

Bus priority makes sense



Carefully planned bus priority measures are good for everyone. Bus passengers benefit from faster and more reliable journey times. And as buses become more reliable more people will be willing to leave their car at home easing traffic congestion for everyone – including other road users, like cars and vans. With less congestion and more people able to access jobs and services more reliably – particularly at peak times – local economies can grow more rapidly.

Bus priority measures are also often combined with a wider transformation of roads and high streets – with clearer parking and drop off spaces, greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and a much more attractive street scene. All of which is good for local traders and good for local communities.



Bus priority works for...



Business

Business needs the bus. More people travel to work by bus than all other forms of public transport combined. There are 2.5 million regular bus commuters. A further one million people travel to work by bus as the need arises. Over 50% of businesses surveyed considered that the bus had a role in recruitment and retention. Twenty per cent of the full time employed and 30% of part time employed are frequent bus users. In our busiest and most congested urban areas the percentages are even higher. And because buses are an efficient way of moving large numbers of people when road space is at a premium, they also cut congestion for all road users. That means easier deliveries, more efficient freight transport and better travelling conditions for other road users as well.

Shops

Buses are crucial to the UK retail sector. A third of city centre visitors made their most recent trip by bus. Those bus users spend an average of £54 per city centre trip and make up 29% of all city centre spending. Thirty per cent of shoppers rely on the bus as they have not got access to a car or van. With 1.4 billion shopping trips per year and an average spend of £29.66, this gives a total estimated retail spend by bus users of £22bn in town and city centres.

Communities

Buses get young people into education and training, prevent older people from feeling isolated and make it easier for the unemployed to find jobs and then get to work. They also provide direct employment for local people. In addition, buses provide access to healthcare, and for those without access to a car the bus is a lifeline. All of which leads to big savings in social and financial costs to society as a whole. For example, over 50% of students over 16 are frequent bus users. If they could no longer travel to their places of education or training by bus, 12% would have to miss sessions and 6% would be forced to look for another less suitable course.

Growth

Buses have a key role to play in facilitating economic growth at national and local levels. They provide essential access to labour markets, businesses and education and training; are crucial to congestion reduction on key corridors (congestion costs urban economies £11bn per year); stimulate investment and regeneration; and provide vital support to local businesses and retail economies.

Bus priority in practice Benefiting towns and cities across the country



Barking: A force for regeneration

In Barking, the East London Transit scheme has contributed to a more prosperous town centre.

More convenient journeys for shoppers and smarter streets have created better trading conditions for retailers, helping them to combat difficult economic conditions. *“We expected trade to fall during the recession, but in fact we held our own,”* said Simon Green, manager of Vicarage Field shopping centre.

The improvements are repeated across the 11km Ilford-Dagenham Dock route. Pocket parks and wider pavements were built, and ordered facilities for parking and loading were provided, easing traffic congestion.

A range of measures enabled Transport for London to install bus priority despite constrained road space. They included widening a bridge to Barking Riverside, where a planned 10,800 home development is underway – also reducing risk of traffic tailbacks.

Improved journey times are particularly notable in Barking. Previously it was quicker to walk across the town centre than take the bus. In addition, the project provided better links between East London business centres and to rail services. Smoother journeys, higher frequencies and high quality information have seen bus patronage rise 20%.



Rochester: Faster buses, attractive streets

A creative approach to bus priority in Rochester has delivered major public realm improvements as well as faster, more predictable bus journeys.

A new bus lane on the main road into the town provided the opportunity to reduce a central reservation and increase public space on the side of the street. Trees were planted, new paving laid, guardrails removed and LED street lighting installed for the first time on a road of this type in the UK. The streetscene enhancements meant proposals for the 480-metre bus lane created minimal public objection.

Peak bus journeys through sections of Rochester are now 40% faster, providing convenient access to employment and new housing across Medway. General traffic flow has also benefited as the bus stop is now within the bus lane rather than on the road, and National Cycle Route One was improved as part of the works. In addition, the bus lane means emergency services can by-pass traffic queues at peak times.

“On the back of the bus priority scheme we were able to redesign the streetscape, creating a range of transport improvements, attractive public space and a more appropriate gateway to historic Rochester,” said David Bond, Transport Operations Manager at Medway Council.

More convenient journeys for shoppers and smarter streets have created better trading conditions for retailers

‘We created a more appropriate gateway to historic Rochester’ David Bond Medway Council

Chorlton: A more vibrant district centre

In Greater Manchester, the Chorlton bus priority scheme acted as the catalyst for developing a district centre with better trading conditions, improved traffic flow and a safer, more pleasant environment.

The project included installing bus lanes on the approach to Chorlton and ‘built out’ bus stops to enable easier boarding and prevent buses being blocked by traffic. At the same time, more formal arrangements for parking were introduced along with revised traffic routing and new pedestrian crossings.

As planned, the overall package removed conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, parking and loading activity and vehicles. In addition, redirection of cars onto strategic routes rather than travelling through the district centre meant less traffic in Chorlton and quicker journeys. Built-out bus stops meant more space for roadside parking bays and loading facilities.

All users of the street benefited. Morning peak bus journeys are five minutes faster, the number of passengers boarding buses grew by 23% and congestion fell. Better crossings saw pedestrian flows across junctions increase by 7% – which along with improved parking and loading created a more attractive shopping destination.

The well planned arrangements meant initial concerns expressed during consultation over the impact of the scheme on traffic flow did not materialise in practice.

Transport for Greater Manchester uses similar holistic approaches across its Quality Bus Corridor Programme.

Leeds: Better journeys for all road users

Journeys into Leeds on one of the city’s busiest commuter routes are quicker and easier following the opening of four kilometres of bus lanes on the Kirkstall Road. Initial monitoring shows bus user satisfaction with journey time and service reliability rose 60% and 44% respectively.

The improvements to the bus route mean more people have chosen to use public transport – initial surveys show patronage up 9% with further increases expected. As buses are segregated from general traffic, journeys are more convenient for car drivers at certain times of day. Lower road congestion has taken over a minute off morning peak journeys, a large reduction given the length of the bus lane. Cyclists are permitted to use the bus lanes, contributing to a 33% rise in cycle trips on the road.

Six new crossings built as part of the scheme are also making the road safer for pedestrians.

Changes to traffic signals are expected to deliver further benefits for all traffic. Ongoing monitoring will confirm the impact of the scheme.

James Lewis, chair of West Yorkshire Combined Authority Transport Committee, said the project was: *“undoubtedly one of the most significant transport improvements in Leeds in recent years.”*

Bus priority

It's much more than bus lanes

Giving buses greater priority on our roads matters because when road space is at a premium it makes sense to give priority to those vehicles that can move the most people in the most efficient way. And a well used bus service clearly takes up less road space than the equivalent number of cars. Faster and more reliable bus services bring a host of benefits. Bus services become more attractive leading to more passengers, including people switching from private cars. The economics of running the services improves – which means more services can be provided at less cost. It's good for air quality too as buses spend less time idling in traffic. More reliable and more competitive bus services mean buses provide greater benefits for communities, for shops and for business as well.

Bus priority is not just about bus lanes – though bus lanes can and do play a key role in many schemes. Other bus priority measures include 'bus gates' through traffic light priority or dedicated bus-only spurs at junctions.

Importantly, bus priority schemes involve far more than providing better conditions for bus passengers – they are also often part of wider streetworks which can include:

- Making streets safer and more attractive for cyclists and pedestrians
- Renewing pavements and street furniture
- Reorganising parking, delivery and drop off to better meets local needs
- Bringing life to shopping areas when full pedestrianisation can sometimes lead to too sterile an environment

Bus gates

Bus gates are often used in areas with limited road space for bus lanes. They can take the form of a spur of 'bus-only' road to a junction, or selective vehicle priority (SVP) at traffic lights. SVP extends green lights or shortens red lights so delayed buses can pass through a junction more quickly. Light timings can also be adjusted to smooth general traffic flow. In Hazel Grove, Manchester, SVP has reduced bus journey times by three minutes and journey time variability by 50%, while cutting congestion levels for all traffic by 75%.

Better pedestrian crossings

The bus journey is just one part of passengers' 'door to door' trip. Successful bus priority schemes take full account of passengers' experience when they arrive at their destination. As a result, they include new or upgraded pedestrian crossings in the vicinity of bus stops and road junctions. These works also mean safer streets for all. Examples include tactile paving and audible signals, benefiting older shoppers. Careful planning means additional crossings can be installed without an adverse impact on the speed of bus journeys or general traffic.

Smarter streets

Bus priority schemes offer the opportunity to consider the wider character and design of streets and any issues the public would like to be resolved. Improvements that have been implemented in towns and cities due to bus priority schemes being introduced include: remodelling roads and pavements to provide new public spaces; better street lighting; higher quality paving; and tree planting and landscaping. In addition, parking arrangements can be upgraded or moved to new expanded facilities.

Cycle priority

New facilities for cyclists have been integrated into bus priority projects cost effectively across the country, ensuring the schemes contribute as widely as possible to reducing road congestion and promoting sustainable travel. Typically, cyclists are permitted to use some bus lanes; bus lanes are built with a cycle lane to the side; or priority boxes are provided for cyclists at junctions. Bus stop designs can ensure that a dedicated cycle route continues in front of, or behind, bus shelters.

Bus priority myth buster



Myth: Bus priority is bad for towns and cities because overall it slows down traffic.

Fact: Well-designed bus priority schemes mean more people can move more quickly on congested roads. This helps reduce congestion and delay for all road users.

Myth: Bus priority kills local high streets by reducing parking for cars.

Fact: Many more people shop by bus than is often assumed. Better parking, delivery and drop off arrangements for local shops can be built into bus priority schemes. Overall local high streets can be transformed into more attractive places to shop through streetworks that incorporate greater priority for bus services.

Myth: Bus priority is anti-car and many buses run half empty anyway.

Fact: Well-designed bus priority schemes can benefit all road users and focus on providing priority where it delivers the greatest benefits. This means smoother journeys for bus passengers, car drivers, vans and freight, particularly at the times of day when our roads are busiest.

Myth: Investing in bus priority measures shouldn't be a high priority for local councils when compared with rail or road schemes which will have much bigger impacts.

Fact: In a 2014 report for Greener Journeys, KPMG estimated that bus priority schemes can typically generate £3.32 of benefits for every £1 invested by Government. This represents excellent value for money, compares well with other forms of urban transport investment, and scores more highly than many much larger transport infrastructure projects. Bus priority schemes are also cheaper to build and maintain, and quicker to implement, than many traditional transport infrastructure schemes.

Making places more prosperous and pleasant

Bus priority is about more than smoother bus journeys. Indeed, it is about more than improving transport. It can make a considerable contribution to local economies and quality of life. Bus priority schemes are significant projects which can provide the catalyst to assess how streets function, what people and businesses want from their local area and how to resolve longstanding issues effectively. This integrated approach delivers many benefits. They range from quicker journeys for all road users to greater access to employment, better trading conditions, safer streets, and public realm that makes for more enjoyable time in our towns and cities. This is how bus priority works.



Bus priority works

for...

Business

Shops

Communities

Growth



Bus gates



Better pavements and street furniture



Cycle priority



Better pedestrian crossings

