Journeys to be planned down to the minute as open data revitalises bus use across England

- government brings buses into the digital age with pioneering open data project to improve passenger journeys
- information on timetables, fares and live location to help passengers plan journeys
- the Bus Open Data Service launches today (28 January 2020)

Bus passengers across England will soon be able to plan their journeys down to the minute thanks to a pioneering project to share bus data.

Buses Minister Baroness Vere has announced a huge project to standardise and openly publish information from operators, which will enable bus users to plan routes, understand costs in advance and predict bus arrival times. Information on timetables will be available from early 2020, followed by location and fares data during 2021, encouraging more people to choose buses by making them easier to use than ever – improving connectivity for communities and boosting the environment as more people turn to public transport.

Developers will be able to add the information into existing apps or develop new products to bring the benefits to passengers across the country.

Buses Minister, Baroness Vere, said:

> We know the value of our buses – responsible for around 12 million trips a day, they take us on the everyday journeys that make up our lives.
>
> But we want to create a golden age for our buses, and we can only do this if passengers find them easy to use and understand how much journeys will cost.
>
> This pioneering project will bring transparency to passengers, boosting bus use and helping the sector thrive – just one example of how government is harnessing technology to make journeys across the UK greener, easier, safer and more reliable.

Only half of bus users think that it is easy to stay up to date with timetables and fares, impacting the number of journeys taken and the user experience, according to Transport Focus.

The latest annual bus statistics demonstrated that whilst bus patronage figures have continued to fall year on year, the decline is tailing off. In

areas where bus operators and local authorities have already invested in their passenger information offer, such as the West Midlands, this trend has been fully reversed with year on year patronage growth of 7.8 million journeys being reported.

The Bus Open Data Service will be followed by new regulations which will mean bus operators are legally required to provide timetable data by the end of 2020 and fare, ticket and location data by 2021. The new regulations will mean a better deal for bus passengers — providing live location data boosts passenger confidence and providing greater transparency across different operators will help to keep fares down following years of fares increasing beyond the rate of inflation.

Ed Parsons, Geospatial Technologist at Google said:

> Open transport data is valuable both in providing real time information to passengers and enabling a broader ecosystem of app developers and service providers that will allow future innovative solutions to the challenges of urban mobility

Johan Herrlin, CEO at Ito World, said:

> Accurate, timely and rich public transport information is crucial in encouraging the use of public transport which, in turn, helps address congestion and pollution issues. We're excited to be working with DfT to make this a reality.

David Sidebottom, Director at Transport Focus, has supported the announcement saying:

> Making it easier for passengers to find bus times and fares is good news. Ensuring that information is accurate and timely will be crucial to the success of the open data service.

David Beardmore, Commercial Director at the Open Data Institute, said:

> We're delighted to see this significant step forward. Consumers are the ultimate winners. Armed with better information, they can plan their journeys more easily and make better choices about tickets.

Barry White, CEO at Transport for the North said:

> We welcome the launch of the Department for Transport's Bus Open Data's Digital Service as a watershed moment in the industry's collective efforts to transform the provision of information for

bus users and other public transport passengers.

In 2020 the project will standardise information from operators and legally mandate the open publication of data; bringing greater transparency to passengers to help them use the UK's bus network.

The government will work with technology companies, app developers and information providers to ensure a range of innovative products are designed to make the most of the data and help all bus users make informed choices.

Full data on fares and locations will be available from 2021, by which point it is expected that a range of apps will be on the market, allowing passengers to manage their journeys from start to finish from their smartphones.

This follows the government's recent announcement of new low-fare, high-frequency 'Superbus' networks, Britain's first all-electric bus town and contactless payments on every city bus.

The package, worth £220 million in the first year, will see many cuts to services reversed. It will create 'express lanes' for buses in the West Midlands and elsewhere, and will invest in new ways of providing more frequent public transport in the countryside and other places where conventional buses have dwindled or disappeared.

The government has also committed to the UK's first-ever long-term bus strategy and funding settlement, including support for councils who want to create London-style franchised services in their areas.