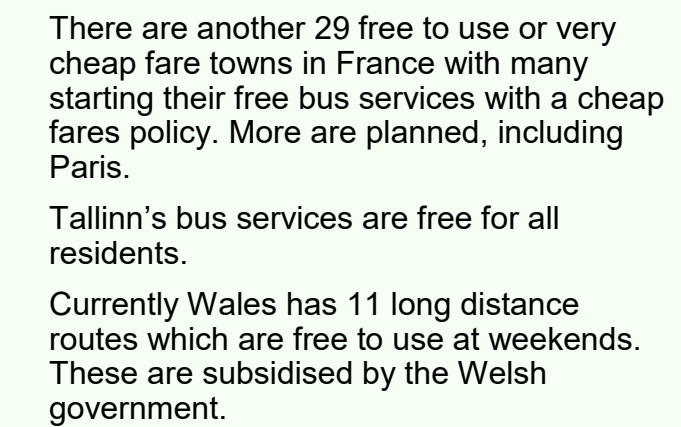
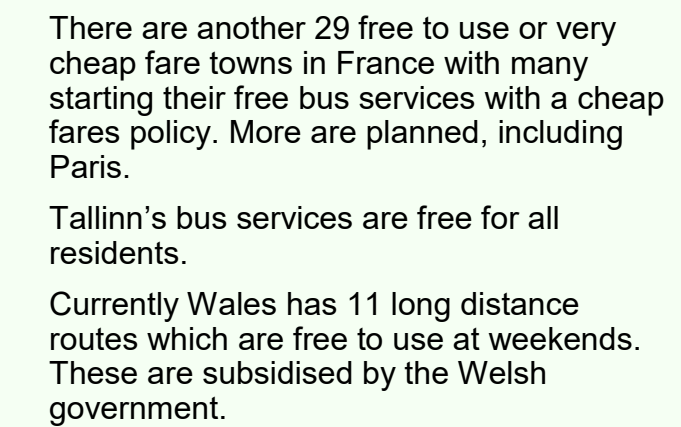
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Appendix

Further information and relevant reports:

Review of Reduced and Concessionary Fares in England outside London – House of Commons (Oct 2019)

“The Future of the Bus – Future Funding Arrangements” Campaign for Better Transport (Oct 2019)

DfT Bus Services Act - Consultation on Accessible Information (2018)

Age-Friendly Transport for Greater Manchester (September 2018)

“Are we getting there?” Age-Friendly Transport across Greater Manchester (March 2018)

Transport for all - A manifesto for a world-class accessible transport system (2012)

“Public Transport Can be Free” article in Tribune

“French City of Dunkirk tests out free transport” article (September 2019)

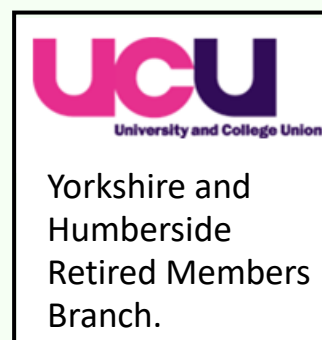
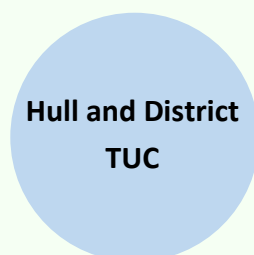
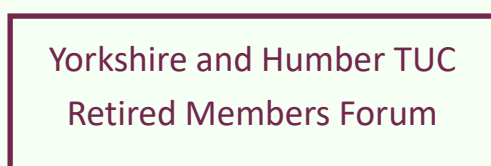
Map of Leeds bus network

Notes on the cost of free transport – J. Turner, (Nov 2019)

You can access all these documents here:

<https://sites.google.com/site/yhpctransportgroup/>

The 5 principles in this manifesto have been supported by the following organisations:



Burngreave Clean Air Campaign

If you would like to add your organisation's support for this manifesto please contact either

Paul Russell, YHPC Secretary, telephone 07967 348880 email prussell2@btinternet.com

or

Fran Postlethwaite, YHPC Assistant Secretary, telephone 07837 996888 email fran.pos10@gmail.com

For more information or to order copies of this manifesto or to receive an electronic copy

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We can also provide a speaker to come to a meeting.

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