

Bus Reform – Full Equality Impact Assessment

March 2026

Full Equalities Assessment

Name of policy: Bus Reform – Development of a franchising scheme assessment (FSA)

Short description:

The North East Mayor and Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) are working with our partners to deliver a green, integrated transport network that works for all. This Full Equalities Impact Assessment (FEqIA) has been prepared to inform the MSA as to the potential equalities impacts of the proposed franchising scheme, and the design of its future consultation.

The preparation of an FSA is key part of the statutory process that must be undertaken to introduce a franchising scheme. Implementing a franchising scheme would constitute a fundamental change to the delivery model of local bus services in the North East as the region would move from a deregulated system with control of the bus network primarily resting with private bus operators, to a franchised system where bus operators bid for local service contracts, enabling them to run services to a specification set by the public sector. This would give the MSA control over local bus services including on aspects such as fares, routes and overall standards.

Subject to North East MSA Cabinet approval, the next stage of FSA development will involve the FSA undergoing an audit. Once the audit has concluded, the MSA will undertake a consultation on the proposed franchising scheme, where statutory stakeholders and members of the public will be invited to contribute their thoughts and opinions.

Age

Buses enable an ageing population to maintain social contact with friends and family who may live some distance away, can provide access to healthcare facilities and may help to avoid loneliness and isolation which can all affect wellbeing.

The age profile of our region is expected to change over the coming decades. The North East has an ageing population which will have an impact on future transport requirements. By 2040, one in four people will be 65+, resulting in the working age population falling.¹

Older people use buses disproportionately more than their younger counterparts, meaning that any effort to improve bus services in the North East will have an outsized impact on this group. In 2024, 75% of eligible pensioners in the North East (incl. Tees Valley) held a concessionary bus pass according to the National Travel Survey with nearly 1 in 10 trips taken by those aged 60 and over in the North East being made using local bus services.

Children and young people also rely more on public transport as a way to independently access education. According to the most recently published NTS data (2024), 15% of children aged

¹ [“Population projections”](#). North East Evidence Hub, 2024

between 5 and 16 in the North East (inc. Tees Valley) use buses (both local and private) for trips to and from school. Public transport offers a financially viable gateway to gain a sense of independence as young people are more likely to have lower paying jobs or are financially supported by their families or educational loans. Over 1 in 10 trips made by those aged between 17 and 20 in England are made using local bus services indicating the importance of this mode of transport for young people.

Improvements to the bus service that could potentially be brought about by the proposed franchising scheme will disproportionately benefit children, young people, and older people. The MSA will aim to ensure that these groups are adequately consulted during the public consultation by tailoring the consultation strategy to accommodate their specific requirements, such as through the use of age-appropriate engagement channels. The views gathered during the consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Disability

5.6% of journeys undertaken by those with a disability are by bus. This is in comparison to 4.12% of journeys taken by non-disabled people.²

Nationally, 11% of people aged 16 and over have some form of mobility difficulty, and 4.3% of their journeys are taken by bus as opposed to 2.9% for people with no mobility issues³.

It is clear from these statistics that people with disability/mobility difficulty are more likely to be bus users and as a consequence are much more likely to be positively impacted by any improvement to the bus service.

Over 21% of people living in the North East MSA area identified as having a disability in the 2021 Census, the highest percentage of all English regions⁴. Disabled adults take an average of 29% fewer journeys per year than non-disabled adults. Additionally, we know that the proportion of the population that is disabled increases with age, therefore we must consider that as the population of the North East ages faster than other regions, the proportion of people living with a disability in our region may also increase at a faster rate.

Therefore, ensuring that the views of disabled individuals are considered is critical to futureproof this proposal. The MSA will ensure that disabled individuals are adequately consulted during the consultation phase of the statutory process by engaging with disabled regular/prospective bus users, and/or organisations that represent the interests of disabled individuals. Furthermore, the consultation strategy will be designed to ensure accessibility for all those who wish to participate, such as through consideration of access requirements at event venues, and development of a suite of accessible document formats.

² ["National Travel Survey: 2024 - GOV.UK"](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

³ ["National Travel Survey: 2024 - GOV.UK"](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

⁴ ["Disability, England and Wales"](#). Office for National Statistics. 2023

The views of disabled people gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Gender reassignment

There is currently no data on the bus use of individuals that are experiencing or have experienced gender reassignment. 0.55% of England’s population had a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth according to Census 2021. Surveys conducted in other parts of the country (namely, London) report that 91% of trans+ individuals alter their travelling behaviour out of concern of their safety and 80% of trans+ individuals feel like there is a possible threat of violence or harassment when they use public transport⁵.

With hate crimes directed against those with transgender identity rising by 58% between 2024 and 2025 in the North East⁶, it is likely that individuals that are experiencing or have experienced gender reassignment are encountering incidents that may make them feel unsafe when using public transport.

The MSA will aim to ensure that individuals that are experiencing or have experienced gender reassignment are adequately consulted during the consultation. The views of these groups gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Sex

Nationally women use buses far more than men, The National Travel Survey shows that on average women took 45 bus journeys in 2024 and men 37.

Across all travel in 2024 men made 4% fewer trips (904 trips per person) than women (939 trips per person) but travelled 14% further (6,549 miles per person by men, as opposed to 5,633 miles per person by women)⁷.

DfT data also shows that women over 17 are also less likely to hold a driver’s licence: 71% compared to 80% of men⁸ and the DVLA report that only 35% of licensed cars are registered to women⁹.

⁵ “[Out in London: LGBTQ+ People’s Safety on London’s Transport Network](#)”. London TravelWatch, 2023

⁶ “[England and Wales Hate Crime Statistics](#)”. Home Office, 2026

⁷ “[National Travel Survey: 2024](#)”. Department for Transport. 2025.

⁸ “[National Travel Survey: 2024](#)”. Department for Transport. 2025.

⁹ “[Vehicle licensing statistics data tables - GOV.UK](#)”. Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. 2026

Due to these travel patterns improving bus journeys is therefore an impactful tool to further equality between men and women as women’s mobility will be disproportionately improved by improving bus services.

While there are no bus-specific crime statistics collected centrally, the British Transport Police (BTP) do record crime statistics for violence against women and girls on the railway. In 2024/25, reported VAWG increased by 5% compared to 2023/24, with a 10% increase in sexual offences. Crimes involving sexual harassment, were also up by 6%.¹⁰

Intersectional challenges can exacerbate violence against women and girls and perceptions of feeling unsafe on public transport, with only 17% of disabled girls reporting that they felt safe using public transport which is significantly lower than the 33% of non-disabled girls that reported feeling safe on public transport¹¹.

The MSA will aim to ensure that women are adequately consulted during the consultation. The views of women gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. The input received from this consultation would be used to work towards delivering on the second ‘One Million Women and Girls’ devolution pledge of working to ensure that women and girls can access safe transport. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Marriage and civil partnerships

No data is recorded for marital status and bus use. Additionally, marital status is unlikely to have significant impacts and therefore has not been appraised through this exercise.

Pregnancy and maternity

No data is recorded for pregnancy and bus use. Additionally, pregnancy and maternity status is unlikely to have significant impacts on bus use and therefore has not been appraised through this exercise.

The prior section on ‘Sex’ details how the MSA will look to ensure that women and girls are adequately consulted on the proposed franchising scheme during the consultation. During this consultation, the MSA will also look to engage with those who are pregnant or may be caring for babies to ensure that their views are also considered when developing a transition and implementation strategy.

¹⁰ “[Annual Report and Accounts](#)”. British Transport Police, 2025.

¹¹ “[2025 Girls’ Attitudes Survey](#)”. Girlguiding. 2025

Race and ethnicity

In the North East, people of ethnic minority backgrounds use buses significantly more than white people, with the National Travel Survey showing that 10.1% of trips taken by those who identify as an ethnic minority were by bus, as compared to 6.4% of trips taken by white people. Consequently, any positive reform to buses will disproportionately benefit people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Racial hate crime recorded by the British Transport Police across England, Wales and Scotland increased from 2,827 cases in 2019-20 to 3,258 in 2024-25¹². In the North East, a total of 4,611 hate crimes were recorded across the Northumbria and Durham police areas¹³ in 2024/25 with race being the motivating factor in 72% of these crimes, an increase of 9% when compared to the previous year when race was the motivating factor in 63% of hate crimes¹⁴. Findings from focus groups conducted as part of the 'Safety and Public Transport in the North' report prepared by Transport for the North (TfN) indicate that individuals from ethnic minorities changed the way they travel in response to the 2024 riots with some changing the way they dress while on public transport while others changing the routes or modes of transport that they usually take¹⁵.

The MSA will aim to ensure that people belonging to ethnic minorities are adequately consulted during the consultation. The views of these groups gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Religion and belief

Census travel to work data shows that 5% of the working population in the North East travel to work by bus. The two largest religious groups (Christian and those with no religion) travel to work by bus at the same rate as the regional average.

Bus use was generally higher among other faith groups, including Muslims (7%), Buddhists (7%) and Hindus (9%). These figures intersect with other equalities considerations, particularly race, and differences in bus use are unlikely to result directly from religion.

Bus use was lower than average among the Sikh (4%) and Jewish (3%) communities.

Improvements to services brought about by a franchising scheme are therefore likely to benefit the experience of religious groups with the highest bus use. Increased public sector direction of the network also presents opportunities to engage with those with the lowest bus use to understand any barriers and proactively reduce inequalities.

¹² "[Racial and religious hate crime on UK public transport is growing, data shows](#)". The Guardian. 2026

¹³ *The Durham Police Area covers Darlington as well as County Durham.*

¹⁴ "[England and Wales Hate Crime Statistics](#)". Home Office, 2026

¹⁵ "[Safety and public transport in the North](#)". Transport for the North. 2025.

There has been a 22.3% increase in hate crime motivated by religion between 2023/24 and 2024/25 in the North East¹⁶. Across England, Scotland, and Wales, religious hate crime recorded by the British Transport Police saw a similarly upward trend from 343 in 2019-20 to 419 in 2023-24 although it slightly dipped to 372 the following year¹⁷.

The MSA will aim to ensure that these groups are adequately consulted during the consultation. The views of these groups gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Sexual orientation

No data is recorded for sexual orientation and bus use.

3% of the North East's (inc. Tees Valley) population aged 16 and over identified with an LGB+ orientation¹⁸. Findings from focus groups conducted as part of their 'Safety and Public Transport in the North', TfN found that LGB+ communities felt that their sexuality impacted their safety when it became visible.

The MSA will aim to ensure that members of the whole LGBTQIA+ community are adequately consulted during the consultation. The views gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Socio-economic background

Nationally, 40% of households in the lowest income quintile have no access to a car or van¹⁹. 8.6% of all trips made by households in the lowest income quintile are using buses. In fact, outside London, households in upper income quintiles make a lower number of bus trips when compared to those in lower income quintiles²⁰. Outside London, households in lower income quintiles also travel longer distances on their local bus services than those in higher income quintiles²¹.

Nearly 35% of North East residents live in Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are in the top 20% most deprived LSOAs nationally. This rate of deprivation is reflected in regional travel patterns with 28% of households in the North East having no access to a car or van²² compared to 20% in England outside of London. Annual bus use per head is also much higher in

¹⁶ ["England and Wales Hate Crime Statistics"](#). Home Office. 2026

¹⁷ ["Racial and religious hate crime on UK public transport is growing, data shows"](#). The Guardian. 2026

¹⁸ ["Sexual orientation, England and Wales"](#). Office for National Statistics. 2023

¹⁹ ["National Travel Survey: 2024 - GOV.UK"](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

²⁰ ["National Travel Survey: 2024 - GOV.UK"](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

²¹ ["National Travel Survey: 2024 - GOV.UK"](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

²² ["Car or van availability \(Census 2021\)"](#). Office for National Statistics. 2023.

the North East (52.3) compared to England outside of London (35.95)²³. Bus density roughly aligns with areas of high deprivation, with a particular concentration in deprived urban areas²⁴. Therefore, increasingly costly fares are likely to have a disproportionate impact on lower income individuals.

The MSA will aim to ensure that these groups are adequately consulted during the consultation, such as by ensuring that decisions concerning the specific location of consultation activities are designed in such a way as to enable their involvement. The views of these groups gathered during this consultation process will be considered and responded to by the MSA. They will also inform the development of any transition and implementation strategy that may need to be designed depending on whether a mayoral decision to proceed with franchising is taken.

Fostering good relations

N/A

Summary

The FSA is a crucial step in the statutory process of exploring the feasibility of introducing bus franchising to the North East. The full equalities impact assessment conducted at this stage of the process has enabled the MSA to understand the differential impacts that this policy reform could potentially have on various communities in the region.

This FEqIA will be appended to the relevant Cabinet paper in March 2026 and shared amongst the MSA’s constituent local authorities, and any other relevant delivery partner/stakeholders, through distribution of the overall Cabinet paper. Additionally, the insights and information present in this FEqIA will help shape the consultation strategy that seeks to ensure that marginalised communities will have an opportunity to contribute their views.

²³ [“Bus statistics data tables: BUS01”](#). Department for Transport. 2025.

²⁴ [“English Indices of Deprivation 2025”](#). Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. 2025.