

Written evidence submitted by Transmanche Metro (start up) to the Bus Services (No.2) Public Bill Committee (BSB20)

1. Clarifying Misconceptions Around Public Operation of Buses

There is a growing narrative that council-run bus operations are the answer to current service failings. In truth, many private operators – especially those with deep local roots – are ethical, effective, and better regulated than other privatised sectors. **The Go Ahead Brighton & Hove bus company is a fine example where they offer a guaranteed all access mobility service – wheelchair guarantee scheme.** What's missing is not ownership reform but structured subsidy and revenue capture that supports operators for delivering social and environmental benefit.

We urge the Committee to focus on:

- Revenue reform models that reflect road use impacts;
- Exploring voluntary visitor mobility levies in tourist-heavy rural areas;
- Ensuring all operators, regardless of ownership, can access appropriate long-term support.

2. Free Bus Trial Learnings – Route 418 (SW London/Surrey)

A recent free travel experience on a Sunday using heritage buses on Route 418 showed overwhelming public demand. Families and residents—not just enthusiasts—embraced the trial. Modal shift occurred immediately, with pressure shifting to other non car modes. This underscores the latent demand for local mobility if well-branded services are in place.

Recommendation:

- Include provision for local authorities to trial short-term fare-free or themed services, and gather data.

3. Data Blind Spots: PlusBus and Coach Travel

The Department for Transport currently lacks visibility over:

- PlusBus ticket uptake (despite full digitisation)
- Coach passenger volumes and movement trends

Both modes form part of an integrated journey but are systemically neglected. PlusBus remains one of the UK's best-kept integration secrets.

Recommendation:

- Require the DfT to report annually on multimodal integration statistics.

- Funded Viral Marketing and radio campaign – suggest launch Digital Plus Bus Brighton and Hove/Southern Trains extend into Seine Maritime SNCF Normandie and Bus network

4. Equity and Funding Mechanisms – A Sustainable Model for Rural Buses

Modal shift is essential for decarbonisation and access, but we must acknowledge that vehicle-related tax revenues currently underpin rural transport funding. The decline of these revenues, as EV adoption rises, threatens service viability.

We propose a national pilot of **visitor mobility levies** in congested rural/tourist zones— not punitive, but framed as a fair, local access contribution. Early modelling suggests this could raise up to **£1 billion/year**, enough to fund nearly 5,000 zero-emission buses over a decade.

This would:

- Be ringfenced for rural transit
- Protect local residents via exemptions
- Reinvest in routes, workforce skills, and infrastructure
- Potentially explore aligning with Scotland's tourist tax proposals, and global precedent (Switzerland/NZ)

Recommendation:

- Enable legislative framework for such pilots in high-traffic national parks and tourist areas.

5. Opportunity for Parcel and Freight Integration

Rural buses could connect smart lockers, last-mile parcel hubs such as village convenience stores, community pubs, churches, or mobile retail units/libraries . These generate new revenue streams and deliver co-benefits in remote communities. This principle already works in the Nordics and Germany.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/supporting-rural-mobility-infrastructure-through-innovative-transport-solutions-the-kombibus>

<https://brakar.no/en/customer-service-centre/sending-letters-or-packages-by-bus/>

Recommendation:

- Add provisions to allow for integrated passenger and light-freight models within bus franchising powers and private sector subsidy contracts.

6. Cross-Border Bus Travel Integration – Transmanche Metro Interest

We are actively exploring reconnection of cross-border travel through better integration between UK bus networks and northern France. The proposed **Transmanche Metro** aims to link bus and active travel corridors in **Kent/Scotland(Rosyth) to Hauts-de-France**, and **Sussex/Hampshire to Seine Maritime/Normandie** via underutilised ferry routes such as:

- Dover–Calais
- Newhaven–Dieppe
- Portsmouth – Le Havre
- Rosyth – Dunkerque (proposed route)

We are also researching a Dutch opportunity from Essex (Harwich to Hook of Holland and **the Northern Cities Arc across Hull/Newcastle – Rotterdam/Amsterdam**)

These routes have potential for climate-friendly, high-capacity international connectivity if local bus franchising powers are aligned to enable true multimodal access to ports and ferry terminals.

Recommendation:

- Recognise the opportunity of international modal integration via ferry in rural bus strategy.
- Support pilot regions to explore bilateral public transport access strategies with European partners.

Conclusion

The Bus Services Bill is timely. But structural subsidy, local fiscal innovation, and joined-up data and planning across modes are essential to ensure rural and cross-modal networks thrive. We would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee or support further discussion.

25th June 2025