

To Department for Transport

Bus Franchising Consultation  
2nd Floor, Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

7 October 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

### **Age UK's response to proposed changes to bus franchising guidance**

We welcome efforts to coordinate and improve bus services, which are a lifeline for older people. Wherever they live, older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease.

#### **Importance of buses to older people**

Buses are the most popular form of public transport for older people, yet lack of access to transport can have a profound impact on their quality of life, health and wellbeing. For example, 66% of older people cannot reach a hospital within 30 minutes by public transport.<sup>i</sup> The most frequent reason people aged 65 and over say they do not use public transport is because it is inconvenient and does not go to where they want it to go.<sup>ii</sup> Access to public transport is a crucial consideration to address loneliness and isolation among older people.

As such, we welcome efforts to ensure the national bus network is revived, properly funded and that older people can be included in shaping improvements in their local area. With so many bus routes being cut in recent years,<sup>iii</sup> we frequently hear from people who struggle to access services and get out and about as a result. The Department for Transport should work with local authorities to support a sustainable network of bus services and develop contingency plans in the case of threats to existing routes, in order to ensure older people can access vital services.

#### **Developing local plans**

Local plans must consider the needs of older people to ensure they have access to the services and routes that work best for them, particularly in rural areas. Local authorities must consult with older people in the preparation of their transport plans, and in decisions about the location and destinations of bus services. They should consider interactions with community transport and take into account services operating across borders with neighbouring areas. The impact of changes should be monitored to ensure passengers are satisfied that improvements have been made and performance has improved, i.e. that proposed new timetables work well and fares remain reasonable.

#### **Age UK**

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## **Passenger experience**

We welcome the addition of Section 7 in the guidance, to put people at the heart of franchising, including giving consideration to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ensuring active engagement with communities and people-centred design approach measures. Local authorities have a key role in making sure the built environment in public spaces and streets in communities are safe and inclusive. More bus stops and shelters with improved lighting, seating, shelter and accessible information at bus stops would make public transport more accessible.

For older people with limited mobility, getting to the bus stop and on and off the bus are significant issues, compounded by a lack of facilities at bus stops. Local transport authorities should work with operators to consider infrastructure and facilities, to improve the physical accessibility, safety and reliability of the journey as a whole. This should cover leaving the house to arriving at a destination, with services provided that are comfortable, affordable and as stress free as possible.

## **Digital inclusion**

It is essential that information about public transport services is easily accessible in various formats, since many older people are not able to access online information. Online information needs to be high quality and easy to use, whilst information provided in other formats must be of equal quality and fully accessible. Efforts should be made to ensure consultation on transport plans is as inclusive as possible and operators do not exclude older people through digital only developments, such as smart ticketing or information provision on smart phone apps only.

## **Funding context**

We call on Government to fully fund and resource the improvements required to ensure sustainability of these changes to bus services. Furthermore, the free bus pass remains a crucial benefit for many older people, helping users to get to shops, healthcare and other local services. The national bus concession must remain free and universal for older and disabled people given its huge social and economic benefits.

Age UK looks forward to working with the Department of Transport and local authorities to support the development of an integrated, inclusive and efficient network of bus services to ensure that older people can access vital services and remain connected to their communities.

Yours faithfully,

Nadine Kennedy

Communities Policy Manager, Age UK

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- <sup>i</sup> Government Office for Science (2019) Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/784685/future\\_of\\_mobility\\_access.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> Holley-Moore, G and Creighton, H. (2015) The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society. ILC
- <sup>iii</sup> [Campaign for Better Transport research](#) found 23 per cent of bus services in England were cut between March 2021 and March 2023, resulting in 2,800 fewer services.

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