



Department for Transport

Annual bus statistics: England 2015/16

About this release

This statistical release presents the latest annual statistics on the local bus sector. Local bus services use public service vehicles (PSVs) to carry passengers paying separate fares over short distances. Most of the data are derived from the Department for Transport's (DfT) annual survey of local bus operators. Figures are presented for England, in line with coverage of DfT bus policy. Statistics for Scotland and Wales are available [online](#).

Local bus passenger journeys

4.53 billion journeys
in England in 2015/16

2.6% ↓
since 2014/15

Vehicle miles on local bus services

1.25 billion vehicle miles
in England in 2015/16

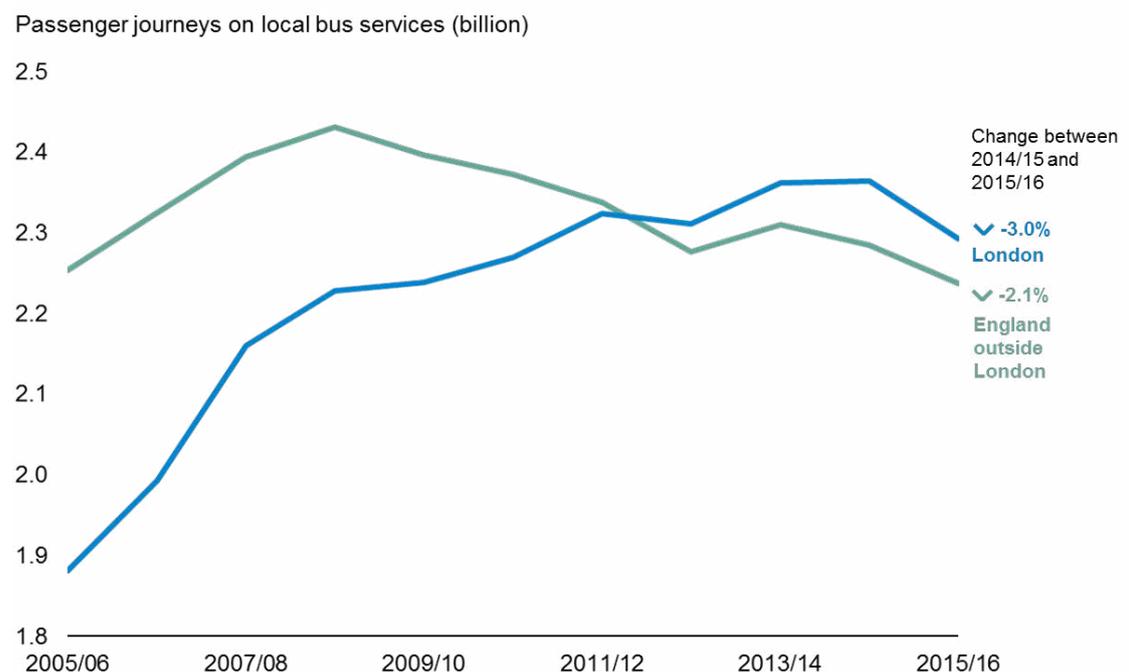
2.0% ↓
since 2014/15

The number of local bus passenger journeys in England fell by 119 million or 2.6% to 4.53 billion in the year to end March 2016.

The steady decline in bus use in England outside London continued and for the first time since 2012/13, bus use in London decreased when compared with the previous year (see chart 1). Local bus fares in England, in the 12 months to March 2016, increased by 1.8%, similar to the annual all items Retail Prices Index rate of inflation (1.6%).

Bus mileage in England decreased by 2.0% when compared with 2014/15. This was largely due to a 12.3% decrease in mileage on local authority supported services in England outside London. Commercial mileage decreased by 0.8%, a reversal of the recent trend where a decrease in supported mileage has been partially met by an increase in commercial mileage.

Chart 1: Local bus passenger journeys in England outside London and London, 2005/06 to 2015/16 ([table BUS0103](#))



Summary

Table 1 summarises the annual figures for bus passenger journeys and mileage for the 2015/16 financial year. Figures for England are broken down into England outside London (metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan areas) and London.

Table 1: Local bus passenger journeys and mileage by area type: England, 2014/15 to 2015/16 (tables [BUS0103](#) and [BUS0203](#))

| | Passenger journeys | | Vehicle mileage | |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | 2015/16 figures in billion / billion miles and change compared with 2014/15 | | | |
| London | 2.29 | 📉 -3.0% | 0.30 | 📈 0.6% |
| English metropolitan areas | 0.97 | 📉 -2.5% | 0.32 | 📉 -2.9% |
| English non-metropolitan areas | 1.27 | 📉 -1.7% | 0.63 | 📉 -2.7% |
| England outside London | 2.24 | 📉 -2.1% | 0.95 | 📉 -2.8% |
| England | 4.53 | 📉 -2.6% | 1.25 | 📉 -2.0% |

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Things you need to know

The statistics presented here on the local bus sector in England provide information for monitoring trends in usage and provision for a mode of transport used for nearly two-thirds of public transport journeys.

Most figures in this release relate to local bus services. These are timetabled services using public service vehicles to carry passengers over relatively short distances, and usually eligible for Bus Services Operators Grant. Long distance coach services, private hire work and closed contracts are excluded but school services accessible to the general public are included.

The majority of bus services in England are provided by private companies since deregulation of the industry in 1986 in England outside London. Services can be operated on a purely commercial basis or with financial support from local authorities (supported services). London services are operated by private companies but regulated by Transport for London (TfL). There are two broad passenger types: concessionary and non-concessionary passengers.

Concessionary passengers are either older or disabled people (free to travel anywhere in England since April 2008) or young people in local authorities where such discretionary travel schemes exist. More detailed statistics on concessionary travel are published separately by DfT and available [online](#).

Why the distinction between London and England outside London?

Buses in London, through Transport for London, operate under a different regulatory framework to the rest of England. The size of the bus market in London and differing trends in bus use also makes it sensible to disaggregate these two area types. Different disaggregations are available online including local authority level and for urban and rural areas.

Local bus statistics in 2015/16 in five charts

1. Fewer local bus passenger journeys in England in 2015/16

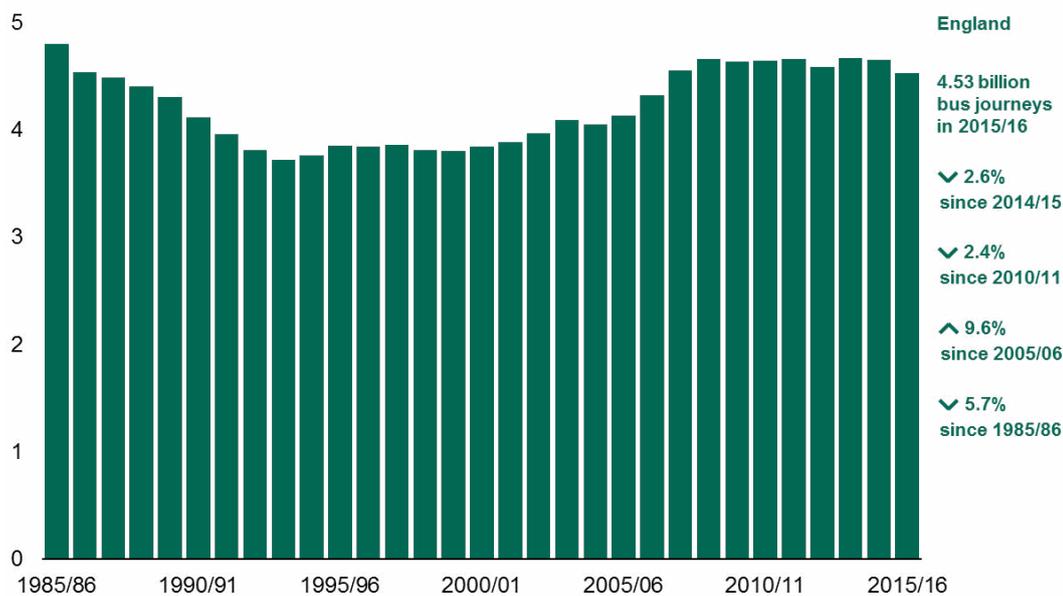
In 2015/16, 4.53 billion passenger journeys were made by bus in England, down 119 million journeys or 2.6% when compared with 2014/15.

Chart 2 shows the trend in bus journeys between 1985/86 (year before deregulation of the bus market) and 2015/16. Bus use fell in the early 1990s before starting to increase and has remained steady over the last five years at over 4.5 billion passenger journeys.

Chart 2: Local bus passenger journeys in England, 1985/86 to 2015/16

([table BUS0103](#))

Passenger journeys on local bus services (billion)



2. Bus use in England outside London continued its steady decline, bus use in London decreased for the first time since 2012/13

Local bus passenger journeys decreased in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in 2015/16 (see chart 3). In metropolitan areas, there were 0.97 billion passenger journeys, a decrease of 2.5% compared with 2014/15. In non-metropolitan areas, there were 1.27 billion passenger journeys, a decrease of 1.7%. Bus use in England outside London has decreased since its recent peak in 2008/09 from 2.43 billion passenger journeys to 2.24 billion passenger journeys.

There were 2.29 billion passenger journeys in London in 2015/16, a decrease of 3.0% compared with 2014/15 and the first decrease since 2012/13. Before 2012/13, bus use in London increased every year since 1998/99. Transport for London attribute increased congestion and roads works as likely factors that have affected bus performance including bus speeds. Bus use in London in 2015/16, however, was 21.9% higher than in 2005/06 and accounted for over half (50.6%) of all bus journeys in England.

What is a bus passenger journey?

Each boarding of a bus is counted as one journey. The number of passenger journeys are an important measure of bus demand. These statistics relate to passengers on local bus services. The main source of information on non-local bus use (e.g. long distance coach services) is the [National Travel Survey](#).

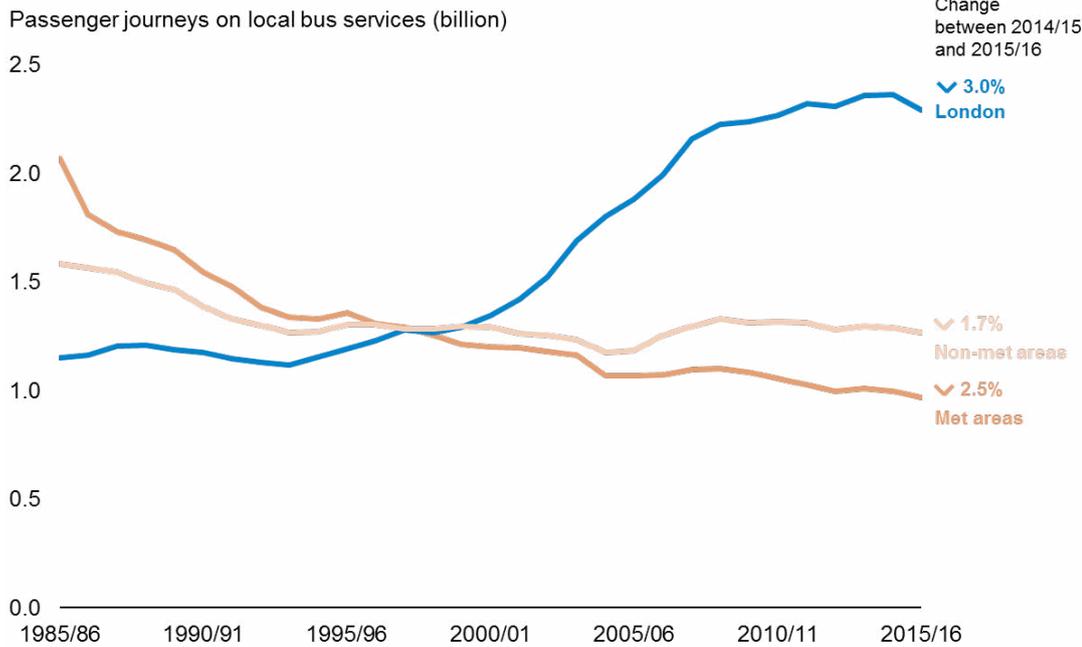
Quarterly bus statistics

Local bus passenger journeys and local bus fares are updated every quarter. The latest quarterly statistics are available for [April to June 2016](#).

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to bus.statistics@dft.gsi.gov.uk by completing a [short online feedback form](#).

Chart 3: Local bus passenger journeys by area type: England, 1985/86 to 2015/16 (table BUS0103)

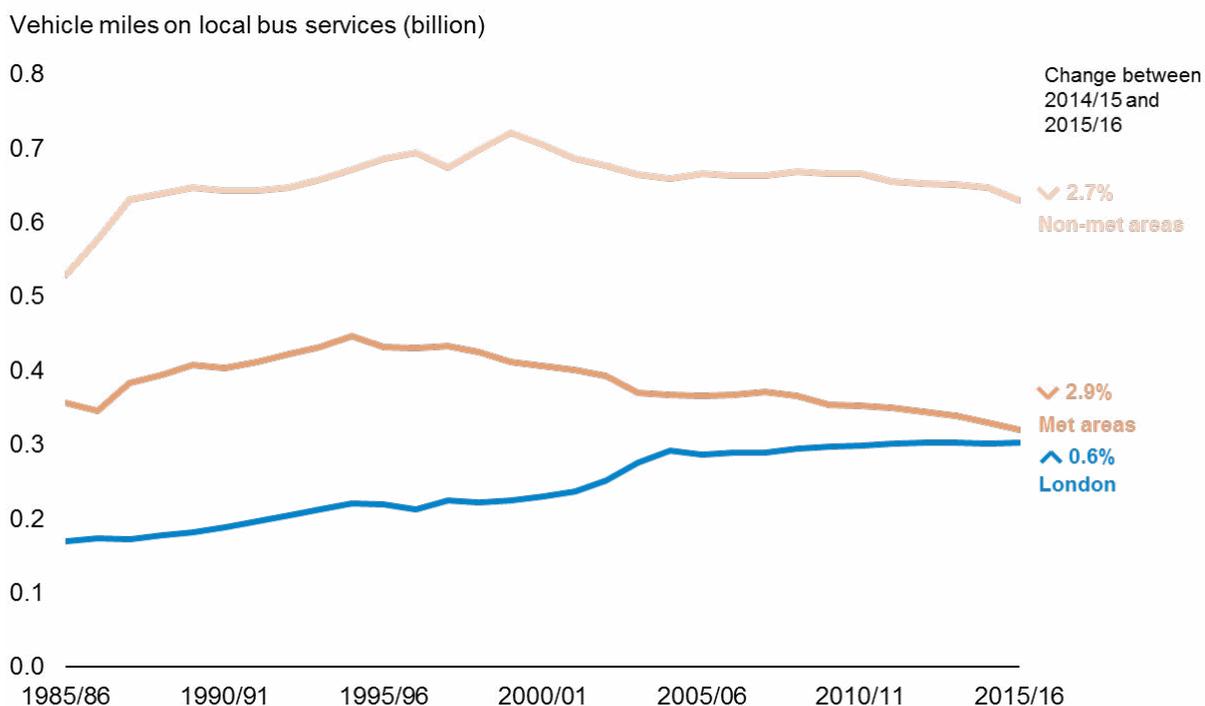


Concessionary travel
 Total concessionary journeys (elderly or disabled, and youth concessions) made up 34% (1.53 billion passenger journeys) of all bus passenger journeys in England. In England outside London, 30% of journeys were elderly or disabled concessionary journeys, twice the share as in London. DfT's [Concessionary Travel Survey](#) collects more detailed information for Travel Concession Authorities on concessionary passholder numbers, total expenditure on concessionary travel and concessionary discretions offered.

3. Bus mileage in England outside London decreased by 2.8%, the largest annual decrease since 2003/04

In 2015/16, 1.25 billion bus service miles were run in England, a decrease of 2.0% when compared with 2014/15 (see chart 4). In England outside London, bus mileage continued its decline, decreasing by 2.8% when compared with 2014/15. In London, bus mileage remained at levels seen since 2011/12 at over 300 million vehicle miles.

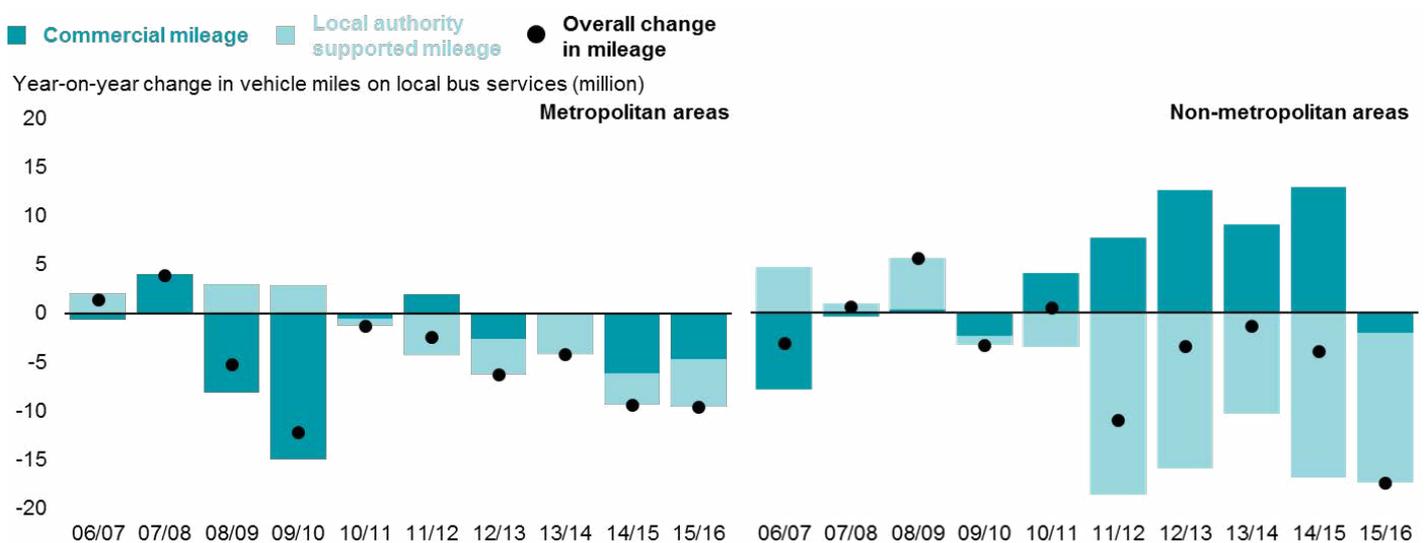
Chart 4: Vehicle miles on local bus services by area type: England, 1985/86 to 2015/16 (table BUS0203)



4. Local authority supported mileage continued to decline, commercial mileage decreased for the first time since 2009/10

Supported mileage in **metropolitan areas** has decreased from 51 to 37 million vehicle miles (a 26.2% decrease) between 2005/06 and 2015/16. Commercial mileage has declined by 32 million vehicle miles or 10.1%. For **non-metropolitan areas**, supported mileage has decreased by 71 million vehicle miles or 39.8% between 2005/06 and 2015/16. In these areas, since 2005/06, commercial mileage has increased by 34 million miles or 7.0%. However, in 2015/16, commercial mileage in non-metropolitan areas decreased by 0.4% whereas in 2014/15 it increased by 2.5%. This was a reversal of the recent trend where the reductions in supported mileage have been partially matched by an increase in commercial mileage. Overall, in England outside London, the decline in supported mileage since 2005/06 has not been fully matched by an increase in commercial mileage. Chart 5 shows the year-on-year change in vehicle miles on local bus services by service type (commercial or LA supported). The black dots show the overall change in mileage.

Chart 5: Year-on-year change in commercial and local authority supported bus mileage by area: England outside London, 2005/06 to 2015/16 ([table BUS0205](#))

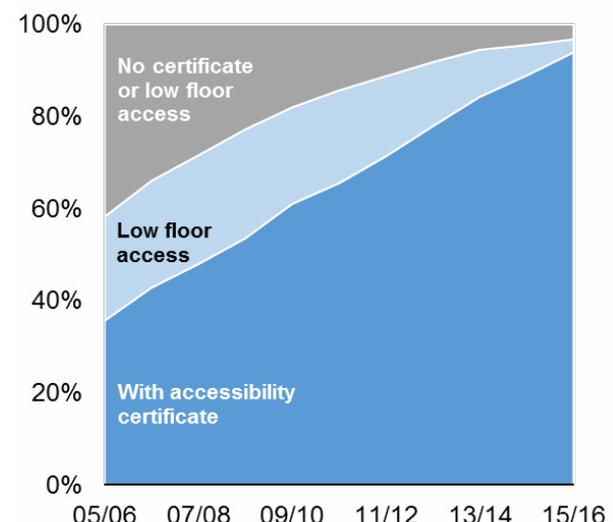


5. Bus accessibility reached record levels

In March 2016, 94% of buses in England had been issued with an accessibility certificate. Chart 6 shows that the proportion of buses in England with an accessibility certificate has increased each year since 2004/05.

Chart 6: Accessible or low floor buses: England, March 2016 ([table BUS0603](#))

Percentage of local buses with low floor access or accessibility certificate



Accessibility regulations

The [Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 \(PSVAR\)](#) set out standards for public service vehicles to ensure they are accessible to disabled people by 1 January 2017 at the latest (depending on bus type). Buses that comply with the accessibility regulations are issued with an accessibility certificate. Some buses are suitable for wheelchair access through low floor designs.

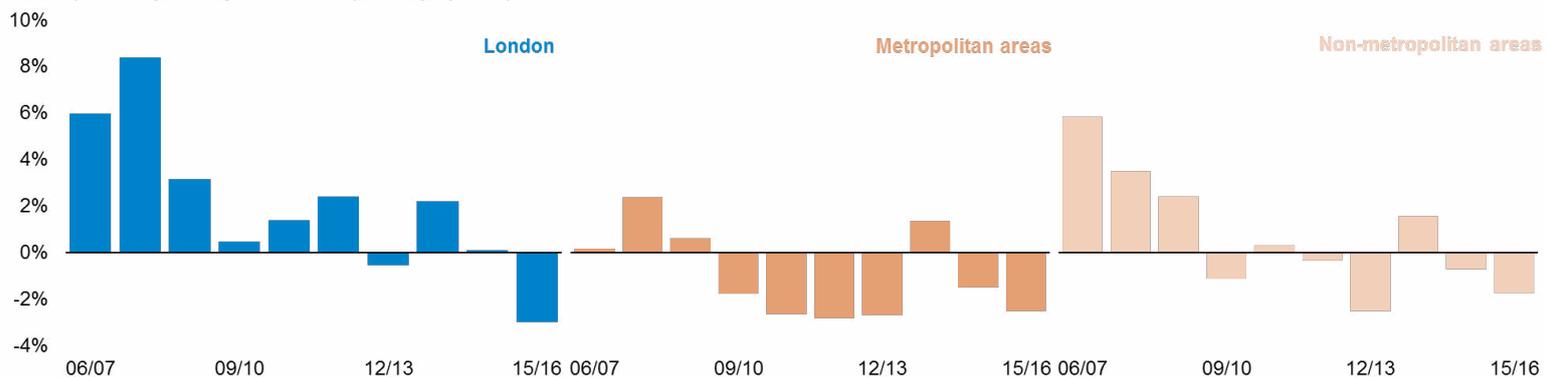
Bus use by area type

In London, metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, the introduction of free concessionary travel in local authority areas from 1 April 2006 and nationally from 1 April 2008 led to annual increases in local bus passenger journeys (see chart 7). After 2008/09, bus use in England outside London has decreased and at a faster rate in metropolitan areas. In the past 10 years the average annual growth rate for metropolitan areas has been -1.0% compared with 0.7% in non-metropolitan areas.

Annual increases in London have also slowed since 2008/09, in particular in the previous two years. Average annual growth since 2005/06, however, has been 2.0% and it is unclear whether the decrease in bus use in 2015/16 is a short-term effect of adverse local conditions (for example increased congestion and road works) or represents a permanent switch away from the bus in London.

Chart 7: Annual percentage change in local bus journeys by area type: England, 2005/06 to 2015/16 ([table BUS0103](#))

Annual percentage change in local bus passenger journeys



England outside London

Figures for England outside London can be disaggregated further into metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Metropolitan areas are the six former metropolitan counties: Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire. Non-metropolitan areas cover the remaining county councils and unitary authorities in England outside London.

Bus use in urban and rural areas

[Table BUS0111](#) shows passenger journeys on local bus services by urban and rural classification. As you move from urban to rural areas the number of bus journeys declines. The [National Travel Survey](#) shows that [household car ownership](#) and the [number of trips by car](#) is highest in rural areas. As the proportion of the household car ownership increases, the level of bus use decreases. Metropolitan areas have amongst the highest levels of bus use and proportion of households without a car. Other factors that could affect bus use in a local authority are population density, income and quality and cost of bus services.

Buses in context

The [National Travel Survey](#) shows that 6.7% of all journeys in England in 2015 were by local bus compared with 2.2% of journeys by rail. [Transport Statistics Great Britain](#) shows that local bus trips account for nearly two thirds of public transport journeys. [Bus use](#) is highest amongst those aged 17-20 and 60+ years, and decreases as household income increases.

Bus use by local authority

This snapshot of bus passenger journeys per head in 2010/11 and 2015/16 in England outside London shows the difference in bus use across local authorities.

Chart 8 has been ranked by bus journeys per head in 2015/16. The average number of bus passenger journeys per head in England outside London was 49 in 2015/16 down from 53 in 2010/11.

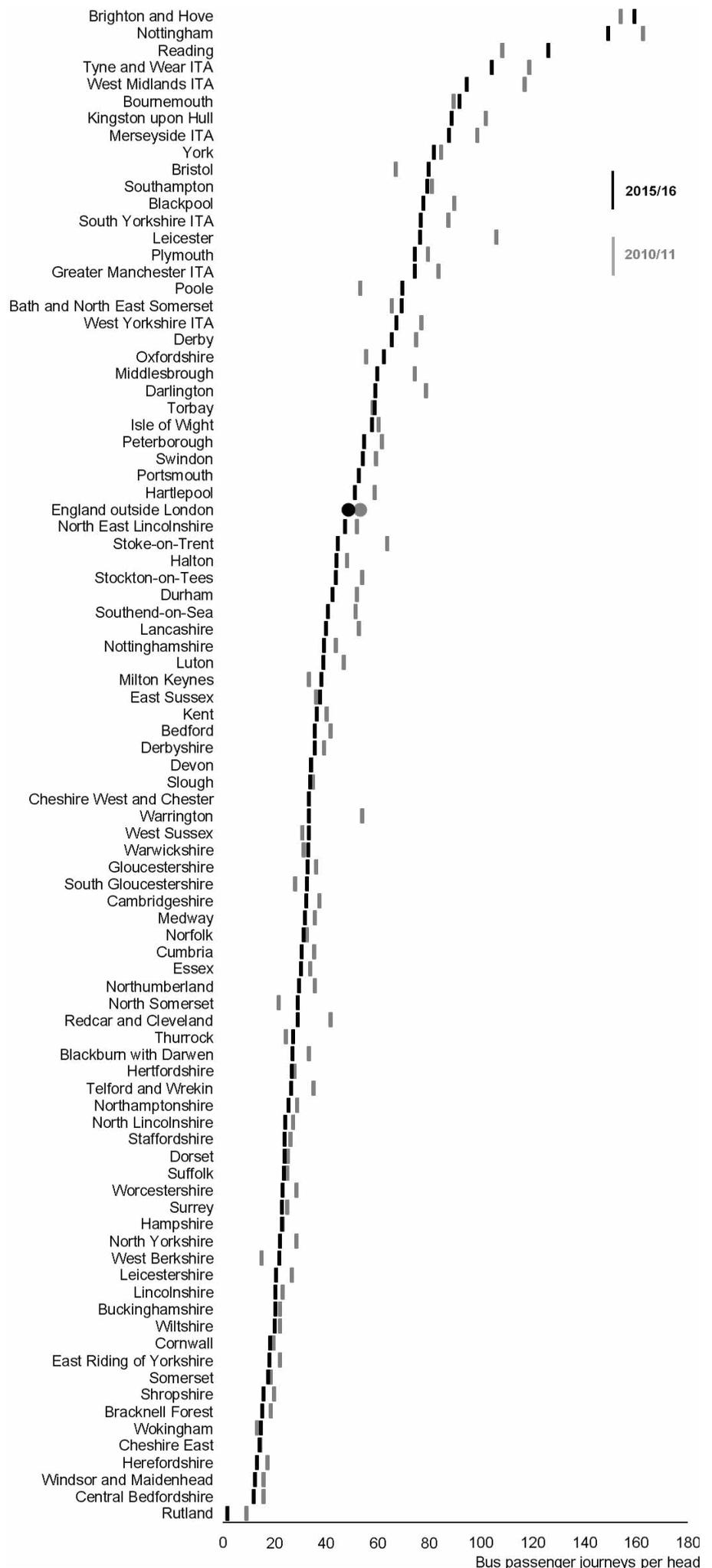
In general, more urban local authorities have above average levels of bus use when compared with rural areas.

Out of 88 local authorities in England outside London, 69 had a decrease in bus use per head from 2010/11 to 2015/16.

Chart 8: Local bus passenger journeys per head by local authority: England outside London, 2010/11 and 2015/16
([table BUS0110a](#))

About the data

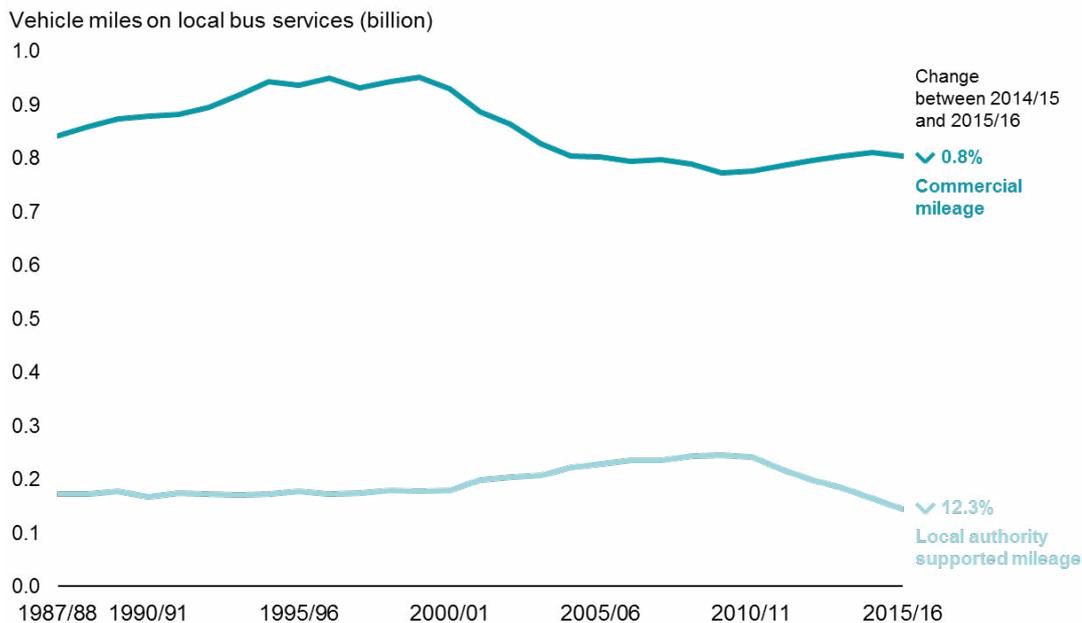
The bus passenger journeys per head figures presented here are estimates based on returns provide by bus operators. Mid-year population estimates from Office for National Statistics are used but do not account for bus passengers using the bus outside the local authority in which they reside. Users should be aware that figures for small areas can be affected by recording differences and so individual figures should be interpreted carefully.



Commercial and local authority supported bus mileage

In England outside London bus mileage has declined by 7.9% since 2005/06. This has mainly been due to a decrease of 36.7% in local authority supported mileage, in particular in non-metropolitan areas. Supported mileage in England outside London as a percentage of total mileage was 17.0% in 1987/88. Supported mileage reached its highest proportion in 2009/10 at 24.2%. Chart 9 shows the decrease in supported mileage since 2009/10 and is now 15.2% of total mileage. The chart also shows the increase in commercial mileage since 2009/10 but at a slower rate than the rate of decrease in supported mileage.

Chart 9: Vehicle miles on local bus services by service type: England outside London, 1987/88 to 2015/16 ([table BUS0205](#))



About bus mileage
 Mileage run by buses in service, which excludes 'dead running' (for example mileage between the start and end of routes and the depot). For supported services, operators receive payment from a local transport authority for running the service. They are usually considered socially necessary but not commercially viable. Supply of services is likely to be affected by similar factors to bus use. Operating costs and local authority support for supported services are also likely to be important.

Overall, the decline in supported mileage has not been fully matched by an increase in commercial mileage. Another part of the public transport network in a local authority is flexible or demand responsible modes transport, including community transport. These forms of transport are unlikely to be captured in these statistics because the annual bus survey is completed by operators holding a Public Service Vehicle (PSV) licence rather than the Section 19 and 22 permits that the majority of "community" transport organisations operate under.

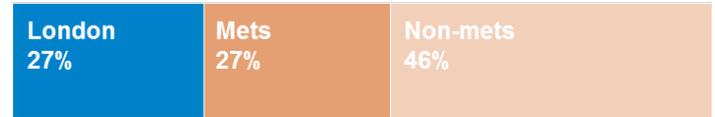
Through DfT's annual bus punctuality survey, local authorities are asked to briefly describe the community and on demand transport services that operate in their area, including the number of passenger journeys if available. A high level review of responses in 2015/16 indicated that there were around 5 million community and on demand passenger journeys in England. This estimate should be treated with caution as responses were not received from all local authorities and the recording of journeys by community transport organisations is unlikely to be as robust as that by PSV operators. Local authorities indicate that community transport services operate for those that cannot use conventional bus services such as older people or people with disabilities, and also for where conventional services do not reach such as rural areas.

Vehicles, bus punctuality and staff

Bus fleet

The number of buses used by local bus operators has remained at similar levels over the last 10 years at around 35,000 buses. Around a quarter of buses were in London (see chart 10). The average age of a bus in England in 2016 was 7.6 years .

Chart 10: Proportion of buses used by local bus operators by area type: England, March 2016
([table BUS0602](#))



Bus punctuality

In 2015/16, 82.6% of non-frequent services in England ran on time compared with 81.4% in 2010/11. 'On time' is defined as one between 1 minute early and 5 minutes 59 seconds late.

At the regional level bus service punctuality varied between 80.0% and 87.2%. At the local authority level there was greater variation ranging between 71% and 98%.

Bus punctuality data

[Bus punctuality statistics](#) provide one measure of the performance of local bus services based on data reported by local authorities who monitor punctuality using manual surveys or data from electronic systems. There are different measures of punctuality for frequent and non-frequent services: a frequent service is one that has six or more buses per hour. Several areas have no frequent services.

Equipment on buses

CCTV

([table BUS0604](#))

(All charts: percentage of buses fitted)

Automatic vehicle location

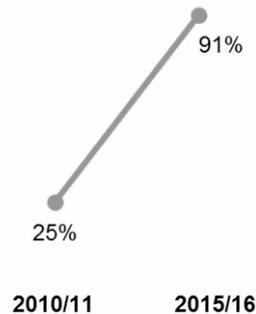
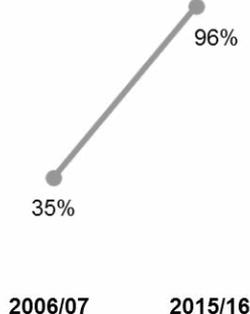
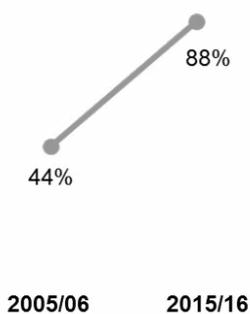
([table BUS0606](#))

To track vehicle location and for real time passenger information systems

ITSO smart enabled

([table BUS0607](#))

Common technical standard for smart ticketing



Bus staff

Local bus operators employed an estimated 104,000 full time equivalent staff as at March 2016 (see [table BUS0701\(area\)](#)). Data on weekly earnings and hours worked from the Office for National Statistics is available for bus and coach drivers in tables [BUS0703](#) and [BUS0704](#).

Financial outlook

Bus fares

In the past year to March 2016, local bus fares in England have increased by 1.8%, similar to the annual all items Retail Prices Index rate of inflation (1.6%). Between March 2011 and March 2016, the average annual percentage change in bus fares was 3.8% higher than the average annual rate of inflation (2.3%).

Local bus fares in England increased by 63% on average between March 2005 and March 2016. Chart 11 shows that bus fares have risen at a faster rate in metropolitan areas (75%) than in non-metropolitan areas (47%). The all items Retail Prices Index has risen by 37% over the same period, which means that bus fares have risen in real terms.

Government support

Central and local government support for local bus services consists of payments for supported services, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) and concessionary travel reimbursement (effectively a subsidy to concessionary passengers). In 2015/16, estimated total net support paid in England was £2.20 billion, of which £1.05 billion or 48% was for concessionary travel.

Chart 12 shows that in real terms total net support in metropolitan areas has remained at a similar level since 1996/97. Non-metropolitan areas and London have seen increases in support but both have declined from their respective peaks in 2010/11 and 2008/09.

Chart 12: Total net support by central and local government for local bus services and concessionary travel by area type: England, 1996/97 to 2015/16 (2015/16 prices) ([table BUS0502b](#))

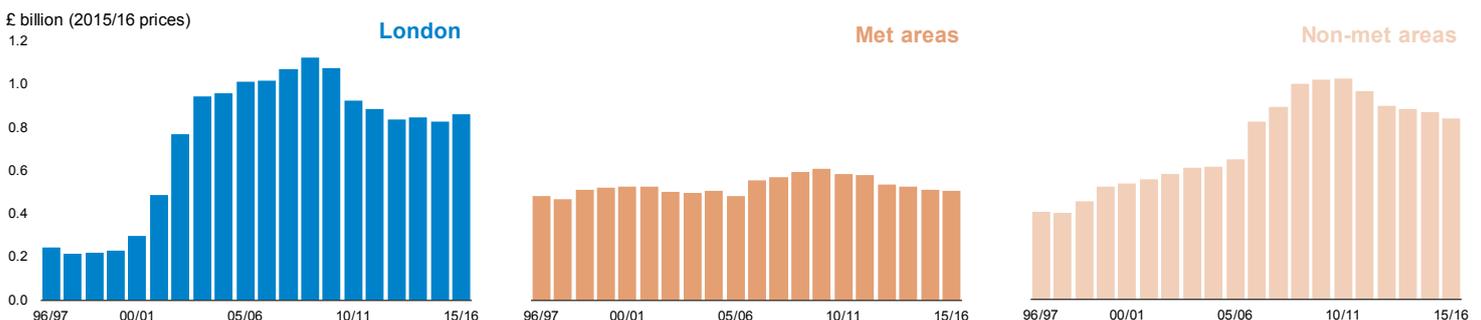
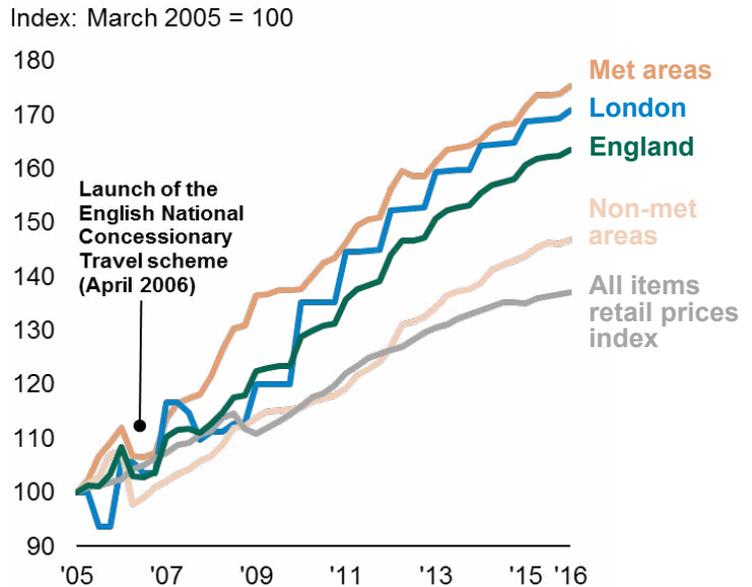


Chart 11: Local bus fares index by metropolitan area status: England, quarterly March 2005 to March 2016, current prices ([table BUS0415a](#))



BSOG per passenger journey
 One way to measure central government support for buses. The rate at which BSOG is paid was cut by 20% from April 2012. From October 2013, BSOG for London was devolved to Transport for London.

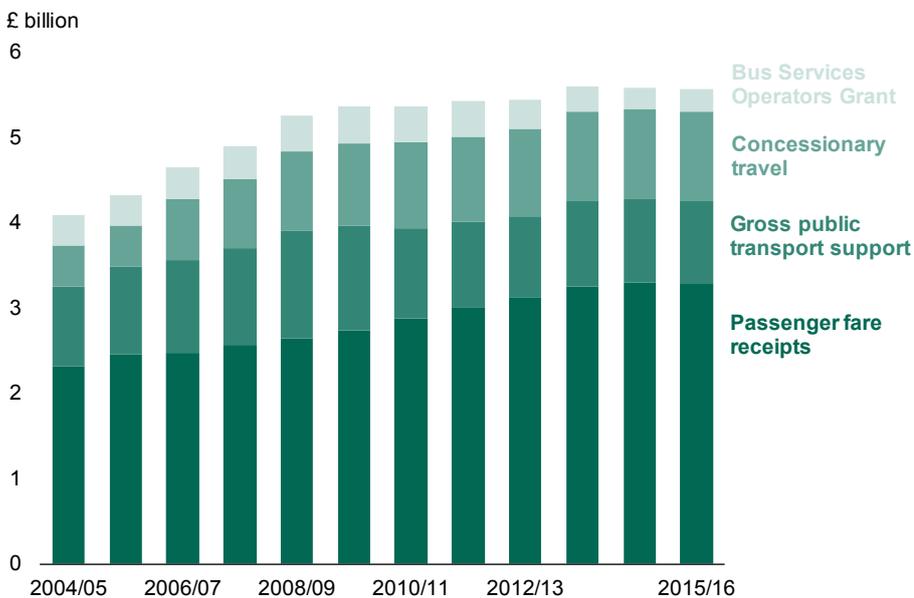
Operator revenue

In 2015/16, the total estimated operating revenue for local bus services in England was £5.57 billion. Passenger fare receipts made up the largest proportion of operating revenue: £3.28 billion or 59% of operating revenue (see chart 13). Revenue from passenger receipts has increased on average each year by 1.4% in real terms between 2004/05 and 2015/16.

BSOG has decreased by 41% in real terms. In 2004/05, BSOG made up 9% of operating revenue but in 2015/16 this proportion had fallen to 5%. Some of this decrease will be due to BSOG in London being devolved to Transport for London.

Operating revenue from concessionary fare reimbursement has more than doubled over the same period from £0.49 billion to £1.05 billion. This increase reflects the wider coverage of the concessionary travel scheme (moving from a local authority to a national scheme), increased eligibility and a larger proportion of elderly people in the wider population.

Chart 13: Operating revenue for local bus services by revenue type: England, 2004/05 to 2015/16, current prices ([table BUS0501a](#))



Types of revenue for operators

Fare receipts: on and off bus fares

Public transport support: payments from local authorities, mostly for running supported services

Concessionary reimbursement: from LAs for carrying concessionary passengers

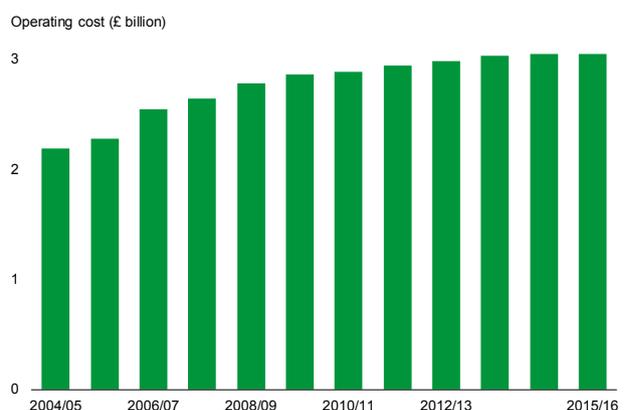
BSOG: fuel duty rebate from DfT

Other sources of income excluded.

Operator costs

In England outside London, between 2004/05 and 2015/16, operator costs for local bus services increased from £2.19 billion to £3.05 billion (see chart 14). This is an average annual real terms increase of 1.2%. A more detailed index of bus industry cost is compiled by the [Confederation of Passenger Transport](#).

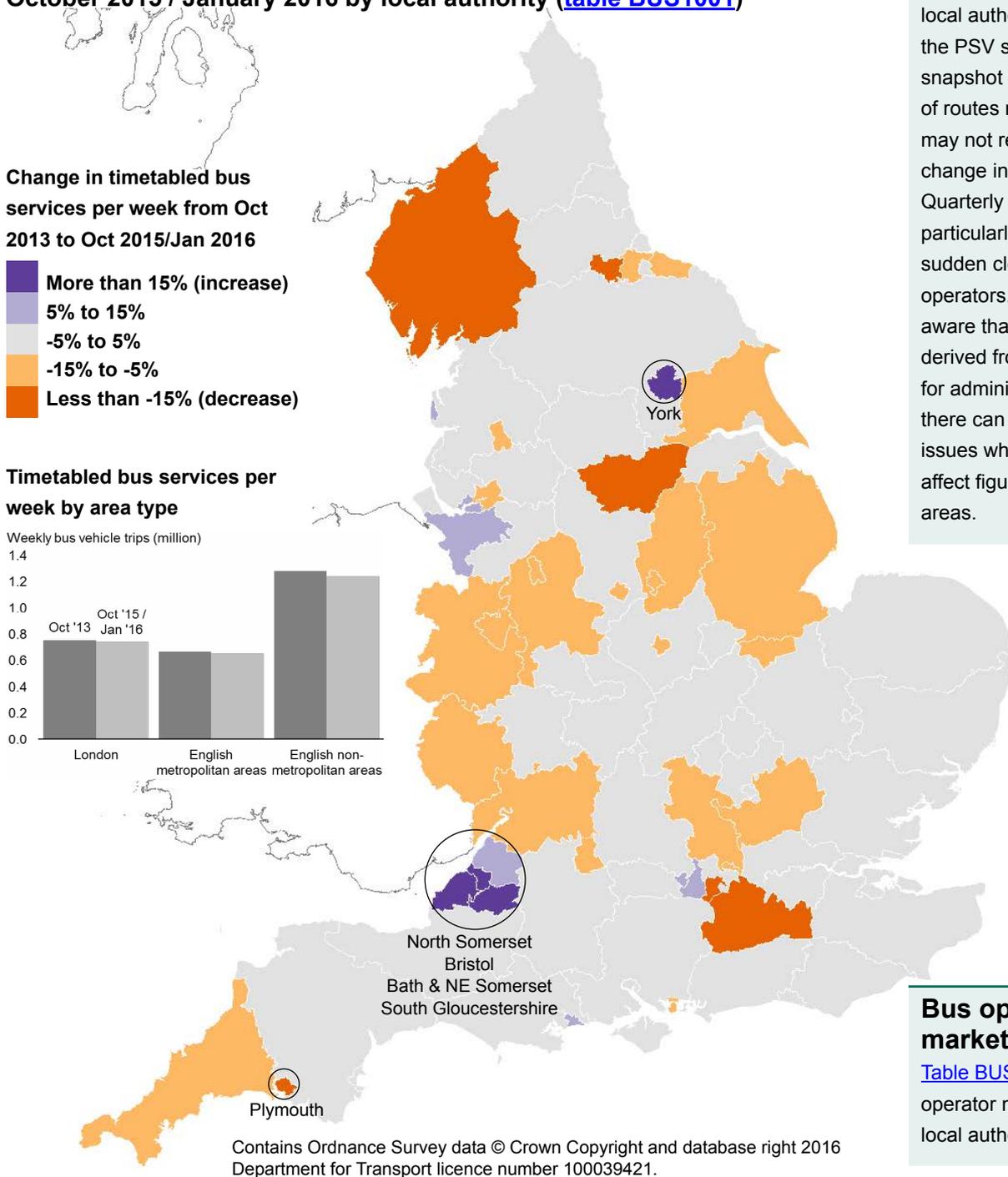
Chart 14: Operating cost for local bus services: England outside London, 2004/05 to 2015/16, current prices ([table BUS0406a](#))



A look at bus timetable data

Timetable data provides more detailed information on when and where bus services run, and who operates them than the other sources in this publication. There are approximately 2.6 million timetabled bus services per week in England, operated by around 690 operators. This is a small decrease on the 2.7 million timetabled bus services in October 2013. A service essentially relates to one line in a timetable, therefore reflecting frequency on more frequent routes. Map 1 shows that there have been larger changes in some local authorities but the majority have seen smaller changes in services.

Map 1: Change in timetabled bus services per week from October 2013 to October 2015 / January 2016 by local authority ([table BUS1001](#))



About this data

The October 2015 / January 2016 estimates are based on a combination of the quarterly snapshots of the [Traveline National Data Set](#). Snapshots from both quarters were analysed and validated against DfT's PSV survey. The final data set used for analysis was based on the coherence of each snapshot, at the local authority level, to the PSV survey. Each snapshot will vary in terms of routes registered, which may not represent actual change in service provision. Quarterly snapshots are particularly sensitive to the sudden closure of local bus operators. Users should be aware that as the data are derived from a system used for administrative purposes, there can be data quality issues which particularly affect figures for small areas.

Bus operator market share

[Table BUS1002](#) shows bus operator market share by local authority.

Background information

Users and uses of these statistics

These statistics provide key information on trends in the bus sector.

Within the Department for Transport they are used for:

- ▶ Ministerial briefing and to answer public enquiries;
- ▶ As background to policy development;
- ▶ Monitoring trends in the bus sector, for example in relation to accessible buses;
- ▶ The bus punctuality figures are used to monitor progress for the DfT business plan indicator related to the proportion of buses running on time (www.gov.uk/government/publications/input-and-impact-indicators); and
- ▶ By economists in modelling policy options (for example related to reform of bus subsidy).

Outside DfT known uses include:

- ▶ Passenger journeys figures are used as a measure of the overall health/state of the industry, for example by private research organisations, and are occasionally reported in the trade press;
- ▶ Local authorities may use these statistics to compare trends in their area with the national picture;
- ▶ These statistics have also provided background information for recent reports by the Transport Select Committee and Competition Commission;
- ▶ Bus fares data are used by the Office for National Statistics in calculating the Retail and Consumer Price Indices and in the National Accounts.

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

These statistics are derived from a number of sources, with the main source being the DfT annual Public Service Vehicle (PSV) survey of over 500 local bus operators which provides data on passenger journeys, vehicle miles, revenue and costs, and vehicles and staff. However, certain statistics (for example annual statistics on bus fares) are derived from smaller surveys of the larger bus operators, or from local authorities. Information on passenger journeys and bus mileage for London is provided by Transport for London.

Many of these statistics have been collected on a broadly comparable basis from operators for many years. However, following revisions to the methodology used to compile the published

National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html. For details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/bus-statistics

figures, 2004/05 is the earliest year for which figures are comparable on exactly the same basis.

The PSV survey uses imputation techniques to derive key figures for operators who were either not selected in the sample for that year, or who did not respond. On occasion, imputations for earlier years can be improved using directly-reported data for later years. Minor revisions to back-data can occur as a result, although trends are rarely affected substantively.

For the key indicators (passenger journeys and vehicle miles operated) the data provided by operators covers around, or above, 90% of the total figure, with the remainder imputed.

Comparison with other sources suggests that, at aggregate (national) level, the statistics are likely to provide a reasonably robust measure of levels and broad trends. However, figures representing smaller groups of operators and single year on year changes should be treated with caution as these are more susceptible to measurement errors (for example, an inaccurate return by an operator, or a change in an operator's method of producing the figures) which are more likely to even out at the national level. Regional, and particularly local authority, level figures should be interpreted with caution.

Further details of the full range of data sources and methods used in the production of these statistics can be found in the notes and definitions document available via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/buses-statistics-guidance

Next update to bus statistics

Quarterly bus statistics will be released in December 2016, and will contain estimates for Q3 2016 (July to September) together with annual figures for costs, revenue and Government support for buses and concessionary travel. The next annual bus statistics will be published in Autumn 2017.