

To: All Members and Officers of the Cabinet.

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Date: 18 October 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Cabinet - Wednesday 20th October 2021

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the Cabinet.

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Wednesday 20th October 2021 meeting of the Cabinet, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

- Staffordshire Bus Strategy – Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Household Support Fund

John Tradewell
Director of Corporate Services



Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 October 2021

Staffordshire Bus Strategy – Bus Service Improvement Plan



Cllr David Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport said,

"This is an opportunity to bid for funding over a fixed period to support local bus operators in making their services more attractive.

Working with operators, and listening to bus users, this is an opportunity to modernise bus fleets, improve stops and incorporate real-time information, as well as using technology to make tickets and payment so much easier.

A reliable, comfortable bus service can support town centres, give students more choice and help people get to work."

Report Summary:

Department for Transport (DfT) published the National Bus Strategy (NBS) outlining its ambition to improve bus services in England earlier this year. The County Council, as the Local Transport Authority (LTA), needed to consider whether it wished to form an Enhanced Partnership or Franchise model by end of June 2021.

The Council agreed to commit to developing an Enhanced Partnership at the Cabinet meeting held on the 16 June 2021. As a consequence of this, the Council is required to submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to DfT by the 31 October 2021.

This report seeks approval of the key elements of the Staffordshire BSIP which has been developed in partnership with the public bus providers operating in Staffordshire. The BSIP is ambitious and represents an ask of government of some £113m to deliver outcomes which have been shaped by a recent public engagement exercise and comments from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on the 16 September 2021.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Note the comments and suggestions of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee when they reviewed the emerging priorities of the BSIP at their meeting held on the 16 September 2021.
- b. Note the key issues highlighted by the BSIP public engagement exercise.
- c. Approve the key asks of Staffordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as outlined in this report and to authorise Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to finalise the required documentation and make any final minor changes prior to the 31 October 2021 deadline.
- d. Authorise the Director of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills to submit the final BSIP to the Department of Transport by the deadline of the 31 October 2021.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 20 October 2021

Staffordshire Bus Strategy – Bus Service Improvement Plan

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Note the comments and suggestions of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee when they reviewed the emerging priorities of the BSIP at their meeting held on the 16 September 2021.
- b. Note the key issues highlighted by the BSIP public engagement exercise.
- c. Approve the key asks of Staffordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as outlined in this report and to authorise Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to finalise the required documentation and make any final minor changes prior to the 31 October 2021 deadline.
- d. Authorise the Director of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills to submit the final BSIP to the Department of Transport by the deadline of the 31 October 2021.

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

Background

1. On 15th March 2021, the government published its National Bus Strategy for England “Bus Back Better”, announcing £3b transformational funding for those authorities that engage in the strategy.
2. “[Bus Back Better](#)” sets out a significant step change in the government’s approach to funding and delivering the bus network. Whilst the market remains deregulated, it suggests that a more co-ordinated partnership approach between operators and local authorities is now required. The Strategy makes clear that there is a commitment to long term increased funding for bus services, both for local authorities and bus operators alike. However, access to funding streams is contingent on the Council having a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and entering into either

an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or franchising arrangement to deliver the objectives set out in the BSIP.

3. At the Council's Cabinet meeting held on the 16 June 2021 it was agreed that the Council would commit to an Enhanced Partnership (EP). An EP is a formal agreement between the local authority and bus operators setting out what is expected of each party, and the standards that will be met. The basis for an EP is set out in the Bus Services Act 2017 and associated guidance. Cabinet agreed that a franchising model was not necessary for Staffordshire as it would have been resource intensive and it was felt that the required improvement could be delivered by adopting the EP model which retains the ability for our local bus operators to innovate without the significant market intervention that franchising entails.
4. Having committed to an EP there is now a requirement to submit a BSIP by the 31 October 2021 to the Department for Transport (DfT).
5. The emerging themes of the BSIP were discussed by the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 16 September 2021.
6. In line with DfT requirements and guidance, a survey exercise has been undertaken to seek Staffordshire residents' views on the current bus network in Staffordshire and highlight potential priorities for the future. The survey opened on the 19 August 2021 and ran until 17 September 2021 (four weeks).

Feedback from Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7. The Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members received a report on the National Bus Strategy on the 16 September 2021.
8. Members were given details of the current challenging conditions of the Staffordshire bus market together with the intended approach to the development of the BSIP. Members asked that the following considerations should be given for potential inclusion in the BSIP or in any partnership working that is to follow:
 - a. Improvements be made to Roadside Information and Infrastructure, including bus shelters, bus stops, timetable information and real time passenger information, to provide consistent and accurate information at all locations.
 - b. Improvements to the timing and reliability of local bus services.
 - c. Linkage should be made to other strategic agendas and policy areas, including climate change and access to education.

- d. Continued engagement with bus users and local communities as the BSIP and EP are developed, particularly in the most rural areas of the county.
- e. Encourage more people to use local bus services to increase the financial viability and sustainability of services.
- f. Acknowledgement that a Staffordshire BSIP will focus on supporting commercial bus operators to maintain and build on existing services, that will remain financially sustainable in the longer term.

Key Issues from the Public BSIP Survey

9. The four-week engagement exercise resulted in 1,900 responses being received by the close of survey on 17 September 2021. Full analysis of the survey results is presented in Appendix 1. 65% of respondents were current bus users and 35% were not. Bus usage was higher amongst younger age groups, those without a car and concessionary bus pass holders.
10. The key themes highlighted by the members of the public, that responded to the survey, that should be considered in a BSIP are:
 - a. The most frequent reasons for travelling by bus were shopping (55%), socialising (54%), travel to work (37%), health/medical appointments (34%), leisure (19%) and education (17%). This indicates the importance of bus services to our town centres, economy, access to employment, independent living and access to education.
 - b. Both current and non bus users placed importance on availability of real time information, improved reliability, better connections, better waiting facilities and easier access to service information. (note that our bus operators have identified priorities around bus stop infrastructure and service information).
 - c. Fare initiatives were supported by both current and non-bus users, in particular lowering fares to encourage use. This is consistent with the emphasis placed by DfT in addressing fare structures. (note that our bus operators have also identified a young persons' concessionary scheme as being a priority item for the BSIP). In turn this links to the importance of bus services for younger age groups.
 - d. Both current and non-bus users placed importance on screens at bus stops/stations and being able to track the location of buses.
 - e. The open questions allowing free text responses attracted detailed and constructive feedback. These mostly related to service provision and network coverage, both also emphasised as key considerations for a BSIP. The most common themes were:
 - i. Requests for services to run earlier/later in the day, with some respondents citing that lack of these prevented access to employment and services.

- ii. Requests for more frequent services, which in turn would facilitate better connections.
 - iii. More routes – to create new links and to cover specific areas.
 - iv. Improved reliability
 - v. Non-bus users overwhelmingly cited no bus service in their area, generally relating to villages around the County. Additionally, some non-users cited frequency and earlier / later / Sunday services as being barriers to use.
11. 85% of non-bus users and 83% of bus users said they would use the bus or use the bus more if the improvements listed in the survey were introduced.

Development of BSIP

12. Following the comments provided by Members of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee and analysis of the results from the four-week engagement exercise, discussions have taken place with the Staffordshire bus operators on the development of the BSIP.
13. Using external support, funded by DfT, the required DfT documentation is currently being finalised. The financial ask of the BSIP is some £106m which will be delivered over 3 years and a further £7m to cover lifetime costs.
14. The key items of note in the BSIP together with the funding ask are as follows:
- a. Financial support for the introduction of zero emission buses in Staffordshire on core routes (with willing operators) combined with a strategy to increase frequencies to make the services more attractive – c£33m.
 - b. Financial support for implementation of bus priority measures to improve journey time reliability -c£7.5m.
 - c. Financial support for improving and maintaining on-street bus infrastructure including passenger information – c£21m.
 - d. Financial support for improvements at key bus station hubs across Staffordshire – c£23m.
 - e. Financial support for the introduction of a discounted fare structure for younger people leading to a long term new commercial product for younger bus users – c£11m.

- f. Financial Support to help the Staffordshire bus industry and community transport sector recover from the global covid 19 pandemic and assistance in shaping the new urban and rural Staffordshire bus network to ensure it is fit for the future. This will include targeted pump priming new evening and weekend services that are expected to become self-sustaining (commercial) - £16.5m.
 - g. Financial support to development skills in the sector ensure delivery of aspirations of the Staffordshire BSIP and provide a coordinated approach to marketing and ticketing -£1m.
15. It should be recognised that the submission of the BSIP at the end of October to DfT will be the start of the journey to improve the bus network in Staffordshire working in partnership with the bus companies and community transport providers operating in our area.

Legal Implications

16. The following legal implications are relevant to the submission of the BSIP:
- a. Development of Enhanced Partnerships are governed by Bus Services Act 2017, which amended the Transport Act 2000. Under an EP, the Council is legally obliged to deliver those measures it commits to.
 - b. Multi Operator Ticketing Schemes are governed by the Competition Act 1998 (Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption) Order 2001 (as amended) and the Transport Act 2000.
 - c. DfT intend to review the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) 2000, by the end of 2023 (this will have a bearing on our Vacant Seat Policy in home to school transport).
 - d. Traffic Management Act 2004 - Statutory traffic management guidance will be updated to "expect enhanced bus reliability as an integral part of the highway authorities' Network Management Duty".

Resource and Value for Money Implications

17. The government has committed significant funding (£3b) to the development and delivery of BSIP's across England in an effort to improve bus public transport recognising that a strong, successful, low emission bus network will help support the decarbonization of the transport sector, support the economy and minimise traffic congestion.

18. The exact allocation of DfT funds from government to support Staffordshire's BSIP is not certain at this time since the BSIP is a competitive process. It is anticipated that funding awards will be made in Spring 2022 once DfT have had the opportunity to review all the submissions from the Local Transport Authorities.
19. Staffing resource will be required across a number of key teams to support the development and implementation of our BSIP / EP. The DfT has provided us with £100,000 towards the development costs of the BSIP and a further £ 438,538 has been provided for capacity funding following the Council's commitment to an Enhanced Partnership earlier this year.

Risks Identified

20. The development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan does bring some risks. However, these can be managed and mitigated with the right approach.
21. The key risks and mitigating measures that have been identified at this stage include:
 - a. Team capacity – our current teams do not have sufficient capacity to develop and implement a BSIP / EP. In the short term this can be mitigated by utilising external support. However, beyond this additional capacity will be needed to ensure effective delivery. With the award of the capacity funding additional resources are currently being recruited.
 - b. Loss of funding – if the Council is successful in the BSIP submission it is likely that significant funds could be available to improve the bus network in Staffordshire. At the present time it is unclear what funding will be available after May 2024 and therefore careful consideration has been given to ensuring that our BSIP recognises the risk of funding being withdrawn within two years.

Conclusion

22. The Staffordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan offers a great opportunity for Staffordshire. Improving the bus network could play an important role in delivering our key priorities including access to employment and key services, town centre regeneration and contributing towards achieving net carbon zero.

Community Impact Assessment

Full CIA – Following the recent completion of a public engagement exercise and consultation with all Staffordshire Bus Operators, a full CIA will be developed and published once the BSIP funding allocations are known. The publication of the CIA will be linked to the approval of the Enhanced Partnership (EP) documentation and will set out the community impact implications of the BSIP once funding is known.

(Note - The BSIP is a high level aspirational document, and implementation of any schemes is reliant on funding being made available and will be agreed through the enhanced partnership due to be established by March 2022.)

List of Background Documents:

- Bus Back Better – National Bus Strategy for England” - [Bus back better - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- “The Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnerships Guidance” - [Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnership creation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- Greener Journeys – A Roadmap to Growth - [greener-journeys-a-roadmap-to-growth.pdf \(cpt-uk.org\)](http://cpt-uk.org)
- Cross Sector Benefits of Backing the Bus - [The cross-sector benefits of backing the bus | URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP](http://urbantransportgroup.org)
- Local Government Association – Decarbonising Transport – The Role of Buses [Decarbonising transport - The role of buses | Local Government Association](http://localgovernmentassociation.org)
- Staffordshire County Council – Connected Staffordshire Strategic Plan 2018-2022: Update [Strategic-Plan-2018-to-2022-full-Updated.pdf \(staffordshire.gov.uk\)](http://staffordshire.gov.uk)

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Staffordshire County Council – Bus Service Improvement Plan Survey Results

Contact Details

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Staffordshire County Council – Bus Service Improvement Plan Survey Results

September 2021



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Context of the report

Context of the report

Following the announcement of the Government's National Bus Strategy, £3 billion has been earmarked for improving bus services throughout England.

Staffordshire County Council is working closely with bus operators to develop a **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Staffordshire** aimed at **encouraging more people to travel by bus**.

As part of this, Staffordshire County Council ran a **passenger engagement survey** between 19 Aug 2021 and 17 September 2021, to gather views from its Staffordshire residents. The survey aimed to **understand feelings towards local bus services** and highlight **priorities for the future**.

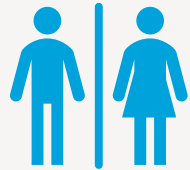
Respondents were asked different questions based on whether they were a current bus user or non-user.



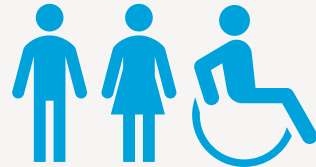
Who responded to the consultation?

A total of 1,900 responses were received during the consultation period. Most filled in the questionnaire online, but a small number (24) completed a paper copy.

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31% Males
69% Females



13% have a mobility impairment due to disability
8% have a mobility impairment due to age



8% aged
21 and under

14% aged
22 to 34

37% aged
35 to 54

18% aged
55 to 64

20% aged
65 to 79

3% aged
80+



24% have a
concessionary
bus pass



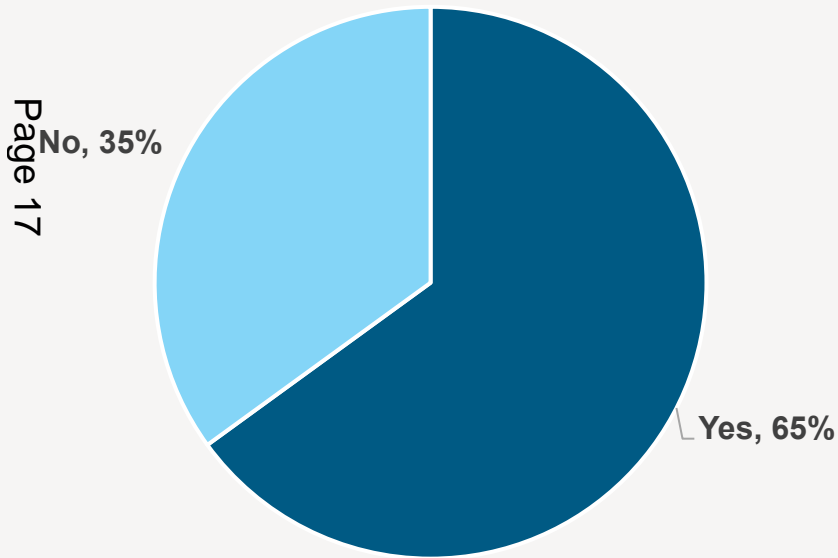
54% have regular access to a car
14% have occasional access to a car
33% have no access to a car



Bus usage

Bus usage

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were current bus users, with usage higher amongst concessionary bus pass holders, those without a car and younger respondents.



Q1. Do you use the bus?
Base = 1,900 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

1,235 respondents (65%) said they currently travel by bus, compared to 665 respondents that do not (35%).

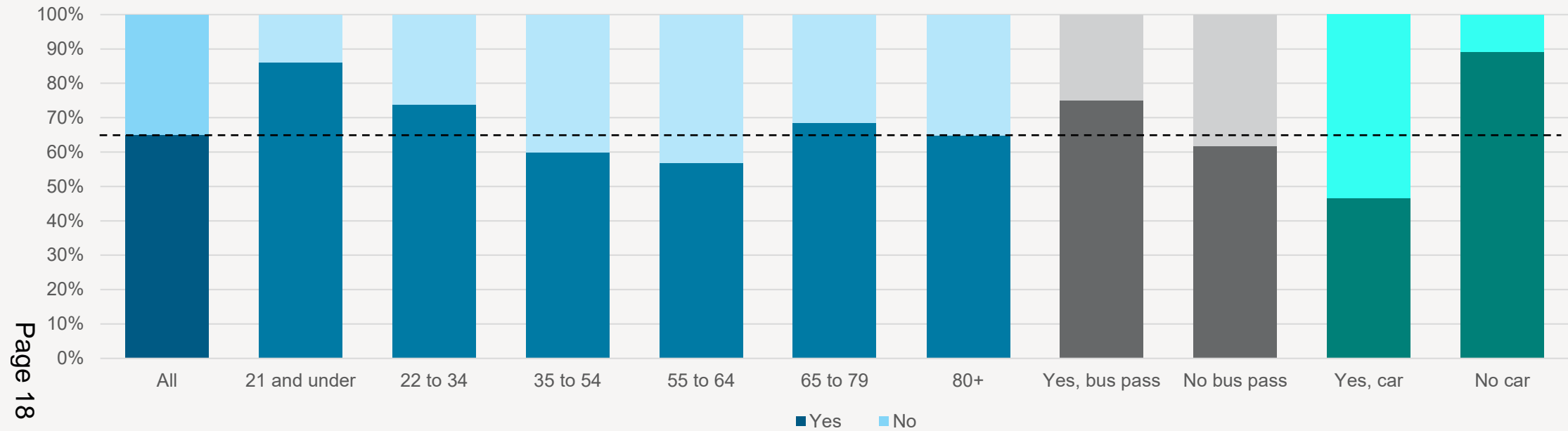


TRENDS BY LOCATION

Analysis by location found that Burton on Trent had the highest proportion of respondents that travel by bus, along with Lichfield and Cannock. Areas to the south and east of Stoke on Trent (Blythe Bridge, Eccleshall, Alton, Stone, Kidsgrove) had the lowest proportion of respondents that use the bus.



Bus usage – trends by respondent profile



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TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

Bus usage was higher amongst younger respondents; 86% of respondents aged 21 and under use the bus, compared to 57% of the 55 to 64 age group, and 65% of respondents aged 80+.

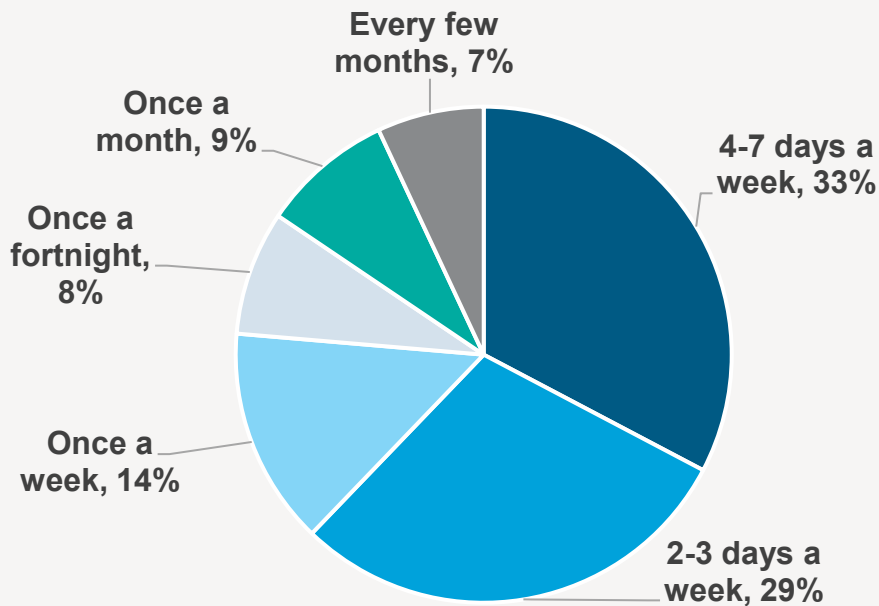
Bus usage was higher amongst respondents who have a concessionary bus pass (75% vs 62%). A higher proportion of respondents without regular access to a car use the bus (89%) compared to those without a car (47%).



Bus usage – frequency [Current users]

Most respondents that use the bus are frequent users; 76% travel at least once a week.

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Y1. How often do you take the bus?
Base = 1,235 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

404 respondents (33%) travel on the bus 4-7 times a week, whilst a further 364 (29%) travel 2-3 days a week. 16% are less frequent users (travelling once a month or less frequently).



TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

55% of respondents aged 21 and under use the bus 4-7 days a week (the highest proportion of all age groups), while 92% of this age group travel at least once a week.

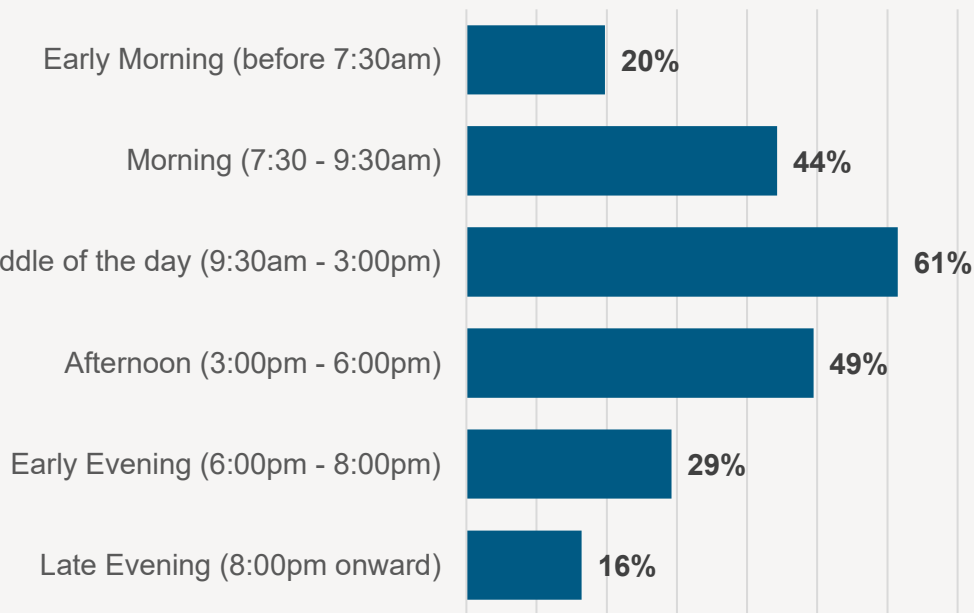
The proportion travelling frequently decreases slightly with age, however 70% of 65+ respondents still travel at least once a week by bus.

A slightly higher proportion of respondents without a bus pass travelled 4-7 days a week compared to those with a bus pass (36% vs. 23%)

Bus usage – time of day [Current users]

Respondents said they travel on the bus throughout the day, with the middle of the day being the most common time to travel.

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Y2. When do you normally take the bus? (select all that apply)
Base = 1,235 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

61% of respondents travel in the middle of the day (between 09:30 and 15:00). Although making up a lower proportion of respondents, a fifth travel early morning (before 07:30) and 16% travel late evening.



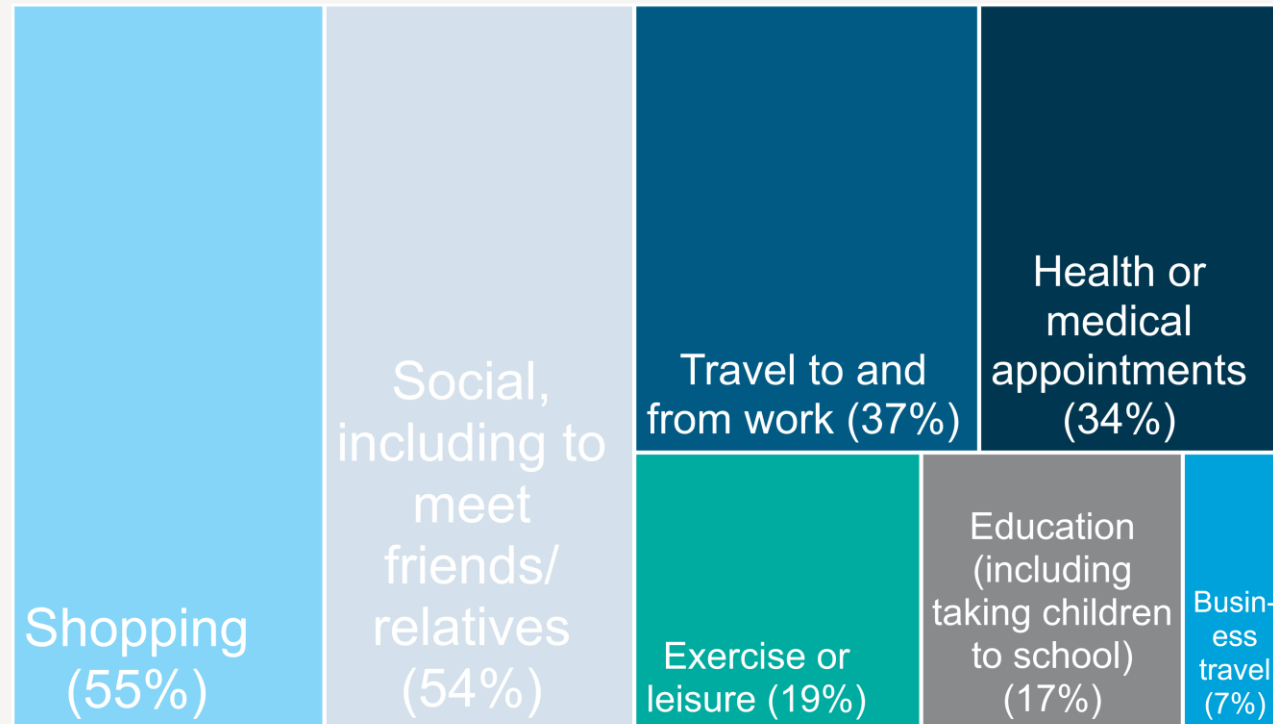
TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

There were varied responses by age. Respondents aged 65+ were most likely to use the bus in the middle of the day. Whilst younger respondents (21 and under / 22 to 34) were more likely to travel in the morning and afternoon.



Bus usage – journey purpose

The most frequent reasons for travelling by local bus are to go shopping and/or for social reasons (meetings friends/relatives).



Y3. What are your usual/most frequent reason(s) for travelling by local bus? (select all that apply)
Base = 1,235 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

Shopping and social visits were the most frequent reasons for travelling by bus (55% and 54% respectively). However, 37% respondents also frequently travel by bus to and from work and for health/medical appointments (34%).



TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

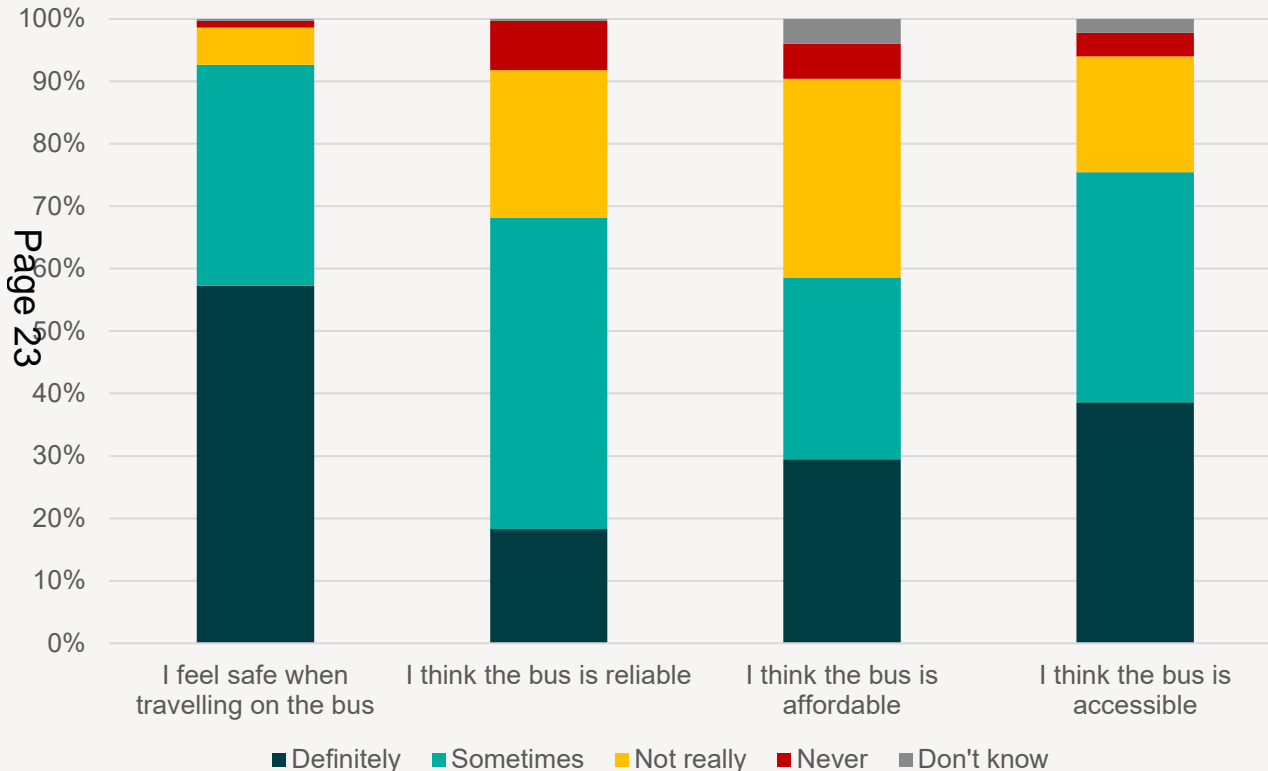
Responses also varied by age of respondent. For those aged 21 and under, education was the most frequent reason for travel. For 22-54 year old respondents, it was travel to work and social reasons. For respondents aged 55+, shopping was the most frequent reason for travelling by local bus.

Current bus users

The following questions were only asked to respondents who answered 'yes' to Q1 (Do you currently use the bus?)

Feelings towards the bus service [Current users]

Feelings towards the bus are generally positive; feelings of safety score higher than affordability/reliability and accessibility.



Y4. How do you currently feel about the bus service?
Base = 1,235 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

57% respondents said they 'definitely' feel safe when travelling on the bus, whilst a further 35% 'sometimes' felt safe.

'I think the bus is affordable' had the highest proportion of respondents that answered 'not really' or 'never' (37%).

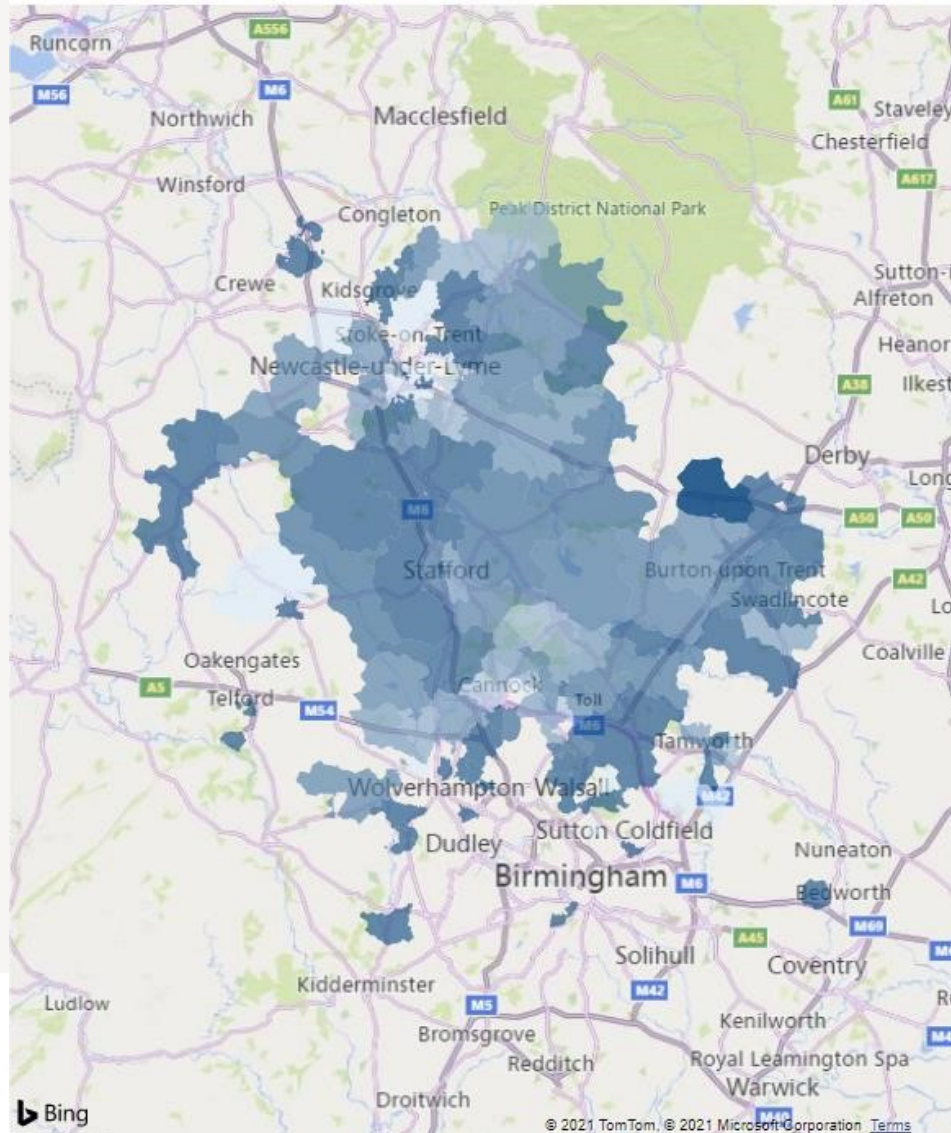


TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

Older respondents scored more positively than younger respondents, with a greater proportion scoring these aspects as 'definitely'. The most notable difference was the *affordability of the bus*.

A higher proportion of male respondents 'definitely' felt safe on the bus compared to females (64% compared to 53%). Bus pass holders also scored more positively for all aspects. 49% of respondents with a bus pass 'definitely' think the bus is affordable compared to 21% of those without a bus pass.

Feelings towards the bus service – trends by location



TRENDS BY LOCATION

With reliability having the lowest proportion of respondents selecting ‘definitely’, further analysis was conducted by location. Responses were analysed by location to show areas where respondents felt the most positive towards the bus service (in terms of reliability).

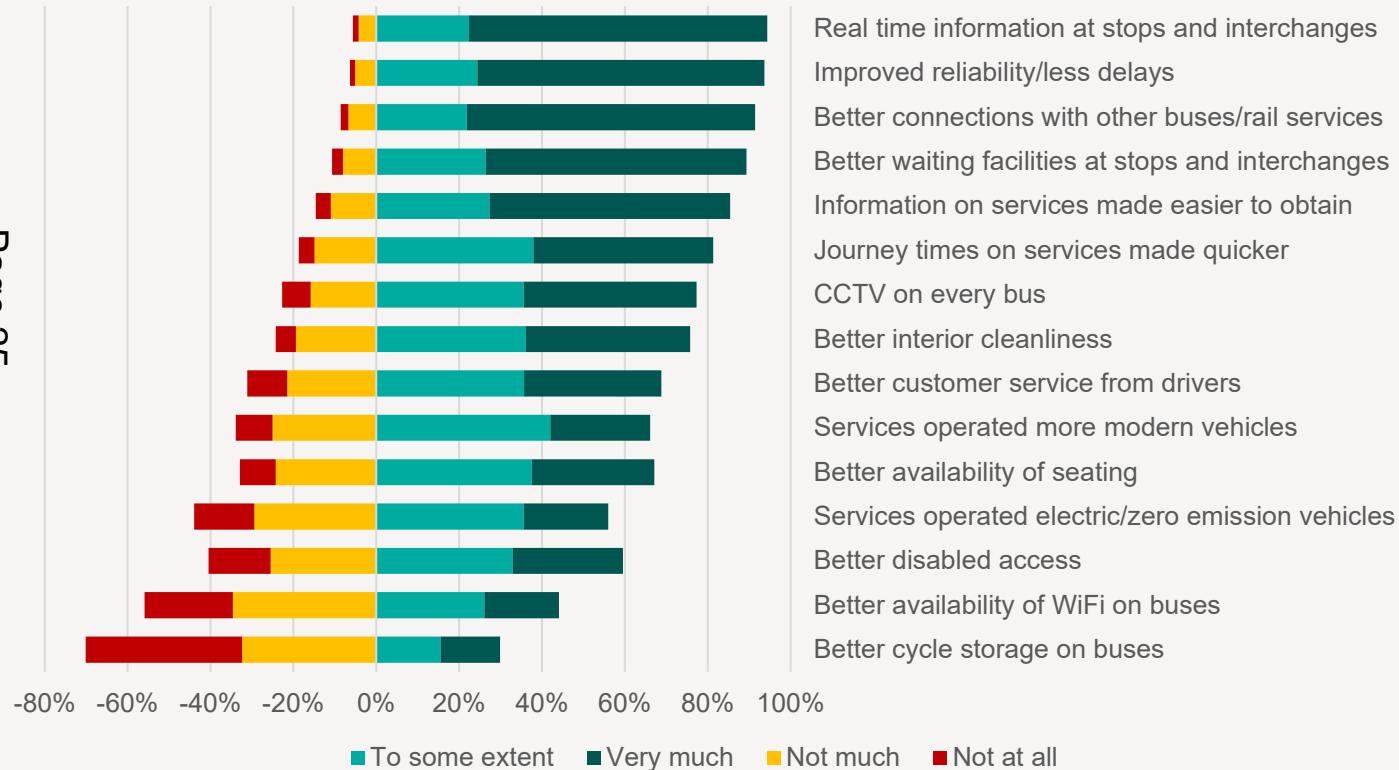
Burton upon Trent and surrounding areas contained the highest proportion of respondents that think the bus is ‘definitely’ or ‘sometimes’ reliable. Conversely, areas of Codsall, Cannock and Stoke-on-Trent contained the highest proportion of respondents that answered ‘not really’ or ‘never’.

In terms of safety, Burton upon Trent also contained the greatest proportion of respondents that said the bus was ‘definitely’ safe.

How could bus usage be increased? [Current users]

Real time information at bus stops, improved reliability and better connections were most likely to increase bus usage amongst current users.

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OVERALL SUMMARY

Most likely to increase bus usage amongst current bus users is *real time information at stops/interchanges* (1,127 respondents). Respondents also chose *improved reliability, better connections, better waiting facilities at stops and easier access to information* as improvements that would personally make them use local buses more.

Least likely to increase usage was *better cycle storage, better availability of Wi-Fi and services operated by electric vehicles*.

Y6. To what extent, if at all, would the following make you personally use local buses more?

Base = 1,235 respondents

ATKINS

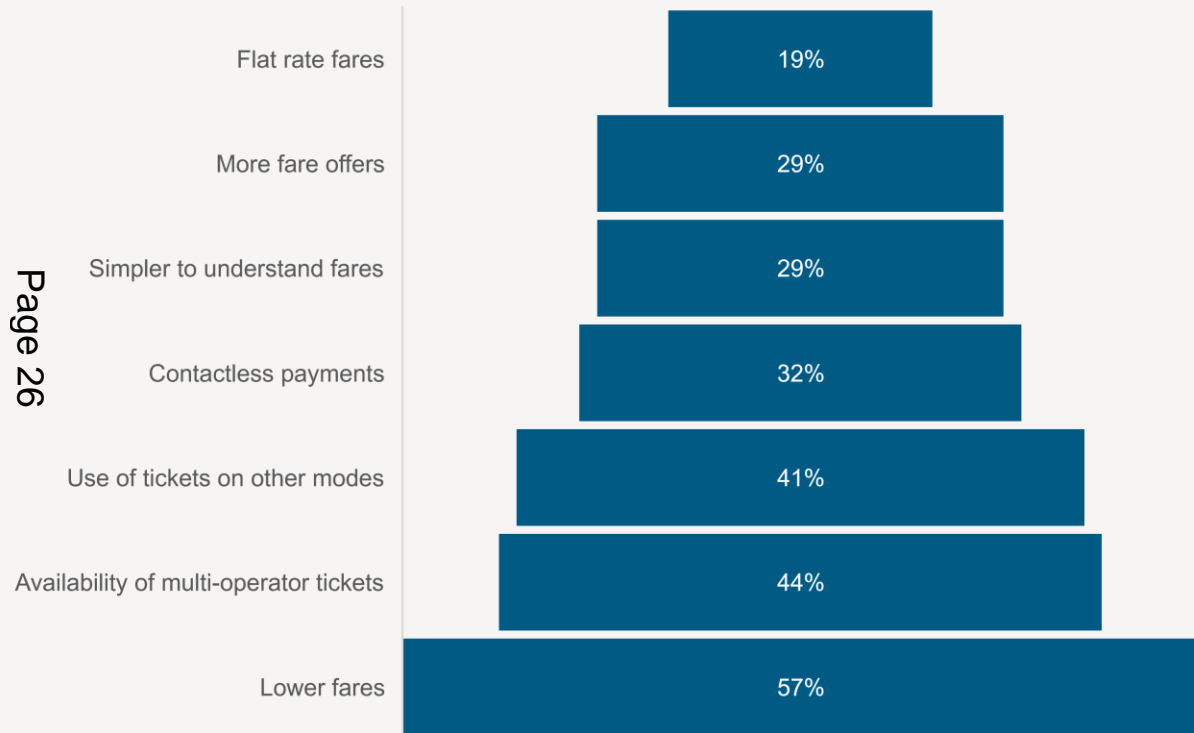
Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group



How could bus usage be increased - Fares? [Current users]

In terms of fares, 'lower fares' were most likely to encourage current users to travel by bus more.

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Y7. Thinking about fares, to what extent, if at all would the following make you use local buses more? (select up to 5)

Base = 1,235 respondents

ATKINS

Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group



OVERALL SUMMARY

Respondents were permitted to choose up to five fare-related initiatives that would encourage them to travel by bus more. The most popular response was *lower fares*, chosen by 57% respondents. This was followed by *availability of multi-operator tickets* (44%) and *use of tickets on other modes of travel e.g. trains* (41%).



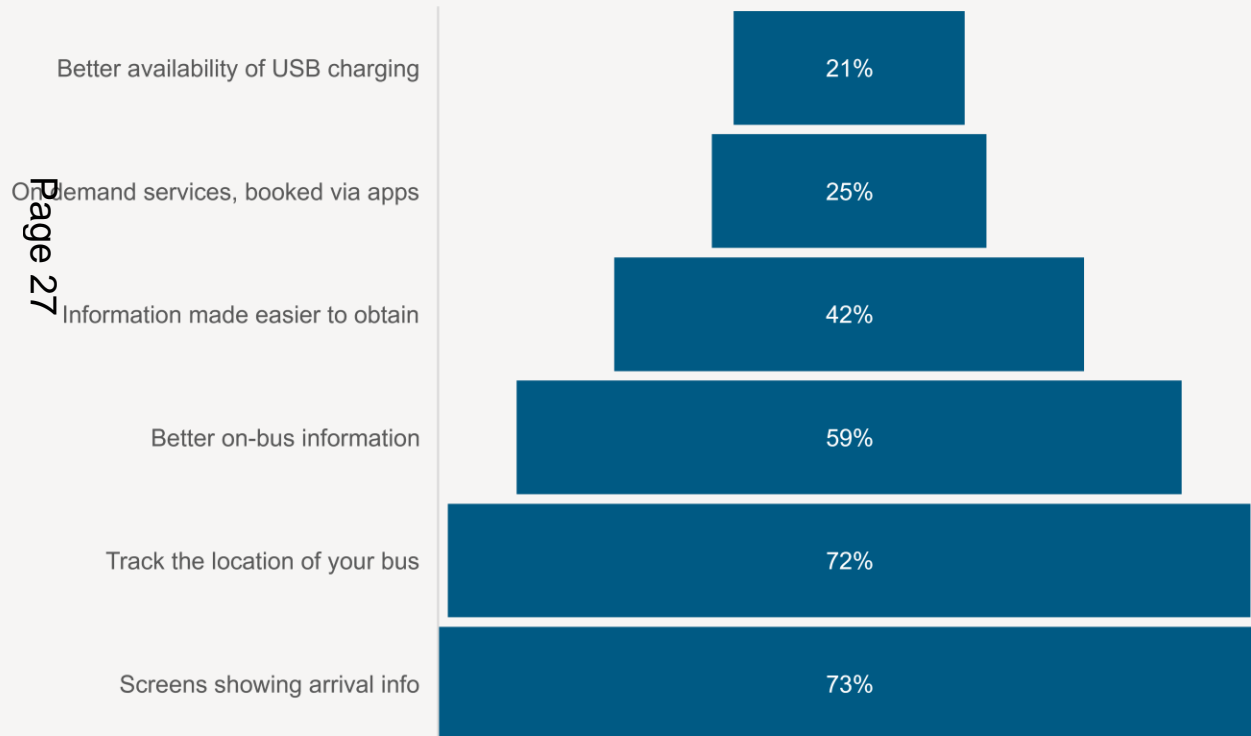
TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

There were slight differences in response by age. The proportion of respondents that chose *lower fares* was highest amongst those aged under 65. For instance, 74% of those aged 21 and under chose this improvement. For 65+, the most frequently chosen aspect was *tickets than can be used on other transport (i.e. trains)*.



How could bus usage be increased - Technology? [Current users]

In terms of technology, 'screens at bus stops/stations showing arrival information' and being able to 'track the location of your bus' were most likely to encourage current users to travel by bus more.



Y8. Thinking about technology, to what extent, if at all would the following make you use local buses more? (select up to 5)

Base = 1,235 respondents

ATKINS

Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group



OVERALL SUMMARY

Respondents were permitted to choose up to five technology-related initiatives that would encourage them to travel by bus more. The most popular responses were *screens at bus stops/stations showing arrival information* chosen by 73% respondents and *being able to track the location of your bus* (72%). 59% also answered that *better on-bus information such as next stop displays* would encourage them to use local buses more.



TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

There were some slight differences in response by age. Whilst all respondents appeared to value information on bus location/arrival information, a greater proportion of younger respondents chose *'track the location of your bus'*, whilst older respondents favoured *'screens that show arrival info'*.

How could bus usage be increased? [Current users]

Respondents were if anything would encourage them to use local buses more frequently (open question). Responses appear to focus mostly on bus timings – including a more frequent service and/or services that run earlier/later in the day / on a Sunday.



TIMINGS (EARLIER/LATER/SUNDAY SERVICE)

137 comments related to requests for bus services to run earlier and later in the day. Some felt that this prevented them from being able to access services/employment etc.

“ Later services, no longer able to get back from work after 18.00, let alone 21.00! ”



TIMINGS (MORE FREQUENT SERVICE)

A further 135 comments were also on the theme of timing, with requests for more frequent services throughout the day.

“ By having a service that ran at least every hour during the working day and the linked with other transport. ”



MORE ROUTES / ROUTES TO X, Y, Z

66 respondents commented that they would like to see services increased to other local areas. Some specifically asked for routes to cover particular areas.

“ Need more services to Oakamoor, Alton, etc. - ridiculous that we're in such a tourism hotspot on the Churnet Valley and next door to the UK's number 1 theme park but no busses! Entire of Staffs would benefit from evening and weekend services. ”



IMPROVED RELIABILITY

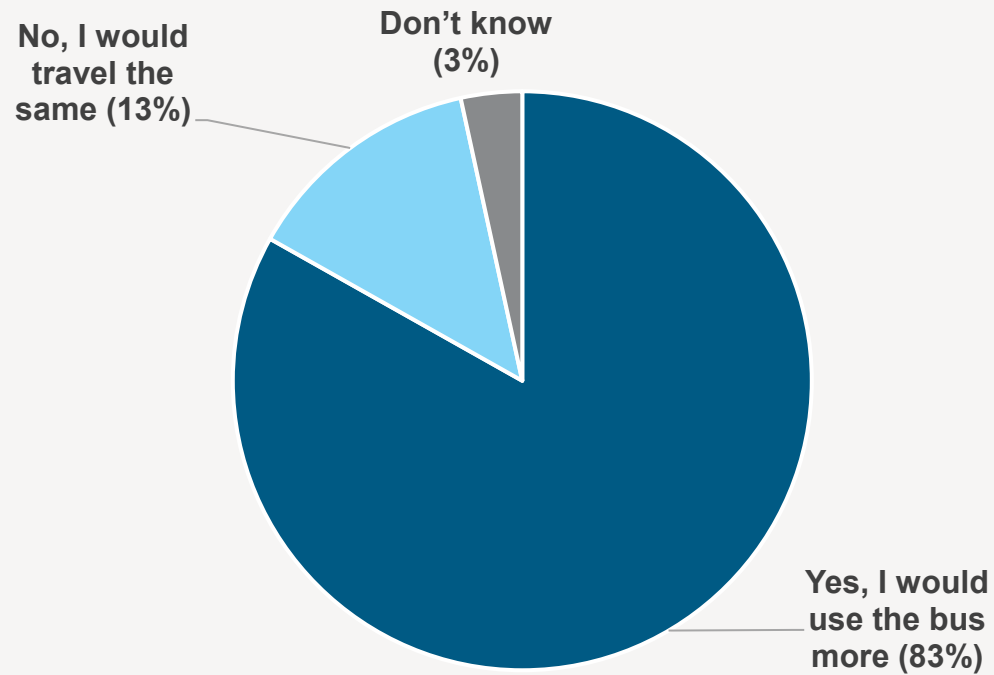
54 respondents commented that they would like to see reliability of current services improved which in turn, would encourage them to use the bus more.

“ Buses to turn up...lately a few haven't...two on the same day which caused a delay for me getting to my appointment ”



Would these improvements increase the amount you travelled?

Most respondents that currently use the bus said they would use the bus more if the previous improvements were introduced



OVERALL SUMMARY

83% of current bus users said they would travel by bus more if the previous improvements were introduced. However, 13% answered 'no, I would travel the same'. A small proportion (3%) responded 'don't know'.

Y10. Would any of the above improvements affect the way you travelled? (select the most appropriate)
Base = 1,229 respondents

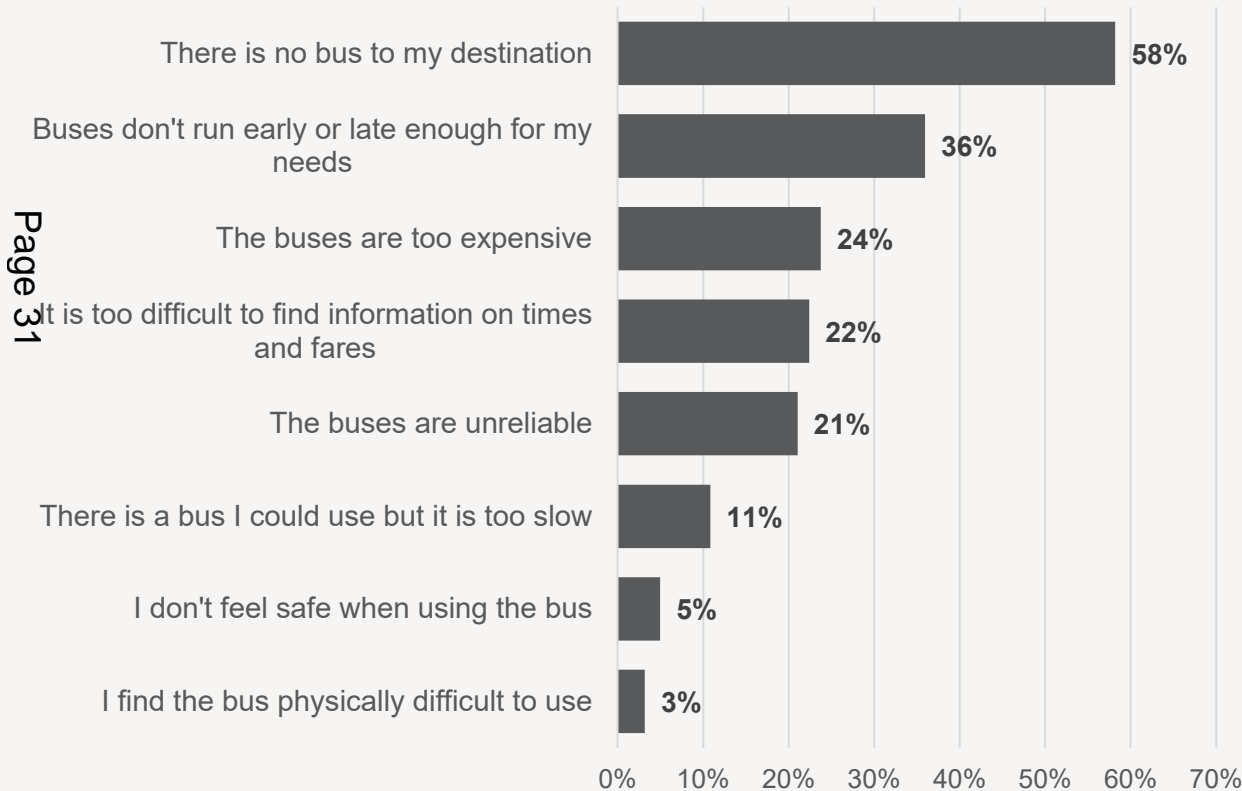


Non-bus users

The following questions were only asked to respondents who answered 'no' to Q1 (Do you currently use the bus?)

Reasons for not using the bus [Non-users]

The main reason for not using the bus is a lack of service to planned destination. Timing of bus services is also a factor in not using the bus.



OVERALL SUMMARY

58% of non-bus users said the reason they don't travel by bus is due to there being no bus to their destination. *Buses not running early or late enough* was also a reason for not travelling by bus. These reasons reflect the open responses given on the following slide.

24% non-bus users felt the *bus was too expensive*, whilst 22% struggled to find *information on times/fares*. *Unreliable buses* were also a factor for 21% of non-bus users.

N1. Why don't you currently use the bus service? (select all that apply)

Base = 665 respondents

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Feelings towards the bus service [Non-users]

Respondents were invited to add anything about how they felt towards the bus service. The most frequent reason was due to not having a local service in the first place. Similarly to current users, some respondents commented about the timing of bus services.

NO BUS SERVICE IN MY AREA

The majority of open comments (241) were from respondents who said they did not use the bus because there was not a local service to them.

Although several locations/destinations were mentioned, the key ones noted were:

- Hill Ridware
- Alton
- Perton to Codsall
- Drayton Bassett
- To Stafford

“ All public transport vehicles have ceased to run in my area. this makes it impossible for me to get to work using bus services and my children can no longer get to school using bus services. ”

“ There is no longer a bus from my area meaning I need to use a car to access facilities. ”

TIMINGS (MORE FREQUENT SERVICE)

52 commented that the bus service was not frequent enough for their needs.

“ There is considerable unhappiness about the routes available , frequency and reliability of the bus service. Many do not use it due to these problems. ”

TIMINGS (EARLIER/LATER/SUNDAY SERVICE)

40 respondents noted that bus services did not start early enough / run late enough / run on a Sunday, which meant they were unable to use the service.

“ It is completely unacceptable to not have an evening and Sunday bus service which adversely affects young people and those without access to own car travel. ”

How could bus usage be increased? [Non-users]

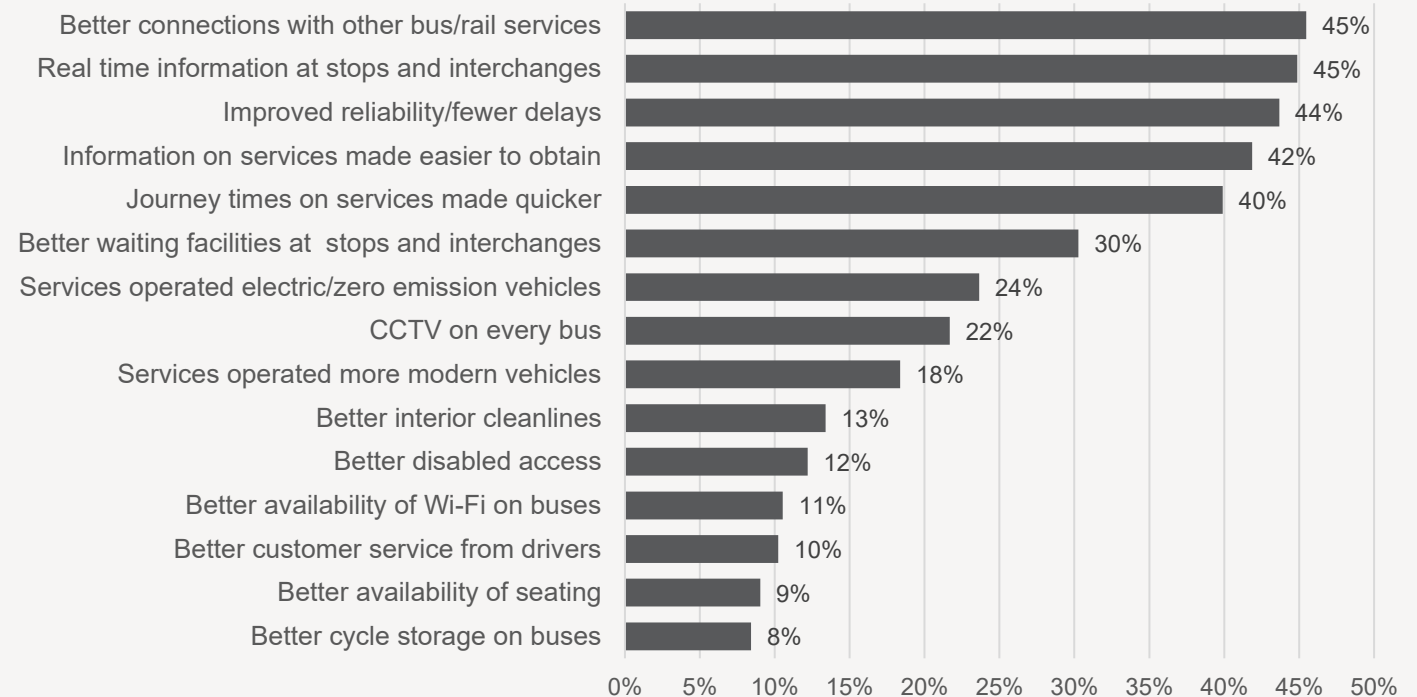
As with current users, real time information at bus stops, improved reliability and better connections were most likely to increase bus use. However, making information easier to obtain was also key.

OVERALL SUMMARY

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Most likely to increase bus usage amongst non-bus users are *better connections with other bus/rail services, real time information at stops/interchanges, improved reliability, easier access to information, and quicker journey times.*

These findings are very similar to those from current users.

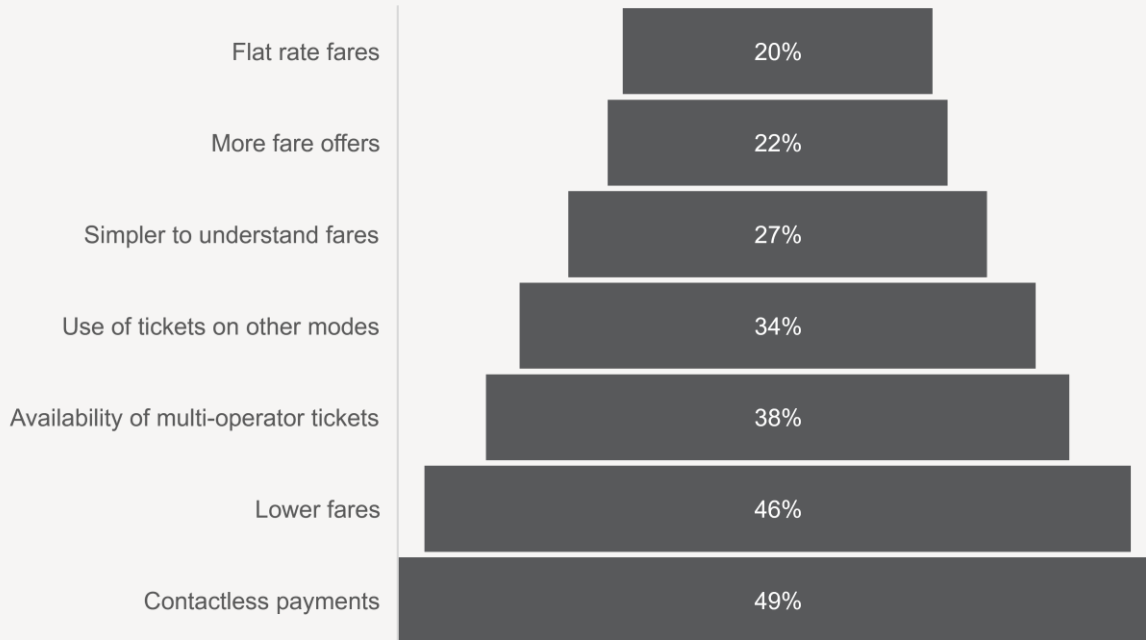


N3. What improvements to the bus service might encourage you to use it. (select up to 5)
Base = 665 respondents

How could bus usage be increased - Fares? [Non-users]

In terms of fares, 'contactless payments' were most likely to encourage non-users to travel by bus more, along with 'lower fares'.

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N4. Thinking about fares, to what extent, if at all would the following make you use local buses more? (select up to 5)

Base = 665 respondents



OVERALL SUMMARY

Respondents were permitted to choose up to five fare-related initiatives that would encourage them to travel by bus. The most popular response was 'contactless payments', chosen by 49% respondents. This was followed by 'lower fares' (46%) and 'availability of multi-operator tickets' (38%).

These results were slightly different to those chosen by current users. 32% of current users wanted to see *contactless payments* vs. 49% of current users.



TRENDS BY RESPONDENT PROFILE

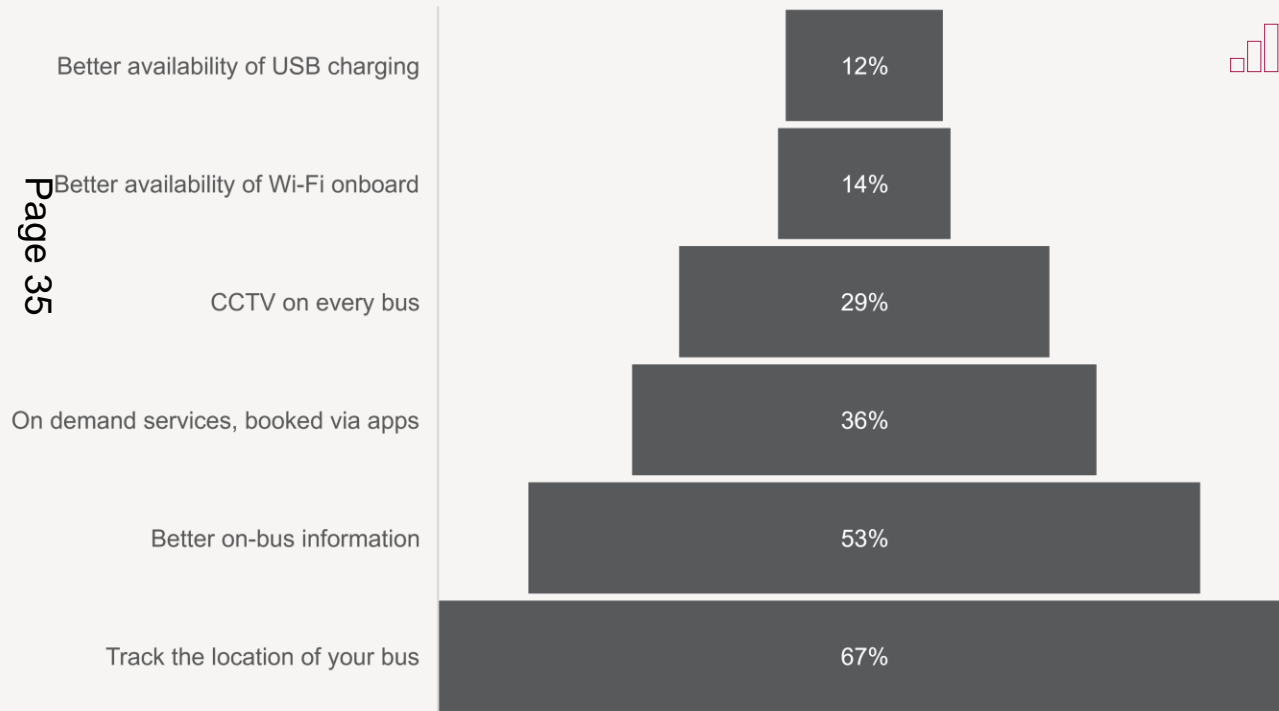
As with current bus users, there were slight differences in response by age. The proportion of respondents that chose 'lower fares' was highest amongst younger respondents.

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How could bus usage be increased - Technology? [Non-users]

In terms of technology, 'screens at bus stops/stations showing arrival information' and being able to 'track the location of your bus' were most likely to encourage current users to travel by bus more.



OVERALL SUMMARY

Respondents were permitted to choose up to five technology-related initiatives that would encourage them to travel by bus more. The most popular responses were *'being able to track the location of your bus'* chosen by 67% respondents and *'better on-bus information'* (53%). 36% also answered that *'on demand services, booked via an app'* would also encourage them to use local buses more. Answer categories were slightly different for current/non-users, but a high proportion of both respondent types chose being able to *'track the location of your bus'* as something that would encourage bus use.

N5. Thinking about technology, to what extent, if at all would the following make you use local buses more? (select up to 5)

Base = 665 respondents

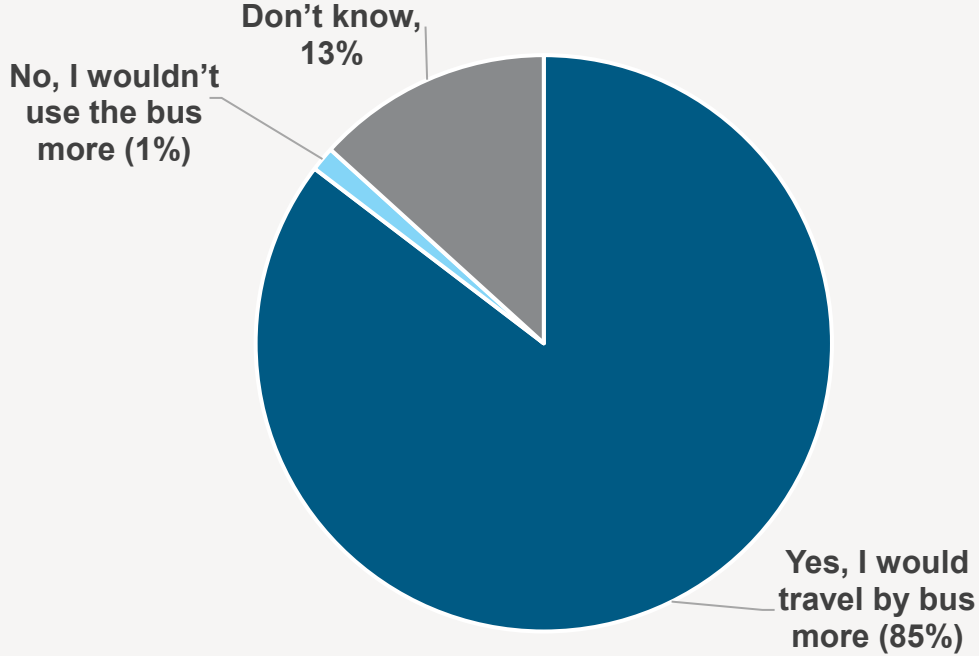
ATKINS

Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group



Would these improvements affect the way you travelled?

Most respondents that do not currently travel by bus said they would if the previous improvements were introduced.



OVERALL SUMMARY

85% of non-bus users said they would travel by bus more if the previous improvements were introduced. These results align with the responses from current bus users, however a larger proportion of non-bus users answered, 'don't know'.

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N7. Would any of the above improvements affect the way you travelled? (select the most appropriate)
Base = 655 respondents



Key take outs

Summary

- During August/September 2021, Staffordshire County Council conducted a passenger engagement survey to understand current views and experiences of bus services. **1,900** people responded to the survey, covering a range of demographics and current bus usage.
- Nearly **two-thirds of respondents currently use the bus**.
- Most respondents who use the bus are frequent users – **76% travel at least once a week**.
- The most frequent reasons for travelling by local bus are to go **shopping** and/or for **social** reasons (meetings friends/relatives), but reason does differ by age.
- Current users generally feel **positive** towards the bus service, but fewer feel the bus is reliable or affordable compared to the proportion that feel safe on the bus.
- For both current and non-bus users, **real time information** at stops/interchanges was most likely to encourage bus travel. Other improvements included improved **reliability**, better **connections**, better **waiting facilities** at stops and easier **access to information**.
- In terms of fare initiatives, both non-bus users and current users felt that 'lower fares' would encourage use. A high proportion of non-bus users also chose **contactless payments**.
- In terms of technology initiatives, both non-bus users and current users wanted to see 'screens at bus stops/stations showing **arrival information**' and 'being able to **track the location** of your bus'.
- The survey's open questions also garnered detailed feedback. For both types of users, a **lack of bus service** in their local area was a key issue. Several respondents specifically mentioned that a previous route had been removed and not reinstated. Many also said they would use the bus more if services were more **frequent**, and a key issue was also services running **early/late** enough and on **Sundays**.
- 85% of non-bus users and 83% of current bus users said they would use the bus/use the bus more if the improvements listed in the survey were introduced.

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 October 2021

Household Support Fund



Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said,

"For the last 12 months we have been supporting thousands of children – and their families – though school holidays with either the distribution of eVouchers to parents/carers, or the provision of food and activities across the county.

"Now this new bid for approximately £5.5 million will help many more households most in need with food, energy and water bills, through the Christmas, Easter and February school holidays."

Report Summary:

The Government has announced a new Household Support Fund (HSF) Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills.

The Report outlines the proposed expenditure and delivery arrangements for the HSF in Staffordshire which is required to be fully spent by 31st March 2022.

Recommendation(s)

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Acknowledges the anticipated receipt of £5,506,547.99 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in relation to the HSF.
- b. Approves the proposals for the usage of the HSF.

- c. Delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities, to decide the eligibility criteria for distribution of the HSF in Staffordshire, and to take all other subsequent decisions to ensure that this support gets to those who need it as quickly as possible.
- d. Acknowledges that the delegation to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People includes authorising the County Council to enter required contractual arrangements with Partners and Providers where required to deliver the HSF in Staffordshire.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 20 October 2021

Household Support Grant

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Acknowledges the anticipated receipt of £5,506,547.99 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in relation to the HSF.
- b. Approves the proposals for the usage of the HSF.
- c. Delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities, to decide the eligibility criteria for distribution of the HSF in Staffordshire, and to take all other subsequent decisions to ensure that this support gets to those who need it as quickly as possible.
- d. Acknowledges that the delegation to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People includes authorising the County Council to enter required contractual arrangements with Partners and Providers where required to deliver the HSF in Staffordshire.

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities

Background:

1. On Thursday 30th September 2021, the DWP announced a new HSF Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this Winter. This new Grant will be facilitated from the 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022 and totals £500m nationally.
2. The County Council has the discretion on exactly how this funding is used, targeting support within the scope of the conditions set out by the DWP. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used

to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

3. The new HSF will be distributed by County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England. Shire Councils are encouraged to work closely with District Councils and other local partners to identify a broad range of vulnerable households across their local area. Support is available from the 6th October and Local Authorities should aim to have arrangements in place as quickly as possible to support vulnerable households throughout the Grant period.
4. The County Council has received detailed guidance which has been reviewed and the outline provided within this report meets the terms of the Grant. The Grant Determination Letter is provided in Appendix A and the Grant Guidance is provided in Appendix B.
5. Staffordshire is anticipated to receive £5,506,547.99 through the HSF.
6. The County Council is proposing a number of schemes to deliver the HSF as detailed below.

Proposed Education Support Fund (ESF):

7. It is proposed to provide families of children who are in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM) a £15.00 eVoucher for each week of the Christmas, February, and Easter School Holidays. Children currently receiving universal free school meals, who would be entitled to benefits-related FSM and Early Years Children who receive funding for Think 2 and Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) will be included in the proposed ESF.
8. It is proposed to provide a £15 eVoucher to Staffordshire Children (Residents) and Non-Staffordshire Children (Non-Residents) who attend a Staffordshire Education Setting. Including Non-Staffordshire Children in the Fund ensures fairness and equality across pupils attending a setting within the Local Authority boundary whilst supporting settings to support, safeguard and care for families in the settings community. Removing Non-Staffordshire Children (Non-Residents) from the ESF provides complexities in administering the scheme and may lead to negative public perception. The County Council, subject to Cabinet approval, is seeking to secure a similar arrangement with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Cheshire East, Derbyshire County Council, Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council.
9. It is proposed to procure a voucher digital service to facilitate the HSF directly with Staffordshire Education Settings. This is an established

process following the previous COVID Winter and Locality Grants. The vouchers will be available for a variety of supermarkets, Aldi, ASDA, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsburys, Marks & Spencer's and Waitrose.

10. The anticipated volume and expenditure on vouchers is outlined below:

Holiday:	Anticipated Volume:	Anticipated Expenditure:
Christmas 2021	25,944 Children	£778,320
February 2022	25,944 Children	£389,160
Easter 2022	25,944 Children	£778,320
	Total:	£1,945,800

Proposed Targeted Support Fund (TSF):

11. It is proposed to target families of children who are identified through Financial Exclusion, assessed through the DWP and FIDO. It is proposed to provide families of children with a £15.00 eVoucher for each week of the Christmas, February and Easter School Holidays.
12. This HSF will provide support to families of eligible children accessing Alternative Education, families of eligible children in Independent Education Settings and families of children aged 0-2. It is also proposed to advertise this scheme for applications from families of children where:
 - a. Children Electively Home Educated, cross matched with Financial Exclusion
 - b. Children identified as meeting one other Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) Criteria, cross matched with Financial Exclusion, removing anyone on the FSM data set.
 - c. Children Open to Staffordshire's Youth Justice System, cross matched with Financial Exclusion, removing anyone on the FSM data set.
 - d. Children with SEND, crossed matched with Financial Exclusion, removing anyone on the FSM data set.
13. It is proposed available data sets, which have not already been cross matched with Financial Exclusion data, will be cross matched through the DWP and FIDO to ensure eligibility to the HSF.
14. Identified families will be contacted by the County Council via post inviting them to claim the eVoucher from the District Family Hub. Families will be invited to do this via a Response Form published on Staffordshire.gov.uk. On validation of the response, the District Family Hub will provide the families with a unique collection link, each linking to the voucher system.

15. On receipt of the collection links, families can access the voucher system, where families can directly select a supermarket of their choice. The available supermarkets are Aldi, ASDA, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsburys, Marks & Spencer's and Waitrose. The eVoucher code will be displayed onscreen and can be downloaded as a PDF and/or printed off if required.
16. The anticipated volume and expenditure on vouchers is outlined below:

Holiday:	Anticipated Volume:	Anticipated Expenditure:
Christmas 2021	2,751 Children	£82,530
February 2022	2,751 Children	£41,265
Easter 2022	2,751 Children	£82,530
	Total:	£206,325

Proposed District Assistance Grants for Food and Essential Supplies:

17. It is proposed that the County Council will administer Assistance Grants for Food and Essential Supplies using eVouchers.
18. Families facing substantial financial hardship will be able to apply for an Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Families/vulnerable individuals will be required to meet appropriate eligibility criteria before being considered for an Assistance Grant.
19. Assistance Grants will be made available to Families via an eVoucher. The eVoucher will be awarded to Families/vulnerable individuals via Text or Email, depending on their preference. Recipients will be able to activate the E-Voucher for Aldi, ASDA, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose or Marks & Spencer's.
20. Families/vulnerable individuals receiving a voucher from the Assistance Grant will be provided with information, advice and guidance to support them to engage in local networks of support, enabling a local approach to meeting their needs in the future.
21. Families/vulnerable individuals will be entitled to make a maximum of three applications to the Assistance Grant. Families will receive a six-week allocation at the time of referral to avoid further processing costs.
22. It is also proposed to provide a ringfenced Children's Social Care budget. Children's Social Care Service (including SYOS/Future Matters) will be able to make a referral for payments of eVouchers. The Children's Social Care Teams (including SYOS/Future Matters) will be provided with a digital referral pathway. In addition, Children's Social Care Teams

(including SYOS/Future Matters) will be invited to identify children/families in advance of the School Christmas Holidays via an eVoucher Order Form. All children/families will be required to meet the referral criteria.

23. The anticipated volume and expenditure on vouchers are outlined below:

Anticipated Volume:	Anticipated Expenditure:
3,333 Families/Grants	£1,000,000
Total:	£1,000,000

Proposed Winter Warmth Project:

24. Building upon the 2020/21 Winter Warmth Project, the County Council is engaging with Support Staffordshire, Beat the Cold and the Staffordshire Community Foundation to develop a Winter Warmth Project for 2021/22.

25. Residents of Staffordshire who are struggling financially to either pay their bills or are dealing with a breakdown of their heating system will be eligible for the Winter Warmth Project.

26. Through the Winter Warmth Project, eligible Staffordshire residents will be provided with financial support for energy. This will be provided via either a top up card credit for those on pre-payment meters or credit paid directly to the energy supplier for those on metered accounts. The payments will be made via the Staffordshire Community Foundation and their "Surviving Winter" Campaign Team. In addition, eligible residents will have access to an exceptional circumstance "top up" grant to contribute to new boiler systems.

27. Eligibility will be based upon the existing eligibility criteria for the subsidised heating installations which is the Business as Usual activity of the Staffordshire Warmer Homes Partnership. Discussions are on-going with DWP about the use of their Searchlight software to verify applicants' eligibility criteria around benefit entitlement.

28. In addition, it is proposed to provide the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service with a Grant to provide reactive support. The Service will purchase RCD Plug in Surge Protection Devices, Fire Retardant Cellulose Blankets, CO2 Monitors and Radiators. Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service will store and distribute these items free of charge to the household without heating as an interim measure.

29. The anticipated volume and expenditure is outlined below:

	Anticipated Volume:	Anticipated Expenditure:
Reactive Support Grant	1,000	£12,037
ECO "20% Top Up" Fund	100	£50,000
Financial Support	2,857	1,000,000
	Total:	£1,062,037

Proposed District & Borough Council Fund:

30. It is proposed to provide District & Borough Councils with a percentage of the HSF to support families with Council Tax debt. District & Borough Councils will be able to determine the eligibility for this element subject to the HSG Grant Determination Letter and Guidance.
31. The County Council is seeking to facilitate conversations with District & Borough Councils to further explore the delivery model for the District & Borough Council Fund.
32. It is proposed that £1,000,000 will be provided to District & Borough Councils. This allocation will be made based on an allocation for the total population weighted for deprivation and CEV residents. It is therefore anticipated the allocations will be as follows:

District & Borough Councils	Population	Population %	Base Funding	Deprivation %	Deprivation Allocation	Total Allocation (rounded)
Cannock Chase	98,490	12	£57,438.42	17	£83,610.67	£141,000
East Staffs	115,284	13	£67,232.52	28	£140,531.97	£207,800
Lichfield	102,004	12	£59,487.74	5	£24,934.36	£84,400
Newcastle	126,863	15	£73,985.28	17	£87,465.22	£161,500
South Staffs	108,423	13	£63,231.25	0	£0.00	£63,200
Stafford	131,253	15	£76,545.48	9	£44,993.63	£121,500
Staffs Moorlands	97,928	11	£57,110.67	4	£20,280.28	£77,400
Tamworth	77,108	9	£44,968.64	20	£98,183.87	£143,200
Total	857,353	100	£500,000.00	100	£500,000.00	£1,000,000

Timescale

33. Support is available from the 6th October and Local Authorities should aim to have arrangements in place as quickly as possible to support vulnerable households throughout the grant period.

Risks Identified

34. There are several risks that have been identified and a full risk assessment continues to be reviewed. The key risks are outlined below:
- a. There is a risk of legal challenge where contracts are awarded as a direct award.
 - b. There is a risk that this scheme creates a longer-term dependency which the Local Authority cannot afford to sustain.
 - c. There is a risk that some people eligible will not be identified, leaving them in financially challenging circumstances.
 - d. There is significant interest in this scheme locally and nationally and there is a risk that this causes reputational damage and an increase in complaints to the County Council.

Legal Implications

35. As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients there is a risk of fraud, as recipients might appear to be eligible when they are not. One of the biggest risks for this scheme is impersonation fraud, where fraudsters work through a residential area and falsely claim under the names of eligible recipients.
36. The County Council are encouraged to mitigate this risk, by ensuring checks are in place to verify the applicant's identity. The County Council and its Partners have access to a range of data sources and checks which can be carried out against this data to verify the identity of the recipient.
37. It is for the County Council to decide how payments are made to recipients. However, when making this decision the County Council is encouraged to consider the risks involved. Although vouchers still carry fraud risks, the DWP are suggesting vouchers should be used instead of cash where possible as this helps to mitigate the risk of the money being spent by the recipient on things outside the policy intent, therefore undermining the purpose of the scheme.
38. Officers are engaging with Legal Services and the Commercial team to explore how best to implement the proposals in this report. The County Council will enter into contracts with providers and also agreements with District and Borough Councils as detailed above. Although the value of the HDF is significant, the value of the services to be provided by the providers in administering the schemes or proving relevant systems will be relatively low value.

39. There is a risk that if the HSF conditions are not met then the County Council may need to repay some or all of the grant back to the DWP. The County Council will need to consider this when entering into arrangements with providers and the District and Borough councils.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

40. A summary of anticipated expenditure is as follows:

	Anticipated Expenditure
Education Support Fund	£1,945,800
Targeted Support Fund	£206,325
District Assistance Grants	£1,000,000
Winter Warmth Project	£1,062,037
District & Borough Council Fund	£1,000,000
Administration Fees	£292,385.99
Total	£5,506,547.99

41. The HSF is ring-fenced to be spent as detailed in the guidance and the accompanying grant determination, including the specific condition that at least 50% be spent on families with children. To ensure that the objectives of the HSF are being met during the course of the grant and reduce administration costs for all concerned, including the need for DWP to recover underspend, Grant payments will be made in arrears upon DWP being satisfied with the Management Information (MI) returns. This will enable DWP to adjust the amount of the payment based on the MI returns.
42. Payment of the Grant from DWP to Authorities will be made in arrears after the interim MI return in January 2022 and the final MI return at the end of Grant period in April 2022 after the DWP have verified the MI. If an Authority feels that the payment arrangements will create significant cash flow problems, they notify DWP with supporting evidence. Both an interim and a final MI return will be required, and Grant payments will be made in respect of the periods 06 October 2021 to 31 December 2021 and 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.
43. MI returns must be endorsed by the Section 151 officer in accordance with their statutory assurance responsibility in order for the Grant payment to be made.
44. The timetable for provision of funding and MI returns is as follows:

Payment	Amount (%)	Date	Notes
Interim	Actual Grant spend up to 100% of grant allocation*	February/March 2022	Payment made in arrears
Final	Actual Grant spend up to 100% of grant allocation*	May/June 2022	Payment made in arrears

45. The HSF allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the scheme. Authorities should deduct their administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining.

46. In all cases, Authorities should keep administrative costs to a reasonable level. Administration costs for each Authority will be published on www.gov.uk alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme. The County Council's Administrative Costs will include the payments to the relevant providers.

Conclusion

47. On Wednesday 20th October 2021, It is proposed that the Leader of the County Council will acknowledge the receipt of the HSF and ask the Cabinet to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor, to decide the eligibility criteria for distribution of the HSF, and to take all other subsequent decisions, to ensure that this support gets to those who need it as quickly as possible.

48. Subject to Cabinet Approval (and any subsequent Delegated Decisions), it is proposed to move forward with the implementation of the above proposed expenditure against the HSF.

49. Underspends against the proposed investment areas will be redirected to respond to demand across the scheme as required.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix A: DWP Household Support Fund Determination Letter

Appendix B: DWP Household Support Fund Grant Guidance

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