
Young Persons Bus Travel

EDTCE Scrutiny

Date of meeting: 26 August 2026

Lead director/officer: Daniel Pearman

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All Wards
- Report author: Daniel Pearman
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- Report version number: 01

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform members of the commission of work done to date on the topic of young person's bus travel
- 1.2 To inform members of the commission of initiatives, both local and national, relevant to the topic area.
- 1.3 To advise members of the commission of the next stages of work relevant to the topic area

2. Summary

- 2.1 Officers brought a report on transport affordability to the 22 April EDTCE scrutiny commission, detailing the relative costs of different transport modes and projects that were operating locally and nationally that were impacting at the topic.
- 2.2 At the same session, members of the Young Persons Council (YPC) shared lived experience with transport issues, including the high cost of accessing public transport being a barrier to employment, education, and social opportunities.
- 2.3 Other comments were also made by the group in terms of bus timetabling, fleet deployment, and bus stop placement which contributed to specific difficulties for some users. This included reference to the city centre free bus, the Hop, and a lack of service to stops that would better enable interchange with education facilities on the fringes of the city core.
- 2.4 At the time, officers advised that work in this space was underway, but there was still more investigation that needed to be undertaken. The commission recognised this, and asked that a report be brought back following this work and after officers had further considered the comments made by the YPC.

3. Leicester Buses Enhanced Partnership

- 3.1 Leicester's bus network operates via an Enhanced Partnership arrangement, Leicester Buses.
- 3.2 Under this arrangement, the city council alongside all bus operators work collaboratively to support and grow the bus network. This is formalised via the publication of a plan and scheme, which outline targets for the partnership and the approach to achieve them.

- 3.3 Though the city council do have some additional powers and duties as a result of serving as the highway and transport authority, it cannot compel operators to act in a certain way and must negotiate or fund schemes and initiatives accordingly.
- 3.4 The partnership has, to date, achieved great success in growing the city's electric bus fleet, maintaining bus frequency, improving passenger numbers since covid, and increasing user satisfaction. This has led to it being recognised as a national exemplar of the model, and is featured heavily in guidance to other local authorities considering improving their own arrangements.

4. Partnership Initiatives

- 4.1 The partnership has recognised that fares can prove a barrier to the usage of bus services, and "Great Value" is a core target of the partnership .
- 4.2 Over the past few months, two key initiatives have been launched that are relevant to this topic area:
- i A reduction in the flexi fare ticket to £6.20, making it the cheapest and default option for a day ticket across the local bus network.
 - ii A reduction in cost of the student ticket (£575), alongside the new option of a 4 weekly ticket priced at £68.
- 4.3 Both of these schemes have made use of grants from government – namely the Local Authority Bus Grant (formerly Bus Service Improvement Plan Grant).
- 4.4 As a result of this, we will need to monitor impact and consider whether this is supporting our wider partnership objectives and leading to a genuine improvement to users.
- 4.5 In addition to the above, the partnership is continuing to invest in electric buses – including electric buses owned entirely by the city council, for usage on our own tendered services and in support of key routes across the city – and undertaking work to assess the network ready for future initiatives or improvement.
- 4.6 Concerns about access to education due to cost, location, hours of operation, and fleet makeup have been noted, and will be considered as part of this work and will additionally feed into wider transport plans and strategies across the city.

5. National Programmes

- 5.1 Since the previous session, there have been three significant national changes and announcements.
- 5.2 The Government has opted to provide free travel to under 16s throughout August, intended primarily to support families to access entertainment and leisure locations over the course of the summer holidays.

- 5.3 The new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, announced shortly into his tenure the return of the £2 fare cap, from January of 2027. This in particular could prove to be very beneficial, as research nationally suggested that the increase to £3 did see a drop in bus patronage.
- 5.4 Finally, the government will be amending the terms of the 16-17 railcard; as of the 1 September they will be valid for a full year from purchase, rather than expiring immediately when the holder turns 18. This has the potential to present an additional year of saving to 19 year olds, if they renew immediately before their birthday. Of particular note, is that this discount also applies to the cost of adding 'plusbus' to a ticket; meaning people that travel into Leicester may access a discounted flexi fare that enables unlimited travel on the day the ticket is dated for.

6. Further Work

- 6.1 'Great Value' continues to be a primary area for the partnership; maintaining a suite of options that are sensitively priced, alongside best fare automatic capping, is a commitment as part of the partnership plan and will continue through to at least 2030.
- 6.2 Work will continue to assess the benefits that come from reduced ticket pricing, and whether this leads to an increase in patronage, change to journey patterns, or other beneficial effects.
- 6.3 Crucially, however, we will need to consider the impact of the £2 fare cap on our own initiatives and pricing structure. It is at this point unclear how the government will administer that scheme nor if any measures will be put in place to offset local or regional ticket offers. Officers are engaging with the department, as are operators within the partnership, and will continue to seek clarity.
- 6.4 We would very much welcome the views of the YPC in the coming months, so we can understand the direct impact that these initiatives are having on young people across the city and area.
- 6.5 Officers would be pleased to return an update to the commission at the end of the financial year, to share any data that has been received and what – if any – changes have been made as a result of the fare cap or evidence found during the subsidy period.

7. Financial, Legal, Equalities, Climate Emergency, and Other Implications

7.1 Financial Implications

The current programme of bus investment is maintained through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant, to be replaced by the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) from 26/27 onwards. Statutory provision - the English National Concessionary Travel scheme - is funded by the authority. Potential future discount or fare arrangements will need to be affordable within the envelope of the budget and available grant funding.

Signed: Joel Martin – Principal Accountant

Dated: 18/08/2026

7.2 Legal Implications

Highway and local transport authorities have responsibility to manage traffic network efficiency, support local accessibility, coordinate infrastructure works and cooperate with bus operators through enhanced partnerships. This report provides an update on the current position regarding young people's bus travel and the issues affecting access and affordability. There are therefore no legal implications arising from the report.

Signed: Zoe Iliffe, Principal Lawyer (Property Highways & Planning)

Dated: 18/8/26

7.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are subject to a number of statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). When carrying out their functions they have to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

The Equality Act identifies nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

This report provides an update on young people's bus travel and considers the issues affecting access and affordability at both local and national levels. The Young Persons Council has provided feedback based on their lived experience, highlighting key areas of concern. Continued engagement with the Young Persons Council will help ensure that young people's experiences and views are taken into consideration when developing services.

Equality Impact Assessments should be undertaken where appropriate to identify and assess any potential equality impacts arising from proposed or implemented changes. This should include consideration of the impact of measures such as the £2 fare cap, particularly on groups with protected characteristics to ensure that equality considerations are properly addressed.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 11 August 2026

7.4 Climate Emergency Implications

The proposals outlined in this report are expected to have a positive impact on the Council's Climate Emergency objectives. By improving the affordability and attractiveness of bus travel for young people, the initiatives support a shift towards sustainable transport modes and may encourage increased public transport use in place of private car journeys. Continued investment in electric buses through the Leicester Buses Enhanced Partnership further

contributes to reducing transport-related carbon emissions and improving local air quality. Any increase in bus patronage arising from fare reductions and national support schemes would support the Council's ambitions to reduce emissions from the transport sector.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer

Dated: 12th August 2026

7.5 Other Implications

None

8. Appendices and Other Papers