

Greater Manchester strikes trailblazing new transport devolution deal

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Greater Manchester will get new responsibilities over transport as part of the city-region's most significant devolution deal with government.

The new Trailblazer Deal includes more influence on regional rail services to deliver a London-style integrated public transport system – the Bee Network – by 2030.

The Bee Network aims to integrate bus, Metrolink, rail, and cycle hire with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing. Progress is already being made through bus franchising with public control of the buses taking effect from September in Bolton, Wigan and parts of Bury and Salford.

Building on existing plans for transport integration between trams and buses through franchising, the Deal commits to activity to enable the delivery of full integration of local rail services into the Bee Network by 2030. This includes London-style touch-in/touch-out integrated fares and ticketing across bus, Metrolink and rail and Bee Network co-branding across the public transport network. This will be taken forward by a new Rail Partnership with Great British Railways, with the first pilots on integrated fares and ticketing agreed by the end of the year.

The deal lays the foundation for greater input into our stations, services and strategic infrastructure investment with the creation of the North West Regional Business Unit and GM Rail Board. This will enable Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to improve local scrutiny of performance, help shape future service integration with the Bee Network and support the best possible public transport experience for the people and businesses of Greater Manchester.

The deal also commits the government and GMCA to identify the specific legal powers needed for TfGM to effectively tackle anti-social behaviour and fare evasion on the bus network. This may include GMCA having the power to introduce byelaws where necessary. Tackling these issues are a priority locally and the Mayor and Leaders want to do everything they can to keep the public safe when using public transport as well as protect revenue that goes back into the bus network to continue to improve it.

To be able to deliver the transport ambitions in the Deal, there is an outstanding issue which Greater Manchester is seeking to resolve. Securing the financing of Greater Manchester's public transport system post-Covid, and in light of inflationary pressures on energy and other costs, requires short-term support over the next two financial years. Discussions are still ongoing with the Government on this matter, and we are working towards a positive resolution at the earliest opportunity. This is essential to delivering the full Bee Network vision by 2030.

Welcoming the announcement, Transport Commissioner, Vernon Everitt, said: "The integrated Bee Network will transform how people move around our growing city-region and radically improve what it is like to do business here for generations to come. Better rail services are critical elements in delivering this.

"We are supportive of rail reform under Great British Railways (GBR) and I very much welcome this Trailblazer Deal. It provides a firm foundation for effective partnership working with GBR with clear initial actions to enable full integration of local rail services into the Bee Network by 2030.

"It is particularly exciting to see the Deal's commitment to simplified and joined-up fares and ticketing, with pilots for this to be agreed this year, and the branding of stations to bring everything together for customers. Having greater influence to shape train services and infrastructure investment is also very welcome.

"In just over six months' time we will deliver the first major steps towards creating the Bee Network when buses begin to come under local control alongside Metrolink and active travel. Integrating train services with the rest of the Bee Network is the next step and we can't wait to take it all forward with partners to deliver world-class connectivity and services for the people and businesses of Greater Manchester."

Andrew Haines, Great British Railways Transition Team Lead, said: "To create a simpler and better railway for everyone in Britain, the railway must be much closer and more responsive to the needs of customers and local communities.

"This requires the creation of a new guiding mind which can ensure the railway fulfils its potential as a catalyst for growth and supports local ambitions for effective and reliable connectivity.

“We have been working together with Transport for Greater Manchester for some time and it is pleasing to see this collaborative work come to fruition with the announcement of this trailblazer devolution deal. We look forward to continuing to work closely with TfGM to deliver a railway that works better for passengers and supports the delivery of the Bee Network.”

Further details of the devolution deal can be found [here](#).

Photo credit: Transport for Greater Manchester