# Government's bus legislation overhaul aims to revive rural and social services



MPs have voted overwhelmingly to repeal a 2017 ban that prevented local councils from setting up their own bus companies, a move intended to revitalise bus services across the UK. The Bus Services (No. 2) Bill, approved by 362 to 87 votes, is now poised to become law after clearing both Houses of Parliament. This legislation marks a significant shift in public transport policy, giving town halls greater powers to manage bus routes and protect socially necessary services, which are those vital for local communities but often unprofitable for private operators.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander described the Bill as “the biggest change to our buses in a generation,” criticising 40 years of deregulation that led to service cuts, route closures, and rising fares. The new law will require local authorities partnering with bus companies to identify and protect essential routes, making it harder for operators to withdraw or change them without local oversight. Councils will also have to explore alternatives to mitigate any service disruptions. Crucially, the Bill removes the requirement for councils to obtain government consent before launching London- or Manchester-style franchised networks, thus empowering local decision-making.

The legislation responds to long-standing concerns about the decline of bus services, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Independent MP Chris Hinchliff highlighted the social costs of deregulated bus services, including increased traffic congestion, pollution, and social isolation, especially for young people and the elderly. Liberal Democrat MP Charlotte Cane spoke of her rural constituents’ struggles with infrequent and absent bus services, noting that some villages lack any Sunday routes, severely restricting access to amenities such as Ely Cathedral and hindering community participation.

Opposition voices, however, have warned of financial risks. Conservative shadow transport minister Jerome Mayhew expressed concern that local authorities might face bankruptcy without explicit support from the Secretary of State, highlighting the potential fiscal burdens of running bus services. Transport minister Simon Lightwood responded by emphasising the government’s trust in local leaders to make the right decisions for their communities, rejecting the notion that this would increase burdens but rather empower local authorities to better meet local needs.

The Bill also addresses accessibility concerns, notably the contentious “floating bus stops” design, where a cycle lane separates the bus stop from the pavement. These stops have been criticised for creating dangers for visually impaired passengers and others, including the elderly and families with young children. Labour MP Marsha de Cordova, who is blind, described the crossing of cycle lanes to reach these stops as “quite terrifying and a very dangerous experience.” In response, the government has committed to publishing statutory guidance on floating bus stop design within three months of royal assent and has funded research and remediation efforts to improve accessibility.

Supporting this legislative overhaul, the government has backed it with significant financial investment. Over £1 billion is being channelled into improving bus services nationwide, with a cap on single bus fares set at £3 until the end of 2025 to boost affordability, especially in rural areas. Additionally, a £150 million funding package has been allocated to local bus services in the North and Midlands, part of a broader £3.5 billion commitment to revitalise bus travel since 2020. These investments aim to enhance service reliability, accessibility, and environmental sustainability, supporting the transition to greener buses and improved integration with other local transport modes.

In summary, the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill represents a major policy reversal from decades of deregulation, aiming to restore and protect essential bus routes through enhanced local control, financial investment, and accessibility improvements. The legislation is expected to have profound effects on how communities across England access and rely on bus transport, especially those in rural and previously underserved regions. The Bill will now return to the House of Lords for consideration of amendments before it can become law.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/better-buses-on-the-way-as-government-introduces-new-legislation-to-boost-local-control-of-services)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-act-2017-bus-franchising-creation/setting-up-a-bus-franchising-scheme-december-2024), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-no-2-bill-rpc-opinion-green-rated)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-no-2-bill-rpc-opinion-green-rated)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/funding-boost-of-150-million-for-local-bus-services), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-1-billion-to-boost-bus-services-across-the-country-as-bus-fares-capped-at-3), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/80-million-funding-delivered-to-improve-and-protect-bus-services)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/better-buses-on-the-way-as-government-introduces-new-legislation-to-boost-local-control-of-services), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-no-2-bill-rpc-opinion-green-rated), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/funding-boost-of-150-million-for-local-bus-services)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/mps-agree-to-overturn-ban-on-councils-setting-up-bus-companies-2FELLEYH55OJPKT22AXSV3A6FU/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/better-buses-on-the-way-as-government-introduces-new-legislation-to-boost-local-control-of-services> - The UK government has introduced the Bus Services Bill, aiming to overhaul bus operations and enhance local authority control over routes, timetables, connections, and fares. This legislation seeks to reverse decades of deregulation, empowering local leaders to make decisions that better serve their communities. The bill also includes provisions to protect socially necessary routes and improve service quality, marking a significant shift in bus service management across the country.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-act-2017-bus-franchising-creation/setting-up-a-bus-franchising-scheme-december-2024> - The UK government has updated guidance to facilitate the establishment of bus franchising schemes by local authorities. This move aims to streamline the process, making it easier for councils to take control of bus services and improve local transport networks. The guidance provides a clear framework for authorities to implement franchising, ensuring that bus services meet the specific needs of their communities.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-no-2-bill-rpc-opinion-green-rated> - The Regulatory Policy Committee has provided a green-rated opinion on the Department for Transport's impact assessment for the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill. The assessment covers 21 measures designed to improve bus services, including facilitating franchising, permitting the establishment of new local authority bus companies, enhancing accessibility and safety, modifying the registration process, and reducing emissions from bus travel.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/funding-boost-of-150-million-for-local-bus-services> - The UK government has announced a £150 million funding boost for local bus services, reallocating savings from the cancellation of HS2 phase 2. This investment aims to improve bus services across the North and Midlands, enhancing reliability, affordability, and accessibility for passengers. The funding is part of a broader £1 billion initiative to revitalise bus services and support local communities.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-1-billion-to-boost-bus-services-across-the-country-as-bus-fares-capped-at-3> - The UK government is investing over £1 billion to enhance bus services nationwide, including capping single bus fares at £3 until the end of 2025. This initiative aims to make bus travel more affordable, particularly in rural areas and towns, while ensuring the sustainability of bus services. The funding will support improvements in service quality and the protection of vital bus routes.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/80-million-funding-delivered-to-improve-and-protect-bus-services> - The UK government has allocated £80 million to local authorities to support and improve bus services. This funding is intended to protect essential bus routes, enhance service reliability, and keep fares low for passengers. The investment is part of a broader £3.5 billion commitment since 2020 to revitalise bus services and support local communities across England.