
Greater Buses: A Better Network

A strategic framework for improving bus networks.

Greater Buses

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Introduction

The bus industry is experiencing yet another massive shift in societal and governmental expectations. Not content with shifting millions of passengers a day in the UK, customers and local authorities are expecting more and more from the humble bus. Multi-modal interchange, real time information, social inclusion, economic regeneration, and zero emission travel.

The changing societal landscape also means a change to the way bus networks are revised and designed. Operational efficiencies alone are not enough to persuade customers and local authorities that bus operators and franchised networks are contributing to their local economies and communities.

*To help bus operators and local authorities meet these challenges we've created this guide to provide a clear, structured approach to planning. **Greater Buses: A Better Network** is a strategic framework for improving bus networks.*

It's for network planners, local authorities, and bus operators who want to:

- *Deliver services that are more reliable and better connected.*
- *Make informed decisions grounded in real-world use.*
- *Build networks that supports both community needs and long-term growth.*

This guide will give you the clarity and direction to cut through the complexity and take bold, practical steps towards a stronger network.

Greater Buses A Better Network.

The Framework

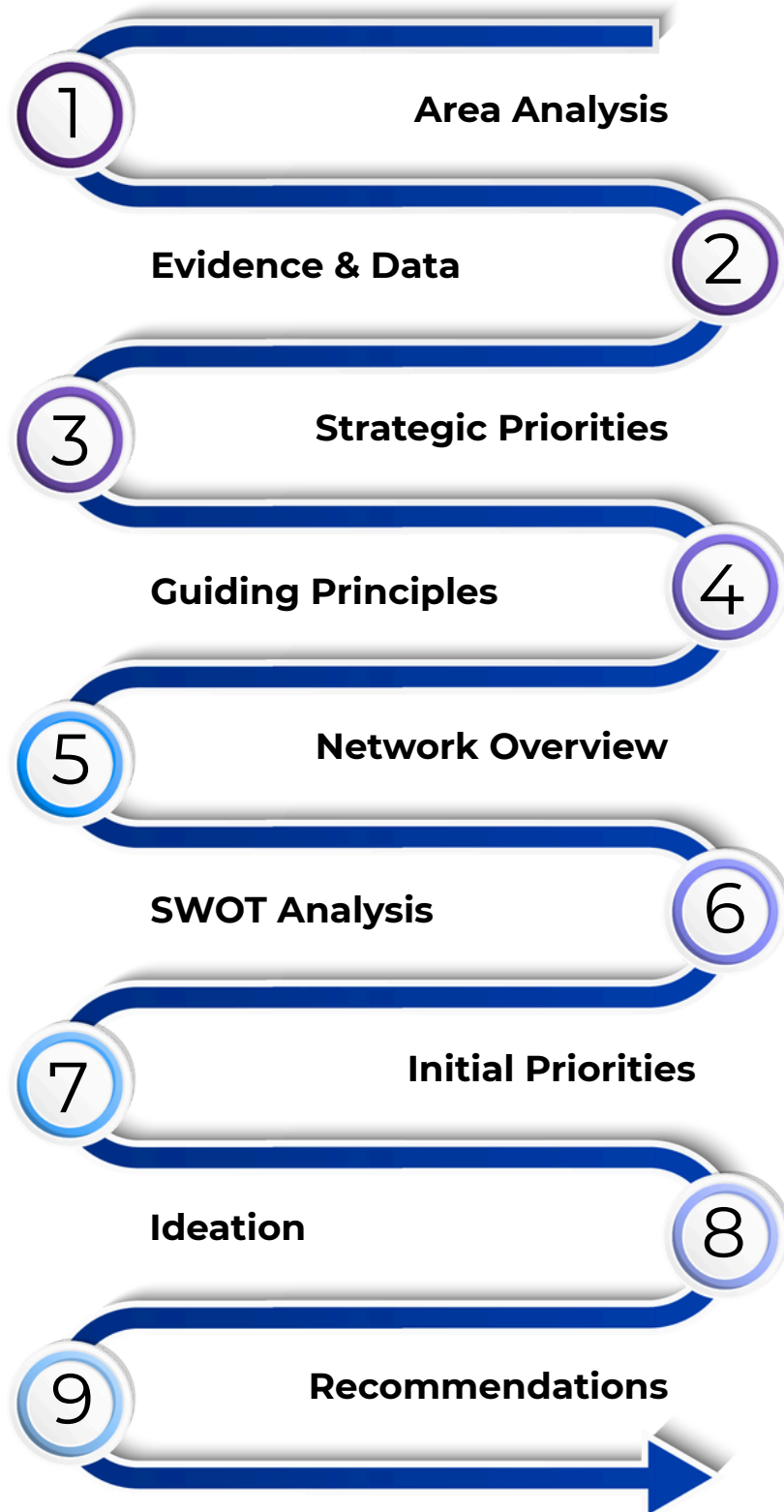
At the heart of this guide is a simple but powerful structure designed to help you analyse and improve your network with confidence.

*The **Greater Buses Strategic Framework** sets out nine clear steps. Each one builds on the last, moving from understanding the local context through to shaping practical recommendations. Together, they provide the clarity to cut through complexity and ensure decisions are consistent, transparent, and evidence-led.*

The framework is not abstract theory. It's a practical tool that is clear, repeatable, and focused on keeping passengers at the centre of your decision-making.

The nine step framework is show over the following pages, combining a simple visual overview with short explanations for each stage.

Greater Buses Strategic Framework



Step 1: Area Analysis

Understand the place you are planning for.

Every network is rooted in its geography and is completely unique. No two towns or cities are the same. By looking at settlement patterns, employment hubs, and local travel corridors helps set the boundaries of what a realistic and useful bus network looks like.

This step builds the foundation for everything that follows.

Step 2: Evidence and Data

Research and discover how people are travelling today.

Passenger counts, demographic trends, and journey data show where demand is strong. They also help to show where gaps exist. No single dataset tells the full story, so the real art is combining sources from different places to reveal the big picture.

Step 3: Strategic Priorities

Define exactly what success looks like.

Networks, and in turn network reviews, can't do everything at once. By clarifying whether the priority is growth, social inclusion, accessibility and connectivity, sustainability or resource efficiencies gives direction to every decision. This ensures that changes are consistent, purposeful, and aligned with wider policy goals.

Step 4: Guiding Principles

Establish rules to guide the design of the network.

Clear principles, such as minimum frequencies, interchange standards, and route specification, provide consistency for planning and decision-making. They also make choices transparent, so that changes can be explained and justified.

Step 5: Network Overview

Step back and look at the bigger picture.

Mapping the existing network at a high level highlights core corridors, local routes, multi-modal connections and areas with little or no coverage. This makes it easier to spot duplication, gaps, and future opportunities.

Step 6: SWOT Analysis

Capture the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

A simple SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) sets out what works, what doesn't, and what external forces are at play. Even at this stage, it can identify quick wins whilst flagging risks that need to be planned for.

Step 7: Initial Priorities

Focus attention where it matters most.

Not every issue you've identified needs solving at once. Early wins build momentum, while tackling obvious problems first frees capacity for more ambitious redesigns later.

Step 8: Ideation

Explore possibilities without limits.

Brainstorm a wide range of options, from timetable tweaks to new service patterns and routes. This is where creativity meets strategy. It's about quantity first, and refinement later.

Step 9: Recommendations

Turn ideas into proposals.

Shape the strongest ideas into clear recommendations that planners and decision-makers can review, adapt, and carry forward. From there, they can be tested, refined, and developed into detailed plans.

Bringing it Together

The Greater Buses Strategic Framework is designed to simplify the complex world of bus network planning.

By following these nine steps, planners, authorities, and operators can make more confident decisions, grounded in evidence and shaped around the passenger experience.

This guide is an introduction to the framework. Over the coming months I'll explore each step in more detail on the Greater Buses website.

Used consistently, the framework becomes more than a process. It is a structured way to bring clarity, transparency, and direction to the choices that shape our networks.

What's next?

This guide has introduced the

Greater Buses Strategic Framework

a clear, nine-step approach to improving bus networks.

But this is only the beginning.

For more insights, updates, and future resources, visit:

greaterbuses.co.uk

Found this guide useful? Share it with a colleague who also cares about designing better bus networks.

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