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# Business Transport Advisory Council (BTAC)

Annual Report 2024-25

## Overview

Greater Manchester (GM) is home to over 100,000 businesses. They power our economy, support the livelihoods of millions of people and move within, to and from the city region for operations and commuting purposes every day. If TfGM is to help design and deliver a Bee Network for GM, by GM then the voice of business is crucial to how connectivity grows and changes over time. The opportunity is enormous, with the Centre for Cities in 2022 finding that GM has an annual £9bn productivity gap due to poor public transport when compared to other better functioning city regions in Europe. Recognising this, we've developed a wide range of methods to engage with the city-region's business community. An important avenue is via our Business Transport Advisory Council (BTAC), established as a regular interface with GM business leaders.

Established in September 2023, BTAC meets quarterly and brings together a panel of business leaders to help us develop a Bee Network that works well for the GM business community, their employees and customers. Businesses represented on BTAC operate in a range of sectors, come from various locations across the city-region and range from micro to large in size.

This is the first annual report, and summarises the key findings from our regular meetings with BTAC members between January 2024 – February 2025 and provides a set of recommendations and actions for TfGM. Engagement with BTAC will continue into 2025 and the Business Engagement team will provide further updates as insight is gathered. This insight will continue to inform TfGM's development of the Bee Network.

**Every journey. Every day.**

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# Background

Engaging with business can support TfGM across many fronts: growing patronage by designing a service that meets business needs and encourages take-up, identifying strategic issues that need to be addressed in advance, testing draft policies and ideas, and maturing our relationship with potential future advocates. BTAC allows a more informed and systematic approach to this.

It is equally as important that BTAC is a useful forum for its members, and that its business leaders can shape agendas and present to TfGM and the Transport Commissioner the ideas, issues, and priorities most pressing to them. In this vein, at BTAC's inaugural meeting in September 2023, members listed their top priorities for GM transport. These priorities shaped the main discussion points for the year ahead.

Meeting date	Main agenda item
January 2024	Night-time travel
June 2024	Integration of all modes to give seamless journeys
July 2024	Improving services outside of the regional centre, including orbital routes
November 2024	Active travel deep dive
February 2025	Business-facing comms workshop

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# Membership

Businesses represented on BTAC operate in a range of sectors, come from various locations across the city-region and range from micro to large in size. Whilst membership is slightly weighted towards the micro and SME community, this reflects GM's business makeup which has over 80% micro businesses of 1-9 employees.

Given that this group is representative of GM's business makeup, their views should be informative when considering the development of the Bee Network. As of April 2025, the current membership consists of:

- Erin MacTague - Picture Shop (Salford, Medium)
- Paul Ambrose - Rochdale BID (Rochdale, Micro)
- Rachael Flaszczak - The Snug Coffee House (Wigan, Micro)
- Tom Matthew - Dunsters Farm (Bury, Medium)
- Andrew Picken - HSQE Ltd (Wigan, Small)
- David Sudworth - Mr Soot Chimney Sweep (Wigan, Micro)
- Daisy Whitehouse - Down at the Social (Manchester, Micro)
- Phill Marples - Music Magpie (Stockport, Large)
- Jennie Heeley-Wiggins - Drinks of Manchester Ltd (Manchester, Small)
- Matthew Heath - Frederic Robinson Ltd (Stockport, Large)
- Will Hamilton - KPMG (Manchester, Large)
- Emma Bradshaw - EY (Manchester, Large)
- Ewen Miller - Calderpeel (Trafford, Small)
- Janine Smith from The Growth Company sits as an observer.

In 2025/26, TfGM aims to recruit up to four additional members to fill the current geographical gaps.



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# Key themes and recommendations

The key themes and recommendations below bring together the most frequent and forceful issues raised by BTAC members in between January 2024 - February 2025.

## 1. To increase patronage across the network, we must improve safety and perceptions of safety

Safety is threaded throughout most discussions with members. For example, BTAC were the first group to be engaged on the proposed night bus pilot, as there is a large appetite for nighttime transport from a business perspective. Our hospitality and manufacturing member businesses cite nighttime travel as a huge challenge to staff recruitment and retention. There are either no public transport options available for staff and customers to use, or too far of a distance between the business location and the nearest stop which feels unsafe at night. Some member businesses are mitigating this by using private hire taxi services for their staff, which has large cost implications and is not sustainable in a challenging economic context.

Members emphasise that safety measures on night services must be increased and be more visible. Members also state the importance of increasing safety measures on-stop and in the surrounding areas of interchanges. Some members currently plan shifts around the first / last services to their site, with employees relying on live services times to plan their journey to / from the stop, so it is crucial early morning / nighttime services are reliable. From an active travel perspective, members cite inadequate infrastructure and lighting of routes as barriers to using active modes.

### Recommendations: safety at night

1. Continue to engage with business at informative stages of future night-time service provision.
2. Use the network review process to work with businesses and Local Authority colleagues in scheduling, where possible, first and last bus and tram services around start and finish times of key employment sites.

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## **2. Businesses are supportive of integration and understand its benefits, but rail is the most important piece of the puzzle**

When discussing transport integration, members place their focus on rail. Members cite that to foster confidence in the rail system, reliability, frequency and capacity must urgently improve on commuter lines. Members state that rail travel within GM is relatively straightforward on paper, but cancellations and timetabling (one train per hour) result in employees opting for car travel instead. Members also highlight that rail travel outside the GM boundary is far more difficult, but crucial to business rail use. In an ideal scenario, members would like to see fast routes (minimum stop + motorway routes) and slower, commuter routes to serve the local boroughs. It is therefore important that we continue to engage with and inform GM business as we move forward with rail integration. Ensuring rail ticketing is integrated, accessible and affordable is a priority to members.

The importance of rail integration cannot be understated. To this end members are eager to inform the planning and delivery of an integrated network.

### **Recommendations: rail**

1. Ensure that business engagement is integrated meaningfully into the development and delivery of rail integration into the Bee Network.

## **3. Communicating and engaging meaningfully with businesses and commuters in general, but particularly during infrastructure design and delivery, is paramount**

Members express concerns about the local communications approach to delivery of enabling infrastructure. They cite that some local engagement does not talk in a language to which businesses can relate - even referring to 'active travel' can be alienating. The 'bigger picture' of why infrastructure delivery is important is often missing, or not articulated well, and varies across the city region. Live scheme examples were cited often.

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When discussing how to promote public and active travel use amongst their workforce, members cite simplicity of message, off-the-shelf materials, place-making, signage and maps as a key component. At present, it's thought that these areas need improvement and should be a simple route to increasing sustainable journeys. Members suggest signs to promote journey times as well as distance, and maps to show the network in its entirety. For bus journeys, they recommend branded names for key routes (like the 'super loop' in London) for commuters to identify easily. They also suggest more marketing and communication activity around the advantages of travelling sustainably and to shout about the measures TfGM and partners are taking to mitigate some of the key issues e.g. safety.

**Recommendations – communication and engagement:**

1. TfGM's business engagement team will support the infrastructure project delivery teams with business comms and engagement activity, ensuring this key audience has a voice in infrastructure development and delivery.
2. TfGM's business portal houses a travel planning for employers page on the Bee Network website, where off-the-shelf materials are made available for business. This will continue to be promoted, reviewed and evolved to ensure it meets business needs as per above feedback.
3. As the Bee Network grows, consider place-making and branding when marketing key routes.

**4. Network reliability must continue to improve**

The fundamentals of a reliable network that employees and businesses can depend on is at the forefront of a Bee Network that delivers. Member feedback was predominantly related to the experience of using buses and trains. Regarding tram, most feedback speaks to capacity issues: too full at commuter times, and single trams arriving at busy times instead of double-trams. This serves as a reminder that if public transport cannot be depended upon, the benefits of cost and sustainability may not be enough to convince people to use it and decrease car use.

**Recommendations: reliability**

1. TfGM's business engagement team to keep reminding of the Bee Network app's reporting feature to ensure issues are reported through the most efficient channels.
2. As the infrastructure programme progresses to improve the network by "joining up" the network with wider improvements, continue to give GM businesses a voice through robust engagement and consultation.

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## 5. Continued improvement in the coverage of the Bee Network is vital

Another recurring thread is how important to BTAC members it is for the Bee Network to expand with more direct and orbital routes to reduce the need to come into and out of the centre to travel around the region.

### **Recommendations: network coverage**

1. TfGM's business engagement team will ensure that relevant feedback supports the Network Review process and that businesses are kept informed, with every opportunity given to contribute to Network Reviews. Businesses will be encouraged to gather data that can support the network review process and TfGM will explore the potential for a Network Review themed around orbital opportunities. The employee travel survey template, available through TfGM's business page, can support employers to gather insight from their workforce.
2. The Greater Manchester Bus Strategy aims to make buses the first choice for more journeys by aiming to run services at least every 12 minutes on key radial and orbital routes, and to provide 90% of the entire Greater Manchester population with a 30-minute frequency bus or Metrolink service by 2030. The business engagement team will keep stakeholders informed of improvements and developments that are being made to reach these targets.



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# They said, we did

TfGM is committed to listening to the business community in order to keep improving the Bee Network and wider connectivity. Where possible, we bring feedback from BTAC colleagues into areas of Bee Network development alongside the views of the wider community to enable informed decision making. We have already actioned some of the recommendations from the feedback highlighted in this report.

For example, BTAC's feedback on the importance of safety connected to the proposed night bus pilot on the V1 and 36 services directly contributed to the consideration and inclusion of additional measures. These include more Travel Safe Enforcement Officers (TSEOs) on key stops along routes, and the commissioning of a vehicle for TSEOs usage, ensuring that a mobile team can attend reports quickly. Furthermore, TfGM partnered with the StrutSafe charity to ensure customers were aware of the service they offer to support people walking from their stop to their home late at night.

TfGM is carrying out a series of network reviews to better understand bus services across the city-region. This will help to identify changes and improvements to better connectivity and reliability. The network review process therefore enables additional business engagement around network improvements, building on BTAC feedback around the importance of easier orbital routes around the city region and access to business and industrial parks.

Feedback has also contributed to several improvements in the way TfGM communicates and engages with business. Examples from the last year include:

- Business-to-business information and off-the-shelf communications packs have been made available on the [Travel planning for employers | Bee Network | Powered by TfGM](#) site, making it easier for businesses to understand and promote sustainable travel options.
- An improved approach to communicating and engaging about infrastructure improvement works, comprising more dedicated sessions with business groups to speak to the benefits of the wider programme as well as discuss individual schemes, and a dedicated business engagement officer now in post to lead on this work, working with our Local Authority partners.
- A refresh of TfGM's Business Travel Newsletter, keeping the business community informed of all relevant transport developments, and a complete redevelopment of TfGM's business portal, acting on BTAC's feedback to ensure it is simpler, more accessible and can point users to useful materials in a more streamlined way. Bespoke materials prepared for businesses and employers as part of the night time transport pilot, enabling organisations to better engage their staff around the services.

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# Next steps

The business engagement team will work to put into action the recommendations outlined in this report. TfGM will continue to engage with BTAC around strategic transport priorities and Mayoral priority areas, such as the Local Transport Plan refresh, on a quarterly basis throughout 2025/26. TfGM will continue to report on the engagement and actions of BTAC on an annual basis.

Additionally, TfGM will look to address and fill any geographical gaps in membership via a targeted recruitment campaign in 2025.

And finally, as per the Terms of Reference, members are to elect a new Chair each year. So, TfGM would like to put on record our gratitude to Erin MacTague for all she has contributed as Chair during the inaugural year of BTAC.