Draft Greater Manchester Rapid Transit Strategy

Trams, trains, busways and beyond for the Bee Network

BEE NETWORK

Transport for Greater Manchester

Contents

Foreword

Greater Manchester is the country's fastest growing city region and has huge potential for further growth. However, like other UK cities, our economy is underperforming compared to our European peers. We need to better connect people, businesses and places to the opportunities that exist throughout Greater Manchester, supporting the future prosperity of the North and the UK.

We are committed to delivering a world-class, integrated transport system for Greater Manchester: the Bee Network. Rapid transit – public transport options like trams, trains and busways that are fast and frequent – form a critical part of this.

Greater Manchester is already a proven leader when it comes to developing and providing rapid transit. Metrolink, our light rail system, is the largest in the country with 99 stops across over 100km of track. Its yellow trams have now become an icon for our city region. The demand for new lines and extensions is testament to this success and reflects how the network has transformed since the very first line opened in 1992, with May 2024 being Metrolink's busiest month on record.

The Leigh–Salford–Manchester Busway is another clear example of our successful approach to rapid transit in action, carrying over two and a half million journeys per year and removing the need for around half a million car journeys.

Our rail network will play an important role in bringing the benefits of rapid transit to more of Greater Manchester and we are committed to bringing local rail services on eight corridors into the Bee Network by 2028. By bringing rail into the Bee Network, we will have a greater ability to improve the customer experience. Through investing in growing patronage we could, in time, reduce the subsidy required to support local rail services – helping to deliver a better service at a lower cost.

This draft strategy sets out our vision for rapid transit and how we'll aim to deliver it – both through sustaining and growing the existing system and transforming our services and infrastructure.

Developing and delivering new rapid transit requires time and significant funding. That will mean considering better use of existing funding, and new forms of funding. This draft strategy will support Transport for Greater Manchester to plan its work, extending rapid transit to more of Greater Manchester and helping create a fairer, greener and more prosperous city region.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

Executive summary

Greater Manchester (GM) is building the Bee Network, an integrated transport system that will support sustainable travel across the city-region. With the first buses brought under local control from September 2023, we have now franchised 50% of the bus network. This has yielded ridership growth of 5% in the last 6 months through strongly improved reliability, customer service and fleet. All buses will be franchised, and the first phase of the Bee Network complete, in 2025.

Local train services are then to be brought into the Bee Network in a second phase, with 8 rail corridors integrated by 2028. Looking beyond this to 2040, the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 sets out how transport is an enabler of sustainable economic and housing growth in support of the Greater Manchester Strategy.

Purpose and structure

The Draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy sets out how better rapid transit (fast and frequent mass transit) is to play its role for the city-region alongside other public, active and shared modes as part of the Bee Network. As a sub-strategy flowing from the GM Transport Strategy 2040, the draft strategy complements and reinforces other published Bee Network family documents such as the GM Streets for All Strategy and the GM Bus Strategy.

The draft strategy will help people to understand how the rapid transit system can be sustained and support GM growth to a horizon of 2030, and how the network could continue to be transformed to 2040 and beyond. The draft strategy will support Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) by informing decisions on prioritisation, underpinning our work with government and external organisations – including those that make up the rail industry – and setting out the background to our planning and policy case when promoting schemes.

As we refresh the GM 2040 Transport Strategy, the draft strategy will play a key role in shaping the next Five Year Delivery Plan (2027-32). For that reason – and also to ensure that rapid transit is part of a fully integrated Bee Network approach to refreshing the 2040 Strategy itself – this document is being published in draft so that it can form part of the wider engagement on this activity.

Work as part of our City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 1 (CRSTS1) Delivery Plan in relation to this draft strategy will continue. Much of this work concerns schemes 'in flight' – such as Metrolink Renewals, Metrolink Next Generation Vehicles / Tram-Train Pathfinder, Bury Interchange Redevelopment, Golborne Station, Access for All, and integration of 8 rail lines into the Bee Network by 2028. These schemes, and others, are all reflected in the draft strategy.

One key piece of scheme development work in relation to our CRSTS1 Delivery Plan – namely the planning for new, extended and/or converted rapid transit lines – is shaped by the draft strategy rather than simply being reflected in it. Our principles and emerging priorities for rapid transit network expansion are described.

This draft strategy therefore sets out the following, which are summarised below and overleaf:

- our vision for rapid transit and why there's a case for change
- what we need (in broad terms) and how we'll seek to deliver it (in more detail)
- integrating rail into the Bee Network by 2030, with 8 priority corridors by 2028
- c.15 emerging priorities for expansion of the rapid transit system
- next steps

Our vision for rapid transit

In GM, rapid transit is defined as a public transport service that is fast, frequent and capable of moving large numbers of people (mass transit). Throughout this draft strategy, 'rail-based rapid transit' includes suburban rail and metro services (today in GM, that means trains and trams) and 'bus-based rapid transit' includes busway services (today in GM, that means the 'V' bus services on the Leigh–Salford–Manchester busway). We also look ahead to a future where tram-train technology and underground technology play a role, by joining up the light and heavy rail networks and providing major new Regional Centre rapid transit capacity, respectively.

Rapid transit offers faster journeys with fewer stops than local buses, and more frequent services than inter-city and regional trains and coaches. However, it shouldn't be thought of as being separate with individual services, information, and fares and ticketing. It needs to be a seamless part of the Bee Network – integrated with other public transport and underpinned by active travel.

This draft strategy sets out the overall policy position for rapid transit as part of the Bee Network including the 'Right Mix' vision – **aiming to more than double rapid transit trips by 2040** – and our ambitions for a greener, fairer and more prosperous city-region in the context of:

- an approximately 10% population increase in that period
- our commitment to be carbon-neutral by 2038, and improved air quality and biodiversity
- transforming opportunities for all, and responding to GM's growth locations

Why there's a case for change

This draft strategy sets out the case for rapid transit playing its part in **tackling inequalities**. The case is made with reference to the Levelling Up White Paper, Centre for Cities research, and the National Infrastructure Assessment – which all show that a lack of infrastructure to get large numbers of people quickly to and from the centres of economic activity is a key factor limiting the productivity of city-regions including GM.

The argument for rapid transit's role in **delivering the opportunities for good growth** across GM is also made in relation to our growth locations – by having enough rapid transit capacity to accommodate growth in Regional Centre and town centre trips, and achieving a step change in connectivity with rapid transit taking a greater share of wider city-region trips.

Meeting our environmental commitments makes up the third part of the case for change, with rapid transit offering an attractive alternative to driving (and therefore tackling congestion and moving us towards the Right Mix vision and our carbon-neutrality target). The challenges and opportunities regarding embodied carbon and operational emissions are considered.

The success story of Metrolink from its opening in 1992 onward, the serious challenges faced by suburban rail in recent years, and the continual evolution of busway services including their integration into the Bee Network in 2023 all form part of the **story so far** for rapid transit.

Rapid transit can play an important role in orbital connectivity, with the **complementary role** of Quality and Express Bus services for some middle distance trips rounding out the case for change.

What we need, and how we'll seek to deliver it

In broad terms, we need three things for rapid transit:

- We need it to be part of a **seamless Bee Network**.
- We need **room to grow** because capacity is the single biggest challenge to our vision.
- We need it to work at its best, which is when it has local **accountability**.

In this draft strategy, we set out how we'll seek to deliver that by:

- **Sustaining, integrating and improving.**
    - Sustaining a well-maintained, resilient and reliable rapid transit system.
    - Integrating our rapid transit system within the Bee Network and the regional and national context, including the rail pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing pilot by 2025.
    - Continually improving our offer to customers in terms of the environment and health, safety and security, and accessibility and inclusion.
- **Growing.**
    - Addressing mounting capacity challenges on Metrolink with a fleet of longer 'next generation vehicles' that have tram-train capability, working with the rail industry on train and platform lengthening, and remaining responsive to demand on the busway.
    - Developing and delivering new rapid transit stops and stations, whilst improving our existing ones with access for all and better first and last mile connections.
    - Working to improve key links that knit together the existing rapid transit system.
- **Transforming.**
    - Integrating rail into the Bee Network by 2030, with 8 priority corridors by 2028.
    - Developing proposals for new, extended and converted rapid transit lines including tram-train technology, the Airport as a hub, and major Regional Centre capacity.

Integrating rail by 2028

Between now and 2028 rail integration delivery will focus on 8 priority corridors across GM. This will bring customer-facing improvements that align rail services with the Bee Network, including consistent branding, information, fares, accessibility, and station enhancements. This will deliver early realisation of customer benefits, create an environment for passenger growth and provide the first step in establishing a single cohesive recognisable 'Bee Network' product that incorporates rail.

Emerging priorities for rapid transit system expansion

The draft strategy presents a principles-based prioritisation of options for new, extended and converted rapid transit lines, with c.15 emerging priorities identified for rapid transit system expansion. These will be taken forward for further detailed prioritisation during 2024, alongside ongoing business case development and supporting activities.

Developing new, extended or converted rapid transit lines requires significant time and funding, so it is vital to prioritise the proposals to achieve our aim of a steady, rolling pipeline that builds up skills and moves them from scheme to scheme – driving efficiency and applying lessons learned.

Prioritising in this way allows us to focus our finite scheme development resources on those that would most effectively move us towards our vision. It also allow us to maintain a proper focus on the other key actions to sustain, grow and transform the rapid transit system that do not involve new, extended or converted rapid transit lines.

The emerging priorities are described in both text and map form, and are shown in the context of the 8 rail lines to be integrated into the Bee Network by 2028 and complementary Quality Bus routes.

Next steps

The draft strategy is not in itself a costed or funded delivery plan, and its fullest ambitions would require significant funding (including considering better use of existing funding, and new forms of funding) and statutory powers to be delivered. It is anticipated that a number of delivery plans (for example, concerning the full integration of rail into the Bee Network) will come forward over time to support implementation of the draft strategy. The main next steps are:

- **Wider engagement** on this draft strategy as part of our Local Transport Plan refresh, which itself starts with refreshing the GM Transport Strategy 2040 and is followed by the creation of the next Five Year Delivery Plan (covering 2027-2032).
- Further work on **future funding** arrangements, including as part of the Single Settlement and for the anticipated City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 2 (CRSTS2) period 2027/28 to 2031/32 – with an indicative overall CRSTS2 allocation of £2.5 billion for GM, subject to further engagement and agreement with central government.

- Continued development and delivery of our **existing commitments** including those in the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 1 (CRSTS1) Delivery Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27 that will **sustain** and **grow** our rapid transit system.
- Continuing work on **transforming** our rapid transit system:
    - Working with the rail industry to fully integrate rail into the Bee Network, including the key next step of agreeing our long-term partnership with the rail industry to embed local accountability for our rail network.
    - Development of the Metrolink Next Generation Vehicles and Tram-Train Pathfinder, which will be crucial to addressing capacity challenges and developing viable business cases for tram-train schemes on a larger scale respectively – unlocking future expansion of GM's rapid transit system.
    - Further detailed prioritisation during 2024 of the c.15 emerging priorities for new, extended and/or converted rapid transit lines, to sequence a potential future expansion programme – this is alongside ongoing business case development, working with local authorities to space-save for potential future routes in Local Plans, and planning for Regional Centre capacity and network optimisation.

A trip on our future rapid transit network

1 More Greater Manchester residents live a short walk from their nearest rapid transit stop or station. Housing developments are often completely integrated with rapid transit, and some developers have invested in the facilities.

2 Rapid transit stops and stations are easy to access for everyone. In particular, rail stations feel like part of the Bee Network, and step-free access to them has been transformed.

3 For those that live close enough, walking, wheeling and cycling are the main way to get to and from the rapid transit stops and stations – and there are excellent facilities to support this active travel. For those that live further away, local bus services and other first and last mile options are fully physically integrated with the stops and stations.

4 Tram and busway services have remained reliable and frequent, and reform has allowed suburban rail services to rise up to meet reliability and frequency standards across the day and week.

5 People can plan the best journey for them in one place – the Bee Network app and other journey planners – without having to think about the different modes of transport involved. They can purchase best value and flexible tickets before boarding.

6 The rapid transit service departs on time and is easy to board for everyone – with level boarding as is already standard on all tram services, and ramps and other devices provided as needed to bridge any gaps on busway and suburban rail services.

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A trip on our future rapid transit network

7 The rapid transit service makes swift progress on its route – faster than a local bus service – because it is mainly separated from general traffic, and is given priority at junctions. There is enough capacity for everyone to travel safely and comfortably, without excessive crowding.

8 A trip on a Bee Network rapid transit service feels safe at any time of day or night. Stops and stations are bright and well-lit. Frontline staff, including partnerships with the police, are on hand to help. CCTV and audio-visual announcements mean everyone can use rapid transit with confidence.

9 Changing from one rapid transit service to another during the journey is seamless, with the right infrastructure supported by information and signage to help passengers find their way. There are no worries about getting the best-value fare, because tickets are simple and multi-modal.

10 In the background, the Operational Control Centre is monitoring the network to keep passengers informed, taking decisions to keep tram and busway services on time, and working with partners to achieve the same for suburban rail services.

11 All tram and busway services are zero-emission, and suburban rail is increasingly electrified – using overhead wires and batteries to move away from diesel.

12 The rapid transit service arrives on time and passengers are able to change seamlessly to other local services - like buses and cycle hire - or walk or wheel to their destination. Using the Bee Network app, customers can rate their journey and provide immediate feedback on their experience.

Our vision for rapid transit

GM is building the Bee Network, an integrated transport system that will support sustainable travel across the city-region. Our overall vision is to have "World class connections that support long-term, sustainable economic growth and access to opportunity for all."

In seeking to achieve our vision, the GM Transport Strategy 2040 sets out our ambition "To extend the benefits of rapid transit to more of GM and provide the capacity and reliability needed to support growth in the economy." We will strive to deliver an enhanced rapid transit system that enables everyone to travel easily and affordably, that is safe, accessible, reliable and sustainable – and is an integrated and accountable part of the Bee Network.

Improved public transport is essential for increased productivity and economic growth, and better living standards. Here in GM, we need to invest in and expand the capacity and coverage of our rapid transit system to deliver greater access to jobs, education, healthcare, culture and leisure opportunities, to support healthy and active lifestyles, and to reduce carbon emissions.

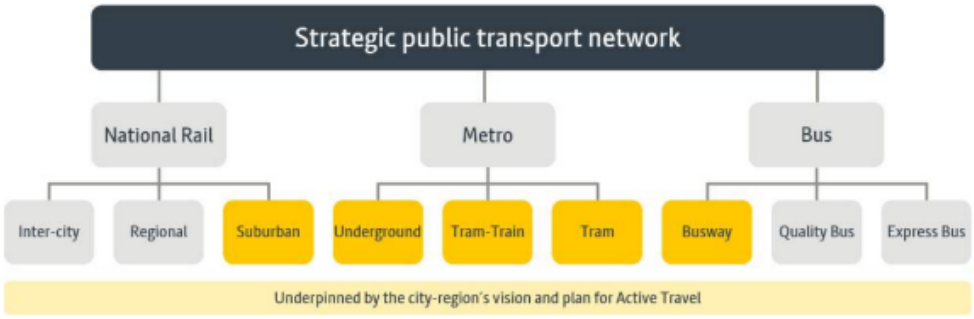
What is rapid transit?

In GM, rapid transit is a public transport service mainly focussed on middle distance trips that is:

- Faster than local bus services. Local bus services with closely spaced stops are good for serving shorter distance trips. For middle distance trips, faster journeys with fewer stops are critical.
- More frequent than city-to-city services. Inter-city and regional trains and coaches are good for serving longer distance trips. For middle distance trips, services need to run more frequently.
- Able to move large numbers of people. Rapid transit uses dedicated routeways, with a high degree of segregation, to serve major passenger flows concentrated on key corridors.

Throughout this draft strategy, we describe 'rail-based rapid transit' as including suburban rail and metro services, and 'bus-based rapid transit' as including busway services.

In the figure below, current and potential future rapid transit modes are shown highlighted in yellow, in the context of the wider strategic public transport and active travel network.



Our ambitions

Sustainable growth with the 'Right Mix'

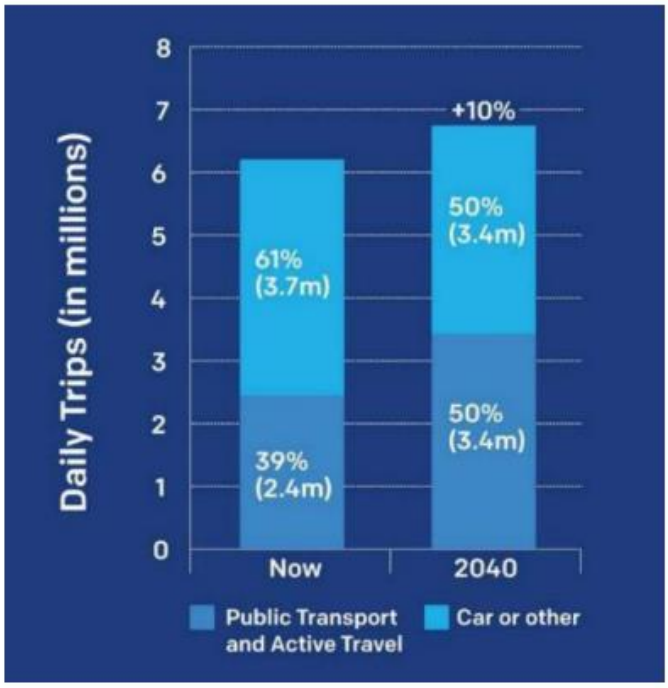
Since 2000, GM's population has grown by 300,000 to 2.8 million – and is expected to exceed 3 million by 2037. We need to accommodate that growth in a sustainable way.

By 2040 we want at least 50% of all journeys in GM to be made by active travel and public transport. That will mean one million more sustainable journeys every day enabling us to deliver a healthier, greener, and more productive city-region. This is our 'Right Mix' transport vision.

The Right Mix vision anticipates a much greater role for rapid transit, supporting a stronger Regional Centre and a step change increase in the use of rapid transit for wider city-region trips, including to and from thriving town centres. That will require the number of trips made by rapid transit to more than double by 2040 – with consequential increases in connecting active travel trips by walking, wheeling and cycling, and connecting public transport trips by bus.

Achieving the Right Mix would enable us to make progress towards reducing carbon emissions, with local authorities across the city-region having declared a Climate Emergency, and the aim being for the city-region to be completely carbon neutral by 2038.

Our Right Mix vision is currently being reviewed in the light of the longer term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial indications are that changes to working patterns may reduce growth in the travel-to-work peak but could also lead to more use of rapid transit for non-work trips.



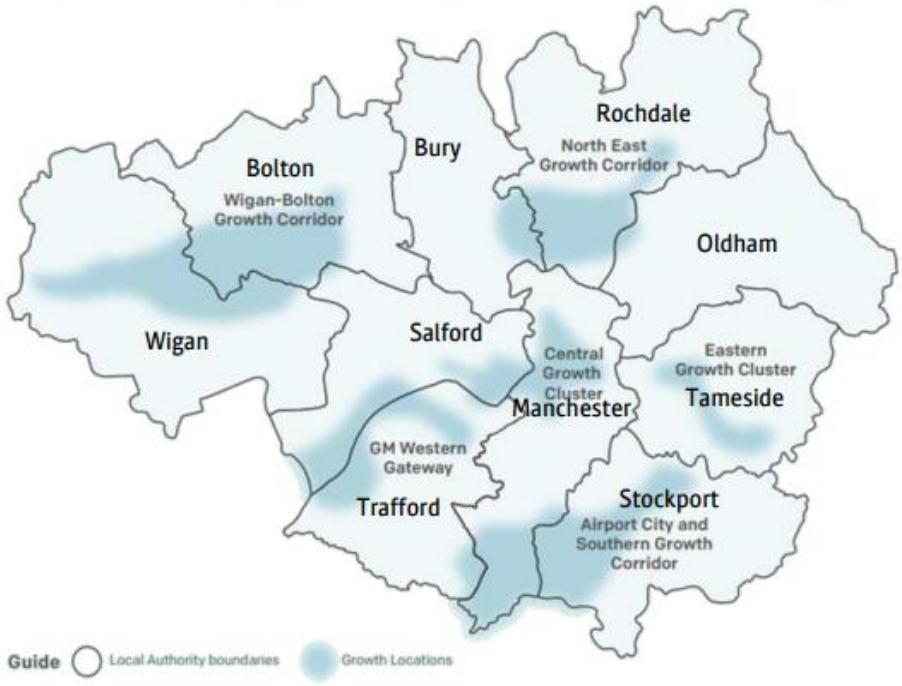
Transforming opportunities

As well as accommodating the sustainable growth of GM's population, our ambition is for rapid transit to play a key role in transforming opportunities for everyone across our city-region. Over the last 30 years, improvements to our metro, suburban rail and busway services have connected people with jobs, education, healthcare, culture and leisure opportunities.

But there is much more to be done, in line with the Places for Everyone spatial plan and emerging Local Plans. The vast majority of growth will be within the existing urban area. In addition to this, Growth Locations represent opportunities for the whole city-region to bring forward housing and employment development at a scale which can drive the transformational change we want to see. By linking opportunity and need – and connecting investment and development – the growth locations offer a chance to realise improvements for communities and places which may not have benefited previously from economic development and growth, or where there is major scope to drive growth.

GM is a potential catalyst of substantial growth, supporting the future prosperity of the North and the UK. The city-region is home to large clusters of high-value jobs in advanced materials and manufacturing, health innovation, and digital, creative and media. To thrive and grow, these high productivity sectors need to be connected to a large pool of highly skilled labour.

Rapid transit needs to respond to and shape these opportunities, by ensuring that all our residents and communities are able to benefit from the opportunities that growth and increased economic prosperity brings – and ensuring that new development is supported by sustainable transport.



Why there's a case for change

Tackling inequalities

Addressing regional inequalities across the UK is a key priority. The 2022 White Paper, 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom', highlights the role of cities as drivers of productivity. Currently, productivity in the UK's major cities outside of London lags international comparators, and a combination of lower population density and poorer public transport infrastructure are the root causes.

The White Paper set out that "The UK's second cities have generally lower population densities and relatively poor local transport infrastructures. Centre for Cities, for example, found that in Europe, on average, 67% of people can get to their local city centre in 30 minutes using public transport, compared with 40% in Britain. This suggests public transport in UK cities may limit productivity by reducing effective density and, as a result, agglomeration".

In recognition of this weakness, the White Paper sets out a mission that, by 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country and all transport networks in all major urban centres will be significantly closer to the standards of London – with improved services, simpler fares, and integrated ticketing.

'Greater Manchester's productivity resurgence' published by the Northern Powerhouse Partnership makes the case that "Greater Manchester is experiencing the beginning of a productivity resurgence, with analysis showing the city region's productivity growth outstripping that of comparable Northern cities and closing the gap with London. Evidence shows that income and productivity growth is being felt across Greater Manchester more widely thanks to investment in intracity transport connectivity."

Metrolink Phase 3's Monitoring and Evaluation Second Report, March 2021 showed the power of that investment, achieving a 10%+ improvement in public transport door-to-door access to healthcare, employment (ages 16-75) and further education (ages 16-19) for around 20% of GM's total population. Because the Phase 3 Metrolink lines targeted a number of areas with high deprivation, the 10%+ connectivity improvement was achieved for a greater proportion of people living in the most deprived areas in GM – with 30% of these people seeing the 10%+ improvement in public transport door-to-door access.

National Infrastructure Assessment

The National Infrastructure Commission carries out an overall assessment of the UK's infrastructure requirements – including transport – every five years. The Commission published its second Assessment in October 2023 and published its latest Progress Review in May 2024. The Assessment was guided by objectives to support sustainable economic growth across all regions of the UK, improve competitiveness, improve quality of life, and support climate resilience and transition to net zero carbon emissions.

The Assessment emphasises that better transport networks can support economic growth across regions, with cities being the main engines of economic growth. It also notes that there has been underinvestment in transport systems in regional English cities. The proposed solution is better public transport and active travel – noting that these are much more space efficient than cars.

The Assessment recommends that "Government should invest £22 billion [between 2028 and 2045] to improve public transport in the largest regional English cities to unlock economic growth. Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, and Manchester are important economic hubs within their wider regions but face the biggest transport capacity constraints. They should be the... initial priorities for investment in mass transit systems." This recommendation is restated in the Progress Review. The National Infrastructure Commission sets out some conditions, such as local funding contributions.

The Assessment also stresses the clear need for action to invest in the maintenance and renewal of existing transport infrastructure on both a national and local level.

The GM view

The National Infrastructure Commission's recommended level of investment, whilst significant, should be seen as a minimum if we are to seek to unlock the scale of economic growth that the largest regional cities have the potential to deliver. But this will also mean considering better use of existing funding, and new forms of funding.

Individual schemes to be promoted for investment would be subject to detailed, bottom-up assessments and appraisals – as is standard practice.

Delivering opportunities for good growth

Core Growth – the Regional Centre and the Central Growth Cluster

Our future rapid transit system must support the development of a well-connected Regional Centre at the heart of the North. At present, more than half of rapid transit trips in the city-region start or finish in the Regional Centre. It is GM's principal hub for rapid transit services due to its high concentration of employment, education, health, culture and leisure trip attractors – and its role as the city-region's central hub for inter-city connections. Its economy depends on people being able to travel in and out of it, and without rapid transit there would be significantly increased congestion.

As a result, radial links connecting the city-region into and across the Regional Centre represent the principal markets for rapid transit. These will continue to be a main driver of the case for further investment – noting that combining radial links facilitates cross-city journeys, and some radial links can also make a strong contribution to orbital and semi-orbital journeys between town centres.

We want to support the continuing growth of the Regional Centre and the Central Growth Cluster. We aim to do this without increasing car travel, meaning that the volume of Regional Centre trips made by rapid transit will need to double by 2040. That requires attractive rapid transit services with sufficient connectivity, capacity, and reliability – and increased development densities around rapid transit stops and stations.

Town centres

As well as the doubling of Regional Centre trips, our Right Mix vision includes a step change increase in the use of rapid transit for wider city-region trips. Many of those wider city-region trips will be to, from, or passing through our key town centres. Rapid transit therefore has an important role to play in supporting the growth of our key town centres. Whilst at the time of writing the Right Mix does not have explicit targets for these town centre trips, it is anticipated that these will be developed. With its emphasis on fast and frequent services, rapid transit can create opportunities for travel between town centres (whether on orbital or semi-orbital links, or via the Regional Centre).

Boosting northern competitiveness – from west to east

Beyond the Regional Centre, rapid transit needs to play a much greater role in serving other centres of employment, education, health, culture and leisure. By serving a wider range of origins and destinations, rapid transit can spread prosperity more widely in GM.

In the north of the city-region, this includes responding to the emerging growth locations spanning from west Salford and the Western Gateway, to the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor, the North East Growth Corridor (including the Atom Valley cluster across Bury, Rochdale and Oldham) and the Eastern Growth Cluster in Tameside. Ensuring that residents across the north of the city-region can access the established major employment centres in the Regional Centre, at Trafford Park and at Manchester Airport is also important. Traffic congestion on the highway network and some slow public transport links mean that many of these trips are difficult at present, especially at peak times.

Sustaining southern competitiveness – Airport and southern gateway

Our overall spatial strategy seeks to spread prosperity to all parts of the city-region. This is balanced with the need to ensure that the existing competitiveness of the southern areas is sustained, and the potential is realised of key assets such as Manchester Airport and the town centres of Altrincham, Wythenshawe and Stockport. Further development of rapid transit can play a vital role in supporting the objectives of the development of the Airport and Southern Growth Corridor.

Manchester Airport is our 'Global Gateway'. The Greater Manchester Strategy notes that "the international connectivity afforded through the airport, Airport City, and development of the wider integrated transport system connecting the airport to all parts of Greater Manchester and the wider North will be important in... rebalancing both the local and national economy".

In the longer term, the jobs growth in this area means that the Airport has the potential to become a second hub for rapid transit in GM. In the nearer term, the cancellation of the northern sections of High Speed 2 means that Stockport's role as GM's southern gateway is more important than ever.

Meeting our environmental commitments

In 2019 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and the GM Local Authorities declared a Climate Emergency and stressed that urgent action is needed to put GM on a path to carbon neutrality by 2038, 12 years ahead of the Government's net zero target of 2050. In March 2022, GMCA also declared a Biodiversity Emergency, and GM leaders signed the Edinburgh Declaration – a statement of intent calling for local, national, and international action to reverse devastating biodiversity loss.

Transport currently accounts for around a third of carbon emissions in GM. The Bee Network is critical to enable people to travel in a different way – increasing the use of active travel and public transport will help us to tackle our most pressing economic, environmental, and quality of life challenges, and address environmental concerns around carbon, climate change, noise pollution and biodiversity.

To achieve this, GM needs more people to choose to travel by these more sustainable forms of transport. Rapid transit, supporting a stronger Regional Centre and a step change increase in the use of rapid transit for wider city-region trips, will help give everyone travelling in GM an attractive alternative to driving. This will move us toward achieving the Right Mix and enable us to make progress towards reducing carbon emissions.

Where we invest in rapid transit we will not consider that investment in isolation. Instead, we will examine how it can also better support walking, cycling, wheeling and bus trips as part of overall sustainable journeys – and how investment in these modes can grow the rapid transit market.

TfGM will incorporate the nationally recognised standard for managing carbon in infrastructure into our development and delivery process to ensure that carbon is considered throughout the scheme lifecycle. Known as PAS 2080, the standard aims to reduce carbon and cost through intelligent design, construction and usage decisions.

We also need to make the best use of our existing infrastructure (including the potential of tram-train technology to join up existing light rail and heavy rail infrastructure with new rapid transit services) as a way of mitigating carbon emissions – and seek reductions in the carbon intensity of the rapid transit trips themselves, for example with further electrification of rapid transit services.

Rapid transit – the story so far

Rapid transit shouldn't be thought of as being separate – with individual services, information, and fares and ticketing. It needs to be a seamless part of GM's Bee Network. But to describe the story so far, a quick description of metro, suburban rail and busway in the GM context follows below.

Metro

These are tram, tram-train, and underground train services that call at stops in the heart of the city centre. Customers can 'turn up and go' without checking a timetable first, because they run frequently. A large proportion of their routes operate on their own dedicated tracks, which are owned and maintained locally. In GM, Metrolink is our metro system.

Metrolink has grown from two lines to Bury and Altrincham in 1992 to eight lines today. The number of trips people took more than doubled between 2010 and 2020, and before the COVID-19 pandemic there were over 45 million tram trips each year. The increase in trips has not just a result of opening new lines, though. As with National Rail, Metrolink has seen strong growth on existing lines. Metrolink passenger numbers have now exceeded pre-pandemic levels during most weekday peaks, and significantly exceeded them on weekends. It saw its busiest month in its 32 year history in May 2024, with 4.1 million tram trips. Capacity is once again a challenge.

One of Metrolink's particular strengths from day one has been the growth in off-peak travel for shopping and leisure purposes, encouraged by a service that is easy to use for all.

Suburban Rail

These are train services that call at stations on the edge of the city centre. They might run often enough that people can 'turn up and go' without checking a timetable first, but this is not always the case. Services run on tracks that form part of the National Rail network, owned and maintained by Network Rail – so they often need to be timetabled around inter-city, regional and freight services, which make their own important contribution to GM, the North and the UK. The rail line through east Manchester and across the boundary to Hadfield and Glossop is an example of suburban rail.

On the National Rail network, trips to (and through) the Regional Centre during the morning peak increased by 72% between 2002 and 2017. Some of those additional trips were carried by the suburban rail services that form part of GM's rapid transit system. Despite this significant growth, investment in capacity of the network has not kept pace. Rail passenger numbers have also shown a strong recovery, with a similar pattern to Metrolink of greater weekend use.

In attempting to squeeze more out of available capacity, the over-ambitious May 2018 rail timetable was an example of an insufficiently robust approach to development and delivery. As a result of over-stretching Victorian infrastructure and a failure to deliver required enhancements in time for the timetable change, customers suffered major disruption. Since then, recovering reliability has been at the expense of the loss of services in the December 2022 timetable. Greater investment and joined up development and delivery will be essential to provide benefits to passenger and freight customers, and avoid constraining the growth potential of GM, the North and the UK.

Busway

By this, we mean buses that are highly segregated from general traffic (with a good degree of continuity of that segregation) and more widely spaced stops than is usual. This allows higher frequencies, increased speeds and reduced journey times. Segregation can be achieved either with bus lanes, bus-only streets or a guideway, as shown in GM by the Leigh–Salford–Manchester busway. Busways offer more flexibility than suburban rail or metro because they can use the existing highway when they need to, without the need for tracks or signalling.

Since 2016, the Leigh-Salford-Manchester busway has formed an important part of our rapid transit system. The 7km of guideway from Leigh, and the bus lanes and priority measures between Ellenbrook and the Regional Centre, make it a particularly effective service.

Patronage on the busway services grew from 2.1 million annual trips in its first year of operation to over 3 million trips prior to the pandemic. Like most public transport services, patronage is still recovering, but in 2023/24 over 2.6 million trips were made on the busway – an increase of over 300,000 from the previous year. Growth in passenger demand for busway services brought capacity challenges, and it is expected that demand will continue to recover and grow. Busway services became part of our Bee Network in September 2023 as part of the first phase of taking local control of GM's bus services (due to be complete by January 2025). Frequencies have increased, and more buses deployed.

Complementing rapid transit

Where passenger flows are not great enough to justify the significant investment in rapid transit, there are two particular types of bus service that also form a critical part of our city-region's strategic public transport network and complement rapid transit. Whilst Quality Bus and Express Bus are part of the GM Bus Strategy, the features that they share with rapid transit – and the need to plan GM's Bee Network as a seamless whole – mean that they are outlined here. They play a particularly important role on orbital and semi-orbital routes, where these routes are not served by rapid transit.

Quality Bus

We want all Bee Network journeys to be high quality, regardless of transport mode. Quality Bus refers specifically to whole route upgrades on key corridors – with bus priority to achieve reliable services, attractive waiting environments integrated with the public realm, and sometimes an even higher quality of vehicles than would be the norm. Quality Bus proposals can have features in common with rapid transit including higher frequencies, faster speeds and reduced journey times.

Express Bus

Limited stop services that enable people to make middle distance trips due to the faster journey times they achieve. GM examples include cross-boundary services to Rawtenstall, Burnley, and Accrington. In seeking to maximise the service offer to passengers, Express Bus services can be aligned with complementary Quality Bus whole route upgrades on key corridors.

What we need

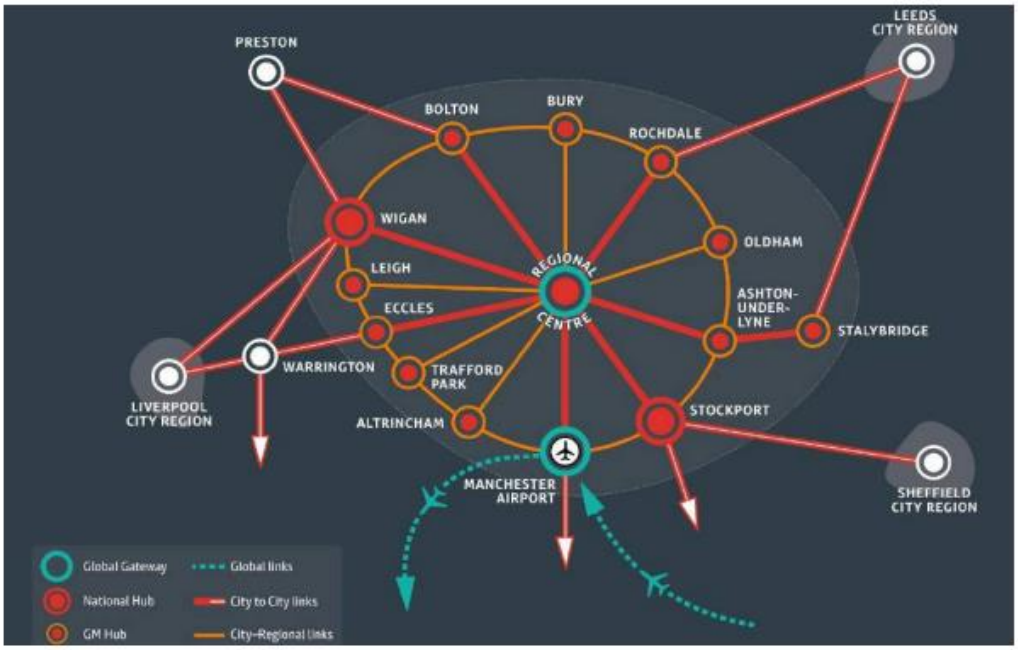
A seamless network

Our GM 2040 Transport Strategy was developed around spatial themes so that we can implement the most appropriate interventions for different parts of the city-region and for different journeys.

Our strategic public transport network connects GM hubs (the key town centres of Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham, Ashton-under-Lyne, Stalybridge, Altrincham, Eccles, and Leigh, plus Trafford Park), National Hubs (the Regional Centre, Stockport, and Wigan), and our Global Gateway at Manchester Airport.

The aim is not for direct rapid transit links between all of these hubs, but for seamless overall journeys as part of the Bee Network. A network approach will enable us to meet a wider range of travel needs, facilitating easier interchange at key nodes on our transport network. This includes enabling people to make cross-city and orbital journeys around the city-region much more easily.

Our vision for a seamless Bee Network includes the integration of all forms of rapid transit across the city-region, underpinned by integration with a wide range of other public transport, active travel and shared mobility modes to provide for the first and last mile of journeys. Effortless connections are to be facilitated at network hubs across the city-region. A seamless customer experience will see high quality services at high quality stops, stations and interchanges that are accessible to all (especially by walking, wheeling and cycling) and have joined up, simplified, and affordable fares and ticketing.



Room to grow

Capacity on our rapid transit system poses the most significant challenge to our vision for supporting sustainable growth across GM. Over the past three decades, our city-region has seen extraordinary growth in the number of customers using rapid transit services.

Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel in recent years, demand has quickly returned close to (or exceeded) the levels seen before – and growth is expected to continue. Whilst travel patterns and the nature of trips on our networks may have changed, the critical issue of capacity remains.

In the past, crowding on the Metrolink network was addressed by deploying additional trams in 'double' formations. However, the contract for procuring more of our current fleet of M5000 trams has now come to an end – limiting our ability to address crowding in this way. Progressing the development and procurement of the next generation of Metrolink vehicles will therefore be vital.

In the longer term, however, network capacity constraints are expected to become critical, with the focus on Manchester city centre on which all Metrolink lines converge. Network capacity is limited by street running in Manchester city centre, and achieving a step change in Regional Centre rapid transit capacity is considered later in this draft strategy.

Whilst returning crowding issues on the National Rail network can be addressed to an extent through investment to provide longer trains on existing services, capacity on the network to accommodate the additional services that are needed is significantly constrained. There are longstanding capacity issues on the Castlefield Corridor in central Manchester and emerging capacity issues in and around Stockport.

On the busway, we can remain responsive to demand by deploying buses as needed.

Accountability

Transport works best when it is seamless and locally accountable. GM's busway and other franchised bus services, Metrolink and Starling Bank bike hire services offer compelling evidence for that – where decisions have been and continue to be made on behalf of GM by elected members through the GMCA and the Bee Network Committee, supported and delivered by TfGM.

We are radically improving the accountability and integration of GM's bus services by finishing the job of bringing them under local control as part of the Bee Network by 2025. But suburban rail is also a critical part of the vision: it needs to be more accountable and more integrated, with 8 priority corridors to be part of the Bee Network by 2028 and full integration of rail by 2030.

To this end, in March 2023 the GMCA agreed a 'Trailblazer' deeper devolution deal with central government. This commits the government to support the development of a new partnership with Great British Railways: "to support the delivery of the Bee Network by 2030, which will see full multi-modal fares and ticketing integration, co-branding and common customer information, 'pay as

you go' ticketing pilots, better integration of local stations, identification of opportunities for regeneration and development, greater access to local rail data and giving GMCA the opportunity to sponsor infrastructure and service enhancement schemes."

The Greater Manchester Rail Board has been established under the Trailblazer deal. Guided by the GM 2040 Transport Strategy, and on behalf of the Mayor and Leaders of the 10 districts of GM, it:

- Contributes local insight supporting the joined up planning and delivery of all existing major rail infrastructure and rail service projects and programmes affecting the economy, people and businesses of GM.
- Leads and monitors delivery of the Trailblazer deal commitments.
- Brings local expertise together to inform the prioritisation and business case development of future rail infrastructure and service delivery projects affecting GM.
- Champions regular joined up public communication of a coherent delivery plan for improving rail services in GM.

The Board is designed to streamline the need for multiple forums and it provides a single place to plan and monitor the delivery of rail elements for the Trailblazer deal – as well as helping to ensure that the needs of the people and economy of GM are properly considered in railway industry decision making at a time of major change.

How we'll seek to deliver better rapid transit

This section of the draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy sets out how, subject in some cases to funding and statutory powers, we will seek to deliver improvements across all aspects of rapid transit in GM. It is structured around the seven network principles of the GM Transport Strategy 2040 and our six Bee Network customer commitments.

If we are to achieve our vision of more than doubling rapid transit trips by 2040, we need to make the best use of the rapid transit infrastructure we already have and build on its strengths, as well as expanding it with new, extended and converted lines (which take a long time to plan and build).

This section is split into **sustaining**, **integrating**, **improving** and **growing** – with a focus on our system to a horizon of 2030 – and **transforming**, with a focus on our system to 2040 and beyond.

Whilst this section of the draft strategy sets out the ways in which we intend to act to achieve our vision for rapid transit and gives examples, it does not set out exactly what specific interventions we intend to deliver. The draft strategy is not in itself a costed or funded delivery plan, and its fullest ambitions would require significant funding (including considering better use of existing funding, and new forms of funding) and statutory powers to be delivered.

Wider engagement on this draft strategy will take place as part of our Local Transport Plan refresh, which starts with refreshing the GM Transport Strategy 2040 and is followed by the creation of the next Five Year Delivery Plan covering the years 2027-2032.

We also anticipate a number of specific plans coming forward to support implementation of this draft strategy (for example, concerning the full integration of rail into the Bee Network).

Sustaining our rapid transit system: well-maintained, resilient and reliable

Rapid transit services that turn up on time – and get to their destination at the expected speed – allow our customers to plan more effectively and have confidence that their journey will take the same amount of time every day. That will make them more likely to use rapid transit again.

We will:

- **01: Maintain and renew Metrolink, and continue to have robust operating procedures for planned and unplanned disruption.** This includes paying particular attention to the assets that are critical to the operation of the entire network such as the supervisory and control system. In some cases, it may be necessary to 'over-specify' to deliberately build in some spare capacity or extra resilience. Minimising inconvenience to customers will be at the forefront of our thinking, and high quality and reliable alternative transport will be provided where necessary.
- **02: Work with the rail industry to support development and delivery of infrastructure and service planning in pursuit of a well-maintained, resilient and reliable railway.** Some parts of GM's rail network are heavily congested, and the May 2018 timetable illustrated the disastrous effect on reliability of attempting to squeeze more services in. Whilst longer term strategic infrastructure investment is required to expand capacity and connectivity, some tactical steps can be taken in the nearer term. These include the new turnback facilities either side of Manchester Victoria and a third platform at Salford Crescent that are being delivered by the rail industry as part of the Manchester Task Force workstream, with an expected completion in 2026.
- **03: Work with the rail industry to influence rolling stock improvements** including replacing older trains with newer ones that have better performance characteristics such as faster acceleration and deceleration and better layouts to speed up passenger boarding and alighting. Northern are currently starting procurement for a standard vehicle for their services (up to 450 new trains) and this could bring opportunities to improve services across GM.
- **04: Explore additional capacity that may be required at critical parts of the Metrolink network.** This will become increasingly important as passenger growth continues and pressures on the network increase. A particular focus will be placed on the critical trunk section of the network between Cornbrook and St Peter's Square.
- **05: Protect and seek to enhance rapid transit's on-highway priority over general traffic,** so that Metrolink and the busway can provide a fast and reliable service. This will involve regular review of journey time performance, with a particular focus on monitoring the performance at junctions. An equitable balance with other modes does however need to be struck. For the busway in particular, its potential now that it is part of the Bee Network should be fully exploited – including consideration of services (routes, frequencies and stopping patterns) as part of the structured, transparent, area-based 'Network Reviews' that are set out in the GM Bus Strategy.

Integrating our rapid transit system: seamless and locally accountable

This section of the draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy describes how we will build on our existing arrangements with those newly created through the Trailblazer deeper devolution deal and the partnership with Great British Railways to ensure that metro, suburban rail and busway services are seamless and locally accountable as part of the Bee Network.

An exemplar of the integration we want to see is the proposed Bury Interchange redevelopment. Building on the Stockport Interchange redevelopment and the second tranche of bus franchising (delivered in March 2024), and subject to government approval and funding, the £81m project would see the current site (which is over 40 years old) transformed into GM's first operationally carbon neutral interchange. The project would provide better links between trams and buses, improved facilities for customers who are walking, wheeling or cycling, and a new link to the southern end of a refurbished Metrolink stop. The redevelopment would also deliver a safe, secure, sustainable and accessible gateway into Bury town centre, supporting its wider regeneration.

Rail is the last piece of the jigsaw which needs to be fully integrated with the Bee Network, to deliver seamless integration and local accountability.

Further information on the 8 rail corridors to be prioritised for delivery is given later in this draft strategy in 'Integrating rail by 2028'.

Operating hours and service pattern integration

Our customers need operating hours and service patterns that are integrated, so that they can trust in connections between different modes of transport and depend on rapid transit to be running when they need it across the day, week and year.

We will:

- **06: Continue to align bus timetables with tram and train timetables** through the roll-out of bus franchising to 2025 and network reviews, particularly with first and last tram and train times.
- **07: Consider night-time services on the busway** and wider bus network. This is in line with the GM Bus Strategy's commitment that TfGM will explore "providing services to major town and employment centres during the night, albeit on a less frequent basis than during the day" and the GM Night-Time Economy Strategy's commitment to developing a business case in 2024 for a pilot of later night transport services.
- **08: Explore opportunities to align tram services with demand later at night and earlier in the day.** Later services have been reintroduced from September 2023. Initially, services are running every 24 minutes between midnight and 1am on Fridays and Saturdays. Understanding the impact of these services is critical to assessing any further changes to first and last tram times.
- **09: Work with the rail industry to seek enhanced hours of operation on the suburban rail network with a '7-day railway'** that fills in the gaps in train services – particularly evening and weekends – to support shift work, the night-time economy and the weekend economy.

Digital and physical integration

Our customers need to experience the Bee Network as a seamless whole – both in terms of how they find out information and plan journeys, and how they make their 'first and last mile' of a trip involving rapid transit.

We will:

- **10: Seek to improve the integration of rail stations as part of completing the Bee Network, with 8 rail lines to be integrated by 2028.** Our stations need to look and feel like they are part of an integrated Bee Network. Many stations are tired and have seen little investment in decades. As set out in the 'Trailblazer' deal, a crucial step is the introduction of Bee Network co-branding by 2027, including wayfinding to and from the stations, signage and information provision. Improving the accessibility of our stations is covered later in this draft strategy in a separate item due to its importance.
- **11: Integrate the existing rapid transit network with the growing Bee Active Network and Starling Bank bike hire scheme.** The planned Bee Active Network would put 95% of the GM population within 400m of an active travel route built to Bee Network standards – and a focus for potential future expansion of the Starling Bank bike hire is suggested to be integration with public transport. Meaningful integration with this strategic walking, wheeling and cycling plan will provide our customers with high quality options for active travel to and from rapid transit.
- **12: Apply TfGM's 'Travel Hubs' approach to our customers' journeys to and from rapid transit stops and stations.** Walking, wheeling and cycling are seen as the main way to get to and from rapid transit. However, recognising that some people live beyond an active travel catchment, the 'Travel Hubs' approach seeks to provide an attractive alternative to driving all the way that is broader than our traditional park and ride solution for that issue. It involves integrating rapid transit with local bus services, demand-responsive and shared transport, and pick-up and drop-off provision. Facilities that benefit customers and could also generate net revenue for TfGM such as electric charging infrastructure, delivery lockers and convenience shops will also be investigated. The rapid transit 'Travel Hubs' approach is in line with the GM Streets for All Strategy and the GM Bus Strategy, which (as an example) committed to explore the relocation of bus stops to better serve rapid transit stops and stations.
- **13: Continue to explore how stops and stations can become community assets that support local sustainable economic growth and wellbeing,** both as a welcoming gateway to rapid transit and as places in their own right. A particular focus will be working with the rail industry to identify and bring back into use disused buildings at stations, for both community and commercial uses.

Fares and ticketing integration

Our customers need simpler fares and integrated ticketing to make their journeys seamless. The Metrolink zonal fares and 'touch-in, touch-out' ticketing system provides a model for this. A further step towards simplification and integration has been made with the Bee AnyBus + Tram tickets introduced in 2023, which have made combined bus and tram journeys 20% cheaper. Further simplification and integration would make a significant difference for our customers.

We will:

- **14: Introduce a contactless pay-as-you-go system that will automatically cap all travel made across bus and tram in 2025 as part the Bee Network.** This could attract more customers who are beyond walking distance of tram stops.
- **15: Work with the Great British Railways Transition Team and the Department for Transport on the first pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing pilot on rail services in GM.** Due to be launched by 2025, the pilot is to cover services between Stalybridge and Victoria, and between Glossop and Piccadilly (subject to DfT business case approval). The vision is to deliver an effortless 'tap in, tap out' system that provides simpler fares and the best value on the day for rail travel, encouraging more people to use the rail network and improving customer satisfaction.
- **16: Work towards full pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing roll-out across the GM rail network and multi-modal fares and ticketing integration across bus, tram and train by 2030 – with 8 corridors prioritised for 2028.** This will require further work with Great British Railways and the Department for Transport as well as transport operators. We will also focus on finding the best approach to integrating cycle hire into the fares and ticketing regime.

Land use and planning integration

Rapid transit will be most effective in achieving our ambitions if it is integrated with land use planning and the planning system, so that more customers' homes and destinations are close to rapid transit stops and stations. The Places for Everyone plan sets out ambitions for development across the city-region towards 2040. It contains policies on high densities in the city centre and the Quays, as well as minimum densities within 400m and 800m of rapid transit stops and stations.

We will:

- **17: Continue to work with the GMCA and GM's 10 Local Authorities in support of minimum net residential densities around rapid transit stops and stations.** This includes developing proposals for improvements to services, improvements to stops and stations, and new stops and stations to serve major developments – with third party investment sought as appropriate.
- **18: Work with industry partners to develop a formal vehicle for delivering regeneration and commercial and housing development in and around rail stations.** At present, opportunities on land owned by the rail industry are not being fully realised. In 2023, TfGM and Network Rail announced a new partnership to deliver a joint vision for stations within the Regional Centre. The collaboration agreement, the first of its kind between the two organisations, is a major step forward. Working with key stakeholders, the partnership will establish future regeneration and development opportunities at stations and attract partners for delivery of future projects. Work is now underway to look at opportunities at Stockport, Piccadilly, Victoria, Oxford Road, Deansgate, Salford Central and Salford Crescent.
- **19: Promote a sustainable approach to transport for developments that encourages the fullest use of active travel and public transport, including rapid transit, over traditional road capacity enhancements.** This includes refreshing TfGM's "Transport for sustainable communities: a guide for developers", published in March 2013. In the case of very major developments that are linked to new, extended or converted rapid transit lines, high quality active travel and other public transport should often come first to prepare the way and build the market. This is because the rapid transit solutions take longer to deliver. Embedding sustainable choices early on relies on walking, wheeling, cycling and bus – with our customers able to transfer to rapid transit services at a later date.

Integration with freight networks

Rail freight is an essential part of a greener, fairer and more prosperous city-region. Many of the goods people purchase will have been moved by container on train for part of their journey, while aggregates trains bring essential construction materials from quarries. Each freight train can remove between 50 and 130 HGVs from our roads, and they help to reduce congestion, carbon, and air quality impacts. Many companies look to use rail freight to improve efficiency – in particular, avoiding congestion on the highway. A shift to rail freight can help to overcome other issues such as driver shortages, and can also help with companies' environmental objectives. Government have set a rail freight target of 75% growth by 2050. Rapid transit often shares corridors with rail freight, and it is important for them to work in harmony if we are to continue to see economic growth in a sustainable way.

We will:

- **20: Encourage the rail industry to electrify the Strategic Freight Network.** A large proportion of freight trains in GM use diesel. At present, the only practical alternative is full electrification – although batteries may support limited operation within freight terminals. Electric freight trains can free up capacity for suburban rail and metro services because they are faster and have better acceleration. In some locations the need for electrification to support rail freight may also improve the case for electrified passenger services.
- **21: Consider the needs of rail freight in capacity planning for rapid transit.** When promoting changes to suburban rail services or the introduction of new metro services, we will consider the capacity needs of freight operations and their future growth requirements. This includes the existing Trafford Park terminals and the planned Port Salford tri-mode freight interchange with access to the rail network, the M60 motorway, and the Manchester Ship Canal.

Integration with new inter-city lines

As described earlier in 'Room to Grow', focussing existing rail lines on rapid transit services can be challenging to achieve in GM. The legacy of two-track railways with heavily congested sections, flat junctions and mixed uses (with rapid transit services often sharing tracks with regional, inter-city and freight services) means that compromises are often needed. New inter-city rail lines could absorb some longer distance trains and release capacity for rapid transit services.

We will:

- **22: Following the cancellation of High Speed 2 infrastructure to Manchester, continue to work together with partners for the best outcome.** There are new challenges arising from the current proposals for High Speed 2 services to run on the existing rail network in the North. Whilst a solution is sought for the missing link between Birmingham and the route of Northern Powerhouse Rail in Cheshire, our ability to plan rapid transit services is impacted – particularly in the Stockport area with its role as GM's southern gateway.
- **23: Continue to work with partners to plan rapid transit services and new inter-city lines holistically, and seek the best Northern Powerhouse Rail outcome.** We will ensure that our input reflects the importance of rapid transit services in their own right – as well as rapid transit services providing sustainable access to new inter-city lines, reducing environmental impacts at key hubs in the Regional Centre and at Manchester Airport. Depending on the Northern Powerhouse Rail solution that is chosen, some railway lines such as Manchester–Warrington–Liverpool (CLC line) – which today has a low frequency that limits its contributions to existing communities and planned development – could see capacity released for better rapid transit services.
- **24: Seek the best solutions where proposed new inter-city lines do not release capacity for rapid transit.** It is anticipated that some existing highly-constrained lines – notably the lines via Bolton, Chat Moss, Calder Valley, Stockport and Manchester Airport – are less likely to experience released capacity from new inter-city lines. They will continue to present challenges in finding a balance between serving inter-city, regional, rapid transit and freight markets. We will continue to work with the rail industry to seek better rapid transit on these lines, including taking advantage of capacity provided by upgrades. For some of these lines, though, the only solution may involve major new capacity through the Regional Centre – which is covered later in this draft strategy.

Collaborate with, and hold central government and the rail industry to account

One of the challenges faced by our city-region is that the national planning for railway schemes does not always fully integrate them into local networks – or even with other national schemes that are progressing in parallel. This is a particular challenge when a long-term programme is phased – intermediate stages can create localised problems in the short term and medium term. There are also critical network capacity issues in central and southern Manchester that present a considerable constraint to growth, as demonstrated by the May 2018 timetable. With key schemes such as the Hope Valley Railway Upgrade, Transpennine Route Upgrade, and Manchester and North West Transformation Programme, we need mechanisms for greater and more meaningful collaboration and for holding central government and the rail industry to account – to ensure the benefits of schemes are realised.

We will:

- **25: Support the GM Rail Board to bring together national, local and rail industry insight, evidence and expertise so that GM is properly represented in railway industry decision-making.** The GM Rail Board streamlines the need for multiple forums and provides a single place to plan and monitor the delivery of the rail elements of the Trailblazer deal, support the joined up planning and delivery of existing schemes, and inform the prioritisation and business case development of future schemes.
- **26: Participate in the North West Regional Business Unit (NWRBU),** which is to be established to support the management of the current Northern and TransPennine Passenger Service Contracts by overseeing these in the north west area and providing one voice for the north west when engaging with Train Operating Companies (TOCs).
- **27: Monitor that scheme commitments are being met and hold central government and the rail industry to account when they are not.** An example going forward is ensuring that the Transpennine Route Upgrade delivers the promised freight capability and that the corresponding capacity constraints in Manchester are resolved.
- **28: Press for urgent investment to tackle the longstanding issue of capacity in the Castlefield Corridor in central Manchester and the emerging issue of capacity in and around Stockport.** Following the 2023 cancellation of Northern Hub 'Package C' (including two new through Platforms 15 & 16 at Piccadilly and a reconstructed four platform station at Oxford Road) and its accompanying Transport and Works Act Order, continuing to mitigate the unacceptable reliability of the May 2018 timetable without investing in new infrastructure would mean fewer trains and worse connections. Infrastructure investment announced in 2023 is a step along the way, and a more comprehensive package that addresses issues that 'Package C' did not address is being developed. Ultimately, the only solution that facilitates growth may involve major new capacity to and through the Regional Centre – covered later in this draft strategy.

Improving our rapid transit system: environmentally responsible and healthy

Metrolink vehicles continue to be zero-emission at the point of use, powered by electricity generated from modern, cleaner, and greener sources. At present, busway services are not yet zero-emission, while suburban rail remains heavily reliant on diesel-powered trains that add to air quality problems and carbon emissions in environmentally sensitive town and city centres.

To achieve a clean and healthy urban environment in support of the Clean Air Plan and carbon targets, high environmental standards will be applied to our rapid transit system where it is in our direct control and promoted where it is not. Active travel will be promoted as a healthy way to access rapid transit.

We will:

- **29: Replace the current low-emission fleet on the busway with a new fleet of zero-emission electric buses** in line with the GM Bus Strategy.
- **30: Advocate for further rail electrification and power supply upgrades.** Around half of the GM rail network is currently electrified at present. Work is underway to electrify the route between Bolton and Wigan – a £78 million upgrade of 13 miles of infrastructure aiming to complete by 2026. The Transpennine Route Upgrade will see electrification of the entire route

via Huddersfield. There are many other strong candidates, though, that we need to see acceleration of. We will work with the rail industry to make the case for further electrification, and for power upgrades on the existing electrified network to support more electric trains.

- **31: Support the introduction of alternative technologies to replace diesel trains.** Many older trains are reaching life expiry and replacement is planned, as described earlier in 'well-maintained, resilient and reliable'. A key priority is to replace the diesel trains which are between 30 and 40 years old and have worse emission outputs than more modern trains. But without widespread electrification at present, alternatives are needed. In the short term, the rail industry may use diesel bi-mode trains, which could help to reduce instances of diesel trains operating on electrified lines and diesel engines idling in our city centre stations. The modular design of these trains supports easy conversion from diesel engines to battery or electric as electrification is extended. As battery technology develops, and with the use of fast-charging or similar technology, there may be scope for some suburban rail lines to use this technology where full electrification cannot be justified.
- **32: Promote active travel as a healthy way and sustainable way to access the rapid transit system, and consider active travel provision in rapid transit schemes.** Whilst the need for integration of rapid transit and active travel has already been described above, active travel has unique and significant benefits for health and the environment. Walking and wheeling is already an essential element of many rapid transit trips – for example, 96% of tram trips in 2022 included some walking or wheeling as part of the trip. New and improved cycle parking has recently been delivered on Metrolink. Moving forward, rapid transit schemes (such as any new stops and stations and any new, extended or converted rapid transit lines) will consider how active travel infrastructure can be delivered as an integral part of the scheme.

Improving our rapid transit system: safe, secure, accessible and inclusive

Rapid transit, as a major part of GM's Bee Network, needs to work for everyone. However, we know that at present there are barriers that need lowering. Negative perceptions of personal safety and security can be a significant barrier – particularly for women and girls, and people from minority groups. People need to be, and feel, safe and secure at all stages of their journeys. And for our ageing population, the fifth of people who identify as having some form of disability across GM, and those who have other access needs such as a buggy or luggage, accessibility can also present a barrier to using rapid transit. We are determined to tackle safety, security and accessibility to ensure that rapid transit is inclusive.

We will:

- **33: Work continually to improve health and safety and reduce the number of accidents, incidents, and near misses** through performance monitoring, engagement with operator forums, and safety campaigns for customers and staff alike.
- **34: Uphold recommended counter-terrorism and security best practice and other regulatory standards to support the safety and security of customers.**
- **35: Address and deter crime, antisocial behaviour and fare evasion – and encourage ethical travel behaviours – to improve safety and security (and its perception) on rapid transit through the GM TravelSafe Partnership (TSP).** The TSP is jointly led by TfGM and Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and uses a data and intelligence based approach to deploy a wide range of tactics across the network. Tactics include regular patrols (high visibility and/or plain clothes as appropriate) by operator staff, the GMP Transport Unit and other partners such as local authority youth workers. Other prevention methods include infrastructure assessment/remediation (vegetation cut-back, CCTV and lighting), intervention (such as community engagement and education) and deterrence (including penalty fares, prosecutions, restorative justice, removal of passes, exclusion orders and civil injunctions), all accompanied by clear information, campaigns and brand promotion. See: tfgm.com/travelsafe.

- **36: Maintain, renew and improve customer-facing assets (such as CCTV, information, lighting, shelters, stairs, ramps, lifts, escalators, and walking, wheeling and cycling facilities) at tram and busway stops** to support safety, security, accessibility and inclusivity. There will be a particular focus on the oldest Metrolink Bury line stops that originally formed part of the British Rail network, where standards of these customer-facing assets may be lower than elsewhere. This includes maintenance attention to the assets at Bury Interchange in advance of the proposed redevelopment of the site.
- **37: Working together with the rail industry, deliver accessible and inclusive stations.** Many National Rail stations within GM are not fit for purpose in these terms. Almost half of stations have no step-free access, having only steps or non-compliant ramps – and there are often many other deficiencies in the customer-facing assets. Together with the introduction of Bee Network co-branding by 2027, we will work with the rail industry to agree minimum standards and bring forward a plan to develop and deliver a programme of improvements – making all of our rail stations accessible by 2040, with a significant increase by 2028.
- **38: Examine the scope for the carriage of bicycles, non-standard cycles and mobility devices as we develop the rapid transit network (and consider future vehicles and infrastructure).** The trial of allowing pet dogs on trams in 2022 ultimately led to a permanent change in 2023 that removed a specific barrier to using part of the rapid transit system. In 2024, a guided pilot has taken place to test the safe carriage of bikes, non-standard cycles and mobility on off-peak tram services – involving a range of people, and controlled scenarios. We will consider the results of the pilot and consider how this flexibility could be safely introduced.
- **39: Embed meaningful consideration of equalities in all planning and decision-making,** including representative groups at an early stage to shape future service and infrastructure design. That includes the contents of this draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy, which has been published so that its draft contents can form part of the wider engagement activities undertaken as we refresh our Local Transport Plan.