

## Written evidence submitted by Peninsula Transport STB (BCC0069)

### Introduction

**Peninsula Transport** is the Sub-national Transport Body (STB) representing Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay.

Peninsula Transport STB is submitting evidence to the Transport Select Committee to highlight the rural access and mobility issues faced by our communities, and the **alternative service models** to traditional franchising that could offer a solution to these challenges. Transport for Cornwall is leading the way for rural transport with its award-winning partnership (NTA 2023). There are opportunities to expand this partnership approach across the peninsula region, and other rural regions throughout England, as a potential alternative or preliminary step to franchising at a regional, rather than LTA level.

### Key Characteristics of the peninsula

The Peninsula region has a series of transport challenges, including but not limited to:

- **High car dependency** within the region – around 90% journeys to work are by car and the region has very high levels of car ownership<sup>1</sup>.
- **Lower average income** with average income in bottom 3 regions of country
- High proportion of **short journeys** - half of peninsula workers travel less than 10km to work.
- The region has a **huge influx of visitors** across the year (more than 11 million domestic overnight visitors annually<sup>2</sup>), particularly during the summer months, placing additional pressures on all transport networks
- **Highest private transport mileage** per person in England.
- **Ageing population** with 31% over 65 – high levels of concessionary pass usage
- **Highest bus subsidy** of any region by population, with a significant proportion of rural services currently subsidised by our local authorities.
- **Commitment to net-zero** – all peninsula authorities have declared a climate emergency.

Rural bus services have been in decline for some years, with reduction in coverage and frequencies impacting on the accessibility of rural areas by public transport. This is particularly the case in the peninsula region where 44% of

our population live in rural communities reliant on relatively limited bus services. This has led to a hugely car-dependent population in conditions where the cost of owning and running a car has become unaffordable to many.

Although some rural communities are affluent, many in the peninsula region suffer from significant, complex economic challenges and associated deprivation and isolation. This leads to transport deserts and social isolation for those without cars, alongside higher levels of spend on transport, particularly in some of our coastal communities.

The bus has a key role to play to replace some car journeys within the peninsula. The challenge of attracting residents and visitors out of their cars is the focus of the STB. Creating the right environment for the bus to thrive through improved services and connectivity is key, along with reducing barriers to bus travel such as cost and convenience to encourage greater modal share.

### **Peninsula Transport Strategy**

The STB adopted the [Peninsula Transport Strategy in 2024](#), with the aim of facilitating the delivery of an integrated, sustainable transport system across a predominantly rural region.

One of the four outcomes within the strategy, 'Easier Journeys', focuses on developing a **regional plan** to establish a customer focussed integrated public transport system, making sustainable travel easy and accessible for all, removing some of the barriers to use. For buses, this means building on the current best practice, including the established Enhanced Partnerships, Bus Service Improvements Plans (BSIPS) (including the work undertaken by Transport for Cornwall Partnerships) and the in-progress ZEBRA programmes across the peninsula. The STB has the aim of making the best use of the networks and services we have through growing patronage, improving information and making travel by public transport as convenient as possible, creating a consistent passenger experience across the region.

Alongside this, Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway STBs are funding a rural mobility pilot scheme, to test the effectiveness of small scale rural mobility solutions which could ultimately form part of a wider integrated network for the south west.

### **Government Policy and the Bus Services Bill**

Recent government policy interventions have taken clear steps to tackling the decline in bus services.

### National Bus Fare Cap

The £2 bus fare cap proved effective for rural communities across the peninsula. Recent bus statistics show the largest increase in patronage (post bus fare cap in 2023) is within Somerset and Cornwall – both largely rural counties. It is a fair assumption that the fare cap has been shown to significantly benefit rural passengers (who travel longer distances):

Patronage					
£2 fare cap					
	2022	2023	% increase 22-23	2024	% change 23-24
<b>Cornwall</b>	7.8	10.2	31%	11.1	9%
<b>Devon</b>	16.1	17.4	8%	17	-2%
<b>Plymouth</b>	12.6	14.6	16%	15.5	6%
<b>Somerset</b>	3.2	3.9	22%	4.8	23%
<b>Torbay</b>	5.2	5.7	10%	5.6	-2%

<sup>3</sup>Patronage quoted in '000s

Analysis undertaken by Transport Focus<sup>4</sup> supports the assessment that rural regions benefit more from subsidised fares, compared to urban areas, due to passengers travelling further and for longer (see tables below for key findings).

The South West ranked fourth nationally for the overall usage of the £2 fare (23%) and more importantly, scored the highest in terms of agreement that the £2 capped fare will personally save passengers money (53%).

Bus  
Service  
Improvement  
Plan

Highest agreement that the £2 capped fare will encourage people to try the bus (71% over all)	
55-64s	74%
North West	78%
<b>South West</b>	<b>79%</b>

Highest agreement that the £2 capped fare might personally save them money (44% overall)	
18-24's	54%
<b>South West</b>	<b>53%</b>
North West	52%
No access to car	53%

Highest increased bus use because of £2 fare	
North East	22%
Yorkshire & Humber	17%
North West	15%
<b>South West</b>	<b>12%</b>
East Midlands	9%
South East	8%
Eastern	7%
West Midlands	4%

Usage of £2 fare	%
North East	37
Yorkshire & Humber	35
North West	29
<b>South West</b>	<b>23</b>
East Midlands	22
Eastern	19
South East	19
West Midlands	19

s (BSIPs)

The introduction of BSIPs (and EPs) has resulted in positive changes for bus services across the peninsula, including the following examples:

- Plymouth City Council developed a Customer Charter (tested through focus groups) and introduced the ‘Skipper Ticket’
- All five LTAs have set performance targets
- Devon County Council and Cornwall Council agreed a joint approach for cross-boundary services – defining network principles
- Somerset Council introduced £1 Taunton town ticket (resulted in a 30% rise in bus use)
- Transport for Cornwall introduced **one network/one map, any ticket/any bus, simplified fare structures** and **Tap & Cap**

There is strong alignment around priorities for bus within the region, driven by close partnership working and established good practice. More can be done to build on the successes so far, with the STB ideally placed to bring together local transport authorities and bus operators to collectively agree a region-wide strategic approach.

#### *Zero Emission Buses - ZEBRA Funding*

The Peninsula has significantly benefited from ZEBRA 2 funding, receiving just over £25 million<sup>5</sup> of government investment. There are real opportunities to decarbonise the regional fleet, improve air quality and take advantage of economies of scale. This will require a joined-up approach between all five LTAs and bus operators, which the STB can support (via established Electric Vehicle Stakeholder Forum).

<b>Name</b>	<b>Funding allocation</b>
Cornwall Council	£1,300,000
Devon County Council	£5,300,000
Plymouth City Council	£9,500,000
Somerset Council	£2,200,000
Torbay Council	£7,100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£25,400,000</b>

## *Bus Services Bill*

Peninsula Transport welcomes the priority given by the Government to increasing bus use through the additional powers to be made available to local authorities to work alongside private operators to improve bus services, and to operate bus services themselves where considered viable. The bill sets the conditions where local authorities can pursue franchising of services, where this suits the local economic and transport environments. The proposed streamlining of franchising to make it a more straightforward prospect for local authorities is also welcomed, however it still represents a potentially costly undertaking for local authorities.

Franchising may not currently be the most appropriate option for rural authorities where there are high levels of supported services and authorities cannot afford to carry the revenue risk. Due to current pressures on local authority budgets, upfront capital investment needed to acquire infrastructure would also be a challenge. Franchising models themselves need to offer more parity and shared risk wherever possible between LTAs and operators if they are to succeed in the long term. LTAs like Cornwall Council have demonstrated how much can be achieved under the enhanced partnership model without the need for franchising.

### **Peninsula Transport approach**

The STB is working in partnership with local authorities, bus operators and user groups to deliver the objectives set out within the Peninsula Transport Strategy and the Bus Services Bill to create the opportunity to improve the local bus network and better integrate with local rail and DRT services. This approach does not require local authorities and operators to enter into a franchising arrangement, although it may set the foundations for establishing franchising in the longer term. In contrast, Peninsula Transport are of the view that many of the improvements to bus network integration can be achieved through voluntary partnership working at a regional, strategic level. This also allows adaptation to any potential changes in the political landscape which may come forward across the region in coming years.

Each of the peninsula member authorities has established Enhanced Partnerships with their local operators and user groups. The complex economic conditions, transport 'deserts' and rural isolation as detailed earlier

in this submission give some context to the challenges faced by these partnerships. Despite this, there has been considerable progress made in the region on improving the experience for the passenger. There is strong alignment across the EPs around priorities for growing patronage, and improved partnership working.

Cornwall leads the way having delivered the comprehensive Transport for Cornwall package of improvements focused around:

- **One Network**
- **One Timetable**
- **One Ticket**
- **One Standard**
- **One Brand**

The Cornwall approach has led to the following successful outcomes:

- **Faster bus patronage recovery** after Covid-19
- **12% overall growth** since 2019 (despite falls in ENCTS and P&R patronage)
- **59% growth in adult fare paying passengers** – resulting in higher proportion of fare payers (54% in 2023, 38% in 2019)
- **Over 1 million interoperable journeys** – any ticket, any bus
- **Cheaper fares for young people** – 16-19 access child tickets
- Research demonstrates **2/5<sup>th</sup> respondents made more bus journeys** because of a reduction in bus fares
- Transport Focus research shows massive **improvement in VFM** score – now at 75%.
- In 2022, Cornwall was the **only area in England where residents made more bus journeys than before the pandemic.**

Whilst Cornwall were afforded the powers to implement franchising in order to achieve their vision, ultimately the Transport for Cornwall model was achieved through voluntary agreements and their Enhanced Partnership, significantly reducing the time taken to establish the network and the costs to the authority.

Cornwall are not alone in delivering improvements - pockets of best practice exist across the Peninsula and bus travel is recovering in terms of patronage growth since Covid-19 albeit different approaches and customer outcomes are

evident. In Devon, significant investment has been made in the provision of consistent passenger information as well as working with GWR to provide convenient bus-rail links for rural communities. In Plymouth, the introduction of a multi-operator day ticket has made travel within the city more convenient for passengers who can use any bus to make their journey. In Somerset, the introduction of the £1 Taunton town ticket saw a 30% increase in bus use in the town. Somerset also leads the way in DRT with their Slinky services and they are currently trialling a digital DRT solution to further enhance their offer.

The STB is now looking to build on this success across the region, taking a strategic approach to rolling out this best practice to achieve a consistent level of service for passengers. This includes consistent information, timetabling, ticketing and interoperability meaning that wherever passengers are within the peninsula region, they can expect the same enhanced level of bus service. It is Peninsula Transport's view that further success can be achieved during this parliament by building upon BSIP and EP foundations delivered by LTAs across the region to achieve:

- **Simplification** – removing barriers for customers and making bus the easy option
- **Improved consistency and standards** – standard terminology for ticketing, common age range for young people, upgraded ticket machines, standardised network principles
- **Regional bus/coach/rail maps**
- Step change in **delivering information** to the customer
- **One approach to ticketing**
- **Interoperability** across the peninsula

This approach would be led by the STB, working in partnership with member authorities and operators to provide region-wide improvements without the need to enter into franchising arrangements due to the experience and learning from the Transport for Cornwall model.

### **What further support would we like government to provide?**

Whilst the Bus Services Bill and the recent BSIP funding announcements are welcomed by the STB, a longer-term approach and commitment to funding of public transport would create the environment where partners, operators and local authorities can develop a comprehensive plan to introduce and maintain customer-focussed improvements. Long term BSIP settlements will provide

certainty and continuity that is required for investment by operators and local authorities.

The Peninsula Transport approach to a regional bus network will require modest contributions from member authorities via their BSIP funding. In order to achieve the region-wide ticketing solution, some capital investment will need to be made into ticket machines and app/online infrastructure to ensure all systems are consistent and compatible. This would also enable full early alignment with the national Project Coral initiative, led by Transport for the West Midlands. Limited funding for additional resource to oversee the integration, as part of Peninsula Transport would also be sought. This represents a relatively modest investment in comparison to a full-scale franchising arrangement.

The Peninsula approach does not discount a franchising solution for the region in the longer term. However, as demonstrated in Cornwall, much can be achieved without the need for legal agreements and significant financial commitments by the local authority. This solution represents the opportunity for authorities to work towards integrated, efficient and customer-focused bus networks ahead of affordable franchising options becoming available. Should franchising become the preferred long-term solution for local transport authorities, support will be needed from Government to ensure the legal instruments applied are affordable and revenue risks can be shared and managed.

January 2025

---

<sup>1</sup> ONS Census

<sup>2</sup> Visit Britain Great Britain Tourist Survey 2021-2023

<sup>3</sup> [Bus statistics data tables - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Awareness and effect of £2 bus fare - March 2023](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas \(ZEBRA\) programmes funding amounts - GOV.UK](#)