University of BRISTOL

Not on the Buses

Professor Antonia Layard, University of Bristol Law School

Room 13 Hareclive, E-Act Academy

Ingrid Skeels, Bristol Child Friendly City Group

Finlay McNab, Streets Re-Imagined

Dr Phil Jones, University of Birmingham

The Bristol Law Research Paper Series publishes a broad range of legal scholarship in all subject areas from members of the University of Bristol Law School. All papers are published electronically, available for free, for download as pdf files. Copyright remains with the author(s). For any queries about the Series, please contact *researchpapers-law@bristol.ac.uk*.

Not on the Buses

A report from *The Bus Project* (2018-2020), researched by Room 13 Hareclive, E-Act Academy, Antonia Layard (University of Bristol), Ingrid Skeels on behalf of Bristol Child Friendly City Group, Phil Jones (University of Birmingham) and Finlay McNab (Streets Re-Imagined), funded by the Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol and the University of Bristol Law School.

Now's the Time - https://vimeo.com/325299656

1.   Introduction: Is it fair?

In October 2017, Mia, then aged 11, told the audience at Bristol's Festival of the Future City about buses:

> *"My family don't own a car and the bus fares are so expensive. Lots of people can't get into Bristol to experience everything in the city centre. Some children have never been into Bristol, yet they only live a few miles away. So, I want to ask you: how can children grow up and enjoy their cities if they can't get around them? And is it fair that some children can't do this at all?"*

Mia highlighted a problem that is not new but is nevertheless shocking. There are children living in south Bristol, four miles from the city centre, who have never visited it. While bus ridership in Bristol is rising, children living in Hartcliffe and Withywood, one of the least affluent wards in the city, where over 40% of households have no access to a car or van, are telling us that they are spatially excluded from their city because they cannot afford the price of buses.

Buses are Britain's most used form of public transport, accounting for 58% of all public transport trips.[1] Twelve million journeys a day are made by bus[2], totalling 4.8 billion a year in 2018-19. Nationally, bus use is declining (down by 62% from 1960[3]), particularly outside London (nearly half of all of bus journeys in England are in London – 2.12 billion of 4.32 billion[4]). Many metropolitan areas have seen a marked reduction in use, decreasing from an average of 46 trips per person in 2002 to 33 trips per person in 2018, accompanied by a reduction in mileage, down from 211 miles by bus per person in 2002 to 173 miles in 2018.[5] Reductions in bus use are conventionally attributed to rising car ownership, congestion slowing journey times and the reduction in local authority supported bus services due to budget cuts.[6]

Unusually, Bristol had been bucking the trend in declining bus ridership for some time, with patronage increasing to 92.1 journeys per head of population in 2018-19, an increase of 44% since 2012/13 (when the average stood at 63.7 per person) and an increase of 6% from 2017-18.[7] These increases, hailed by the City Council, are conventionally attributed to collaborative

[1] Department for Transport, 'Transport Statistics Great Britain 2019: Moving Britain Ahead' (2019) 13

[2] Department for Transport, 'Guidance: A Better Deal for Bus Users (Updated 6 February 2020)' (*GOV.UK*) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-better-deal-for-bus-users/a-better-deal-for-bus-users> accessed 2 April 2020

[3] Department for Transport, 'Transport Statistics Great Britain 2019: Moving Britain Ahead' (n 1) 3

[4] Department for Transport, 'Annual Bus Statistics 2018-19' (Statistical Release 17 December 2019) 1

[5] Department for Transport: Table NTS 0303

[6] Department for Transport, '2017 National Travel Survey' 1, 16-17 (this point was not repeated in the 2018 survey)

[7] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol City Council Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended March 2019 (Subject to Audit)' (2019) 11

fare negotiations, improved publicity, bus priority initiatives, controlling street parking, and the introduction of the Metrobus. Bristol's growth in bus use is consistent with a rise in the West of England more generally where 70 million bus passenger journeys were made in 2018/19, an increase of nearly 40% from 2011/12.[8] More recent data, however, indicates that Bristol's growth in patronage is declining, with the Council tasked to investigate why this is happening.[9]

Also, while these rises are undoubtedly pleasing, the bus's modal share in Bristol still lags behind many other UK cities at around 9.6%.[10] The public transport mode share for travelling to work is lower than most other comparable city regions, with relatively low levels of use of buses and trains[11] (though Hartcliffe has one the highest proportion of commuters by bus in the city).[12]

Mia's also words illustrate that increased bus mobility in Bristol is not necessarily trickling down. This realisation led to *The Bus Project* (2018-2020), a piece of research commissioned by the Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol. Children aged 7-12 working within Room 13 Hareclive, an independent, child-led artists' studio based in the grounds of Hareclive E-Act Academy in Hartcliffe, joined with academics at the Universities of Bristol and Birmingham to understand children's experience of buses. The project used arts-led methods (by the children), a survey (both paper-based and electronic), interviews with ten experts on bus policy as well as legal research to investigate how bus regulation appears to have caused spatial exclusion.

This report, *Not on the Buses*, comes out of *The Bus Project*, which found that children's experiences of bus travel are affected by bus prices as well as fear of the unknown and unfamiliarity about bus travel. The data for this finding was limited but the project provides a rare opportunity to hear what children are telling us directly. This report calls for funding at least some children's free bus travel in Bristol, perhaps including a pilot study, matching the free bus fares available to children in London under a different regulatory regime. Free bus travel for children might cost around £59.50 per child per year, using the average cost of an annual older or disabled person's bus pass at £119 as a proxy and halving it to reflect children's 50% fares on First Bus in Bristol.[13]

---

[8] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation Document* (2020) 5

[9] Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission, *Public Reports Pack* (Bristol City Council 2020) 8.

[10] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal' (2019) <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s41736/Bristol%20Bus%20Deal%20MOU.pdf> accessed 14 April, 2020

[11] West of England, '*West of England Joint Transport Study: Final Report*' (2017) 39

[12] Fraser Wilkinson, *Using Bristol's Quality of Life Survey to Investigate Trends in the City's Transport Sector: MSc in Environmental Policy and Management Dissertation* (University of Bristol, 2019) 12 (on file with the author).

[13] The £119 figure is taken from House of Commons Library, *Transport 2018: FAQ for MPs* (Briefing Report, Number CBP 7954, 2018), 13. This is the most recent edition of these FAQs. There are important differences between the way older people and children use buses (children are at school for 39 weeks of the year but

Given the undoubted effects of austerity on local authority funding, *The Bus Project* identified three possible ways to fund free fares for children: (1) (re)allocating discretionary funds from supported bus services to include categories of user (as permitted under the Transport Act 1985[14]); (2) finding other sources of funding, particularly but not limited to young people aged 16-18 for educational or economic development purposes; or (3) using the proceeds of either a road pricing or workplace levy scheme. This report does not recommend a single funding source for reform, calling instead for an investigation of possible funding streams.

This report has six parts: introducing the project; outlining buses in Bristol, setting out the project methodology and findings; providing the law and policy explanation for how our current system of bus governance evolved; outlining the three proposals for funding children's bus fares and a conclusion.

2. Buses in Bristol

2.1   History of buses in Bristol

The Bristol Omnibus Company (1875-1986) began life as the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company offering early horse drawn bus services from the Victoria Rooms to Clifton. After a number of acquisitions and sales, the company flourished, becoming the operating partner in the Bristol Joint Service (BJS), a joint undertaking with the Bristol Corporation which controlled bus services within the city (and initially also its trams, known as Bristol Tramways, until their disassembly between 1938 and 1941). At its peak, the Bristol Omnibus Company (BOC) was the dominant bus operator in Bristol and one of the oldest bus companies in the United Kingdom, running buses in Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. The BOC even manufactured its own buses after 1908, selling vehicles both nationally and abroad. As a company it underwent many changes, splitting off sections and purchasing neighbouring bus companies before being nationalised after World War II and later privatised by way of a management buyout of the rebranded Badgerline in 1986, before eventually becoming First Bus.[15] Today buses in Bristol are run by First West of England (owned by First Group), Stagecoach West (owned by Stagecoach Group) and Bristol Community Transport.[16]

---

might travel more at weekends and in holidays, for example) but at a national level (excluding London) this is the best estimate we currently have.

[14] Section 93(7). Subsequent amendments have not changed this power to support children and young people to use buses via publicly funded concessionary fares.

[15] This is a complicated history, with many branches and developments, see P Hulin, *Bristol's Buses* (Mather Bros, 1974), Mike Walker, *Bristol City Buses* (Amberley Publishing 2014) and Stephen Dowle, *Bristol Omnibus Company: The Twilight Years* (Amberley Publishing 2018)

[16] See First Group, *Putting Our Customers First Annual Report and Accounts* 2019 and First Bus West *Connecting People and Communities: Annual Report 2019*, Stagecoach *Stagecoach Group Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019* and *Stagecoach West April 2018 to March 2019* and <http://bristolcommunitytransport.org.uk/> accessed 20 March 2020

In 1963, buses became a flashpoint for justice and fairness when the Bristol Omnibus company implemented a colour bar, refusing to employ people of colour (even though this was not the case in the nearby city of Bath). The bar was supported by some in the city, including the Western Daily Press who suggested that "the solution obviously is to have sections in which coloured and white folk work apart so that the coloured man has a fair chance of promotion".[17] Quoting from this editorial, Madge Dresser notes that: "Just as Martin Luther King Jr was waging his historic campaign against segregation, here was the *Western Daily Press* trying to initiate it in Bristol!".[18] Instead, led by black Bristolian and youth worker Paul Stephenson, passengers implemented a 60 day boycott, which eventually induced the company to climb down, employing black as well as Asian crews from September 1963 onwards.[19] While bus activism on this scale was not seen again, members of the public have from time to time campaigned for reform, including the 2013 *Make Fair Fares* campaign, led by graphic designer Dan Farr.[20]

Buses provide particularly critical transport modes for residents on the outskirts of cities. Disputes illustrate that whilst these fights are often locally-based, their discourses resonate with global, national and local politics. Throughout cities, suburbs and rural areas, people share transport problems including long delays, partial networks and under-funding, all alongside the dominance of the private car. As Steven Higashide writes of the United States: if we had a technology that could hugely improve air quality, reduce climate change emissions, improve public health and make cities and towns pleasanter places to live wouldn't we hail it as an undoubted success? Well, we do, the humble bus.[21]

2.2   Bus Governance

Nationally

Bus companies were privatised in the 1980s, with commercial operators now running the vast majority of routes in England.[22] At a national level, transport policy comes primarily from the Department for Transport (DfT) and its agencies, non-departmental pubic bodies and other

---

[17] Madge Dresser, 'Black and White on the Buses: The 1963 Colour Bar Dispute in Bristol' <https://libcom.org/files/black-white-buses.pdf> accessed 2 April 2020
[18] Ibid
[19] For histories of discrimination against Sikh bus drivers and conductors particularly the resistance to the wearing of turbans instead of a peaked cap as part of bus uniforms see David Beetham, *Transport and Turbans: A Comparative Study in Local Politics* (OUP, 1970) and George Kassimeris & Leonie Jackson 'Negotiating race and religion in the West Midlands: narratives of inclusion and exclusion during the 1967–69 Wolverhampton bus workers' (2017) 31 *Contemporary British History* 343
[20] 'Dan Farr: Fighting for Fairer Fares' *BBC News* (4 April 2013) <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-21844236> accessed 27 April 2020.
[21] Steven Higashide, *Better Buses, Better Cities: How to Plan, Run, and Win the Fight for Effective Transit* (Island Press 2019)
[22] See Section 4

related bodies including DVLA, Highways England, Network Rail, the Civil Aviation Authority and HS2 Ltd. Some other Government departments also have responsibility for particular aspects of transport-related policy, including the Ministry of Justice (penalties for road traffic and other offences); the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (air quality, noise pollution and climate change); and Communities and Local Government (parking on private land). Bus operators are licensed by the Traffic Commissioners (though their routes are not).

Despite privatisation, buses are still heavily subsidised, at around 42%.[23] Bus operators depend on central government funding for Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG), Better Bus Area funding and the general, non-hypothecated grant, including concessionary fares. Bus funding forms a tiny proportion of the central government funding given to trains and highways, which account for 80% of all transport subsidy.[24] In particular, rail receives far more funding despite being used by far fewer, and far wealthier, public transport users. In 2019-20, £269,053,000 was to be spent on bus subsidies and concessionary fares, just 4.12% of the £6,516,078,000 spent on Network Rail.[25] This funding clearly benefits wealthier commuters: people in the highest income quintile make nearly three and a half times more rail trips each on average compared to those in the lowest.[26] Bus trips, meanwhile, are mostly made by those in the lowest income quintile and people without a car.[27] Bus operators also pay fuel duty, which aviation and rail services do not, leading to a complicated and partial rebate system under the Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG).

In their 2019 Report *Bus services in England outside London* the House of Commons Select Committee said that they "recognise that in the current financial situation additional funding for bus services is not likely to be found."[28] Such an admission of defeat was incredibly disappointing given the extent to which road and rail are prioritised by government transport funding. Buses even receive less money than the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (at £358,498,000).[29]

Those bus subsidies that exist are often fragmented and *ad hoc*.[30] The Government's 2020 *Better Deal for Bus Users* includes £220 million's worth of funding aims to support bus priority, information, one all electric bus or city as well as assisting with supported bus services. Yet these funds are apparently available only on a single financial year basis, which transport

---

[23] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (HC 2017-19 1425-I) 11

[24] Great Britain and Department for Transport, *Department for Transport Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19 (for the Year Ended 31 March 2019)* (2019) 25

[25] Ibid 275. Some of the categories in the tables overlap slightly, e.g. an additional £ 367,863 planned to be spent on local authority transport, which may also have included some bus funding

[26] Department for Transport: Table NTS0705

[27] Ibid

[28] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (n 23) 6

[29] Great Britain and Department for Transport, *Annual Report and Accounts* (n 24) 275

[30] Other than BSOG and the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS), which are both complex in practice

authorities must apply for on a short deadline**.**[31] The £5 billion, five-year spending package for buses, announced in February 2020 alongside the introduction of HS2 rail (estimated to cost between £35-45 Billion[32]), is still to be detailed in the upcoming National Bus Strategy, itself to be published later in 2020 at the Comprehensive Spending Review.[33] There was no further mention of buses in the 2020 Budget where £27 billion was allocated to the strategic road network.[34]

Expressing their frustration about subsidies, FirstGroup told the 2019 Transport Select Committee investigation into buses that: the "Government invests significant sums in the bus sector, but it is uncoordinated, fragmented and piecemeal, and there is an unfortunate habit of specifying the public policy outcomes but failing to fund the means (concessionary fares being the most damaging example)."[35] The Select Committee concluded that such: "views were reflected by most of the local authorities and bus operators we heard from".[36] The Committee recommended that "the Government consider how funding of bus services could be reformed to give local authorities and bus operators greater certainty about funding. The Government has long-term funding plans for roads and for rail investment; it seems strange not to have a similar plan for the most used form of public transport."[37]

Even with more consistent, multi-year funding settlements, however, one consistent theme is emerging in bus policy: to improve buses and the bus network for passengers. This makes huge sense in that, if the bus is an attractive travel option, more people with use it, profits will increase and the network will become increasingly viable. Two critical aspects, however, are often missing from debates. The first is competition in road space between buses and cars, leading to congestion and delays. One critical factor here is the cost of fuel versus the cost of the bus. Tucked away in the 2019 Transport Select Committee's report is a single reference to fuel duty:

> "It has been government policy since 2010/11 not to increase fuel duty. Had fuel duty been increased by inflation over this period it would have seen revenues

---

[31] Department for Transport, 'Funding for Supported Bus Services in 2020-2021' (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-supported-bus-services-funding> accessed 14 April 2020

[32] The Infrastructure and Projects Authority considers that this first phase can be delivered for its current projected cost of £35 billion to £45 billion in today's prices. Department for Transport, 'PM statement on transport infrastructure: 11 February 2020' (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-transport-infrastructure-11-february-2020> accessed 20 March 2020

[33] Gov.uk 'Major boost for bus services as PM outlines new vision for local transport: 10 February 2020' (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-boost-for-bus-services-as-pm-outlines-new-vision-for-local-transport> accessed 20 March 2020

[34] HM Treasury, *Budget 2020: Delivering on our promises to the British people* (HM Treasury, 2020, HC 121)

[35] Written evidence submitted by FirstGroup to House of Commons Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (2018, BHC0122)

[36] House of Commons Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (n 23) 19

[37] Ibid 4

increase by £9 billion per year ... The Government has explained that this policy is to assist with the cost of living by freezing fuel duty but has not explained why this principle does not extend to the costs associated with bus (or rail) fares (other than through concessionary fares)."[38]

Once again in the 2020 Budget fuel duty was frozen, despite being critical to debates on transport and bus policy. Plotting the increase in motoring costs against public transport costs, the RAC foundation found that bus prices had increased by nearly double the amount of motoring costs.[39] It is often cheaper and far more time efficient to drive than to travel by bus. Research also consistently demonstrates that access to a car improves people's life chances, particularly in relation to employment, access to services and social participation.[40]

Asked to wave a magic wand for children's bus fares, one expert told *The Bus Project* without hesitation that he would use the wand:

> "to raise fuel duty, to reinstate the fuel duty escalator and probably to bring in some mechanism that enables local authorities to raise ringfenced revenue support for bus services".[41]

To make buses a truly viable form of public transport, we need to tackle the dominance on roads of the private car, including by addressing transport subsidies and limits on fuel duty: both national decisions.

A second missing theme concerns who has access to the bus. Aspirations are often expressed in absolute numbers rather than focusing on currently excluded groups (for example, while we wait for a National Bus Policy to be published, at regional level, the new West of England proposal is to double bus ridership by 2036[42]). New funding initiatives do not explicitly mention excluded groups, even though legally, it is permissible to subsidise users as much as routes.[43] While older and disabled passengers benefit from free bus travel, children and young people have no national public subsidy whatsoever. Strikingly, the focus on transport accessibility developed within work on social exclusion and transport poverty is frequently redirected to be understood as physical accessibility rather than focusing on economic vulnerability.[44] And while older and disabled people are well represented in modern transport

---

[38] Ibid 29

[39] RAC, 'Cost of Motoring against Costs of Public Transport' <https://www.racfoundation.org/data/cost-of-transport-index> accessed 10 April 2020

[40] Kiron Chatterjee and others, *Access to Transport and Life Opportunities* (Department for Transport 2019).

[41] Interview 126/05/2020 12:58:00

[42] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation Document* (n 8)

[43] Transport Act s93(7)

[44] See for example, Department for Transport, *Accessibility Action Plan Consultation* (2017); *The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People* (2018)

research, there are far fewer attempts to understand the effects of immobility on children and young people or any other sub-group.[45]

One of the striking aspects of bus policy is that it is governed at multiple scales of governance – nationally, regionally and locally – with global discourses often resonating. National government could undoubtedly do much, much more to support bus services and address the substantial financial preference accorded to rail. Given the environmental, social and spatial advantages of the bus, national levers must be considered and regional and local governments should lobby for greater bus funding. In Scotland, the devolved government has recently decided that it will introduce free bus travel for all children and young people under 19[46], demonstrating that funding can be found if the political will exists.

WECA

The 2016 Budget announced the devolution of powers to the West of England, with the West of England Combined Authority coming to life in 2017. This included the election of a Metro Mayor, currently Conservative Tim Boles (on a 29.7% turn out). Originally WECA was to cover the same area as the County of Avon (1974-1996), drawing on remnants of collaborations and regional memories[47], yet this plan was frustrated when North Somerset Council rejected the proposal. Councillor Nigel Ashton, Leader of the Council, was quoted as saying that North Somerset did not want "the additional costly and bureaucratic layer of decision making that a combined authority and metro mayor would bring".[48]

WECA's constituent councils are now Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset (BANES), who are to collectively benefit from the £30 million a year granted to WECA (50% capital and 50% revenue), amounting to around £1 billion of investment to deliver infrastructure to boost economic growth in the region". This funding will be subject to "gateway assessments" every five years where independent assessors will investigate the "economic benefits and economic impact of the investments made under the scheme, including whether the projects have been delivered on time and to budget".[49] In transport matters, North Somerset participates in the Joint Local Transport Plan (as well as the Joint

---

[45] Emily Cooper, Shivonne Gates and Molly Mayer, Byron Davis, Urszula Bankiewicz, Dr Priya Khambhaita., *Transport, Health and Wellbeing* (Department for Transport 2019); Shivonne et al Gates, *Transport and Inequality* (Department for Transport 2019).

[46] Mure Dickie, 'Scotland to Extend Free Bus Travel to 18-Year-Olds *Financial Times* (26 February 2020) <https://www.ft.com/content/e2370e3e-58c8-11ea-a528-dd0f971febbc> accessed 10 April 2020, though this pledge was not in the Scottish Budget itself.

[47] 'Progress in Setting up Combined Authorities' (HC 2017-19 240-I) 24

[48] Cited in 'Tests for the West: Devolution to the West of England' (*The British Academy*) <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/tests-west-devolution-west-england> accessed 10 April 2020.

[49] West of England Combined Authority Devolution Agreement 2016, para 51(a)

Spatial Plan and the West of England Local Economic Partnership).[50] It is WECA, however, that is responsible for developing a Joint Local Transport Plan and a Bus Strategy.[51] There is also an emerging Sub-National Transport Board, the Western Gateway, though strikingly its evidence base makes no mention of either buses or coaches.[52]

The scope of devolution is legally set out in the West of England Combined Authority Order of 2017[53] with WECA now responsible for housing, economic development and infrastructure, including transport. Central Government budgets for transport (as well as for adult education and economic regeneration) have been increasingly delegated to the regional authority[54] and WECA is now responsibility for a devolved and consolidated local transport budget, with a multi-year settlement.

WECA forms the Local Transport Authority for the Devolution area, with transport functions that include concessionary fares, bus information and community transport. It was the 2016 Devolution Agreement that gave the metro mayor the "ability to franchise bus services, subject to necessary legislation and local consultation, which will support the Combined Authority's delivery of smart and integrated ticketing".[55] Under the 2017 Order, WECA has the powers and duties contained in Parts 4 and 5 of the Transport Act 1985 as well as Part 2 of the amended Transport Act 2000.[56]

Transport powers are divided between Mayoral and Combined Authority Powers. The mayor's powers include taking responsibility for a devolved and consolidated local transport budget, with a multi-year settlement, franchising and responsibility for a Key Route Network of local roads, defined and agreed by the constituent local authorities, managed and maintained at a city region level. Combined Authority transport powers include policy development, entering into joint working arrangements with Highways England and Network Rail as well as proposals to implement Clean Air Zones in the Combined Authority area. The possibility of introducing either road user charging or workplace parking levies under Part 3 of the Transport Act 2000 have not been allocated to WECA and remain with local authorities.

---

[50] The Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP) was last approved in 2011 by the four West of England authorities, including North Somerset Council. The JTLP covers the years 2011 to 2026, see Travelwest, *Draft Joint Local Transport Plan 4 2019-2036* (January 2019)

[51] Required by the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. Consultations on the fourth version of the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP 4), underpinned by a 2017 Joint Transport Study, closed in 2019.

[52] Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body, *Regional Evidence Base and MRN / LLM Scheme Priorities*, July 2019 <https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/media/2090915/wg-reb-introduction.pdf> accessed 20 March 2020

[53] Building on the *West of England Devolution Agreement* (2016) as well as the 2012 City Deal and the 2014 and 2015 Growth Deals.

[54] West of England Combined Authority, *Statement of Accounts For the year ended 31st March 2019* (WECA, 2020)

[55] West of England Devolution Agreement (2016) para 44(b), subsequently also the Bus Services Act 2017

[56] Local Government, England Transport, England: The West of England Combined Authority Order 2017, SI 2017/126, Reg 8(4)

In January 2020, Bristol City Council transferred staff and transport functions (including Travelwest and Metrobus) to WECA in line with the 2017 Order. The Integrated Transport Authority functions are now the legal responsibility of WECA and highway powers – which are important for creating bus priority measures in congested areas – also remain with the relevant highway authority.

One exception to these transfers is supported bus services, which are jointly held by WECA and the constituent councils.[57] One 2017 WECA document suggests that "joint powers" means that both WECA and the constituent councils can use the relevant powers in the Transport Act 1985 with the approval of the other organisation but cannot use the powers unilaterally.[58] However, a subsequent WECA document suggests that: "Joint responsibility means that individual Unitary Authorities must make a decision independently of the Combined Authority in line with their own constitutions."[59] Supported bus services are not explicitly mentioned in either the 2016 WECA Agreement or the 2017 Order[60] and there is no reason why devolution to the regional scale should necessarily inhibit local authority decision-making in respect of supported bus services. These different interpretations appear to lie in questions of policy translation rather than legal requirements. It is, however, WECA who can bid for the additional £736,397 in 2020 for supported bus services under the 2020/21 *ad hoc* Better Bus Funding provision.

After some delays, WECA's Bus Strategy was published for consultation in February 2020.[61] Its absence has led to considerable frustration, expressed by one of *The Bus Project's* interviewees:

> "I was reading through some of the minutes of when the West of England Combined Authority was set up, and one of the councillors asked, 'When will this be a bus strategy?' and this was back when he first came in, in 2017, and they said, 'Oh, by the end of the year.' We're now in 2019, and there is still no bus strategy. We're over halfway through his term, and there has not been any clear plan."[62]

---

[57] Ibid

[58] West of England Combined Authority Committee, *Public Document Pack* (2017) <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/20170315-WECA-15-March-2017-Combined-Doc.pdf> accessed 20 March 2020

[59] West of England Combined Authority Committee, *Public Document Pack* (2018) <https://westofengland-ca.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g129/Public%20reports%20pack%2030th-Nov-2018%2010.30%20West%20of%20England%20Combined%20Authority%20Committee.pdf?T=10> accessed 20 March 2020

[60] Though are included in Part V of the 1985 Transport Act, delegated to WECA under the 2017 Order. Almost certainly, the precise details of supported bus services were not contemplated in any detail at the time of devolution.

[61] The Bus Strategy is to include North Somerset, even though the authority is not part of WECA

[62] Interview 5

The 2020 Consultation proposes an ambitious target of doubling passenger numbers by 2036. Both in Bristol and at WECA level, increasing bus use is desired to underpin a greater mode shift towards public transport laying the way for the delivery of a subsequent mass transit network.[63] The latest, 2019, draft of the Joint Local Transport Plan 4, noted that:

> "The Bus Strategy will include a wider framework to assess gaps in the commercial bus network, including consideration of estimated patronage, links to deprived areas, links to employment and contribution to tackling traffic congestion. This information will be used to ensure bus services provide realistic opportunities for travel."[64]

Hopefully this will provide an opportunity to consider questions of transport equity and justice.

Strikingly, however, WECA's transport vision is primarily framed in terms of infrastructure, justifying its funding. In its 2019 update, WECA confirmed that its transport policy was not focused on mobility for its own sake but rather to support the delivery of new homes (as set out in the Joint Spatial Plan – currently back for re-drafting) as well as "inclusive growth by improving access".[65] Confirming once again that transport is a major barrier to economic growth in the West of England National[66], the 2019-20 update stressed that WECA's transport policy is also – inevitably – regional:

> "We need joined-up and reliable transport, to reduce congestion and help people move around the region. This includes suburban rail services, road schemes and improved public transport, as well as better connections for motorbikes, cyclists and pedestrians."[67]

There is something of a geographic tension here. As the 2020 WECA *Bus Strategy* consultation document notes:

> "The West of England is, in terms of its geography, predominately a rural area. Accessibility for rural communities is a critical issue, including the provision of bus

---

[63] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal' (n 10); West of England, 'West of England Joint Transport Study: Final Report' (n 11) 44 and Bristol City Council, Key Decision: Bus Deal (01 October 2019) <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s41827/Bus%20Deal%20cabinet%20report%20DRAFT%20v16%20MO.pdf> accessed 14 April 2020

[64] Travelwest, 'Joint Local Transport Plan: 2020-2036', 55

[65] WECA, *WECA Business Plan 2019-20, Mid-Year Update September 2019* (2019) 4

[66] Atkins, *Unlocking Our Potential: The Economic Benefits of Transport Investment in the West of England: Atkins and the West of England Authorities* (2012)

[67] WECA, *WECA Business Plan 2019-20, Mid-Year Update September* (n 65) 4

services to enable access to jobs and education, as well as leisure and retail destinations." [68]

What is left unsaid is that in urban areas, accessibility is also critical for access to lower paid jobs and education as well as to facilitate leisure and citizenship. There is also significant two-way traffic. The 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy explained that "60% of people driving to work in Bristol city centre do so from neighbouring areas, and over 35,000 Bristol residents drive to workplaces outside of Bristol".[69] WECA covers a particularly large landmass and is far less densely populated than the other Combined Authorities. Yet although WECA has a mixed population in transport terms, which can cause tensions, the transport accessibility challenges faced by vulnerable rural and peri-urban residents are often remarkably similar.

Our interviews demonstrated a consistent shared concern about mobility, hoping to protect the most vulnerable be they elderly, disabled as well as children growing up with immobility. As WECA's own documents say: "the continued operation of supported bus services and community transport are critical to helping promote social inclusion and enable residents, particularly those who are vulnerable to access work, education and leisure facilities".[70] A WECA-wide pilot study for free bus travel for children would be quite possible. Areas of deprivation exist throughout the region, including in Twerton in BANES as well as in Mangotsfield in South Gloucestershire where children may well face similar mobility issues. There are strong arguments for a WECA-wide response to children's exclusion from buses.

To intervene in buses effectively, it is crucial to focus not only on routes but also on types of people who currently cannot afford to use the buses at all (as national governments have done for older and disabled people). At a possible annual cost of £59.50 per child, WECA has the capacity to lead the way here, at the very least undertaking a pilot study to investigate the possibility of free bus fares for deprived children wherever they live in the region. When the gateway assessments come to be undertaken after the first five years of funding, innovative transport initiatives, including those that link to better education outcomes at post-16[71], could be useful.

Bristol City Council

Given the structure of bus governance in England, and particularly the emphasis on privatisation, local authorities have limited powers to govern buses. What they can do is fund supported or subsidised bus services (which in Bristol have been focused on particular routes as well as an additional subside for older and disabled people travelling between 9am and 9.30am). "Subsidised services" are those not deemed commercially viable by private

---

[68] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation* (n 8) 5
[69] Bristol City Council, *Bristol Transport Strategy* (Bristol City Council, Bristol, 2019) 25
[70] West of England Combined Authority Committee, *Public Document Pack* (n 58)
[71] See below under *Proposal 2*

operators, which have to be supported by local authorities if they are to continue. The viability of these services depends on local authorities having the funds to support them. This is increasingly difficult at a time of local authority finance austerity when, as the National Audit Office (NAO) estimated in 2018, there was a 49.1% real-terms reduction in government funding for local authorities, 2010-11 to 2017-18 and a 28.6% real-terms reduction in local authorities' spending power (government funding plus council tax), 2010-11 to 2017-18.[72]

Increasing bus use is a policy priority for Bristol City Council. It is widely recognised that greater bus use supports economic growth, reduces carbon emissions, improves quality of life and contributes to better natural environment, improves safety, health and security as well as promotes accessibility. The 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy notes the interconnection between car and vehicle drivers and bus use, in a city where "the majority of public transport use is by bus", stating that:

> "… in order to improve reliability of buses we need to improve the resilience of our road and rail network and reduce congestion by encouraging people out of individual cars and on to vehicles that carry larger numbers of people."[73]

Yet until competition for road space between buses and private motor vehicles is tackled, reliability will remain a problem. Perhaps this issue will be considered by the newly set up Bristol Transport Board, an outcome from the Bristol Congestion Task Group.[74]

The Council often works in partnership with bus operators. The most recent collaboration is the *Bus Deal 2019*, a legally non-binding, currently unfunded, Memorandum of Understanding aims to deliver "an ambitious programme of work to deliver significant improvements in Bristol's buses" particularly for commuting to work.[75] This deal forms **"part of a nested deal with the other West of England authorities"**, where the remaining WECA Highway and Transport Authorities will mirror their individual deals along a route, corridor or geographic area. The proposals promote infrastructure and policy changes, particularly facilitating bus priority**.** A Bus Deal Delivery Board is to be established to steer the development and delivery of the partnership, including senior representatives from WECA, its constituent authorities and bus operators.

The seven objectives of the partnership agreement are aimed first at buses and then at transport infrastructure more generally. The first four objectives are to:

1. Increase the modal share of bus to 20% of all journeys in Bristol by 2031 (subject to Bus Strategy target confirmation).

---

[72] National Audit Office, *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities 2018* (HC 2017–2019 834-I) 4
[73] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Transport Strategy' (n 69) 33
[74] Bristol City Council, 'Recommendations from The Bristol Congestion Task Group' (2018)
[75] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal' (n 10)

2. Double the peak frequency of bus services on core corridors.
3. Use new technology to inform the partnership where services are most delayed.
4. Deliver further substantial investment in a greener and more modern bus fleet for Bristol.

The next three objectives aim to support a more sustainable transport future for Bristol and the region by:

1. Reduction of parking in the City Centre, and the prioritisation of public transport over private vehicles, particularly at junctions, to encourage behaviour change.
2. Promote and deliver infrastructure schemes and service levels which make the bus a more attractive option for travel across the city.
3. Development of further Park & Ride facilities.

These seven objectives are to be applied to eight priority routes based on "the scale of impact" using bus service punctuality and passenger numbers to determine "where investment can yield the maximum customer benefit".[76]

While increasing bus use is a shared objective between commercial operators and local authorities, reducing car use, pollution, congestion and facilitating active travel, for Bristol City Council, the **"Bus Deal is the precursor to mass transit"**. Introducing the Bus Deal, the Council said that:

> "Metrobus services are the first step towards an integrated rapid and mass transit network and future Metrobus routes and a park and ride scheme which will build on the launch of these successful services. This will create an integrated regional rapid transit network that is the backbone of the wider bus network. These schemes, along with improvements for the background bus network, will build the user base for public transport in the region and help develop the demand for a mass transit system. The bus deal will tie together our wider regional aspirations for improving bus services as a forerunner to a fully integrated transport network, with mass transit at its core."[77]

Again, there is no mention in any of the announcements of a mass transport system about who will use the new services and whether poorer, older or younger users will be able to afford to travel in this way.

---

[76] Ibid, 7
[77] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal: Decision Pathway' (n 63)

Children are rarely mentioned in transport strategies (if they are, it is conventionally in terms of walking to school[78] or in one very helpful intervention, focusing on safety on local roads[79]). In the context of the One City Plan and, individually as councilors, Bristol City Council is alive to inequality. The Bus Deal announcement stated that the "the development of a high quality bus network delivers benefits across all Corporate Strategy Themes" including "Empowering and Caring: It increases independence particularly in the young, as well as maintaining social inclusion for all and especially older people".[80] In transport strategies, however, there is little mention of children or young people as bus users.

If young people can afford bus fares, a good bus network can increase independence and engender a feeling of belonging (as the research on free bus travel in London shows[81]). However, it is striking that once again in the Bus Deal announcement, social inclusion is mentioned for older people and no mention is made of the fact that older people are entitled to free bus travel regardless of financial need, while all children, regardless of financial need, have to pay. There is also no mention in the Bus Deal of bus fares or of transport fairness or justice. The aim is to increase absolute bus usage, there is a notable absence of emphasis on who is catching the bus. Further, while the A37 and A38 are the second and third priority respectively in the 2019 Bus Deal, Room 13 in Hartcliffe lies a 20-30 minute walk from either of these main "radial corridors".

Bus Routes

First Bus currently has a single "bus zone" in Bristol, extending around Cribbs Causeway, Winterbourne, Keynsham, Wraxall and Flax Bourton. It is one of First's four bus zones in the West of England, together with the Bath, Weston Super Mare and the West of England. Stagecoach West expanded its services by taking over discontinued Wessex Bus services in 2018, while Bristol Community Transport provide community-focused transport services.[82] The First Bus routes run on a "hub and spoke" model, bringing customers into the centre of

---

[78] Ibid

[79] Bristol City Council, 'A Safe Systems Approach to Road Safety in Bristol: A 21st Century Approach: A Ten Year Plan 2015-2024' (2015) <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/34140/A+Safe+System+Approach+to+Road+Safety+in+Bristol.pdf> accessed 2 April 2020

[80] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal: Decision Pathway' (n 63)

[81] Judith Green, Alasdair Jones and Helen Roberts, 'More than A to B: The Role of Free Bus Travel for the Mobility and Wellbeing of Older Citizens in London' (2014) 34 Ageing & Society 472; Judith Green and others, 'Integrating Quasi-Experimental and Inductive Designs in Evaluation: A Case Study of the Impact of Free Bus Travel on Public Health' (2015) 21 Evaluation 391; Alasdair Jones and others, 'Rethinking Passive Transport: Bus Fare Exemptions and Young People's Wellbeing' (2012) 18 Health & Place 605; Anna Goodman and others, '"We Can All Just Get on a Bus and Go": Rethinking Independent Mobility in the Context of the Universal Provision of Free Bus Travel to Young Londoners' (2014) 9 Mobilities 275; Judith Green and others, 'On the Buses: A Mixed-Method Evaluation of the Impact of Free Bus Travel for Young People on the Public Health' (2014) 2 Public Health Research 1

[82] <http://bristolcommunitytransport.org.uk/bristol_community_transport/about_bct> accessed 14 April, 2020

Bristol along "radial corridors". In 2018, the Metrobus was finally introduced, consisting of three services; the m1, m2 and m3 (and M3x) though the bus only section of the South Bristol Link Road and connection to Bristol Parkway are still to be brought into regular use.

There is within, the city, a decent network for many, the crisis in bus networks is, as one expert interviewee told us, in rural or inter-urban routes where, as one industry interviewee told us: "if there are further cutbacks, that's going to be a place that actually might not end up with any bus service whatsoever."[83] In particular, the service between Hartcliffe and the city centre is regular and reliable during daytime hours – if long at the Hartcliffe end. The children have told us, however, that they just can't afford to get on the bus.

Bus Fares

Bus fares have undergone greater experimentation in Bristol than in many other English cities. In 2013 a campaign was launched by Dan Farr to "make fares fair", which resulted in price reductions, including the 50% discount for children. However, fares crept up again, reaching £3 for a single *Long Trip* of over three miles within the Bristol's *Inner Zone*. In October 2018, First Bus introduced a flat fare across the city for single tickets, no longer distinguishing journeys of more than three miles, benefitting bus users living further away from the city centre, including the children at Room 13.

Initially priced at £2, flat Bristol fares increased in November 2018 and since September 2019 cost £2.25/£2.50 for adults, £1.60/1.80 for students or £1.30 /£1.50 for children aged 5-15. The cheaper cost is the price of a ticket bought in advance from shops or via the M-ticket app. A Group all-day ticket for up to five people allowing travel after 9.30 am Mondays-Fridays and all-day Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays costs £9/10. [84]

---

[83] Interview 3

[84] FirstBus, *Fares Guide 2019* (2019) <https://www.firstgroup.com/uploads/node_images/J12851%20Fares%20Guide%200619%20AW%20web.pdf > accessed 6 April 2020. The cheaper price is when M-tickets are used – which require a mobile phone and data – the higher price is paid direct to the driver on the bus

3   The Bus Project

The Bus Project was a collaborative project that ran from 2018-2020. The researchers were Room 13 Hareclive at Hareclive E-Act Primary (a creative collective of children and adults including Shani Ali and Paul Bradley, co-founders and artist educators, with Ingrid Skeels a writer and development worker); Antonia Layard (at the University of Bristol); Ingrid Skeels, also as an independent consultant on behalf of the Bristol Child Friendly City working group and Phil Jones (at the University of Birmingham). It was first funded by the Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol who paid Room 13 to develop the first draft of the survey questionnaire, administer it within the school and make the film *Now's the Time*. Further funding from the University of Bristol Law School funded Finlay McNab of Streets Re-Imagined to organise the interviews, conducted with Antonia Layard, with ten experts in bus policy and governance.

Hartcliffe & Hareclive E-Act Primary

Hareclive E-Act Primary is located between Bishport Avenue and Hareclive Road, the two most deprived streets in Bristol, with index of multiple deprivation (IMD) scores of 65 and 67 respectively.[85] As a Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) "Hareclive" in Hartcliffe and Withywood ward ranks in the most deprived 100 neighbourhoods in England.[86] The ward, Hartcliffe and Withywood, has a proportionately higher number of children aged 0-15, who make up 25.2% of residents, compared to a Bristol-wide average of 18.5%.[87] There are also proportionately more children in care than in the rest of Bristol, 85 per 1,000, compared with 35.2 per 1,000[88] as well as a proportionately higher number of older people living in the ward, 14.6% compared with 13.2% as well as a greater proportionate number of respondents who say that disability prevents them from leaving their house when they want to, 17% compared to 6% in Bristol as a whole. Hartcliffe and Withywood is 92.8% White British, far above the Bristol average of 77.9%.[89]

---

[85] Bristol City Council, *Deprivation in Bristol: The Mapping of Deprivation within Bristol Local Authority Area* (2015) <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/32951/Deprivation+in+Bristol+2015/429b2004-eeff-44c5-8044-9e7dcd002faf> accessed 6 April 2020
[86] Bristol City Council, *Deprivation in Bristol: The Mapping of Deprivation within Bristol Local Authority Area* (n 82)
[87] Bristol City Council, *Hartcliffe & Withywood Statistical Ward Profile 2019* (2019) <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/436737/Hartcliffe+and+Withywood.pdf/49d31847-00da-471c-95c8-82630662e073> accessed 2 April 2020. This figure is rising, it was 25.2% of 18.6% in 2018, Bristol City Council, *Hartcliffe & Withywood Statistical Ward Profile 2018* (2018) 3
[88] Ibid
[89] Ibid

Many children receive free school meals, over 70% at Hareclive E-Act Academy[90], a figure well above the ward as a whole at 38.7%, Bristol's average of 20.3%[91] and nationally of 15.4%.[92] Nearly half the children in the ward (48.4%) are recorded as "disadvantaged"[93], compared to a city-wide average of 27.7%.[94] On the majority of local authority measures Bristol continues to have lower levels of deprivation relative to the other English Core Cites, yet it is a striking feature of the city that it continues to have deprivation 'hot spots' that are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country yet are adjacent to some of the least deprived areas in the country.[95]

A lack of bus mobility has been linked to educational outcomes. One 2018 study found a significant participation gap in higher education with only 8.6% of students in Hartcliffe and Withywood going on to university between 2007-2011, despite many more having the qualifications to do so.[96] UCAS data demonstrates that South Bristol had the second lowest rate of entry to University in England in 2016 (and twelfth in the UK) behind only Barrow in Furness in Cumbria, despite being less than a mile away from constituencies where entry to university is one of the highest in the country.[97] One hypothesis for this is that young people in South Bristol are unable to access post-16 education opportunities in more affluent parts of the city as they cannot afford the bus fares, which then limit both their opportunities and aspirations.[98]

One of the striking aspects of bus use in Hartcliffe is that the ward is served by some of the most reliable buses in Bristol, FirstBus's 75 and the 76. Older and disabled people who have the necessary passes can use these buses free of charge. Since the data-collection phase of *The Bus Project*, fare-paying passengers benefitted from the 2018 changes which equalised fare structured across the city, before prices were slightly increased again in 2019.[99]

---

[90] Figure provided by Hareclive E-Act Primary, email on file with the authors

[91] Bristol City Council, *Hartcliffe & Withywood Statistical Ward Profile 2019* (n 87)

[92] Department for Education, 'Schools, Pupils and Their Characteristics' (2019) 6. The average figure for primary schools is slightly higher at 15.8% (and 14.1% for secondary schools, 37.5% in special schools and 42.5% in pupil referral units) but the Bristol figures appear to combine schools.

[93] Disadvantaged is defined as pupils who have "ever been Looked After/In Care, been adopted or been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years", Ibid.

[94] Bristol City Council, *Hartcliffe & Withywood Statistical Ward Profile 2019* (n 87)

[95] Bristol City Council, *Deprivation in Bristol: The Mapping of Deprivation within Bristol Local Authority Area* (n 86)

[96] Dr Jo Rose and others, 'Amber: Ambitions Evaluation and Research Programme (Phase 1 and Phase 3): Final Report, December 2017' 58

[97] 'Entry Rate Data Explorer for Parliamentary Constituencies (Experimental)' (*UCAS*, 30 July 2018) <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/he-entry-rates> accessed 27 April 2020.

[98] Bristol City Council, *Improving Bristol Post 16 Education, Skills and Career Pathways: Be Inspired Strategy 2019 -24* (2019) 16 <https://www.bristollearningcity.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Post-16-Strategy-2019-24.pdf> accessed 6 April 2020 16

[99] See Section 2

Reliance on buses is particularly important for people who do not have access to a car, with car availability linked to household income, particularly outside inner urban areas. Nationally, 24% of all households have no car or van available, yet this rises to 44% of households in the lowest national real income quintile, who often on the outskirts of cities or more isolated rural areas.[100] Although household car access is higher in the South West than the national average (with 84% of residents having access to a car or van, while 16% do not), in Hartcliffe and Withywood, the 2011 census found that 41.2% of households have no access to a car or van.[101] While mobility is increasing for many, and bus patronage is growing in Bristol, children in Hartcliffe and Withywood are telling us that they feel immobile and that their lives would be quite different if they could access buses for free.

Room 13

Room 13 Hareclive is an innovative and nationally acclaimed arts/education project based in the grounds of Hareclive E-Act Primary; an independent artists' studio that has been run by children and adults working together since 2003. The studio provides a free, creative space that children aged 5-11 can access at breaks, lunch times and also in class time (where agreed with teachers) and sometimes after school on the three days a week that it is open. Once there, children can draw, paint, sculpt, make, read, work on the computers, take photos and much more. They are free to work on their own creative ideas and projects, alone or with others, at their own pace, supported by artist educators. There are no grades or tests in Room 13 and children are only ever there by choice. Room 13 Hareclive is one of the oldest and most established Room 13 spaces in the world (there are over 100 internationally, that have spread organically from the first seeds in Scotland and Bristol, including a few in the UK).

Room 13 is run by a team of children in Years 5 and 6 (age 9 – 11), elected to real jobs and responsibilities, working alongside the artist educators. With roles such as Treasurer, Shop-keeper, Materials Manager, Managing Director, Secretary and Chair, the children meet weekly to ensure the space works well and to problem solve and have ideas. Once a week, senior Room 13ers who have moved onto secondary school have the chance to come back after school and to stay involved.

After seventeen years in the same community, with the same adult team, this mixture of creativity and democracy in Room 13 has developed a strong culture of children having the freedom to be creative, and the trust and motivation to be responsible. Being part of Room 13 has a strong proven impact on children's lives and learning while they are using the studio, including on their confidence to have ideas and their voice to speak out.

---

[100] Department of Transport, Table NTS0703
[101] Bristol City Council, *Hartcliffe & Withywood Statistical Ward Profile 2019* (n 87)

Coming from this, the Room 13 team takes on studio wide projects in collaboration with other organisations: projects that fit the interests and concerns of the children and studio, where the whole studio can get involved and where children's creative involvement can bring valuable new perspectives and outputs. The deep existing culture means that any participation is meaningful, collaborative and ongoing, in ways that (for example) one off or drop-in sessions at a school might not be. Commissions and collaborations also help to bring in important income, given the studio is an independent project that has to be self-funding.

In 2015, commissioned by Playing Out CIC, Room 13 Hareclive children carried out some research around children's ability to play out and get around where they live in Hartcliffe. They then made their findings into a film, *The Sad Reality*.[102] In 2017 they presented the film at the Festival of the Future City as part of a session run by the Bristol Child Friendly City working group, a grass roots initiative aiming to start a conversation around children's rights in the physical and democratic space of their city.[103] This is where Mia also spoke about children wanting – and not being able - to be part of their city. The start of the Bus Project collaboration came out of all of this.

Methodology

In order to research bus policy and practices with children, *The Bus Project* used arts-led methodologies, intrinsic to Room 13's own approach to working with children, which proceed on a working assumption that creative methods can retrieve perspectives and sensations that otherwise might be ignored. Arts-led inquiry enables researchers to tap into some of the emotional resonance of the research question, over and above "objective" data responses. Expression can make the invisible visible, bringing into the foreground that which has been suppressed and silenced.[104]

Arts, it is said, create a sense of knowing through the creative process and the experiencing of it, allowing researchers to draw on "tacit" knowledge which opens up "undiscovered avenues of understanding".[105] This appears to support Taylor and Ladkin's argument that arts-based methods can enable those involved to apprehend the essence of a concept, situation or tacit knowledge in a particular way, revealing depths and connections that more propositional and linear developmental orientations cannot.[106] Empathy for the other also

---

[102] '"The Sad Reality" on Vimeo' <https://vimeo.com/210430100> accessed 2 April 2020
[103] 'How Do We Create Child Friendly Cities? Festival of the Future City Event' (*How do we create child friendly cities? Festival of the Future City event*) <http://bristolchildfriendlycity.blogspot.com/2017/09/normal-0-false-false-false-en-gb-x-none.html> accessed 6 April 2020
[104] Steven S Taylor, 'Overcoming Aesthetic Muteness: Researching Organizational Members' Aesthetic Experience' (2002) 55 Human Relations 821
[105] Karen Estrella and Michele Forinash, 'Narrative Inquiry and Arts-Based Inquiry: Multinarrative Perspectives' (2007) 47 Journal of Humanistic Psychology 376, 381
[106] Steven S Taylor and Donna Ladkin, 'Understanding Arts-Based Methods in Managerial Development' (2009) 8 Academy of Management Learning & Education 55

becomes possible through the multiple perspectives which "allow for recognition of the otherness of the other".[107] In *The Bus Project*, the main artistic research output – the film *Now's the Time,* developed in Room 13 - enables the children to express their experience of mobility as well as express empathy for parents, who cannot afford to do the best for their children, or bus drivers who need steady employment.

Arts-led methodologies also attempt to create a new creative space within which findings can be accessed that might not be recorded otherwise. As well as complying with institutional research ethics requirements[108], *The Bus Project* attempted to be ethical in and of itself, transferring decision-making about lines of inquiry, creative outputs and next steps to the children, artists at Room 13 and participants located in Hartcliffe wherever possible. *The Bus Project* proceeded on "the formula that research should not be carried out *on* children but instead *with* or *by* them".[109] This assumption is key to how Room 13 itself operates in every area, inherently valuing the participation and contribution of children as much as, if not more than, that of adults.

By working with this, this research invigorated the children as explained in a 2019 interview to Radio Bristol about *The Bus Project*[110]: As one eleven year-old girl said:

> "Without art in my life, I probably wouldn't be a speaking because I would be too shy, I wouldn't speak to anyone about nothing my life. Art does give children voices, art does give people massive voices that can change their whole city".

A twelve year-old boy echoed the ways in which artistic practice can underpin involvement:

> "Art gives me independence, so … usually I'm just quite nervous, I just stand there watching but … because of art, because of Room 13 I've been able to stand up and say no, this isn't right and be able to help do the right thing."

For these children, Room 13 gives them art that is child led, daily, and co-created. This is very different to what most children might get in school as 'art' in a delivered session As an adult artist educator at Room 13 explained:

---

[107] Estrella and Forinash (n 105), 381– 382

[108] Socio-Legal Studies Association, 'Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice' <https://www.slsa.ac.uk/images/2019summer/SLSA_Ethics_Statement_Final_2.pdf> accessed 6 April 2020. In line with the Socio-Legal Studies Association's *Statement of Ethical Research Practice* (2001, Revised 2009) requirements as well as those of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences at the University of Bristol.
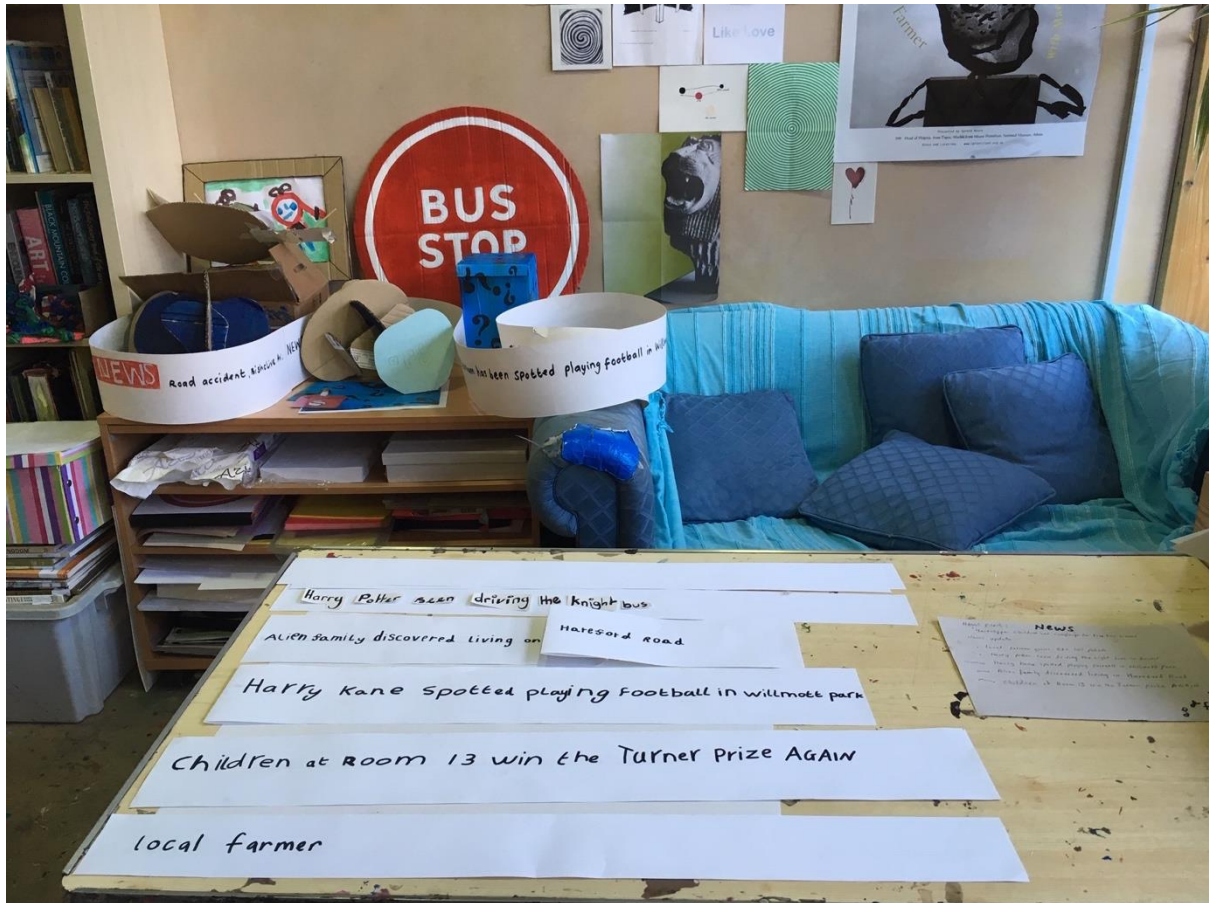
[109] Martyn Hammersley, 'Research Ethics and the Concept of Children's Rights' (2015) 29 Children & Society 569, 569

[110] On file with the author

"We see this as transformation. You can transform a bit of play or plasticine or you can transform yourself… when you see all the studio."

In *The Bus Project*, the children prepared a first, second and third draft of the survey questionnaire, initially alone and then in collaboration with Room 13 adults, before sending it to the academics (first to the University of Bristol, who then sent it to an expert in transport research methodologies at the University of Birmingham). The paper copies were printed and delivered by the University of Bristol to Hareclive E-Act Primary who sent the survey home in children's bookbags after holding a school assembly on buses and the scope of the research. The survey was also posted online (via onlinesurveys.ac.uk), with the link regularly uploaded to the school's Facebook page by Hareclive's head teacher. The survey received a response rate of around 10%, which was low (though for Room 13 adults this was not low for the school, where engagement with parents is an ongoing challenge). The arts-led processes and survey responses also underpinned the development of interview schema for bus professionals. The tensions inherent in scholarly activism were sometimes evident, balancing a need for survey questions that built on previous insights by Room 13 and ensuring that parents would feel that this was a project that might have tangible results, as well as undertaking research that aimed to be as objective as possible.

For the academic researchers, it was striking how perceptive the children's understanding of politics and governance became, with particular sensitivity to the profitability requirement of business and employment needs of bus drivers. In particular, when discussing the Bristol Bus Boycott from 1963, the children were quite clear that an inability to pay is quite different from discrimination on the basis of race. This finding echoed Barker and Weller's conclusion in their 2003 piece, "Never Work with Children", that: "the growing body of research that highlights that children are not simply passive objects dependent on adults, but are competent social actors that make sense of and actively contribute to their environment".[111] This is the premise on which Room 13 as a project has developed and spread.

The Bus Project also undertook interviews with ten experts on buses and bus policy. Interviewees were selected purposively with snowballing sampling. We identified potential interviewees responsible for bus operation and governance in Bristol and once we had completed initial interviews, asked respondents for suggestions for further participants expert in the process. We were unable to interview anyone at FirstBus but were able to interview a senior respondent at another major UK bus operator.

---

[111] John Barker and Susie Weller, 'Geography of Methodological Issues in Research with Children' (2003) 3 Qualitative Research 207, 207

The interviews were semi-structured. Interviewers set up a general structure focusing on bus governance and the main questions to be asked. The detailed structure was worked out during each interview with the respondent given significant freedom in what they wished to talk about, how long their answers would be and how the expressed them. Interviews were all based on based on interviewees' freely given and informed written consent. We also conducted one group discussion with the children at Room 13 Hareclive, where they reflected on the difficulties of bus use in their neighbourhood. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Bristol Law School Research Ethics committee, with all the research carried out in line with the Socio-Legal Studies Association *Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice*.[112]

This qualitative research was supplemented by doctrinal legal and law in context analysis. Legal research investigated the statutory and caselaw basis for bus regulation, identifying the overarching legal structure and how it informs bus use today. Law in context research considers legal questions from broader perspectives, using scholarship and research from other academic disciplines – in this case transport studies – as well as data and statistics provided primarily by Government as well as transport bodies.
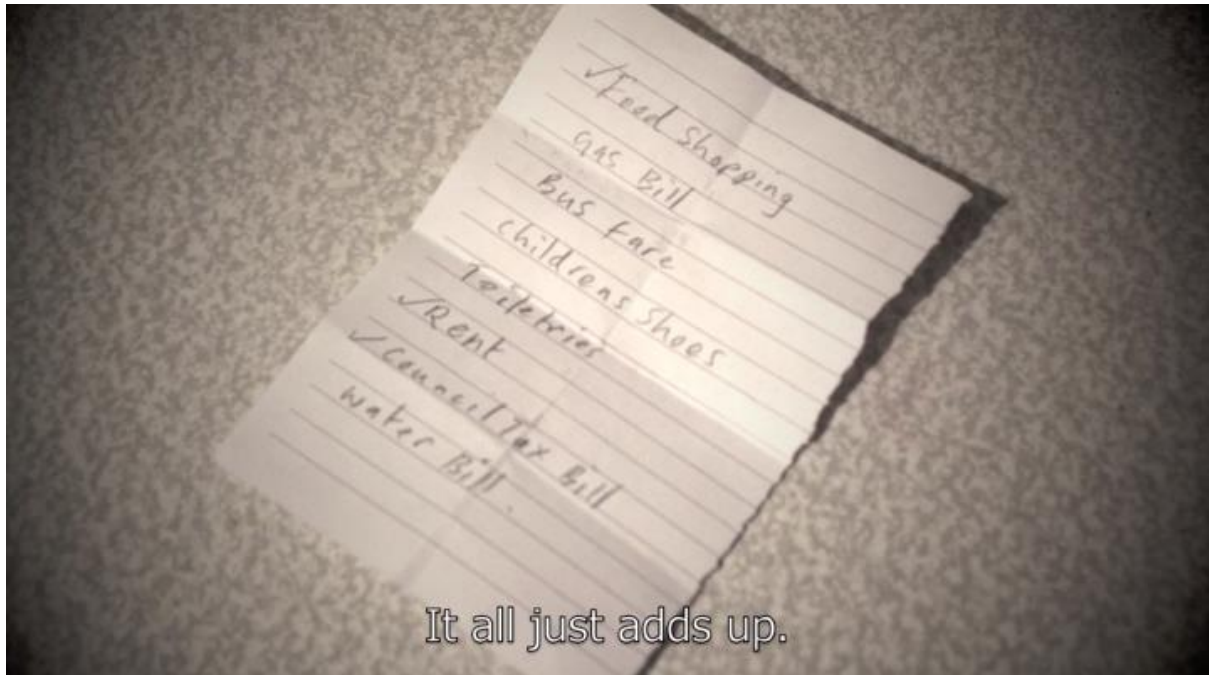
Findings

The Bus Project found evidence of difficulties with bus transport, best represented in the children's Room 13 film *Now's the Time*. The first fictional caller into the video's talk show outlines the concern:

> "*Hi, I'm a mother of three and I want my children to get the best experience from life and their city. Who doesn't?! I want them to grow up healthy and happy. But as a single mum, I can't give them the opportunities they deserve, it's just too expensive.*"

As the narrator cheerily summarises, "clearly there is a problem" before the children perform their concerns. These findings, coupled with survey responses, the group discussion and interviews, can be broken down into four categories: (1) the cost of bus fares; (2) unfamiliarity, reliability and fear of bus travel; (3) the constraints on socialising and leisure, particularly active hobbies; and (4) a lack of a sense of belonging.

---

[112] Socio-Legal Studies Association (n 108)

It all just adds up.

The Cost of Buses

As Mia's statement to the Festival of the Future City indicated, many survey responses emphasised the impact of prices. Too expensive, said one mother ticking the box:

> "*I'm a single parent and it costs too much for one adult with 2 kids*".

Another parent explained her choices:

> "*If I take my children to the dentist, it's 4 stops away but I have to pay £1 each there and back again with the £4 I have to pay for myself – that's £8, which is a week of electricity for us at home.*"

In the group discussion, the children in Room 13 outlined their experiences:

> "*We couldn't go to the free Wethecurious weekend because the bus takes too long and is too expensive*".

Several noted the cost of hospital trips, particularly for children with severe conditions requiring regular visits. In the *Now's the Time* video, one fictional mother tells the camera:

> "*My Ruby broke both of her arms last year and we were in and out of hospital with appointments for weeks. It cost a fortune.*"

The children in the group discussion agreed that using the bus to get to doctor, dentist and eye appointments by both was both expensive and time-consuming.[113]

Bus fares add up quickly as responses to the project's questionnaires showed. One parent replied that (s)he was:

"not happy with the cost as I have 4 kids and have to pay £9.50 if I need to go in town or anywhere else".

Another responded:

"… if you have a budget of £20 for mum, dad, 2 children – for all day tickets costs £13.60, that is more than half the budget! This then leads to more problems e.g. fast food costing less than healthy food."[114]

While First Bus currently offer a group ticket for five people to travel all day for £9, this is still significant for some. *"Prices are rising"*, said one parent: *"Galleries, museums are free but how do we get there on a budget?"*

The Bus Project research indicates – though it cannot prove - that bus prices inhibit bus travel, as expressed by both children and adults. This links into insights on social exclusion, explored in more depth below, where people deal with vectors of poverty, expressed in the film as a list of things a fictitious mother has to pay for:

"If I pay for buses, I won't have any money left for other things. You know how it is (picture of a list with food shopping, gas bill, bus fares, children's shoes, toiletries, rent, Council Tax bill, gas bill). It all just adds up. Having free bus travel would make everything a bit easier."

Research has consistently struggled to demonstrate conclusively that free bus fares would definitely end transport poverty (assuming that an effective transport network is in place, as it is in Hartcliffe in particular and in Bristol in general). In their study on the effects of the 2005 London intervention, Green et al concluded that:

"We had no comparative populations to make the case that 'transport poverty' has disappeared in London because of the free bus scheme – it may well be that discounted child bus fares in other cities have the same effect. However, the exceptions (deviant cases) in our data set strengthened the case for the free bus

---

[113] See also the responses on reliability below
[114] This quote also illustrates some of the mis-perceptions about bus prices as a group fare would have been available

scheme having some causal effect. These were those who had had the card providing free travel confiscated:

> *[W]hen I didn't have [free bus travel] I did struggle in terms of not getting everything done because I didn't have that freedom to get on a bus (M, 12-17). [of friends who've had card confiscated] It puts a strain on their social activities because they can't go out as much (M, 15).*

> That the free scheme (rather than any fare reduction) was crucial (i.e. causal) to eliminating transport poverty was evident in the exceptions. Those young people who had lost their card or had it confiscated, for instance for infringing the behaviour code, were the only able-bodied young people to report transport related restrictions on their mobility." [115]

As in the London research, *The Bus Project* cannot prove definitively that it is price that is preventing children and families from using buses. Nevertheless, the group and individual interviews, survey responses and film all indicated that cost is a significant, if not the only, cause. This is also the strong feedback from Room 13 artist educators, who have worked with the same community for 17 years:

> *"Since we began working in the Hareclive community in 2003, we have seen – year after year – how so many children in Hartcliffe are disconnected from the rest of the city and from all the events, opportunities, experiences, places and activities on offer there. Time and again children tell us how they are not able to go to things, even when there are free tickets or a free event. When asked, the reason is often that they cannot get there, and when we talk to parents, or to older children, the answer nearly always comes down to cost. Every year we encounter children who have never been into Bristol centre, despite living only a few miles out. Also every year, we see how this disconnection feeds into children's learning, aspirations and life chances. This is one of the reasons Room 13 exists – to try and counter this and to create opportunities to link children to their city and all that is there, to try and improve life chances."*

There is also growing evidence that transport poverty is often interrelated with other forms of poverty, particularly fuel poverty[116], a point emphasised by one Hartcliffe councillor who told the following story:

---

[115] Judith Green and others, 'Integrating Quasi-Experimental and Inductive Designs in Evaluation" (n 81) 400

[116] Environment Audit Committee, *Transport and accessibility to public services* (HC 2013-14, 201-I)

"… a young woman, she'd had a pre-payment meter installed because she defaulted on her electricity bill and at the time there wasn't anywhere you could charge your key in Hartcliffe, believe it or not. It was down when SWEB I suppose or whoever had a showroom in East Street. Trying to do the right thing, I can remember her telling me, she was cooking a proper Sunday dinner and her electric went. She's got to get the children, put them on a bus, go down to East Street, charge her key with £10 of electricity, come back, carry on cooking the dinner. It's heart-breaking and nobody thinks that in the 21st century anybody lives like that… You just think, the bus and finding £4.50 or whatever it was to go on the bus is half of the amount she's going to put on her electricity key meter."[117]

Even without being definitive, these concerns about cost echo findings in related research. Transport Focus's 2018 project *Using the Bus: What People Think* studied young people aged 14-19, noting that under-16s are conventionally not included in bus surveys. The report found that respondents ranked bus "value for money" as the most important improvement they wished to see, with 35% of young people using pocket money or money they have earned to pay for bus fares.[118] However again, children are dependent on the adults around them for pocket money, or on being successful in getting a job to have any money of their own. Both of these are a much bigger challenge in poorer areas, and of course if the Saturday jobs are mainly in the city, there is the cost of getting to and from them.

Similarly, one report from Transport for London noted slow wage growth and high housing costs for young Londoners alongside public transport trip rate decline among those aged 17-24 (by 29 per cent between 2007/08 and 2018/19). Transport for London suggest that this is "perhaps connected to the budget pressures particularly faced by this cohort in comparison to previous generations".[119] While it is causally difficult to prove that an absence of bus use is linked to lower disposable income, this is indicated by all surveys and research projects into bus mobility. When finances are limited, bus fares – even £9 for an all-day family ticket – may be beyond the reach of some people in the most economically deprived areas.

One of the main difficulties here is that it is so difficult to measure absence – it is far harder to measure "non-use" of transport than use of transport. One 2019 analysis used Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to assess what is known and not known in the literature about cost and transport. It found a strong link between cost, as well as perceived cost, and transport use:

---

[117] Interview 4

[118] Transport Focus, *Using the Bus: What Young People Think* (2018) 17 <https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/02141502/Using-the-bus-what-young-people-think.pdf> accessed 2 April 2020

[119] Transport for London, *Travel in London Report 11* (2018) 38. This is up from a 22% reduction between 2007 and 2017/18, 65

> "Cost is a primary obstacle to the use of transport. Income was found to be one of the defining aspects of socio-economic inequality. Transport costs and affordability are central to the impact of transport on inequality."[120]

The data is still largely missing but there is growing evidence that what the children have said so simply is true: they can't afford the buses and this is impacting their life-chances.

Unfamiliarity, Fear of the Unknown and Reliability

Unfamiliarity

Fear of the unknown was also widespread in the children's responses. In the group discussion, older Room 13 children explained how they might feel on a bus, not knowing which stop was next, unsure where to get off or how to orientate themselves in the city once they reached their destination. This finding chimes with similar research by Transport Focus in 2018:

> "Many of the concerns young people have come from a lack of confidence or not understanding 'the system'. For some, using the bus seems like a club where they don't belong."[121]

It is a major challenge to build young people's trust and confidence in the bus network.

Children were also concerned about the (un)friendliness of the driver, particularly when they were unsure about where to get off or about how buses operate. Again these are sentiments widely echoed in research with young people on buses[122] (and the 2018-19 First West of England Market report noted a 40% reduction in complaints).[123] The children expressed their worries about waiting at the bus stop, emphasising, as Clayton et al put it, that: "a bus journey in its entirety is comprised of not only the in-vehicle time, but also the other stages of the journey, such as waiting at the bus stop".[124] Apprehension resulting from unfamiliarity also inhibits bus use.

In London, Goodman et al's research found that having free bus travel encourages independence and limits fears about unfamiliarity:

---

[120] Gates (n 45) 3.
[121] Transport Focus (n 118) 3
[122] UWE The Centre for Transport & Society Bristol and University of Oxford Transport Studies, *Young People's Travel – What's Changed and Why?* (2018)
[123] FirstGroup plc, 'First West of England 2018/19: Connecting People and Communities' (2019)
[124] William Clayton, Juliet Jain and Graham Parkhurst, 'An Ideal Journey: Making Bus Travel Desirable' (2017) 12 *Mobilities* 706

"… several young people described free bus travel as providing a safety net in itself, preventing one being 'stranded' and providing a contingency plan if things went wrong:

> M: *When I came to London I didn't yet have free bus travel [... and] it actually limited me and didn't allow me to go places that I would actually go when I had the free bus travel. For example, when you go out because I can get lost easily, you know? If you have to pay for the bus, it's going to limit you from getting back.* (Interview 21, inner London, age 14)

> F: *If I go out, and it's getting late, or if my original journey, say if the train's cancelled, I know I can just get a bus. I've got it free, I can go a different route. [...] So it's like really important, I think, yeah, so security*" (Interview 38, outer London, age 17).[125]

Operators are also concerned about children's unfamiliarity, noting that using public transport is a learned habit, which could (and perhaps should) be supported. As one operator interviewee told us:

> "*if children get into the habit of using the bus, they're more likely to use it in later life ... I've got a worry that there is a generation of people out there who have never used a bus because they haven't needed to.*"[126]

---

[125] Goodman and others (n 81) 292
[126] Interview 3

The transition from child to adult use was also emphasised by the character in the *Now's the Time Film*:

> "If bus travel was free for children until they left education it would be better for ALL of us in the long run. It makes economical sense as children will grow up to be adults that will use buses more, which is good for the bus companies, for congestion, the planet and all our health. And ... my pay cheque."

Stan's statement chimes with research findings on travel socialisation: if parents encourage cycling or use of public transport, children are more likely to use these modes of travel as adults.[127]

Recent research undertaken by UWE and Sustrans also indicates that there is a link between safer streets and modes of active travel. Their 2019 report found that:

> "The experience of using different transport modes as children grow up (in particular walking and cycling) can affect their cognitive abilities and skills with respect to travelling. For example, if a young person walks, cycles and uses public transport with an adult as they are growing up, they will be more able to confidently navigate their environments and able to use these types of transport without adult supervision later in life. This in turn creates more opportunities and

---

[127] The Centre for Transport & Society Bristol and Transport Studies (n 122)

increases their capability set, because of their ability to use additional transport modes".[128]

Yet the Room 13 children have already explained in their film *The Sad Reality* how difficult it is for them to walk or cycle freely in their neighbourhood, often because parents fear the streets are unsafe. This fear is not unfounded, Bristol City Council's 2015 *A Safe Systems Approach to Road Safety in Bristol* found that:

> "Levels of deprivation are also strongly correlated with the likelihood of being injured on our roads. People in poorer communities suffer a greater burden of road traffic injuries than those in more affluent areas."[129]

That report found that children in the most deprived areas were six times more likely to be hurt by traffic than children in the least deprived areas, while there were nearly three times the number of serious or fatal traffic injuries in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas.[130]

The streets of Hartcliffe are, simply, more dangerous than the wealthier streets in the city. Yet Room 13 children are telling us both that evidenced fears about safety restrict their pedestrian or cycling mobility *and* that they cannot afford to catch the bus. As the Room 13 children sing in their video *The Sad Reality*, they are "living in cardboard box".[131]

Reliability

The Bus Project also found a repeated concern for bus reliability, with children explaining how long they wait at bus stops waiting for a bus to arrive. One child noted that:

> *"When I was in Year 5 we were late for the dentist and missed the appointment because no bus so I had to come back to school."*

This is a common concern in Bristol. In their submission to the 2019 House of Commons "Transport Committee report *Health of the Bus Market Inquiry*, Bristol City Council noted historically low bus usage before adding that:

[128] Kiron Chatterjee and others, 'The Role of Transport in Supporting a Healthy Future for Young People' <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/3808739/the-role-of-transport-in-supporting-a-healthy-future-for-young-people> accessed 2 April 2020

[129] Bristol City Council, 'A Safe Systems Approach to Road Safety in Bristol' (n79) 6

[130] Ibid

[131] '"The Sad Reality" on Vimeo' (n 102)

"recently First have worked hard to improve its reputation, which has been poor locally due to service unreliability, perceived high fares and driver attitude".[132]

Similarly, the 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy notes that:

"The most common comments in the public consultation referred to dissatisfaction in existing public transport services, including unreliability, cost and inconvenience. There is a strong urge to invest in improving all types of public transport to encourage its use."[133]

This can also be a worldwide experience. New York City's *Riders Alliance* collated experience of bus use in their 2017 report *The Woes on the Bus: Frustration and Suffering, All Through the Town.* One contributor echoes the Room 13 children's experiences of trying to rely on the bus for medical and dental appointments:

"I've missed so many doctor's appointments because of this bus. In order to waste a trip, I have to sit in the doctor's office and hopes someone else cancels."[134]

In *The Bus Project*, the children's secondary concern after cost was for safe and reliable buses. They are far from alone in this in the city where vehicle use still dominates use of roads.

---

[132] Written evidence submitted to Transport Committee, *Health of the Bus Market Inquiry* by Bristol City Council (BHC0104) 2019
[133] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Transport Strategy' (n 69) 47
[134] Riders Alliance, 'The Woes on the Bus: Frustration and Suffering, All Through the Town' (2017), 8 <http://www.ridersny.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/RA_BusWoes_v4.compressed-1.pdf> accessed 2 April 2020

Constraints on Leisure, Active Hobbies, Socialisation and Independent Mobility

Leisure and Active Hobbies

The Bus Project's third finding concerned the effect of a lack of bus mobility. Research demonstrates that families with children are more likely to use a car and that while more people have access to a car than own a car, in its absence, people must turn to public transport or not travel at all.[135] Children explained how not being on the buses constrains their opportunities for socialising and active leisure. In the *Now's the Time* film, Room 13 children present a dream sequence, acting out recreational and extra-curricular opportunities they might have if buses were free. Silver foil provides the background to one boy's sighs: "*I would really want to go to the skate park but with travelling it would just cost too much*". "*It's the same about me for dance classes*" adds a young girl.

Another girl phones into the fictional call show imagining how children's lives might change:

> "*Hi, I'm a twelve-year old and if there was free bus travel for children … well … [kids playing] …. With free bus travel I can get to the skate park … I can go to football … I can get to dance classes … Now that there's free bus travel me and my mates can go to the park. I love my free bus pass it means I can go to netball, meet my friends, go to things in town. I feel part of my city.*"

This statement maps almost exactly inversely onto quotation from Jones et al's 2012 research with children in London who have had free bus fares since 2005. As one young interviewee explained in London:

> "*I go places more...than I would normally [without the free pass]...Like football, just places to out with my friends [I go to] more... if I had to pay for the bus then it would cost more to go out...than I've got.*"[136]

The Room 13 finding also contrasts with a finding in a Merseyside study:

> "Merseyside pass holders reported that 37 per cent of the bus trips and 46 per cent of the rail trips made in the previous week would not have been made had they no concessionary pass."[137]

---

[135] Chatterjee and others (n 40).

[136] Alasdair Jones and others, 'Rethinking Passive Transport: Bus Fare Exemptions and Young People's Wellbeing' (2012) 18 Health & Place 605, 608.

[137] F Dunkerley, C Rohr and RL Mackett, 'The Benefits of the Liverpool City Region Concessionary Travel Scheme for Elderly and Disabled Travellers' (*European Transport Conference 2016*, 7 October 2016) 8

Free bus travel appears to encourage discretionary travel, particularly for leisure.

In London, research has found that free bus travel also enables children to access facilities that are too far away (or too dangerous given traffic) to walk to. This quotation comes from Jones et al:

> "[For t]he local sports centre near me…we've got to get a bus to get to it. So my brothers do that, and my mum takes my sister because they have like that little baby club thing there. So if a bus, the price went up, my mum wouldn't take my sister to the little clubs where she can meet other little kids. And my brothers probably wouldn't go to the gym at all (Sut, F, 15–16)."

These London-based researchers concluded that:

> "Although few young people in our interviews were explicit about the impact of free bus travel on their own ability to take part in, for instance, education or social activities, there were occasional accounts of increased opportunities for access to sport and leisure".[138]

In London, free travel appears to indicate that children travel more. In London the introduction of free bus fares for children via the Zip Oyster photocard in June 2008 provides free bus and tram travel for people under 18 years of age in full-time education. While free bus travel in London has Free been associated with a sharp decline in trip rates, that is, the number of "walk all the way" trips made per person on an average day, the distance walked by children and young people has not declined, rather more trips were taken in total. [139] This indicates greater mobility with no reduction in physical activity.

Travelling in a group also becomes more usual with free bus fares, increasing the capabilities of groups of young people to travel, minimising unfamiliarity. In London, Jones et al found that it was "notable" that:

> "the instances of increased opportunity of access recounted were often group-based activities, with the intervention enabling families to more easily afford to go on outings:

<https://aetransport.org/en-gb/past-etc-papers/conference-papers-2016?abstractId=4952&state=b> accessed 2 April 2020
[138] Jones and others (n 136) 608
[139] Mayor of London, *Travel in London Report 11*, 2018, p. 109

'When I was younger because my mum was pregnant at the time… me and my dad used to go up London because it was free for me… We used to go the Science Museum and things like that… so it was quite fun' (Sut, M, 13–16)."[140]

Free bus fares for children and young people in London have created opportunities for sociability between both groups of friends and family (though children and young people with disabilities are often inhibited by physical constraints from developing their independent mobility[141]). The bus is itself a space of sociability and, as one research paper puts it: "We call all just get on the bus and go".[142] In contrast, in *The Bus Project* one parent told us that the buses were too expensive: "*because we are a big family*".[143]

Independent Mobility

Free bus fares appear to encourage children's independent travel. This is a relatively under-studied area, with limited research on children's mobility that is not "school-bound, car-dependent, adult-determined and highly localized".[144] Children's independent mobility has often been framed in terms of being unaccompanied by parents on established trips from A to B, notably active travel to school. Yet independent mobility can also be understood as children setting their own mobility agenda, travelling not just from A to B but creating opportunities and networks of their own.[145]

Children and young people's independent mobility can be linked to having the disposable income to pay for buses. Research from the RAC indicates that 11-16-year olds are more likely to use buses in metropolitan areas, with young people in higher income households making proportionately more trips for social or leisure purposes.[146] The London project found, however, children with free bus travel can and do set their own travel agendas:

> "during the teenage years, young people may have permission to travel by themselves in theory, but may not be able to do so in practice if they cannot afford

---

[140] Jones and others (n 135) 608

[141] Michelle Pyer and Faith Tucker, '"With Us, We, like, Physically Can't": Transport, Mobility and the Leisure Experiences of Teenage Wheelchair Users' (2017) 12 Mobilities 36

[142] Goodman and others (n 81)

[143] A 24 hour group ticket after 9am Mon-Fr or at weekends currently costs £9 for five people although this is not that well known, two tickets for more than five people at £18 is clearly more financially significant, FirstBus, *Fares Guide 2019* (2019) (n 84)

[144] Anne Hurni, 'Moving on : The Role of Transport in the Everyday Mobilities of Children and Young People in Urban Australia' 29 <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A34543/> accessed 1 April 2020

[145] Ibid

[146] Qunyi Chen, Scott Le Vine and John Polak, 'Generation Next: The Changing Travelhabits of Pre-Driving Age Young People in Britain' (2014) <https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Generation_Next_Teenage_Travel_Behaviour_LeVine_Chen_Oct2014.pdf>. and proportionately fewer trips to visit friends or families in private homes than young people in lower income households

to pay for travel and if their parents are unwilling or unable to give them money …".[147]

In *Now's the Time*, the dream sequence hints at children imagining being able to go where they would like to, when they would like to. As one 12-year-old mused: "*If the buses were cheaper I'd be allowed out somewhere different every weekend*".

Within Bristol's bus strategies, however, the focus is on increasing passenger numbers in absolute terms, with the 2019 *Bus Deal* explicitly focused on prioritising services for commuters. This is undoubtedly desirable and important. Nevertheless, policies prioritising compulsory journeys to work, school or hospitals can under-estimate the significance of additional leisure journeys. Things could be different. Parents consistently responded on the questionnaire that they would let older children catch the bus more often if it was free.

By limiting children and young people's access to buses, it appears that we are limiting opportunities for social inclusion, what Goodman et al have called "children's freedoms and capabilities for self-determination with respect to their mobility".[148] Whilst Bristol City Council has noted the significance of an effective bus network for social inclusion for older people[149] (who can travel for free), there is limited recognition of the ways in which bus networks operate as spaces for social inclusion both to access leisure and cultural opportunities.

Buses themselves also provide spaces for socialisation. In London, Green et al found that:

> "… discretionary journeys, which parents may be reluctant to pay for, emerge as vital for young people's social inclusion. They are first a rare space for young people to socialise: It's one of the main things you do on the bus, if you go out with someone you sit down and you talk about things. (M, 14-18)".[150]

Transport Social Exclusion

Much of the justification for concessionary fares for older and disabled people has been to prevent social exclusion, promoting social inclusion. In 1997, the Social Exclusion Unit defined the concept as:

> " … a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown."

---

[147] Goodman and others (n 81) 288
[148] Ibid 291
[149] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Bus Deal' (n 10)
[150] Judith Green and others, 'On the Buses' (n 81)

In Levitas et al's influential formulation, relational disadvantage was central, focusing on lack of resources leading to:

> "… the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas."[151]

Accessibility planning was begun under New Labour, focusing: "on the ability to get to essential services: education, employment, health and others, and to food shops, as well as to sporting, leisure and cultural activities".[152] The 2003 Social Exclusion Unit's report *Making the Connections* recognised that transport poverty, disadvantage and/or exclusion is problematic for some people, excluding them from facilities. Researchers aimed to understand how easy or difficult it is for people to access work, education, shopping, health care, social interaction and recreational activities.[153]

The 2013's Audit Committee Report *Transport and Accessibility to Public Services* maintained this emphasis on accessibility but was concerned enough to conclude that:

> "Overall, our inquiry has pointed to accessibility worsening since the *Making the Connections* Report was published in 2003, driven by the current economic climate, a tightening of government spending, public transport fare increases and cuts to bus services. But a perhaps more fundamental concern is that the Department for Transport's recent policies have adopted a narrow definition of accessibility that focuses on 'mobility' rather than the wider issue of 'accessibility' used in *Making the Connections.*"[154]

This framing of accessibility around disability rather than the broader sense of inclusion for all, limits the concept of accessibility quite significantly.

---

[151] Ruth Levitas and others, 'The Multidimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion', University of Bristol, 2007, 246

[152] Janet Stanley and Karen Lucas, 'Social Exclusion: What Can Public Transport Offer?' (2008) 22 Research in Transportation Economics 36

[153] Jon Shaw and James D Sidaway, 'Making Links: On (Re)Engaging with Transport and Transport Geography' (2011) 35 Progress in Human Geography 502; Hurni (n 143); Karen Lucas, 'Providing Transport for Social Inclusion within a Framework for Environmental Justice in the UK' (2006) 40 Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice 801; Peter Jones and Karen Lucas, 'The Social Consequences of Transport Decision-Making: Clarifying Concepts, Synthesising Knowledge and Assessing Implications' (2012) 21 Journal of Transport Geography 4

[154] Environment Audit Committee Transport and accessibility to public services (n 116) 27

Legally, there is no right to mobility for all.[155] English passengers should be able to board a bus without discrimination[156], yet there is no legal provision to ensure that children and working age adults can use bus (or any other form of public transport) in the first place. Despite this lack of a right to transport, inequality in mobility is widely recognised, including by the OECD who concluded that across Europe:

> "There is significant evidence across countries that lower-income populations tend to suffer more from restricted transport options, have lower quality transport services available to them and travel under worse conditions (safety, security, reliability, comfort). Broad evidence also suggests that the lack of, or poor access to, transport options is central to limitations on access to jobs, educational institutions, health facilities, social net- works, etc., which in turn generates a 'poverty trap'."[157]

Transport and social disadvantage intersect, as Karen Lucas explains:

> "although transport disadvantage and transport-related social exclusion are not necessarily synonymous with each other, i.e. it is possible to be socially excluded but still have good access to transport or to be transport disadvantaged but highly socially included … transport disadvantage and social disadvantage interact directly and indirectly to cause transport poverty."[158]

Understanding "exclusion as more of a process than an end-state"[159], we can frame transport exclusion as: "the discrepancy between what you can do and what you want to do", being on "a spectrum of deprivation" rather than a binary distinction between being excluded/included.[160] Research on social exclusion tends to look at effects rather than causes, focusing on the consequences of transport poverty, rather than prioritising understanding why it exists. One influential definition of transport exclusion comes from Kenyon, Lyon and Rafferty:

> "The process by which people are prevented from participating in the economic, political and social life of the community because of reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or part to insufficient

---

[155] Mobility in immigration terms, including EU free movement, is a related but distinct policy context.
[156] *FirstGroup Plc v Paulley* [2017] UKSC 4
[157] International Transport Forum and OECD, *Income Inequality, Social Inclusion and Mobility* (OECD 2017) 11
[158] Karen Lucas, 'Transport and Social Exclusion: Where Are We Now?' (2012) 20 Transport Policy 105, 106
[159] John Preston and Fiona Rajé, 'Accessibility, Mobility and Transport-Related Social Exclusion' (2007) 15 Journal of Transport Geography 151
[160] Glenn Lyons, 'The Introduction of Social Exclusion into the Field of Travel Behaviour' (2003) 10 Transport Policy 339, 340

mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility".[161]

Transport social exclusion inhibits participation, in work, leisure and cultural activities. In Mia's words, it prevents children from being part of their city.

This is not the first Bristol project to identify transport exclusion, particularly in relation to cultural activities. In 2015, *Teenage Kicks*, found that:

> "Those who lived further away from the city centre and in more working-class areas of the city didn't often travel into the centre of the city, blaming expensive bus fares and poor transport links. This comment from one of the young people we spoke to at the Hub exemplified what most said about their relationship with the cultural organisations in the city, 'there is an art gallery in town but I've forgotten what it's called - I've never been there."[162]

The Bus Project provides further evidence that transport social exclusion focuses is preventing children from participating, echoing the findings from *Teenage Kicks*. The Room 13 children told the project that transport excludes them from participating active hobbies and leisure opportunities, cultural events or accessing city museums, galleries and parks.

As Karen Lucas notes, we simply do not have "equitable accessibility for all" in the UK. Transport analyses, she writes,

> "… do not actively and systematically address the knock-on effects of transport poverty and transport-related social exclusion, such as reduced labour markets, ill-health, inaccessibility and social exclusion. This situation cannot any longer be blamed upon a lack of awareness or insufficient evidence of the problem, or inadequate know-how."[163]
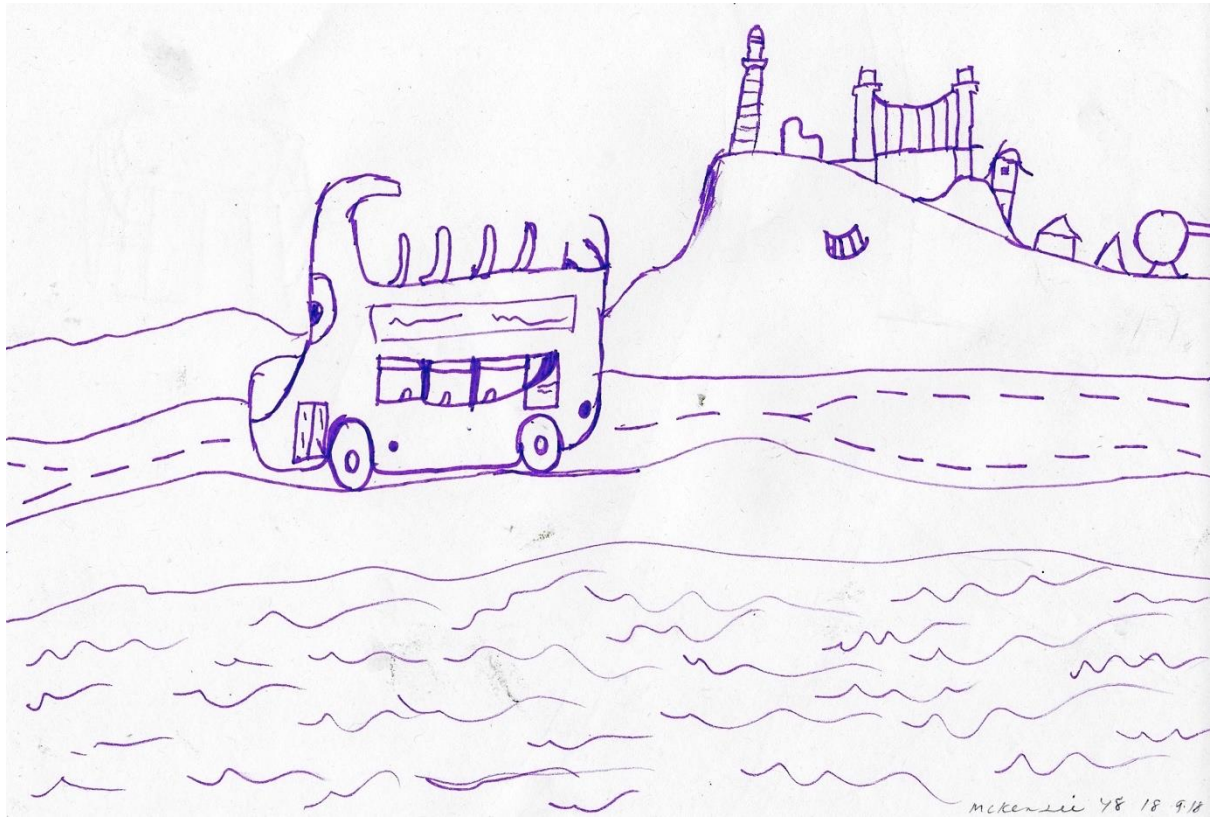
Understanding transport poverty matters because the plight the children in *The Bus Project* face can be presented as an unavoidable consequence of the decision to privatize buses in 1985. In practice, however, bus governance is complex, as this working paper explains with variegated powers and responsibilities. All older and disabled people are entitled to travel for free. If some or all children travel for free, this would cost money, perhaps around £59.50 per child. The costs of running buses, whether publicly or privately, will always require a subsidy.

---

[161] Kenyon, S., Lyons, G., & Rafferty, J. (2002). Transport and social exclusion: investigating the possibility of promoting inclusion through virtual mobility. *Journal of Transport Geography*, *10*(3), 207, 210

[162] Helen Manchester and Emma Pett, *Teenage Kicks: Exploring Cultural Value from a Youth Perspective* (2015) 19

[163] Karen Lucas, 'Editorial for Special Issue of European Transport Research Review: Transport Poverty and Inequalities' (2018) 10 European Transport Research Review 17

This raises broader national questions about the balance of bus subsidy in relation to highway, rail or even coastal protection. It also raises regional and local questions about how that subsidy should be spent.

Belonging

The fourth and final finding in *The Bus Project* comes back to Mia's opening question where she asks: "*how can children grow up and enjoy their cities if they can't get around them?*". One consistent finding in research with recipients of concessionary fares, be they young people in London or older passengers elsewhere in the UK is that free bus travel facilitates a sense of belonging to their city.

To belong to one's city, one also has to know it. While bus companies often offer discretionary tickets for free public events in Bristol (including the Harbour and Balloon Festivals as well as Gay Pride) these opportunities are not always familiar to people not already using the buses. These initiatives are also often *ad hoc*. One Councillor referred to bus initiatives or arts organisations who have in previous decades worked closely in economically-deprived communities including Hartcliffe, noting that: "*like everything else, when the money dried up, that was it*".[164] Another local councillor explained that: "*pricing is obviously part of it, but perception about pricing is probably worse*".[165] One child in the group discussion told us that

---

[164] Interview 9
[165] Interview 4

"*We couldn't go to the free Wethecurious weekend because the bus takes too long and is too expensive*". This may be perception about bus availability, yet it limits the child's experience nevertheless.

Our research found broad agreement that all children should be able to experience the cultural and leisure opportunities in their city. Particularly in light of the highly innovative Children's Charter, one councillor told us:

> "*we wanted every child to go to the Colston Hall. We wanted every child to go to the M Shed to experience that, so all these children have got a sense of identity with Bristol that they would all share. I think if we can't get them here because of transport, then that's a problem that we then need to solve, because there's no point in having city museums and city cultural activities that are already prohibitive.*"[166]

Councillors are also clearly in favour of encouraging children's independence. As one said:

> "*I think it's important that older children bit when they're getting their independence as well and we want them to get out of Hartcliffe and out of Southmead and see opportunities that are there for them*."[167]

Bristol's Children's Charter calls for a city where "[c]hildren have access to, and benefit from, Bristol as a leading cultural, social and sporting city and can grow up with a sense of belonging and pride in their city". The difficulty, it seems, is providing children's mobility to facilitate this.

As well as being unable to reach these cultural destinations, a lack of bus mobility has other consequences. Free buses for children and young people have been shown to facilitate independent mobility, to provide a physical space for socialization and a way to develop a sense of belonging, which Mia's opening quote tells us some children in Hartcliffe lack. The London research found such a sense of belonging from the free fares:
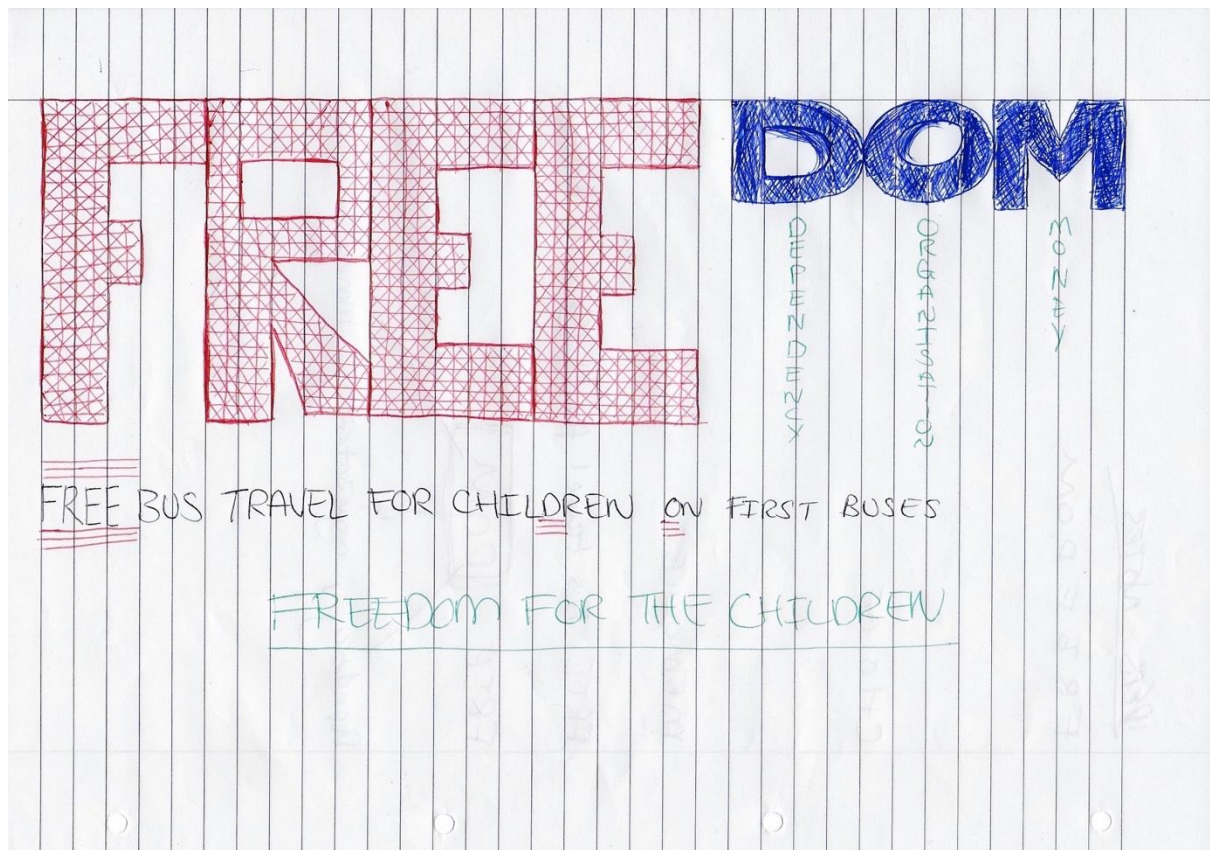
> "these benefits were not just a matter of facilitating access to social destinations. Instead the benefits also included the experience of bus travel as a socially inclusive activity in itself, both through opportunities for interactions with fellow passengers and through a broader sense of belonging to London's 'general public'."[168]

---

[166] Interview 9
[167] Interview 9
[168] Goodman and others (n 81) 289

This finding about belonging echoes research done in London with older and disabled concessionary bus users, which found that a bus pass can "promote a sense of belonging to the local community".[169] A nationwide research review similarly found that "early evidence suggests that the concessionary bus pass scheme in England may have positive impacts in terms of reducing social exclusion, encouraging physical activity and producing a sense of belonging among a group who may otherwise be marginalised."[170] Free bus fares can be seen as much about a sense of citizenship and belonging as they are about social or economic involvement, particularly for people who are economically deprived and live too far away to walk to cultural destinations in their city.
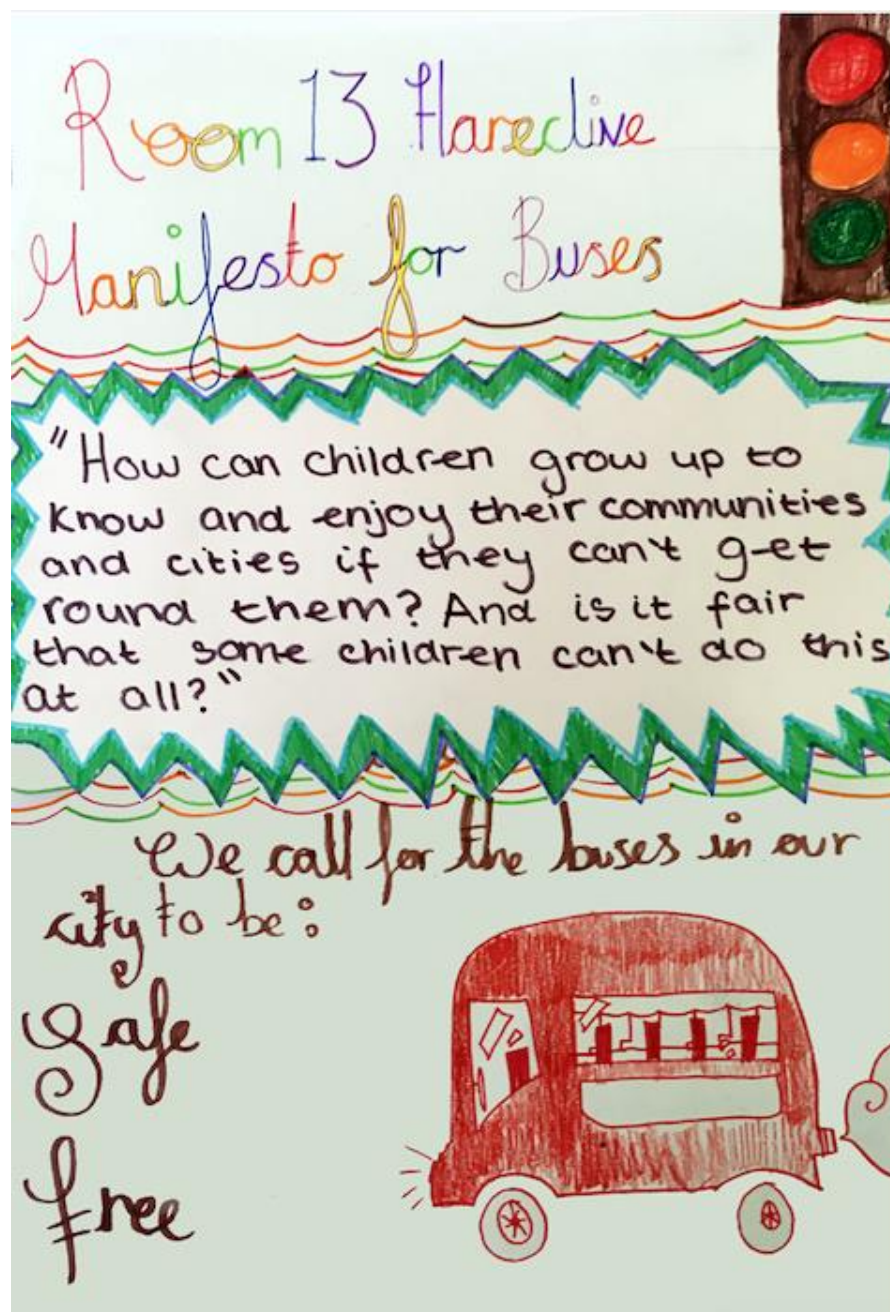

Room 13 Conclusions

While *The Bus Project's* empirical findings were drawn primarily from arts-led methods, coupled with a limited survey and a group interview, they have illustrated that children feel inhibited by cost, unfamiliarity and a lack of reliability from using buses. The effects of this bus immobility are expressed as a lack of access to sports and active leisure, cultural opportunities, difficulties attending medical and dental appointments and, more generally, a sense that they do not belong to or in their city.

---

[169] Alasdair Jones and others, 'Entitlement to Concessionary Public Transport and Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study of Young People and Older Citizens in London, UK' (2013) 91 Social Science & Medicine 202
[170] Anthony A Laverty and Christopher Millett, 'Potential Impacts of Subsidised Bus Travel for Older People' (2015) 2 Journal of Transport & Health 32, 34

Once the initial phase of research was finished, Room 13 Hareclive children came to the University of Bristol to develop their manifesto for buses. They asked for two things: that buses are free for children and safe.

When *The Bus Project's* film *Now's the Time* was put into the public domain via the Brigstow Institute newsletter, Bristol-based media picked up on it and were particularly interested in the child-led angle. The Room 13 team was keen to respond to this interest as a key studio aim is for children from Hartcliffe's creativity and voice to have a platform. Also, crucially, Room 13 wants to see change happen around bus costs: this is the main reason why children, adults and the parents who commented became involved in The Bus Project.

BBC TV Points West covered the story first, filming children meeting with Councillor Helen Godwin at City Hall to discuss the call for free bus travel. This was followed by coverage on BBC Radio Bristol, Bristol Post, Bristol 24/7 (online) [171] and The Bristol Cable (printed and online).[172] Further follow up work included children submitting statements to be read out at a full public council meeting at City Hall in July 2019, alongside screening of the film; speaking to various other city organisations who share their conviction that free bus travel would have a huge positive impact on children and young people; and presenting the film in a session at the international Towards the Child Friendly City Conference in Bristol in November 2019, again sharing the stage with the Bristol Child Friendly City group.

Room 13 is very limited by resources and capacity to do further work around this, but it remains a key priority and interest for children and the studio.

---

[171] Tristan Cork, 'Youngsters Launch Campaign to Get Free Bus Travel for Children in Bristol' *Bristol Post* (13 June 2019) <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/youngsters-launch-campaign-free-bus-2971877> accessed 4 April 2020

[172] Lorna Stephenson, 'Children Are Being Deprived of Feeling Part of Their City' *The Bristol Cable* (19 September 2019) <https://thebristolcable.org/2019/09/children-are-being-deprived-of-feeling-part-of-their-city/> accessed 1 April 2020

4. How did this Happen?

One aim of *The Bus Project* was to understand how bus governance has evolved to co-produce a situation where children tell us that they have never been able to visit the centre of their city because they cannot afford bus fares. As this section explains, bus governance is underpinned by a series of policy decisions: deregulation, partnership working, concessionary fares for older and disabled people, as well as local subsidies, primarily for supported services (rather than types of passenger). These political decisions have been legally implemented to produce the bus service – or lack of service – that passengers in England experience today.

4.1 Deregulation

In 1985, the Thatcher Government deregulated buses, aiming to lift the "dead hand of regulation", following the successful deregulation of coaches in 1980.[173] Abolishing road service licensing in Great Britain outside of London, the Transport Act 1985 came into force in October 1986.[174] At the time, bus deregulation was an act of conviction with limited empirical justification for the proposal. The 1984 White Paper *Buses*, presented by then Transport Minister Nicholas Ridley, had relied on the experience of three trial areas in Norfolk, Hereford and Devon.[175] This basis was widely critiqued, particularly given the lack of testing in a major-urban area. Commentators noted that the results were both more marginal than the White Paper suggested and that, as the submission from Maidstone Borough Council to the consultation explained:

> "… the subject areas chosen predetermine the results of this critique ... with no economists with practical experience of bus operation were included in the panel of advisers." [176]

The 1985 House of Commons Select Committee Report on *Financing of Public Transport Services* published a highly critical report on the 1984 proposals, agreeing with the symptoms of bus malaise ("an ailing sector of determining patronage, service levels, increasing fares and increasing subsidy") but identifying a different "diagnosis of cause".[177] As they wrote:

---

[173] Transport Act 1980

[174] Northern Ireland was excluded from the reach of the Transport Act 1985 and bus policy is now devolved in Scotland and Wales

[175] RD Fairhead and RJ Balcombe, 'Deregulation of Bus Services in the Trial Areas 1981-84', TRRL Laboratory Report, 1984

[176] Great Britain Parliament House of Commons Transport Committee, *Second Report from the Transport Committee. Session 1984-85: Report and Minutes of Proceedings* (HM Stationery Office 1985) 203

[177] Transport Committee, Financing of Public Transport Services 1985 Transport Committee response to Buses 1985, (HC 1984-5 38-1) lxxxv

> "… the White Paper considerably understates the extent to which the problems of the industry are the result of fundamental underlying economic and social trends, and overstates the damage caused by the regulatory regime."[178]

The 1985 Select Committee concluded that compulsory tendering should be introduced, with the rest of England following London. This, however, did not happen, so that London remains distinctive with its competitive tendering to this day.

Elsewhere in England, privatisation for buses went ahead despite the reservations. Part III of the Transport Act 1985 required the break up and privatisation of the National Bus Company, which were reorganised into 72 separate companies, with bus operations swiftly sold to companies, management or employee buy-outs by April 1988.[179] The National Bus Company sale brought in £323 million, giving a net surplus of £89 million to the Government once debts and privatisation expenses had been accounted for.[180]

Privatisation was designed to increase competition between operators, providing a better service for passengers. While initially, in the late 1980s, there was diversity amongst bus owners, agglomeration escalated in later decades. By 2011, there were still 1,245 different bus operators in England outside London, yet five large companies, First Group, Stagecoach, Arriva, National Express and Go Ahead, already dominated the market (as they continue to do today).[181] Only a few English municipal bus operators remain, including: Blackpool Transport Services Ltd.; Ipswich Buses Ltd., Nottingham City Transport Ltd., Reading Buses, Rosso, Thamesdown Transport Ltd. and Network Warrington. Several municipal bus companies have won awards and charge lower average fares.

Investigating the bus market in 2012, the Competition Commission found that "head-to-head competition in the supply of local bus services was un-common" estimating the cost of uncompetitive behaviours to be between £115 million and £305 million a year.[182] Rejecting franchising, the Commission proposed introducing "vigilant merger control" as well as partnerships to address the identified adverse effects of competition and resulting customer detriment.[183] Responding to the Commission in 2012, the then Coalition Government noted findings and recommendations but responded rather vaguely, with a commitment to investigate how to revise the funding of bus services whilst also noting its current

---

[178] Ibid

[179] David Parker, *The Official History of Privatisation. Vol. 1: The Formative Years: 1970 - 1987* (Routledge 2009) 222

[180] Ibid

[181] Competition Commission, 'Local Bus Services Market Investigation' (2011) <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140402200211/http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/our-work/directory-of-all-inquiries/local-bus-services-market-investigation/final-report-and-appendices-glossary> accessed 1 April 2020

[182] Ibid 1

[183] Ibid 12

commitment of "minimising the burden of red tape on businesses, including public transport operators".[184] More recent interventions by the Competition & Markets Authority focus on the detail of bus provision, particularly on improving outcomes by making the local market work better, especially trough multi-operator collaboration.[185] Yet as Peter White observes, accurate assessments of the effects of anti-competitive behaviour are difficult in relatively small local markets, not least because "the aggregate nature of data available in Britain inhibits the examination of competition effects on demand at a very local level".[186] Bus companies have been slow to release their data given its commercial value, although the introduction of the Bus Services Act 2017 may now help.

Whether or not bus privatisation outside London has been a success is, and will continue to be, debated by scholars and analysts, often using econometric models.[187] Yet even if efficiencies can be calculated, this rarely tells us much about distribution. If bus patronage is increasing, this may not necessarily be because children or low income users are able to use the bus more.

The most recent Transport Select Committee to consider the health of the bus market, reporting in 2019, took privatisation and current structures as a given. Its recommendations included proposing the possibility of franchising for all authorities (not just combined authorities), reforms to concessionary fare payments and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), improvements in information and recommending a national bus strategy (which the Government said it will introduce in 2020).[188] However, the Committee did not recommend more funding for bus services concluding that:

> "We recognise that in the current financial situation additional funding for bus services is not likely to be found. Whilst we would welcome more funding, the Government and local authorities need to think about how best to spend the funds they already have."[189]

Given the far greater funding for road and rail, and the reluctance by Conservative Governments to reintroduce the fuel duty escalator or facilitate hypothecating funding for

---

[184] Department of Business Innovation & Skills, 'Government Response to the Competition Commission's Report "Local Bus Services Market Investigation"' (2012) 6-7

[185] Competition and Markets Authority, 'Bus Services Bill: Retaining the Benefits of Competition' (2016) <https://competitionandmarkets.blog.gov.uk/2016/07/05/bus-services-bill-retaining-the-benefits-of-competition/> accessed 13 April 2020

[186] Peter White, 'Bus Economics', *The Routledge Handbook of Transport Economics Routledge* (Routledge 2017) 46

[187] For one recent analysis including references to earlier work see Preston in Routledge Handbook of Transport Economics

[188] Campaign for Better Transport, 'The Future of the Bus Policy and Fiscal Interventions as Part of a National Bus Strategy' (2019); Go Ahead, 'A National Strategy for Bus The Go-Ahead Group's Recommendations' (2019)

[189] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (22) 6

bus priority schemes[190], this lack of political pressure is disappointing. Buses are used by the least economically privileged members of society yet this form of transport receives limited funding.

Today, English bus governance outside London has barely changed since 1985. As one expert interviewee explained:

> "… it's quite an unusual way of doing it compared to the rest of Western Europe, for example, [here] all a bus operator has to do to operate a service is to have a compliant vehicle and compliant maintenance arrangements and register a service with the traffic commissioner, who is a legal representative of the state, in some shape or form and then after an appropriate amount of notice, they can run that service."[191]

While local and combined authorities are responsible for local transport plans and local or regional bus strategies, they have no power to restrict or require the introduction of bus services.

The remaining form of oversight rests with seven regional Traffic Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport who license routes submitted by operators. Once services are licensed, they must be run in accordance with the specified route. Operators must give notice of new routes (42 days' notice to the local authority before applying to the Traffic Commissioners in England, who require a further 42 days' notice, giving 70 days in total unless the local authority respond sooner). Similarly, if an operator wishes to cancel or alter a bus service, it must give 28 days to the local authority in England, before a further 42 days' notice to the Traffic Commissioners.[192] Neither the Traffic Commissioners, nor the local authority, have any authority to prevent the operator from withdrawing or changing a bus route. The 1985 Transport Act devolved bus strategies to local transport authorities (in Bristol's case, this is now WECA's obligation). There is no oversight body – an OFBUS - equivalent to the Office of Rail Regulation (now the Office of Rail and Road). Even when the bus strategy is finally introduced, supplementing existing government strategies for road, rail, air travel, cycling and walking, this is likely to be somewhat generic. We are unlikely to have, for example, a representational equivalent to road atlases, a national representation of which buses go where.

---

[190] For example, by bringing Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 into force, which would give local authorities the powers to prosecute parking and driving offences (and keep the funds generated by fines), see Select Committee 2019, 33

[191] Interview 1

[192] Office of the Traffic Commissioner, 'Operating Registered Local Bus Services in England (except London) and Wales Guide for Operators' (Revised 2018 PSV353A, London, 2018)

If passengers have concerns, they have some, limited, avenues for complaint. Transport Focus, once the Central Transport Consultative Committee (CTCC) under the 1947 Transport Act, and now an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Transport, is the national statutory representative body for bus passengers.[193] Transport Focus styles itself as "the independent watchdog representing the interests of Britain's rail passengers, bus and tram passengers in England (outside of London)"[194], with "a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research".[195] Should passenger disputes remain unresolved, then the Bus Appeals Body (BAB) the Final Appeal Panel of the Complaints process can resolve concerns. The Appeals body includes Bus Users UK, an independent charity, originally set up in 1985 as the National Federation of Bus Users, and the first approved Alternative Dispute Resolution Body for bus and coach passengers, as one of its members.[196] In the last instance, disputes can be litigated, as in *Paulley v First Group UK* illustrates, where the Supreme Court held that First Group had breached the Equality Act 2010 on disability grounds.[197] These complaints processes are complex to understand, with litigation also potentially expensive. Critically, for *The Bus Project*, all such disputes start after a passenger at least intends to catch a bus. There is no mechanism for people who cannot afford to catch the bus at all.

4.2   London

Buses have been free for all under 17-year olds in London since 2005 with the subsidy increased to 17 year olds in full-time education in 2006.[198] The capital was excluded from the 1985 Transport Act[199], having only recently been legislated for by the 1984 London Transport Act and bus governance is operated under a distinctive tendering model. The 1984 Act had transferred responsibility for the bus network from the Greater London Council (GLC) to London Regional Transport (LRT), in the wake of the then mayor, Ken Livingstone's, "fares fair" campaign.[200] It required London Transport to set up operating subsidiary companies to run bus and Underground services and in 1985 London Buses Ltd was formed as a wholly owned subsidiary. In November 1993 the Government announced that it would defer the

---

[193] Local Transport Act 2008, ss 73-74 and the Passengers' Council (Non-Railway Functions) Order 2010 (SI 2010/439)

[194] *Transport Focus* <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/> accessed 12 April 2020

[195] 'About' (*Transport Focus*) <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/> accessed 12 April 2020

[196] One expert bus industry witness thought the system worked relatively well and did not require greater regulatory oversight for individual complaints, saying: "I think it would be sad that government had to spend money on creating something when I think that it's more about most operators are quite good at resolving customer issues" (Interview 3)

[197] [2017] UKSC 4

[198] For a discussion of the introduction, see A Jones, 'Free for Some? Setting the Context for the "On the Buses" Study' [2010] Occasional Papers in Transport and Health: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine <https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/989689/> accessed 24 October 2019

[199] Along with Northern Ireland

[200] See also the subsequent litigation in *Bromley LBC v GLC* [1983] 1 AC 768, where the House of Lords held that a 25% supplement on rates to subsidise public transport in the capital under the *Fares Fair* scheme was *ultra vires*

previously intended deregulation of buses in London, although privatisation of the bus operating subsidiaries of London Transport would proceed.[201]

Under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, London's buses, trains, Underground system, traffic lights, taxis and river transport, were devolved to a single institution, now called Transport for London (TfL). The Mayor of London was given responsibility for policy and a duty to produce an integrated transport strategy for London. TfL secure bus services by contract from operators following competitive tendering so that there is a completely different system from the rest of England. TfL also implements the Mayor's transport strategy and oversees transport services on a day-to-day basis, although statutory duties still rest with the Mayor. The London Assembly approves the integrated transport strategy and the transport budget, scrutinises TfL and the Mayor's transport performance and can conduct wider investigations.[202]

London's transport system remains extraordinarily well-funded compared to the rest of the country. Our interviewees repeatedly compared bus governance outside of the capital with the freedoms and financial resources in London:

> *"London has a budget which is way in excess of anything that a provincial city could come to terms with, imagine in their wildest dreams, have access to."*[203]

Even despite the funding differentials, however, John Preston writes of the policy significance: "Almost by accident, the government had created a controlled experiment in which competition-in-the-market and competition-for-the-market in the local bus industry could be compared".[204] Bus use is significantly higher in London and free for children and young people.

4.3   Quality Contracts and Partnerships

The New Labour Governments (1997-2010) left the deregulatory bus framework broadly untouched. Instead, they promoted "quality contracts" and partnership working between transport authorities and bus operators. Quality contracts were to be akin to franchising, giving local authorities "similar powers to grant exclusive operating rights on defined routes or within a defined area", on the basis of "best value".[205] They have, however, proved

---

[201] House of Commons Library, 'Buses: Research Paper 99/59' (1999) 11
[202] Transport for London, 'London's Bus Contracting and Tendering Process' (2015) TWC 12/8/15
[203] Interview 1
[204] John Preston, 'The impact of regulatory reform on public transport markets' in Transport for London, 'London's Bus Contracting and Tendering Process' (2015) TWC 12/8/15 26
[205] Department for Transport, *Department for Transport - From Workhorse to Thoroughbred: A Better Role for Bus Travel* (Department for Transport 1999) Chapter 6

unattractive to bus operators and no quality contracts have been agreed to this day.[206] In 2006, the House of Commons Transport Committee attributed this failure to "fear of legal proceedings from operators, and the cost and complexity of making an application".[207]

Partnership working, particularly voluntarily, has been more successful. Around 20% of bus operators are currently involved in some form of partnership, approximately 107 of which are voluntary and 22 statutory (although data on this is – once again - not centrally collected).[208] Many partnerships are voluntary, based on agreement, as one expert explained:

> *"There are a lot of good partnerships, and sometimes they're not written down, sometimes they're just a single sheet of paper, sometimes they are big books, but there are partnerships and they're delivering results."*[209]

Partnerships enable local authorities to act in agreement with bus companies, perhaps influencing fares, promoting integrated ticketing, reviewing the stability of the network and the overall integration of the network into transport policy.[210] They are an attempt at soft regulation, facilitating the negotiation of mutually agreeable commitments that may – if they are binding - be legally enforceable. Introducing partnerships in the 1998 White Paper *A New Deal for Transport*, the then Labour Government suggested that putting partnerships on a statutory footing would:

> *"… enable local authorities to require operators to meet certain standards of service quality in order to use the facilities provided by the local authority as part of the Quality Partnership. This will give local authorities greater influence over the provision of bus services and their marketing, and will enable them to encourage the provision of easy access buses."*[211]

The discourse of partnerships sometimes underestimates the power dynamics in a deregulated system. As one expert interviewee told us, even under a highly collegial partnership model: "*we cannot make an operator run a loss-making services*".[212] Voluntary partnerships without statutory requirements are consequently often seen as more

---

[206] Nexus, the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive, worked on a QCS from 2012 to 2015,24 but the QCS Board decided that Nexus was unable to proceed with the QCS, Cited in Transport Committee, *Bus services across the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06* (HC 2007-8 298-I) 16

[207] Transport Committee, *Bus services across the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06* (n 206) 17

[208] Transport Committee Bus services in England outside London (n 23) 16

[209] Interview 3

[210] Local Government Association, *Get in on the Act: Bus Services Act 2017* (London Government Association 2017) 2

[211] Department for Transport, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*, (White Paper, Cmnd 3950, 1998) 34.

[212] Interview 1

manageable and can increase ridership, even though they are negotiated in light of the power dynamics enabled by the deregulated bus governance framework. Reliability and access often remain practical concerns as one commercial operator explained:

> *"There are a lot of good partnerships, and sometimes they're not written down, sometimes they're just a single sheet of paper, sometimes they are big books, but there are partnerships and they're delivering results. We just need to have more discussion around what can be done jointly, because I can do lots of stuff … but I need help from the local authorities to try and open up a bit more road space or to tweak traffic lights, or extend a double yellow line so that we can make better use of what we're doing today. Then it's those other sensible decisions like the parking policies and all the things that have a big impact on what we can do."*[213]

Partnerships are, however, time-intensive and costly to negotiate for both local authorities and operators. And, as one expert noted, even when one is finally agreed: "any partnership scheme has a time limit to it".[214]

Bristol City Council has voluntary partnerships with FirstBus, its primary operator, contributing to increasing city ridership by an estimated 14.2 million bus journeys a year between 2009/10 to 2017/18, albeit with ongoing passenger and council concerns about reliability.[215] The Metrobus has been introduced through partnership working, with significant public infrastructure funding. One Metrobus spur was originally destined to run through South Bristol, a less affluent part of the city and close to the ward where *The Bus Project* was located. The Managing Director of First West of England, James Freeman, reportedly attributed the bus company's decision not to take on this route to the fact that had this Metrobus Route been introduced, it might have affected the viability of First's commercial operations in the South of the city. He is quoted as saying he was "reasonably unapologetic" about this commercially strategic decision, explaining how First examined the network, determined that as a whole it would make insufficient financial return, and identified individual profitable routes instead, which it successfully bid for. Declining to run the Southern spur, which currently lies empty and unused, James Freeman reportedly said that the company didn't not "damage existing services" in the area.[216]

4.4   Public Ownership, Management Buy-Outs or Franchising

---

[213] Interview 3

[214] Ibid

[215] Transport Committee, *Bus services across the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06*, 11 (HC 2007-8 298-I) 18

[216] Esme Ashcroft, 'FirstBus Won't Offer MetroBus on South Bristol Link Road as It Doesn't Want to Damage Existing Services' *Bristol Post* (25 May 2018) <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/firstbus-wont-offer-metrobus-south-1599192> accessed 2 April 2020

There are three broad alternatives to current bus governance system: public ownership, local management buy outs or franchising. The Labour party has increasingly called for buses to return to public ownership[217], particularly since the Conservatives prohibited municipal ownership under the Bus Services Act 2017.[218] This is, however, current prohibited. A second option, particularly if profits are insufficient to satisfy corporate investors, is for a management buyout of buses, so prevalent in the early years of privatisation. The Bristol Cable recently mooted this as a local possibility suggesting that:

> "… another option would be a management and worker buyout; that crazy old idea where the people who do the work also own the company. If FWE's managers and 1,800 employees were up for it, they would have to raise a lot of money – especially with bus use on the up locally and a reasonably performing local company (good profits in 2019 but next to nothing and losses in the years before). The new set up could have a range of control and ownership models for the workers and managers.

> That's not a simple operation – though FWE's managing director, James Freeman, does have some experience in the matter. Widely recognised as a decent bloke and described to the Cable by a local bus expert as "one of the finest busmen and transport minds around", Freeman led a buyout of buses in Hampshire in the late 80s following privatisation, and also ran Reading's council-owned service."[219]

So far, however, there is no indication that this will happen in Bristol.

Thirdly, the 2017 Bus Services Act introduced franchising, already in use in London, as a regional possibility. Greater Manchester, a combined metropolitan area, led by metro-mayor Andy Burnham, is the furthest along this path, beginning a period of consultation on bus franchising in Autumn 2019.[220] This consultation must feed into a report prepared by the Greater Manchester Combined Area (GMCA) before Burnham can then make a decision.[221]

So far there is limited support for franchising within WECA, though it is sometimes under discussion. WECA's 2020 *Bus Strategy* raises the issue before going on to note that:

---

[217] In light of decision-making at regional scale, with powers given to combined authorities, this report uses the phrase "public ownership" rather than "municipal ownership".

[218] Section 22 provides that a relevant authority (county or district council, Combined Authority, Integrated Transport Authority or Passenger Transport Executive) "may not, in the exercise of any of its powers, form a company for the purposes of providing a local service". Considerable campaigning, particularly by transport NGOs, *We Own It* and opposition parties, failed to stop Clause 21 coming into law as Section 22.

[219] Adam Cantwell-Corn and Hannah Vickers, 'The Routes out of Bristol's Bus Nightmare' *The Bristol Cable* (22 February 2020) <https://thebristolcable.org/2020/02/the-routes-out-of-bristols-bus-nightmare/> accessed 1 April 2020

[220] Greater Manchester Combined Authority, *Have Your Say on How Your Buses Are Run: Consultation Document* (GMCA, Manchester, 2019)

[221] Department for Transport, *The Bus Services Act 2017 Franchising Scheme Guidance* (Department for Transport, London, 2017)

"The experience to date of some authorities considering franchising is that it presents a number of challenges including cost which would have to be evaluated before initiating this strategy. … It is important to emphasise that franchising, of itself, will not generate new services, lower fares or greater reliability. These issues are delivered through investment in the bus network. Franchising could, however, lead to greater network stability, although this may require more subsidy and the need to raise additional funding. In other words, it is important to be clear what the problem is that we are trying to solve before deciding that franchising is the best way to solve it."[222]

The suggestion appears to be that franchising is a solution looking for a problem. Certainly, it is arguable that greater progress in bus policy could be made by radical and significant road priority measures for buses, genuinely reducing congestion, making bus travel more attractive and encouraging a modal shift from cars. It is striking, however, that London, the best region in the country for children's use of buses, uses franchising (albeit under a distinctive funding model). Critically, under a franchising model an authority can offer a package of routes that are both profitable and loss-making, leaving an operator to decide whether to tender for the package.

A further concern about franchising considers the employment conditions of staff under a franchised model. As one Bristol Councillor told us:

"to win the contracts the companies undercut each other and it's the drivers that end up paying the cost in terms of conditions. As a Labour administration that's something I'm concerned about."[223]

Privatisation certainly had dramatic effects on the ownership of bus stations[224], which needed to be addressed in light of the 2011 Competition Commission investigation, so it is undoubtedly important to keep a watchful eye on the employment conditions of staff.

Even if franchising does not go ahead, the option remains rhetorically persuasive as a policy expert explains:

"… the decision to go for franchising or not hasn't been made. It's more, it may be more appropriate to have it in your back pocket to say, 'Operators, if you don't lift the quality of services here, here and there, then we will have no option but to

---

[222] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation Document* (n 8) 22
[223] Interview 9
[224] Though note the Access to Bus Stations Order 2012, introduced following the Competition Commission's 2011 Report

regulate bus services which the councils then setting the various the fares and frequencies themselves".[225]

One concern is that in a deregulated system, bus operators can, and do, sell up and withdraw from markets. In the Summer of 2019, First Group Plc announced that it would pursue its strategic options in relation to First Bus, and at the time of writing the company's strategy remains uncertain. Should First leave, it is likely that another one of the big five operators would step in and run buses in Bristol, however there is the possibility that a city could be left without commercial bus services with no option to introduce municipal service, given the ban under the 2017 Act. This possibility was foreseen during Parliamentary debates but did not persuade the Government to permit municipal ownership, even as a fallback option.

Unsurprisingly, bus operators, although they would prefer greater national consistency, for example, on how concession fares are reimbursed, rather than more regulation, favour the existing system, at best pushing for more use of partnerships. And whatever the model of governance, there is considerable evidence suggesting that passengers' primary concerns are with "reliability, frequency and value for money rather than competition as such".[226] Certainly, *The Bus Project* found a difference of opinion amongst the transport experts it interviewed about whether bus services would be better run privately, franchised or municipalized. As one commercial interviewee said:

> *"I don't think it matters who runs it. The costs are the same. First Group is a PLC, their shareholders haven't had dividends for years and years and years. The margins are so slow, so small."*[227]

Responding to the suggestion that bus companies are often said to make 8% profit on running their services, the interviewee replied:

> *"Oh, if you're lucky, you can dream of eight per cent.*"[228]

Similarly, one commercial expert was sanguine:

> *"The ownership issue is a bit of a distraction at times, and it's more of a political thing that depending on your affiliation you think buses should be franchised, contracted or whatever… up and down the country there are today some really good bus companies and they are getting more people using the buses, they are*

---

[225] Interview 1
[226] Peter White, 'An Assessment of the Competition Commission Report and Subsequent Outcomes' (2014) 48 Research in Transportation Economics 277, 281
[227] Interview 7
[228] Ibid

getting good satisfaction… Then there are some bus companies that aren't, and guess what? If it was all franchised, the same people working in the industry, and the same problems would still be there… And they'll be franchised or council owned bus companies, some of which will be doing really well, and some won't, and it will be down to the people in them and the strategies that they have, and that's the issue."[229]

Beyond the debates about ownership, there is a simple recognition that running buses costs money. Whoever provides the service, funding would still have to be found for children to travel for free. In this vein, the 2020 WECA Bus Strategy concludes its discussion by noting that, even if franchised, money for subsidies would still have to be found:

"… with or without franchising a network, the need to subsidise some bus services will remain. These are services which don't make a profit but are considered socially necessary".[230]

A Bristol Councillor made a similar point:

"… at the end of the day what we really need is subsidies for buses and you can franchise the routes, but actually where the subsidies come from you still haven't answered that question…. So some people are saying it's a silver bullet, but I don't think it is. Also, I personally, if I could have the ideal system, I would probably have a municipal company rather than a franchise model."[231]

Supported services are, however, so often taken to be subsidised routes rather than locally or regionally subsidised categories of people. Of course, franchising does not necessarily mean that children could travel for free. It is striking, however, that London, the one city in the country that has franchised bus services – albeit under a distinctive funding model – has free transport for children.

4.5   Bus Fares

Although the provision of bus services is deregulated, passenger fares only make up 58% of funding and are supplemented by the Government's 42% subsidy, amounting to approximately £2 billion a year.[232] Under the 1930 Transport Act fares had been linked to Road Service Licences, and before deregulation Traffic Commissioners would award operators

[229] Interview 3
[230] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation Document* (n 8) 22 23
[231] Interview 9
[232] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London* (n 23) 11

licences to run a service defined by a route and timetable with a specified fare scale.[233] The 1980 and 1985 Transport Acts repealed these requirements.

In practice, many companies had already experienced a shortfall between fares and running costs requiring cross subsidy from transport authorities. In the 1960s and 1970s "local authorities played an increasing role in sustaining public transport through revenue support payments, in line with their statutory obligations to provide co-ordinated public transport to meet the needs of their populations".[234] Subsidies varied but could be costly.[235] In 1963, 70% of all services run by Bristol Omnibus failed to cover their costs and by 1976 the situation was so bad that Bristol Omnibus notified the City Council of a likely £1.1 million deficit purely on Bristol City operations in the year (around £8.1m at 2017 prices).[236] It was these deficits, combined with falling patronage, which influenced the move to deregulation in the hope, or expectation, that privatisation would improve bus efficiency.

Today, bus operators set fares individually without regulatory oversight, according to their individual commercial or organisational strategy.[237] The Campaign for Better Transport have estimated that bus fares have risen 61 per cent between 2009 and 2018 – significantly faster than both regulated and unregulated rail fares (50 per cent) and motoring (35 per cent).[238] Bus governance has no oversight equivalent to that in the rail sector where 45% of fares are regulated according to a formula based on the RPI figure for the previous July.[239] Nationally, the average single bus fare went up by around 42% from 2009 to 2019[240], though as the influential TAS survey noted: "it remains our assertion that there has never been a 'standard bus fare' across GB for a three mile journey and this continues to be the case".[241] If anything, fares are lower in urban areas and significant variation in bus fares continues, with research struggling to find a clear relationship between distance, local wages or location. Path dependency offers one explanation for the fact that fares are not always rationally linked to cost. As the 2019 TAS Fares Survey noted:

---

[233] This was regulated over the years by the 1930 and 1968 Transport Acts as well as the Local Government Acts of 1972 and 1973

[234] Louise Butcher, 'Buses: Deregulation in the 1980s' (House of Commons Library, SN/BT/1534, 2010) 7

[235] Ibid; TAS Partnership Limited, *6th TAS National Bus Fares Survey: 2019* (2020) <https://taspartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/30281-REP-TAS-National-Fares-Survey-2019.pdf>.

[236] TAS Partnership Limited, *6th TAS National Bus Fares Survey: 2019* (n 235) 25

[237] For unsupported routes. 20% of all routes are supported, tendered by local transport authorities. Outside of London, which has a franchised system.

[238] Campaign for Better Transport, 'The Future of the Bus Policy and Fiscal Interventions as Part of a National Bus Strategy', 26 (2019) <https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/The-future-of-the-bus-August-2019.pdf> accessed 2 April 2020

[239] House of Commons Library, *Public Transport Fares* (2016)

[240] TAS Partnership Limited, *6th TAS National Bus Fares Survey: 2019* (n 235) 6

[241] Ibid 5

"… areas with a more marked fare taper before deregulation have generally stayed that way and areas which were previously considered to be 'high fare' areas have retained this distinction."[242]

Very occasionally, operators collaborate with transport authorities to investigate how best to set fares. In Bristol in 2013-14, a "Fairer Fares" campaign led to a consultation by First, producing a simpler fare schedule that was, according to the influential *TAS Bus Fares Survey*, "the first radical change to single fares by any UK operator for many years".[243] Simpler, flatter fares enabled the introduction of carnets (including of mobile, m-tickets) with the changes attributed to increasing Stagecoach's ridership by around 15%.[244]

While changing fares can be useful experimentation with flatter fares attributed to increasing patronage, one disadvantage is that passengers are often confused about how much buses cost, particularly if they lack access to the internet. Our research found that perceptions about bus fares are also a significant problem. The price reduction of m-tickets is also of no assistance to people who do not own a smartphone. Moreover, as M-tickets must be activated within five minutes of boarding a bus, they are also tricky for people who have smart phones but limited or no access to data. It is not just smartphone ownership but matters but also data packages. While M-tickets are hugely useful to speed up boarding times, improving reliability, other forms of smart ticketing, similar to London Oyster cards or credit cards, could be more inclusive.

---

[242] Ibid 27
[243] Ibid 29
[244] Ibid 32

4.6   Concessionary Fares

New Labour's most enduring intervention in bus policy was to introduce concessionary travel for some.[245] The Transport Act 2000 introduced a half-fare statutory bus concession for older and disabled people[246] on local bus travel during the "relevant time", (all day Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays as well as between 0930 and 2300 Monday to Friday) on "eligible services". Initially the subject of sex discrimination litigation[247] as women acquired bus concessions at 60, compared to men's 65, the age differential was rectified in 2002.[248] In 2005, the concession was geographically extended from a half-fare concession on local bus services to free travel on local services throughout England from 1 April 2006.[249] In 2008 free off-peak local bus travel became available to eligible older and disabled people anywhere in England, implemented by the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) from April 2008.[250] Today, concessions are linked to pensionable age so that it will be 66 for all by 2020. As concessionary travel is a devolved policy area, these rules apply to England only. Legislation and assessment of eligibility with regard to concessionary travel in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the appropriate devolved administration.

Whilst politically popular particularly with older voters, the concessionary bus scheme is administratively contentious. In 2006, the House of Commons Transport Committee concluded that: "The concessionary fares system in England is a mess."[251] In 2007, the then Government responded to this criticism by acknowledging the criticism adding that it was working with local authorities and operator and contributing more funding.[252] In 2019, again

---

[245] There are seven categories of disabled people who are entitled to the statutory minimum concession, set out in section 146 of the Transport Act 2000 and section 240(5) of the Greater London Authority Act (in relation to London). DfT has produced guidance to local authorities on assessing eligibility of disabled people, which can be found at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/buses/concessionary/informationlocalauthoritie s/guidancedisabled/Section 1.7: "An eligible disabled person is someone who: Is blind or partially sighted, Is profoundly or severely deaf, Is without speech, Has a disability, or has suffered an injury, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to walk, Does not have arms or has long-term loss of the use of both arms, Has a learning disability, that is, a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning . Would, if he or she applied for the grant of a licence to drive a motor vehicle under Part III of the Road Traffic Act 1988, have his/her application refused pursuant to section 92 of the Act (physical fitness) otherwise than on the ground of persistent misuse of drugs or alcohol".

[246] Proposed by the White Paper, sections 145 to 159 of the Transport Act 2000, in force since 1 June 2001 outside London.

[247] See *Atkins v Wrekin Borough Council [1997] I.C.R. 75* (where the ECJ found no breach) and *Matthews v United Kingdom (application no. 40302/98)* where the European Court of Human Rights held the application admissible, a decision that was swiftly followed by the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002, which equalised entitlement between genders.

[248] Travel Concessions (Eligible Services) Order 2002 (SI 2002/1016)

[249] Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 and Travel Concessions (Extension of Entitlement) (England) Order 2005 (SI 2005/3224) and Travel Concessions (Eligible Services) (Amendment) Order 2009

[250] Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007. With some limited changes introduced by Travel Concessions (Eligible Services) (Amendment) Order 2009 (SI 2009/575)

[251] Transport Committee, *Bus Services across the UK,* 33 (HC 2005-06 1317-I)

[252] Transport Committee, *Bus services across the UK: Government Response* (n 206) 11

critiquing the current system, the 2019 Transport Select Committee *Bus Services in England Outside London*, called for the Government to "review how it finances concessionary bus passes" and to ensure it re-baselines fares at least every four years.[253]

The ENCTS scheme is a remarkable achievement. In the words of the Labour government that extended it: since 2008, the national bus concession entitles qualifying older and disabled people "to free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England. So for the first time eligible people will be guaranteed off-peak bus travel across local authority boundaries."[254] The scheme is also, however, complicated and contested, with suggestions that it costs local authorities more than initially supposed.[255] Legally, Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs) are required by law to reimburse bus operators for carrying concessionary passengers, on the principle that the operators are "no better off and no worse off" by taking part in concessionary travel schemes. The aim is not to subsidise bus operators, but to pay for any increased costs that they have incurred including both revenue forgone for fares that would have been paid had concessionary journeys not gone ahead in the absence of such a scheme as well as net additional costs for these "generated journeys".[256] Bus operators must cooperate with the concessionary scheme, even though they too find reimbursement complicated and contested.

National passenger concessions are the most expensive form of government subsidy for buses, costing £0.98 billion in 2018/19, 47% of the estimated total net support paid in England of £2.07 billion.[257] Central and local government support for local bus services consists of payments for supported services, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) and concessionary travel reimbursement (effectively a subsidy to concessionary passengers). As a universal benefit, the bus pass is relatively cheap to administer and includes those who might not apply if there was a means-tested, either electronic or documentary application process. Its rationale is as a universal benefit and as Mackett notes, "because many of those with higher incomes probably do not use the bus very often, the reduction in the number of trips made using the pass would not be huge: the saving might well be less than the cost of means testing."[258] Nevertheless, the use and cost of the concessionary travel scheme is declining –

[253] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London*, 7 (n 23)

[254] Transport Committee, *Bus services across the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06* (n 206) 11

[255] Transport Committee, *Bus services in England outside London*, 22 (n 23)

[256] See the Explanatory Memo to The Mandatory Travel Concession (England) (Amendment) Regulations (SI 2018/385) as well as the litigation in *First Essex Buses v Secretary of State* [2009] EWHC 3024 (Admin), *Stagecoach Group Companies v Secretary of State for Transport* [2010] EWHC 223 (Admin)

[257] Department for Transport, 'Annual Bus Statistics 2018-19' (n 4) 11

[258] Roger Mackett, 'Has the Policy of Concessionary Bus Travel for Older People in Britain Been Successful?' (2014) 2 Case Studies on Transport Policy 81

from £1.14 billion in 2017-18, to £0.98 billion in 2018-19 at a time when public transport spending (particularly on rail) is increasing significantly – to £32.5 billion in 2018.[259]

Evaluation of Concessionary Fares for Older and Disabled People:

The justification for concessionary travel for older and disabled people was, as with proposals for deregulation in 1984, relatively informal. Arguments in favour of the concession have been primarily qualitative and discursive, rather than tied to quantifiable benefits. The 1998 White Paper, *A New Deal for Transport*, proposing a half price concession, asserted that it would:

> "… enable elderly people, especially those on low incomes, to continue to use public transport and to use it more often, improving their access to a range of basic necessities such as health care and shops and reducing social isolation." [260]

In 2005, Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, announcing that the scheme would be extended by giving "free off peak local bus for those aged over 60 and disabled people in England from April 2006", reducing the cost of travel "for approximately 11 million people aged over 60 and approximately 2 million disabled people" as well as helping "approximately 54 per cent of pensioner households who do not have a car to travel freely in their local area''.[261] Extending free travel across the whole of England, the 2006 Budget justified the concession as recognising "the importance of public transport for older people and the role access to transport has to play in tackling social exclusion and maintaining well-being".[262]

The rationale for free bus travel for older and disabled people has rarely been pinned down. One influential 2016 evaluation outlined the "policy objective of statutory concessionary travel" as five-fold: (1) reducing the cost of bus travel for disabled and older people (in particular those without access to a car), (2) contributing to improved access to essential services; (3) improved access to friends and family; (4) improved access to leisure activities; and (5) facilitating independent living for longer.[263] As well as these expected direct benefits, the scheme also anticipated generating considerable indirect benefits including reducing congestion through modal change, as journeys switched from cars to bus, as well as benefits to the local economy from increased expenditure as a result of more frequent shopping

---

[259] Anthony A Laverty and Christopher Millett, 'Potential Impacts of Subsidised Bus Travel for Older People' (2015) 2 Journal of Transport & Health 32

[260] Department for Transport, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*, 100 (Cmnd 4024) (1998).

[261] Cited in Roger Mackett, 'Has the Policy of Concessionary Bus Travel for Older People in Britain Been Successful?' (n 258)

[262] Great Britain Treasury, *Budget 2006: A Strong and Strengthening Economy; Investing in Britain's Future Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report and Financial Statement and Budget Report; March 2006* (The Stationery Office 2006), 109

[263] For older people, there was insufficient data to evaluate the scheme for disabled people

trips."[264] Reviewing the scheme in 2014, Mackett summarised the objectives for the free bus pass for older and disabled people as being: (1) to increase public transport usage by older people, especially those on low incomes and those without a car; (2) to improve access to basis necessities such as health care and shops for older people; and (3) to reduce social isolation, reduce social exclusion and maintain wellbeing for older people."[265]

There have been several academic and government attempts to evaluate the benefits of the concessionary bus pass, both in qualitative terms as well as by formally assessing value for money. In 2016, an Evaluation commissioned by the Government (in part in response to 2006 Select Committee criticism) identified who used concessionary travel. They found that people with a car are less likely to have a bus pass:

> "access to a private vehicle is the main determinant of ownership of a bus pass, and regular use of the bus pass. In response to direct questions access to a private vehicle was given by 69% of respondents as a reason for not owning a pass and cited by 74% of respondents as a reason for infrequent pass use."[266]

The 2016 evaluation found it more likely that a bus pass would be acquired if people "are in lower income households, have no access to cars, live in metropolitan areas or generally live near better bus links".[267] Use of the bus pass also increased for people with low incomes and those without a car:

> "passholders without access to a car make more than three times as many trips as passholders with access to a car. Those from lower income households also make more trips – pass holders with income of less than £10,000 per annum made twice as many trips than those receiving £20,000 or more."[268]

While this finding relates to older and disabled people, many of these characteristics would be shared by families in Hartcliffe.

Quantifying the benefits of the concessionary travel scheme is undoubtedly difficult. There is no counterfactual to the concessionary scheme. All older people in England were given concessions at the same time, becoming available at retirement, a major life transition where public transport use might change in any case. That said, research consistently finds greater social interaction and engagement indicating an increase in volunteering, easing access for shopping and medical trips and crucially (as discussed in Section 3 above) a sense of

---

[264] Department for Transport, *Evaluation of Concessionary Bus Travel: The Impacts of the Free Bus Pass* (2016) 9
[265] Mackett (n 258) 82
[266] Department for Transport, *Evaluation of Concessionary Bus Travel* (n 262) 33
[267] Ibid 4
[268] Ibid

entitlement and belonging. Research has linked having a bus to being 15% more likely to have walked three or more times in the previous week, as well as over four times more likely to undertake physically active forms of travel.[269] Having a bus pass has also been linked with a 25% reduced risk in becoming obese.[270]

The 2016 Evaluation concluded that the ENCTS "met the objective of generating additional bus trips that could help older and disabled people to stay connected to their community and social surrounding" and provided "the concession provides low to medium value for money, when we take into consideration its potential non-monetised benefits", which it classed as a positive result". It concluded that: "In order to measure how adequately the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) has met its social (non-monetised) objectives, we have to recall its main objective - to increase the 'quality of life' for concessionary travellers. The literature on the relationship between the ENCTS and social objectives presents various definitions for the term 'quality of life' and consequently utilises varying proxies for the term. The recurring references regarding the interpretation of 'quality of life' relate to 'well-being', 'physical and mental health', 'standard of living', 'recreation and 'leisure time' and 'social-belonging'. The measurement of these variables has involved both quantitative and qualitative assessments."[271] Concessionary travel is also highly popular electorally, frequently included in political manifestos to reassure older voters.[272]

Children & Young People

There is no national concession for children or young people. In 2007, the then *Transport Select Committee on Ticketing and Concessions* concluded that:

> "There is a good case to be made for concessionary travel to be extended to other groups. Many young people and those on low incomes find bus fares expensive. In 2002, the Commission for Integrated Transport advised that greater benefits would be achieved at lower cost by extending half-fares to young people and those on low incomes, rather than free travel for those over 60. It is unclear why the Government ignored this advice. Local authorities have a well-being power. If the Local Transport Bill is enacted as proposed, the well-being power will be extended to passenger transport executives. Amongst other things, this permits these

---

[269] Sophie Coronini-Cronberg and others, 'The Impact of a Free Older Persons' Bus Pass on Active Travel and Regular Walking in England' (2012) 102 American Journal of Public Health 2141

[270] Elizabeth Webb, Gopalakrishnan Netuveli and Christopher Millett, 'Free Bus Passes, Use of Public Transport and Obesity among Older People in England' (2012) 66 Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 176; Elizabeth Webb and others, 'Free Bus Travel and Physical Activity, Gait Speed, and Adiposity in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing' (2016) 106 American Journal of Public Health 136

[271] Department for Transport, *Evaluation of Concessionary Bus Travel'* (n 264) 31

[272] Conservative and Unionist Party, *Get Brexit Done, Unleash Britain's Potential: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019* (2019) 13: "We will keep the triple lock, the winter fuel payment, the older person's bus pass and other pensioner benefits".

authorities to provide travel concessions for other groups of people. Implementation, however, depends very much on local priorities and the availability of local funding, which is unlikely if they are struggling to pay for existing concessionary travel schemes. If the Government is minded at any stage to extend the English national concessionary travel scheme, young people and others identified by the Commission for Integrated Transport should receive priority consideration for concessionary travel."[273]

Sadly, this recommendation was not taken up, one recent Transport Minister confirming in 2018 that "the Government had "no plans to implement a national bus concession for young people".[274] While the Labour Party proposed free bus travel for all people under 25 funded from vehicle excise duty[275], in the 2019 manifesto this became a promise that "[w]here councils take control of their buses, Labour will introduce free bus travel for under-25s", ie. concessionary bus fares would only be available in areas where the local authorities municipalised their bus services.[276]

Despite this lack of political appetite, concessionary fares for children or young people is a decision that could be taken by national government, as the recent Select Committee on Transport's report on buses has urged:

"… since young people are required to be in education or training until they are 18 they should benefit from a concessionary fares scheme. Young people are also key to securing the future of bus use. Inconsistency in how young people are treated when using buses is a barrier to travel."[277]

So far there is no prospect, however, of a national English scheme for concessionary fares for children or young people. With a Scottish scheme for free bus travel for all under-19s due to be introduced, perhaps there will be further political pressure to extend free bus travel in England for children and young people.

All local authorities have powers under the Transport Act 1985 to establish travel concession schemes for the benefit of blind and disabled persons, children and persons over sixty.[278] Nearly all Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs), essentially, local authorities, have travel

---

[273] Transport Committee, *Ticketing and Concessionary Travel on Public Transport* (HC 2007-08, 84-I) 129
[274] Louise Butcher and David Hirst, 'Concessionary Bus Fares' (2019) Briefing Paper House of Commons Library 8
[275] Shadow Transport Minister Matt Rodda set out some of the details of this proposed policy during a Westminster Hall debate 8 May 2018. Cited in Louise Butcher and David Hirst, 'Concessionary Bus Fares' (n 274) 8
[276] Labour Party, *It's Time for Real Change: The Labour Party Manifesto 2019* (2019) 19
[277] Transport Committee Bus services in England outside London (n 23) 10, para 26 (repeated at page 39, para 107)
[278] Section 93, Transport Act 1985

concessions for young people in their area, yet as the statistics collected on this note: "Youth concessions are not statutory but may be offered at the discretion of the TCA or on a commercial basis by bus operators".[279] This means that even though neither Bristol city Council or WECA fund concessionary bus travel for children, since commercial operators, notably FirstBus, do offer a concession, Bristol is included in the statistical list of TCAs where there is concessionary bus travel for children. In fact, very few local authorities – only 19 out of 89 Travel Concession Authorities in England - grant some form of concessionary travel to young people.[280] Often this concession provides for 16-17 year olds, or is related to education. Overall, as Barker et al note, "travel concessions for young people are localised, inconsistent and patchy".[281]

In Bristol, it is First who have made a commercial decision to reduce child fares, with significant discounts: children aged 1-5 are free, aged 5-16 are half-price, young people aged 16-18 receive 30% off. As there are sometimes age-related disagreements on buses, particularly without ID stating proof of age, some companies have also made commercial decisions to increase the period of discount (up to 25 in Gloucester, for example) to avoid evidential difficulties. As one operator interviewee told us they introduced this extended age range as they were keen to increase young people's use of the bus (which is what happened). For this operator interviewee, checking age:

> "it's just down to driver's judgement, and we try and make sure we're more lenient than not…".[282]

Commercial operators are incentivised to use discounts or concessions where it will increase patronage.

Children in London have had free bus travel since 2005 for all under 17-year olds, increased to 17 year olds in full-time education in 2006.[283] Justifying the concession in 2006, a Transport for London press release stated that they would:

> "… help young people reach their full potential through continued studies and is
> a cost-saving measure for thousands of London families"

The free fares policy was also to help:

---

[279] Department for Transport, Table BUS0842
[280] Department for Transport, Table BUS0842
[281] John Barker and others, 'Youth Transitions: Mobility and the Travel Intentions of 12–20 Year Olds, Reading, UK' (2019) 17 Children's Geographies 442, 444.
[282] Interview 3
[283] Jones (n 81)

"young people to unlock education, sport, leisure and employment opportunities."[284]

As so often in bus policy, these justifications are assertions rather than interventions backed up by data (although data collected after the fact found the interventions did benefit young people).[285] Academic research investigating this change has indicated that although mileage covered in London has not increased significantly, there has been a change in the sense of children's belonging and sense of citizenship. Researching free child fares, Goodman et al found: "One of the most direct effects of free bus travel was to increase financial access to what many young Londoners experienced as a comparatively independent mode".[286]

4.7   Local subsidies and supported bus services

Local authorities can supplement national concessions either under the Transport Act 1985[287] or under "wellbeing powers".[288] Many authorities, including Bristol, extend the time period for older and disabled passengers, enabling free travel to start at 9am rather than 9.30am.[289] There is so far no indication that the transfer of supported bus services to WECA will change this. In London, TfL fund the concession for older people in the weekday morning peak on TfL services (between 04:30 and 09:00), which one analysis suggests accounts for around 5% of the cost of the concession overall.[290]

The vast majority of local subsidies are for supported services, where local authorities invite tenders for additional routes or journeys if commercial services do not meet social needs. Local authorities support approximately 20% of services[291] yet are weathering the effects of austerity. In Bristol, the Council significantly reduced its subsidies by over 50% between 2016-17 and 2017-18, aiming to save £900,000 over two years, reducing from £3,642,000 to £ 1,886,000, rising to £1,920,000 in 2018-19.[292] After consultation, the Council stopped subsidising some routes that had become commercially profitable, ended subsidising one

---

[284] Press releases cited in Goodman and others (n 81)

[285] Green and others (n 81); Phil Edwards and others, 'Health Impacts of Free Bus Travel for Young People: Evaluation of a Natural Experiment in London' (2013) 67 J Epidemiol Community Health 641; Goodman and others (n 81); Jones and others (n 81)

[286] Goodman and others (n 81) 281

[287] Section 93(7), which explicitly notes that "persons whose age does not exceed sixteen years" as well as "persons whose age exceeds sixteen years but does not exceed eighteen years and who are undergoing full-time education" are eligible to receive travel concessions.

[288] Under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended

[289] TCAs can also add on "local enhancements" e.g. free travel between 9 and 9.30am or companion passes (both available in Bristol).

[290] Paul Woods, 'Concessionary Transport Cost and Funding by NECA (NR TWG 18-17).Pdf' (2018) <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Concessionary%20Transport%20cost%20and%20funding%20by%20NECA%20%28NR%20TWG%2018-17%29.pdf> accessed 5 April 2020

[291] KPMG, *Local Bus Market Study: Report to the Department for Transport* (2016) 6

[292] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (2017) <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/moderngov> accessed 5 April 2020 and Department for Transport, Table BUS0505a

particularly unprofitable rail replacement bus and maintained subsidies for others, notably routes including hospitals.[293] Reductions for supported bus services are common. The Campaign for Better Public Transport reported in 2019 that local authority spending on supporting buses outside London declined by 43% from £381,393,252 in 2009/10 to £162,718,491 2018/19.[294]

While there are formal tender procedures, in practice supported bus routes are a matter for negotiation between operators and the Council. As one interviewee explained:

> *"Well, the supported bus routes, there's a constant argument with First, who's the major supplier, about well, actually, I've been on that bus and it looks as if it could wash its face because it's busy all the time."*[295]

Disagreements can arise given a lack of available data from private operators, which is said to increase the costs of tendering. This may improve with the introduction of new provisions on data sharing under the 2017 Bus Services Act.

It is striking that although powers have long existed to subsidise both routes and categories of people, with powers to compel operators to participate with concessionary schemes, most local authorities have chosen to subsidise routes, rather than providing concessions for children, young people or apprentices.[296] Not only do younger users not vote, they also rarely have their voices heard in bus consultation processes. In 2017 the Council itself noted that "the under 15 group underuse supported bus services"[297] and were under-represented in responses to the Supported Bus Service consultation.[298]

Subsidising older and disabled people as a passenger category, rather than focusing on individual routes, means that the government is reinforcing commercial decisions as Mackett explains:

> "the network that is being subsidised is one that has emerged from the commercial decisions of bus operators with some additional services perceived as socially necessary by local authorities. It is not necessarily the optimal network from the perspective of passengers, including older people. Summing up: the policy of providing concessionary travel passes for older people was a political decision which has had major ramifications for both older people and bus

---

[293] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (n 292) 47

[294] Campaign for Better Public Transport, The future of the bus Future funding arrangements October 2019 9

[295] Interview 4

[296] With the exception of filling in the 9am to 9.30am gap for older and disabled concessionary passengers.

[297] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (n 292) 47

[298] Ibid

operators, and indirectly for the rest of the population as taxpayers and travellers."[299]

There are clearly valid reasons to ensure that there is a workable and connected bus network. In deciding how to prioritise bus subsidies at a time of reduced local authority funding, Bristol City Council noted that:

 "Many of the supported services are orbital in nature or create links between communities that are not connected by arterial routes … these routes are deemed as being socially necessary and without Council support, they would not otherwise be provided."[300]

In a city where a hub and spoke network is more commercially efficient, there are good reasons to ensure that cross-radial routes are supported. Yet these choices – as limited by funding as they are – continue to prioritise subsidising a bus network either for people who can afford it or for those who are able to travel for free, rather than prioritise mobility for those who are currently excluded.

---

[299] Mackett (n 252) 87
[300] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (n 292) 2

5.   Funding Children's Bus Fares in Bristol

Local Bus Funding in Austerity

In 2019, Mayor Marvin Rees, responding to the children in *The Bus Project*, indicated that free bus fares for children are an aspiration for the city, to be included in Bristol's local transport policies. At the moment, however, there is no formal commitment to such a pledge.

How much would it cost to pay for free bus fares in Bristol? Any suggestion can only, of course, be a best guess. The House of Commons Library has estimated that the average figure for the cost of a bus pass for an older or disabled person is around £119.[301] In Bristol there are, according to the Office of National Statistics, approximately 14,600 children aged 5-9 and 12,800 children aged 10-14.[302] Were each concessionary bus pass to cost £59.50 per child (half the average for adults to reflect the FirstBus commercial concession in Bristol), this would cost around £1,630,000. Of course, children's bus use might be quite different from older and disabled people's bus use. Older people's concessionary entitlement begins with retirement, itself a time where people have more free time, including time to travel. Most secondary age children are at school for 39 weeks of the year and while concessionary bus travel could be used to facilitate educational choice, this would raise additional policy questions. Given these differences, *The Bus Project* concluded that a pilot project to investigate likely bus use by children and possible cost would be an important and useful way to test the proposal of free bus travel for children.

Who would pay for free bus fares for children in Bristol?

Buses will always cost money to run and there is little commercial appetite to offer greater concessions to children and young people beyond FirstBus's existing 50% reduction. Costs might come down with a change in ownership or bus governance. However, if we take transport poverty seriously, then whoever owns the buses, some subsidy for either all or the poorest children will be required.

One clear research finding was that, as the system stands, commercial operators would expect to be compensated. As one industry professional noted "…*inevitably you would*" have to compensate as "*there's a cost to running a bus service and for a double-decker bus to run for a year, the associated costs are about £200,000 … It's still additional, passengers are getting on and not paying a fare. There's a financial impact. It would be the same as saying to*

---

[301] The £119 figure is taken from House of Commons Library, *Transport 2018: FAQ for MPs* (Briefing Report, Number CBP 7954, 2018), 13. This is the most recent edition of these FAQs.
[302] Office of National Statistics, *Population projections for local authorities: Table 2* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandtable2> accessed 14 April, 2020

Marks & Spencer's, 'Why can't you give out one meal in 10 for free? You won't miss that, will you?" [303]

Similarly, a private sector interviewee suggested that it would be "*a huge risk of capacity, huge risk.*"[304] While commercial operators have some experience in increased bus usage following the introduction of first half- and then full-fare concessions for older and disabled people under New Labour, there would be different issues with timing here: "*perhaps children travelling to school, want to travel at the same time as people are travelling to work. So actually to meet the demand, you'd need more buses at £200,000 a time, who's going to pay for that?*"[305]

Rather than having a concessionary pass, subsidies could be provided via the First Bus app:

> *"If somebody's able to subsidise costs, we can do that through a way of a voucher code system. So somebody could pay the difference to enable someone to have cheaper travel and they would have unique voucher codes which would be issued individually and then whoever was paying that subsidy, if you like, would pick up the tabs for that difference and that's very easily to do. Whoever was paying for those tickets would only be charged for the tickets that were actually used, so that would be value for money. That is a way of doing it, and certainly within the city, there may be other pots of funding for different sectors of the community, so that is a way that something could be done.*"[306]

Such an approach assumes, however, that children would have access to both smartphones and data, which is not always the case. Another approach might be to distribute Travelwest smartcards, perhaps through schools in deprived parts of the city. If the commitment to run a pilot project were there, these options could be investigated.

As "*somebody's always going to have to pay for it*", the *Bus Project* identified three possible was to raise funding at local authority level for children's possible bus concessions: (1) (re)allocating existing bus subsidy funding; (2) making broader transport arguments for support or (3) raising funds through spatial governance. This report simply outlines the options, rather than arguing for one particular policy choice.

Proposal 1: Using existing supported service subsidies

---

[303] Interview 1
[304] Interview 7
[305] Interview 7
[306] Interview 7

One source of funding free children's bus travel in Bristol is to use existing subsidies for buses. Supported bus services are a joint power for WECA and Bristol City Council. While there is some confusion on policy translation here, if the funds are available, this probably means that either body can introduce support.[307]

The preference for routes over concessions in supported bus services is plausible. Creating a viable bus network is important, particularly in a city where the efficiencies for a private operator of running a "hub and spoke" model with routes in and out of the centre make travel from one neighbourhood to lengthy and complex. There are also very strong reasons to continue to fund the companion scheme[308], while the 9-9.30am subsidy to nationally-funded older and disabled concession remains politically and economically attractive.

However, categories of people can also be subsidised under the Transport Act 1985.[309] *The Bus Project* researchers were left in no doubt that in a hypothetical scenario of unlimited funding, many decision-makers would be sympathetic to the children's call for free bus fares. While children and young people figure rarely in WECA's policy strategies, Bristol City Council are explicitly committed to building a fair and inclusive city as well as honouring the commitments of the Children's Charter. As Mayor Marvin Rees said in his introduction to the 2017 Budget consultation: "Bristol is a successful city but it is also one of the worst cities in which to be born poor."[310]

The Room 13 call for free bus fares for children comes, however, at a difficult time for local authority finance. 2019-20 was the ninth year of austerity cuts in funding and the final year of the four-year settlement agreed between Bristol and central government. Having piloted business rate retention, almost all funding from central government will have gone from 2020 onwards and, in the Mayor's words, "we are on our own and almost all our funding from central government will have gone",[311] albeit implementing a council tax increase on a growing council tax base.[312] In 2019-20, Bristol City Council is anticipated to have a net revenue budget of £376.3 million. This includes a net increase of £12.8m from 2018/19 with the Mayor noting that there "is no requirement for any new savings to achieve a balanced budget for 2019/20."[313]

---

[307] See Section 2, WECA

[308] For criteria, see the form available at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/32859/Companion+form+Jun+19.pdf/ec41f20d-9a19-e592-e580-586d8d645552> accessed 14 April, 2020

[309] Section 93(7)

[310] Bristol City Council, *2017/18 – 2021/22 Big Decisions, Tough Choices* (Bristol City Council, Bristol, 2017) 1.

[311] Bristol City Council, *Mayor's Budget Recommendations to Council*, 2 <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s29048/Appendix%20A%20-%20Budget%20Report.pdf> accessed 14 April 2020

[312] At the time of writing (April, 2020), it remains to be seen what effect business tax rebates will have on the city's finances.

[313] Bristol City Council, *Mayor's Budget Recommendations to Council*, (n 311) 2

Bristol City Council has significantly reduced its subsidies for supported bus services to make budgets balance. A 50% reduction was implemented between 2016-17 and 2017-18, aiming to save £900,000 over two years, reducing from £3,642,000 to £1,886,000, increasingly marginally to £1,920,000 in 2018-19.[314] The Council identified which cuts to make following a consultation, stopping subsidising some routes that had become commercially profitable, as well as ending support for one particularly unprofitable rail replacement bus whilst maintaining subsidies for other routes, notably ones including hospitals.[315] While the budget must still balance, some proposed cuts, including in library provision can now be stopped although rising social care costs will bring budget pressures. If the funds could be found, Bristol City Council retains joint powers with WECA to initiate supported services (including concessions) if the funds and political will are there.

However, there may also be scope for rethinking some of these subsidies, and funding at least some free bus travel for children instead funded by re-allocation of the existing bus subsidies. At the very least, existing funds might be used for a pilot project into children's free bus fares in particularly deprived parts of the city.

Free bus travel for young people aged 16-19 is already a policy aspiration for Bristol City Council with the linkage between transport difficulties and educational outcomes acknowledged in the *Bristol Learning City Partnership Post 16 Education, Skills and Career Pathways Strategy 2019-2024*. This identifies a priority to "introduce free bus travel for all 16 to 18 year olds who progress into education and training so that no matter where young people live they can access post 16 provision without additional travel costs".[316] It is widely understood that educational and apprenticeship provision are not equally distributed across the city and that mobility for young people is important to develop their educational and employment opportunities. Free bus travel for 16-19 year olds in education or training is a fantastic priority and *The Bus Project* is delighted to see it.

Proposal 2: Making the Case for Children's Free Bus Travel by Connecting Transport Budgets

The linkages between transport and economic outcomes are increasingly evident at regional level and it is possible to make extrinsic arguments for free bus travel, specifically, to improve access to educational and training opportunities. WECA's bus strategy consultation proposes just this, prioritising a number of transport aims including: "Access to education; reducing the need to travel by car or providing support to younger adults who would otherwise struggle to access higher education".[317] WECA expresses its commitment to increasing bus travel, reducing car travel, to achieve the West of England's economic as well as environmental and

---

[314] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (n 292) and Department of Transport, Table BUS0505a
[315] Bristol City Council, *Supported Bus Services Review* (n 292)
[316] Bristol City Council, *Improving Bristol Post 16 Education, Skills and Career Pathways: Be Inspired Strategy 2019 -24* (n 93) 3
[317] Travelwest, *West of England Bus Strategy: Consultation Document* (n 8) 23

quality of life ambitions.[318] This linkage between economic development and bus travel is critical to WECA's core aim of supporting residents acquiring better skills, more job opportunities and a better standard of living.[319] In Greater Manchester, where bus and tram fares are now free for 16-18 year olds, the funding has come through the Combined Authority.[320] While each agreement is different, with Manchester further along the devolution path, their intervention for 16-18 year olds illustrates how free travel and education, training and economic development can be connected and implemented at combined authority level.

Despite the political attention paid to free bus fares for children and young people aged 16-19, however, so far neither the 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy nor the 2020 WECA Bus Strategy, mention direct mechanisms to achieve these aims. Behind the scenes, conversations appear to be underway. According to Council documents, Bristol is working on "collaborative applications to generate additional external funding to drive forward priority actions including the provision of free bus travel for 16-18 year olds".[321] The document continues: "Early conversations have already started with local transport suppliers and further detailed business planning and option appraisal is now required as part of the mayor's One City conversation".[322] The 2019 One City Annual Report, however, barely mentions children and young people's transport (the most concrete proposal on bus travel relates to a *Health and Wellbing Goal enabling Bristol to achieve* 'Age Friendly City' status from the World Health Organisation.[323]

With the 2012 abolition of the Education Maintenance in England (EMA) in England, young Bristolians who would once have had access to funds to help pay for transport to post-16 education depending on their family income, no longer have an automatic entitlement. While discretionary funds are still distributed by schools and colleges, these are often only advertised once young people apply to or are already attending the school or college. We simply do not know empirically whether transport costs are inhibiting educational choice for post-16 students in Bristol. The 2019 *Post-16 Strategy* acknowledges that travel is particularly important for young adults and that, in particular, that there is "a lack of A Level provision across the South of Bristol and parts of North Bristol which means that young people either

---

[318] Ibid 7
[319] Ibid 6
[320] 'Our Pass – Travel Pass for 16-18 Year Olds | Help & Support Manchester'<https://hsm.manchester.gov.uk/kb5/Manchester/directory/service.page?id=2sD149EcHEo&directorychannel=6-8> accessed 15 April 2020
[321] Bristol City Council, 'Decision Pathway: Improving Bristol Post 16 Education, Skills and Career Pathways – Strategy 2019-24 (1 October, 2019)' <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=3688> accessed 14 April, 2020
[322] Ibid
[323] Bristol City Council, *One City Annual Report 2019* (2019) 14

have to travel further to access provision which involves more cost".[324] There is broad recognition that if children do not travel further, they limit their learning options and life chances by accessing only those resources that are close to home. The strategy documents the high rates of children 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (often known as NEETs), with one of the highest *national* rates in Hartcliffe and Withywood of 15-38% (where Room 13 Hareclive is based).[325] Young people in Hartcliffe and Withywood are in the bottom quintile *nationally* for not progressing to higher education.[326]

Children and young people's bus use could then be seen as part of transport more generally within the region, particularly given WECA's authority. As one interviewee explained:

> *"You could perhaps look for it at WECA region but they've got limited funds and people say, 'Great, all the money they've got, that's just a fraction of what they need'. But I think I don't see any harm in the combined authority raising it with central government. Particularly in an area where they're net contributors to the Treasury and where I personally believe we're at risk that if we don't tackle the congestion issue and the air quality issue, they go side by side, but the congestion issue is perhaps a more visible one, at the moment. Potentially, it's going to disincentivise new investment to the region and that will be a real shame."[327]*

While collaborating with WECA may seem like too obvious an ask, our interviewees explained repeatedly that presumptions in transport economics in favour of profitability, facilitating driving whilst inhibiting change for buses, drew on much larger arguments and that it is critical to see transport as part of economic development.
Transport is often overlooked as a constituent factor of inequality, as one Councillor explained:

> *"... if you see transport as an isolated operational geeky thing, then I think it will always be low down on the list. If you see it as a massively important enabler to people being able to gain access to all sorts of things, leading fulfilled productive lives, staying healthy both physically and mentally, it's probably number two on the list behind housing. That's where I would put it. Sadly, whilst you see it as a geeky, techie transporty only thing, it gets left out and it's a real shame."[328]*

---

[324] Bristol City Council, *Improving Bristol Post 16 Education, Skills and Career Pathways: Be Inspired Strategy 2019 -24* (n 93) 14

[325] Ibid 19

[326] Dr Jo Rose and others, *Amber: Ambitions Evaluation and Research Programme (Phase 1 and Phase 3): Final Report, December 2017* (University of Bristol, Bristol, 2017)

[327] Interview 7

[328] Interview 2

The value of transport lies in its ability to enable, be that education, economic development or citizenship. It is difficult to be a healthy, happy and productive member of society (particularly if access to broadband is unaffordable) if you cannot afford to travel even a few miles.

Proposal 3: Raising funds through spatial governance

Local authorities are increasingly looking to spatial governance to raise funds, particularly through road charging (for congestion, air pollution reduction or both) and workplace parking levies, charging employers who allow employees to park on their land. The Transport Act 2000 introduced powers for local, and now combined, authorities to introduce both types of schemes,[329] which under the Act can be justified if they appear "desirable for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of local transport policies of the charging [or licensing] authority".[330] While nationally, the 2010-2015 Coalition government introduced some restrictions on local authorities decision-making as part of its "red tape" initiative, growing numbers of cities are investigating both road pricing and parking levies to generate revenue for local transport. Either a workplace parking levy and/or a congestion or low-emission levy charge, as permitted under the Transport Act 2000, could provide a way to fund children's free bus travel in Bristol.

Road Pricing

In Bristol, road user charging was first suggested in the 1975 Land Use Transportation Study and has appeared in subsequent local transport plans, with recent studies dating back to 2007.[331] A 2013 assessment later suggested that a road pricing scheme costing £5 for all users between 7am and 10am Monday to Friday could raise "between £5m and £20m per year dependent on the size of the zone and the number of people avoiding the zone."[332] It would be popular with many locally, given the Council's estimate that while 35,000 Bristolians currently drive to work in the city, 60% of people driving to work in Bristol city centre live in neighbouring areas outside the city boundary.[333] Although the ruling Labour Cabinet rejected a Green Party proposal to introduce a charging zone in the city in February 2019, the suggestion of a charging scheme – but no more - is included in the 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy.

---

[329] Under Part III and Schedule 12, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. Part III, Chapter 1, covers road pricing (ss163 to 177A), while Chapter 2 covers workplace parking levies (ss 178 to 190)
[330] Transport Act 2000 Section 164(2) for road charging and Section 179(2) for workplace parking levies
[331] Interview 2
[332] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Transport Strategy' (n 69) 76
[333] Ibid

Road pricing charges could be reduced for citizens[334] (in London there is a 90% discount available for residents) and as the 2011 census data illustrated, 41.2% of people living Hartcliffe and Withywood have no access to a vehicle at all. As one of our interviewees noted:

> "*one of the resistances about charging is the impact on lower income families, but the reality is, if you're poor and you're living in Hartcliffe and you've got a job in a shop in Broadmead, the likelihood that you're driving in in the morning, in the morning peak [paying to park]. It's not happening, we need to be bolder about it.*"[335]

It is the on-going nature of this kind of revenue, which can make such a difference to funding public transport improvements, as one of our expert interviewees explained:

> "*… if you want good public transport, and you want it to be aimed as a public service rather than a commercial entity, you've got to find new sources of income … it's the revenue, it's the cost of the service and operating the service that's a real problem for most local authorities. That's really what stops you growing the bus market, growing the extra routes, putting on the extra services, it's the revenue.*"[336]

The best example of a low emission road levy is in central London, which has had a low emission zone since 2008 and an ultra-low emission zone since April 2019. The new ultra zone, raised £51 million over its first four months (from March to August 2019), cutting the number of polluting vehicles in central London by more than a third, reducing number of "non-compliant" vehicles from 35,578 a day in March to 23,054 a day in July.[337] In Bristol the Council have recently decided to prohibit diesel cars and charge commercial diesel vehicles from the centre of Bristol from 2021, rather than implement a whole-scale charging system.[338] A ban may incentivise greener driving but it does not raise revenue for public transport from prohibited drivers. As the Bristol Transport Strategy suggests, it may be that road charging returns but this possibility is not currently in sight.

Workplace Parking Levy

Another, perhaps supplementary, form of income-producing spatial governance would be to introduce a workplace parking levy (WPL) scheme. A WPL scheme imposes an annual tax on

---

[334] Section 173(2) Transport Act 2000
[335] Interview 4
[336] Interview 2
[337] Mayor of London, Central London Ultra Low Emission Zone – Four Month Report (GLA, London, September 2019).
[338] Bristol City Council, 'Clean Air Plan Outline Business Case Executive Summary' (Bristol, 2019). See generally, *Clean Air for Bristol* < https://www.cleanairforbristol.org/> accessed 14 April, 2020

employers with more than ten parking spaces who provide employee parking on their land.[339] Affected employers can pay the tax directly or pass it onto employees. As Dale et al have explained: "The WPL has a dual role; firstly to act as a transport demand man- agement measure and secondly to raise hypothecated funds for transport improvements".[340]

Nottingham, so far the only English city where such a scheme exists, raised £10.1 million in revenue during 2018-19 from their WPL scheme, with running costs of around £577,000.[341] The city is a unitary authority with unusual levels of political stability that also retains one of the few remaining municipal bus companies in England. As our Nottingham interviewees explained, the City Council there paid attention to process, incrementally raising licence fees, addressing displaced parking and providing an obvious *quid pro quo* – a tram system – that benefitted many different neighbourhoods in the city.[342] The Nottingham scheme is now widely accepted by residents and has not affected job creation or inward investment.[343] Crucially, Nottingham's scheme was approved in 2009[344], before the Coalition Government came into power in 2010 bringing in additional regulatory hurdles.

Although a workplace parking levy requires consent from national government under s184 of the Transport Act, the legislation does not require a consultation (which Nottingham did not undertake). In 2011, introducing a definite change of tone, the Coalition Government's Transport White Paper stated that the then Government:

> *"… made clear that local authorities may put forward schemes, but they must demonstrate that they have properly and effectively consulted local businesses and addressed any proper concerns raised by local businesses during those consultations."*

Similarly, the 2011 *Red Tape Challenge Road Transportation* report required:

> *"… any future schemes to demonstrate that they have properly and effectively consulted local businesses, have addressed any proper concerns raised and secured support from the local business community. This will make sure that future schemes will not impose a burden on business."*[345]

---

[339] This is the Nottingham model, there could be higher or lower parking thresholds

[340] Simon Dale and others, 'Evaluating the Impact of a Workplace Parking Levy on Local Traffic Congestion: The Case of Nottingham UK' (2017) 59 Transport Policy 153

[341] Nottingham City Council, 'Statement of Accounts 2018-2019 - Draft Version 29th July 2019' 96 (<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/documents/statement of accounts > accessed 14 April, 2020

[342] Interviews 6 and 8

[343] Interviews 6 and 8

[344] City of Nottingham Workplace Parking Levy Order 2008 confirmed by letter on behalf of the Secretary of State 31 July 2009 (required by s184 Transport Act 2000)

[345] Department for Transport, *Red Tape Challenge – Road Transportation* (Department for Transport, London, 2011) 25

While the precise requirements for national approval remain unclear, this policy guidance indicates that consultation is now necessary before consent is given, with some public transport *quid pro quo* given. While the criteria for central government approval remain rather opaque, several cities and London boroughs are currently investigating introducing a WPL scheme so that much of the detail of what is required are likely to be decided by schemes that precede any application Bristol would make.

The 2019 Bristol Transport Strategy proposed a workplace parking levy potentially unlocking "£1.5bn of transport investment over 30 years", which could the Council suggest, be used for funding "transformational transport improvements such as a light metro system".[346] As with road charging, the WPL proposal is included in "implementation" but confined to "potential funding sources". Bristol's Strategy notes that: "[a] robust business case must be made before progressing the implementation of any scheme". While this is not required by legislation, Nottingham did prepare one and is implied by the "red tape" wording.[347] The introduction of a levy – or not - will inevitably come down to local politics. As Dale et al noted in 2013, "Bristol in the last decade has considered and rejected the idea of a tram scheme, major bus improvements, re-opened rail services and a WPL and one can speculate that this is probably due to political factors rather than an objective examination of the pros and cons of such schemes in what is accepted as a congested City."[348]

Certainly not all would be in favour of a WPL. Yet this discontent was initially felt in Nottingham as well where the Council today believe it to have been a genuine success in funding the tram and other transport initiatives. As one expert interviewee in Nottingham told us:

> "*There are some people that it's always going to be contentious with. There's always going to be a few people saying, 'No.' Politically, there are always going to be some groups who are going to oppose it. Generally speaking, it's not a problem. It's pretty much seen like if you go to most European cities, there is a local tax. If you stay at a hotel somewhere, then, it's so many euros per night in tax. Businesses just see it as being nothing more than that. Nobody has moved away from the city because of it. It hasn't stopped inward investment. We do have inward investment teams and companies working on that sort of thing around the city. That's a question they ask. It's not a deterrent to moving here*."

Similarly, in Nottingham experts said:

---

[346] Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Transport Strategy' (n 69) 76

[347] Department for Transport, *Red Tape Challenge* (London, 2011) 25

[348] Simon Dale and others, 'Workplace Parking Levies: The Answer to Funding Large Scale Local Transport Improvements in the UK?' (2014) 48 Research in Transportation Economics 410, 417

"people always dwell on the negatives. There were lots of people, particularly business people, who were not of the same political ilk as the governing group on the council, who'd hate the idea of any tax. It is a tax. It's a local infrastructure tax. There are some people who are just always going to be noisy and implacably opposed to it. There are other people in other local authorities who've grumbled a bit about some aspects of the tram and made problems. Some funding was going to come from the county council. Then, they changed political complexion, then, it wasn't going to come from the county council. There are some people who think that a tram is the wrong answer, whatever. The opposition tends to be loud. People, often, hear that and don't see the success story, which is why we've made a big deal of pushing this out."

If WPL comes in at a local level, then how would the money be spent in Bristol? The Transport Act 2000 gives local authorities flexibility in spending the proceeds of charging or licensing schemes, with the first ten year's proceeds to be spent in accordance with local transport policies.[349] As one expert Bristol interviewee noted: *"WPL is a "must" … let's call that the stick, I think we need to find some carrots as well."*[350]

There would be many competing calls for the funding as one Council interviewee explained:

"… there are lots of groups calling for [WPL income]… cycling campaigns have said, 'Introduce a workplace parking levy and spend the money on cycling infrastructure.' Bus campaigns - spend it on supporting bus routes. The mayor saying, 'Well, I'm going to introduce it and use the money for a mass transit system.' So that pot of money then becomes very thinly spread and it's what can you achieve with that? What's the best intervention?"[351]

For some, the mass transit scheme could be a priority, a carrot alongside the stick of WPL. As one council expert explained:

"I think you've got to be really clear about what you're going to do with the funding, it's not going to be soaked into the council coffers or the local authority coffers, it's going to be used for dedicated purposes, so it could actually be to strengthen interchange between bus and rail, and, indeed, if we get rapid transit in the future, but it could also be used for real social imperative such as young people. I think a lot of people would actually sign up to doing that."[352]

---

[349] Section 191 and Schedule 12
[350] Interview 1
[351] Interview 9
[352] Interview 2

As another councillor added:

> *"There is a transaction. That's the reality isn't it? Bristol has got this fundamental issue that every time we try and ask people to use transport differently, i.e. to stop using their cars, we have the same conversation which is that transport infrastructure as it is not good enough to persuade people to do that."*[353]

If a mass transit scheme were to be introduced, careful work would need to be done to prevent a situation where, just like buses, children in deprived areas cannot afford to use the transport system available. It is clear, however, that WPL income could be used to fund free bus travel for children and young people in the city.

---

[353] Interview 9

Miã y6 18.9.18

6.   Conclusion

Children's lack of bus use is the consequence of a series of policy decisions about transport policy. Privatising buses, promoting partnerships, prioritising older and disabled passengers as well as subsidising highways for car, van and truck drivers has left little money over to provide free bus fares for children outside London. Many of these policy decisions are taken at the national level, however they are also evident at city and regional scale. Links between economic deprivation, and economic development are increasingly evident.

Funding free bus fares for children would not necessarily support a modal shift, as the children at Room 13 tell us that they barely travel at all. While many children in Bristol could perhaps be encouraged out of their parent's cars and onto buses with free fares, the transport dilemma for the children in *The Bus Project* is to achieve any mobility other than walking.

There is an opportunity here for Bristol City Council and WECA to be genuine innovators, particularly at a time of declining bus use in the city. Free bus fares are to be introduced for children and young people under 19 in Scotland. Public transport is to be free for all in Luxembourg. Many international cities now have free or very cheap public transport children,

including Berlin, Dunkirk and Changning as well as London.[354] Around 100 cities now have fare free public transport.[355] The trend for free public transport for children and young people appears to be accelerating on social and cultural grounds as well as for environmental reasons, with increasing understanding about air quality, active travel and climate change. This report calls for the city or the region to be at the forefront of this political shift.

The Bus Project researchers were convinced that all their interviewees and collaborators are concerned about transport social exclusion in Bristol, particularly for children and young people. The question, consistently, is how to fund any intervention. This report has made three suggestions: (1) to (re)allocate funding for supported bus services, (2) to draw on WECA funding for economic development (particularly for post-16 educational bus travel), or (3) to raise funds through spatial governance, at either a city or regional scale, through road charging and/or workplace parking levies. Transport social exclusion is critical, as Karen Lucas explained in 2018:

> "Without an integrated, human-centred policy approach, cities will continue to deliver inadequate, unaffordable, unsafe and socially unacceptable transport systems, which exclude the poorest and most vulnerable in our society from living a full and active life."[356]

In Bristol, we could develop an integrated, human-centred policy approach to transport. There are undoubtedly competing objectives both for transport policy and to spend any proceeds of new revenue raising schemes. *The Bus Project* suggested that children and young people living in some of the most economically deprived parts of the country should be a local priority.

One conclusion from this project is for more research, so that we can understand more about children's choices, particularly educational and professional for young adults but also what the effects of "not being on the buses" is like for children in some of the most deprived streets in the country as well as in Bristol. Bus geographies are rare, and it was ever thus. Writing A History of Buses in 1951, Green opened with the statement that: "Geographers have paid little attention to the striking interwar development of motorbus services."[357] Room 13 and the University of Bristol would be delighted to collaborate with Bristol City Council, WECA or First Bus West to develop a pilot scheme for children's free bus travel in Bristol perhaps

---

[354] Henri Briche & Maxime Huré & translated by Oliver Waine, 'Dunkirk as a New "Laboratory" for Free Transit' (*Metropolitics*, 29 June 2018) <https://www.metropolitiques.eu/Dunkirk-as-a-New-Laboratory-for-Free-Transit.html> accessed 14 April 2020; Maxime Huré & translated by Oliver Waine, 'Free Public Transport: From Social Experiment to Political Alternative? - Metropolitics' (20 March 2013) <https://www.metropolitiques.eu/Free-public-transport-from-social.html> accessed 14 April 2020

[355] Wojciech Kębłowski, 'Public Transport Can Be Free' Tribune (22 August 2019) <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/08/public-transport-can-be-free> 15 April 2020

[356] Karen Lucas, 'Editorial for Special Issue of European Transport Research Review' (n 163) 17

[357] FHW Green, 'Bus Services in the British Isles' (1951) 41 Geographical Review 645, 645

limited in time (free travel in August or December) and/or geographically (to bus stops or schools in the most deprived parts of the city).

At the beginning of this report, we raised Mia's question:

> "... how can children grow up and enjoy their cities if they can't get around them?
> And is it fair that some children can't do this at all?"

This raises a question of fairness. It seems to adults that it is undoubtedly "unfair" in a simple sense, that wealthier pensioners can have a free bus pass while deprived children must pay (albeit a half fare, given First's concessions). This does not mean that a universal bus pass, that is not means-tested, is undesirable, far from it. There are multiple good, policy reasons to support bus concessions for older and disabled people borne out by the research including a sense of belonging and citizenship, increased mobility, decreased loneliness, mode shifting from car to bus, road safety, reduced congestion and environmental improvements. *The Bus Project* participants felt very firmly that the older and disabled bus concession should continue. There was also widespread support for a well-connected and effective bus network in Bristol, including hospitals, linking up neighbourhoods rather than relying solely on a more commercially advantageous "hub and spoke" model into the city centre. However, the children of Room 13 believe that *Now's the Time* for free bus travel for children and young people in Bristol as well.