

Free travel and new routes: government's bus revolution hits another gear

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£3 million funding boost will help 6 mayoral authorities set up bus franchising to improve travel for passengers across England.

- government is continuing to invest in better bus services, with a new £3 million boost to help areas transition to a franchised bus model, ensuring buses work better for the people who rely on them every day
- local authorities are already using record government funding to introduce schemes such as discounted and free fares, as well as new services to previously unserved rural areas
- alongside the government's biggest reform to buses in a generation, the support will help local leaders shape services around their communities and deliver a modern, passenger-focused network

Millions of bus passengers across England are benefitting from cheaper fares, new routes and better services as local authorities are putting government funding to work in their communities.

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to play a part in people's everyday lives, local authorities are stepping up to make buses work better for everyone, reducing the burden on households.

Support comes as the government commits a further £3 million to better buses, supporting 6 mayoral authorities to set up bus franchising, building on the success of the Bee Network in Greater Manchester.

The 6 authorities benefitting from today's (13 April 2026) £3 million funding package are:

- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
- North East Combined Authority
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

From £1 fares for those 21 and under in the north-east, to brand new bus routes connecting rural Norfolk villages for the very first time, councils across the country are choosing to invest in the journeys that matter most to people's daily lives.

Liverpool City Region, which is on course to franchise its services by the end of 2027, has maintained its £2 bus fare cap and introduced new express services to Liverpool City Centre, while in the West of England, the £1 fare cap for children has been extended until Spring 2029, helping families with the cost of living.

Meanwhile, in Norfolk, a new bus service has been introduced between Great Yarmouth and Caister into Norwich, serving several rural villages previously without a bus route into the city. This transformative new route is connecting isolated communities with jobs and education, showing the government's commitment to breaking down barriers to opportunity.

Many authorities are choosing to make travel completely free, and in Barnsley, all those aged under 18 are receiving free travel for the next 2 years, meaning young people don't have to pay a penny as part of the school or college commute.

These schemes are all backed by the government, with more than £3 billion invested through the Local Authority Bus Grant between 2026 and 2029 - money that local leaders can spend on the things passengers actually need.

The result is a network that is becoming more affordable, frequent and connected, particularly for those in rural and less affluent areas who have for too long been left with no viable alternative.

Roads and Buses Minister, Simon Lightwood, said:

It is an incredibly exciting time for buses at the moment with record government funding supporting new services, including to rural communities and discounted ticket offers, alongside our £3 fare cap.

Meanwhile, today marks a major milestone on our journey towards better buses. Our £3 million funding boost will help mayors take a step closer to franchising, allowing local leaders to take control of their buses to deliver for the thousands of people who rely on bus travel in their regions.

Jason Prince, Director of the Urban Transport Group, said:

Buses are the backbone of our public transport system. Local areas are investing in bus services like never before, with mayoral combined authorities leading the way in making their bus networks affordable, accessible and integrated.

This £3 million funding boost, together with the new Bus Service Act, will unlock the future of bus reform and see local passengers and communities benefit from better bus services.

Lydia Horbury, CEO of passenger champions Bus Users UK, said:

Buses are a lifeline for millions and putting passengers at the heart of the network is the only way to ensure these services truly thrive. This investment is a positive step toward creating a more integrated and affordable transport system that works for the people who use it every day.

Whether it is a young person in Barnsley accessing education for free or a resident in a rural Norfolk village finally being connected to their local community, seeing local leaders use this funding to break down barriers is incredibly welcome.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-travel-and-new-routes-governments-bus-revolution-hits-an-other-gear>