

STATEMENT AS 01

Submitted by Alderman Anthony Negus

Title: Take back control of our bus services

Bus services in the Bristol region are calamitous.

Elected members need to step up and consider all the options for developing a system that serves the interests of the public rather than private companies. The private bus companies are traders, investing and taking the risk alongside sharing profits; they were set up to operate the bus services they wanted to run. A strategic, holistic co-operative approach was at best not factored in and is actually barred in key aspects.

Bus services were deregulated in a way that restricted the co-operation between private bus operators and local authorities. It has been possible to change this since 2017 when the Bus Services Act provided for directly-elected metro mayors, responsible for local regional transport, to intervene but nothing has yet been done.

Surely now, when getting around our city and region is chaotic and causing real hardship and anxiety, people need to see that members recognise this and are willing to consider alternatives to this failing system.

Even if buses did not need drivers and other means of mass transit were eventually added to the network, it is hard to contemplate getting round the city without surface mass transit and the current operating model is broken. The way that private bus services are currently deployed to fulfill a public demand without city-wide public need being represented and protected is unworkable, unfair and not benefiting our economy.

Our city and regional government bodies are designed to provide some specialist services and commission others. Franchising our bus services - setting enforceable standards of service, fares, rates timetables and vehicle quality and tendering their delivery is a tried method around the world.

Franchising, compared to the wholly private or publicly-owned alternatives, is a reasonable balance of investment, expertise, risk and desirable outcomes. It is now being taken up by more progressive local authorities of all political hues in the UK.

This Council alone cannot deliver a franchised regional bus service. It can and should recognise that the present system is fundamentally flawed and will never deliver what the people have been demanding for a long time. It should see that there is provision for change and should at least today support pressing Bristol's resolve that the metro mayor should examine better alternatives to the present failed bus services operation and implement the outcome at the earliest opportunity, for the benefit of all those who long for a better bus service, and to achieve the many benefits that flow from it.