

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: Friday 22nd August 2025

Subject: Digital Our Pass and 18-21 Discounted Ticket

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Portfolio Lead for Transport and Caroline Simpson, Group Chief Executive, GMCA

Purpose of Report

The report provides an update on the delivery of Digital Our Pass and proposes the introduction of a new product for 18-21 year olds to increase access to public transport through affordable and simpler fares and ticketing.

Recommendations:

GMCA is requested to:

1. Approve the introduction of a half price 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18-21 year olds living in Greater Manchester.
2. Note the delivery of Digital Our Pass.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

N/A

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

The proposed 18-21 product has been structured in such a way to ensure that it does not breach financial or procurement regulations.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

As detailed in Section 4 of the report.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None.

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Background Papers

- 28 July 2023 – GMCA Delivering the Bee Network – Fares and Products
- 12 July 2024 – GMCA Bee Network Fares and Tickets
- 27 September 2024 – GMCA Bee Network Fares and Tickets

Tracking/ Process

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

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

Bee Network Committee

The report was considered by the Bee Network Committee on Thursday 24th July 2025. The committee noted the delivery of digital Our Pass and endorsed the introduction of a half price 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18-21 year olds living in Greater Manchester.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the delivery of Digital Our Pass and outlines the proposal to introduce a half-price 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18 to 21-year-olds living in Greater Manchester, in line with the Mayor's 2024 Manifesto commitment.
- 1.2. The Mayor's 2024 Manifesto included a commitment to improve ticketing options for young people. Key pledges included:
 - Extending the Care Leavers Pass to age 25;
 - Maintaining Our Pass, including free bus travel for 16 to 18-year-olds;
 - Introducing a half-price 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18 to 21-year-olds.
- 1.3. These initiatives aim to reduce financial barriers to education, employment, and opportunity for young people. The Greater Manchester Strategy sets out the vision for people in the city region to live well, shifting spending and effort from crisis to prevention and creating the conditions for people to thrive, whatever their age and wherever they live. Students on the MBacc pathway will be able to explore options to work in technical careers through affordable public transport, increasing opportunities to build on their training.
- 1.4. The extension to the Care Leavers Pass to age 25 was completed earlier this year.
- 1.5. The proposed half-price bus ticket for 18 to 21-year-olds living in Greater Manchester will encourage young people to continue to use public transport, reinforcing habits developed during their Our Pass eligibility. It will help deliver the aims and outcomes set out in the Greater Manchester Strategy including an affordable public transport network and increased bus use. It will also support Greater Manchester to achieve the Outcomes agreed with government under the Integrated Settlement, including specifically increasing the share of trips made by bus and public transport overall.

2. Digital Our Pass

- 2.1. In May, Our Pass digital applications through the Bee Network app opened for this year's cohort, allowing customers to apply in advance, in preparation for 1st September, when they become eligible for free bus travel.

- 2.2. This new digital application process has made it easier for customers to apply and is quicker for TfGM to verify and process applications. There has been no change to the proof of eligibility criteria and the £10 administration fee still applies.
- 2.3. To promote the new digital application process, engagement with schools and colleges has been taking place, supported by communications and marketing activity, and this will continue throughout the summer. Over 3,000 digital applications were submitted at the end of June, which represents 90% of Our Pass applications to date for this year's cohort. The other 10% have applied for a physical smartcard, which remains available for those who might be digitally excluded. The total number of applications is expected to be in the region of 28,000.
- 2.4. In September, successful applicants will receive a digital pass in the Bee Network app which they will be able to use for free travel on bus in Greater Manchester. For those who have applied for a physical smartcard, the process will remain unchanged from previous years.
- 2.5. This is a positive step forwards listening to customer feedback and making continual improvements to our proposition.

3. Discounted Bus Ticket for 18-21 Year Olds

- 3.1. It is proposed to introduce a half-price 28-day Bee Bus ticket for residents of Greater Manchester aged 18 to 21. The ticket would be priced at £40, 50% of the adult fare, and be available from the 1st September after their 18th birthday until 31 August following the customer's 21st birthday.
- 3.2. Proof of eligibility to purchase this half-price ticket will mirror that of Our Pass (albeit a different age range) with customers requiring to provide proof of age and address in Greater Manchester.
- 3.3. From September, to coincide with the annual Our Pass expiry, 18-21 year olds will be able to make a digital application through the Bee Network app. In line with Our Pass, there will be a £10 administration fee.
- 3.4. A non-digital application route will also be available for those who are digitally excluded.
- 3.5. Once a customer's application has been verified and processed, they will be able to purchase a 28-day Bee Bus ticket priced at £40 in the Bee Network app.

- 3.6. A marketing campaign has been developed to reach the target customer group and we will work with education venues and other organisations during the lead up to the launch to ensure the eligible age group are aware of the new offer.

Customer Journey & Communications

- 3.7. Transport for Greater Manchester will review customer communications across the ticketing lifecycle, including key transitions from igo to Our Pass, and from Our Pass to the 18–21 offer. Messaging will also be developed to support customers as they become age ineligible for the 18–21 product, to make them aware of the best ticketing options available to them for the journeys they make, ensuring a smooth transition to adult ticketing with minimal barriers.

4. Financial Impacts

- 4.1. If approved, the net budgetary impact for 2025/26 of the introduction of the half-priced 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18-21 year olds from September 2025 is estimated to be up to £1.1 million. This can be accommodated from the 2025-26 budget and risk allowance.
- 4.2. There are estimated to be 150,000 eligible 18 to 21-year-olds in Greater Manchester. If all customers in this age group who are currently purchasing the AnyBus Student and Young Persons tickets were to transition to the new product, the estimated annual revenue loss impact to Transport for Greater Manchester could be up to a maximum of £1.9 million. To note however, this figure does not include any revenue growth that would result from passenger growth due to the new lower priced ticket and assumes a full take-up.
- 4.3. Evidence from the Government's £2 fare cap suggests that lower fares can increase patronage. During the initial 10-month period of the cap (January to October 2023), bus patronage outside London was approximately 5% higher than expected, based on trends in London used as a control. While external factors cannot be excluded, this suggests the impact may be understated.
- 4.4. Although the proposed offer may generate additional patronage, this is unlikely to fully offset the revenue loss from a 50% fare reduction in the short term. However, the potential revenue loss has been factored into the 2025/26 budget and risk allowance and once the impact is understood will feed into the Medium Term Financial Plan. There are also longer-term benefits from embedding public transport habits in young people, potentially creating lifelong bus users, increasing

sustainable travel and the associated health and environmental benefits; and increasing the number of future fare payers contributing to the financial sustainability of the network.

5. Next Steps

GMCA is requested to approve the introduction of a half priced 28-day Bee Bus ticket for 18-21 year olds who live in Greater Manchester. Following approval, work will commence for a launch in September.