Bee Network Committee

Date: Thursday 26th March 2026

Subject: Refreshed Approach to Network Development

Report of: Alison Chew, Interim Director of Bus, TfGM

Purpose of Report

To seek the Committee's endorsement of a refreshed approach to development of the bus network, superseding the previous process of area-based network reviews.

Recommendations:

The Committee is requested to:

1. Note the reasons for a refreshed approach to bus network development; and
2. Endorse the proposed revised approach to network development, including criteria that will be used to prioritise proposed changes to the bus network.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers

Endorse the proposed Network Development processs to underpin the future growth of the bus network, to ensure a consistent approach to delivering an accessible, effective and sustainable network.

Impacts Questionnaire

Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	
Health	G	
Resilience and Adaptation	G	
Housing	G	
Economy	G	
Mobility and Connectivity	G	
Carbon, Nature and Environment	G	
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		Increase public transport use via modal shift away from private car.

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		

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/0!	
Roads, Parking and Vehicle Access	*(blue)*	This proposal considers a range of improvements, including an overall approach to future network development processes. Specific interventions and their impacts will be considered at a later date.
Access to amenities	*(green)*	This proposal considers a range of improvements, including an overall approach to future network review processes. Specific interventions and their impacts will be considered at a later date. This proposal considers a range of improvements, including an overall approach to future network review processes. Specific interventions and their impacts will be considered at a later date.
Vehicle procurement	N/A	
Land Use		
Land use	*(green)*	This proposal considers a range of improvements, including an overall approach to future network review processes. Specific interventions and their impacts will be considered at a later date. This proposal considers a range of improvements, including an overall approach to future network review processes. Specific interventions and their impacts will be considered at a later date.

No associated carbon impacts expected.	High standard in terms of practice and awareness on carbon.	Mostly best practice with a good level of awareness on carbon.	Partially meets best practice/ awareness, significant room to improve.	Not best practice and/ or insufficient awareness of carbon impacts.

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

Any changes to the franchising scheme will require legal consideration. In some cases, a statutory consultation may be required before proposals can be taken forward.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

An overall budget envelope for Bee Network improvements 2026/27 is set out in paragraph 3.3.

Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 1

- Appendix 1: List of early interventions

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

Network Development Principles and Connectivity Assessment – Report to Bee Network Committee, June 2025

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. To support Greater Manchester's ambition to be a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life, the Bee Network should enable people to travel where they want, when they want, and get them to their destinations on time. As Greater Manchester continues to grow, both economically and in population, the Bee Network and the bus system must adapt to meet its needs and deliver a transport system for a global city region, as set out in the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS).

1.2. For the first time in almost forty years, Greater Manchester now has full control of its bus network and, through franchising, can plan the network as an integrated whole. While the transition to franchising is now complete, the bus network has largely been preserved as it was before September 2023, minimising disruption to customers and giving Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) time to develop a clearer understanding of service provision and the city region's transport needs.

1.3. Improvements to the bus network have already been delivered in many areas, with punctuality, bus usage and Bee Network customer satisfaction all rising. Despite this, the lack of a consistent, conurbation-wide process to underpin decision-making has hindered moves to make strategic changes to the bus network. TfGM is therefore proposing to establish a new 'Network Development' process to support dynamic and responsive decision making that can transform services to meet the needs of Greater Manchester's places and communities.

2. Ambitions for the Bus Network

2.1. Greater Manchester is the UK's fastest growing city region: its economy grew at double the UK average from 2015 to 2023, but its productivity levels remain below the national average. Both the Greater Manchester Independent Prosperity Review (2019) and Manchester Independent Economic Review (2009) made the case that development of and investment in the city region's local transport network were key to increasing productivity and stimulating local growth and regeneration.

2.2. Developing our bus network is one of the quickest ways that we can enhance Greater Manchester's transport offer. Today's bus network is the product of over a century of evolution, driven by the competing priorities and imperatives of different operators, but without always considering the unique needs of the places served by

the bus system. This created a fragmented network, with differing levels of integration, connectivity and commercial viability.

2.3. With Greater Manchester's buses now part of the Bee Network, we can address these inconsistencies, redesigning parts of the network to reflect local priorities, our changing economy (e.g. by improving access to industrial and retail parks) and the need to integrate with active travel, tram and train services to form one joined-up system.

2.4. The Greater Manchester Bus Strategy (2023) set out three key ambitions for the city region's bus network under franchising:

- **Growth** – To grow bus usage by 30% by 2030 from the 2022/23 baseline.

- **Reliability** – For at least 80% of buses to arrive on time (less than one minute early and five minutes late).

- **Connectivity** – For 90% of Greater Manchester residents to be within 400m of a bus or tram that comes at least twice an hour during weekday daytimes.

2.5. We have made good progress towards these ambitions since the launch of Bee Network bus services in September 2023: we are consistently hitting our 80% punctuality target, over 80 services have seen enhancements, and annual journeys on the bus network have grown from just over 150 million in 2022/23 to over 170 million today, in line with our 2030 target. Nonetheless, delivering on our GMS priorities and local ambitions will require us to go further, shaping the network in new ways and acting to address long-standing challenges.

3. Refreshing our Approach

3.1. The Greater Manchester Bus Strategy set out a process of 'area-based network reviews' which would work their way, local authority by local authority, around the 'clockface' of Greater Manchester. Developed before the realities of the franchised bus network became apparent, this approach focused on a specific area's requirements but did not account for the need to take a holistic view of the city region's routes and geography or allow TfGM to allocate resources for the benefit of all areas at once. Crucially, it meant that some parts of the conurbation could wait years to see significant improvements to the bus network in their area.

3.2. In June 2025, we brought an update on network development and connectivity to the Bee Network Committee. In that meeting, we heard clearly from elected

members that the process as originally conceived needed to change to deliver interventions more quickly and be more responsive to the needs of communities.

3.3. Recognising the limitations of the original approach, TfGM has developed an alternative process which considers the needs of the entire city region on an ongoing basis, using a set of consistent criteria to identify and prioritise service improvements. This process will provide a rolling pipeline of interventions for Greater Manchester's bus network, allowing TfGM to develop routes in a way that is more systematic and responsive to local needs.

3.4. The pipeline will be aligned to the budget-setting process via the new Bee Network Improvement Fund. The size of this Fund will be determined by patronage growth (and associated revenue) and available funds from the Transport Levy, Mayoral Precept and Central Government. £15 million has been allocated in the GMCA budget in 2026/27 for the Bee Network Improvement Fund to support Network Development and other enhancement activity.

3.5. The main benefits of the pipeline approach over 'area-based network reviews' are:

- Moving to an 'always on' engagement approach, that supports wider involvement in the network change process and allows TfGM to be more responsive to local needs.

- Creating a process that will see quicker and more direct interventions for more places compared to the original area-by-area approach.

- Enabling a city region-wide view of proposals, ensuring changes are coordinated and prioritised to achieve the greatest benefit.

- Linking infrastructure improvements with service changes, supporting improved reliability and greater network efficiency.

4. Reflecting the needs and priorities of local communities

4.1. People and place will remain central to the development of Greater Manchester's bus network, with local knowledge and ownership critical to the system's success.

4.2. Key to this will be meaningful engagement with elected members and communities via an 'always on' engagement approach, that allows discussions about the bus network to take place continuously across the year, as part of the new, ongoing process.

4.3.   Under this new approach, TfGM will:

- Proactively engage with councillors and officers in every district, including through local Bee Network committees/forums, both at regular intervals and before bringing forward proposals, ensuring local knowledge and experience shapes the pipeline of interventions.

- Broaden engagement opportunities to other local voices including communities, businesses and local people who do and do not use the existing bus service.

- Seek early insight on local priorities, challenges and opportunities, including growth areas, regeneration plans, and community needs.

- Create clear routes for members to raise issues and propose ideas, ensuring they are considered consistently within the Greater Manchester-wide network development pipeline.

- Work collaboratively to resolve challenges, including areas with long-standing connectivity gaps and clear community priorities.

- Engage with drivers and trade union representatives on an ongoing basis, visiting depots to gather ideas and suggestions for the network.

4.4.   This new engagement approach will support a broader understanding of the needs of Greater Manchester's diverse communities and allow the network to develop in a way that is more dynamic and responsive.

5.   Network Development Process

5.1.   Network Development will be driven by the ongoing engagement approach set out above. Proposals derived through this engagement will then be taken through a four-stage process, repeated each time the process is undertaken.

5.2.   It is currently anticipated that the Network Development process will run and produce outputs twice a year.

Phase 1 - Developing the Long List

5.3.   Proposals will be developed using stakeholder input (set out in section 4), operational data and detailed place-based analysis to identify where the network is underperforming or not serving potential demand.

5.4.   Throughout the development and prioritisation process, the voice of local authorities, customers and stakeholders will be involved to ensure an ongoing focus on people and places. TfGM will work closely with local authorities to develop solutions to locally identified challenges.

Phase 2 - Shortlisting and Prioritisation

5.5.   Interventions within the pipeline will be categorised and then scored and prioritised based on the following proposed criteria, to ensure that any interventions put forward are aligned with the overarching ambitions for the bus network and Greater Manchester:

Responding to local strategic priorities

5.6.   Input from local authorities and communities will be at the heart of the new process. The adoption of the new Greater Manchester Strategy, development of the draft Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2050 and the creation of the Good Growth Fund mean that potential network interventions can be considered more holistically. This includes assessing how investment in the transport network can support other workstreams of the Greater Manchester Strategy, such as creating healthy homes, accessing high-quality jobs, or making Greater Manchester a great place to do business.

5.7.   Responsiveness to customer and stakeholder requests for specific changes will also be assessed at this stage, including supporting the delivery of local Greater Manchester Strategy pledges and local authorities' local strategies and plans.

Connected places

5.8.   People's freedom to pursue opportunities depends in large part on having access to transport options.

5.9.   The shortlisting process will consider how best to support areas with limited connectivity, including consideration of deprivation, local geography and population density. Addressing connectivity gaps requires a multi-modal approach: in some areas it may be more appropriate to enhance active travel links to access existing nearby bus services or provide on-demand neighbourhood transport.

Attractive to customers

5.10.   The Bee Network bus system will only achieve its aims if it is well-used. Potential interventions will be subject to high level patronage forecasts to assess their

contribution towards retaining and growing our customer base. As our patronage targets are for the whole of the bus network, absolute increases will be used to compare proposals. This measure will also consider capacity requirements to ensure that increases in bus usage can be accommodated.

Building an integrated Bee Network

5.11. The creation of the Bee Network provides an opportunity to create an integrated network with different modes supporting rather than competing against each other. Along with improving connections between bus services, changes to the network need to ensure that buses better connect and serve Metrolink and rail services. Connection and alignment to other parts of the network will be assessed through this criterion.

Performance impact

5.12. Ensuring that services run reliably is a foundational requirement for the network: expanding the network should not come at the expense of the performance of existing services. Increased levels of congestion and slower average speeds have meant that maintaining current performance has required additional resources and therefore increased costs.

5.13. The delivery of more bus priority or other infrastructure measures can help address these challenges; where bus priority measures are not possible, other measures will be considered.

Value for money

5.14. Value for money is not just a measure of expected revenue but the holistic impact of a service and the benefits it brings to Greater Manchester. Proposals will therefore be subject to a high-level assessment of economic benefits, relative to their estimated costs. With ticket sales only covering a proportion of revenue, this measure seeks to ensure that public subsidy is being used as effectively as possible.

Deliverability

5.15. Any intervention put forward needs to be deliverable; vehicle capacity at depots is restricted and limited numbers of buses and drivers are available. The transition to a fully zero emission bus fleet by 2030 also requires some fleet relocations, meaning

some interventions may need to be delayed until depot electrification works can be completed.

5.16. The requirement to undertake a formal, statutory consultation on some proposed changes will also be considered at this stage: the need for consultation does not preclude an intervention being selected but does require additional time, resources and supporting activities.

5.17. With scoring complete, the list of interventions will be ranked by score.

Phase 3 - Selection and development of a detailed delivery package.

5.18. The highest-scoring interventions will be taken forward for further development. The number progressed will depend on the availability of funding and resources, as well as considerations relating to deliverability, such as depot and fleet constraints.

5.19. During the development stage, the proposed interventions will be validated with local authorities to ensure a shared understanding that the selected package appropriately addresses local priorities.

5.20. This phase will also involve negotiations with operators to ensure the interventions are delivered as efficiently as possible, following a planned and coordinated approach.

5.21. Formal approval will then be sought for finalised proposals and their costs. In some cases, formal consultation may also be required at this stage.

Phase 4 - Delivery of the interventions.

5.22. We expect the Network Development process as a whole to produce outputs twice a year. The service changes that result from the process will, wherever possible, be implemented on one of five annual service change dates (these generally fall each year at the end of January, during April, late July, late August/early September, and late October). This supports a coordinated approach to customer messaging.

5.23. Where interventions are designed to complement investment in service infrastructure, the changes will be timed to align with the infrastructure delivery dates. In other scenarios, depot or fleet capacities may require enhancing before changes can be introduced.

5.24. Otherwise, we will work with operators to ensure changes are implemented at the earliest appropriate change dates.

6.   Early interventions

6.1.   Alongside the development of the proposed new approach, an early iteration of the new process has been used to develop a package of interventions announced by the Mayor earlier this month. These interventions touch every GM local authority area and, subject to final costing and approval, are planned to be implemented during the 2026/27 financial year.

6.2.   The proposed changes will bring an additional 33,000 people across the city region within a 400m walk of a twice-hourly bus or tram service, increasing the proportion of residents within this catchment from 83.9% to 85.1%. This supports the GMS target for 90% of residents to be within 400m of a twice-hourly service by 2030.

6.3.   This first package of Network Development interventions seeks to improve the following for the city region as a whole:

- Enhanced connectivity at key employment, retail and leisure destinations, supporting more people to access good jobs and live well, as well as economic growth.

- Night bus services in every local authority area, running on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, providing all-day connectivity for a 24-hour city region.

- Performance, scheduling and capacity improvements, delivering a more attractive bus network that will support our targets to carry 200m passengers a year by 2030, and for over 80% of buses to run on time consistently.

The full list of the announced interventions is set out in Appendix 1.

7.   Next Steps

7.1.   Subject to Bee Network Committee endorsement, TfGM will work to implement the refreshed approach following the upcoming local elections, with engagement activity commencing early in the summer, supporting a further package of interventions for announcement late in 2026.

7.2.   As the process is utilised and repeated, we will learn from our experiences and work to refine this new approach, working with Bee Network Committee, local authorities and other partners.

Appendix 1: List of early interventions

Early interventions for delivery in 2026/27 are set out below, by local authority. The listed interventions are subject to finalisation before implementation.

Bolton:

Service	Intervention
575/576/615	Direct bus connectivity between Bolton town centre and Middlebrook Retail Park, giving shoppers and workers access to a key local destination, attracting more people on to the bus network and addressing a GMS pledge.
20/471/507/511	Amended timetables to align with shift patterns at Logistics North, supporting journeys from the east of the borough and access to a key strategic employment site.
471	Performance enhancements and evening and Sunday timetable improvements to the key orbital route linking Bury, Bolton and Rochdale, supporting connections to shopping, health services and employment.
36 Night Bus	Continuation of night bus services between Bolton and Manchester city centre on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, with some additional late night mid-week trips. NB Proposal would see some late night trips on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays withdrawn from September 2026.
TBC	Smaller scale improvements to local, less frequent services through small franchise re-procurement.

Bury:

Service	Intervention
471	Performance enhancements and evening and Sunday timetable improvements to the key orbital route linking Bury, Bolton and Rochdale, supporting connections to shopping, health services and employment.
472/474	Improved evening services on two key routes to Ramsbottom and the north of the borough, supporting the night time economy and onward connections to Metrolink and other bus services.
95	Improvements to service 95 timetables at weekends and evenings, supporting improved connections between Salford and Bury, linking communities in the south of the borough.
135 Night Bus	Continuation of night service between Manchester, Whitefield and Bury on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Manchester:

Service	Intervention
50 Night Bus	Thursday, Friday and Saturday night bus introduced between East Didsbury and MediaCity via the city centre, supporting the nighttime economy, creative industry sector and access to cultural attractions.
142/143/219	Additional capacity on key services on Oxford Rd, and on route to Tameside, supporting continued patronage growth.
115/116	Rerouting services in North Manchester following member feedback, improving connectivity and providing more direct routing between Higher Blackley and Charlestown. This proposal would see services enter Middleton via Rhodes.
368	Improved connectivity between Stockport, Wythenshawe and Manchester Airport, providing better connections to key employment site, flights and rail links.

Oldham:

Service	Intervention
83 Night Bus	Thursday, Friday and Saturday night bus introduced between Oldham, Failsworth, Hollinwood and Manchester city centre, supporting the night time economy.
83	Evening/weekend frequency improvements to timetable, linking Oldham and Manchester, supporting access to employment and leisure travel.
83	Performance enhancements on key route between Oldham and Manchester city centre. NB This proposal would see the service curtailed at Oldham Bus Station c.1km from current terminus at Oldham Mumps to support improved punctuality.

Rochdale:

Service	Intervention
434	Daytime and evening frequency enhancements on key route linking Middleton, Stakehill Industrial Park, Rochdale town centre and Kingsway Business Park, providing improved links to employment sites.
471	Performance enhancements and evening and Sunday timetable improvements to the key orbital route linking Bury, Bolton and Rochdale, supporting connections to shopping, health services and employment.
406	Frequency enhancements and improved evening and Sunday services on the route between Rochdale and Kirkholt.
163A	Continuation of service, connecting Edgar Wood Academy and providing additional capacity into Manchester city centre.
17 Night Bus	Continuation of night service between Manchester, Middleton and Rochdale on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.
TBC	We commit to working with Rochdale Council to provide improved links between Heywood, Middleton and Manchester city centre, connecting communities and new housing developments to economic opportunities and supporting our vision for Atom Valley.

Salford:

Service	Intervention
50 Night Bus	Thursday, Friday and Saturday night bus introduced between East Didsbury and MediaCity via the city centre, supporting the nighttime economy and access to cultural attractions.
33	Continuation of summer season service to RHS Bridgewater which operated in 2025, providing access to key tourism/leisure destination.
95	Improvements to service 95 timetables at weekends and evenings, supporting improved connections between Salford and Bury, linking communities in the south of the borough.
V1/36 Night Bus	Continuation of night bus services between Bolton, Leigh and Manchester city centre on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, with some additional late night mid-week trips. NB Proposal would see some late night trips on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays withdrawn from September 2026.

Stockport:

Service	Intervention
377/378/379	New service connecting residential development at Woodford Garden Village to Stockport town centre (developer funded), with enhancements to surrounding services, including for improved access to education.
368	Improved connectivity between Stockport, Wythenshawe and Manchester Airport, providing better connections to key employment site, flights and rail links.
192 Night Bus	Full night bus provision on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, connecting Stockport and the city centre, supporting the night time economy.
309/310/312/313	Retaining some amendments to routes in the town centre following recent Greek Street roadworks to support improved performance.

Tameside:

Service	Intervention
388/389	Expanded service connecting communities south of Ashton and Stalybridge to Hyde.
216 Night Bus	Thursday, Friday and Saturday night bus provision, connecting Ashton, Droylsden, Etihad Campus and the city centre, supporting the night time economy and access to sporting and cultural events.
219	Increased capacity on route connecting Tameside to the city centre.
TBC	We commit to working with Tameside Council to deliver a direct bus service between Hollingworth and Hyde. TfGM will continue working with the Council to respond to other local connectivity priorities, including work to improve links between Ashton, Audenshaw and Droylsden and local links around Dukinfield, Mossley and Stalybridge.

Trafford:

Service	Intervention
255	Key service between Partington and Manchester city centre increased from 30 to 20 minute frequency, supporting access to employment and onward connectivity for a community that has historically suffered from poor access. Addresses a GMS pledge.
263 Night Bus	Thursday, Friday and Saturday night bus provision, connecting Altrincham, Sale and Stretford and the city centre.
263	Frequency and performance improvements on service 263, connecting Altrincham, Sale and Stretford and the city centre.
132	Later journeys and more capacity to support staff journeys from the Trafford Centre.

Wigan:

Service	Intervention
612/588/630	Package of cross-boundary improvements, developed in partnership with Liverpool City Region to align with franchising in St Helens and protect services during transition: • Provides a new service between Wigan and St Helens via Abram, Golborne and Newton-le-Willows that will serve the site of Golborne Station. NB Will see withdrawal of some services primarily covered by new route. • Frequency improvements plus evening and Sunday journeys on LCR service 34 with a revised route in the Lowton area to strengthen links to local communities and promote onward bus and rail journeys.
132	Later journeys and more capacity, supporting journeys for employment, retail and leisure between Wigan and the Trafford Centre.
V1 Night Bus	Continuation of night bus services from the city centre to Leigh on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, with some additional late night mid-week trips. NB Proposal would see some late night trips on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays withdrawn from September 2026.
V1	Developer-funded increase to peak-time frequency on service V1, supporting residential development at Mosley Common.
TBC	Smaller scale improvements to local, less frequent services through small franchise re-procurement.