

Toolkit

TUC
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Better Buses Activist pack

A toolkit to support activists campaigning for better buses in their communities



Bus Policy

Public control is the norm around Europe. The UK is a notable exception for its extreme position of bus deregulation.

Deregulation allows private operators to set their own fares, routes and standards. It has resulted in almost no on street competition. This gives private operators monopoly power and has led to prices rising significantly above inflation.

Deregulation also allows operators to cherry-pick the most profitable routes, extracting as much profit as possible as, while leaving local authorities to pay for quieter but essential routes and off-peak services.



Public control, through a franchising system, allows local politicians to control the network. Under this system private operators must win a contract from the local authority specifying their routes, ticket structures and prices, and standards such as disabled access.

Public control also allows local politicians to control all the fares from across the region, meaning less money leaks out as dividend. It also allows fare revenue from profitable routes to subsidise socially necessary services.

The Government has introduced Enhanced Partnership Schemes (EPS) as a way to deflect criticism, by appearing to address the failure of deregulation, while really protecting bus operator profits.

An Enhanced Partnership is an agreement between a local transport authority and local bus operators to improve local bus services. It should include a clear plan of the improvements that are being sought (known as an EP plan) and accompanying actions to achieve them (set out in one or more EP schemes). The local transport authority has formal responsibility for making the scheme, they can only proceed with their proposals if they have the support of local bus operators.

Therefore, EPS can unlock some improvements, but only if private operators agree. It is not a long-term solution.

An EPS can never deliver some of the benefits of franchising, such as simple ticket integration or effective cross-subsidy.

Furthermore, a bus network must be planned to meet the needs of residents. Under an EPS, control of the network will lie with operators, not bus users.

It is illegal to start a new municipally owned bus company. Welsh Labour have pledged to reverse this for their nation. New guidance from the Government suggests even in England, local authorities can buy up existing bus companies. This provides a new avenue for public ownership.

For public ownership to succeed on a large scale, deregulation must end: otherwise, private companies can undercut and bankrupt ethical public operators by cutting environmental, employment & accessibility standards to make tickets cheaper.

What we want

The TUC believes bus services should be brought back into public (municipal) ownership, and supports measures to franchise buses as a stepping stone to achieving this goal.

The provision of buses varies in different localities. It's important that local activists take ownership of campaigning that fits their circumstances.

This pack is designed to give advice on some of the potential campaign tools you may wish to use to achieve better buses in your region.

Coalition building

The more diverse your campaign in terms of membership, the greater the chance you have of success.

Below are some examples of the type of groups you could speak to in order to build a broad coalition.

This is not an exhaustive list, and you will be aware of local groups and activists who you may be able to partner with:

- *Regional TUC, local unions and local Trades Union Councils*
- *We Own It*
- *Campaign for Better Transport*
- *Political parties*
- *Tenants and residents' associations*
- *Local green groups – eg, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace*
- *Campaign for Protection of Rural England*
- *National Pensioners Convention*
- *Women's Institute*
- *Disability groups*
- *Student Unions*
- *Ramblers Association*
- *Parish councils*
- *Quakers*
- *Campaign for Real Ale*

If you wish to set up your own campaign group, or to link in with local trades union councils and trade unions the TUC Midlands can be of assistance.

Please contact midlands@tuc.org.uk and a member of the team will be in touch.

Model local authority motion

Getting a motion debated at the local authority is a good means of both building support from political groups and in raising general awareness about the rights and responsibilities local authorities have in securing better buses for their areas.

Template motion

This local authority believes we need a new settlement for the bus network in (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) to ensure we build back better from Covid-19, creating a sustainable transport system that meets people's needs. Such a system will help us meet our climate change agenda, support isolated and vulnerable communities and offering good jobs.

Franchising has been used in London for many years, and what is good enough for London is good enough for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY)

A franchising model in (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) will lead to:

Better journeys

- *Giving (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) the power to decide:*
- *what bus services run where and when.*
- *the types of ticket available including discounts for apprentices or other passengers as required.*
- *what types of payment must be accepted including smart and contactless.*
- *what information is available to passengers.*

Better places

- *Putting responsibility for key local roads, and deciding which bus services run, in one place.*
- *Giving (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) the power to decide what sorts of buses must be used – including their emissions standards or technologies.*

Better value

- *Local Government accountable to local people – setting all fares.*
- *Giving Local Government the central funding for bus services that is currently provided directly to operators.*
- *Taking a more strategic view of what services are needed and where and focusing services where they are most needed – rather than where the best commercial opportunity may be.*
- *Creating effective competition to run bus services in areas where there is little on-road competition today.*

- *Local Government joining up their planning of local transport services across modes and types of provision (including school and health transport).*
- *Allowing commercial bidders for franchises to innovate too.*

(INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY), noting the powers contained in the 2017 Bus Act, resolves to formally write to the Secretary of State for Transport to request the right to introduce franchising in (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY).

Moreover, (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) will immediately:

- *Push for additional central government funding for bus services in order that we can expand services.*
- *Protect concessionary travel so vulnerable groups can continue to access public transport*
- *Work with bus companies and trade unions to ensure the highest standards of health and safety are implemented across the bus network*
- *Commit to supporting investment in the necessary green infrastructure to facilitate a modern, green bus network.*
- *Work with bus companies, trade unions and other statutory agencies to enforce a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of staff.*



Model letter to local media

Activists could instigate a coordinated letter writing campaign to the local press as a means of highlighting the need for – and solution to – better buses in their area to help raise the profile of the campaign locally.

Model letter

Bus services in (INSERT NAME OF AREA) are not fit for purpose and don't meet the needs of local people. But they could be so much better. Right now, bus companies do what they like and it's a wild west free market. Private companies control our bus network. They dictate prices, routes and timetables. The result has been catastrophic - passenger numbers have plummeted, prices have risen and services have shrunk.

Reductions in government funding over the last decade have gradually eroded our bus network and left us with a patchwork service. We now need to see increased funding and greater coordination of bus services through the franchising model.

Franchising has been used in London for many years, and what is good enough for London is good enough for (INSERT AREA). It would enable (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) to determine the details of the services to be provided – where they run, when they run and the standards of the services. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

The 2017 Bus Act introduced a range of options for local government to improve bus services. One of these measures enables local authorities to request from government the right to introduce franchising.

The franchising model used in London – and soon in Manchester – brings buses under public control. Regulation would mean affordable fares, and more evening and weekend services, all with a smart ticket where daily spending is capped.

What's good enough for London and Manchester is good enough for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY).

Why should our citizens settle for second class status and second-class services?

It's time that (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) acted and pushed for franchising. Why would they not?

Petitions



Using a petition is a common tool for demonstrating local support for a campaign, identifying people who support the campaign and putting pressure on decisions makers.

Megaphone supports activists to start and run campaigns to make our workplaces and communities fairer. It's free and easy to use.

You can use this form to start your own campaign:

<https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petition/new>

And look at similar petitions like this for inspiration:

<https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/take-west-yorkshire-s-buses-back-under-public-control>

If you have any questions or need support getting started, you can contact the team at campaigns@megaphone.org.uk.

Bus petition example

This is some suggested text for a local bus campaign petition that you may wish to use as a template.

Better buses for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA)

Bus services in (INSERT NAME OF AREA) are not fit for purpose and don't meet the needs of local people. But they could be so much better.

Right now, bus companies do what they like and it's a wild west free market.

And they're desperate to cling onto that power. Private companies control our bus network. They dictate prices, routes and timetables. The result has been catastrophic - passenger numbers have plummeted, prices have risen and services have shrunk.

However, the franchising model used in London – and soon in Manchester – brings buses under public control. Regulation would mean affordable fares, and more evening and weekend services, all with a smart ticket where daily spending is capped.

What's good enough for London and Manchester is good enough for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY).

Why should our citizens settle for second class status and second-class services?

Local Authority leaders should work with all stakeholders and write to the Department for Transport to request the right to bring buses in (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA) under public control.

Reverse Town Hall meetings

We all know that politicians like to speak to the public and 'sell' their message. 'Reverse town hall' meetings are a new campaigning method that enables activists to turn this dynamic upside down and instead get politicians to hear direct from constituents and to answer direct, specific questions.

This is a tool that could be utilised to pin down politicians in your local area to expressly support – or rule out – support for better buses.

These meetings can work either in person or online. The TUC regional offices will be able to assist you with the hosting and running of these events online if needed.

The aim of the meeting would be to get residents presenting their case as to why they want politicians in their area to fight for greater public control of buses. These need only be short statements - how and why buses are important to them, their friends and family. At the end of their statement they ask the political leader to write to the Department for Transport to request the right to franchise buses in their area.

At the end of the meeting the host of the meeting will again ask direct question of the politicians– 'do you support (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) having as much control of buses as London and Manchester?'

The result is either a public statement of support and commitment to action, or a clear refusal to deliver better buses for their area.

These events can work well for the local press so do contact your local press ahead of the public event and invite them. A model press release is available in this pack for you to use.



Model speech for public meeting

The most powerful speeches are those that are authentic and tell the lived experience of bus users. Don't worry too much about writing the perfect speech, speaking from the heart is the most effective thing you can do, coupled with a clear ask of the politician to back franchising is perfect.

However, we have a template speech that pulls the main points in the activist pack that you may wish to use as a starting point. This may be especially useful if you are not used to speaking in public meetings.

But fundamentally, it's your story that matters. It'd your belief in better buses that matters and your politicians delivering (or not) better buses is what matters!

Better buses are important to me and people in my community. Not only do they allow me/us to meet family and friends, get to work and socialise but they are essential in ensuring that, for example, many older and disabled people are not socially excluded.

They are a vital public service and they matter. And tha is why it saddens me that our bus service isn't fit for purpose and doesn't meet the needs of local people.

But I know they could be so much better. Right now, bus companies do what they like and it's a wild west free market. Private companies control our bus network. They dictate prices, routes and timetables.

Our buses are not serving me or my community. The result has been catastrophic - passenger numbers have plummeted, prices have risen and services have shrunk.

Reductions in government funding over the last decade have gradually eroded our bus network and left us with a patchwork service. We now need to see increased funding and greater coordination of bus services through the refranchising model.

Franchising has been used in London for many years, and what is good enough for London is good enough for us.

Franchising would help us regain control of our bus services and ensure it was a public service that met the needs of our community. We would be able to decide where the buses run, when they run and the standards of the services. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

Better buses are now on the agenda and local government can now request the right to introduce franchising from the Department for Transport. As elected representatives of our community I am asking you to do that.

What's good enough for London and Manchester is good enough for us. Why should residents in our area settle for second class status and second-class services?

Reductions in government funding over the last decade have gradually eroded our bus network and left us with a patchwork service. We now need to see increased funding and greater coordination of bus services through the refranchising model.

Franchising has been used in London for many years, and what is good enough for London is good enough for (INSERT AREA). It would enable (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY) to determine

the details of the services to be provided – where they run, when they run and the standards of the services. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

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The franchising model used in London – and soon in Manchester – brings buses under public control. Regulation would mean affordable fares, and more evening and weekend services, all with a smart ticket where daily spending is capped.

What's good enough for London and Manchester is good enough for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY).

Why should our citizens settle for second class status and second-class services?

It's time that (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) acted and pushed for franchising. Why would they not?

Model press release for public meeting

Date: (the date press release sent out)

Embargo: 00.01 (day of meeting)

Activists to push political leaders of (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) to greater regulation of buses at public meeting

Public transport campaigners will today (DAY, DATE) press political leaders to support the campaign to secure London style buses for (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) at a 'reverse town hall' public meeting.

Under the 2017 Bus Services Act, in order to improve bus services, local authorities can request the right from the Department for Transport to introduce bus franchising.

Franchising is the model that's been used in London for decades and is soon to be introduced in Greater Manchester.

At the meeting campaigners will tell their stories of bus service provision and make a clear ask that (INSERT NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) support the call for franchising locally.

Said (INSERT NAME), from (NAME OF CAMPAIGN):

"Bus services in (INSERT NAME OF AREA) are broken. But they could be so much better.

"Right now, bus companies do what they like and it's a wild west free market. Private companies control our bus network. They dictate prices, routes and timetables. The result has been catastrophic - passenger numbers have plummeted, prices have risen and services have shrunk.

"However, the franchising model used in London – and soon in Manchester – brings buses under public control. Regulation would mean affordable fares, and more evening and weekend services, all with a smart ticket where daily spending is capped.

"What's good enough for London and Manchester is good enough for (INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY).

"Why should our citizens settle for second class status and second-class services?"

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

Include info on how journalists can attend the meeting

Contacts

Name, role and contact details of campaign leaders for journalists to contact.