

# Padam Mobility

## With Funding in Crisis, Can We Really Improve Services?

It's a critical time for bus service funding. Just as Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and Enhanced Partnerships change the way everyone works, the funding which has supported operators through the pandemic is set to taper off.

Meanwhile, new funding for BSIPs is estimated to cover only a quarter of proposals submitted to the Department for Transport. Operators and authorities are understandably worried about meeting the aspirations set for the bus industry.

Climate experts agree that switching people out of cars and on

to buses is imperative to save the planet from catastrophe. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis means many are wondering whether they can reduce their reliance on cars and the expensive fuel they consume.

With high stakes and small budgets, it's more important than ever to consider efficiencies. However, the question should really be "can we afford not to improve services?"

Enhanced Partnerships aim to improve the bus network and serve more people in a useful way. It's our experience that when the network is truly useful, we see radically greater numbers of passengers, who also report that they have reduced their car ownership (often people giving up the expensive second vehicle). However, to achieve this, for the bus

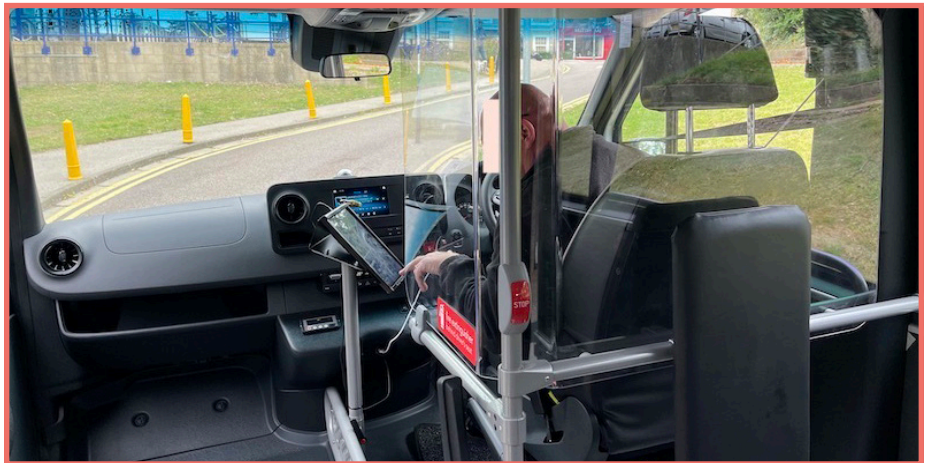
network to be perceived as 'useful', it requires service levels that equate to a bus at least every 30 minutes within a short walk of the journey's origin. That means, in most cases, within a short walk of people's homes. It also means a service that enables people who travel beyond core commuter times – for instance, those with late and early shifts – to get to work and home again. It means a service that can be relied on to get to appointments, for socialising and for onward travel.

The National Bus Strategy highlighted how networks have shrunk to major corridors, serving fewer people's homes. The impact of cost-cutting has often been to strip away off-peak services and those to smaller villages or less densely populated areas, which has

reduced the pool of people who can use the bus to fulfil their transport needs. Once certain trips (even relatively infrequent ones) can't be completed by bus, people start to look at driving as a solution. And once they have sunk costs in the car, it becomes the first choice for almost every trip. To challenge that, bus services need to be radically improved. But expanding networks back into off-corridor communities and expanding timetables can be expensive. On a more positive note, our experience of developing demand-responsive transport (DRT) services is that this is possible – and using DRT technology to carefully manage resources means it isn't impossibly expensive.

DRT – done well – can be the way to increase network coverage, serve low-density areas and ensure that the late nights and early mornings are covered, providing services to meet off-peak demands. These services have to be booked by phone or app either in advance or in real time. We find that in general about 75% of trips are booked in advance, enabling the operator to forecast the vehicles and drivers needed and match them to the actual demand more closely.

With good publicity and a strong marketing strategy, these services attract new passengers.



When we see DRT introduced even to cover a low-density area, we discover whole new groups of transport demand. Our DRT provision in suburbs and small villages surrounding Strasbourg, that connects people into the fixed rapid transit network, was launched in 2019. The latest consumer research into users indicates that it has enabled people to give up second cars. We are convinced that serving the (in some instances, literal) edge cases increases the overall utility of the system to tip the balance back in favour of the bus.

This works even better where ticketing allows through trips so that end-to-end multi-operator travel is simple and cost-effective. The impact of this is that ridership grows, reducing the subsidy per person and per trip.

Within the context of the Enhanced Partnership, where there is better oversight of the network, it is possible to combine DRT with fixed lines to ensure that people have services that meet their needs, without inflating costs. Equally, where fixed line routes have low patronage, but are providing this 'edge case' service, replacing them with DRT can save money whilst ensuring the integrity of the network.

Analysing the network to ensure that the best value solution is provided for each area – without compromising the service levels is essential. DRT can be designed to serve across areas, as a feeder service or to ensure off-peak travel is possible along fixed lines.

**Padam Mobility can advise how to design your services to reduce costs and ensure that your network is an attractive alternative to the car.**







Scan the QR code to learn how we can tailor DRT services to specific areas

# Delivering BSIPs?

Talk to us

We can help **improve** your **network** and **reduce costs**

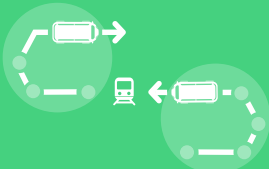
DRT can be **3x cheaper** than running a subsidised fixed-line bus service with greater coverage



DRT optimises low ridership routes



Early morning and late at night **DRT** gets passengers home and to work at off-peak times



DRT feeds frequent fixed-line services



DRT offers flexible mobility solutions for different use cases

Contact our DRT experts in the UK

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