

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Bus use falling steeply in England, think tank finds, but new markets emerging

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***Traditional bus markets are in decline; but new ones are emerging among younger, more affluent travellers – offering a fresh long-term focus for the revival of the bus industry***

A new report by the Independent Transport Commission (ITC), Britain's leading pan-transport think tank, uncovers major changes in travel behaviour across the bus market in England over the past decade. Against a backdrop of falling overall bus usage in spite of significant population growth, the report shows that the traditional core market for the bus has been shrinking. Today's bus travel is shaped around a smaller number of higher-intensity users, with each passenger outside London making an additional 5% journeys than in 2009.

The report – "[The shape of changing bus demand in England](#)" – authored by leading transport experts Dr Scott Le Vine and Emeritus Professor Peter White, uses National Travel Survey (NTS) data to explore what has been happening to bus travel demand in England since 2009, and investigates how the bus market has been changing in recent years. The main findings are:

- Outside London, the number of annual bus journeys in England fell by 15%
- The proportion of the population who are 'bus users' has declined from 21% to 18%, the opposite of rail where a greater percentage of the population is travelling by rail
- The remaining 'Bus users' are using the bus more intensely, making 5% more journeys
- Overall, local bus travel by women has fallen by 15% and men by 6%
- The highest rates of bus journeys are by people between ages 17 and 20, particularly females.
- Men between 17 and 39 are making 14% more trips than in 2009, with 5% more miles per trip
- Traditional bus 'core' markets – the unemployed, students, non-car owners, low personal income (less than £5,000) – have decreased by 15%, 10%, 10% and 13% respectively
- Usage has fallen most steeply in the lowest income groups, due to increased car ownership
- Nationally, there is no strong evidence of lost market share to private hire services (Uber) and taxis.
- Of all journey purposes by bus, shopping has fallen the most due to online shopping and the decline of the high street
- Local bus shopping trips have declined by 25% since 2009, compared with shopping trips by all modes decreasing by 5%, related to the increasing trend for out-of-town shopping centres
- Low-density rural counties (Lincolnshire, Yorkshire) and historic industrial areas (Stoke, Middlesbrough) are the areas with the strongest decline in bus usage with falls of over 20%. However, much of southern England, including low-density locations (West Berkshire, Cornwall) and urban areas where bus usage was already high (Reading, Bristol, Brighton), have seen bus use increase.

*"It is clear that the decline in bus travel outside London has been caused by a shrinkage in the proportion of the population who are bus users, rather than existing travellers using the bus less – the opposite trend that the ITC uncovered in the rail market,"* said **Dr Matthew Niblett, Director of the ITC.**

He added: *"While traditional core bus markets – people on low-incomes, non-car owners, students, pensioners and those shopping – have been turning away from the bus since the great recession in 2008, it's not all gloom for bus travel. The gender gap has narrowed, economically flourishing cities in southern England have delivered strong numbers, while usage has intensified amongst younger men."*

The ITC will share the results with Government (No.10, MHCLG, DfT), the Office of Road and Rail, regional transport bodies and the industry.

In September 2019, the Government announced that a National Bus Strategy would be published, backed by £220m of funding to expand, decarbonise and modernise the bus network through the use of technology to improve passengers access. The Budget is due on 11<sup>th</sup> March.

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#### **Media enquiries:**

If you have a media query about the report or would like to set up an interview, please contact John Stevenson on [john@ti-communications.co.uk](mailto:john@ti-communications.co.uk) or 07824 621756.

#### **Notes to editor:**

This research study was funded through a generous grant from the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund ([www.reesjeffreys.co.uk](http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk)). The **report was authored by Dr Scott Le Vine and Prof Peter White**, advised by the Independent Transport Commission's 'Road and Rail Travel Trends' steering group, comprising Professor Peter Jones OBE, Kris Beuret OBE, Terry Hill CBE, Tony Depledge OBE, Dr Matthew Niblett and Christine Hannigan.

**Dr Scott Le Vine** is a Transportation Planner on the faculty at the State University of New York and an Honorary Research Fellow at Imperial College London. He is a leading analyst of how travel patterns are evolving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, frequently drawing on the DfT's NTS and complementary data sources.

**Professor Peter White** is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Westminster, having retired from regular teaching work in 2015. He is a specialist in public transport systems, and author of the textbook *Public Transport: Its Planning, Management and Operation* (first edition 1976, sixth 2017).

**The Independent Transport Commission** is Britain's foremost independent land use and transport think tank. The ITC is a research charity providing insight and analysis of the most pressing long-term strategic issues in the fields of transport and land use. Founded in 1999, it is run by a small directorate led by Dr Matthew Niblett with an advisory team of 14 voluntary commissioners. It is based at Cowcross Street in central London. The Patrons of the ITC include Lord Adonis, Lord Freeman, Sir Peter Henty, Sir Patrick Brown, Simon Linnett and Sir Terry Farrell.

For more information, please see the ITC website: [www.theitc.org.uk](http://www.theitc.org.uk). The charity has no endowment and is supported by donations from a wide range of organisations (for a full list of supporters see: [www.theitc.org.uk/5\\_funding.html](http://www.theitc.org.uk/5_funding.html)). However, the ITC retains strict editorial independence from all our funding partners.

