Written evidence submitted by the Association of Local Bus Company Managers (ALBUM) (URB0036)

1 What is ALBUM?

ALBUM represents the 'non-aligned' sector of the bus industry. The Association has 156 members, representing over 50 companies: 36 private businesses, 11 municipal companies, three 'second tier' groups (East Yorkshire, TrentBarton and Centrebus) and the Isle of Man Transport Company, who between them operate 5,400 buses. This is about one in twelve nationally.

2 ALBUM's importance

2.1 ALBUM is a people-based organisation, whose members therefore represent their own views as owners, directors and senior managers in this sector of the industry, rather than those of the corporate entities themselves. They are close to the front line and know what they are talking about from personal involvement and experience. A number of ALBUM members are from family-owned and other SME businesses. ALBUM members' businesses collectively are equivalent to Britain's fourth largest operator - in the same league as the big five multi-national groups. Stagecoach runs 8,100 vehicles in the UK, First Group 6,200, Arriva 5,900, ALBUM members 5,400, Go Ahead 4,600, and National Express 1,600.

2.2 ALBUM members' companies, whether municipal or SME independent frequently perform with great success at annual industry award events. Nottingham, Reading, Swindon, Compass Bus and Safeguard Coaches, to which we refer later in this submission, have each been judged best in their respective categories of award in the last five years – yet even their 'close to the coalface' local management cannot overcome the increasing pressure on their businesses as a result of congestion.

3 Structure of ALBUM Submission

3.1 ALBUM addresses each of the topics outlined in the Committee's brief and outline the factors most affecting bus operation and their impacts. The spiralling impact of traffic congestion has long been understood: slower and less predictable journey times cause passengers to desert buses for alternative modes, resulting in reduced service frequencies and further falls in demand. What has been less well recognised is what to do about this, in particular in political terms. The physical measures required to make buses more attractive are the easy part; but how can politicians and local authority officers be convinced of the value of taking action.

3.2 The popular view "I would use the buses if services were better" has to be tackled headon by taking drastic measures such as when bus services increased and priority measures extended in London ahead of bringing in the congestion charge. In Nottingham, improvements to bus services and development of the tram system were well advanced before the workplace parking levy was introduced. Reading, one of the first towns to adopt bus priorities, has a largely pedestrianised centre, with bus access to congestion-free bus-only streets. These three places,

London, Nottingham and Reading have the highest levels of bus use per head of population in the country, something that is not coincidental. Appropriate action is required across the country to guarantee the sustainability of urban communities and the ability of bus services to serve the local travel market.

4 Greener Journeys' report *The Impact of Congestion on Bus Passengers*

4.1 We strongly recommend the Committee to take on board the messages from Greener Journeys' thorough assessment of the impact of traffic congestion on bus passengers by Professor David Begg. The key conclusions of *The Impact of Congestion on Bus Passengers* include:

a. That bus journey times have increased by 50% over the past 50 years in the most congested urban areas
b. That over 50% more journeys would probably be made by bus today in the absence of this increased congestion
c. That there is a direct inverse correlation between bus journey time and patronage: every

10% reduction in bus speed reduces ridership by at least 10%

d. That congestion prevents bus drivers from giving passengers the service they would wish and makes it increasingly difficult for bus companies to recruit and retain drivers
e. That towns and cities that are succeeding in growing bus use have tighter parking policies and higher parking prices than those with lower restraints
f. That slower bus journeys are bad for urban economies and worsen access to jobs
g. That slow buses increase exhaust emissions and are bad for pollution.

4.2 The report sets out a five point plan that requires serious consideration and urgent implementation. The plan proposes:

a. Encouraging authorities and operators to set targets for average bus speeds
b. Demand management to prevent rising congestion and slower traffic speeds from becoming the norm: sticks as well as carrots will be needed as increasingly 'choice' means 'no choice but to sit in a traffic jam'.
c. Bus priority to enable services to run according to their timetables on every journey
d. Reducing dwell time at bus stops by speeding up boarding and fare payment rates
e. Championing bus passengers as vital contributors to healthy, vibrant and low-pollution urban environments

This approach will give the submission immediacy and specific relevance, by covering practical matters and showing when, where and how they really occur.

5 Addressing the Inquiry Scope

5.1 We review the combinations of measures that can come together to form integrated urban traffic management strategies for managing competing demands for urban road space; shifting people from private vehicles to public and active transport modes in urban areas; and reducing urban road traffic congestion. A report on the situation in Swindon, compiled by the locally-based bus operator Thamesdown Transport, is submitted as a case-study alongside this document. The situation in Swindon is typical of that facing bus operators – and passengers – throughout the country; a growing congestion problem and too little local attention to its resolution.

5.2 Worthing, Sussex operator Compass Travel notes the main congestion-related issues it faces to be:

- Increased unreliability and late running or lost journeys – which ultimately results in reduced patronage and revenue.
- Necessary revision to timetables to allow more running time. The services do not justify more vehicles, which unfortunately means either reducing service frequency or revising routes to reduce mileage. Again the ultimate result of this is reduced patronage and revenue.
- Poor driver morale and difficulty in recruiting – "who wants a job that involves sitting in traffic congestion and then being lambasted by passengers for being late?"

5.3 Guildford's family-owned SME bus operator Safeguard Coaches quantifies how seriously increasing congestion has affected buses in this Surrey town:

- In 2006 the town service was allowed 40 minutes to complete its horseshoe-shaped route, including peak hours and including adequate recovery time for delays

- In 2010 this was increased to 52/53 minutes at peak times

- Further increased in 2016 to 60 minutes at the worst points of the peak. This figure includes extended recovery time which is necessary to deal with the unpredictability of running times as a consequence of variable traffic congestion, which has become noticeably worse since September 2015

- Overall over the last 10 years Safeguard has seen a 31% increase in average peak hour cycle time, with instances of 66%

- Resource increase: 5.25 buses needed to run the service now, compared to 4 in 2008: at a cost of £125,000 per bus per year, this amounts to a total annual rise of over £150,000 in the company's costs. An additional member of staff, costing £30,000 a year, has also been employed to meet the added requirement for service supervision at Guildford bus station. Thus there has been a total cost increase to the company of some £180,000 per annum; to be recouped from passengers experiencing slower and less reliable travel because of congestion.

5.4 A small Oxford operator acknowledges its inability to provide the travelling public with the quality of service it aspires to. The company does not have spare drivers to plug gaps in services; all it can do is to use its best efforts to regulate services effectively.

5.5 We are appalled and disappointed by the policies of two major cities, Liverpool under Mayor Joe Anderson and Coventry under Council Leader George Duggins to scrap bus priorities, in each case without carrying out proper prior research into the impact of their decisions. The full Council at Kirklees, West Yorkshire is to debate the removal of bus gates in Huddersfield town centre, "in order to improve traffic flow". Speeding traffic flow may slow the flow of people overall, by increasing severance (making it harder to cross the road) and adding to pollution levels in areas that are already badly affected. If 1000 cars being used by 1.2 people each save 1 minute then the benefit is 1200 people minutes. If this is achieved by taking out bus lanes (or other priority measures, such as gates) and 30 buses carrying on average 30 people have to add two minutes to their schedule, then the dis-benefit is 1800 people minutes, an overall loss to the local community and economy of 600 people minutes.

Such actions send out entirely the wrong message on urban transport, with a common thread that the changes are to the detriment of the bus use and of the viability of the very city centres they purport to be trying to help. These negative and disruptive interventions stem from unqualified politicians interfering with the very precise science of urban transport planning and environmental management. Guidance to local authority officers and members requires reenforcement to ensure that improvements achieved in town and city centres by restraining car access are not squandered through a lack of understanding of the issues.

5.6 Those politicians who do not understand the principle must be made aware be aware that public transport is the most effective way of catering for mass travel markets and cars inappropriately space-consuming for major city centres.

6 Combatting Congestion

Measures for addressing the problems identified by the inquiry are presented below.

6.1 Bus priority measures (including, but not limited to bus lanes)

Buses have the potential to carry people quickly to and from their destinations, if only they can be freed from congestion. The outcome illustrated in paragraph 5.5 above applies equally in reverse: adding 1,200 people minutes to car travel time would give a benefit of 1,800 people

minutes to bus users. As the relative advantage to buses would increase, the actual benefit would most likely be greater, as some former car users opted for the bus instead. Urban and suburban transport policies need to recognise this and act to maximise the number of *people* rather than of *vehicles.*

Local authorities and the police can play an important role in achieving this aim. They and bus operators need to liaise with local businesses, as many already do, to ensure the contribution of bus passengers to local economies is recognised. While bus passengers may purchase on average less per trip than those coming by car, they make more frequent trips and their collective contribution should not be under-estimated. Employers benefit when staff arrive on time for work, are not stressed after a difficult commute (especially when they drive) and make financial savings by not having to provide car parking. The less land devoted to car parking, the more is available for productive uses.

Bus priority need not take up road space. Features such as signalised bus priority, bus gates and exemptions from banned turns each have a role to play. Unlike cars, buses do not need to be parked close to destinations. Buses can therefore be given access via bus-only streets to pedestrianised areas, a benefit that can also be made available to tramways, as for example in the centres of Nottingham and Sheffield.

6.2 Local road-pricing, including lessons from the London congestion charge and low emissions zones

Road pricing is potentially a beneficial option, but has disadvantages: prices need to keep pace with inflation, if the deterrent effect is to be maintained (which rising traffic congestion in central London suggests is not happening); business users may be able to pass the charge on the customers; and authorities may seek to achieve other aims such as reduced pollution by offering extensive exemptions, e.g. to low-emission vehicles, which reduces the charge's congestionbusting impact.

If road pricing is used, the payment system must be simple and effective, almost certainly with automated 'smart' payment.

6.3 Parking schemes, including workplace parking levies

Charging for parking is almost universal in larger towns and cities; less so in suburbs, where congestion is becoming increasingly serious; and rare at out of town retailing, leisure and employment sites. Queuing to enter urban car parks is a major cause of congestion when the vehicles block back on to adjacent roads, with consequent delays to buses as well as other traffic.

The Nottingham workplace parking levy has demonstrated that, in combination with improved public transport, walking and cycling facilities, financial controls on parking can work. Other cities, such as Oxford are now considering such schemes.

6.4 Cycling and walking infrastructure

Walking plays a crucial role in bus travel. The majority of bus journeys start or finish at a roadside bus stop, to reach which passengers must cross the road in at least one direction of their trip. Enabling bus passengers – and other pedestrians – to cross roads safely is a vital but often forgotten element of travel.

Cycling is a mixed blessing so far as running good bus services is concerned. When building dedicated cycle routes, their design must not disadvantage buses; a defect that is present on parts of the London cycle network, where some bus priorities have been truncated or are obstructed by cycle facilities. Cycle lanes must be designed so as to ensure good access to bus stops, with neither pedestrians nor buses impeded or endangered. If cycling is to become a mainstream mode of urban travel in Britain, as it is in the Netherlands, better (self) regulation of cycling is essential, e.g. with regard to speed, giving way to pedestrians, using lights, paying attention to other road vehicles, etc.

6.5 Street-running trams

Trams have a role to play in reducing congestion where passenger flows are high enough to justify the investment; arguably in more cases than have so far been introduced in British cities. Tramways must be built to facilitate efficient and effective co-existence with buses, both in terms of physical demands on road-space and of integrating fares and charging. The removal at the behest of the competition authorities of integrated bus and tram fares when the Nottingham tram operating contract changed hands was a retrograde move that did nothing to encourage public transport use.

When considering the tram option, factors to take into consideration include:

a. The high capital cost, which may be sucked out of bus-based transport solutions
b. The extent and impact of congestion during construction, especially on bus routes from areas that will never eventually benefit from the tram
c. That tramways are few and far between in the UK because since the 1930s housing policy has, to varying extents, been for dispersal rather than concentrated high density, which is required to make a tram proposal financially viable. Trams will thus only be relevant in only a small number of cases, unless the rules are changed to include benefits from reduced congestion
(and pollution) as part of the financial case
d. Trams usually stop less frequently than buses and take different alignments, so cannot directly replace bus services
e. Congestion will continue to be an issue, especially if capacity is released around the road system to allow car use to grow.

6.6 Use of innovative traffic management technologies

Effective pro-bus traffic management need not entail heavy expenditure on construction; often just careful attention to detail can enable a cheap, simple and easy-to-implement solution. For example:

a. A bus priority lane starting immediately after a bus stop reduced the likelihood of infringement by non-entitled vehicles

b. Traffic signals activated by an approaching bus can cut delays to services. The signals can even be programmed to give special priority to buses that are running late

c. Buses can be given exclusive use of principal bus corridors, with other traffic directed elsewhere. It is vital that local authorities do their homework and implement the regulations correctly. This did not occur in York, where a bridge closure to all except buses, taxis and cycles was overturned because incorrect procedures had been adopted. In the York case, the road network for a mile either side of the bridge experienced a significant reduction in traffic and congestion. The SE-NW A1036, including Lendal Bridge itself, and NW A19 corridors became free-flowing for the first time for many years; but the congestion, queues of static traffic and the associated high level of pollution returned as soon as the closure was rescinded. A specific example, but strongly indicative of what can be achieved where there is a will. Just as road construction encourages more traffic, road-space reduction causes some traffic just to 'disappear'. Re-enacting a failed change
is much more difficult than getting it right in the first place, as the political and community credibility of the scheme has been lost.

7 Greater reliability: better services – lower costs

7.1 The unpredictability of congestion

Apart from making journeys take longer than they should, a key feature of congestion is its unpredictability. Not knowing how long a trip will take is both frustrating inefficient, bringing about greater uses of time and money: both by individuals and in the form of national financial resources - a congested transport system is no way to run an economy. Choice of which mode of transport to use becomes 'no choice but to sit in a traffic jam'. Removing congestion enables improvements across the board.

Reducing congestion bring numerous benefits, not only to bus passengers and operators, but to society and the economy at large, including lower pollution and easier access for everyone to urban areas and city centres.

7.2 Improved timekeeping

Congestion makes it impossible for buses to keep to the timetables operators are legally bound to keep to when services are registered with the Traffic Commissioners

7.3 Reduced 'lost mileage'

Fewer journeys cancelled because of delays caused by congestion

7.4 Faster bus journeys

Higher operational speed and shorter journey times by removing time wasted sitting in a traffic jam

7.5 Better resource utilisation

Reduced numbers of vehicles and drivers needed to provide a particular level of service, leading directly to……

7.6 Lower costs of operation

However unproductively buses and staff perform on the road, they still have to be paid for and many costs are time- rather than mileage-related. So higher productivity cuts costs, enables fares to be kept down and makes better services more affordable

7.7 Fewer buses and drivers to deliver the same services

Many bus operators cite the need to increase running times due to road congestion, sometimes resulting in more buses being needed to maintain service frequencies. This is a totally unacceptable waste of resources that increases in costs – and therefore fares – for reasons entirely outside bus companies' control. For example, Nottingham City Transport (NCT), UK Bus Operator of the Year 2016, has increased end-to-end journey times on 27 of its services, of which six of the changes have required additional buses to be deployed in order to maintain the service frequency. There has also been a significant rise – over 10% in two years - in the number of passenger complaints in the two main categories (bus not turning up and bus late), largely attributable to congestion. It is difficult to mitigate congestion effects by altering bus schedules, as its causes and occurrence are so unpredictable: emergency roadworks which results in roads being closed with no prior notice; a broken down car in peak period taking a lane out of use on a main arterial road (which may have a knock-on effect for the next two hours); and bad (lazy) parking and unloading: all factors that bring unexpected delays.

7.8 Better managed utility and other highway works

The impact of the utility companies on traffic congestion is also serious: not only their own works but also the delay and cost they add to highway authority congestion removal schemes.

Delays to works have a particularly serious effect. For example, a major scheme to improve bus and general traffic flows at the Royal Infirmary junction in Hull was due for completion in August 2016, but is now unlikely to be finished until early 2017, due to errors in the original

Northern Gas main location records. This meant they were on site for weeks longer than they originally planned. Meanwhile the Council's contractor had moved on to other work and nothing happened in August the quietest time for traffic. Further delays then occurred when Northern Power Grid were unable to provide the appropriate labour for some weeks to connect up the new electric cables. The traffic signal contractors moved on to other work and will not return until January 2017.

Statutory undertakers also add to the cost of schemes as controls on their prices are inadequate. The key problem is that whilst the supply and retail aspects of gas and electricity supplies have been deregulated and are subject to competition, the network operators remain regulated monopolies, but are not regulated in terms of their impact on the highway. In his Autumn statement the Chancellor announced £1 billion to help local transport pinch-point schemes. We trust the allocation of this expenditure will be carefully monitored, as in the past too much of such spending has gone to utilities to cover the cost of moving underground infrastructure.

The same principle applies to other works on or adjacent to bus routes. Contractors must be made to plan work carefully in advance and to specify the time tasks will take. Adoption 'lane rental' principles would encourage/ensure work was completed on time, with penalties for noncompliance. As well as bus passengers/operators, whole urban communities suffer from the effects of roadworks; business less easy to reach, noise, dirt, less attractive environment, obstruction of the carriageway by works vehicles, etc. The timely completion of works will assist in managing disruption to local communities and businesses during construction and minimise delays to bus passenger and other road users.

An Oxford bus operator shows how roadworks in the city cause huge fluctuations in the punctuality the company can achieve. In 2015 this ranged from 99-100% in the best months to 91% overall. In 2016 punctuality dropped to 78% in the worst month, July. How, the company would like to know, can it take such random, externally-caused variations into account when registering its services?

7.9 Improve passenger perceptions

Passenger attitudes become more favourable when service quality improves, leading to more pleasant travel for customers and staff. We noted above the evidence of Sussex-based Compass Travel that congestion leads to late running, lost journeys, less frequent services, routes being shortened, poor driver morale and difficulty in recruiting road staff.

7.10 Higher staff morale

Higher job satisfaction boosts driver morale and assists the recruitment and retention of drivers by making their job less stressful. There is a knock-on effect on maintenance and engineering, as fewer buses cuts the requirement for maintenance, taking the pressure off staff and facilities. Less stop-start operation under congested conditions also reduces the wear and tear on the vehicles.

7.11 Better routes leading to greater inclusivity

Network and route structures can be designed more effectively if congestion is absent. In York, hardly any buses run towards the city on the inner section of the heavily-populated A19 corridor. Locally based SME operator Reliance diverted its inbound service via a much longer route to avoid the tailbacks that typically delayed buses by 15 minutes on the final quarter mile.

In King's Lynn, progressively all bus services are withdrawn from the regional Hospital from about 15.30 onwards due to traffic congestion. The quarter mile diversion in and out of the hospital grounds can add up to 30 minutes journey time, but with wide variably in the time taken.

The core message is that the impact of congestion affects real people, often inner suburban residents and visitors, who are the least likely to have cars and therefore most likely to feel the impacts of service withdrawal and diversion most greatly.

7.12 Urban motorways

Congestion on urban motorways also has a serious impact. Kent operator Chalkwell, which runs London coach services as an affordable alternative to rail for price-conscious commuters, reports that "once in London the delays are very unpredictable but can lead to running over an hour late". This has led to losses of patronage and to services being halved.

7.13 Pollution

Idling engines while queuing in congestion – whether buses or other vehicles – cause higher emissions and worse pollution than occur under free-flowing conditions.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

This submission is not just 'special pleading' on behalf of the bus industry. It has been prepared out of our genuine concern for the health of Britain's towns and cities; health in terms of economic viability, freedom for residents and visitors to experience un-polluted air, the ability of pedestrians – the people who make the city tick – to circulate simply, safely and without being subject to traffic-related impediments.

We firmly believe that to judge heavy traffic flows and extending the uptake of scarce urban land for roads as a 'virility symbol' of a strong economy is completely false. Such policies only serve to make our towns and cities unattractive and drive economic activity to out-of-town and fringe sites. Places people hate to work in, are beginning to turn against as 'optimal' for shopping, which lead to residential isolation; and of course generate yet more traffic, pollution and congestion. A vicious circle that policies to encourage more and better public transport access and pleasanter town and city centres can break, if only we would help it happen.

December 2016

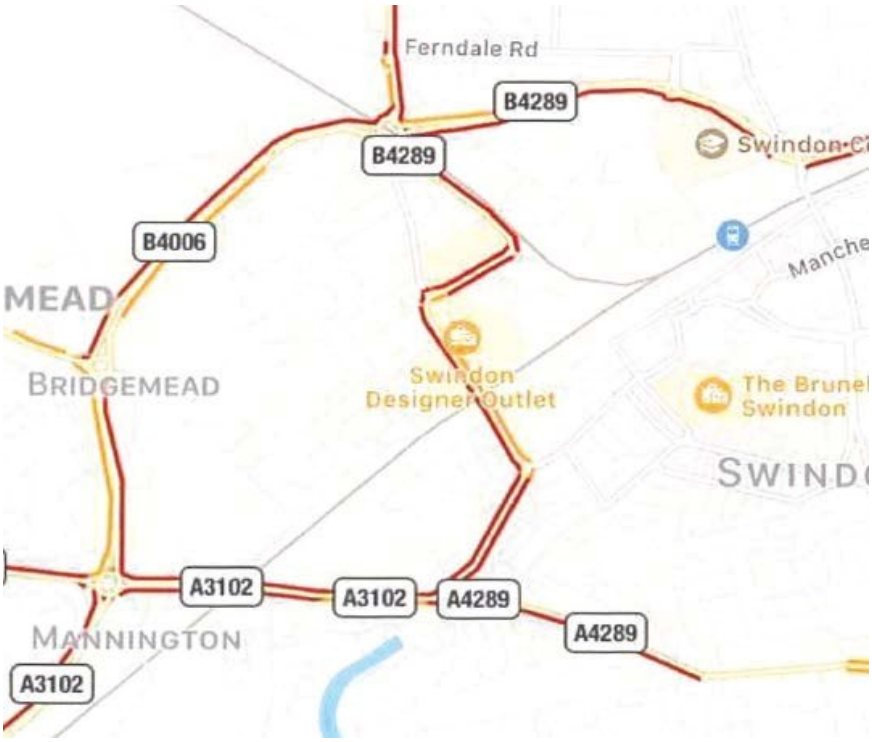
ALBUM MH
December 2017

Annexe to ALBUM Evidence

Case Study Report on Swindon from Thamesdown Transport

5th December 2016

Thamesdown has been facing increasing levels of congestion on Swindon roads for a number of years.



As a company we have been doing a number of things to try and deal with these changes.

To increase boarding speeds on our buses we discourage the use of cash fares on the buses use a combination of carrot and stick The carrot being the Swindon Travelpass which is a network wide pass valid on both Thamesdown and Stagecoach buses within Swindon.

Unlike most multi operator schemes there is no price premium for these products with both companies working together to ensure an amicable split of revenue is in place to reflect actual use on each other's buses.

The stick method is through the use of an exact fare which requires customers to have the right money for travel. Thamesdown does not give change in its buses in the belief that by not providing change on our buses then overall boarding times are quicker which helps maintain overall bus speeds.

Bus Priority

Swindon also does have a reasonable amount of bus priority within the town and uses bus enforcement cameras to assist compliance. Whist it disappointing that in recent years some of this has been removed which has contributed to increased levels of unreliability. The remaining bus lanes to the best of our knowledge is not under threat of being removed.

The picture on the right is the former bus lane on Paddington Drive that helped buses gain easier access to Meads Roundabout in Swindon.

In places our buses link with certain junctions within the town in order to trigger priority access.

Congestion Issues

The town has expanded considerably over the last 10 years with exciting plans for further substantial expansion over the next 10 – 20 years.

The recent expansion has contributed to the rapid increases in congestion which has been compounded through the recent expansion of the Swindon Outlet village.

Whilst the Outlet Village is a success for the town. Overall levels of traffic in the area now overwhelms the road network on a regular basis resulting in considerable delays in and around the town centre. The situation within Swindon is that there are now significant areas of the town without a bus services for periods in excess of 30 minutes due to town centre gridlock.

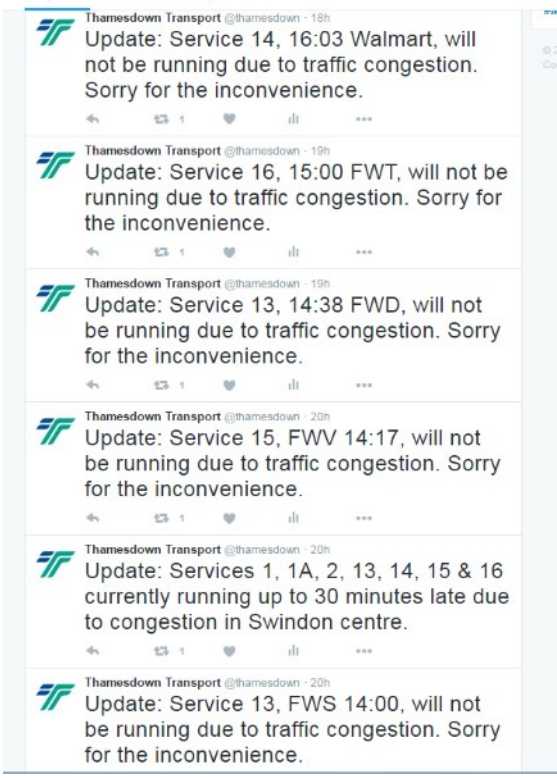
Unfortunately when it comes to network planning this can be quite difficult to adapt for. This is due to the variable nature of when congestion becomes a serious issue which can vary from week to week, sometimes hour to hour.

It is also quite hard to compete against the car when offering an alternative form of transport. All of the towns out of town retail parks (Swindon has the second highest concentration

of Out of town retail parks outside London) provide free parking. The town centre also provides reduced parking charges. Swindon has over 5,500 parking spaces within the town centre. It is possible to park in Swindon town centre for up to 4 hours for only £2.
The very popular Swindon Outlet Village charges £1 for parking up to 5 hours. Parking is free if spending more than £100
Thamesdown has though tried to adapt for these problems.

Thamesdown does provide reduced travel on weekends with the family dayrider at £5 we have also just commenced a December sale reducing the price of a Dayrider to £3.50.

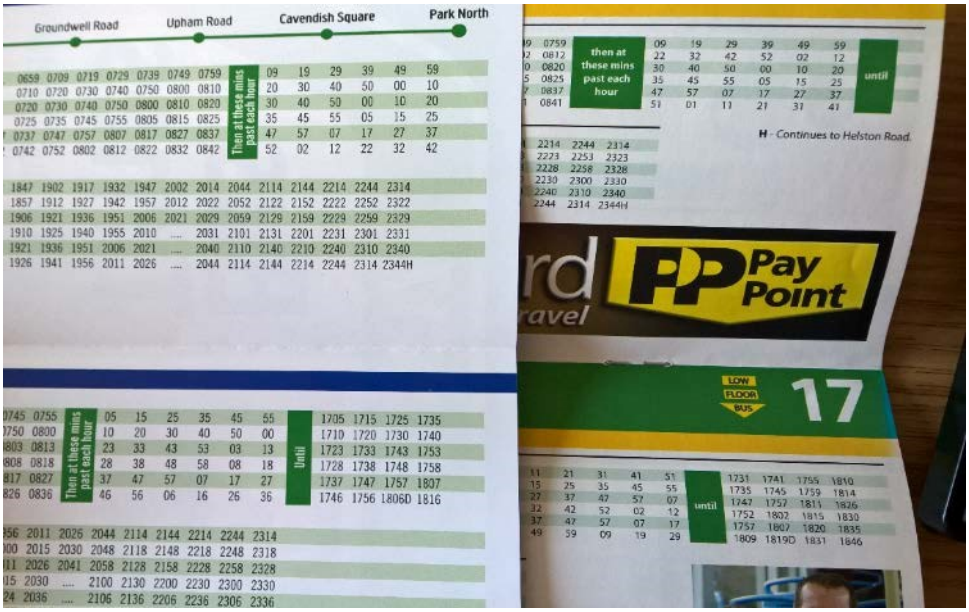
However it is fair to say that neither offer can compete against the provision of free or reduced parking charges, making it hard for the local bus network to do its bit in trying to reduce traffic congestion. We do our best to inform our passengers of problems with the highway through the use of Twitter. From September 2016 we increased the hours of cover within Customer services to 8pm Monday to Fridays. We carry out regular reviews of our network, making changes where ever possible in order to adapt to the increasing levels of congestion.



This usually results in increasing journey times on our services. So for example as part of our changes which commence from the 8th January we will be linking what was Service 16 which is the main service to the Great Western Hospital with Service 1/1A which operates between the Town Centre and West Swindon in the belief that linking these two services will make the overall timetable more resilient to congestion problems within the town centre, Outlet Village and Mannington.

This is not a new approach, indeed there are a number of bus services which have been given increased journey times over the last few years.
Indeed there are a number of services taking longer to do the same job compared to services in operation only six years ago. The best example of this is Thamesdown Service 17 which has operated the same route for over 30 years, yet compared to just six years ago, a vehicle operating this route was able to complete a full timetabled journey in 1hr 20 minutes. Now the same journey departing at the same time of day takes an additional 7 minutes, meaning the service requires one additional bus and 2 additional drivers in order to provide the same level of service as enjoyed by customers only six years ago.
There is no denying that slower bus speeds can result in reduced passenger numbers, indeed there are ¼ million fewer journeys now being made on this service each year. From the 8th January 2017 we will be increasing the frequency of this service to every 7/8 minutes in the hope of regaining this lost patronage. It is possible that due to increased levels of congestion in the

Gorse Hill area of Swindon, together with increasing congestion issues around Regent Circus that this service will need to be retimed again in the not too distant future.
Service 17 was once a service famous for being a service you could set your watch by, sadly it is now losing that reputation.



The timetable on the left is the 2016 Service 17 timetable

The timetable on the right is the same service as operated in 2008.

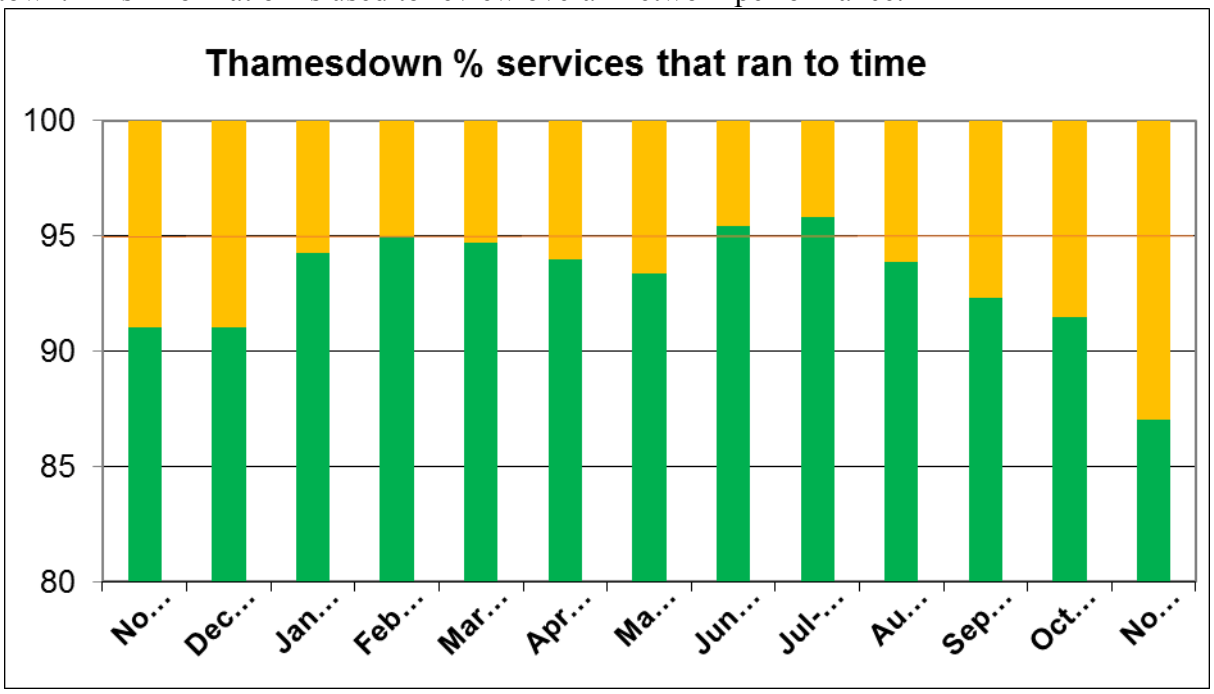
It is a similar story on a number of Thamesdown routes but for this report we have focused on the Service 17 as means of demonstrating that the continued deterioration of the transport system has led to slower bus speeds resulting in higher costs. This has an effect of weakening our ability to grow the network through investment be this in the form of operating a newer fleet, running more services, or existing services at a higher frequency.
Thamesdown until recently enjoyed an excellent reputation for being reliable and punctual. Indeed Thamesdown was bus operator of the year in 2011 due to its ability to maintain a high quality operation across the town.
Despite our continued best efforts we continue to encounter new areas of congestion on our network. The most recent example is Rodbourne Road.
2016 saw the completion of a multimillion pound road improvement scheme to Bruce Street Bridges.
Unfortunately one of the unintended consequences of the scheme has been the creation of heavy congestion during busy times on Rodbourne road. This is a road used by Service 13/14. Service 13/14 is Swindon principle bus service that connects the area of Haydon Wick with the Town Centre and Eldene.
The picture is Rodbourne Road during a recent period of heavy traffic in the area.

It was certainly disappointing that in the planning of the Bruce Street Bridges road improvement scheme that no additional bus priority was provided. Had it been provided then it is probable that

the current reliability problems with this service would not have been as severe as it has been of late.
Swindon Borough Council is aware of our concerns and have been modelling various options to see if improvements can be made.

Partnership Working

Thamesdown is engaged with Swindon Borough Council in working though these concerns. There is a commitment in the recently published local bus strategy to sign a Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership. The Borough council also has a team dedicated to encourage people to car share use the bike and bus through Swindon Travel Choices.
There are also schemes on the drawing board for improved bus access through Swindon Old Town.
We also work in partnership in the funding and operation of the Swindon real time system which is used to not only provide information to passengers on where their buses are, but also to track the overall performance of the system.
We currently monitor on a regular basis 88% of all Thamesdown bus movements within the town. This information is used to review overall network performance.



The above table shows Thamesdown Transport overall compliance over a rolling 13 month period. Green shows the percentage of buses that operated within the Traffic Commissioners window of tolerance.

Conclusion

It is felt that the situation in Swindon is not an unusual one. Like most major towns within the UK it has considerably increased in size over recent years which has brought increased pressures on the transport system.
If Swindon is reflective of the rest of the UK, then what does seem clear is that congestion levels will continue to rise. What is an unknown at this stage will be is will this be a problem for all forms of transport, or will special measures be put in place to ensure that buses will be able to get through.