



Bee Network Committee

Date: Thursday 24th July 2025

Subject: Supporting the Night Time Economy: Night Bus Pilot and Future Options

Report of: Steve Warrener, Managing Director, TfGM

Purpose of Report

In September 2024, the Bee Network began a pilot of 24-hour operation on the V1 and 36 bus services to support the nighttime economy. This report sets out results of the evaluation of this pilot; seeks approval for an extension of the original pilot; and proposes additional night service pilots in other parts of Greater Manchester.

Recommendations:

The Committee Members are requested to:

1. Note the results of the pilot evaluation and their implications;
2. Approve an extension of the 24/7 service on the V1 and the 36 until at least the end of the 2025/26 financial year, on a 7-day a week schedule; and
3. Approve the introduction of new pilot 24-hour bus services to Bury and Rochdale on the 135 and 17 routes, on a 3-day weekend schedule.

Contact Officers

Alison Chew	Deputy Director of Bus	alison.chew@tfgm.com
Nick Fairclough	Acting Head of Policy, Insight and Public Affairs, TfGM	nick.fairclough@tfgm.com
Zoe Langmead-Jones	Policy Officer, Transport Strategy, TfGM	zoe.langmead-jones@tfgm.com

Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers			
Insert text			
Impacts Questionnaire			
Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation	
Equality and Inclusion	G	<p>Positive impact on a number of groups with protected characteristics, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people who are more likely to work in and use the night time economy - Women who are more likely to be employed in low wage night time industries and can provide a safe way to travel home compared to walking alone at night - Black or Black British people who are disproportionately more likely than other groups to travel by bus - Disabled people - all buses are wheelchair accessible unlike private hire vehicles. <p>Positive impact on Low-income households - many of the positions that involve night time working are low to medium earning sectors; night buses provide a cheaper way to travel at night and increase access to employment opportunities.</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities, leisure opportunities, health provision (the V1 serves Manchester Royal Infirmary) and the wider night time economy.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p>	
Health	G	<p>24-hour bus services may encourage increased active travel as part of the first and last mile of journeys.</p> <p>Reliable 24-hour bus services may provide residents with certainty and security that they can access employment and leisure opportunities, and have a safe way to travel at night.</p> <p>24-hour bus services may encourage increased active travel as part of the first and last mile of journeys.</p> <p>24-hour bus services may improve residents access to leisure opportunities, therefore reducing social isolation.</p> <p>The V1 service provides links to Manchester Royal Infirmary.</p> <p>N/A</p>	
Resilience and Adaptation			
Housing			
Economy	G	<p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities for residents and enable employers to reach a wider talent pool. These services also improve access leisure opportunities. This will support Greater Manchester's night time economy.</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities for residents and enable employers to reach a wider talent pool.</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities for residents and enable employers to reach a wider talent pool.</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities for residents and enable employers to reach a wider talent pool.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to employment opportunities for residents and enable employers to reach a wider talent pool. These services also improve access leisure opportunities. This will support Greater Manchester's night time economy and may attract inward investment into towns and cities services by the 24-hour services.</p> <p>The V1 and 36 24-hour bus services improve access to universities along the Oxford Road Corridor, as well as University of Salford and University of Bolton.</p> <p>N/A - proposal does not involve construction or re-purposing of buildings.</p>	
Mobility and Connectivity	G	<p>N/A - proposal does not involve digital connectivity.</p> <p>N/A - proposal does not involve smart systems.</p> <p>Provision of 24-hour bus services may improve access to services and employment opportunities in the night time economy.</p> <p>Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore improving road congestion.</p> <p>24-hour bus services provide an affordable transport option at night.</p> <p>N/A - proposal does not involve shared transport schemes.</p> <p>Proposed 24-hour bus services improve connectivity along key bus corridors in certain areas of Greater Manchester.</p> <p>Proposal provides improved availability of bus services.</p> <p>Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore road congestion and parking may improve.</p> <p>Use of existing vehicles</p> <p>N/A</p>	
Carbon, Nature and Environment	G	<p>Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore local air quality may improve.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore supporting efforts to reduce carbon emissions across GM.</p>	
Consumption and Production			
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		Improved late night public transport options reduces a reliance on taxis, private hire vehicles and private vehicle usage, by providing an alternative means of transport. In turn, by reducing the number of vehicles on the road, this will reduce emissions and support Greater Manchester's Carbon Neutral 2038 target.	
Further Assessment(s):		Equalities Impact Assessment and Carbon Assessment	
G	Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	A	Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.
R	Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.	RR	Negative impacts overall.

Carbon Assessment									
Overall Score		<div></div>							
Buildings		Result	Justification/Mitigation						
New Build residential		N/A							
Residential building(s) renovation/maintenance		N/A							
New build non-residential (including public) buildings		N/A							
Transport									
Active travel and public transport		<div></div>	N/A - proposal applies to bus services N/A - proposal applies to bus services N/A - proposal applies to bus services Extension of 24-hour services on V1 and 36 bus routes provide links to regional city centre and employment sites. Introduction of 24-hour services on 135 and 17 provide links to regional city centre and town centres. N/A - proposal does not include shared mobility options N/A - proposal applies to bus services provision improvement Proposal would increase bus service provision						
Roads, Parking and Vehicle Access		<div></div>	Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore road congestion may improve. N/A - proposal applies to bus services provision improvement Provision of 24-hour bus services may increase access for pedestrians, encouraging active travel as part of the first/last mile of journeys. Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car usage Provision of 24-hour bus services may reduce private car and taxi usage, therefore the number of parking spaces may increase N/A - proposal applies to bus services provision improvement						
Access to amenities		<div></div>	Provision of 24-hour bus services may increase access for pedestrians, encouraging active travel as part of the first/last mile of journeys. Proposed 24-hour bus services will improve access to shops and services and the wider night time economy. N/A - proposal applies to bus services provision improvement						
Vehicle procurement		N/A							
Land Use									
Land use		N/A							
<div></div>	No associated carbon impacts expected.	<div></div>	High standard in terms of practice and awareness on carbon.	<div></div>	Mostly best practice with a good level of awareness on carbon.	<div></div>	Partially meets best practice/ awareness, significant room to improve.	<div></div>	Not best practice and/ or insufficient awareness of carbon impacts.

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

Extending the T1 night bus and introducing the 2 x T2 night bus pilots will require contractual changes to three different Large Franchise Agreements (Bolton (T1), Oldham and Queens Road (T2)). These changes are all permissible modifications under the relevant procurement regulations (UCR 2016) as they are not 'substantial modifications' to the franchise agreements based on the values of the contract change against the total value of each Franchise Agreement that they vary.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

The net costs to date, and the projected annualised net costs, of the V1 and 36 pilot services, on a 7-day frequency can be funded from the approved 2025/26 bus budget.

The net costs of the 135 and 17 pilot services, on a 3-day frequency, can be funded from the approved 2025/26 bus budget and forecast projections for 2026/27.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None.

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Appendix One - Map of Bury & Rochdale Proposed Pilot Night Services

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

- 21 March 2024 – BNC 24-Hour Transport Pilot
- 25 July 2024 – BNC Bee Network Bus Service Improvements

Tracking / Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution?

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

1. Introduction

- 1.1. In September 2024, the Bee Network launched a pilot of 24 hour a day, seven day a week (24/7) bus services between Manchester City Centre and Leigh and Bolton town centres on the V1 and 36 routes. The pilot was set to run for an initial 12 months, allowing time to assess usage and the benefits to passengers and the local economy.
- 1.2. The Mayor of Greater Manchester (GM) has set out his ambition to create a night bus network across all 10 GM boroughs. GM's night time economy is a major part of the city region's growth ambitions. 358,000 people, well over a fifth of the city region workforce, work in jobs or businesses that are active at night. Despite this, there has historically been limited overnight public transport options for much of the city region, particularly in areas to the north of the regional centre.
- 1.3. The creation of new night bus services was intended to support safe journeys at all times of day, particularly for people who work in the night time economy. Poor transport links at night have been identified as a barrier to residents' access to employment and other opportunities. The 2024 Greater Manchester Residents' Survey (published in February 2024) found that a lack of public transport at night had prevented 27% of respondents from accessing opportunities or services.
- 1.4. As the first 24/7 bus services introduced by the Bee Network, the night bus pilot was designed to help TfGM understand:
 - The demand for night time services;
 - The wider benefits for Greater Manchester residents and businesses of providing the services;
 - Any additional measures required to ensure that people felt safe when using the services;
 - The net costs of running the services; and
 - How to shape GM's approach to future night services.

- 1.5. The pilot services were established in areas covered by the first tranche of bus franchising, with the aim of exploring potential unmet demand for transport services at night and focused on supporting workers to access their places of employment. The routes were selected on the basis of extant patronage and their proximity to night time trip attractors. Together, they deliver at least an hourly service at all times of day within 400m (c. a five-minute walk) of around 135,000 Greater Manchester residents.
- 1.6. The pilot was introduced to complement existing night time provision, such as the 24/7 43 service in South Manchester and the late running 192 service to Stockport. The pilot also builds upon improvements to the Bee Network's provision of night time transport options, including the reintroduction of later running Metrolink services on Friday and Saturday evenings.
- 1.7. Stakeholders identified perceptions of safety as a potential barrier to using the services. As such, TfGM implemented a number of safety measures, including two dedicated teams of roaming TravelSafe Support and Enforcement Officers (TSEOs); advertisement of the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) Livechat service, a partnership with the charity Strut Safe; and the deployment of security staff at relevant Interchanges.
- 1.8. Following approval by the Bee Network Committee in July 2024, the pilot has now been running since September 2024. TfGM has analysed its performance to date, covering service usage, safety issues, user perceptions, social benefits and farebox revenues and costs.
- 1.9. The findings from this pilot will also help to inform the ongoing Network Review programme.

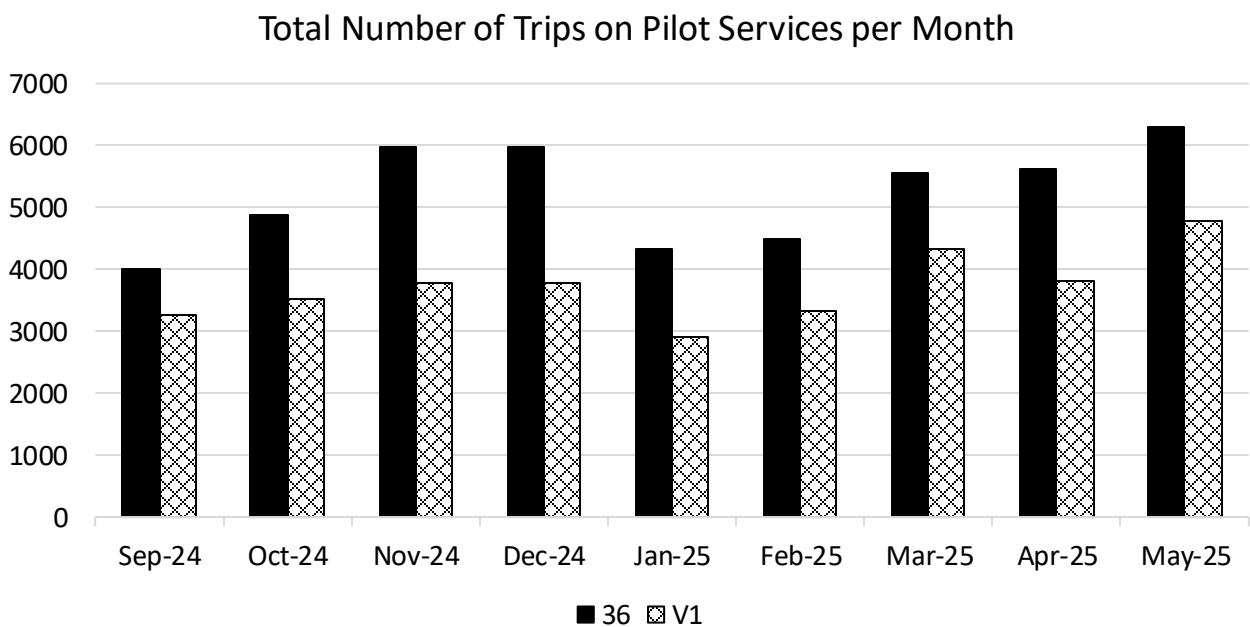
2. Performance So Far: Evaluation Findings

- 2.1. TfGM has examined a combination of quantitative and qualitative data covering the period from 1st September 2024 to 31st May 2025, including demand, customer feedback, business feedback, safety reporting and net costs.
- 2.2. The findings indicate that:
 - Patronage for the pilot services is lower early in the week, but begins to increase on Thursdays, and rises further on Fridays and Saturdays;

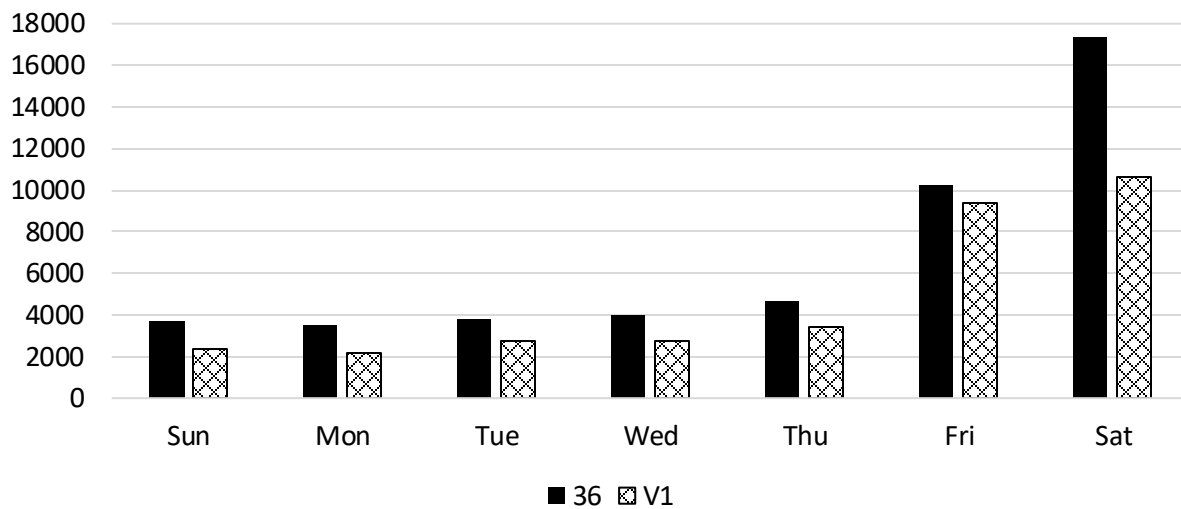
- The usage of the pilot services has gradually increased over time;
- Regular users value the service and intend to use it more;
- The safety measures that were introduced are valued by users;
- The net costs, to date, of the pilot services are in line with forecasts; and
- Interest in night time services is high and TfGM's communications relating to the pilot are popular.

Demand (Patronage)

2.3. The graphs below summarise the total numbers of trips per month on the pilot services



**Total Number of Trips on Pilot Services:
Day of the Week**



- 2.4. Trips on both the V1 and 36 pilot services have been largely concentrated on Friday and Saturday nights (i.e. Saturday and Sunday early mornings). There are fewer trips made mid-week, particularly on inbound (towards Manchester) services, although it is anticipated that these will increase over time.

Customer and Business Benefits

- 2.5. Face-to-face interviews and online surveys with passengers, and in-depth interviews with a number of local employers have provided evidence that customers value the pilot services; have come to rely on them over time; and are likely to use them more in future.
- 2.6. A total of 412 passengers were surveyed across the pilot routes V1 (100 respondents), 36 (120 respondents) and control routes 43 (143 respondents) and 192 (49 respondents).

Findings from customer research indicate that:

- The pilot services are an important, safe and low-cost option for users and one that allows them to take up both work and leisure opportunities as part of the night time economy.
- Customers report that their frequency of use has increased since the pilot services first started, with over 40% of the users surveyed using the pilot services more than they did initially.
- The pilot services are predominantly used to reach employment, with most passengers surveyed working in hospitality.

- Employers also appreciate the 24-hour services and think they help to boost employment opportunities and widen their applicant pool.
- The pilot services allow users to access the night time economy when they would not otherwise be able to and help to reduce reliance on taxis, providing a safe and affordable, alternative means to travel at night.
- TfGM bus safety initiatives tend to be thought of as more effective by those using the pilot services.
- Pilot services have been successfully promoted, with the Bee Network App playing a key role in raising awareness.

Sample demographics:

- Users are more likely to be men (70%) than women (27%).
- Users are more likely to be younger – 35% were aged 16-24, 54% were aged 25-44, and 11% were aged 45 and over.
- Disproportionately fewer White people (54%), and disproportionately more Asian people (18%) and more Black people (20%) use the service, compared to the GM 2021 Census and bus users from the 2023 Travel Diary (TRADS) survey.
- Disproportionately more people who work both full-time (55%) and part-time (21%) use the service, compared to the GM 2021 Census and bus users from TRADS 2023.
- Disproportionately fewer people who have access to a car (driver or passenger) use the service (32%), compared to the GM 2021 Census and bus users from TRADS 2023.

- 2.7. The above demographic information indicates that, compared to the GM population as a whole, the pilot services are more likely to serve younger men who are in employment, without access to a private vehicle.
- 2.8. While these findings suggest that the pilot services support users to access and work in the night time economy, women are not using the pilot services to the same extent as men. The Equality Impact Assessment for this project outlines that safety and perceptions of safety are often cited as a barrier to women using night services. TfGM will continue working with TravelSafe and Marketing teams to provide and promote the enhanced safety provisions on the 24-hour bus services, to encourage more women to use night services in the future.

Safety

- 2.9. TravelSafe Support & Enforcement Officers have been deployed to provide 24-hour cover. This includes two teams of two officers, each with a vehicle to provide coverage across the route.
- 2.10. This additional safety and security provision has demonstrated its value over the course of the pilot, as demonstrated in the customer research. Among other examples, security provision safeguarded two young people who were suspected to be linked to 'County Lines' drug trafficking; reunited a vulnerable adult with their carer; and supported a young female who was believed to have been 'spiked'.

Promotion and Communications Strategy

- 2.11. TfGM prepared an extensive promotional campaign for the pilot launch, covering a mixture of physical promotional assets (e.g. posters at relevant bus stops, leaflets) and digital assets (e.g. online advertising, advertisement on the Bee Network app). The pilot has continued to be promoted as part of business-as-usual communications content, on the Bee Network app and featured in bespoke campaigns, such as the Christmas period campaign.
- 2.12. Findings have shown that communications campaigns successfully promoted the pilot services, and the pilot services content had higher than expected levels of engagement on social media. Online sentiment towards the pilot has been positive, with users expressing they are pleased with the provision and asking for more services in other areas of Greater Manchester.

Net Costs

- 2.13. Wider market and travel trends indicate that revenue on night buses will always be lower than daytime services as there is less demand to travel at night. Delivered as part of a wider network, however, we are able to invest in night buses to support our residents, businesses and night time economy, giving people in the city region the ability to travel by public transport at any time of day or night.
- 2.14. Similarly, it was anticipated that costs for the pilot services would be higher than existing V1 and 36 services and general Bee Network services due to several factors, including costs of security (both TravelSafe Officers and Interchange security), extra driver hours, increased pay rates and additional costs of operating depots during the night.

- 2.15. The total net cost of the pilot services in the period from September 2024 to May 2025 was c. £1.59 million, which is in line with forecasts; and revenues are anticipated to grow as services establish themselves further.
- 2.16. The net costs to date can be funded from the approved 2025/26 bus budget.

Next Steps

- 2.17. Based on the success, to date, of the pilot services, and to gather a full 12 months' worth of data, it is proposed to extend the V1 and 36 pilot services until at least the end of the financial year. TfGM will continue to monitor the performance and impacts of the pilot services during this period.

3. Extension of the Night Bus Network

- 3.1. As part of the Mayor's ambition to extend a night bus network to all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs, TfGM has undertaken initial scoping of additional night bus routes in Bury and Rochdale. Work will continue to scope out night bus proposals for Oldham, Tameside and Trafford for introduction in the next financial year.
- 3.2. Identification of potential new routes used similar principles to the first pilot:
- Extensions to existing high patronage, 'core' services
 - To serve areas of high deprivation
 - To serve areas of low car ownership
 - To serve areas that are active during the night time

135 and 17 Bus Routes

- 3.3. Using the criteria outlined above, TfGM has identified the 135 and 17 as pilot options for the next phase of 24-hour services.
- 3.4. The recommended routes provide links to Manchester city centre, Whitefield, Bury, Middleton and Rochdale town centres.
- 3.5. Bury and Rochdale are large centres with significant night time economies and dense residential areas, and analysis indicates that there is a substantial proportion of employees based along the 135 and 17 routes who work in sectors that are predominantly active at night, including at Stakehill Industrial Estate, as well as in Rochdale and Bury town centres.

- 3.6. The 135 and 17 also both serve areas of significant multiple deprivation and low car ownership, which indicates reliance on public transport options.

Net Costs

- 3.7. It is recommended that 24-hour operation on the 135 and 17 routes is piloted on a 3-day weekend (Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights) basis, running at least hourly throughout the night. The total annual net cost of piloting 24-hour services on routes 135 and 17 on a 3-day weekend basis is currently estimated to be c. £481,000, which can be funded from the approved 2025/26 bus budget and forecast projections for 2026/27.

Appendix One - Map of Bury & Rochdale Proposed Pilot Night Services

