Bus

BRIEFING

CEN Councillor Briefing: Buses

Buses and net zero:

- **Surface transport (e.g. road, train) is the UK's highest-emitting sector, accounting for a quarter of the UK's total emissions in 2022.** These emissions are dominated by cars, which make up over half of the sector's carbon footprint. Increasing electric vehicle uptake will help to cut most of the sector's emissions, supported by buses switching to zero emission and making walking and cycling an easier choice.

- **Improving access to public transport such as buses will help to improve local road congestion and air quality.** Last year, 64 local authorities were found in breach of legal limits on the nitrogen dioxide emissions which come from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. Reducing congestion is critical to limit the quantity of harmful particulate matter in the air, which can lead to serious respiratory diseases and other serious health conditions such as lung cancer.

- **The majority of car trips made by the UK public are under 5 miles, with more than a quarter under 1 mile.** Where walking or cycling is not suitable, such short journeys are well-suited to being travelled by bus. Buses already make up the majority of public transport journeys and represent high value for money, delivering benefits worth more than four times their cost.

The £2 fare cap:

- **The government introduced a £2 bus fare cap on services in England outside of London in January 2023.** It is aimed at encouraging the use of bus services following a fall in ridership and slow recovery caused by the pandemic. The scheme was meant to be temporary, but has been extended twice through to December 2024.

- **Households say that the fare cap has helped them with the cost of living.** The cap can save passengers a third of the cost of a ticket on average, with the biggest cost reductions at £12.50 per ticket. It is particularly impactful for those on lower incomes, who take almost three times as many bus trips as those on higher incomes.

Improving local bus transport:

- **Ensure that local authority plans and policies encourage bus use.** Councils have influence over local spatial planning and can design new developments to be well-connected to facilitate more journeys by public transport. Embedding public transport options into new developments can ensure fewer residents have to become dependent on their car.

- **Work with bus operators and neighbouring councils.** Developing a bus strategy or partnership with local bus operators is the most effective way to create an affordable and

reliable service. Partnerships with neighbouring councils, different tiers of government, and transport operators can help to deliver a more efficient bus network.

- **Seek opportunities to collaborate with Highways England.** Local planning authorities, Highways England, and bus operators should look to the wider road network to see how they can collaborate to cut congestions. This will improve the experience of both bus passengers and other road users.

- **Introduce flexible franchising to establish new bus routes.** 1.4 billion passenger journeys were made by bus outside of London last year. This figure reflects a downward trend of bus use since 2009. To increase bus services without introducing a costly full franchising model, you could explore the option of flexible franchising whereby bus operators bid for the lowest amount of support that they would need to operate a specified network as defined by the devolved authority.

Other benefits of improving access to bus services:

- **Supporting personal independence.** The young, elderly, disabled, and those on low incomes often do not have access to a private vehicle. Creating a reliable and affordable bus network allows them to access essential services, travel to work, and socialise.

- **Making it easier to find a job and travel to work.** A comprehensive bus network can help residents access good quality jobs. Over 77% of jobseekers and a third of the lowest income households don't have access to a private car; reliable public transport options can expand the areas in which jobseekers can find employment.

- **Increasing economic efficiency.** Congestion, particularly in cities, is both time-consuming and expensive to the local and national economy. Congestion was estimated to cost the UK economy £8 billion. This works out at £595 and 73 wasted hours per driver.

- **Benefiting the local high street.** Expanding and improving bus services are effective ways to increase footfall and cut congestion, making high streets more pleasant and allowing measures such as alfresco dining and outdoor markets.

Case studies:

- **Coventry City and Warwickshire County Councils** partnered with the Department for Transport and local bus operators to help make Coventry the first all-electric bus city. £150 million of investment will mean that every bus will be electric by 2025, and charging infrastructure will be available to all bus operators. National Express is now operating 130 double-decker zero emission all-electric buses in Coventry.

- **Tees Valley Combined Authority** created Tees Flex, an on-demand bus service that looks to serve residents who live in rural areas of the Tees Valley not well-served by conventional bus routes. Using the Tees Flex app, customers hail a bus directly from their smartphone.

The Tees Flex serves approximately 1,000 customers per week and has become particularly popular with the old, young, disabled, and isolated residents with access to study and local services. The pilot project has cost £3 million.

CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENT NETWORK