

Installing Audio-Visual Equipment on Buses – Cost and Practicality Issues

A Report for Guide Dogs

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FINAL



The TAS Partnership Limited
Passenger Transport Specialists

Executive Summary

Guide Dogs asked passenger transport experts, the TAS Partnership, to uncover the true cost of installing audio-visual technology on British buses. The partnership's findings support Guide Dogs Talking Buses campaign, and challenge the long-running myth that audio-visual technology is expensive.

The report found that the entire UK bus fleet could be equipped with audio-visual technology for as little as £58million. Guide Dogs believes £58million is a relatively small sum of money and the Department for Transport could provide financial incentives similar to the "Better Bus Areas Fund" specifically for installing audio & visual information on buses.

For an individual bus, installing audio-visual technology could cost as little as £2,100 for a single-decker vehicle, or £2,550 for a double-decker. These figures reflect the discounts that are possible if whole fleets are equipped with the technology.

Trains, trams, tubes and planes in the UK are all regulated to have on-board audio-visual announcements, but buses are one the only form of public transport not to have a requirement for regulations to provide audio and visual passenger information in the UK. A traveller, whether visually impaired or otherwise, who uses trains and trams with confidence is denied this reassurance on buses. A suggested minimum of £58million investment by the Department for Transport would resolve this anomaly and bring buses in to line with other forms of public transport.

This sum also compares very favourably with the £70m allocated by the DfT Better Bus Areas Fund, which was allocated in a piecemeal fashion for a range of improvements, rather than a universal uplift in standards across the sector. The Better Bus Areas Fund was welcomed by Guide Dogs, but the charity believes that the fund lacked the impact that a UK-wide Talking Buses fund would guarantee.

Many benefits of audio-visual announcements were highlighted in the report. These include an increased propensity for people to use buses away from home (as audio-visual announcements provide greater certainty), and the potential to attract more regular passengers and tourists onto buses (as well as the opportunity to create route specific marketing by advertising shops or businesses on an individual route. For example, a bus stop with a supermarket nearby could advertise the shop's latest offers and provide another valuable marketing tool that would generate income.

The report also recognises that it's not just disabled people and tourists who would benefit from audio-visual information on buses. A significant proportion of other passengers, including non-concessionary passengers, would also gain. There are also those who would like to use buses but who are put off by the lack of adequate information once on board and are unsure of where to get off.

Guide Dogs' Recommendations:

1. The Government should allocate £58million for a specific Talking Buses Fund as a minimum to assist operators to install audio-visual equipment on every bus in the United Kingdom. The current cost of equipping the entire UK fleet is £83m-£126m, but with the potential to reduce this to £58m-£88m with volume discounts.
2. The Government to use the Red Tape Challenge as an opportunity to amalgamate all existing transport regulations into one inclusive regulation that makes audio-visual requirements for all modes of public transport, with buses having a compulsory introduction phase within 10 years.
3. The Government should publicly agree with the report's authors that on-board audio-visual announcements are cost effective and deliver the following universal benefits:
 - Reliable on board passenger information provision that will benefit all passengers
 - Increase the likelihood of people wanting to use buses, as audio visual announcements provide greater certainty and vital onboard information on the destination and next stop information;
 - To highlighting the potential for new income streams in relation to on board marketing for local shops & businesses and local attractions.

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For the full report or for further information, email campaigns@guidedogs.org.uk.