Better Connected: tap-and-go travel across trains, trams and buses announced in government's new transport strategy

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Strategy sets the direction for a more joined-up transport network that works better for passengers, drivers and communities across England.

- more contactless, tap-and-go travel a step closer as government gives local leaders tools to join up buses, trams and trains
- millions of passengers across England will benefit from simpler, more affordable and more joined-up journeys under a new national transport strategy launched today
- other measures include a new Google Maps partnership to track rural buses, ‘Mini-Switzerland’ Peak District trials and a Parking Platform to end car app chaos

Tap-and-go travel across buses, trains, and trams will benefit more cities and towns across England after the government announced more local powers for contactless travel today (2 April 2026).

Local leaders are being given the tools to replicate joined-up systems already in place in areas like Liverpool, London and Nottingham, where passengers travel seamlessly across the city on different transport while tapping their bank card as payment – without juggling multiple tickets or apps.

It is one of more than 40 fully funded commitments in the new Better Connected national transport strategy, designed to make everyday journeys simpler, easier to pay for and more reliable from door to door.

Huge steps have already been taken to make people’s everyday journeys more affordable, including the rail fare freeze, the bus fare cap, and freezing fuel duty.

Giving people genuine choice over how they travel and making these options more affordable is at the core of this strategy. By providing local leaders with more flexibility, control and long-term funding certainty, they can design more joined-up networks that deliver better value for money, helping to keep fares down and support the cost of living.

The strategy also announces a breakthrough new partnership with Google, allowing passengers across England to track their bus in real time through Google Maps. The service will be especially useful for passengers in rural areas where bus services are less frequent.

Drivers will also benefit from the expansion of the National Parking Platform, allowing them to use any parking app across participating car parks, ending the frustrating experience of having to download a different app each time.

Better Connected also announces a ‘Mini Switzerland’ pilot in the Peak District’s Hope Valley, backed by £6 million of government funding. Taking its name from best practice in European rural areas, the trial will test more frequent, reliable rural bus services timed to connect with arriving trains to support local communities and tourism.

Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, said:

> For too long, getting from A to B has been more complicated than it needs to be.
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> People want journeys to be easy and reliable. They want to be able to get off a train and straight on to a bus without having to battle through a confusing system or buy separate tickets for each part of their journey.
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> That's why we're giving local leaders the powers to build transport networks that are simpler, more accessible and better connected, improving everyday journeys and supporting growth in every corner of the country.

While local leaders will continue to decide whether to invest in contactless, tap-and-go travel, the government has made it easier than ever by providing back-end technical support and long-term funding to bring it to their towns and cities.

Gold standard examples like Nottingham and Derby's Ride app, part-funded by government, show what is possible when local leaders are backed to improve local transport. The app allows passengers to plan and pay for journeys on buses and trams, as well as shared transport services, including car clubs, e-scooters and e-bikes – all in one place.

To help local areas go further, the government is also launching £40 million in new funding for local authorities to trial digital technologies to improve transport, reduce congestion and ease disruption.

Alongside these new features, the government is also publishing new local transport plan guidance, giving local leaders clear blueprints for building joined-up transport, making the most of their funding and boosting local growth.

Better Connected comes alongside major action on transport across the country, from the creation of Great British Railways, record investment to fix local roads, to faster rollout of EV chargepoints and support for major infrastructure projects that will improve connections and drive growth.

Together, this sets the direction for a more joined-up transport network that works better for passengers, drivers and communities across England.

Support for Better Connected

Alex Robertson, Chief Executive of the independent watchdog, Transport Focus, said:

> Passengers have told us for years that complexity is one of the biggest barriers to using public transport. Having to juggle different tickets, apps and payment methods for a single journey is frustrating and puts people off leaving the car at home. It's good to see a transport strategy so focussed on people.
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> Tap-and-go travel, real-time bus tracking and better-connected services will make a genuine difference to people's daily lives. We look forward to working with government and local leaders to make sure passengers see the benefits of these changes as quickly as possible.

Claire Ward, Mayor of the East Midlands said:

> This national strategy is a significant step towards the transport system people across the East Midlands want: simple, joined-up and easy to use. We're already seeing what's possible through innovations like the Ride app in Nottingham and Derby, bringing journey planning and payment in one place.
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> It shows how we can integrate buses, trams and trains so passengers can tap, travel and get where they need to be without juggling multiple tickets or apps.
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> With better real-time information and stronger rural connections, including our work in the Peak District, we can build a transport network that works as one system – supporting growth, cutting congestion and improving access to jobs, education and opportunity across the region.

David Shepherd, Chair of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) Transport and Connectivity Board, said:

> Local authorities are committed to creating connected transport networks and have a shared desire to make technology work for people, passengers and place. The Better Connected integrated transport strategy sets out a national framework for achieving this, providing the right powers, funding and technical backing from the government to make that a reality.
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> ADEPT members have helped shape this strategy which gives us the tools we need to join up buses, trams and trains in a way that genuinely works for communities. We welcome its strong focus on people, passengers and place, and the recognition that digital technology can transform everyday journeys.
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> Great public transport helps us deliver great places that people can be proud of: we look forward to bringing the Better Connected strategy to life through local transport plans the length and breadth of the country.

Graham Vidler, Chief Executive of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, said:

> Buses account for two-thirds of public transport journeys and it's encouraging to see them at the heart of the government's joined up transport strategy. The initiatives outlined today will help passengers to see when their bus is coming, to pay for their journeys conveniently and to swap seamlessly between different modes of transport.
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> Bus and coach operators are already doing a great deal to improve integration – by offering tickets that can be used across different networks and by publishing combined, at-a-glance timetables. Our industry has been at the forefront of work with the West Midlands Combined Authority, and central government, to develop the technology needed to make this a reality nationwide.

Jacqueline Starr, Executive Chair and Chief Executive Officer of Rail Delivery Group, said:

> This is a major step forward for seamless travel and putting the customer experience at the heart of transport. Over half (58%) of rail customers use a mix of different transport options to start their journey and we know they want simpler, joined up journeys – building on the ambitions outlined in this strategy, we are working with Traveline to make this a reality.
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> The rollout of the new digital PlusBus ticket makes it easier to move between rail and bus without the need for multiple paper tickets.

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

> The new transport strategy, which includes an ambition to deliver a step change in tap-and-go contactless services for customers, is welcome. The strategy, which has been eagerly anticipated by the sector, builds on the innovative work already underway in devolved areas of the country to deliver better, more joined-up transport networks.
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> The strategy will complement this ongoing work and help to ensure all people across England – from cities to the countryside – are better connected.

Lydia Horbury, CEO, Bus Users UK, said:

> Connectivity is what turns transport into a network. When buses, trains, trams and active travel options join up seamlessly, it transforms confidence, accessibility and everyday journeys. This strategy moves us closer to a system that works around passengers, not the other way round.

Max Sugarman, Chief Executive, Intelligent Transport Systems UK, said:

> Technology has the power to bring different modes of transport together into one seamless network, providing smoother and easier journeys for the travelling public.
>
> It is fantastic to see the commitments in this Better Connected strategy, setting out how smart ticketing, journey planning and digital tools like the National Parking Platform can integrate services, simplify payments and give passengers real-time information – ultimately, creating better journeys for all.

Patrick Mahon, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), said:

> The lack of reliable, affordable public transport in rural areas is a widespread problem which impacts on those in greatest need and holds back economic growth. We welcome the fact that the new integrated national transport strategy explicitly recognises several of the main challenges that face public transport users in rural communities.
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> These include the delays and extra costs they encounter when they have to take multiple buses or trains to get to their destination, and the difficulty of knowing when the next

bus will actually turn up. The strategy has the potential to deliver a step change for rural transport users, and ACRE looks forward to working with central and local government to ensure that this potential is delivered in practice.

Rod Dennis, senior policy officer, RAC said:

Paying to park a car should be one of the simplest tasks any driver does, but with a plethora of different mobile parking payment apps now in existence things have got a little more complicated.

The roll-out of National Parking Platform has the potential to change that, giving drivers the chance to use a single app of their choice. We now need as many operators as possible to join the scheme to make parking easier for everyone.

Sarah-Jayne Williams, Director of Geo Partnerships at Google Maps, said:

We are committed to using data and technology to help people make more sustainable and informed travel choices every day. By integrating real-time bus information across England into Google Maps, we are giving millions of passengers the confidence to plan their journeys accurately.

This partnership with the Department for Transport ensures that whether you are heading to work or visiting friends, you have accurate, live arrival times right at your fingertips. Making public transport easier to navigate is key to creating a more connected and sustainable future for everyone.

Sarah Randall, CEO, National Parking Platform, said:

This is a hugely positive endorsement of the National Parking Platform and the progress being made across the sector. We're encouraged to see the Department for Transport reaffirm its support, recognising the NPP as key digital infrastructure that simplifies parking and gives drivers real choice.

By enabling drivers to use the app they already trust, while supporting innovation and inclusivity across the market, the NPP is helping to create a more connected and user-friendly transport experience. We're excited to work with local authorities and partners to build on this momentum and deliver even greater benefits in the months ahead.

Sue Sharp, Interim Chair, Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, said:

DPTAC welcomes putting people at the heart of this strategy. The traveling public is diverse not only in terms of their personal characteristics, but in where they live, their reasons for travel and the choices they make for their journeys. The strategy recognises that diversity and we look forward to seeing it deliver an effective, accessible and affordable transport network for everyone who needs to travel.

> We are particularly pleased that accessibility, alongside affordability, is one of the guiding principles. Around 18 million people in the UK have a disability. Embedding accessibility from the outset, taking a co-design approach to development and continuing to engage with disabled users throughout, are critical steps in achieving a transport network that is truly accessible and addresses disabled people's rights to travel.

Tina McKenzie, Policy Chair at the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

> Small businesses need a reliable, regular and well-connected transport system to allow staff, suppliers and customers to reach them. More joined-up transport networks across England, that allow customers to use different modes on a single ticket would make public transport far more attractive – as long as the services are there.
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> For those in rural areas, where public transport is often unreliable and infrequent, being able to track your bus could really improve accessibility and give people much more confidence in using them.
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> Parking remains a huge issue for local businesses, particularly on the high street and in our town centres. Measures that make the process of paying for parking easier and less confusing are crucial in attracting customers to our high streets.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/better-connected-tap-and-go-travel-across-trains-trams-and-buses-announced-in-governments-new-transport-strategy