



There has been a bus revolution in Greater Manchester, but will Burnham take that further?



WHAT WILL BURNHAM PREMIERSHIP MEAN?

‘King of the North’ is likely to be next PM and may bring change for coach and bus



Jonathan Murray
/ Acting MD, Zemo Partnership

The prime ministerial merry-go-round does not seem to be slowing down. Andy Burnham – for it looks nearly certain to be him – will be the UK’s seventh PM in 10 years. At the time of writing, it is possible that Mr Burnham could take up that job as early as 20 July.

Many people will be asking what a Burnham government will mean for the coach and bus sector, particularly as buses were such a prominent part of his time as Mayor of Greater Manchester.

There will be hopes, at least, that buses will be higher up the list of prime ministerial priorities than has been the case with many past leaders. Whether this will translate into concrete and

positive changes for the sector is the big question.

Mr Burnham’s administration in Greater Manchester brought what is now the region’s Bee Network under public control by franchising bus services and shifting private operators into the role of contractors rather than decision-makers.

Introduced in three phases from September 2023, franchising brought 577 routes and 1,600 buses carrying more than 160 million passenger trips per year under local control. As mayor, Mr Burnham delivered Greater Manchester’s buses back into public control on time and within the original £134.5 million budget.

The now-former mayor has already called the Bee Network “a blueprint for the rest of Britain.” A Burnham government may be expected

to lean hard on other city regions to follow suit.

Greater Manchester has committed to a fully electric Bee Network bus fleet by 2030, with a quarter of buses already battery-electric by the end of 2025.

Transport for Greater Manchester completed the region’s first all-electric bus depot in Ashton-under-Lyne, now home to more than 80 zero-emission buses, and Middleton has followed.

However, delivery has not been without its challenges. Transport Commissioner for Greater Manchester Vernon Everitt has acknowledged that depot electrification is a genuine challenge.

It is clear from the direction of travel that franchising gave Mr Burnham direct control over vehicle specification in a way that Enhanced Partnership areas

in England do not have. Based on his track record, his instincts are clearly towards rapid decarbonisation.

The big question is whether the government will seek to replicate the Bee Network model nationally, or whether a Burnham government instead extends targeted schemes like the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas approach to non-franchised authorities that lack a Bee Network-style framework to hang investment on.

In any case, more change is on the way, and there seems a good possibility that it could brighten prospects for the coach and bus sector.

FIND OUT MORE

For more about Zemo Partnership’s work supporting the coach and bus transition, or to find out about membership, visit www.zemo.org.uk

// It is clear from the direction of travel that franchising gave Mr Burnham direct control over vehicle specification in a way that Enhanced Partnerships do not //