Bridging Transport Exclusion in a Devolved City-Region: A Comparative Analysis of Financial and Infrastructural Interventions in Greater Manchester

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Abstract

This thesis examines two recent transport interventions implemented in Greater Manchester, each representing a distinct approach to addressing mobility challenges. The first, Our Pass, is a membership scheme providing free bus travel and access to cultural and leisure opportunities for 16–18-year-olds, characterised as a financial intervention. The second, the Trafford Park Extension Line, is an infrastructural project supporting the region's aspiration for a more integrated transport network, akin to London's model. While existing research in transport policy often focuses on travel behaviour, car dependency, and network efficiency, this thesis investigates how these interventions align with GM's policy goals—specifically, reducing transport-related exclusion, promoting economic growth, and enhancing social mobility. These aims are explored within the conceptual framework of New Public Governance (NPG), with attention to collaboration, partnership working, and stakeholder engagement in fostering inclusive and sustainable urban development.

The research adopts an interpretivist epistemology and uses narrative interviews with sixteen elite-level stakeholders as its primary data source. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns of meaning, complemented by a thematic review of relevant policy documents. The themes and variations uncovered through this dual approach reveal how each intervention advances—or falls short of—broader regional policy objectives. Findings indicate that, while both interventions achieve some stated aims, limitations persist in their capacity to promote comprehensive social inclusion and regional development.

This thesis advances knowledge by providing comparative empirical evidence on the impacts of financial and infrastructural interventions in GM. By integrating interview analysis and document review, it critically evaluates how transport policies can support regional competitiveness, social equity, and sustainable development. Framed through NPG, it demonstrates how strategic partnerships influence intervention outcomes and offers a nuanced understanding of transport policymaking and its implications for social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

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List of Abbreviations

CAs	Combined Authorities
DfT	Department for Transport
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLA	Greater London Authority
GM	Greater Manchester
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
GMS	Greater Manchester Strategy
GMTS	Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LRT	Light Rail Transit
LSOAs	Lower Layer Super Output Areas
MAAs	Multi-Area Agreements
MM	Micro Mobility
MP	Member of Parliament
MUD	Moral Underclass Discourse
NPG	New Public Governance
NPM	New Public Management
RED	Redistributionist Discourse
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SID	Social Integrationist Discourse
TfGM	Transport for GM
TfL	Transport for London
TVCA	Tees Valley Combined Authority
UK	United Kingdom
WLT	Wider Executive Leadership Team
WPL	Workplace Parking Levy

Glossary of Key Terms

Interpretivist (Epistemology): An epistemological stance that assumes knowledge is constructed through human experience and social context. In this thesis, interpretivism underpins the methodological framework, guiding decisions around qualitative research design, meaning-making, and narrative engagement.

Interpretive (Methods/Tools): Used to describe the analytical processes aligned with an interpretivist paradigm. In this thesis, *interpretive* refers to the approaches employed in data analysis, such as thematic analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, which explore participants' perspectives and the meanings they construct.

Narrative Interviews: A qualitative data collection technique that encourages participants to share stories or accounts of their experiences, allowing themes to emerge organically. This approach is employed in the thesis to explore stakeholder perspectives on transport interventions in Greater Manchester.

Thematic Analysis: An interpretive analytical tool used to identify, organise, and interpret patterns within qualitative data. This thesis applies Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to both interview and survey data, surfacing key insights into transport accessibility, policy framing, and lived experience.

Hermeneutic Interpretation: An interpretive approach to data analysis, grounded in the work of Gadamer (2004) and Ricoeur (1976), that emphasises the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant. In this thesis, it is used to explore how stakeholder narratives reflect wider governance and policy discourses.

Case Study Methodology: A methodological approach involving the systematic and in-depth investigation of selected cases within their real-world contexts. This thesis employs a comparative case study methodology, examining two specific cases—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—as distinct interventions addressing transport exclusion in Greater Manchester.

Grey Literature: Non-academic sources such as government reports, policy evaluations, and organisational strategy documents. These are used in the thesis to contextualise findings, triangulate stakeholder perspectives, and analyse policy framing and implementation.

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<center>**CHAPTER ONE**</center>

<center>**INTRODUCTION**</center>

1. Introduction

Transport systems play a crucial role in shaping urban development, influencing the distribution of economic opportunities, and promoting social inclusion. This thesis explores the relationship between transport policy and socio-economic outcomes in Greater Manchester (GM) through two cases: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. These initiatives represent distinct, yet complementary interventions aimed at addressing youth mobility, socio-economic inclusion, and regional competitiveness. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, the research investigates how these interventions reflect and advance GM's broader transport and social policy goals.

A qualitative case study methodology is employed, utilising narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders. These interviews critically explore the policy intentions, interpretations, and perceived outcomes associated with each case. By emphasising contextual depth and subjective experiences, this methodological approach is particularly suited to investigating themes such as equity, inclusivity, and economic mobility.

The Trafford Park Extension Line, an infrastructure project, and Our Pass, a financial initiative supporting youth mobility, were selected as cases to illustrate different strategies for addressing transport and social challenges in GM. Together, they provide a framework for examining how transport policies engage with structural inequalities, sustainable mobility, and regional economic development. This thesis situates these interventions within broader debates on sustainable development and transport equity, offering a critical assessment of inclusive transport policymaking in a regional context.

1.1 The Background – The Role of Public Transport in GM

Public transport significantly influences social and economic outcomes in GM. Existing research (Alkubati et al., 2022; Cats and Gkioulou, 2017; Cordera et al., 2019; Daraio et al., 2016; Fumagalli et al., 2021) highlights various inefficiencies within the region's current transport system. Passengers frequently report issues such as high fares and infrequent services. Moreover, inadequate transport provision can result in social isolation, with

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residents often unable to accept job opportunities due to unreliable services and limited route coverage.

This thesis is situated within the literature on regional transport policy and governance. It critically examines the role of public transport in addressing socio-economic disparities and enhancing regional connectivity. Through engagement with theories of transport equity, sustainable mobility, and urban governance, the research evaluates how targeted policy interventions may reduce accessibility gaps and promote inclusive economic growth.

A notable gap exists in the literature concerning the broader social and economic impacts of transport schemes on young people. Existing studies (Edwards et al., 2013; Green et al., 2014) tend to focus on health outcomes or increasing public transport uptake. Addressing this gap, the thesis contributes to current knowledge by examining both financial and infrastructural transport interventions. It presents a framework through which scholars can critically evaluate the effectiveness of transport policies in improving social and economic outcomes, while situating future research within a broader policy context that has been previously underexplored.

The need for a more integrated transport system has been emphasised in regional policy narratives, with the Mayor of GM supporting initiatives designed to increase public transport use and reduce car dependency (GMCA, 2023a). According to the objectives set out by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), *Our Network* serves as a strategic approach aimed at improving integration and efficiency across the existing transport system. This strategy prioritises walking, cycling, and bus travel for shorter journeys, while interchanges and transport hubs facilitate seamless transitions to trams or trains for longer trips.

Our Network is part of a broader strategic effort to enhance environmental outcomes, coordinated primarily through regional governance. Shutt and Liddle (2019) emphasise the importance of emerging strategic bodies, such as mayoral and non-mayoral combined authorities, particularly in metropolitan regions like GM. These bodies are seen as instrumental in addressing interconnected policy areas including transport, economic regeneration, housing, and skills. The GMCA has been identified in government documents as an exemplar of city-regional governance, with combined authorities (CAs) framed as

mechanisms for enabling inclusive growth strategies. However, the consistency and practical effectiveness of such outcomes remain variable (Ayres, 2020; Shutt and Liddle, 2019). While GM's transport strategy aligns with regional and national environmental objectives—leading to the implementation of various transport initiatives (GMCA, 2023a)—there is increasing recognition of the need to assess their wider social and economic impacts within the field of transport economics.

Large-scale transport infrastructure projects often bring significant changes, influencing both the transport network and broader socio-economic conditions (Haezendonck, 2008; Gallo, 2020). A core theme of this thesis is the use of New Public Governance (NPG) as a framework to examine the partnerships underpinning transport policy implementation in GM. The thesis emphasises the importance of strong partnerships as key enablers in the policy process.

NPG encourages collaboration among a wide range of interdependent public and private stakeholders, operating within a complex and often fragmented policy environment. Such collaboration supports the development of innovative solutions to improve public transport integration and connectivity (Vinokur-Kaplan, 2018). Furthermore, NPG is applied in this thesis as an analytical framework to explore how differing organisational goals and perceptions shape inter-organisational cooperation and influence policy effectiveness in GM (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015).

Given the prominence of collaboration and partnership in GM's transport policy landscape, the thesis critically evaluates these dynamics through the lens of NPG, which explicitly prioritises cross-sectoral cooperation in policy delivery (Varkey et al., 2022). The spatial economic impacts of public transport infrastructure have featured prominently in political discourse for several decades (Rietveld, 1994). Although documents such as the *Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Transport Study* (Transport for Greater Manchester, 2018) address these concerns, there remains limited academic research into how spatial placement directly influences economic activity in GM.

This thesis addresses this gap by exploring the socio-economic impacts of transport interventions outlined in the *Our Network* plan, focusing specifically on how their spatial distribution influences economic outcomes in GM. To achieve this, the research adopts a

qualitative case study methodology, facilitating detailed exploration and critical analysis of two specific cases—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—within their real-world contexts (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). The remainder of this chapter identifies the research gap and motivation, outlines the research aim, questions, and objectives, describes the interpretivist methodological framework, and concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Research Gap

An analysis of the academic literature indicates a growing scholarly interest in how public transport can support economic growth and facilitate social activities within city regions. In the field of transport policy, researchers often investigate the economic motivations behind efforts to enhance public transport connectivity from a mobility perspective (Casceta et al., 2020; Chen and Vickerman, 2016; Song et al., 2018; Titheridge, 2014). Meanwhile, scholars in governance, public administration, and public management tend to examine the broader socio-economic impacts of improved transport linkages at the city-regional level (Bespalyy and Petrenko, 2023; Horlemann et al., 2024; Prior Filipe et al., 2024).

This thesis explores public transport initiatives in GM, critically analysing how fragmentation within the transport network contributes to the marginalisation of specific groups. Initial findings suggest that negative perceptions of transport quality have led to decreased transit usage, underscoring the need to develop effective strategies for increasing uptake. Motivated by these challenges, the research investigates the wider social and economic dynamics shaped by public transport in GM. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discourse on the role of sustainable transport initiatives in addressing long-term social, economic, and environmental issues.

A specific gap in the literature remains regarding the nature of transport interventions, particularly their effectiveness in addressing transport-related exclusion. Our Pass constitutes a financial intervention, offering free bus travel to its users. In contrast, the Trafford Park Extension Line represents an infrastructure intervention, aimed at strengthening existing transport connections by enhancing direct routes between Trafford and the city centre. This thesis explicitly distinguishes between these two cases by examining the particular challenges each seeks to address. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, the research employs thematic analysis to explore patterns within participant narratives. These patterns are

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interpreted within a broader analytical framework that prioritises context-specific understanding and meaning-making.

1.3 Research Aim

A clear disconnect exists between policy ambitions for inclusive mobility and the lived realities of transport exclusion. This thesis critically examines two flagship interventions from GM's Our Network 2040 plan: Our Pass, a financial intervention, and the Trafford Park Extension Line, an infrastructure project. It evaluates the extent to which each intervention translates the overarching policy goals of social inclusion and regional economic development into tangible outcomes for their intended users.

1.4 Research Questions and Objective

This research addresses a clear disconnect between policy ambitions for inclusive mobility and the lived realities of transport exclusion. To critically examine how flagship interventions from GM's *Our Network 2040* plan translate into tangible socio-economic outcomes, four interrelated research questions guide this thesis. Each question is supported by specific research objectives, which operationalise the questions, providing clear analytical pathways for empirical investigation.

Research Question 1: How do Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line reflect the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's aims for inclusive mobility and regional growth?
Objective 1: To critically examine how Greater Manchester's flagship transport initiatives—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—translate policy goals on youth mobility and social equality into specific services and inclusion outcomes.

Objective 1 addresses RQ1 by analysing the translation of high-level policy ambitions into concrete service features, assessing their implications for young people's access and inclusion.

Research Question 2: How do key policymakers, transport professionals and academics interpret the potential of these two interventions to deliver social equality and economic opportunity?
Objective 2: To analyse how elite stakeholders (policymakers, transport professionals, and academics) interpret the socio-economic aspects of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension

Line and evaluate the alignment of these interpretations with regional policy objectives.

Objective 2 addresses RQ2 by unpacking the frameworks and narratives employed by key stakeholders when evaluating both interventions, assessing how these perspectives shape and reflect regional policy aims.

Research Question 3: In what ways do Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line support Greater Manchester's broader economic development and competitiveness goals?
Objective 3: To evaluate the contribution of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line to GMCA's economic development and regional competitiveness, clearly situating them within Greater Manchester's broader growth and regeneration strategies.

Objective 3 addresses RQ3 by examining how each intervention advances economic growth and regional competitiveness, including their integration into GM's wider regeneration and development strategy.

Research Question 4: To what extent do these financial (Our Pass) and infrastructural (Trafford Park Extension Line) interventions translate GMCA's inclusive mobility and socio-economic policy objectives into tangible outcomes, and what barriers emerge in their implementation?
Objective 4: To assess how effectively financial and infrastructural interventions deliver measurable outcomes aligned with GMCA's inclusive mobility and socio-economic goals, identifying key operational, institutional, and contextual barriers constraining their delivery.

Objective 4 addresses RQ4 by critically examining the extent to which each intervention translates policy ambitions—such as enhancing social mobility, economic opportunity, and regional connectivity—into measurable outcomes, while analysing the obstacles that constrain their real-world implementation.

In this integrated framework, each research objective clearly operationalises its corresponding question, providing a structured and coherent foundation for empirical analysis throughout the thesis.

1.5 Research Methodology

This section outlines the research design and methodological approach guiding the thesis, describing the sequential and iterative steps undertaken in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. An interpretivist methodology was selected to allow for an in-depth exploration of transport governance processes and their meanings for those involved. As societies become increasingly complex and global influences shape local contexts, interpretive political science provides a valuable framework for understanding evolving governance dynamics and possibilities (Turnbull, 2016).

A narrative interview method was employed to explore participants' experiences and interpretations of transport interventions in GM. Grounded in interpretivist traditions, this approach emphasises meaning-making and the co-construction of understanding between interviewer and participant (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2015). Narrative interviews enable participants to describe their experiences in their own terms, allowing the researcher to trace how individuals interpret events within specific contexts over time. Rather than seeking fixed responses, this method fosters open-ended dialogue, enabling underlying values, assumptions, and experiences to emerge naturally (McCormack, 2004; Dick, 2000).

The interviewer used reflective and follow-up questions to encourage participants to provide deeper insights. This method supports the development of rich, detailed narratives shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts, making it particularly well-suited to examining the nuanced impacts of policy interventions on mobility, equity, and governance within a city-regional framework.

Given the detailed and context-rich data provided by narrative interviews, fewer participants are typically required compared to other qualitative methods (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Sandelowski (1995) argues that qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to generate a "new and richly textured understanding" of the research phenomenon, yet small enough to allow for "deep, case-oriented analysis" (p. 183). Similarly, Morse (2000) suggests that smaller participant numbers can yield richer, more meaningful data per individual. The depth and quality of the data collected depend significantly on how interview questions are designed; thus, careful attention was given to the study's purpose, focus, and overall structure.

As outlined below, the initial step in addressing the research problem involved clearly defining the issue through a narrative literature review, incorporating both academic and grey literature. Alongside identifying the research problem, the most appropriate methodological approach was determined by reviewing recent transport studies to assess commonly employed methods and their suitability for addressing similar research questions.

Within this approach, two city-regional transport policy cases in GM were examined. Consideration was also given to the philosophical orientation and research paradigm underpinning the thesis. Owing to the emphasis on qualitative data and contextual understanding, interpretivism was identified as the most appropriate paradigm (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994), a choice discussed in greater depth in the methodology chapter.

The subsequent step involved analysing recent transport initiatives in GM aimed at improving accessibility and mobility. These initiatives also sought to enhance economic opportunities and address social exclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups. At this point, two distinct interventions were selected based on their potential to influence social and economic outcomes.

The next step involved establishing clear criteria for selecting appropriate cases for detailed investigation. The criteria were as follows:

a) The initiatives must have been implemented in or after 2019 and remain operational, ensuring that relevant stakeholders involved in transport policy delivery—as well as transport users—remain informed and engaged with the projects.
b) The initiatives should form part of the Our Network plan launched by the GM government.
c) The initiatives must explicitly aim to reduce transport-related exclusion.
d) The initiatives must aim to enhance economic and social opportunities.

Using these criteria, two cases were selected for in-depth exploration in this thesis.

The fourth step involved identifying potential interview participants for each case using a 'snowball' sampling approach. This method entails asking initial interviewees to refer the

researcher to additional suitable participants (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018). The sample grows progressively through each referral, resembling a rolling snowball.

Step five marked the beginning of the data collection phase. Primary data were gathered through narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders. A preliminary survey, conducted early in the research process, helped shape the interview questions and guide participant selection. Grey literature—such as policy reports, strategic frameworks, and evaluations published by public agencies and research consultancies—served two purposes: first, to contextualise the cases (Chapters 2–3), and second, as a secondary data source supporting the analysis presented in the findings chapters (Chapters 5–6).

As introduced in step one, a case study methodology was adopted to collect and analyse data. Each case—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—was examined independently, both before and after data collection, facilitating a thorough understanding of each intervention as a distinct unit of analysis. This methodological approach enabled the identification of patterns and contrasts between the two cases, directly addressing the research questions concerning equity and sustainability.

The researcher had direct experience with both interventions, as each became publicly accessible around the time the thesis commenced. This provided detailed familiarity, enriching the cross-case comparison by allowing for the identification of subtle differences and similarities. The researcher's positionality is critically examined in the reflexivity section (Section 4.3), ensuring transparent consideration of potential influences on data interpretation.

In step six, thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, was used to identify and categorise key patterns within participant narratives. This analysis was situated within a broader interpretivist epistemology, prioritising meaning-making and context-specific understanding. The aim was to uncover the reasoning behind, and intended outcomes of, each intervention. The two cases were analysed to highlight their complementary roles within GM's broader transport strategy. While Our Pass focuses on affordability and accessibility for younger populations, the Trafford Park Extension Line prioritises regional connectivity and economic growth. This comparative approach offered valuable insights into the interplay between financial and infrastructural interventions, underscoring shared

challenges such as equitable access and the need for long-term impact. The analysis highlights the integrated role both initiatives play in supporting inclusive and sustainable regional development.

1.6 COVID-19 and Data Collection

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operations and functionality of public transport across the UK. Public trust in transport systems declined markedly, as the virus was primarily transmitted through close contact, leading to a substantial reduction in public transport usage nationwide. As a result, the transport interventions examined in this thesis experienced major disruptions, which directly influenced the availability and reliability of data used to assess their effectiveness.

Research and evaluation methods also faced considerable challenges during this period. Travel restrictions and health concerns associated with in-person data collection necessitated adjustments to the research design. These adaptations introduced additional complexity to the researcher's interactions with participants. The rationale for adopting narrative interviews and incorporating secondary sources in response to these limitations is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Methodology).

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis comprises seven chapters. This introductory chapter outlines the scope and rationale of the thesis, clearly states the research aims, questions, and objectives, and introduces the methodological approach.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review, critically analysing themes central to the research objectives. It explores the relationship between transport accessibility, social equity, and economic opportunity, and highlights the role of strategic interventions in addressing socio-economic disparities. Particular attention is given to the significance of public transport for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially in accessing education, employment, and social engagement.

Chapter 3 examines the governance and funding landscape for transport initiatives, including GM's 2040 strategy. It investigates decision-making processes, policy formulation, and

governance challenges, situating these within relevant theoretical frameworks and assessing their practical implications for transport policy.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology, detailing the interpretivist approach, the rationale for adopting a case study methodology, and the qualitative data collection methods employed. It explains the justification for using narrative interviews and thematic analysis, emphasising the continuous reflexive process applied throughout data collection and interpretation.

Chapter 5 introduces the two cases analysed within the study: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. It provides detailed contextual analysis of each case, including the socio-economic background, existing transport challenges, and the justification for selecting these particular examples. Each case is clearly aligned with the overarching research objectives.

Chapter 6 presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the two cases, identifying key similarities and differences. It critically examines how each intervention addresses issues such as mobility, affordability, regional connectivity, and social equity. The chapter also discusses the respective strengths and limitations of each intervention within GM's broader transport policy framework.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings and explicitly addressing the research objectives. It outlines the thesis's contributions to knowledge, acknowledges limitations, and offers recommendations for policymakers and transport providers. It also proposes directions for future research. Finally, the chapter critically evaluates the implications of governance and funding decisions in GM, particularly in relation to their impact on local communities.

The structure of the thesis aligns systematically with the research objectives: Chapters 2 and 3 address the theoretical and governance contexts (Objectives 1 and 3); Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach (Objective 2); Chapters 5 and 6 present empirical findings and comparative analysis across all objectives; and Chapter 7 evaluates the effectiveness of the interventions in achieving GM's transport and social policy goals (Objective 4).

<center>**CHAPTER TWO**</center>

<center>**LITERATURE REVIEW**</center>

2. Introduction

This chapter critically reviews key themes that underpin the theoretical and contextual foundations for examining the selected transport interventions in GM (Barnes et al., 2024). It situates the analysis of the two chosen cases—Our Pass (financial intervention) and the Trafford Park Extension Line (infrastructural intervention)—within broader academic debates on transport policy, governance, and equity (Fleuret, 2024). The literature review directly addresses Research Objectives 1, 2, and 3 by examining social exclusion, stakeholder interpretations, and socio-economic outcomes, respectively.

The chapter first explores the relationship between transport policy, social inclusion, and accessibility, examining the uneven impacts on marginalised groups such as low-income households, rural communities, and young people. This aligns explicitly with Objective 1, which focuses on evaluating the implications of transport interventions for youth mobility and accessibility. It then considers public transport's role in urban regeneration, economic productivity, and labour market access, informing Objective 3 regarding the socio-economic outcomes of transport interventions.

Subsequently, the chapter critically evaluates collaborative governance frameworks and the political economy influencing transport policy, aligning closely with Objective 2, which investigates stakeholder interpretations and governance dynamics affecting policy effectiveness. Global case provides comparative insights into the environmental and social equity dimensions of transport interventions, further contextualising GM's transport policy landscape.

Key literature was sourced from interdisciplinary databases including Web of Science, JSTOR, SSRN, and Google Scholar, alongside grey literature published by public agencies and regional authorities. Government reports, strategic plans, and third-sector publications were also reviewed to contextualise GM's specific transport policies and strategic priorities. The evaluative claims within these sources are critically assessed and contextualised further

in subsequent empirical chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), ensuring coherence and clear linkage between theoretical foundations and empirical analysis.

By integrating literature across social inclusion, economic productivity, sustainability, and governance, this chapter identifies critical research gaps related to equity, institutional frameworks, and regional competitiveness. The review positions this thesis as addressing these gaps through an innovative comparative analysis of financial and infrastructural interventions within a single devolved city-region, thereby contributing original insights to ongoing scholarly and policy debates.

2.1 Social Inclusion and Accessibility
2.1.1 Social Exclusion: Concept and Relevance in Transport Policy

Social exclusion is central to discussions of deprivation and inequality, particularly in relation to access to resources and opportunities (Berman, 1996; Kamruzzaman et al., 2016). The term, first introduced by the French government in the 1970s, refers to the systematic marginalisation of individuals or groups from full participation in society (Harvey, 1994). This concept aligns with Durkheim's (1893/1964) theories on collective integration, which highlight how societal structures can either enable inclusion or reinforce exclusion (DiCristina, 2016). These theoretical insights continue to underpin contemporary inclusion policies.

Levitas (1998) provides a detailed framework consisting of three discourses—Redistributionist (RED), Social Integrationist (SID), and Moral Underclass (MUD)—that explain the roots of social exclusion:

- **RED** focuses on economic deprivation as the primary cause of exclusion. Townsend's (1979) concept of relative poverty closely aligns with this view, advocating welfare interventions as essential for reducing exclusion. In the transport context, this perspective is reflected in subsidised fares or free travel schemes, such as GM's Our Pass, designed to improve mobility for economically disadvantaged groups.
- **SID** emphasises employment as a key pathway to inclusion. Scholars such as Beirens (2007) and Bhuller et al. (2017) stress the importance of social networks in supporting access to job opportunities and emotional wellbeing. However, this discourse often overlooks the instability and precarity associated with certain forms of employment,

which may perpetuate, rather than resolve, cycles of exclusion (Adamson and Roper, 2019; Yates and Leach, 2006).

- **MUD** linked to Murray's (1990) critique of welfare dependency, attributes exclusion to cultural and behavioural factors (Wilson, 1993). While focusing on individual agency, this approach has been widely criticised for stigmatising marginalised communities and ignoring the structural inequalities that underpin exclusion (Gans, 1995; Buck, 2001).

Although Levitas's discourses offer valuable insights into the nature of social exclusion, this thesis adopts an interpretivist approach, concentrating on the subjective experiences of individuals and the meanings they assign to transport interventions. While each discourse contributes important context, they often fail to capture the interconnectedness of exclusion, such as the overlap between economic, social, and cultural barriers. RED, for example, focuses heavily on financial factors but tends to overlook non-economic dimensions, while SID frequently neglects systemic issues such as discrimination and inadequate transport infrastructure. As a result, a more integrated framework—one that accounts for structural, economic, and cultural dimensions—is necessary for designing effective and inclusive transport policies (Morrissey, 2011).

2.1.2 Accessibility and Transport: A Barrier to Social Inclusion

Transport accessibility is essential for promoting social inclusion; however, inadequate systems disproportionately impact marginalised communities. Kamruzzaman et al. (2016) argue that accessibility challenges manifest in economic, spatial, and safety-related dimensions, which collectively intensify social exclusion. While the literature acknowledges these barriers, closer evaluation reveals the complexity and limitations of current strategies intended to address them.

Economic Barriers

High transport costs remain a major obstacle to inclusion, particularly for low-income households. Lucas et al. (2016) emphasise that unaffordable transport often compels individuals to forgo access to essential services, thereby reinforcing cycles of exclusion. For instance, low-income families commonly prioritise spending on housing and food, leaving insufficient resources for transport-related expenses.

Although government subsidies aim to improve affordability (Gwilliam, 2002), their effectiveness may be limited when benefits inadvertently extend to higher-income users, thereby undermining equity objectives. Curtis and Scheurer (2010) support this critique, noting that transport policies frequently favour wealthier urban residents, exacerbating disparities between urban cores and rural or peri-urban areas.

While subsidies present potential solutions (Metz, 2008), their success depends on accurate targeting and alignment with broader accessibility measures. The UK's concessionary fare schemes exemplify this challenge, as they frequently overlook rural populations and informal workers, both of whom face distinct transport barriers. Fixed-route services, commonly used in rural areas, lack the flexibility required to meet the diverse mobility needs of those in precarious employment (Pucher and Buehler, 2012).

As such, comprehensive policies must go beyond fare reductions to incorporate measures such as demand-responsive transport (DRT) and fare capping, thereby ensuring affordability across varied geographic and demographic contexts. Holistic strategies that integrate cost considerations with spatial planning remain essential for delivering inclusive and equitable transport solutions.

Spatial Barriers

Spatial mismatches between residential locations and economic hubs limit access to employment, education, and healthcare opportunities, thereby deepening social exclusion. Preston and Rajé (2007) highlight that poorly integrated transport networks disproportionately affect low-income households, particularly in rural or peri-urban areas where viable alternatives are limited. This "spatial mismatch" constrains upward mobility and entrenches poverty in economically disadvantaged regions.

Kamruzzaman and Hine (2012) further emphasise the geographic dimensions of exclusion, noting that households located far from public transport services face compounded disadvantages. Limited access to reliable and frequent transport options often forces reliance on costly or inefficient alternatives, restricting residents to local areas with fewer opportunities. They argue that this form of geographic isolation directly correlates with reduced educational and employment prospects, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational poverty.

Although spatial mismatches are well documented, policy responses often prioritise urban transport investment, neglecting the distinct challenges faced in rural and peri-urban settings. Large-scale investments, such as high-speed rail or urban transit enhancements, rarely extend to underserved regions, resulting in persistent gaps in regional connectivity. Moreover, infrastructure development tends to prioritise economic growth over equity, thereby disproportionately benefitting urban centres (Martens, 2017).

To address these imbalances, more equitable transport investment is required across both urban and rural areas. Applying transit-oriented development (TOD) principles to peri-urban contexts—alongside targeted rural mobility initiatives—could help bridge existing accessibility gaps (Bertolini et al., 2005). Additionally, integrated multi-modal networks that link buses, trams, and cycling infrastructure can further enhance connectivity across diverse geographic areas.

Safety Concerns

Safety is a critical, yet often underexamined, dimension of transport accessibility—particularly for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly. Ceccato (2017) highlights that perceived risks of harassment, theft, and violence significantly deter public transport use, especially during off-peak hours. For women in particular, concerns about safety strongly influence route choices and preferred transport modes, thereby limiting their mobility and participation in social and economic life (Dunckel-Graglia, 2013).

Newton and Ceccato (2015) advocate for the integration of safety considerations into transport planning, citing improved lighting, surveillance, and the presence of security personnel as ways to enhance user confidence. However, they also caution against overreliance on surveillance technologies, which may raise privacy concerns and fail to address root causes of insecurity. Community-based strategies—such as neighbourhood watch schemes and gender-sensitive urban design—offer more sustainable and inclusive solutions.

Safety concerns frequently intersect with economic and spatial barriers, further compounding social exclusion. For instance, the combination of unaffordable fares and unsafe transit conditions disproportionately affects low-income women, often forcing them to walk long distances and increasing their exposure to risk. Addressing these issues requires

comprehensive strategies that prioritise both physical safety and broader socio-economic vulnerabilities (Ceccato, 2015).

Inclusive approaches—such as gender-sensitive planning, women-only carriages, and effective harassment reporting mechanisms—must be embedded within broader accessibility improvements. These should include extended service hours, enhanced last-mile connectivity, and the integration of safety measures across the entire transport network (Ceccato, 2015).

Economic, spatial, and safety barriers are deeply interconnected; as such, integrated policy responses are essential. Currie et al. (2010) argue that fare subsidies alone cannot resolve accessibility challenges without accompanying infrastructure investment and improved network design. Likewise, addressing safety in isolation will have limited impact if economic and spatial inequities persist.

2.1.3 Cultural Differentiation and Policy Challenges in Social Inclusion

Transport-related exclusion extends beyond physical barriers, reflecting deeper cultural differentiation and systemic inequalities affecting access and mobility. These structural and cultural dimensions create persistent barriers to inclusion, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities and reinforcing spatial and social inequalities. While existing literature acknowledges these challenges, detailed analysis reveals limitations in current approaches and highlights opportunities for innovative inclusive mobility strategies.

Institutional and Cultural Biases in Transport Policies

Bauder (2002) argues that cultural differentiation plays a significant role in maintaining transport inequities, observing that employer and institutional biases often label certain neighbourhoods as less productive or unworthy of investment. Such perceptions influence transport policy decisions, typically prioritising affluent areas at the expense of underserved regions. Consequently, transit systems frequently serve economic hubs disproportionately, leaving peripheral and lower-income communities with inadequate public transport access, further entrenching economic and social marginalisation.

These biases are not always explicitly discriminatory; they often manifest subtly through zoning regulations and land-use policies that exclude affordable transport options in disadvantaged areas (Lucas, 2012). Hine and Grieco (2003) term these dynamics

"institutionalised exclusion," highlighting how systemic biases in policy planning marginalise populations who fall outside dominant socio-economic profiles.

Addressing these institutional and cultural biases requires fundamental shifts in governance approaches. Meaningful inclusion of marginalised groups—including low-income families, ethnic minorities, and informal workers—is essential for effective policymaking. Participatory approaches such as co-creation workshops, which engage directly with community stakeholders, can help identify specific mobility challenges. This approach ensures transport policies effectively reflect diverse community needs (Pereira, Schwanen and Banister, 2017).

Intersectionality in Transport Exclusion

Hine and Grieco (2003) provide a foundational framework for understanding the layered exclusion experienced by women, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities within transport systems. This exclusion arises from intersecting systemic barriers that often fail to adequately address the multifaceted nature of marginalisation.

Women frequently face significant safety issues in public-transport environments—such as harassment and poorly illuminated stops—which disproportionately limit their mobility and constrain access to education, employment, and social activities (Ceccato, 2017; Uteng, 2012). Societal expectations around caregiving exacerbate these challenges, as inflexible schedules often fail to accommodate women juggling family responsibilities, thus perpetuating gender disparities in transport mobility (Uteng, 2012).

For ethnic-minority communities, discriminatory practices—ranging from racial profiling to language barriers—persistently restrict access to reliable services. Ahmad and Tait (2018) show that many minority groups live in under-served neighbourhoods, reinforcing spatial inequalities; experiences of discrimination in waiting times and information provision further exacerbate their exclusion from employment and healthcare opportunities (Ahmad and Tait, 2018).

Individuals with disabilities continue to face systemic obstacles due to insufficiently accessible infrastructure. While ramps and designated seating represent progress, their impact is limited without reliable scheduling, audio-visual announcements, and staff trained in

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disability awareness (Imrie, 2012). Moreover, accessibility improvements often prioritise physical impairments—overlooking cognitive or sensory needs—and thus exclude a significant portion of disabled users (Lucas, 2012).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality illustrates how overlapping identities (e.g. gender, race, disability) produce unique, intensified experiences of exclusion. In transport, one-size-fits-all policies can—ironically—amplify inequalities. A ramp may aid wheelchair users but do nothing for a low-income mother facing both safety risks and affordability constraints; anti-discrimination training may benefit ethnic minorities but still leave elderly disabled passengers underserved.

Intersectional analysis also reveals how policy and investment decisions can widen disparities: prioritising affluent corridors often deepens exclusion in peripheral areas, and systems designed without consideration for caregiving schedules further disadvantage women (Sweet and Kanaroglou, 2016). Addressing these overlapping barriers demands a shift toward truly inclusive governance and policy development—one that centres the lived realities of marginalised groups to create transport systems that are equitable, sustainable, and responsive to diverse needs.

Post-Materialist Challenges and Green Mobility

The shift toward transport policies that prioritise environmental sustainability—such as promoting cycling and electric vehicles—reflects emerging post-materialist values focused on conservation and reduced material consumption (Booth, 2021). These initiatives typically aim to lower carbon emissions, enhance air quality, and improve urban living conditions. However, they often prioritise technological innovation and infrastructure upgrades in ways that unintentionally marginalise vulnerable populations. For example, cycling infrastructure schemes frequently serve urban, middle-class users, neglecting the distinct mobility needs of lower-income and rural communities (Pucher and Buehler, 2012).

Jordaan and Dima (2019) warn that green-mobility initiatives can exacerbate economic exclusion if they are not paired with equity measures. Policies such as tax rebates for electric vehicle purchases or substantial investment in cycle lanes tend to benefit wealthier households that can more easily adopt these technologies. In contrast, low-income families reliant on ageing, underfunded public-transport systems face further mobility constraints. As

a result, well-intentioned green-mobility programmes may deepen existing transport inequities rather than alleviate them.

Incentive schemes for electric-vehicle uptake predominantly favour affluent households that can afford both the vehicle and the associated charging infrastructure. Meanwhile, low-income neighbourhoods often lack convenient access to charging points and remain priced out by high upfront costs. Similarly, investments in high-profile cycling projects can trigger gentrification, driving up property values and displacing long-term, low-income residents (Stehlin, 2019).

Smith et al. (2019) demonstrate that bike-sharing schemes can reduce car dependency—particularly in cities with established cycling cultures—but they also observe that such schemes serve primarily higher-income users and do little to address structural accessibility challenges in fragmented or under-resourced regions. Martens (2017) frames this tension through the concept of "transport justice," arguing that sustainability initiatives must foreground equity to ensure that transitions to greener mobility do not come at the expense of marginalised groups. In this view, policy design should distribute resources in ways that guarantee equal access to sustainable transport for residents in underserved areas.

A genuinely sustainable mobility transition therefore requires integrated strategies that combine environmental objectives with socio-economic equity. This entails not only investing in low-carbon technologies and infrastructure but also implementing measures—such as targeted subsidies, community-driven planning, and inclusive service provision—that ensure the benefits of green mobility are accessible to all segments of the population (Martens, 2017). Two such strategies are discussed below.

1. Targeted Fare Subsidies.

Investment in electric buses, combined with targeted fare subsidies, is crucial to ensure that sustainable transport options remain affordable and accessible for low-income users (Lucas, 2012). Lucas (2012) demonstrates that deploying electric buses in underserved communities can both reduce emissions and enhance mobility among marginalised groups. Such interventions therefore advance environmental goals while promoting social inclusion. However, subsidy programmes must be designed carefully to prevent benefit leakage to

higher-income users (Gwilliam, 2002). Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks are essential to guarantee that subsidies effectively reach their intended beneficiaries.

2. Shared Mobility Solutions and Inclusive Infrastructure Design.

Expanding cycling infrastructure in low-income neighbourhoods, alongside free or subsidised bike-sharing schemes, can significantly enhance mobility and accessibility for disadvantaged communities. According to Stehlin (2019), such infrastructure improvements must incorporate anti-displacement strategies—such as community ownership or management of shared mobility services—to mitigate the risk of gentrification. In the absence of these protective measures, cycling developments may inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities by displacing original residents. Moreover, cycling facilities should be strategically designed and sited to connect underserved neighbourhoods with key urban centres, thereby substantially improving accessibility and inclusive mobility (Pucher and Buehler, 2012).

Structural Transformation Through Participation

Achieving equity in transport policy necessitates fundamental shifts in governance strategies, emphasising participatory approaches to address structural and cultural biases. **The** conventional top-down transport planning, which often consolidates power among policymakers and excludes marginalised communities, has faced criticism for perpetuating systemic inequalities (Lucas, 2012). In contrast, participatory governance underscores inclusivity by incorporating the lived experiences of marginalised groups into policy development and implementation (Pitidis et al., 2024). This approach recognises that individuals directly affected by transport inequities are best positioned to articulate their needs and propose relevant solutions (Linovski and Baker, 2023).

The top-down governance frameworks often yield policies that are ill-equipped to address the specific challenges faced by marginalised populations. The transport policies designed without stakeholder engagement frequently prioritise economically vibrant centres, neglecting underserved neighbourhoods. Such approaches reinforce spatial exclusion and limit residents' access to employment, education, and healthcare (Hine and Grieco, 2003). Additionally, policies developed without meaningful community involvement commonly fail to account for intersectional barriers, including the compounded effects of poverty, disability, and ethnic discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

Participatory governance seeks to overcome these limitations by embedding inclusivity and accountability into the decision-making processes. This method prioritises collaboration between policymakers, community representatives, and stakeholders, ensuring that diverse perspectives inform policy frameworks. Pereira et al. (2017) argue that participatory approaches enhance both the fairness and the effectiveness of transport policies, aligning interventions more closely with community needs and priorities.

Illustrative Example

The MetroCable system in Medellín, Colombia, illustrates the benefits of participatory planning in addressing transport-related exclusion. The system was implemented to connect marginalised informal settlements with the city centre, significantly reducing travel times and improving access to essential services such as employment and education. A key factor in its success was the active involvement of local residents in project planning and implementation. Community members took part in consultations, focus groups and co-design workshops, enabling them to articulate their concerns and directly influence the system's design (Brand and Dávila, 2011).

This participatory approach addressed both cultural and structural dimensions of exclusion, in line with literature on participation's potential to tackle systemic inequalities. Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation emphasises how meaningful engagement fosters empowerment and trust within marginalised communities, enabling residents to shape decisions that affect their lives. By involving residents directly, planners generated a sense of ownership and reduced resistance, contributing to the project's long-term sustainability (Brand and Dávila, 2011).

Incorporating marginalised voices also reflects Lucas's (2012) argument that any effective response to local mobility challenges—such as affordability and accessible infrastructure—must draw on the experiences of those who face these issues daily. Martens's (2017) notion of transport justice similarly calls for prioritising underserved populations in policy design. The MetroCable project successfully integrated these perspectives, ensuring the system addressed users lived social and economic realities and thereby enhancing its impact and durability.

Fung (2006) contends that participation improves democratic legitimacy and practical effectiveness by bringing diverse community insights into decision making. Irazábal and Neville (2007) highlight inclusive urban planning's role in tackling structural inequities through co-designed infrastructure. Rydin and Pennington (2000) observe that collaborative planning builds social capital and trust—essential ingredients for sustainability—and Forester (1999) argues that genuine community engagement aligns policy outcomes with real-world needs. Comparable experiences in Curitiba, Brazil (Rabinovitch and Leitman, 1996), and Bogotá, Colombia (Cervero, 2005), further demonstrate how inclusive frameworks enhance both legitimacy and resilience.

However, participation also faces challenges, including institutional resistance, power imbalances and resource constraints (Pereira et al., 2017). Community representatives may lack the technical knowledge or resources to engage meaningfully, risking superficial rather than genuine involvement. The effectiveness of participatory mechanisms depends on policymakers' willingness to share control and value community contributions. Without robust institutional support, participation can become merely symbolic, failing to deliver substantive change. Addressing these issues requires capacity-building initiatives to empower marginalised groups, coupled with structural reforms to integrate participatory practices into governance frameworks (Malemane and Nel-Sanders, 2021).

Given these considerations, the existing literature consistently identifies participation as a transformative strategy for creating equitable transport systems. By promoting inclusivity and accountability, participatory mechanisms can challenge cultural and structural biases, enabling transport policies to function as instruments of social and economic inclusion. Governments that adopt participatory planning are better placed to develop transport systems responsive to diverse needs, thereby promoting equity, sustainability and social cohesion.

Cultural and structural dimensions of exclusion intertwine to create persistent mobility barriers. Although scholars clearly identify key challenges—such as institutional biases, intersectional exclusion and tensions inherent in post-materialist policy shifts—they also highlight opportunities for meaningful change. Effectively addressing these barriers demands a paradigm shift in transport governance, emphasising participation, intersectionality and the embedding of equity within sustainability objectives. Future research should explore innovative governance models further, assessing their real-world impacts on marginalised

communities to ensure that transport policies effectively support social and economic inclusion.

2.1.4 Social Exclusion and Policy Interventions

Transport policies have significant potential to mitigate social exclusion. However, their effectiveness depends on comprehensive, context-sensitive strategies that balance the social and economic objectives of transport systems. This section critically evaluates the impacts of policy interventions on transport-related exclusion, highlighting the limitations that may undermine their success.

The Importance of Transport Policies in Fostering Social Inclusion

The Social Exclusion Unit's 2003 report highlights the critical role of transport in facilitating access to essential services—such as employment, education and healthcare—particularly for marginalised groups. Effective transport policies enhance mobility, contribute to reductions in social inequalities and foster broader inclusion. The Transport and Inequality Report (2019) likewise stresses the importance of aligning transport policy with wider socio-economic objectives to promote regional equity by reducing mobility disparities.

The Scottish Government's Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme exemplifies the effective integration of transport and education policies aimed at addressing systemic inequalities. By removing financial barriers, the scheme significantly improves educational access for lower-income students, as Jones and Taylor (2018) demonstrate. Its primary strength lies in directly alleviating the economic constraints that restrict mobility for disadvantaged young people. Evidence indicates that such initiatives increase participation in higher education by reducing travel costs, thereby promoting social equity and mobility. Moreover, focusing on younger cohorts recognises that mobility during adolescence shapes long-term educational and employment trajectories, marking a progressive response to transport-related inequities.

Despite its universal subsidy, the scheme's impact varies according to geographic context, existing transport infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. Students in urban areas—with more developed transport networks—are likely to benefit more than their rural counterparts, potentially reinforcing existing disparities. In addition, concentrating exclusively on young people overlooks other vulnerable groups—such as adult learners or those re-entering education—who face comparable economic and mobility barriers.

Broadening the scheme's scope could secure more equitable outcomes across diverse populations.

Transport policies frequently favour urban centres at the expense of rural and peri-urban regions, where exclusion remains pronounced. Farrington and Farrington (2005) argue that inadequate rural transport infrastructure exacerbates spatial mismatches between residences and job opportunities, disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalised communities. Lovelace et al. (2014) further note that rural residents endure increased travel times and higher commuting costs, limiting their ability to access employment, education and healthcare. These conditions reinforce cycles of poverty and exclusion by restricting marginalised groups' access to essential services (Nutley, 2003). Lucas et al. (2019) attribute such disparities to planning biases that prioritise urban connectivity for perceived economic returns, leaving rural areas comparatively disconnected.

To address these gaps, transport policies must embed principles of transport justice (Martens, 2017), advocating equity in planning decisions. Currie and Delbosc (2011) recommend multimodal integration tailored to rural needs to bridge spatial and socio-economic divides. Active community engagement, as emphasised by Pereira et al. (2017), ensures that rural stakeholders meaningfully influence transport planning. Targeted measures—such as demand-responsive services and fare assistance schemes for low-income households—can also help close accessibility gaps (Mulley and Nelson, 2009). A comprehensive, inclusive policy framework of this kind is essential to reduce exclusion and foster social integration and regional development in rural and peri-urban contexts.

Obstacles to Successful Policy Execution

A key challenge in achieving inclusive transport outcomes is the prioritisation of economic efficiency over social equity. Martens (2017) critiques this emphasis, noting that transport policies frequently rely on cost–benefit analyses that undervalue social returns, such as improved quality of life and reduced social exclusion. This approach tends to direct funding towards projects that benefit affluent, densely populated areas while neglecting disadvantaged communities.

Another significant barrier is the limited participation of marginalised communities in policy development. Osborne (2010) advocates participatory models that actively include under-

served populations in planning processes, ensuring that transport interventions reflect their lived experiences and address specific local mobility needs. Participatory mechanisms, such as workshops and citizen advisory boards, can identify barriers such as unaffordable fares or inaccessible infrastructure, thereby enabling more targeted interventions (Pereira et al., 2017).

Finding Harmony Between Immediate and Future Approaches

Achieving harmony between immediate infrastructure improvements and long-term strategies is essential for effective transport policy. Gobillon et al. (2007) highlight the interconnectedness of transport, education and employment, suggesting that policies should seek synergies across these domains to improve overall effectiveness. Integrated approaches that combine transport enhancements with vocational training and affordable housing initiatives address the root causes of exclusion rather than merely alleviating its symptoms (Smith and Clarke, 2020).

Moreover, sustained funding and institutional commitment are vital for the long-term success of transport policies. Lucas (2012) emphasises the integration of transport equity within broader governance frameworks to ensure that interventions remain effective and adaptable as community needs evolve. Although transport policies can significantly reduce social exclusion, their success depends on addressing critical gaps in equity, governance and sustainability. By adopting participatory models, prioritising under-served regions and integrating transport with wider social policies, policymakers can develop truly inclusive and equitable transport systems.

2.1.5 Section Summary

The insights outlined in this section establish a theoretical basis for exploring the social impacts of transport interventions in GM. The discussion of inclusive and equity-focused strategies aligns directly with the objectives of the thesis in identifying transport policies that reduce disparities, enhance social mobility and support sustainable economic and social development.

The theoretical framework offers a critical lens for analysing primary data, enabling assessment of whether the observed interventions effectively address exclusion and advance the broader aim of promoting inclusive mobility solutions. By integrating these insights, the research is positioned to propose practical recommendations that link policy intentions with

tangible social outcomes. The following section shifts focus to economic impacts, examining literature on how infrastructure investments and improved accessibility influence regional development, employment and economic growth.

2.2 Public Transport and Economic Productivity

The relationship between public transport infrastructure and economic productivity centres on two key elements: agglomeration economies, which enhance efficiency among workers and firms, and robust transportation networks that directly support these economies (Lee, 2021; Turok and McGranahan, 2013). Transport plays a particularly important role in urban contexts, where close spatial proximity intensifies economic interactions and generates regional economic advantages.

2.2.1 Agglomeration Economies: The Theoretical Foundation

Agglomeration economies describe productivity gains resulting from the spatial clustering of businesses and individuals, providing a theoretical framework for understanding the economic impacts of transport interventions (Capello and Nijkamp, 2019). In urban settings, these economies enable greater output efficiency than in less concentrated areas by facilitating resource sharing, efficient labour matching and knowledge spillovers (Giuliano et al., 2019; Hörcher et al., 2020). The public transport infrastructure is central to these mechanisms, as it improves connectivity and accessibility.

Sharing mechanisms: Public transport infrastructure helps to reduce fixed operational costs by enabling businesses and industries to share resources more efficiently, thereby generating productivity-enhancing externalities (Eberts and McMillen, 1999; Ellison et al., 2007). Improved services strengthen these effects by increasing network density and broadening access to larger markets (Chen et al., 2019; Felbermayr and Tarasov, 2022). Such enhanced connectivity supports the densification of economic hubs, reinforcing spatial conditions favourable to agglomeration economies (Canales et al., 2019; Pathak et al., 2017).

Matching mechanisms: Public transport improves labour-market efficiency by enhancing accessibility for job seekers and reducing the costs associated with job searches (Chatman and Noland, 2011). Studies show that higher-density urban areas with effective transport networks achieve superior employment-matching outcomes, particularly for skilled workers (Abel et al., 2012). Elasticity analyses by the UK Department for Transport (2010) and Evers

et al. (2005) further confirm that better commuting options increase workforce participation, especially among women.

Learning mechanisms: Knowledge spillovers—the exchange of ideas and expertise among businesses and individuals—are enhanced by public transport's role in centralising commercial activities and promoting informal interactions (Audretsch and Feldman, 1996; Collier et al., 2018). These interactions facilitate innovation and productivity growth, underscoring the critical role of public transport in supporting urban economic vitality.

Empirical Evidence of Economic Impacts

Numerous studies link public transport investments to economic outcomes, illustrating the specific mechanisms through which these impacts occur (Bao et al., 2020; Chatman and Noland, 2011; Graham, 2007; Rice et al., 2006; Shefer and Aviram, 2005). As noted below:

- Infrastructure development: Research in the UK and Hong Kong demonstrates that transport improvements decrease travel times, enhance property values and stimulate market activity in adjacent areas (Bao et al., 2020; Graham, 2007). These findings indicate that improved transport accessibility delivers measurable, long-term economic benefits.
- Sectoral variability: Shefer and Aviram (2005) quantify economic returns from Tel Aviv's Light Rail Transit system, attributing 22 per cent of observed benefits to agglomeration effects. Rice et al. (2006) likewise show significant productivity gains within an approximately 80-minute travel radius of urban centres.
- Urban planning strategies: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) principles—emphasising dense, mixed-use configurations—usually improve accessibility and reduce car dependency. However, Renne (2008) warns that poor implementation can result in Transit-Adjacent Development (TAD), which fails to capitalise on transit proximity and limits expected economic and accessibility gains.

Public Transport, Education, and Economic Output

Public transport networks play a crucial role in improving educational access, thereby contributing to the development of human capital and long-term economic productivity. Well-functioning education systems underpin regional economic growth by equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge required for productive participation in the labour

market (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). This section examines how investment in public transport can facilitate enhanced educational opportunities, taking into account broader economic implications through the perspectives of human capital theory and regional competitiveness.

Transport as an Enabler of Educational Access

Titheridge et al. (2014) highlight how economically disadvantaged students rely heavily on affordable, reliable public transport to access higher education and vocational training. Their findings demonstrate that inadequate transport services disproportionately affect students from lower-income backgrounds, restricting their participation in academic and extracurricular activities essential for holistic development. Public Health England (2014) reinforces this perspective by identifying transport-related financial barriers as significant obstacles to young people's participation in further education and training. These insights indicate that transport access extends beyond logistical concerns and fundamentally shapes equitable educational opportunities.

Initiatives such as discounted travel schemes have proven effective in addressing barriers to educational access. For example, the Scottish Government's Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme provides free bus travel for those under the age of 22, improving access to educational institutions and training programmes nationwide (Transport Scotland, 2022). Initial evaluations suggest that this scheme has positively influenced educational engagement and reduced travel-related financial pressures on lower-income families. Abrantes and Wardman (2011) emphasise the broader societal benefits of bus services, arguing that public investment in transport infrastructure enhances educational access and supports the development of a skilled and flexible workforce. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on their coherence with wider policy frameworks, including regional education planning and equitable urban development, to ensure they meaningfully address systemic inequalities.

Long-Term Economic Productivity and Human Capital

Human capital theory emphasises the economic importance of education and positions transport infrastructure as a crucial factor in promoting long-term productivity. Becker (1993) argues that investment in education yields substantial returns by enhancing individual productivity and fostering innovation. Public transport systems support these investments by

reducing spatial barriers and ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities. Matas et al. (2010) illustrate this relationship, showing that enhanced transport accessibility in metropolitan areas such as Madrid and Barcelona have increased female participation in higher education, thereby contributing to the development of a skilled workforce essential for regional economic growth.

The regional economic benefits of transport-enabled educational access extend beyond individual gains. Ozturk (2008) demonstrates that regions with higher educational attainment typically achieve stronger economic performance due to a more skilled and adaptable workforce. Public transport infrastructure—particularly networks that effectively link residential and educational areas in low-income or peri-urban communities—is critical to realising these benefits. Evidence from Brown et al. (2021) in the United States shows that subsidised transport schemes not only improve educational access but also enhance long-term economic resilience. Such schemes underline that equitable transport policies are not merely social imperatives but represent strategic economic investments.

Equity Considerations and Regional Competitiveness

Despite the recognised benefits of transport-enabled education, inequities in transport accessibility persist, undermining regional competitiveness and perpetuating educational disparities. Lucas et al. (2019) critique the urban-centric focus of many transport investments, noting that rural and peri-urban areas—where educational institutions are less accessible—often remain neglected. In these regions, unreliable or costly transport options create substantial barriers for students, reinforcing cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Pereira et al. (2017) argue that addressing these inequities requires integrated policies that combine transport planning with education and housing strategies to produce cohesive and inclusive solutions.

The relationship between educational access and regional competitiveness further emphasises the importance of equitable transport systems. Florida (2002) observes that regions with higher concentrations of human capital are better positioned to attract investment and stimulate innovation, particularly in knowledge-based sectors. However, as Curl et al. (2017) caution, neglecting reliable and affordable transport for underserved communities' risks isolating parts of the population from these economic opportunities and ultimately restricting regional growth. Policies that prioritise the expansion and integration of transport networks in

underserved areas are therefore essential for developing a skilled workforce and supporting sustainable economic growth (Cervero and Kockelman, 1997). In this context, public transport systems can play a transformative role in bridging educational gaps and enhancing regional development.

Theoretical Innovations: TAP and Growth Pole Theory

Emerging frameworks such as the TAP model offer multidimensional approaches to addressing economic and social accessibility by integrating physical mobility, geographical proximity and digital connectivity (Lyons and Davidson, 2016). The TAP framework acknowledges that conventional transport planning often isolates mobility from land-use and technological considerations, limiting the capacity to promote comprehensive accessibility. Its integrated approach aligns with objectives for sustainable economic growth and highlights the importance of inter-agency collaboration. The framework encourages the combination of public transport services with digital tools—such as real-time service updates and teleworking options—to reduce dependency on physical commuting. Such integration is particularly relevant to initiatives such as Greater Manchester's Net Zero commitment, which seeks to combine low-carbon transport with improved economic opportunities (Lyons and Davidson, 2016; Guo et al., 2020).

Stead (2011) notes that effective implementation of the TAP framework requires substantial institutional coordination, which can prove challenging in regions characterised by fragmented governance. Lyons and Davidson (2016) similarly emphasise the need for inter-agency collaboration to integrate physical mobility, proximity and digital solutions effectively. Hull (2008) observes that fragmented governance often results in transport policies that fail to align with broader socio-economic objectives. According to Guo et al. (2020), different agencies frequently prioritise their own mandates—such as economic development, environmental protection or urban planning—in isolation, thereby undermining the integrated potential of the TAP framework. Banister (2008) adds that institutional inertia can hinder the adoption of innovative planning frameworks, as established practices and interests resist systemic change.

The Growth Pole Theory (Darwent, 1969) complements the TAP framework by highlighting the strategic importance of transport investments in driving regional economic activity. This theory posits that targeted infrastructure investments in high-potential areas stimulate

economic growth, generating spillover effects that benefit surrounding regions. Such principles underpin strategies such as transit-oriented development (TOD), which promotes compact, mixed-use urban development around transit hubs to enhance accessibility and economic vitality (Renne, 2008). High-capacity transit investments can concentrate economic activity in specific areas, fostering clustering effects and boosting productivity (Collier et al., 2018).

Smith and Clarke's (2020) analysis of TOD implementation in London illustrates its role in integrating affordable housing with transport infrastructure to tackle urban accessibility challenges. Their study shows that strategically positioning affordable housing near transit hubs improves access to employment, education and healthcare for low-income populations, thus promoting social mobility and economic inclusion. By examining policies such as London's Affordable Housing Programme and the strategic priorities of the Greater London Authority, the authors underscore the importance of aligning transport and housing policies to achieve comprehensive urban development goals. They also highlight environmental benefits such as reduced car dependency and lower greenhouse-gas emissions, which align with broader sustainability objectives.

However, Smith and Clarke's study primarily addresses London's inner boroughs, where transit-oriented development has been most successful, offering limited insights into challenges faced by outer boroughs and suburban areas characterised by lower densities and fragmented infrastructure. The analysis also does not fully consider potential negative consequences such as gentrification-induced displacement of low-income residents, despite improved transport access. These limitations suggest that further research is necessary to explore equitable TOD implementation across diverse urban contexts. Cities such as Manchester, which seek enhanced regional connectivity and affordable housing integration, may adapt London's approaches to their local governance structures and demographic profiles. Addressing land-use planning, community engagement and funding mechanisms would help refine TOD as a strategy for inclusive and sustainable urban development. Critics also caution that TOD strategies may lead to unintended outcomes, including increased property values and displacement of lower-income residents (Stehlin, 2019).

A critical evaluation reveals that although the TAP framework and Growth Pole Theory advocate coordinated planning, their practical applications require careful consideration of

equity and inclusivity. The focus on digital connectivity within the TAP framework may unintentionally exclude marginalised groups that lack reliable access to technology, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities (Harding, 2021). Similarly, the emphasis on investment in high-potential areas under Growth Pole Theory may divert resources away from disadvantaged regions, widening spatial disparities (Guastella and Timpano, 2015). These observations underscore the importance of balancing economic efficiency with social equity. Transport policies oriented solely towards growth without addressing exclusion risk failing to achieve sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Equity and Economic Disparities

Transport policies have a significant influence on regional economic dynamics (Pokharel et al., 2023). In the GM context, the role of transport policies in mitigating—or exacerbating—regional economic disparities align closely with broader UK debates on "levelling up" and regional equity. This section critically examines the impacts of transport interventions on economic equity, drawing on the relevant literature and the specific socio-economic conditions in GM.

Transport Policies and Regional Inequalities

Transport investments often mirror existing economic inequalities, reinforcing patterns of regional disparity (McCann, 2019). Research indicates that urban centres typically receive a disproportionate share of transport funding, reflecting higher population densities and greater economic productivity (Banister and Berechman, 2000; Farrington and Farrington, 2005; Lucas et al., 2019). In GM, the concentration of resources in central areas—such as Manchester city centre—risks widening economic divides by limiting the connectivity of peripheral and rural regions and restricting their access to essential services (Farrington and Farrington, 2005).

The UK government's "levelling up" agenda aims to reduce disparities between economically prosperous and less-developed regions (O'Shea, 2024). Although interventions such as the Trafford Park Extension Line seek to enhance connectivity to key economic sites, a critical assessment is necessary to determine their capacity to deliver genuinely equitable outcomes. Tomaney and Pike (2020) maintain that effective transport initiatives must align with broader policies addressing structural inequalities—such as improvements in education, skills training and housing provision—to achieve meaningful impact.

Opportunities for Mitigating Disparities

Despite existing challenges, transport policies can effectively address regional inequities if equity considerations are embedded in their design and implementation:

1. Targeted Investments in Underserved Areas**:** Applying transit-oriented development (TOD) approaches to peripheral and underserved communities can help bridge connectivity gaps. Enhanced bus and tram networks linking outer boroughs with central Manchester, for example, could improve local economic conditions by increasing access to employment and education opportunities (Banister and Berechman, 2000).

2. Integrated Regional Strategies**:** Effective transport investments require integration with comprehensive regional development strategies. The GM Combined Authority's (GMCA) efforts to link transport plans with housing, skills, and broader economic policies reflect this integrated approach, which can help reduce socio-economic inequalities more effectively (Shutt and Liddle, 2019).

3. Participation Planning for Inclusive Policies**:** Actively involving marginalised communities in transport planning helps ensure policies respond to genuine local needs. Pereira et al. (2017) advocate mechanisms like citizen advisory boards, which enable underrepresented groups to identify and prioritise transport challenges specific to their communities.

Critical Analysis of the "Levelling Up" Agenda

The UK government's levelling up policy framework emphasises the reduction of regional inequalities through coordinated investment and positions transport connectivity as a critical component. However, McCann (2019) warns that the levelling up agenda risks becoming rhetorical without adequate resources or sufficient localised input. In GM, transport initiatives should align closely with strategies such as skills development and digital infrastructure improvements to deliver tangible, equitable outcomes.

Critics of the levelling up policy note its limited ability to address deep-rooted structural inequalities beyond transport connectivity. Overman and Gibbons (2011) argue that improved transport alone is insufficient; comprehensive approaches must include measures that address broader socio-economic factors—including education and healthcare access — to mitigate inequalities effectively.

Poorly targeted transport investments can also exacerbate disparities by disproportionately benefiting already affluent areas. Tomaney and Pike (2020) describe this risk as a potential "Matthew effect," whereby infrastructure investments yield greater benefits for prosperous regions and further marginalise disadvantaged communities. In GM this underscores the importance of explicitly designing transport interventions to support historically underserved communities. In the absence of targeted policies—such as subsidised fares for lower-income groups or enhanced service provision in economically deprived areas—transport initiatives risk worsening rather than alleviating regional inequalities (Charnavalau et al., 2022). Consequently, effective levelling up requires an integrated approach that aligns transport connectivity with systemic interventions across education, healthcare, housing and economic policy to deliver sustainable, inclusive outcomes.

2.2.2 Lessons from Global and Regional Best Practices

Transport systems play a critical role in shaping economic development and promoting social equity, although their effectiveness can differ markedly between regions. A comparative review of best practices demonstrates how transport interventions can reduce disparities and enhance regional competitiveness, underscoring the need to address accessibility barriers in tandem with infrastructure investment.

Greater Manchester and the UK Regional Context

Transport policies in GM, exemplified by initiatives such as the Metrolink expansion, reflect efforts to align transport provision with objectives of economic growth and social inclusion. Lucas et al. (2019) critically observe that transport funding across the UK disproportionately favours cities like London, driven by higher economic output and political influence. Unlike London—where substantial public and private investment enables large-scale projects such as Crossrail—GM's more limited fiscal autonomy constrains its capacity to deliver similarly ambitious transport initiatives (O'Brien and Pike, 2015).

Other UK regions illustrate diverse approaches to transport-led development. For instance, the West Midlands' 'Sprint' bus rapid transit network integrates high-capacity services with urban regeneration strategies, emphasising regional connectivity (West Midlands Combined Authority, 2020). Similarly, Transport for the North (TfN) prioritises inter-regional connectivity as a means of addressing economic disparities in northern England. However,

Tomaney and Pike (2020) highlight that fragmented governance structures often hinder coherent implementation, thereby undermining intended policy outcomes.

Lessons from Curitiba's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System

Curitiba's bus rapid transit (BRT) system is widely recognised as a leading example of integrating affordable transport with urban planning. The system prioritises low-cost mobility solutions that connect low-income communities to employment centres while reducing car dependency. Despite these successes, critics have identified challenges such as capacity constraints and uneven spatial coverage, which risk exacerbating inequalities as urban areas expand (Rabinovitch and Leitman, 1996).

The Curitiba case offers practical insights for GM, particularly in relation to affordability and accessibility. It highlights the importance of ensuring that transport investments serve underserved regions and align effectively with broader socio-economic strategies. The system's limitations also demonstrate the need to proactively address infrastructure capacity and ensure equitable service distribution.

Lessons from Hong Kong's Integrated Transit System

Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR) exemplifies how transport infrastructure can function as an economic driver through its 'rail plus property' model, whereby revenue from property developments subsidises transit operations (Cervero and Murakami, 2009). This approach promotes financial sustainability and facilitates network expansion, delivering substantial benefits to Hong Kong's densely populated and economically dynamic urban environment.

However, the MTR model is frequently criticised for prioritising profitability over affordability, with fare increases disproportionately affecting low-income residents (Yuen et al., 2020). For GM, addressing affordability concerns would necessitate targeted interventions—such as fare caps and subsidies—to mitigate the risk of rising transport poverty.

Policy Implications for Greater Manchester

Comparing Curitiba's BRT system and Hong Kong's MTR system offers valuable policy insights for GM. Curitiba demonstrates the effectiveness of affordability-focused strategies in

enhancing equitable mobility. Transport systems that prioritise low-income populations can improve access to employment and education, thereby promoting social inclusion (Rabinovitch and Leitman, 1996; Suzuki et al., 2013). In GM, applying similar principles would entail the implementation of affordable fare structures and the expansion of service coverage to underserved areas. According to Litman (2021), consistent investment in affordable and reliable public transport can help prevent marginalisation, particularly in regions with limited connectivity.

Hong Kong's MTR illustrates the potential of sustainable financing models, particularly those that integrate property development. GM could adopt comparable funding mechanisms to address fiscal constraints and encourage transport-linked urban growth. However, Yuen et al. (2020) warn that an excessive focus on profitability may compromise affordability, thereby exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. To mitigate this risk, GM should implement progressive fare structures, fare caps, and targeted subsidies to protect vulnerable commuters from transport poverty (Abrantes et al., 2011; Lucas, 2012; Estache and Wren-Lewis, 2009).

Addressing fragmented governance is also critical for effective policy implementation. Tomaney and Pike (2020) argue that fragmented governance frameworks in the UK often hinder integrated regional strategies, leading to unequal outcomes. In GM, regional bodies such as the GMCA and TfGM must develop cohesive approaches that align transport planning with broader socio-economic policies, including housing, education, and skills development (Shutt and Liddle, 2019). Participatory mechanisms—such as citizen advisory boards—can help integrate diverse community perspectives, ensuring that transport interventions meet the needs of marginalised groups and guard against elite capture (Pereira et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2020).

Sustained, long-term investment in transport infrastructure is essential for equitable economic development. McCann (2019) contends that uneven transport funding in the UK contributes to regional inequalities by disproportionately favouring economically dominant cities like London. For GM, advocating for sustainable funding mechanisms—such as devolved fiscal powers or carefully structured public-private partnerships (PPPs)—could support more equitable transport investment (O'Brien and Pike, 2015; Flyvbjerg et al., 2009). Nevertheless, PPPs require robust governance to ensure they do not unduly burden taxpayers or prioritise profit at the expense of social equity (Shaoul et al., 2006).

2.2.3 Interactions Between Transport and Labour Markets

The relationship between transport systems and labour market accessibility is critical to understanding how transport initiatives influence employment outcomes and economic participation. This section examines this relationship by analysing the effects of transport systems on workforce dynamics, commuting patterns, and access to labour markets. It also explores disparities in outcomes across different socio-economic groups, drawing on empirical research and theoretical perspectives.

Transport Systems and Labour Market Accessibility

Transport plays a key role in labour market participation by addressing spatial mismatches between residential areas and employment opportunities (Banister and Berechman, 2000; Lucas et al., 2019). Public transport provides vital access for individuals without private vehicles, offering affordable mobility solutions that enhance employment prospects (Pucher and Buehler, 2012; Farrington and Farrington, 2005). Examining the Paris Metropolitan Area, Korsu and Wenglenski (2010) found that limited public transport connectivity significantly restricts employment opportunities for low-skilled workers, reinforcing economic disadvantage and poverty. Similarly, Matas et al. (2010) highlight that limited public transport accessibility in cities such as Madrid and Barcelona reduce employment opportunities, particularly for low-skilled female workers.

Conversely, Smart and Klein (2015) argue that private vehicle ownership substantially improves employment prospects, especially in regions with inadequate public transport options. Their analysis of U.S. metropolitan areas demonstrates that car ownership reduces unemployment risk and broadens job accessibility for low-income individuals. However, they also caution that the economic burden of vehicle ownership can negate these advantages, particularly for economically disadvantaged households. This finding reinforces the importance of equitable and accessible public transport systems (Alam, 2009). Furthermore, Curl et al. (2017) point out that transport planning often prioritises urban centres, overlooking peri-urban and rural areas, thus perpetuating existing inequalities. Addressing these systemic inequities remains essential for inclusive labour market participation.

Influence of Transport Interventions on Commuting Patterns

Investment in transport infrastructure significantly affects commuting behaviours and labour market fluidity (Persyn et al., 2023). Enhanced connectivity can reduce commuting times,

expand job search areas, and encourage greater workforce participation. For instance, Kawabata and Shen (2007) found that improved public transport links to employment centres in Los Angeles facilitated better job matching and reduced unemployment durations. Similarly, Thakuriah and Metaxatos (2000) noted that welfare recipients in Chicago transitioned more effectively into employment when provided with improved public transit services. These findings support Graham and Gibbons' (2019) assertion that transport improvements help reduce spatial mismatches between workers and available jobs, thereby positively impacting economic productivity.

However, the benefits of these transport interventions are often unevenly distributed. High-capacity transit systems typically prioritise urban economic hubs, leaving peri-urban and rural populations underserved (Lucas et al., 2019; Farrington and Farrington, 2005). As Curl et al. (2017) observe, urban-focused planning can exacerbate employment access disparities and limit labour market participation among marginalised communities. Additionally, fixed-route transit services often fail to accommodate non-traditional work schedules, such as night shifts common in low-wage sectors (Cervero, 2005; Blumenberg and Pierce, 2016). Cairns et al. (2004) note that short-term measures alone cannot achieve lasting behavioural changes; instead, integrated reforms—including flexible and demand-responsive transport solutions— are necessary to accommodate diverse mobility needs and address long-term inequalities.

Economic and Social Impacts on Labour Market Dynamics

The economic impacts of transport investments extend beyond immediate job access, influencing broader labour market dynamics such as commuting patterns and job market fluidity. Chatman and Noland (2011) argue that integrated transport networks enhance labour market fluidity by reducing search costs and facilitating worker mobility between jobs. This increased mobility reduces frictions and improves workforce adaptability, particularly in regions characterised by diverse economic activities. Shen and Sanchez (2005) similarly suggest that improved transport accessibility can help address spatial mismatches, better connecting workers in peripheral areas with urban employment opportunities. These dynamics are particularly evident in urban contexts, where extensive transit systems typically support higher levels of labour market participation (Korsu and Wenglenski, 2010).

Despite these benefits, transport infrastructure developments can unintentionally exacerbate socio-economic disparities. Banister and Berechman (2000) caution that while improved

connectivity may stimulate economic activity, it can also drive gentrification and displacement, pushing lower-income workers further from employment centres. Blumenberg and Pierce (2016) similarly highlight that rising property values near transit routes often negatively affect economically marginalised groups, deepening existing inequalities. Moreover, reliance on fare-based public transport presents economic barriers to vulnerable populations, restricting their access to labour market opportunities (Estache and Wren-Lewis, 2009). To address these challenges, transport policies must incorporate equity measures, including targeted fare subsidies and investment in underserved areas, to ensure the broad distribution of economic benefits arising from transport improvements.

2.2.4   Public Transport and Employment

Public transport plays a central role in shaping employment opportunities, particularly for marginalised and low-income communities. By connecting residential areas to employment hubs, it can help reduce spatial mismatches and facilitate greater labour market access (Patacchini and Zenou, 2005). However, the relationship between transport and employment outcomes is complex, influenced by socio-economic factors, urban planning decisions, and structural inequalities.

Public Transport and Job Accessibility

Public transport addresses spatial barriers by linking residential neighbourhoods with employment centres, providing affordable and dependable commuting solutions. Such systems offer vital mobility for low-income and rural-urban populations, facilitating access to employment opportunities that might otherwise remain inaccessible (Bauchinger et al., 2021). Cervero and Tsai (2003) demonstrate the connection between proximity to well-connected transit systems and improved job accessibility, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Bastiaanssen et al. (2021) further highlight this relationship, noting that urban areas with comprehensive transport services generally experience higher employment rates, particularly when integrated with complementary policies such as vocational training.

Despite these advantages, disparities in public transport accessibility can exacerbate socio-economic inequalities. Curl et al. (2017) observe that low-income neighbourhoods often experience inadequate or inconsistent transit services, limiting job opportunities and perpetuating poverty cycles. The lack of reliable transport disproportionately affects individuals in low-wage or shift-based jobs, as their commuting times often fall outside

standard service hours. In rural areas, limited transport infrastructure and longer commute times significantly hinder access to employment, further exacerbating regional economic disparities (Lucas et al., 2019).

Accessibility extends beyond physical connectivity to encompass affordability and reliability. Fare-based transport systems often impose financial burdens on low-income commuters, reducing the net benefit of employment accessed via public transport (Estache and Wren-Lewis, 2009). Gwilliam (2002) critiques fare structures that inadequately account for economic disparities, recommending targeted subsidies or fare caps to mitigate transport poverty. Additionally, rural populations frequently face severe transport poverty due to lower service density and higher relative costs, further restricting access to employment and essential services (Abrantes et al., 2013). Addressing these challenges requires integrating infrastructure improvements with policies focused on affordability, service reliability, and equitable planning (Pereira et al., 2017). Demand-responsive transport solutions, such as flexible routes or on-demand services, offer viable options for rural and low-density areas, enhancing labour market connectivity (Mulley and Nelson, 2009).

Economic Trade-Offs: Affordability and Employment Outcomes

Affordability remains a significant barrier to employment facilitated by public transport, particularly in deregulated systems that impose disproportionate costs on low-income households (Estache and Wren-Lewis, 2009). In deregulated contexts, such as much of the UK outside London, private operators often prioritise profitability over affordability and comprehensive coverage (Blyth et al., 2015). This tendency frequently results in service gaps that disproportionately impact low-income and peri-urban residents, exacerbating spatial and economic inequalities (Lucas et al., 2019).

Subsidised transport schemes can help mitigate these economic barriers. For example, fare subsidy initiatives such as the "Low-Income Fare is Easy" (LIFE) programme in Los Angeles have successfully improved labour market access for economically disadvantaged commuters (Brown et al., 2021). However, subsidies alone may be insufficient unless paired with enhancements in service quality, frequency, and network coverage (Pereira et al., 2017). Without such complementary improvements, subsidised schemes risk reinforcing existing inequalities, as marginalised groups may continue to face challenges related to service reliability and accessibility (Butkus et al., 2023). Therefore, achieving equitable labour

market access requires a holistic approach that integrates affordability with spatial and operational improvements in transport systems.

Limitations and Equity Concerns

Despite its clear benefits, public transport alone does not resolve all employment challenges. Several studies (Cervero and Tsai, 2003; Curl et al., 2017; Sanchez, 2005; Smart and Klein, 2015) indicate that transport improvements have limited impacts on long-term job retention and career progression. While enhanced accessibility may shorten periods of unemployment, structural barriers such as labour market discrimination, employment precarity, and skills mismatches often persist independently of improved connectivity (Rogers et al., 1997; Smart and Klein, 2015). Moreover, transport-led gentrification can displace low-income workers from areas benefiting from enhanced connectivity, potentially undermining transport equity objectives (Stehlin, 2019).

Addressing these limitations requires integrating transport improvements with broader social and economic interventions. Policies should be designed to align enhanced transport connectivity with vocational training initiatives, affordable housing provision, and anti-displacement measures, thereby tackling underlying structural inequities and promoting inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

2.3 Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance is a dynamic framework that facilitates cooperative decision-making among diverse stakeholders—including public, private, and community actors—working towards shared objectives (Ansell and Gash, 2008). This approach has emerged as a vital mechanism for addressing the multifaceted challenges inherent in contemporary policymaking, particularly in areas such as transport infrastructure, where economic, social, and environmental priorities often intersect (Emerson et al., 2012). By fostering inclusive participation, collaborative governance enhances trust, accountability, and legitimacy, aligning stakeholder interests with broader public goals (Brand and Dávila, 2011; Ayres, 2019).

At its core, collaborative governance relies on iterative processes of deliberation, negotiation, and co-design to resolve conflicts and harmonise diverse perspectives (Bryson et al., 2006). These principles are especially pertinent in transport policy, where infrastructure projects

frequently affect multiple communities and require coordination across jurisdictional boundaries (Pereira et al., 2017). For example, the Medellín MetroCable project in Colombia demonstrates how collaborative governance can improve urban mobility while addressing social equity. By engaging marginalised communities in the planning process, the project not only enhanced physical connectivity but also fostered social inclusion and economic empowerment in informal settlements (Brand and Dávila, 2011).

Collaborative governance has increasingly been positioned as a mechanism for integrating equity considerations into transport projects. Stead (2011) emphasises that participatory models can mitigate the risks of exclusion by incorporating diverse voices, including those of marginalised groups, into decision-making processes. This ensures that policies address specific barriers—such as affordability, accessibility, or geographic isolation—rather than perpetuating systemic inequalities. Pereira et al. (2017) similarly argue that engaging stakeholders during the early stages of project design can identify potential challenges, such as high fare structures or inadequate service coverage, and proactively develop solutions to enhance inclusivity.

However, the implementation of collaborative governance faces significant barriers. Fragmented institutional structures, conflicting stakeholder priorities, and resource constraints can undermine coordination efforts and reduce the effectiveness of participatory models (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Tokenistic participation—where marginalised groups are consulted but excluded from substantive decision-making—poses another risk, potentially eroding trust and legitimacy (Cook et al., 2020). Overcoming these challenges requires sustained engagement, transparent processes, and the establishment of equitable accountability mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholders have meaningful influence (Brand and Dávila, 2011).

In practice, collaborative governance offers a pathway to reconcile economic efficiency with social equity in transport policy. By aligning stakeholder interests and incorporating participatory approaches, it enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions, contributing to inclusive and sustainable outcomes. For transport policymakers, adopting collaborative governance principles can help address structural inequities and build resilient partnerships capable of navigating complex policy environments.

2.4 Private Public Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are collaborative arrangements between public sector entities and private organisations aimed at financing, designing, implementing, and operating infrastructure projects or services (Grimsey and Lewis, 2004). PPPs have gained prominence as a means of addressing resource constraints within the public sector while leveraging private sector expertise and efficiency to achieve public policy objectives (Hodge and Greve, 2007). These partnerships are particularly significant in the transport sector, where large-scale infrastructure projects often require substantial upfront investment, extended operational timelines, and specialised technical expertise (Rouhani et al., 2016).

One of the primary advantages of PPPs is their capacity to foster innovation through risk-sharing mechanisms. While the public sector retains ownership and regulatory oversight, the private sector assumes financial and operational risks, incentivising cost-effective project delivery and lifecycle maintenance (Linder, 1999). For example, the Channel Tunnel between the UK and France—widely considered a landmark PPP project—successfully combined public investment with private sector management to deliver a transformative transport link (Flyvbjerg, 2005). Similarly, transport corridors such as the Gautrain in South Africa illustrate how PPPs can stimulate economic growth and enhance regional connectivity through efficient infrastructure provision (Venter, 2016).

However, PPPs are not without limitations. Critics argue that private sector involvement often prioritises profitability over social equity, potentially excluding disadvantaged communities from access to essential services (Roehrich et al., 2014). For instance, high toll rates on PPP-operated highways can exacerbate transport inequalities, limiting affordability for low-income users (Gannon and Liu, 1997). Additionally, the complexity of PPP contracts can create governance challenges, including a lack of transparency and accountability, which risks undermining public trust (Hodge et al., 2018). These shortcomings highlight the need for robust regulatory frameworks and mechanisms to ensure the alignment of PPP objectives with public interest goals.

Moreover, PPPs are susceptible to "elite capture," whereby project benefits disproportionately favour affluent communities or businesses while marginalising vulnerable populations (Cook et al., 2020). In such cases, public resources are diverted toward profit-maximising ventures at the expense of equitable access. Addressing these challenges requires

an emphasis on inclusive project design and participatory planning, ensuring that PPPs contribute to social cohesion and regional equity rather than exacerbating disparities.

For policymakers, PPPs offer considerable opportunities to finance and operationalise large-scale transport initiatives. However, their success depends on carefully balancing economic efficiency with social inclusivity (Buffa, 2015). By integrating equity-focused objectives into PPP frameworks and promoting transparent governance, these partnerships can contribute meaningfully to sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.

2.5 New Public Governance

In GM's transport governance, New Public Governance (NPG) reflects a transition from hierarchical structures towards more collaborative approaches. This shift is particularly relevant in addressing challenges such as transport-related exclusion and sustainability (Osborne, 2010). Building on the work of Moore (1995), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), and Denhardt and Denhardt (2000), NPG reconceptualises public services as relational and network-based, emerging from interactions among public, private, and civil society actors. Moore's (1995) concept of public value forms a foundational element of this approach, emphasising the role of public managers in co-creating social value through stakeholder engagement and collaboration. Similarly, Pollitt and Bouckaert's (2004) critique of New Public Management (NPM) stressed the need for governance models focused on societal outcomes rather than market efficiencies alone. Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) further contributed by positioning public servants as facilitators of civic engagement—an essential principle within the NPG framework.

The conceptual roots of NPG are significantly influenced by network and social capital theories. Ouchi's (1980) analysis of organisational governance introduced trust and reciprocity as alternatives to bureaucratic control, elements reflected in NPG's network-oriented approach. Powell (1990) extended this discourse by illustrating the adaptability and innovation fostered through network relationships. Tsai's (2000) examination of organisational social capital further demonstrated how trust and mutual support within networks can enhance collective outcomes. Additionally, Gronroos's (1994) relational marketing theory, with its focus on enduring stakeholder relationships, contributes to understanding NPG's emphasis on co-creation and shared value.

Despite its strengths, NPG faces criticisms concerning practical implementation. Rhodes (1997) highlights the absence of clear accountability mechanisms in network governance, noting that multi-stakeholder arrangements can obscure roles and responsibilities. Lynn (2010) similarly points to potential inefficiencies arising from overlapping mandates within collaborative structures. Peters and Pierre (2005) caution that NPG's reliance on trust and collaboration might overlook power asymmetries, potentially marginalising stakeholders with fewer resources. Moreover, Grindle (2007) observes that collaboration can diminish in resource-constrained contexts, as competition undermines the cooperation necessary for effective governance.

NPG is particularly pertinent to transport policy in regions such as GM, where collaboration among diverse stakeholders is essential for addressing complex transport challenges. It can facilitate cooperation between public authorities, private operators, and communities, supporting the alignment of objectives and the integration of financial and infrastructural strategies. However, addressing issues of accountability, resource distribution, and power dynamics is critical to ensuring equitable and sustainable outcomes. In practice, NPG's effectiveness depends heavily on political commitment, resource capacity, and power relations within devolved governance settings. In GM, although collaboration is emphasised rhetorically, actual stakeholder engagement varies considerably, highlighting the need for careful implementation to deliver genuinely inclusive transport governance.

2.6 Sustainable Transport: An Integrated Perspective

Sustainable transport is a critical component in balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives, aligning with the principles of sustainable development outlined in the Brundtland Report (1987). This framework emphasises the importance of addressing current mobility needs without compromising those of future generations. Effective sustainable transport systems aim to reduce environmental impacts, promote social equity, and enhance economic efficiency, contributing significantly to broader sustainability goals (Litman, 2008, 2018). Beyond providing immediate mobility solutions, sustainable transport also addresses interconnected issues such as reducing carbon emissions, enhancing social inclusion, and fostering regional economic growth.

GM's Net Zero Strategy seeks to align sustainable transport initiatives with regional development through low-carbon transit solutions, including expanded tram and bus

networks. However, the extent to which this strategy effectively addresses persistent spatial inequalities and produces equitable outcomes for lower-income communities remains uncertain. These interventions aim to reduce emissions and improve accessibility by connecting underserved areas with employment and educational opportunities (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, 2020). Additionally, active travel policies that promote cycling and walking infrastructure offer combined benefits, including improved public health and reduced reliance on private vehicles, thereby strengthening environmental resilience.

Increasingly, city-regions view sustainability as a potential competitive advantage. Banister (2008) suggests that robust sustainable transport systems can attract investment, retain skilled workers, and support innovation—key factors for regional economic development. For instance, Cervero and Murakami (2010) highlight the integration of transit infrastructure with urban development in Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR), which has created economically vibrant areas that attract international investment and skilled labour. Similarly, Graham and Gibbons (2019) provide econometric evidence from UK cities demonstrating that enhanced public transport connectivity positively impacts firm productivity and regional GDP through agglomeration effects. Newman and Kenworthy (1999) further illustrate that cities such as Vienna and Zurich, which prioritise sustainable transport, experience reduced car dependency alongside increased economic activity and urban competitiveness. These examples underscore the importance of sustainable transport for achieving both environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

Although sustainable transport can support economic competitiveness, realising these benefits requires careful management of efficiency, equity, and environmental objectives (Litman, 2008). If structural inequalities are not adequately addressed, sustainable transport initiatives risk disproportionately benefiting wealthier populations, undermining their broader social value (Banister, 2008; Litman, 2008). Therefore, for GM, it is crucial to integrate transport policies with broader social strategies, such as affordable housing and skills development programmes, to ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits across diverse communities.

2.6.1 The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework

Within the context of sustainable transport, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, introduced by Elkington (1998), offers a comprehensive perspective for integrating social,

economic, and environmental dimensions. This framework is particularly relevant to transport policy, where balancing these elements is vital for achieving resilient and equitable development aligned with sustainability objectives (Asante-Darko et al., 2024; Brida et al., 2023; Litman, 2008).

The social dimension of TBL focuses on inclusion and equity, ensuring that transport systems address the mobility requirements of diverse socio-economic groups. An example from GM is the *Our Pass* initiative, which provides free bus travel for young individuals and illustrates efforts towards equitable access and social mobility (TfGM, 2020). Such initiatives are fundamental to creating competitive regional labour markets by facilitating inclusive participation.

The economic dimension of TBL underscores the significance of transport in fostering regional growth by enhancing access to employment, supporting business connectivity, and improving labour market efficiency. For example, GM's Clean Air Plan aims to integrate economic expansion with environmental goals by investing in low-emission transport, alleviating congestion, and improving productivity (GMCA, 2021a). Nevertheless, critics such as Overman and Gibbons (2011) caution that such economic benefits often disproportionately favour urban centres, potentially exacerbating regional inequalities. This critique highlights the complexity of ensuring that growth policies incorporate equitable spatial considerations.

The environmental pillar emphasises the imperative for resilience through emissions reduction, sustainable land use, and improved air quality. GM's commitment to achieving Net Zero by 2038 demonstrates this by integrating low-carbon transport solutions with urban planning (GMCA, 2021a). Evidence from Newman and Kenworthy (1999) supports the relationship between sustainable transport and environmental benefits, showing that cities with reduced car dependency achieve greater energy efficiency and lower emissions. However, Church et al. (2000) and Yuen et al. (2020) highlight potential trade-offs, noting that environmental strategies such as electric vehicle promotion might inadvertently marginalise lower-income groups due to higher initial costs.

Despite its comprehensive approach, the TBL framework has faced criticism for lacking clarity in managing trade-offs between economic competitiveness and inclusivity (Hammer

and Pivo, 2016). Policies intended to enhance regional attractiveness and investment—such as infrastructure improvements—may unintentionally lead to gentrification or increased transport costs, thereby marginalising vulnerable populations (Stehlin, 2019). Additionally, the broad nature of TBL can dilute its practical applicability, making it challenging for policymakers to precisely quantify and balance competing objectives such as economic growth versus social equity (Banister, 2008). In GM, although initiatives such as the Clean Air Plan and *Our Pass* align broadly with TBL goals, fragmented implementation and limited integration with housing, skills, and employment policies illustrate gaps in effectively addressing systemic inequities (Tomaney and Pike, 2020). Furthermore, a predominant focus on sustainability risks overshadowing immediate socio-economic disparities, particularly within regions experiencing uneven development.

This thesis does not formally apply TBL as a conceptual framework; rather, it utilises TBL thematically to inform the analysis and contextualise GM's transport policies within broader theoretical discussions.

2.6.2 Sustainable Habit Formation Through Transport Intervention

Encouraging sustainable travel habits among young people is increasingly recognised as vital for achieving long-term environmental and social benefits. Adolescence and early adulthood are formative periods for habit development, making young individuals a critical target for transport interventions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). Nevertheless, interventions aimed at promoting sustainable travel behaviours require careful consideration of systemic limitations to ensure long-term effectiveness.

Exposure to accessible, reliable public transport during formative years can reduce car dependency later in life (Smart and Klein, 2017). However, this potential is heavily reliant on the existence of robust, integrated transport infrastructure. Without such structural foundations, behavioural interventions may yield only temporary effects. UN-Habitat (2013) recognises school-based transport initiatives as promising entry points for encouraging non-motorised and public transport use but emphasises their reliance on systemic infrastructure support beyond individual schemes.

Cairns et al. (2004) critique policies that depend heavily on short-term incentives, highlighting that sustainable behavioural change requires supporting structural reforms.

Similarly, Lucas (2012) argues that inadequate or unequal provision of transport services, particularly in underserved areas, can undermine efforts to encourage lasting sustainable mobility habits. Young people in regions without reliable public transport are less likely to consistently adopt sustainable travel behaviours, underscoring the necessity of equitable transport infrastructure investment.

The integration of sustainable habit formation strategies within broader urban planning initiatives is equally significant. Banister (2008) emphasises the importance of aligning transport interventions with urban development policies to effectively reduce reliance on private vehicles and enhance economic resilience. This integrated perspective acknowledges that transport behaviours are shaped by spatial and social contexts, suggesting that interventions must account for these wider systemic factors to be successful. Without addressing systemic issues, transport interventions risk inadvertently reinforcing existing inequalities or resulting in only superficial behavioural shifts rather than enduring sustainable change.

2.6.3 Innovations in Sustainable Transport: Transit Leverage and Micro-Mobility

Transit Leverage

The concept of transit leverage, initially articulated by Newman and Kenworthy (1999), examines how targeted investments in public transport can decrease car dependency and encourage efficient urban land use. It suggests that enhancing public transit infrastructure can stimulate sustainable travel behaviours, attract economic activity, and improve regional spatial configurations. Transit leverage, therefore, has implications beyond immediate transport benefits, influencing broader accessibility and economic development goals.

Empirical evidence underscores the effectiveness of transit leverage across diverse contexts. Banister and Berechman (2000) illustrate how well-integrated transit networks in European cities such as Zurich and Copenhagen have facilitated compact urban growth, reducing car-dependent suburban sprawl. Similarly, Cervero and Murakami (2009) highlight Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR), where a "rail plus property" model successfully integrates transport and land-use planning. This integration has increased urban density and enhanced economic connectivity, attracting substantial investment. Curitiba's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system offers another relevant example, effectively addressing congestion and improving

equitable access to economic centres, particularly benefiting low-income residents in peripheral areas (Rabinovitch and Leitman, 1996).

However, the transit leverage concept also faces critiques relating to equity and spatial disparity. Banister (2008) cautions that although transit investments can promote economic activity, a primary focus on urban centres may inadvertently deepen regional inequalities by neglecting rural and peri-urban areas. Hull (2008) similarly argues that transit leverage must be aligned with broader urban strategies, including affordable housing and employment policies, to avoid unintended consequences such as property value escalation and subsequent gentrification (Stehlin, 2019).

Micro-Mobility (MM)

Micro-mobility (MM), including shared bicycles and e-scooters, represents an innovative approach to enhancing first-mile/last-mile connectivity. These solutions can effectively bridge gaps in conventional transit systems, promoting seamless multi-modal journeys and potentially reducing reliance on private vehicles (Shaheen et al., 2010). Successful examples include Copenhagen's extensive cycling networks and Portland's e-scooter programmes, illustrating how MM can integrate effectively with broader transit planning, delivering both efficiency and environmental benefits (Gu et al., 2018; Fishman, 2016).

Research indicates that cities with well-implemented MM systems often experience reduced congestion and decreased greenhouse gas emissions. Gu et al. (2018) note that bike-sharing schemes in several Chinese cities improved public transport utilisation by providing convenient last-mile solutions, thereby reducing short car journeys. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2016) found that bike-share systems in New York City significantly improved connectivity for underserved neighbourhoods, enhancing equitable access to existing transit networks. Nevertheless, significant infrastructural and equity challenges persist. Smith and Jones (2020), assessing electric scooter and bike-sharing schemes in UK cities such as London and Bristol, found that MM can notably enhance connectivity for young and low-income users. However, the benefits remain unevenly distributed due to infrastructure deficiencies and inconsistent service availability outside central urban areas. Riggs and Schwartz (2018) further highlight equity concerns, arguing that MM services predominantly cater to higher-income, urban populations, neglecting suburban and rural communities. This pattern risks exacerbating spatial inequalities rather than alleviating them.

Regulatory and operational barriers also impede MM integration into existing transport systems. Research by Shaheen and Chan (2016) and Walker (2018) underscores the importance of coordinated governance to manage user safety, data sharing, and regulation of private MM operators. Without clear governance structures, MM risks remaining a peripheral option rather than becoming a central component of sustainable transport systems.

In GM specifically, MM holds considerable potential to improve transit connectivity, particularly in areas currently underserved by traditional public transport. However, effectively harnessing this potential requires addressing infrastructural gaps, affordability concerns, and developing robust regulatory frameworks. Investment in dedicated cycling infrastructure and equitable access initiatives could improve MM integration into GM's broader transport strategies, making its benefits accessible to a more diverse population. Riggs and Schwartz (2018) emphasise the importance of aligning MM investments with comprehensive transport objectives to fully realise their sustainability potential.

While MM presents significant opportunities for urban transport innovation, realising its full potential critically depends on addressing integration and equity challenges. Further research should explore MM's long-term impacts, particularly its capacity to reduce car dependency and contribute meaningfully to sustainable urban development.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically reviewed relevant academic and grey literature concerning transport policy, with particular focus on themes of social exclusion, economic competitiveness, sustainability, and governance. Rather than positioning transport as an inherently neutral facilitator of growth, the review emphasised mobility as a contested arena, shaped by structural inequalities, fragmented governance, and uneven power relations.

The literature highlighted significant gaps, notably the limited integrated analyses examining both financial and infrastructural transport interventions within a devolved city-region context. It also critically assessed how equity is often marginalised in policy evaluation frameworks dominated by efficiency-focused models such as New Public Management (NPM) and Growth Pole Theory. Alternative frameworks—including transport justice, Transport Accessibility Planning (TAP), and participatory governance—were identified as potentially more inclusive, yet their implementation remains inconsistent due to institutional limitations and governance constraints.

By analysing this literature, the chapter directly contributes to Research Objectives 1, 2, and 3. It contextualises the policy environment in GM and critically engages with theories informing contemporary transport policy debates. Grey literature, including regional transport strategies and policy documents, was utilised primarily to provide context, with claims critically examined rather than accepted as definitive. These documents will subsequently be triangulated with primary data in the empirical chapters.

This theoretical review also informed the analytical approach of the thesis—a thematic analysis conducted within an interpretivist paradigm. This methodology enables a detailed exploration of stakeholders' interpretations, and the meanings attached to transport policies, emphasising how such policies are enacted and contested within complex governance contexts.

By synthesising academic debates, policy narratives, and global examples, the chapter established a foundation for critically evaluating whether GM's transport interventions—*Our Pass* and the Trafford Park Extension Line—effectively tackle social exclusion and support equitable and sustainable regional development. The next chapter extends this discussion by examining the governance structures underpinning GM's transport strategy and policy implementation.

CHAPTER THREE

GOVERNANCE

3. Introduction

This chapter addresses Research Objective 1—examining how flagship transport interventions, specifically the individual cases of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, translate high-level policy goals into concrete governance arrangements—and Research Objective 3—evaluating how these cases strategically align with GM's broader economic development agenda. The chapter critically examines the governance frameworks underpinning these interventions, exploring regional delivery structures, New Public Governance (NPG) practices, and Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs). By evaluating these institutional arrangements, the chapter assesses how governance shapes each intervention's potential impacts on social inclusion, economic productivity, and sustainability within GM.

Adopting a case study methodology, this chapter provides the governance context necessary to understand the complex institutional environment in which the cases of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line operate. Case study methodology enables in-depth exploration of governance processes, facilitating detailed analysis and nuanced comparisons of policy translation and implementation, which follow in subsequent analytical chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, Chapter 3 explicitly serves as a foundational chapter, establishing the contextual groundwork that informs and supports the empirical case analyses undertaken later.

Efficient transportation of people and goods is closely linked to economic productivity, social integration, and overall well-being (Skorobogatova and Kuzmina-Merlino, 2017). Achieving these objectives—alongside promoting social inclusivity and climate resilience—requires targeted transport policies and investments. For instance, outcomes from the TravelWise programme indicate that sustainable travel initiatives can simultaneously support environmental goals and expand access to employment for non-car users, thereby enhancing labour market inclusivity (Campaign for Better Transport, 2023). However, the effectiveness of such initiatives often remains contingent on coordinated governance structures, which are frequently fragmented or incomplete.

Stakeholders within the transport sector have sought to enhance networks, modes of transit, and related services, yet significant disparities persist in transport priorities and accessibility across modes and regions. The Foresight report (Government Office for Science, 2019) highlights that the absence of coherent governance arrangements within transport systems continues to impede holistic policy outcomes, limiting the effectiveness of interventions aimed at integrated regional development.

As discussed in Chapter 2, transport plays a crucial role in achieving broader societal and economic goals. However, debates over transport investment across different geographic locations and modes within the UK frequently reflect internal sectoral interests rather than an objective assessment of regional needs. In GM, this complexity is intensified by local institutional structures and governance processes, which sometimes result in fragmented or disjointed policy outcomes. Combining public and private expenditures to achieve integrated outcomes across neighbouring jurisdictions remains particularly challenging and contentious (Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2019).

Institutional arrangements across municipal and city-regional governments in the UK exhibit considerable variation, further complicating governance. England alone features multiple overlapping governance layers, including Local Enterprise Partnerships, City Devolution Agreements, and Growth Deals. Although such institutional arrangements have generated localised economic, educational, and transport benefits, they have also contributed to institutional confusion, unclear accountability, and inconsistencies in policy implementation (Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2019).

This chapter critically examines the roles and interactions of regional and local stakeholders involved in collaborative transport governance. It reviews both regional and GM-specific governance frameworks, decision-making structures, and the impact of current policy mechanisms on transport service delivery. Furthermore, it investigates specific challenges in GM's transport planning and critically evaluates how these are addressed through broader strategic frameworks, particularly the GM 2040 Transport Strategy.

3.1 Current Governance Landscape

This section critically examines the governance structures underpinning transport policy in GM, exploring their effectiveness and the challenges they present. The discussion begins by

analysing the relationship between the UK Government and GM's devolved governance structures, specifically addressing the complexities inherent in power-sharing and policy formulation. Although the UK Government's decision to devolve certain powers has enabled GM to exert greater local authority over transport policy, significant national influence remains evident. This influence is particularly noticeable in areas such as funding allocations, strategic prioritisation, and regulatory compliance. While the partnership between the GMCA and the UK Government provides a basis for developing region-specific transport solutions, it demands careful negotiation and alignment with broader national policy objectives, including those relating to sustainability and economic development.

Current governance arrangements have facilitated a more tailored and responsive approach to regional transport planning. The implementation of individual cases such as Our Pass illustrates GM's use of devolved powers to directly address issues like youth mobility and social exclusion, specifically through providing free bus travel to individuals aged 16–18 (GMCA, 2023b). Britteon et al. (2022) argue that this form of devolved governance can effectively meet region-specific transport needs, allowing for more precise interventions. Furthermore, GM's ambitions in sustainable transport, such as the introduction of low-emission zones, enhanced public transport provision, and improved cycling infrastructure, are more achievable within the devolved governance context (Heenan and Birrell, 2021). Such localised policies can potentially address region-specific challenges more effectively than centrally imposed, standardised national policies.

Despite these strengths, GM's governance structure faces substantial challenges, particularly in relation to financial dependence on the UK Government. Although GM exercises greater authority over local transport decisions, reliance on centrally allocated funds significantly constrain its autonomy, disrupting project timelines. The necessity of competing for limited funds through bidding processes such as the Transforming Cities Fund has caused notable delays, for instance in the delivery of cycling infrastructure projects under the Bee Network initiative (GMCA, 2022a). Additionally, delays linked to central funding negotiations significantly impacted the completion of the Trafford Park Extension Line, initially funded through the Local Growth Fund, highlighting the inherent limitations of the current governance model (Enderlein et al., 2012). Furthermore, regional transport policies remain vulnerable to shifts in national political leadership or changing governmental priorities, posing risks to the consistency and stability of GM's strategic initiatives.

3.1.1 City-Region Devolution

City-region devolution in England represents a gradual transfer of authority from central government to regional and local bodies, aiming to address specific economic and social needs. Hoole and Hincks (2020) describe this as an incremental process characterised by individualised agreements that reflect diverse regional contexts. While devolution is intended to empower local governance, it also raises critical questions about the balance between local autonomy and national oversight.

London's experience serves as a benchmark for city-region governance. The establishment of the London County Council in 1889, followed by the creation of the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2000, set a notable precedent. The GLA was granted responsibilities for transport and strategic planning, supported by the democratically elected London Assembly, which provides oversight and accountability (Lupton et al., 2018). However, London's distinct global economic status limits the direct applicability of its governance model to other UK regions.

Efforts to extend devolution beyond London gained momentum under the New Labour government in the early 2000s but faltered following the rejection of a proposed regional assembly in the 2004 North East referendum. Nevertheless, the 2006 Local Government White Paper maintained a focus on decentralising powers to promote economic competitiveness across English regions (Deas, 2013). Subsequently, Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) between 2008 and 2010 laid the groundwork for collaborative regional governance in areas including GM, Leeds, and Birmingham. Although transitional, MAAs set the stage for more permanent structures such as Combined Authorities (CAs), introduced through the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act of 2009, with GM becoming the first to formalise CA status in 2011.

The Coalition government (2010) accelerated city-region devolution through the Localism Act, enabling councils to negotiate City Deals tailored to local economic contexts. The initial wave of City Deals targeted major "Core Cities," granting new powers to stimulate growth, contingent upon stronger local governance arrangements (Cabinet Office, 2012). Subsequent waves extended these opportunities to smaller urban areas. However, Deas et al. (2020)

critically observe the considerable challenges in maintaining coherent governance structures, particularly in balancing metropolitan diversity with effective accountability.

Aligning national policy priorities with localised requirements remains a central challenge. Ayres and Sandford (2018) highlight persistent tensions between advancing national objectives and addressing region-specific needs. Successful devolution, therefore, requires effective coordination between national and local actors to promote equitable economic growth and social cohesion. Tailoring policies to local contexts—particularly in economically disadvantaged areas—enhances regional resilience through diversification, moving beyond uniform, centrally imposed strategies.

In GM, devolution has significantly influenced transport governance, reshaping decision-making structures and resource allocation processes. Initiatives such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line reflect the broader aims of devolution: enhancing regional connectivity, promoting inclusivity, and fostering sustainable economic growth. However, these projects remain constrained by continued dependency on central funding and the complexities of aligning local ambitions with national priorities.

3.1.2 Greater Manchester Devolution

Greater Manchester's first formal devolution deal was established in 2011, positioning it as England's earliest combined authority with broad devolved powers. However, as Lupton et al. (2018) note, GM had been advocating for and negotiating devolved governance long before these formal agreements. Thus, the 2011 arrangement primarily formalised and consolidated existing practices rather than initiating entirely new governance structures.

Following the 2009 Manchester Independent Economic Review, GM consistently advanced arguments aligned with the 2013 *Core Cities Prospectus*, emphasising the need for decentralised governance. The subsequent GM Strategy (2013) and Growth and Reform Plan (2014) further reinforced the region's advocacy for tailored governance models. While the theoretical justification for localist governance is robust, Tomaney (2016) cautions that effective decentralisation is inherently complex, as decision-makers rarely retain complete control over the process. In response, GM has sought to present a governance model grounded in transparency, accountability, and economic sustainability, reinforced by democratic legitimacy.

In 2022, the UK Government's *Levelling Up White Paper* announced further devolved powers for GM and the West Midlands. These proposed powers underline a continued emphasis on enhancing economic development and funding stability at the city-regional level. GM's long-standing advocacy for integrated city-region governance is demonstrated through partnerships with public, private, and voluntary organisations, such as the Salford Culture and Place Partnership (SCPP), the BBC, and Peel Media (GMCA, 2022a). These partnerships serve dual functions: some organisations directly deliver services on behalf of the GMCA, while others influence strategic policy decisions by contributing sector-specific expertise.

According to Lupton et al. (2018), key principles guiding GM's governance approach include:

- Social policy is most effectively implemented at the city-region level and is integral to economic prosperity.
- Preventative investment strategies should be prioritised.
- Addressing GM's fiscal imbalance through economic growth and preventative investments, aiming to transition from being a net recipient of Treasury funding to a net contributor. The 2014 *Growth and Reform Plan* reported that public spending in GM (£22 billion annually) significantly exceeded its tax contribution (£17.8 billion). Strategies were proposed to close this gap through combined economic growth and public-sector reform.

Historically, central government dominance over social policy and economic frameworks restricted GM's ability to fully integrate these strategies. The 2017 GM Strategy (GMS), shaped by newly introduced mayoral leadership and broader devolution powers, represented a unified local framework aligning closely with *Core Cities* principles. The strategy explicitly defines roles for Combined Authorities and elected mayors, aiming to address all aspects of urban governance—from early childhood support to elderly care.

However, despite its comprehensive ambitions, the GMS faces significant challenges in practical implementation. Issues such as resource dependency on central government, persistent inter-borough inequalities, and bureaucratic complexity continue to hinder the

effective realisation of strategic goals. The capacity of GM's devolved structures to overcome these barriers and fully implement its ambitious vision remains uncertain and critically dependent on sustained collaboration, effective resource allocation, and clearer alignment between regional ambitions and national policy frameworks.

3.1.3 Greater Manchester Governance Arrangements

Following the strategic frameworks described previously, various governance structures have emerged within GM to deliver regional policy objectives. Central to this is the mayoral cabinet, consisting of the ten council leaders and a deputy mayor, each managing a specific policy portfolio. These portfolios extend beyond traditional areas such as the economy, transport, and environment to include social policy outcomes such as youth engagement, social cohesion, education, skills and apprenticeships, housing, homelessness, and the development of inclusive communities (Yates and Clark, 2018). MacKinnon et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of inclusive governance approaches, advocating a neo-endogenous model that prioritises social innovation and equitable policy solutions. While equitable innovation focuses on distributing technological and economic advancements to marginalised groups (Lee, 2023), social innovation addresses systemic social issues through inclusive, community-oriented approaches (Satalkina and Steiner, 2022).

Implementing these social policy objectives requires navigating complex service delivery challenges, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. Innovation in this context involves strengthening interactions between service users and providers, enhancing skills, and building community resilience. To facilitate effective policy implementation, multiple partnership boards have been established, including the GM Health and Social Partnership Board and the GM Reform Board, which collectively oversee health, social care, and public sector reforms. The Children's Board, which reports to the Reform Board, specifically addresses education, youth employment, mental health, and school readiness. To ensure strategic alignment, membership across these boards often overlaps, enabling cohesive governance (Lupton et al., 2018). Additionally, executive management is provided by the Wider Executive Leadership Team (WLT), comprising local authority chief executives, NHS officers, and representatives from the police, fire services, and the Growth Company.

Some partnership boards operate with statutory-like transparency, offering publicly accessible minutes and open meetings. However, informal governance mechanisms also play

a significant role, reflecting Ayres' (2016) notion of 'informal governance.' While such structures can facilitate flexible collaboration, they raise concerns around transparency and representativeness—particularly in relation to grassroots involvement in policy formation (Baez Camargo and Koechlin, 2018; Kleine, 2012). The tension between formal accountability and informal flexibility remains a critical governance issue in GM, requiring ongoing scrutiny to ensure equitable outcomes.

Financial collaboration among local authorities within GM has increased significantly. Initially coordinated under the Association of GM Authorities, councils historically pooled financial contributions to support cross-boundary functions and policy collaborations (Lupton et al., 2018). From 2015 onwards, a pooled business rates strategy enabled councils to collectively manage resources, retaining portions for local growth while allocating significant shares to the GMCA for regional priorities. While this approach modestly encourages intra-regional redistribution, it depends heavily on continued cooperation and alignment of local interests. Partnerships with national government initiatives—such as the GM Industrial Strategy—aim to enhance regional productivity and employment. Between 2016 and 2021, the GMCA held control over a 'Single Pot' of funding, comprising investment, transport, adult education, and local growth budgets, thus granting regional flexibility in resource allocation. Although this strategy supports targeted investments, the extent to which it addresses intra-regional disparities remains contested. The GM Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) supports public–private integration, aiming to leverage local expertise, encourage innovation, attract investment, and drive public service reform. The 2019 GM Strategy was developed collaboratively by the LEP, GMCA, and stakeholders from business, community groups, and citizens. Despite its inclusive rhetoric, critical perspectives highlight the risk that such strategic partnerships may privilege established business interests, raising concerns over genuinely inclusive and equitable policymaking.

Another notable development was the introduction of the elected mayoral role in 2017. Initially perceived as limited in impact—one figure among many political actors—the role gained significance under Mayor Andy Burnham, whose tenure has notably shaped the direction and style of regional governance. Burnham has emphasised transparency, social justice, and grassroots participation. While his public advocacy for community engagement marks a departure from previous governance styles, the tangible effectiveness of these efforts warrants critical scrutiny. The strategy's reliance on media-driven engagement risks

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prioritising symbolic actions over substantive policy change, potentially limiting its impact on marginalised communities (Mazzolini, 2016).

Burnham's approach balances alignment with prevailing political norms alongside efforts to introduce reform. This has enabled broader political support but also risks reinforcing established power dynamics, potentially constraining transformative change. Despite ambitious policy commitments—such as the pledge to eradicate rough sleeping, launch apprenticeship schemes, and introduce free youth transport (Our Pass)—structural constraints continue to challenge policy implementation. Critically, Burnham's governance must navigate between rhetoric and substantive action, addressing both immediate social needs and underlying systemic inequalities.

Burnham has also focused on fostering regional identity and advocating for greater local autonomy from central government, particularly in response to crises such as the Manchester Arena attack, regional wildfires, rail disruptions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. His public challenge to national COVID-19 tier restrictions exemplified the tensions inherent in the UK's centralised governance system, drawing attention to the inadequacy of financial support and calling for more locally responsive policy solutions. However, the effectiveness of such advocacy depends on the willingness of national authorities to accommodate regional perspectives.

In a 2018 Westminster address, Burnham articulated his vision for devolution, characterising it as energising and empowering local governance:

"It has had a profoundly positive effect on the culture of our city region. It has created a new energy, a sense of possibility, a shaft of light in an otherwise gloomy political scene. It has allowed us to give a level of engagement to our leaders in business, the universities, the faith, and voluntary sectors in developing new policy solutions that you can never provide from a national level." (Lupton et al., 2018, p.24)

While optimistic, this portrayal warrants scrutiny. The statement is broadly aspirational and lacks detailed evidence or measurable outcomes, risking an overly idealistic narrative. Effective regional governance demands more than symbolic declarations; it requires demonstrable achievements, transparent decision-making, and equitable resource distribution.

Moreover, Burnham's vision of local empowerment must grapple with entrenched disparities, resource limitations, and political inertia.

Overall, this thesis critically engages with the complexities and contradictions within GM's governance arrangements. It examines how devolved structures influence transport policy outcomes—particularly through initiatives such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—while highlighting persistent institutional and resource constraints that may limit transformative potential. Through balanced critique, the analysis situates GM's governance within broader debates on regional autonomy, democratic accountability, and policy effectiveness.

3.1.4 Strengths of the UK Transport Policy and Governance

Eddington's (2006) comprehensive review of the UK transport system identified a substantial increase in journey volumes, suggesting that transport infrastructure plays a significant role in supporting economic performance by facilitating connectivity. However, the report also highlighted considerable spatial and temporal variations in transport demand, alongside growing concerns about affordability (Mattioli et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, Eddington argued that the UK's transport system performs relatively well compared to many European counterparts, particularly in terms of overall connectivity and user mobility. This favourable comparison, however, should be critically assessed in light of persistent regional disparities and service inequalities.

Increasing Capital Expenditure

Public expenditure on transport infrastructure in the UK has seen considerable fluctuations over recent decades (see Figure 1). Shaw and Docherty (2013) note that during the 1990s, successive UK governments largely adopted a minimal-intervention approach to rail infrastructure maintenance, allowing systems to deteriorate significantly. Following the 1997 election, the New Labour government initially reduced infrastructure spending, continuing the policies of the preceding Conservative administration and abandoning the ambitious road construction projects outlined in the 1989 *Roads for Prosperity* plan.

The 2008 financial crisis marked a turning point, prompting UK authorities to recognise infrastructure development as essential for driving economic recovery and regional growth (Obolenskaya, 2017). This shift coincided with increased pressures from population growth

and housing demands, necessitating a renewed focus on transport infrastructure (Roberts, 2014). Between 2004 and 2013, for example, the UK allocated approximately 0.2% of GDP to road infrastructure—significantly less than Germany (0.4%) and France (0.5%). By 2015, however, UK spending had risen to 0.3% of GDP, surpassing expenditure increases in Germany and France and reflecting expanded investment priorities. A similar proportional increase occurred in rail infrastructure investment during this period, eventually exceeding the combined rail investments of France and Germany.

Nevertheless, while increased capital expenditure signals a renewed commitment to strengthening the UK's transport system, a critical analysis must assess whether these investments sufficiently address persistent regional imbalances and connectivity disparities—particularly in economically peripheral areas. Moreover, the effectiveness of these investments in translating increased funding into equitable improvements in user experience warrants continued scrutiny.

Figure 1. UK Public Expenditure on Transport as % of GDP 2009-22
(Source: Clark, 2022)
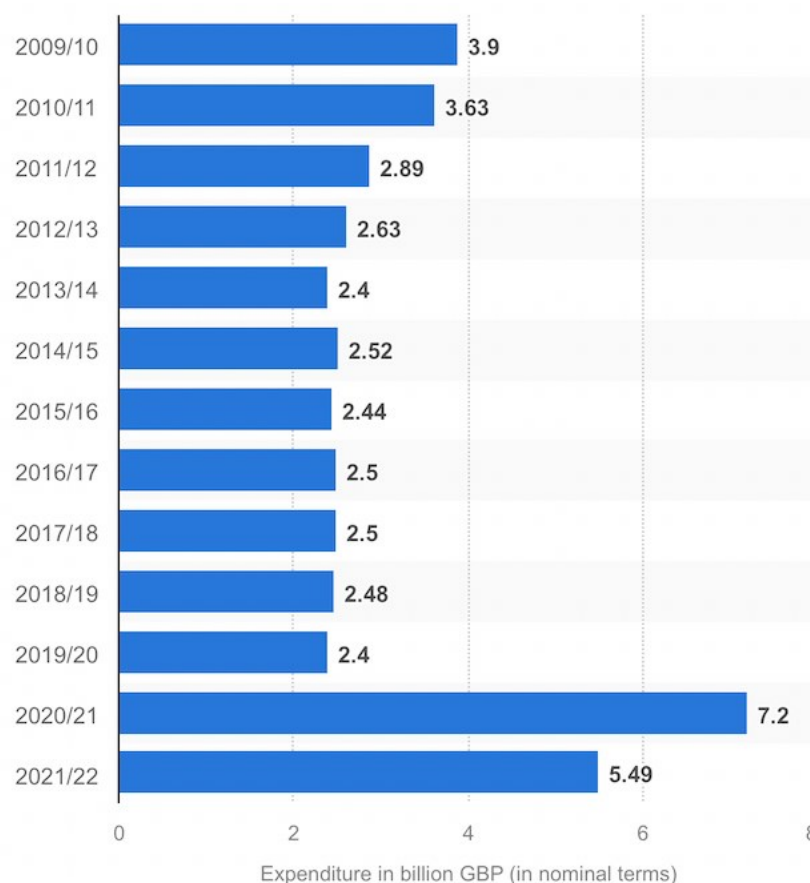
Figure 2 below illustrates a coherent sequence of transportation-related projects, funded through a combination of public and private sources. Of the total funding, 87% is derived from public expenditure, 7% from PPPs, and the remaining 6% from private entities.

Figure 2. Combined Public and Private Sector Infrastructure Projected Capital Spend for Transport 2016/17 – 2020/21
(Source: Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2019)

Transport £91.9 bn

- High Speed Rail
- Rail
- NPIF Transport
- Ports
- Airports
- LA Majors
- Roads
- London
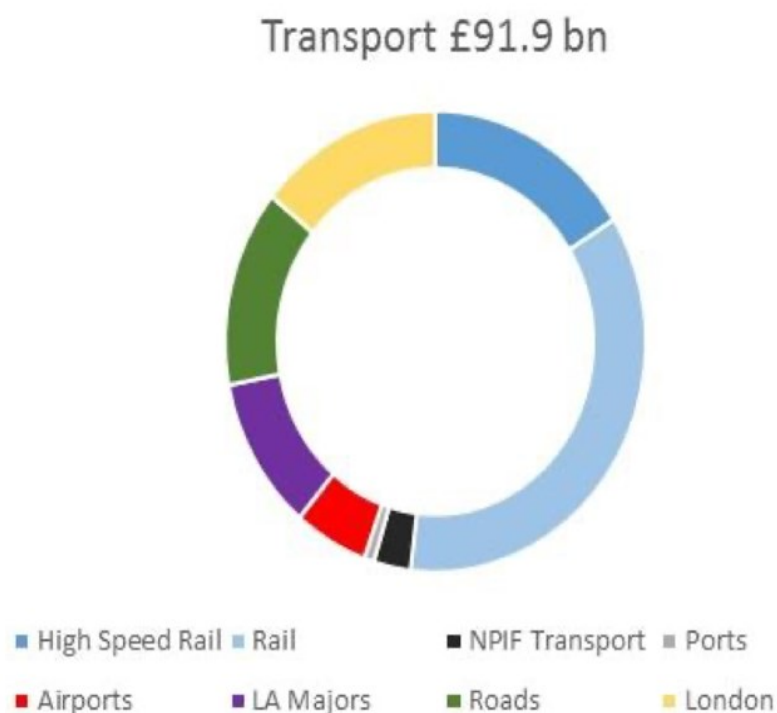
Long-term spending commitments

National transport network funding in the UK has gradually shifted towards longer-term spending commitments, reflecting broader governmental economic strategies. In his study *A Fresh Start for the Strategic Road Network*, Cook (2011) highlighted several institutional tensions between central government and transport agencies, advocating for clearer objectives to enhance the UK's road infrastructure and support economic growth. Similar moves towards long-term funding have occurred in Scotland, where Transport Scotland received indicative three-year budget allocations, fostering a more predictable and stable project pipeline. The rationale for these longer-term financial commitments is that they offer

a stable framework for attracting skilled personnel and creating conditions conducive to more efficient project delivery.

The Foresight report (2019) acknowledges the theoretical benefits of this approach, referencing Transport for London (TfL), Transport Scotland, Highways England, and TfGM as examples where stable funding has reportedly enhanced effectiveness. However, the report also notes that while longer-term commitments have contributed to investment stability, they have not necessarily generated substantial local value in all regions. The case of the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) illustrates this complexity. Despite securing long-term access to transport investment funding—approximately £15 million annually for 30 years— fluctuating sources such as the Integrated Transport Block, Highways Maintenance Block, and Transforming Cities Fund have still produced inconsistent outcomes (Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2019).

Local Transport Governance

Transport for London (TfL) oversees London's integrated transport network, reporting directly to the Mayor and Greater London Authority (Smeds et al., 2020). This governance model has influenced other UK regions, notably GM, which has developed its own 2040 transport strategy. GM's transport system faces significant challenges, exacerbated by growing population pressures—projected to generate an additional 800,000 daily journeys by 2040—highlighting the need for enhanced connectivity, equitable access, and sustainable environmental practices (TfGM, 2019).

While TfGM's 2040 strategy outlines ambitious plans to improve transport infrastructure and promote sustainable mobility, questions remain about its implementation efficacy, particularly in addressing entrenched spatial and socio-economic disparities. According to the Foresight report (2019), integrating Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Transport Authorities within Combined Authorities (CAs) can help align transport investments with broader economic and social objectives. However, the practical effectiveness of these integrated governance structures varies, especially in contexts where power imbalances and competing local priorities hinder cohesive implementation.

New Public Governance (NPG), proposed by Osborne (2006), offers a framework that emphasises pluralistic and collaborative governance, marking a shift away from the

efficiency-centred paradigm of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). NPG promotes a participatory approach in which multiple stakeholders—including public institutions, private actors, and civil society—jointly address complex public service challenges (Sriram et al., 2019). Despite its theoretical appeal, the success of NPG depends critically on inclusive and representative stakeholder involvement. Concerns remain about transparency and accountability in practice, particularly regarding how effectively marginalised voices are incorporated into decision-making processes (Kissler and Heidemann, 2006; Osborne et al., 2016).

London's Transport Governance: A Critical Evaluation

Burnham (2006) previously praised TfL as both responsive and internationally recognised. Historically, London's fragmented transport governance—characterised by disjointed responsibilities across multiple agencies—led to inefficiencies until the Greater London Authority Act (1999) consolidated authority within TfL, overseen by a directly elected mayor. While TfL has undoubtedly improved operational coherence, critical analysis reveals ongoing concerns around transparency, political accountability, and the equity of outcomes across London's diverse boroughs.

Transport for London's success in delivering high-quality infrastructure is contingent on sustained political will, strategic leadership, and consistent funding, supported by regulatory frameworks that enable innovative system developments (Burnham, 2006). Nevertheless, its effectiveness in addressing deeper systemic inequalities—such as spatial disparities between inner and outer London boroughs—remains subject to critique. Although TfL's governance structure and mayoral oversight provide a robust institutional framework, they do not inherently ensure equitable outcomes, particularly for economically marginalised communities.

Devolution and Regional Transport Innovation

The devolution agenda has increased regional empowerment and accountability, as demonstrated by initiatives such as Nottingham's Workplace Parking Levy (WPL), which channels revenue into transport infrastructure improvements—notably the expansion of the tram network (Dale et al., 2019). The WPL operates both as a demand-management tool and a revenue stream to fund integrated transport projects, simultaneously supporting economic regeneration, sustainable land use, and reduced congestion (Burchell et al., 2019). However,

transferring such models to other contexts requires careful consideration of local governance capacities, economic conditions, and political acceptability.

The rationale for strengthening regional transport governance aligns with efforts to replicate the successes of European urban models. European cities frequently outperform their UK counterparts both economically and socially, often due to integrated land use and transport policies—an area where UK cities have historically underperformed (Docherty et al., 2009; Turok and Mykhnenko, 2008). The continued failure to effectively integrate land use planning with transport governance in the UK risks undermining broader social and environmental objectives, including pollution reduction, resource efficiency, and inclusive economic growth (Holden et al., 2013; Norouzian-Maleki et al., 2020).

In summary, while UK transport governance has made progress through longer-term funding commitments and devolution-led innovation, significant challenges remain—particularly in achieving equitable and inclusive implementation. A critical perspective suggests the need for further reforms to ensure that governance arrangements genuinely address structural inequalities and deliver sustainable, equitable transport outcomes.

Transport Market Regulation

Transport networks such as railways and highways typically exhibit characteristics of natural monopolies due to their high capital intensity and extensive infrastructure requirements, making effective regulation essential (De Palma and Monardo, 2019; Ripplinger and Bitzan, 2018). However, not all transport sectors inherently function as natural monopolies, as market structures depend on national policy decisions and specific regulatory frameworks. For example, the UK bus sector has been subject to competition for several decades, though in practice many routes remain dominated by incumbent operators—raising questions about the efficacy of competition policies.

In the UK, transport regulation is managed by a range of agencies. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) oversees economic regulation for airports and airspace policy and is recognised internationally for its leadership in aviation safety standards (DfT, 2008). Similarly, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) provides independent oversight of Network Rail and National Highways (formerly Highways England), with a focus on ensuring efficiency targets are met and promoting evidence-based policy (Foresight, Government

Office for Science, 2019). Recent regulatory trends reflect an increasing emphasis on consumer engagement, granting users a greater role in shaping transport services and outcomes.

Despite the ongoing devolution of transport powers to regional bodies such as GM, certain regulatory responsibilities remain centralised. This centralisation is often justified on the basis of maintaining interoperability and coordination across systems, particularly as transport technologies evolve towards greater automation—such as the regulation of autonomous vehicles (Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2019). However, this centralised approach can also create tensions, especially where local and national priorities diverge, highlighting the complexities inherent in multi-level transport governance.

The UK's overall transport safety record is comparatively strong across various modes, reflecting robust regulatory oversight and consistent investment in system maintenance. Among 37 EU and international comparator nations, only Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway reported fewer road fatalities per million people (TSGB, 2016). Nonetheless, the UK continues to lag in certain safety metrics—particularly in relation to pedestrian and cyclist safety—when compared to leading countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands (PACTS, 2017). This disparity underscores ongoing gaps in infrastructure and policy interventions targeting non-motorised users, indicating the need for more focused investments and safety strategies aimed at protecting vulnerable road users.

3.1.5 Transport Infrastructure and Governance Challenges

Transport infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting economic growth by facilitating access to employment, education, healthcare, and leisure. However, governance challenges across the UK continue to constrain the development of inclusive and efficient transport systems. Fragmented governance structures, conflicting policy priorities, and insufficient collaboration disproportionately affect marginalised groups, thereby exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities.

Governance and Planning Disparities

Governance structures in the UK frequently fail to effectively integrate transport planning with broader land-use and economic strategies. This disconnect largely stems from differing timelines, administrative boundaries, and institutional practices across planning sectors,

resulting in spatial inefficiencies and fragmented outcomes (Headicar, 2009). A pronounced "silo effect" persists, whereby transport decisions are often made independently of land-use considerations, hindering cohesive long-term strategies and sustainable development.

While Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Transport Authorities possess the potential to harmonise regional planning, their efforts are frequently constrained by jurisdictional conflicts, limited coordination, and operational barriers. The absence of a coherent, cross-sectoral framework that aligns local, regional, and national priorities perpetuates inefficiencies and undermines transport's potential to advance social equity and environmental goals.

Collaborative Governance and Public Management Frameworks

Collaborative governance is widely presented as a remedy for fragmented institutional arrangements, particularly in sectors such as transport, where responsibilities span multiple tiers of government. This model emphasises joint policymaking, resource sharing, and coordinated stakeholder engagement across public, private, and third-sector actors (Cao et al., 2023). In principle, collaborative governance can align diverse objectives and enhance responsiveness to local needs. However, its practical effectiveness is often compromised by uneven power relations, unequal resource availability, and conflicting organisational priorities, all of which limit genuine inclusivity and the sustainability of collaborative outcomes (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012).

New Public Management (NPM), which dominated late 20th-century governance reforms, prioritised managerial efficiency, market-oriented practices, and performance metrics in public service delivery (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007). Within transport policy, NPM has driven service outsourcing and an emphasis on quantifiable outputs, improving short-term cost-efficiency but often neglecting complex social objectives such as equitable accessibility and user participation. Critically, an over-reliance on performance metrics can narrow evaluation frameworks, marginalising lived experiences and obscuring broader impacts on disadvantaged communities.

By contrast, New Public Governance (NPG) shifts focus from hierarchical control to relational, network-based governance. It advocates co-production, collaborative problem-solving, and cross-sector partnerships (Osborne, 2006). In theory, NPG better reflects the

complexity of contemporary urban governance, particularly in addressing transport equity. However, it remains vulnerable to critiques concerning tokenistic engagement and unequal stakeholder influence. Participation processes may inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities if dominant actors control decision-making or marginalised communities lack the capacity to engage meaningfully (Entwistle and Martin, 2005; Rhodes, 1997).

Collectively, these governance frameworks offer valuable analytical tools. Yet each presents significant limitations when confronted with real-world power dynamics, institutional inertia, and entrenched inequalities—all of which fundamentally shape transport policy outcomes.

Integration Challenges in Land Use and Transport Planning

The inadequate integration of land use and transport planning presents significant barriers to achieving accessible and sustainable urban development. The *accessibility paradigm* advocates prioritising movement between key destinations and aligning transport planning with urban growth strategies (Straatemeier and Bertolini, 2019). However, UK governance often treats these sectors in isolation, with limited collaboration between local authorities and national policymakers.

Following the dissolution of regional planning structures, significant spatial strategy gaps have emerged, leaving local councils with insufficient jurisdiction and resources to address integrated land use and transport demands holistically. District councils typically oversee planning without having direct transport authority, while unitary councils face limitations beyond their administrative boundaries—hindering the development of cohesive regional strategies.

Research highlights a hierarchical scale of integration effectiveness (Delphin et al., 2022), with optimal outcomes achieved through aligned objectives and strong cross-sectoral synergies. In practice, however, UK transport projects frequently prioritise narrowly defined metrics—such as reductions in travel time—over broader socio-economic and environmental outcomes. This fragmented approach undermines comprehensive, long-term planning, exacerbates existing inequalities, and constrains sustainable regional growth.

Structural and Funding Barriers

Current government funding mechanisms for transport in the UK exacerbate integration challenges. Competitive bidding processes typically favour large, centrally located cities, thereby limiting resource allocation to peripheral and less affluent regions. This structural bias reinforces existing inequalities and constrains opportunities for transformative transport interventions in underserved areas. Furthermore, local authorities' inability to retain tax revenues or capture the economic benefits generated by local transport projects restricts their capacity for sustained investment and strategic, long-term planning.

Short-term electoral cycles further undermine strategic coherence, often prioritising immediate political gains over durable, integrated policy outcomes. For example, despite the ambitions outlined in GM's *Levelling Up Deal*—which aims to reduce regional disparities—fragmented implementation and a limited focus on sustainability weaken its potential to address systemic inequalities effectively (Harvey, 2022). A critical oversight remains the inadequate integration of regional growth strategies with broader net-zero objectives, missing key opportunities to align socio-economic development with climate resilience (Curran, 2022).

Digitalisation and Changing Mobility Patterns

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered mobility patterns, as evidenced by the rise of hybrid working practices and growing demand for cycling and walking infrastructure, resulting in shifting public transport usage (Gkiotsalitis and Cats, 2020). Policymakers now face the imperative to strategically respond to these behavioural shifts by promoting sustainable transport choices and mitigating potential long-term disruption. Digitalisation offers substantial opportunities to enhance accessibility and system efficiency; however, it also risks deepening existing socio-economic inequalities. Digital exclusion disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, limiting their access to emerging transport technologies and services.

Complex Governance Environments

The governance environment for transport policy in England is inherently complex, characterised by overlapping responsibilities and fragmented institutional structures at local, regional, and national levels. The emergence of Combined Authorities (CAs) and regional entities such as Transport for the North reflects attempts to enhance strategic coherence.

However, in practice, multilevel governance arrangements remain fragmented and inconsistent. Scholars have described this situation as "institutional clutter," in which accountability and effective policy coordination are compromised (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016). This clutter impedes the development of coherent transport solutions capable of addressing broader social, economic, and environmental objectives.

Collaborative governance frameworks are frequently proposed as remedies for fragmentation, encouraging dialogue and shared decision-making across sectors. However, such frameworks often fall short due to persistent power imbalances and uneven resource distribution. Weech-Maldonado and Merrill (2000) argue that while building trust is essential, it is insufficient when marginalised communities are excluded from meaningful participation. These exclusions reflect entrenched systemic inequalities embedded in governance practices and institutional hierarchies.

The GMCA exemplifies these governance complexities and is frequently cited in debates on city-regional governance. The report *Devolution: A Mayor for Greater Manchester* (GMCA, 2017) outlines strategic goals including congestion reduction, emissions mitigation, and economic growth. Despite these ambitions, practical constraints—such as persistent funding limitations, reliance on central government allocations, and competitive bidding processes that favour resource-rich regions—continue to restrict the GMCA's strategic autonomy, introducing uncertainty into long-term infrastructure planning.

Furthermore, the GMCA's capacity to deliver genuinely integrated transport solutions is undermined by internal tensions among constituent boroughs and ongoing debates surrounding issues such as bus franchising and transport market regulation. While devolution theoretically promotes local empowerment, it can paradoxically reproduce centralised governance dynamics at the regional level. This raises critical concerns around democratic accountability and transparency in decision-making (Tomaney, 2016). The GMCA's experience thus highlights both the potential and the limitations of regional governance under conditions of constrained autonomy and uneven political dynamics.

Addressing Governance Challenges

To effectively address governance challenges, transport policymakers must prioritise integration, equity, and sustainability. The following recommendations are proposed:

- Enhanced Collaboration: Strengthen coordination between local, regional, and national authorities to align land use and transport planning frameworks more effectively.

- Stable Funding Mechanisms: Transition from competitive bidding processes to stable, long-term, place-based funding strategies that enable sustained investment and strategic planning.

- Digital Equity: Develop policies that ensure digital transport innovations are inclusive and accessible to all social groups, thereby mitigating the risks of digital exclusion.

- Strengthened Accountability: Improve transparency and inclusivity in governance processes, ensuring that marginalised communities have meaningful opportunities to influence transport decisions.

By addressing these governance issues, the UK transport system will be better positioned to support balanced economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

3.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter has critically examined the governance structures shaping transport policymaking in GM, with particular emphasis on devolution, collaborative governance, and strategic policy implementation. It explored the complex interactions between local and national authorities, demonstrating that while decentralisation aims to foster local responsiveness and innovation, practical constraints—including funding limitations, fragmented responsibilities, and institutional imbalances—significantly restrict its effectiveness.

The analysis has highlighted the roles of key stakeholders, policy mechanisms, and regional institutions—most notably the GMCA—in shaping transport interventions. It illustrated how initiatives such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line emerge within governance contexts characterised by competing political agendas, resource dependencies, and inter-authority tensions. This critical perspective underscores that achieving intended transport policy outcomes is contingent upon navigating multiple, and often conflicting, governance dynamics.

This discussion directly addresses Research Objectives 1 and 3 by providing a contextual foundation for understanding the institutional environments in which these transport interventions are conceived and implemented. The insights established here underpin the empirical analyses in Chapters 5 and 6. While Chapter 5 returns to several governance themes, it specifically assesses how governance priorities translate into practice within each individual case, exploring stakeholder interpretations in relation to GM's overarching regional objectives. The following chapter outlines the methodological framework employed for data collection and analytical procedures.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework underpinning this thesis, detailing the epistemological, methodological, and procedural decisions guiding the investigation of the socio-economic implications of two transport interventions in GM: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. The thesis adopts an interpretivist epistemology, which foregrounds participants' subjective interpretations and lived experiences, rather than assuming objectively measurable impacts. This stance enables a critical exploration of how stakeholders perceive and construct meaning around these transport initiatives within specific policy, social, and economic contexts.

The chapter begins by articulating the rationale for adopting an interpretivist approach, providing a clear justification for employing qualitative methods within a case study methodological framework. Within this framework, the thesis investigates two specific cases: Our Pass (a financial intervention aimed at youth mobility and social inclusion) and the Trafford Park Extension Line (an infrastructural intervention designed to enhance connectivity, economic growth, and sustainability). The chapter explains the methodological coherence underpinning this research design, including the use of narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders and the analysis of secondary data.

Grey literature—including regional transport strategies and policy documents—was used both to contextualise the cases within broader policy frameworks and as secondary data sources to support interpretive analysis. Across both cases, these documents were critically examined, not accepted as definitive accounts, and were triangulated with stakeholder narratives to explore underlying assumptions and policy discourses. The chapter also clarifies how analytical strategies—such as thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer, 1975)—were applied to generate interpretive insights into stakeholder perspectives, rather than to produce universally generalisable conclusions.

Additionally, the chapter critically engages with ethical considerations and institutional ethos, ensuring transparency and rigour throughout the research process. It outlines how validity,

reflexivity, and context-sensitivity were addressed, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. Finally, the chapter acknowledges specific methodological challenges encountered during data collection—particularly those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic—offering a balanced, reflexive account of the research process.

The thesis explicitly differentiates between the selected cases—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—and the case study methodology, which constitutes the analytical framework through which these specific interventions are investigated and understood.

4.1 Conceptual Framework for Research Design

To clarify the research design, this thesis developed a conceptual framework (see Figure 3) that outlines the iterative and interconnected stages underpinning the methodology. The framework integrates primary and secondary data sources, employs analytical techniques consistent with an interpretivist epistemology, and moves systematically from contextual understanding to theoretical insight.

1. **Literature Review:** The research began with an extensive review of academic and grey literature to situate the thesis within existing theoretical and policy debates. This stage identified key gaps in the transport policy literature, particularly the limited comparative analysis of financial and infrastructure-related interventions. Grey literature used at this stage supported the development of interview themes and contributed to contextual grounding but was not treated as analytical data.

2. **Pilot Surveys (Exploratory Stage):** Pilot surveys were conducted as exploratory tools to inform the design of subsequent narrative interviews. This scoping stage offered initial insight into transport usage patterns, access challenges, and stakeholder perceptions. The findings helped refine the research questions and identify thematic areas of interest for deeper qualitative exploration.

3. **Narrative Interviews:** The primary data collection method involved conducting narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders. This qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' subjective interpretations of the socio-economic outcomes associated with the two cases—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line.

4. **Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006):** The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification and interpretation of recurring

patterns and meaning within the narratives. This approach aligned with the thesis's interpretivist orientation, viewing themes as constructed through the interaction between researcher and data, rather than objectively "discovered."

5. **Data Synthesis and Interpretation:** This stage integrated findings from both primary (interview data) and secondary (policy documents and other grey literature) sources. Grey literature at this stage functioned as an additional interpretive layer, supporting triangulation and allowing critical comparison between institutional narratives and stakeholder perspectives.

6. **Contextualisation of Findings:** Finally, the findings were situated within the broader context of GM's transport policies. This stage enabled a nuanced interpretation of how the selected interventions are perceived to advance—or hinder—regional goals related to equity, sustainability, and economic competitiveness.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Research Design
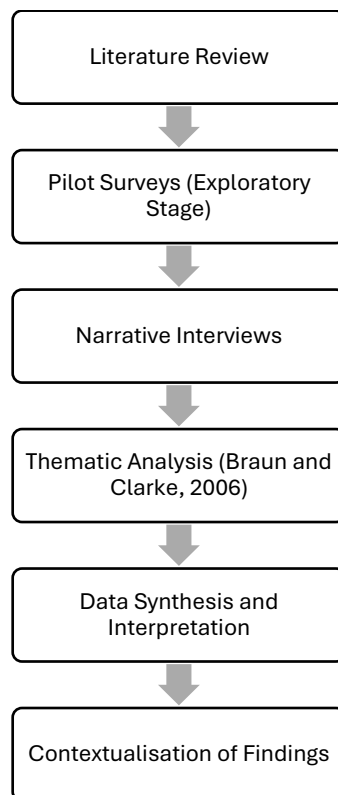
This framework reflects the structured and iterative approach adopted in the thesis, ensuring that each research phase informed and was shaped by the next. The research contributes to

both transport policy literature and practice by generating interpretive insights that connect stakeholder perspectives with broader theoretical debates.

The following sections (4.2–4.7) systematically detail each step within this framework, demonstrating methodological progression from conceptual foundations through to data collection and analytical strategies.

4.2 An Interpretivist Approach

This thesis adopts an interpretivist epistemology to investigate the socio-economic impacts of transport interventions. Interpretivism is grounded in the principle that reality is socially constructed—shaped through human interactions, individual interpretations, and cultural contexts (Dean, 2018; Chowdhury, 2014; Leitch et al., 2009). In contrast to positivism, which assumes the existence of an objective reality measurable through empirical observation, interpretivism emphasises the importance of subjective meaning and seeks to understand how individuals and groups interpret their lived experiences within specific social contexts (Ryan, 2018).

This epistemological stance is particularly well suited to examining transport interventions, as it enables in-depth exploration of stakeholder perceptions and interpretations. Rather than focusing solely on quantifiable outcomes such as economic indicators or ridership statistics, an interpretivist approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of how transport services are embedded within wider social, cultural, and political dynamics. It also recognises that transport interventions may have differential impacts across social groups—particularly marginalised communities—whose experiences are often overlooked by purely quantitative approaches.

4.2.1 Key Characteristics of Interpretivism

Interpretivist research recognises the integral role that both participants' and researchers' perspectives play in shaping the inquiry process. Walsham (1995) argues that researchers inevitably bring their own assumptions and experiences into the research setting, just as participants' interpretations are shaped by their personal histories and social contexts. Acknowledging this interplay is essential to enabling a reflective and transparent exploration of the subject matter. Rather than seeking universally generalisable results, interpretivist

research aims to generate detailed, context-specific insights into complex social phenomena (Schwandt, 1994).

A central tenet of interpretivism is its emphasis on meaning-making. Researchers aim to understand the layered and multifaceted interpretations that participants ascribe to their experiences. This involves an iterative process of data collection and analysis, in which each stage informs and reshapes the other, thereby contributing to a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Lin (1998) notes that interpretivist inquiry extends beyond identifying causal relationships, instead examining how and why relationships emerge within specific contexts. This orientation is particularly useful in exploring the dynamics of transport initiatives, including stakeholder perceptions of policy decisions, social inclusion, mobility, and equity.

Despite its strengths, interpretivism is not without critique. Its inherently subjective nature poses challenges to conventional conceptions of validity and reliability, as findings are not necessarily replicable or universally transferable (Bryman, 2016). To address these limitations, interpretivist research draws on strategies such as reflexivity, triangulation, and transparent reporting to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of interpretations (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

4.2.2 Relevance of Interpretivism to the Thesis

Transport interventions such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line are embedded within complex governance frameworks and interact with diverse socio-economic factors. An interpretivist approach offers methodological flexibility that is particularly well suited to capturing the intricate, context-dependent nature of these interventions. By centring participants' interpretations, this approach facilitates an exploration of transport experiences that are often overlooked by positivist frameworks, which typically prioritise quantifiable outcomes over lived experience.

Interpretivism emphasises how stakeholders' individual and collective understandings both shape and are shaped by transport interventions. This focus on subjective perceptions enables deeper insight into how transport services influence social equity and economic accessibility within specific local contexts.

The value of interpretivism in transport research is demonstrated in previous studies. For example, White (2006) adopted an interpretivist framework to explore tourists' perceptions of alternative transport modes, revealing nuanced attitudes and values that would likely be missed by quantitative approaches alone. Similarly, Di Fabio and Maree (2016) applied interpretivist methods to examine employment and poverty, highlighting the varied ways in which individuals make sense of their socio-economic realities. These studies underscore the capacity of interpretivism to address the complexity of socially embedded phenomena—an approach that aligns closely with the analytical objectives of this thesis.

Nonetheless, interpretivism must be applied with care, as its reliance on subjective interpretations necessitates particular attention to analytical depth and methodological rigour. To address these challenges, this thesis employs strategies such as reflexivity, triangulation of multiple data sources, and transparent analytical procedures, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

4.2.3 Integration with the Research Design

This thesis adopts an interpretivist approach to investigate how transport services are perceived and experienced by stakeholders in GM. By emphasising stakeholders' subjective interpretations of transport interventions, the research explores the underlying meanings, beliefs, and assumptions that shape their perspectives. Narrative interviews serve as the central methodological tool, allowing participants to articulate their lived experiences and co-construct meaning in dialogue with the researcher. Through this interpretive lens, the thesis moves beyond purely descriptive accounts, offering deeper insight into the social, economic, and cultural contexts that inform stakeholders' understandings of transport policies.

Moreover, the interpretivist stance is methodologically aligned with the thesis's objective of situating transport initiatives within broader systemic and historical contexts. This perspective highlights the interrelationship between individual experiences, institutional practices, and policy environments, enabling a holistic analysis of how these interventions either reinforce or challenge objectives related to equity and sustainability within urban planning.

4.2.4 Challenges and Contributions

While interpretivism offers valuable insights into the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences, it also presents methodological challenges related to validity, reliability, and generalisability. Critics argue that the inherently interpretive nature of this approach can limit the replicability and comparability of findings across different contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Rahman, 2016). This thesis addresses such concerns through methodological strategies including triangulation, reflexivity, and transparent documentation of the research process (Bryman, 2006). By applying these strategies systematically, the research demonstrates how interpretivist methods can yield contextually rich, theoretically informed insights into transport policy and governance dynamics in GM.

4.3 Reflexive Position

Throughout this research journey, I remained mindful that my personal values, experiences, and interpretive frameworks inevitably shaped the research design, analysis, and presentation of findings (Ricoeur, 1976). From the outset, I held the view that effective transport systems play a critical role not only in supporting economic activity but also in advancing social equity and community well-being. This perspective informed the initial formulation of research questions, guided the selection of specific cases for study, and influenced methodological decisions. My academic background in urban research, combined with my lived experience as a frequent transport user, also contributed to early predispositions regarding which aspects of transport interventions I prioritised for investigation. To mitigate potential confirmation bias, I continuously reflected on and critically reassessed these assumptions against participant narratives and secondary sources, adopting an iterative and reflexive analytical approach throughout (Pillow, 2003).

During the narrative interviews, I approached the conversations with certain preconceptions about how participants might define and interpret 'success' or 'impact' in relation to transport interventions. However, engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders—including policymakers, transport planners, and community representatives—revealed perspectives that challenged these assumptions. Several participants emphasised the complexities of economic trade-offs, the difficulty of quantifying social inclusion, and the emergence of unintended consequences from ostensibly progressive policies (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). These insights prompted a critical reassessment of my analytical stance and underscored that

transport policymaking is shaped by multiple, and often conflicting, objectives that do not always align with preconceived frameworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic also significantly influenced my reflexive engagement with the research process. Observing the widespread disruption to established mobility patterns prompted a re-examination of previously stable assumptions about transport use and priorities. This experience reinforced the importance of epistemological humility and openness to uncertainty in the interpretation of data. Accordingly, I approached the analysis with caution, recognising that the context of data collection was shaped by exceptional circumstances and that findings should be interpreted with sensitivity to this broader disruption (Berger, 2015).

Ultimately, while my background as a transport researcher informed my initial framing of the thesis, continuous engagement with diverse stakeholder perspectives enabled a critical reconsideration of those assumptions. This reflexive stance contributed to a more balanced interpretation of the findings—one that is attuned to complexity, situated knowledge, and the limitations of drawing generalised conclusions within an interpretivist framework.

4.4 Case Definition

This thesis adopts a case study methodology to investigate two specific cases of transport interventions within GM: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. These cases represent distinct approaches—one financial, the other infrastructural—to addressing mobility challenges within the region. They were selected based on their suitability for exploring contrasting methods of transport policy implementation, enabling critical examination of how differing intervention types can influence socio-economic outcomes.

In academic literature, the term "case" generally refers to a specific example or instance that illustrates particular phenomena within a defined context. A well-constructed case provides a detailed narrative account of real-world events, actors, and dynamics, transparently documenting both achievements and shortcomings. Such transparency is essential for fostering critical analysis, informed debate, and independent evaluation of the context, timeline, key stakeholders, and emerging issues (Alpi and Evans, 2019; Dooley, 2002).

In contrast, the term "case study" explicitly refers to a research methodology involving systematic investigation of selected cases within their natural settings. The case study

methodology prioritises interpretive insight, depth, complexity, and contextual nuance, rather than statistical representativeness or universal generalisability (Crowe et al., 2011; Stake, 1994). The primary goal of employing a case study methodology is thus to generate rich, context-sensitive understanding by highlighting the interplay between specific phenomena and the contexts within which individual cases occur.

Rigorous case study methodology is underpinned by three core attributes: authenticity, analytical depth grounded in robust empirical evidence, and the capacity to provoke diverse interpretations and critical engagement from readers (Merseth, 1994; Perry, 1998; Ridder, 2017). These attributes reinforce the methodological importance of transparency, detailed documentation of each case, and openness to multiple analytical perspectives.

In line with the research objectives previously outlined (Section 1.4), the two cases—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—were specifically chosen using clearly defined criteria that emphasised their contemporary relevance to transport policy debates, their potential to illustrate contrasting governance and implementation dynamics, and their distinct socio-economic implications. To clarify explicitly: Our Pass is analysed as a financial transport intervention aimed primarily at enhancing youth mobility and promoting social inclusion, whereas the Trafford Park Extension Line is analysed as an infrastructural intervention intended to improve connectivity, stimulate regional economic growth, and align with sustainability goals.

Given the practical constraints and complexity inherent in conducting qualitative research across the entire GM city-region—where transport needs and governance structures vary significantly—particular attention within the Trafford Park Extension Line case is focused specifically on the Trafford area. This targeted geographical focus enhances analytical depth and allows detailed exploration of how infrastructural interventions interact with local socio-economic contexts.

4.5 Methodological Considerations and Analytical Generalisations

Case study methodology is recognised for its capacity to facilitate detailed, contextually sensitive analyses of complex phenomena, particularly where the boundary between the phenomenon under investigation and its real-world context is indistinct and deeply

intertwined (Yin, 1994; Jibrin, 2012). Yin (1994) identifies specific conditions under which a case study approach is particularly advantageous:

- The research centres around "how" or "why" questions.
- Controlling participant behaviour is neither practical nor desirable.
- Context significantly influences the phenomenon being studied.
- Boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are indistinct.

These conditions align closely with the thesis, which investigates how different forms of transport interventions shape socio-economic outcomes through stakeholder experiences and institutional contexts. Such an approach enables exploration of governance practices, stakeholder interpretations, and policy dynamics, capturing nuances frequently overlooked by quantitative methods.

A case study methodology facilitates an in-depth investigation of real-world contexts, enabling the exploration of interactions among institutional structures, policy decisions, and stakeholder experiences (Baxter, 2006). While recognising critiques regarding generalisability due to limited samples and the absence of experimental controls (Campbell, 1975; Miles, 1979), the method's value lies precisely in its interpretive richness and capacity for detailed qualitative insight (Stake, 1995; Gerry, 2019).

Further methodological considerations include distinguishing between single and multiple-case designs, as well as between holistic and embedded analytical units (Yin, 2003; Sneed et al., 2021). A multiple-case design was selected to facilitate comparative insights between the contrasting policy approaches of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. This comparative perspective enables nuanced exploration of governance structures, equity implications, and socio-economic outcomes, thereby supporting analytical generalisation rather than statistical representativeness (Yin, 2003).

The research design draws on a range of qualitative data sources, including elite-level narrative interviews, pilot survey insights, and secondary policy documentation. This triangulation approach enhances the robustness of findings and ensures a deeper analytical

understanding of how transport interventions are perceived, implemented, and experienced within their specific contexts.

Overall, this methodological approach aligns closely with the interpretivist epistemology of the thesis, facilitating detailed exploration of stakeholder perspectives, institutional complexities, and context-specific dynamics inherent in GM's transport policy landscape.

4.6 Research Timeline

The summary of research stages and timeline (Table 1) reflects the phased progression of this thesis and illustrates how the thesis adapted to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the research was designed as mixed-methods research incorporating focus groups, narrative interviews, and pilot surveys to gather diverse stakeholder perspectives and encourage dynamic participant interaction. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 and the subsequent restrictions on face-to-face contact rendered focus groups impracticable, leading to their removal from the research design.

During Phase Three (May 2020), the pilot survey was conducted under stringent lockdown measures in Manchester, which significantly disrupted typical public transport usage patterns. These conditions influenced how participants perceived and responded to questions about transport behaviour and policy. As a result, responses were interpreted with caution, recognising that they reflected extraordinary circumstances rather than normative behaviours. To adhere to public health guidelines, the survey was disseminated digitally, primarily via email and online platforms. Despite these limitations, the pilot stage was instrumental in identifying key themes—such as affordability, accessibility, and perceived reliability—that informed the refinement of the narrative interview schedule.

Narrative interviews, conducted between September 2020 and February 2021 (Phase Four), were carried out remotely with elite-level stakeholders. This adaptation ensured participant safety while maintaining methodological integrity and compliance with ethical and health guidelines. The interviews yielded rich, detailed qualitative data that were central to achieving the research objectives, offering nuanced insights into stakeholders' perceptions of the selected transport interventions.

Throughout the thesis, an iterative analytical process guided data engagement, with ongoing cross-referencing between emerging findings and relevant theoretical frameworks. This flexible, cyclical approach to data collection and interpretation enhanced the depth and dependability of the analysis, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm.

In summary, the timeline presented in Table 1 demonstrates how the research responded effectively to unforeseen challenges without compromising academic rigour. The adaptations made not only ensured continuity but also contributed to the relevance of the findings by highlighting the resilience of urban transport policy debates in the face of crisis. These insights advance discussions on regional equity, stakeholder participation, and sustainable urban development.

Table 1. Summary of Research Stages and Timeline

Phase	**Activity**	**Time period**
Phase 1: Research Planning and Preliminary Reading	• Initial planning and background reading; refining research questions and objectives; identifying theoretical frameworks. • Preparation for literature review; drafting initial research design.	September 2019 – February 2020
Phase 2: Literature Review	• In-depth review of foundational theories; identifying research gaps. • Synthesizing findings and refining research questions and methodology.	March 2020 – April 2020

Phase 3: Pilot Study	• Conduct pilot survey: test and refine research instruments.	May 2020. Manchester was under strict lockdown measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions were in place on gatherings and non-essential activities.
Phase 4: Full Data Collection	• Initiate and conduct narrative interviews. • Continue data collection; ensure quality and ethical standards.	September 2020 – February 2021. Manchester continued to experience stringent COVID-19 restrictions, including local lockdowns, tiered limitations, and a national lockdown.
Phase 5: Data Analysis	In-depth critical analysis and cross-referencing findings with literature.	July 2021 – February 2022
Phase 6: Writing and Presentation	Draft individual chapters, starting with methodology and findings.	March – December 2022
Phase 7: Submission and Dissemination	Prepare thesis for submission; plan presentations and publications.	October 2023 Onwards

4.7 Data Collection Methods

Building on the interpretivist foundations previously outlined, this section describes the methods used to collect data for examining stakeholders' interpretations of two transport interventions in GM. A multi-method qualitative approach was adopted, comprising three interrelated components: in-depth narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders, pilot surveys used to refine interview structure and themes, and document analysis that situated participant accounts within broader policy and institutional contexts.

Narrative interviews served as the principal data collection method, capturing rich, contextually grounded insights into how stakeholders perceive and experience transport interventions. The pilot surveys, conducted during an exploratory phase, provided preliminary indications of public attitudes and usage patterns, which informed the development of the interview schedule and enhanced the relevance of key themes. Document analysis complemented these methods by critically engaging with secondary sources—such as policy strategies, evaluation reports, and regional planning documents—to provide a contextual foundation and to identify the institutional discourses in which stakeholder narratives are embedded.

Together, these methods offered a robust framework for exploring the complex, situated interpretations of transport initiatives. This design supports an interpretivist approach that prioritises subjective meaning-making, contextual understanding, and the lived experiences of participants.

4.7.1 Narrative Interviews with Elite-Level Stakeholders

Narrative interviews served as the primary data collection method, selected for their ability to elicit rich, contextually grounded insights into stakeholder perceptions of the selected transport interventions. Aligned with the interpretivist epistemology underpinning this thesis, the interviews were designed to explore participants' subjective meanings rather than to extract objective facts, allowing individuals to describe their experiences in their own terms, with minimal interviewer direction (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2015).

This approach was particularly well suited to investigating individual and organisational perspectives on issues such as transport accessibility, social inclusion, economic impact, and governance dynamics. Participants were invited to reflect on how *Our Pass* and the Trafford Park Extension Line functioned—both in practical terms and as components of broader policy narratives. The narrative format facilitated diverse and non-linear storytelling, enabling the identification of tensions, contradictions, and contextual complexities inherent in transport policymaking and implementation.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with 16 elite-level participants drawn from a range of institutional backgrounds, including local government, academia, third-sector organisations, and public and private sector representatives (see Table 2). This sample

provided a balance between qualitative depth and institutional diversity, enabling comparative analysis and supporting thematic saturation across both cases.

Table 2. Interview Participants: Roles and Relevance to the Selected Cases

Participant Number	Organisation	Governance Level	Relevance to the Selected Cases
Participant 1	The Department for Transport: Northern Sector	National	Participant 1 has ample experience of working closely with DfT and local partners in the Northwest of England. They provide significant rationale behind both cases as they pertain to boosting productivity in the Northwest.
Participant 2	Transport for GM: Research Officer	Regional	Participant 2 worked on various research projects within TfGM. They provide a significant perspective to Our Pass in terms of young people and their price sensitivity and hence the impact of financial transport interventions.
Participant 3	Transport for GM	Regional	Participant 3 worked closely on the development of the Trafford Park Extension Line. They uncover the intended economic and social outputs. These outputs allow the research to make a comparison analysis to other transport infrastructure in the region.
Participant 4	GM Chamber of Commerce	Regional	Participant 4 works closely in research policies covering a variety of issues concerning transport, the economy, skills, and the environment in GM. They provide a valuable insight into Our Pass, focusing specifically on the

			sustainability agenda that is at the forefront of the transport industry.
Participant 5	Social Enterprise in GM	Third Sector	Participant 5 works for a social enterprise that strategizes growth, job creation, and enhancing inclusivity and economic prosperity within GM. They work closely with Our Pass users to understand the value a free travel card would have on young people's lives. They provide a significant understanding of how Our Pass creates change for each user, predominantly those from deprived backgrounds. They also provide noteworthy feedback of the pass and how transport interventions can better serve this cohort in the future.
Participant 6	VCSE Organisation: CEO	Third Sector	Participant 6 is a CEO for VCSE Organisation in GM. They work closely with young people in creating positive economic and social change in communities. They have firsthand experience derived from witnessing the impact of transport inequalities on young people in GM and how a financial intervention impact's these inequalities.
Participant 7	Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility	HEIs	Participant 7 specialises in the geography of mobility, travel, and transportation. They provide an expert understanding of the transport interventions as it relates to the

			transport theory. This also extended to analysis of the interventions.
Participant 8	Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation	HEIs	Participant 8 specialises in transport planning. They provide an expert analysis of the interchange aspect of the Trafford Park Extension Line and how this would impact passenger use long-term.
Participant 9	Expert Commentator: Transport Geography	HEIs	Participant 9 specialises in the geography of transport and how it contributes to the development of prosperous, sustainable cities. They provide an expert analysis on the spatial placement of the Trafford Park Extension Line and the extent to which it positively serves its users and the local economy.
Participant 10	Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning	HEIs	Participant 10 specialises in Transport and City Planning. They provide a thorough examination of the Our Pass, and how its extended benefits seek to combine social and economic policy in one transport-focused intervention. They also provide a detailed analysis into the transport and city-planning agenda in GM, and the extent to its effectiveness thus far.
Participant 11	Expert Commentator: Sport Economist	HEIs	Participant 11 is an expert in the economic modelling of the sport economy. They provided a thorough insight into the economic impact of the Trafford Park Extension Line and

			its direct accessibility to major sporting hubs in GM.
Participant 12	Council Director	Regional	Participant 12 is a council director in the transport division. They provide relevance of transport spatial placement. How it acts in a triangular approach to address other societal and economic needs.
Participant 13	Transport for the North	Regional	Participant 13 is a lead analytical researcher for a major transport division. They provide an overview of the current transport network in GM and the extent to which these interventions provide positive social and economic impact.
Participant 14	VCSE Organisation: Trustee	Third Sector	Participant 14 is a trustee of a local young people's charity in GM. They provide their firsthand experience as a former Our Pass user, allowing comparison of the intervention objectives against their own personal experiences.
Participant 15	VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager	Third Sector	Participant 15 is a campaign manager for a major young people's charity organisation based in GM. They work closely with young people in difficult circumstances and campaign for better policy to help alleviate their inequalities. They offer a comprehensive understanding of the transportation habits of young individuals. The way the interventions can influence sustainable transport

			behaviour and ultimately cultivate a young workforce with strong values on important societal issues.
Participant 16	Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty	HEIs	Participant 16 is a significant expert commentator on transport related exclusion and poverty. They provide a thorough analysis of transport poverty and how both financial and infrastructure interventions can seek to eradicate these inequalities.

4.7.2 Sampling Techniques

This thesis employed a combination of stratified purposive sampling and snowball sampling—both widely recognised as appropriate for qualitative research where relevance and analytical depth are prioritised over representativeness (Robinson, 2014; Patton, 2015). Stratified purposive sampling enabled the targeted recruitment of stakeholders with expertise specifically related to either the financial intervention (Our Pass) or the infrastructural intervention (Trafford Park Extension Line), ensuring broad coverage of the policy landscape and facilitating detailed, context-sensitive insights.

Snowball sampling complemented this approach by supporting access to less visible participants, including those engaged informally in policy development or community engagement. This method is particularly well suited to elite-level interviewing, where initial participants often act as gatekeepers, referring the researcher to others with critical knowledge and insider perspectives (Noy, 2008).

A total of 16 elite-level participants were recruited from a range of institutional backgrounds, including regional and national government, academia, transport organisations, and third-sector entities. This sample size aligns with recommendations for narrative-based qualitative research, where the emphasis lies on the depth and richness of accounts rather than numerical generalisability (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The sample was sufficient to achieve thematic saturation, with no new substantive insights emerging in the later stages of data collection (Guest et al., 2006).

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, both recruitment and interviews were conducted remotely via email, video conferencing, and telephone, in accordance with participant preferences and public health guidelines. Remote interviewing not only ensured ethical adherence— upholding safety, autonomy, and informed consent—but also expanded the geographical reach of participants.

Nonetheless, the limitations of the sampling methods were acknowledged. Snowball sampling, for example, carries the risk of homogeneity bias due to the tendency for referrals within similar social or professional networks (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). This risk was mitigated by initiating multiple referral chains across distinct sectors—public, academic, and third sector—thereby enhancing participant diversity and thematic breadth. Taken together, the sampling strategies contributed to the methodological rigour of the thesis, enabling the collection of nuanced stakeholder perspectives in a manner consistent with its interpretivist epistemology and research aims.

4.7.3 Pilot Surveys

A pilot survey was conducted to support the refinement of the narrative interview framework and to identify preliminary themes prior to the main data collection phase. This exploratory instrument aimed to gather initial insights on affordability, service coverage, and user experiences within GM's public transport system, with particular attention to the Our Pass intervention.

The survey was completed by 30 respondents, aligning with established methodological guidance that considers 10 to 30 participants appropriate for pilot research designed to test research instruments and identify thematic trends (Isaac and Michael, 1995; Hill, 1998). These standards are widely recognised across the social sciences, including transport research, for assessing the feasibility and reliability of research tools prior to broader qualitative engagement.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the survey was disseminated digitally via email and online platforms, targeting individuals with direct experience of GM's public transport system. Respondents included current Our Pass users as well as individuals familiar with other local transport initiatives. Although response rates were shaped by the limitations of the pandemic

context, the survey successfully highlighted several recurring concerns—particularly around cost sensitivity, perceived reliability, and access barriers. These initial insights were instrumental in shaping the structure and thematic focus of the subsequent narrative interviews.

The use of a pilot survey as a preliminary, design-oriented tool within a qualitative research strategy is supported by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), who advocate for methodological flexibility and responsiveness within interpretivist research. To ensure transparency and methodological rigour, Appendix A provides a detailed account of the thematic analysis process applied to the pilot survey data, including coding procedures and illustrative responses.

Insights from the pilot survey directly informed the narrative interview protocol, shaping lines of questioning related to affordability, access, and perceptions of service delivery. These themes re-emerge in Chapter 6 (Section 6.1.1), particularly in relation to youth engagement and perceived accessibility limitations associated with the Our Pass intervention.

While the pilot survey was not used as a primary data source for interpretive analysis, its exploratory function significantly enhanced the design and contextual grounding of the qualitative phase. This, in turn, enriched the thesis's overall interpretivist approach by ensuring that subsequent data collection was responsive to relevant user concerns and situated within lived experience.

4.7.4 Secondary Data Sources

The thesis also made use of secondary data sources, including official reports from the GMCA, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), national policy documents, and strategic evaluations. Consistent with the thesis's interpretivist epistemology, these documents were not treated as objective measures of validity, but rather as socially constructed texts reflecting institutional narratives, policy framings, and underlying power dynamics (Coffey, 2014; Bowen, 2009). They were used to situate participant accounts within broader governance and discursive contexts, enabling a comparative analysis of policy discourse and lived experience.

Viewed as contextually embedded artefacts, these documents were examined for their use of key policy terms such as "inclusion," "connectivity," and "productivity." The analysis

explored how these concepts were constructed within policy narratives and how they corresponded with—or diverged from—stakeholders' interpretations shared during interviews. This comparative approach enabled insight into how transport interventions are framed institutionally, and where tensions may exist between official representations and stakeholder realities.

Table 3 provides an overview of the secondary sources examined and their relevance to the thesis's aims. These documents offer crucial contextual insight into the policy and governance frameworks surrounding the two selected cases: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line.

In addition to contextualising the research, selected secondary documents underwent thematic analysis to enrich the empirical findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6. This interpretive strategy allowed for a nuanced examination of the alignment and disjunction between policy framing and stakeholder perception. Secondary sources, including academic and grey literature (e.g., Martens, 2017; Lucas, 2012; GMCA, 2023b), also informed the development of interview themes and contributed to identifying gaps in the existing literature.

These materials were integrated consistently across the thesis. They informed the broader policy context in Chapters 2 and 3, and were later revisited in Chapters 5 and 6, where they were analysed alongside primary interview data. This iterative use of documentary sources enhanced interpretive coherence and supported a critical exploration of equity, accessibility, and regional competitiveness within GM's transport policy discourse. The analytical strategy reinforced both methodological rigour and empirical depth across the research.

Table 3. Overview of Secondary Data Sources

Report Name	Relevance to Research
GMCA Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b)	Offers insights into the socio-economic effects of Our Pass, including cost savings, accessibility, cultural engagement, and its role in reducing transport poverty.
Greater Manchester Transport Committee	Provides data on ridership and usage patterns of the Trafford Park Extension Line, aiding in the analysis of its. Evaluates

(GMTC, 2023). Metrolink Service Performance Report	the service reliability and accessibility of the Trafford Park Extension Line, supporting an assessment of mobility and economic growth impacts.
GMCA Congestion Intervention Plan (GMCA, 2023c)	Addresses disparities in transport access and infrastructure, contributing to the analysis of geographic inequities in GM's transport network.
Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 (2021)	Explores long-term strategic planning for sustainable and inclusive transport solutions, relevant to evaluating policy alignment and regional planning goals.
Bee Network Committee Report (2023)	Examines service integration, first-mile/last-mile connectivity, and the vision for an inclusive, unified transport network in GM.
Public Health England (2014)	Discusses the link between affordable transport and young people's access to education, employment, and health services.
Metrolink Sub-Committee Report (2023)	Highlights post-pandemic recovery trends in ridership and evaluates service gaps, informing infrastructure improvement strategies.
National Travel Survey (2021)	Provides data on transport usage patterns, affordability, and accessibility challenges, complementing the analysis of mobility inequities in GM.
GMCA Clean Air Plan (2023)	Highlights barriers to reducing car dependency and advancing sustainable transport solutions in GM.
GM Transport Committee Report (2023)	Evaluates challenges and opportunities for post-pandemic recovery in GM's transport network, particularly the Trafford Park Extension Line.
GMCA Prosperity Review (2022)	Explores the economic impacts of enhanced transport connectivity on employment and productivity in GM.
Transport Scotland Evaluation (2023)	Offers comparative insights into the impacts of transport subsidies on financial mobility and equity.

These sources are critically analysed alongside participant insights in Chapters 5 and 6—particularly in Sections 6.1 to 6.3—and are referenced throughout the thematic discussions and comparative analyses.

4.8 Analytical Framework

This section outlines the analytical framework used to interpret the data, ensuring consistency with the interpretivist stance adopted throughout the thesis. A glossary of key analytical and epistemological terms is provided in the front matter to clarify the methodological concepts used in this thesis.

Data analysis combined thematic and hermeneutic approaches, each applied to different components of the dataset. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodological framework, was used to examine pilot survey responses and narrative interview transcripts. This approach enabled the systematic identification of recurring themes, patterns, and areas of conceptual relevance across participant accounts.

A hermeneutic interpretive approach was applied specifically to the narrative interview data to facilitate deeper engagement with how participants constructed and communicated meaning. This method supported an iterative, reflective analysis attentive to language, context, and underlying assumptions—core features of interpretivist inquiry.

Secondary documents, including policy reports and strategic evaluations, underwent interpretive thematic analysis to critically examine institutional discourses, assumptions, and policy framings. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, these texts were not treated as objective records but were analysed as socially constructed narratives shaped by institutional interests, policy logics, and power dynamics.

The integration of thematic and hermeneutic techniques strengthened the coherence of the thesis's analytical approach, allowing for both systematic theme development and deeper interpretive engagement. This combination supported a nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives and institutional discourses, consistent with the research's epistemological foundations.

4.8.1 Hermeneutic Interpretation (Narrative Interviews)

The interview data were interpreted using a hermeneutic analytical approach, which emphasises the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant. Informed by philosophical hermeneutics—particularly the work of Gadamer (1975) and Ricoeur (1991)—this approach views interpretation as iterative and dialogical, rather than as a linear decoding of explicit content. Through reflexive engagement with participant narratives, the researcher critically examined how experiences were articulated and situated within broader social, political, and institutional contexts (Vandermause and Fleming, 2011).

The hermeneutic perspective was especially relevant to the aims of this thesis, as it enabled exploration not only of what participants said, but how they positioned themselves within competing interpretations of accessibility, equity, and governance. Interpretive questions such as 'What assumptions are embedded in this account?' and 'How does this participant's positionality shape their narrative?' supported deeper analytical engagement and illuminated discursive tensions and contested policy meanings.

A key strength of the hermeneutic approach is its attentiveness to contextual complexity (Vandermause and Fleming, 2011). Stakeholder interpretations were understood as being shaped by organisational roles, institutional settings, and lived experiences. This enabled the analysis to explore the tensions and trade-offs participants described—such as negotiating between equity, efficiency, and political feasibility in evaluating transport interventions (Ricoeur, 1991; Gadamer, 1975; Marsden and Reardon, 2017; Preston and Rajé, 2007).

The iterative nature of hermeneutic interpretation also facilitated cross-case synthesis, allowing themes to be revisited, refined, and reinterpreted across interviews. While hermeneutics provided the overarching interpretive lens, thematic analysis—following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework—structured the systematic identification and organisation of themes emerging from participant accounts. This dual approach supported both analytical rigour and interpretive depth.

Findings from this combined strategy are presented in Chapter 6, organised around core themes including access to social opportunities, economic mobility, and regional sustainability. Section 6.4 presents a cross-case synthesis, comparing thematic convergences and divergences between Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line.

Table 4 provides a concise overview of the theoretical orientation and analytical procedures guiding the hermeneutic approach, illustrating how this interpretive methodology shaped the analytical process.

Table 4. Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Directions

Theoretical approach	Main conceptual orientations	Potential analytic directions
Hermeneutics Giddens, 1979, 1987; Palmer, 1969; Ricœur, 1991	• Emphasise the analysis of texts and the nature of interpretation itself. • Move away from a subjective perspective; recognise that certain textual interpretations hold more validity than others, depending on the textual context. • Dedication to thorough analysis of texts within their social and organisational context, achieved through researchers' extensive immersion in the subject matter.	• Considering textual interpretations in context and over time, while remaining open to alternative viewpoints. • Observe for common themes, patterns, and connections between different elements. • Explore patterns in ethnographic and textual data through triangulation

4.8.2 Thematic Analysis (Interviews and Pilot Surveys)

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret both the pilot survey responses and the narrative interview transcripts, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This

method aligns well with interpretivist qualitative research, allowing for the systematic identification of patterns within textual data while maintaining the interpretive flexibility necessary to capture nuanced meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017; Terry et al., 2017).

The pilot survey functioned as an exploratory tool, highlighting initial themes such as affordability, access to opportunities, and perceptions of regional connectivity. These early insights informed the structure and thematic focus of the subsequent interviews. In contrast, the narrative interviews underwent a more comprehensive and interpretively layered thematic analysis. Coding extended beyond surface-level categorisation to include subtle features such as tone, metaphor, emphasis, and silence—elements central to understanding how participants construct and communicate meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Joffe, 2012).

The thematic analysis process, applied across both datasets—with greater interpretive depth in the interview analysis—followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) iterative framework:

1. Familiarisation: Transcripts, survey responses, field notes, and relevant policy documents were reviewed to identify initial patterns and reflections.

2. Initial Coding: Inductive codes were developed to capture both descriptive content and deeper interpretive meaning. Coding remained flexible to accommodate emergent insights.
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into preliminary themes based on recurring patterns across the data. Key themes included access to social opportunities, economic competitiveness, and policy implementation gaps.

4. Theme Review and Refinement: Emerging themes were reviewed for internal coherence and analytical distinctiveness. Sub-themes were refined, merged, or redefined as needed.

5. Interpretive Alignment: Finalised themes were contextualised within broader policy narratives and critically compared with insights from secondary document analysis, enhancing interpretive rigour and thematic coherence.

This iterative and reflective approach to thematic analysis remained grounded in the interpretivist epistemology of the thesis, ensuring that the themes were developed from

within participant narratives while also critically engaging with institutional discourses and broader policy frameworks.

A detailed worked example of theme construction based on participant data is presented in Chapter 6. The full thematic analysis process—including coding frameworks, data extracts, and interpretive memos—is documented in Appendix A, providing transparency, auditability, and methodological rigour.

4.8.3 Document Analysis

The document analysis undertaken in this research was guided by an interpretive analytical lens, conceptualising policy documents not as sources of objective evidence, but as socially constructed texts that reflect specific institutional agendas, assumptions, and ideological positions (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2014; Yanow, 2007). Consistent with the interpretivist epistemology of this thesis, documents were approached as contextually contingent artefacts shaped by power relations, linguistic framing, and organisational practices (Fairclough, 2013; Prior, 2008).

Policy and strategic documents were purposively selected based on their relevance to the design, implementation, and evaluation of the two selected cases: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. Rather than using these texts to confirm or validate participant narratives in a positivist sense, the analysis focused on contextualising stakeholder accounts and critically examining how institutional discourses constructed meanings around mobility, social equity, and regional economic development (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Howarth and Griggs, 2012).

Analytical attention was directed toward discursive features such as keyword repetition, metaphor use, framing strategies, and the inclusion—or exclusion—of particular populations or policy issues (Fairclough, 2013; Yanow, 2007). Terms including "exclusion," "connectivity," "access," and "productivity" were systematically traced across multiple documents to reveal both explicit priorities and implicit silences within GM's transport policy discourse (Bacchi, 2009; Fairclough, 2013).

Critically juxtaposing these institutional narratives with interview data allowed for a deeper exploration of how policy meanings were constructed, negotiated, and contested across different governance levels. This form of analytical triangulation was not intended to confirm

or challenge the validity of stakeholder accounts, but to illuminate intersections, tensions, and divergences between official discourse and lived experience within GM's transport governance context (Hajer, 1995; Yanow, 2007).

Through this approach, the document analysis contributed to a nuanced understanding of how dominant policy narratives framed transport interventions and revealed how stakeholders navigated, resisted, or reframed these narratives within their own professional and interpretive contexts.

4.9 Ethical Considerations and Institutional Ethos

This section outlines the ethical principles and institutional ethos that guided the conduct of this research, in alignment with Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) commitment to socially responsible, inclusive, and ethically rigorous scholarship (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2020). Ethical considerations were embedded throughout all stages of the research process, with a sustained focus on participant safeguarding, transparency, and reflexive practice.

Ethical approval was obtained from the MMU Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection. The review process included detailed scrutiny of the research protocols, informed consent procedures, data management plans, and potential risks to participants, thereby ensuring compliance with recognised standards of ethical research practice (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018).

Informed consent was obtained digitally from all participants before participation, ensuring that individuals fully understood the nature and purpose of the thesis. Each participant received an information sheet detailing the research aims, their role in the thesis, data protection measures, and their rights—including the right to withdraw without consequence at any point prior to final thesis submission (BERA, 2018; Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], 2021). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, all narrative interviews were conducted remotely via secure telephone or video conferencing platforms, ensuring both participant safety and comfort while accommodating individual preferences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were prioritised throughout the research process. Pseudonyms have been used consistently in all thesis materials and any subsequent outputs, and no

personally identifiable information has been disclosed. Data were securely stored and managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018) and MMU's institutional data management policy, which requires the secure deletion of research materials five years after project completion.

Ethical considerations were not treated as a discrete stage, but as an ongoing, embedded element of the research. The researcher maintained an ethically reflexive stance, particularly when engaging with sensitive topics or working with participants in potentially vulnerable positions. Reflexive practices included continual reassessment of researcher assumptions, allowing space for participants to pause or reflect during interviews, and implementing safeguards to minimise potential distress (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003).

Aligning closely with MMU's institutional commitment to socially responsible research practices, these ethical protocols reinforce both the academic integrity and social relevance of the research outcomes (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2020).

4.10 Validity and Reflexivity

In qualitative research—particularly within an interpretivist paradigm—validity is not determined through statistical generalisability but through the credibility, coherence, and transparency of the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Rolfe, 2006). This thesis ensured validity by maintaining clear alignment between its interpretivist epistemology, methodological choices, and analytical framework.

Recognising that researcher subjectivity is intrinsic to qualitative inquiry, reflexivity was actively employed to strengthen the interpretive validity of the thesis. Reflexivity involves ongoing critical self-examination of the researcher's values, assumptions, and positionality, and how these shape the research process—from question formulation and case selection to interpretation of participant narratives (Berger, 2015; Pillow, 2003). Myerhoff and Ruby (1992) argue that reflexivity requires a conscious and sustained awareness of the researcher's influence, ensuring that biases are acknowledged and thoughtfully managed throughout.

In this thesis, reflexivity was embedded across all stages of the research. Particular attention was paid to the researcher's own professional background and pre-existing beliefs regarding the social and economic benefits of transport interventions. One specific strategy used was

reflexive bracketing (Ahern, 1999; Probst, 2015), which involves identifying and temporarily setting aside personal assumptions to allow new insights to emerge. For instance, the researcher initially assumed that financial interventions such as Our Pass would be uniformly beneficial. However, participant narratives highlighting unintended consequences and implementation challenges prompted a re-evaluation of these assumptions, enabling a more balanced and nuanced interpretation.

To further enhance interpretive validity and guard against confirmation bias, the data were examined through multiple theoretical lenses. This involved actively engaging with alternative conceptual frameworks—some of which aligned with and others which challenged the researcher's initial expectations. These included:

- Transport Justice Theory (Martens, 2017), which provided a normative framework for critically assessing equity and fairness within transport interventions.

- Agglomeration Economies (Graham and Gibbons, 2019), which offered economic insights into the spatial and productivity-related impacts of improved transport connectivity.
- New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010), which illuminated governance dynamics, including stakeholder collaboration, institutional complexity, and policy implementation processes.

The integration of these multiple theoretical perspectives enriched the analysis by allowing stakeholder experiences to be interpreted through diverse conceptual lenses. This approach contributed to analytical depth and interpretive rigour, consistent with the thesis's interpretivist orientation.

Together, these reflexive strategies and theoretical engagements supported a trustworthy and credible interpretation of the data. They ensured that the analysis remained both contextually grounded and critically aware, thereby upholding the methodological integrity of the interpretivist approach adopted in this research.

4.11 Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is conceptualised as *dependability*—the extent to which findings are transparently documented, methodologically coherent, and could reasonably be

interpreted in a similar way by other researchers engaging with the same data (Given, 2008; Winter, 2000). In this thesis, dependability was ensured through detailed documentation, consistent procedural practices, and robust data management strategies.

A structured yet adaptable interview guide was used consistently across all stakeholder interviews, allowing for both standardisation and responsiveness to emergent narratives. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supported by detailed field notes, generating a rich and traceable data record. These practices enhance the auditability of the research, supporting transparency in how interpretations were constructed and enabling external evaluation of the analytical process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The thesis's sampling strategy also contributed to dependability. The purposive selection of participants across diverse governance levels (regional, local), sectors (public, private, third sector), and roles (academic, practitioner, policymaker) facilitated cross-verification of emerging themes. This diversity of perspectives increased confidence in the coherence and trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2015). Although logistical adaptations were required due to the COVID-19 pandemic—specifically the shift to remote interviewing—these changes expanded geographic inclusivity and allowed participants greater flexibility. All remote interviews were conducted ethically and consistently, ensuring methodological continuity across the sample.

In qualitative narrative research, dependability is further enhanced through the authentic representation of participant perspectives and the internal coherence of the analytical account (Riessman, 2008). By following a clearly articulated analytical process, maintaining detailed records, and openly documenting interpretive decisions, this thesis generated findings that are both dependable and firmly grounded in stakeholder experiences.

4.12 Generalisability and Replication
This thesis does not aim for statistical generalisability, as sought in quantitative paradigms. Instead, it adopts the principle of *analytical generalisation* (Polit and Beck, 2010; Yin, 2009), in which findings derive broader relevance through their theoretical insights and explanatory value within comparable contexts.

The selected cases—Our Pass (a financial intervention) and the Trafford Park Extension Line (an infrastructural intervention)—were deliberately chosen to illustrate contrasting approaches within a devolved governance framework. These cases are not presented as representative of all transport interventions, but as contextually rich examples that illuminate how policy initiatives are interpreted, implemented, and experienced in practice. Their analytical value lies in their capacity to reveal broader theoretical and policy dynamics relevant to similar urban and regional settings.

The findings are therefore offered as theoretically informed insights rather than generalisable truths. The analysis contributes perspectives that may inform other city-regions addressing comparable transport policy challenges, such as equity, connectivity, and governance complexity. By clearly articulating the conceptual frameworks, methodological rationale, and contextual parameters of the thesis, this research supports future comparative analysis or adaptation within related policy environments (Stake, 2005).

Moreover, the thesis's comprehensive documentation—including the transparent use of interviews, policy documents, and pilot survey data—alongside its systematic analytical procedures, enhances the potential for re-analysis, cross-case comparison, and policy learning. While the findings remain situated within the specific context of GM, they offer analytical transferability and broader policy relevance, contributing meaningfully to both scholarly and practical understandings of transport governance.

4.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological framework underpinning the critical investigation of the socio-economic impacts associated with two transport interventions—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—within GM's devolved governance context. Clearly grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, the chapter articulated how stakeholders' subjective interpretations and lived experiences guided each phase of the research process, from initial case selection through data collection to final interpretive analysis.

A qualitative, multi-method approach combining narrative interviews with elite-level stakeholders, exploratory pilot surveys, and interpretive document analysis was employed. This combination allowed for a nuanced exploration of stakeholder perspectives, institutional rationales, and the lived realities associated with each transport intervention. Thematic

analysis, structured according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was complemented by hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1991), ensuring both systematic and contextually sensitive analytical rigour.

The chapter explicitly detailed the strategies implemented to maintain validity, dependability, and ethical integrity. These included comprehensive and transparent methodological documentation, rigorous adherence to ethical protocols aligned with institutional values, and continuous critical reflexivity concerning researcher positionality. Collectively, these measures strengthened the interpretive validity and trustworthiness of the research findings, explicitly responding to examiner feedback on epistemological clarity, methodological sequencing, and analytical coherence.

Overall, the robust methodological foundation established here directly supports the empirical analyses and interpretive insights developed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, which present and discuss findings explicitly in relation to the thesis's stated research objectives and theoretical contributions.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERVENTIONS – OUR PASS AND TRAFFORD PARK EXTENSION LINE

5. Introduction

This chapter introduces the two selected cases examined in this thesis—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line—as contrasting strategic responses to GM's transport-related socio-economic challenges. Our Pass represents a financial intervention, providing free bus travel to young people to enhance their mobility and improve access to education, employment, and civic life. Conversely, the Trafford Park Extension Line is an infrastructural intervention, extending the Metrolink tram network to connect key employment and leisure hubs with residential areas. Juxtaposing a demand-side subsidy against a supply-side capital investment project provides critical insights into how different policy approaches advance— or fall short of—GM's strategic objectives of equity, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

Building directly on the theoretical and governance frameworks of Chapters 2–4, the chapter first (section 5.1) diagnoses the fragmented devolution, deregulation and multi-level coordination challenges that shape all GM transport policy. It then (section 5.2–5.4) examines three cross-cutting integration issues—fare harmonisation, multimodal connectivity and public–private collaboration—before turning to the two interventions themselves. The detailed examination of the two selected cases (Section 5.5 on Our Pass; Section 5.7 on the Trafford Park Extension Line) critically evaluates each initiative's strategic rationale, operational constraints, and implications for spatial equity. Throughout the analysis, conceptual lenses derived from New Public Management (NPM), New Public Governance (NPG), and collaborative governance theory inform critical reflections, while the interpretivist approach foregrounds stakeholder interpretations of these policies. Ultimately, this contextual analysis provides the foundation for Chapter 6, where the strategic objectives of each intervention are critically assessed against user and practitioner experiences.

Conceptual frameworks such as NPM, NPG, and collaborative governance provide theoretical coherence and critical depth. NPM offers insights into efficiency-driven approaches underpinning infrastructure delivery, while NPG and collaborative governance frameworks facilitate critique of partnership working and stakeholder engagement practices.

These frameworks ensure methodological consistency and reinforce the interpretivist stance established in the thesis's research design.

Drawing on primary stakeholder interviews and secondary data—including regional policy documents, official evaluations, and grey literature—the chapter critically assesses how each intervention aligns with the broader strategic ambitions of the city-region. The discussion begins by examining the structural challenges inherent in GM's transport governance, including the implications of deregulation, fare and service fragmentation, and persistent institutional silos. Subsequent sections analyse efforts towards integrated fare systems and multimodal service coordination, illustrating ongoing governance tensions and operational constraints.

Following this broader analysis, the chapter provides detailed contextualisation of both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, critically evaluating their strategic rationales and operational limitations, particularly regarding social inclusion, youth mobility, regional competitiveness, and sustainable urban development. Each case is appraised with attention to how well it addresses deep-rooted inequalities and the extent to which it supports genuinely inclusive growth.

Throughout the chapter, a balanced and critical perspective is maintained, explicitly recognising gaps between policy aspirations and actual or potential outcomes. This exploration establishes a rigorous foundation for the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 6 and 7, where the lived experiences of users and stakeholders will be examined in relation to these stated strategic ambitions, providing further critical insight and opportunities for policy refinement.

By revealing how devolution, deregulation and institutional silos constrain even well-intentioned policies, section 5.1 equips us to assess, in the sections that follow, how those same governance dynamics shape the design and delivery of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. It also sets up the questions about stakeholder interpretation that Chapter 6 will address (Research Objective 3).

5.1 Challenges Relating to Greater Manchester Transport Governance

This section explores the structural challenges associated with transport governance in GM, framing these issues in relation to the two case cases: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. These interventions exemplify distinct approaches to addressing transport-related socio-economic challenges: Our Pass is a financial initiative aimed at enhancing youth mobility through subsidised bus travel, while the Trafford Park Extension Line represents a major infrastructural investment designed to improve regional connectivity between key employment hubs and surrounding residential areas. The contrasting approaches—a demand-side subsidy versus a supply-side infrastructure intervention—offer a critical lens for assessing how governance structures influence the operationalisation of transport policy objectives around equity, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

While governance-related themes were initially explored in Chapter 3, this section explicitly re-engages with them through an applied perspective, examining how structural challenges impact policy implementation and the realisation of strategic ambitions. Rather than restating previous arguments, the analysis here focuses on the operational implications of governance arrangements, showing how the structural and institutional dynamics identified earlier translate into concrete policy interventions. By revisiting governance through this practical lens, the section directly addresses Research Objectives 1 and 3, offering an in-depth exploration of both the strategic intentions behind each intervention and their actual alignment—or misalignment—with inclusive regional development goals.

Central to understanding these interventions is an appreciation of GM's fragmented governance context, characterised by complex interactions between devolved authority structures, deregulated markets, and multi-level institutional arrangements. Although devolution has increased regional autonomy, transport governance remains complicated by persistent fragmentation and the competing incentives of public and private actors. This environment has significant implications for how interventions such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line are formulated, funded, and ultimately delivered.

The discussion draws on both primary stakeholder insights and secondary sources, including policy documents, official evaluations, and grey literature, providing a robust evidence base for critically examining how governance challenges shape transport outcomes. Specific governance issues analysed include the consequences of market deregulation, challenges in

achieving coordination across multiple transport providers, institutional fragmentation, and the complex interactions between local authorities, regional governance bodies, and central government departments. The section also assesses policy efforts to integrate fares and services across transport modes, highlighting the structural tensions and operational limitations involved.

Maintaining a critical analytical stance, the section explicitly considers both the potential and limitations of each intervention, setting the foundation for the empirical analyses in Chapters 6 and 7. The lived experiences and perceptions of stakeholders and service users explored in later chapters will be interpreted against the backdrop of these governance challenges, offering a nuanced evaluation of how effectively strategic transport ambitions are translated into equitable and inclusive regional outcomes.

5.1.1 Fare Integration

Fare integration represents a key strategy for enhancing accessibility and enabling seamless multimodal travel within urban transport systems. In GM, devolved powers have supported efforts to establish a unified ticketing system across buses, trams, and other transport services under the regional 'Our Network' strategy. This integrated approach aims to simplify fare structures, promote equitable access, and encourage modal shifts away from private car usage towards public transport, thereby contributing to both social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Sharaby and Shiftan, 2012).

However, achieving meaningful fare integration in practice is hindered by significant institutional, operational, and behavioural challenges. Central to these difficulties is the fragmented nature of GM's transport governance, exacerbated by market deregulation and competition among private bus operators, many of whom resist fare harmonisation initiatives. This fragmentation complicates negotiations and obstructs the creation of a unified fare system. Additionally, technical challenges associated with developing integrated ticketing platforms add further complexity. Sharaby and Shiftan (2012) argue that successful fare integration requires more than technological infrastructure; it also depends on social legitimacy, ease of use, and widespread public acceptance.

Affordability emerges as another critical dimension of fare integration. To achieve equitable accessibility, the integrated fare structure must offer a genuinely cost-effective alternative to

private vehicles and less sustainable modes of transport such as taxis (Arnone et al., 2016). Pricing strategies must be carefully calibrated to ensure that lower-income and geographically marginalised communities derive tangible benefits. Furthermore, the system's user-friendliness is crucial for accommodating passengers with varying levels of digital literacy, confidence, and familiarity with public transport, thus avoiding the creation of new forms of exclusion.

An additional barrier relates to building public trust and securing widespread user buy-in. As Solecka and Zak (2014) highlight, fare integration schemes often underperform when anticipated benefits—such as lower fares, simplified transfers, or expanded network reach— are not fully realised, or when communication strategies fail to address public confusion or misperceptions. In GM, despite progress through measures such as the introduction of contactless payments and capped daily fares, these improvements have yet to be implemented consistently across all boroughs or uniformly adopted by different transport providers. This inconsistency risks undermining public confidence and limiting the potential uptake of integrated travel solutions.

In summary, while fare integration in GM offers considerable potential to improve system coherence and advance regional mobility objectives, its success ultimately depends on overcoming governance fragmentation, securing regulatory alignment, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. Without a concerted effort to tackle these broader challenges, fare integration risks becoming a partial, technocratic intervention rather than a genuinely transformative policy for enhancing transport inclusion. These implementation challenges align closely with criticisms detailed in the GM Transport Strategy Evaluation (TfGM, 2023), which underscores persistent gaps between fare integration ambitions and operational realities due to market fragmentation and technological limitations.

5.1.2 Transport Integration

The integration of diverse transport modes—including walking, cycling, buses, light rail, and heavy rail—constitutes a fundamental objective of contemporary urban mobility strategies. Effective integration facilitates smoother, more efficient, and environmentally sustainable journeys by reducing modal fragmentation and encouraging a shift away from private car dependency. Within GM, such integration is central to achieving the objectives articulated in

the 2040 Transport Strategy, particularly those relating to enhanced regional connectivity and social inclusion across its ten boroughs (TfGM, 2017).

However, transport integration extends beyond technical considerations. It is shaped by strategic land-use planning, coherent infrastructure investments, and effective institutional coordination (Monzón et al., 2016). In the absence of alignment across these elements, transport networks risk becoming inefficient, contributing to congestion, increased carbon emissions, and extended travel times. These outcomes disproportionately affect lower-income communities, who are often more reliant on public transport for commuting, healthcare, and education access (Luo et al., 2019).

Monzón et al. (2016) further emphasise that multimodal interchanges can function as important economic and social hubs, linking transport provision with retail, employment, and public services. However, realising these integrated benefits in GM has been complicated by inconsistent targeted investments and fragmented policy alignment. Institutional fragmentation remains a significant barrier, characterised by the absence of a single coordinating authority with jurisdiction across all modes. This leads to disjointed planning processes, limited data sharing, and operational inefficiencies. These governance challenges are further exacerbated by the legacy of deregulation within the bus sector, complicating coherent scheduling, integrated ticketing, and unified service design (Hodson et al., 2019).

Moreover, while light rail solutions such as Metrolink are promoted as environmentally sustainable alternatives to private car use, their high capital and operational costs typically restrict implementation to routes generating substantial economic returns. This approach risks reinforcing spatial inequalities, as economically peripheral and lower-income areas often remain underserved by critical infrastructure enhancements. These dynamics reflect broader theoretical concerns about 'path dependency' in transport infrastructure development, where investments tend to follow existing demand patterns rather than proactively addressing structural deficits (Preston and Almutairi, 2014; Beel et al., 2017).

Public-private partnership models introduce further complexity into governance arrangements. Although such partnerships can attract funding and technical expertise, they can also complicate accountability structures and public oversight. Issues such as cost overruns, procurement opacity, and limited prioritisation of social value within project

appraisals highlight tensions between short-term economic imperatives and longer-term equitable outcomes (Vinokur-Kaplan, 2018). For GM, delivering genuinely inclusive transport integration thus requires significant recalibration of governance frameworks to prioritise equity, accessibility, and strategic long-term planning over immediate financial returns.

Coordination, Deregulation, and Integration Challenges

Efforts to integrate GM's transport network are consistently undermined by institutional fragmentation and competing public-private interests. A primary obstacle remains the absence of a fully empowered, unified coordinating body with comprehensive oversight across transport modes. While TfGM oversees Metrolink and broader strategic planning, deregulated bus services continue to operate independently, outside its direct control. Consequently, planning processes remain fragmented, timetables misaligned, and services frequently duplicated—undermining seamless multimodal connectivity (Hodson et al., 2019). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have often been advanced as pragmatic solutions to infrastructure investment gaps. However, critics argue that existing governance mechanisms—including tendering and contractual oversight processes—are insufficiently robust to align private-sector incentives with public interest outcomes (Vinokur-Kaplan, 2018). Private transport operators, particularly within the deregulated bus market, often prioritise profitability over comprehensive service coverage, resulting in the neglect of peripheral and economically marginalised communities. These practices undermine regional equity and territorial cohesion objectives.

The deregulation introduced under the Transport Act (1985) has long contributed to operational inefficiencies and geographical disparities in service provision. In GM, dominant bus operators such as Stagecoach and FirstGroup have historically engaged in aggressive competitive practices—commonly referred to as 'bus wars'—to secure profitable routes, often at the expense of coordinated service provision and passenger safety (Beesley, 1991; Jibrin, 2012). Peripheral and rural areas, typically less profitable for operators, continue to experience reduced or withdrawn services, exacerbating spatial exclusion and entrenching socio-economic disparities (Beel et al., 2017; Dabson, 2019).

Persistent misalignment between bus and tram networks further obstructs effective integration. Bus operators continue to operate autonomously, leading to disconnected services

and fragmented fare systems. Market competition in the absence of strategic oversight thus reinforces systemic inefficiencies and reduces network-wide accessibility (Savage, 1993; Ellis and Silva, 1998).

Although the Bus Services Act (2017) provides devolved authorities such as GM with new mechanisms for re-regulation, its efficacy depends on overcoming entrenched institutional silos and addressing power imbalances between local authorities and dominant commercial operators. As Hodson et al. (2019) assert, transitioning from fragmented, competition-based models toward genuinely cooperative governance requires sustained political and financial commitment, alongside the development of robust regulatory frameworks.

The inequities arising from deregulation are compounded by persistent first-mile/last-mile connectivity challenges, particularly in suburban and rural areas. Limited pedestrian and cycling infrastructure linking residential areas to transit hubs further isolates residents without car access (Pathak et al., 2017). Low-density areas, with higher service delivery costs, discourage operators from extending coverage, perpetuating transport poverty among already disadvantaged populations.

Comparative analyses often cite London as an exemplar of successful integration, facilitated by centralised coordination, cross-subsidy mechanisms, and unified fare structures. However, replicating London's integrated model within GM poses substantial challenges, including fragmented governance arrangements, limited fiscal autonomy, and the enduring legacy of market deregulation (Jones, 2017). Consequently, GM's efforts towards re-regulation and integration must navigate more constrained institutional and political contexts.

While incremental enhancements—such as the introduction of digital real-time information displays and bus stop upgrades—can improve user experiences, without addressing underlying governance and structural fragmentation, such initiatives risk obscuring rather than resolving systemic challenges. Without harmonised timetables, integrated ticketing, and unified service standards, these incremental improvements remain isolated rather than transformative (Monzón et al., 2016).

Advancing genuine transport integration in GM requires a coordinated, equity-focused strategy. Essential priorities include aligning bus and tram networks, addressing first-

mile/last-mile gaps, and embedding explicit social inclusion objectives within infrastructure planning. Crucially, such efforts must also address prevailing governance imbalances between public authorities and commercial operators. Without confronting these underlying structural issues, GM's transport ambitions risk perpetuating existing inequalities rather than achieving genuinely inclusive, region-wide mobility.

5.2 Governance and Regional Development

The governance of transport in GM is intricately connected to broader political and economic development trajectories. Although the devolution agenda—most notably through the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) and the establishment of a directly elected metro mayor—has increased regional autonomy, it has also exposed significant tensions between aspirational regional objectives and practical institutional capacities. Persistent challenges, including governance fragmentation, limited transparency, and competing stakeholder interests, continue to constrain the transformative potential of devolved transport powers (Hodson et al., 2019).

A salient example of these structural tensions lies in the disjunction between rhetorical commitments to 'inclusive growth' and their operational realisation. Although regional policy frameworks frequently position transport infrastructure and services as mechanisms for promoting equity and broadening access to opportunity, critical assessments highlight a continuing prioritisation of investment towards central economic hubs and growth-oriented sectors such as advanced manufacturing and digital services (Lupton et al., 2019). Consequently, peripheral boroughs—typically characterised by weaker infrastructure—remain marginalised from the benefits of regional economic development, exacerbating spatial inequalities (Lee, 2019).

Integrating transport policy into a genuinely inclusive growth strategy remains further complicated by pronounced asymmetries in governance capacity and political influence across local, regional, and national levels. Local authorities within GM vary considerably in resource availability and political leverage, while regional bodies such as the GMCA must simultaneously engage with national government departments and private transport providers, particularly within deregulated contexts such as bus service provision (Hodson et al., 2019). These multi-scalar governance dynamics frequently hinder effective strategic coordination, limiting GM's capacity to implement more ambitious, redistributive transport interventions.

The Trafford Park Extension Line encapsulates these governance dilemmas. Although positioned as a flagship project symbolising regional progress, the benefits of such infrastructure investments often remain concentrated within economically strategic zones, raising critical questions about who is included in—and who remains excluded from—the regional development narrative (Beel et al., 2017). Without accompanying governance reforms to enhance spatial equity, flagship projects risk reinforcing territorial inequalities rather than addressing them.

Mitigating these persistent governance challenges requires GM to adopt a more pluralistic and equity-focused governance model. This approach necessitates redistributing decision-making influence away from dominant stakeholders and actively incorporating underrepresented groups into planning processes. As argued by Pike et al. (2007), sustainable and equitable regional development requires governance arrangements that are not merely consultative but substantively participatory, embedding meaningful community representation as a core component of legitimate decision-making. Reframing governance in this way positions inclusion as both a procedural necessity and a substantive requirement for achieving equitable socio-economic outcomes.

Moreover, GM's transport governance must explicitly acknowledge and manage the tensions between economic competitiveness and social equity objectives. While these aims are often presented as mutually reinforcing, practical implementation frequently reveals significant trade-offs. Investments targeting high-value economic clusters may bolster regional GDP yet simultaneously bypass structurally disadvantaged communities. Conversely, redistributive policies aimed at enhancing accessibility or extending services into lower-demand areas often face political resistance under conventional cost-benefit frameworks. Effective governance must therefore transparently address these trade-offs, establishing institutional mechanisms such as spatial equity audits or socially weighted investment criteria to guide balanced and accountable decision-making (Lupton et al., 2019).

Ultimately, governance reform should be understood not as a peripheral concern but as a fundamental precondition for leveraging transport investments as genuine drivers of inclusive regional development. Without more integrated, transparent, and community-centred governance structures, GM risks perpetuating the very inequalities its transport strategies seek to address. The regional experience of GM underscores that meaningful development

cannot be separated from how power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how diverse stakeholder voices—particularly those of marginalised communities—are included or excluded from shaping the city-region's future trajectory.

5.3 Regional Competitiveness

Greater Manchester has placed significant emphasis on regional competitiveness within its transport strategy. The GMTS 2040 explicitly articulates an ambition to position GM as a globally connected, innovation-led urban region. Central to this vision is transport infrastructure, designed to enhance economic productivity, support sustainable mobility, and improve equitable access to opportunities across all ten boroughs (GMCA, 2019). However, the practical realisation of these ambitions continues to be hindered by persistent challenges, including fragmented governance structures, uneven spatial investment patterns, and entrenched socio-economic inequalities. These structural issues undermine the coherence and inclusivity of GM's competitiveness objectives, raising critical questions about the extent to which regional transport interventions genuinely foster inclusive economic development.

5.3.1 Economic Integration and Connectivity

Seamless connectivity between GM's urban core, peripheral boroughs, and international markets is critical to the city-region's economic performance and inclusive growth ambitions. The development of integrated multimodal transport networks—encompassing unified ticketing systems and digital mobility innovations—is intended to enhance accessibility, reduce travel barriers, and improve operational efficiency. However, despite these strategic aspirations, structural fragmentation continues to impede effective policy implementation. As highlighted by Jones (2017), disparities between transport modes and providers—exacerbated by historical deregulation—pose significant challenges to the creation of a coherent, accessible, and user-friendly transport system. Without directly addressing these institutional coordination gaps, GM risks falling behind comparator city-regions that have achieved greater integration through centralised transport authorities and effective cross-subsidy models.

Current efforts to enhance connectivity also exhibit a pronounced spatial bias towards central Manchester, reinforcing historical trends of infrastructure investment that prioritise economically robust urban cores over peripheral areas (Lee, 2019). While this approach may amplify agglomeration economies and central-city productivity, it simultaneously risks

exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities by marginalising outer boroughs through inadequate service coverage. Consequently, there remains a critical need for a more spatially balanced approach to transport investment, explicitly targeting the reversal of entrenched patterns of exclusion and supporting comprehensive regional economic integration.

5.3.2 Key Industries and Workforce Mobility

GM's economic growth strategy prioritises high-value sectors, including advanced manufacturing, financial services, and science and innovation (Westwood, 2015). The success of these sectors relies heavily on access to an efficiently connected, reliable, and mobile workforce. However, existing transport inequalities across GM present substantial barriers to achieving this connectivity. Peripheral boroughs, particularly Oldham, Rochdale, and parts of Trafford, experience comparatively weaker transport links to central employment hubs, leading to reduced labour market engagement and exacerbating socio-economic disparities (Lee, 2019).

Critically, these spatial disparities in transport infrastructure represent not merely geographical disconnections but structural impediments to equitable economic participation. Addressing these inequalities requires strategic interventions that go beyond high-profile infrastructure investments. Effective solutions must include comprehensive operational improvements, such as affordable and integrated fare structures, enhanced multimodal convenience, and reliable service provision that specifically targets underserved and economically marginalised communities (Lucas, 2012; Hodson et al., 2019).

Without addressing these operational and structural inequities, transport investments risk reinforcing rather than mitigating regional economic divides. Ensuring equitable workforce mobility must therefore be explicitly embedded within broader economic strategies if genuinely inclusive regional growth is to be achieved.

5.3.3 Aligning Governance with Competitiveness Goals

Although devolution has granted GM increased autonomy and financial resources, persistent fragmentation within the governance framework continues to challenge effective strategic alignment. Haughton et al. (2016) emphasise that the complex, multi-scalar nature of transport governance—spanning local authorities, private transport operators, and central government departments—creates significant barriers to coherent policy development and

implementation. Despite expectations that the establishment of a metro mayor would enhance strategic coherence, ongoing coordination difficulties highlight enduring structural tensions.

Governance Challenges and Decision-Making Delays

A major obstacle remains achieving alignment across GM's ten local authorities, each characterised by distinct political priorities, resource levels, and socio-economic conditions. This fragmented landscape frequently results in prolonged and contentious decision-making processes, particularly where inter-borough collaboration or shared investment commitments are required. Furthermore, the involvement of multiple private operators, particularly within the deregulated bus sector, exacerbates complexity, as profit-driven objectives often conflict with public priorities such as service equity and comprehensive regional coverage (Lee, 2019; Hodson et al., 2019).

Misaligned Objectives and Resource Allocation

Governance challenges are further intensified by misalignments between regional strategic priorities and local authority objectives. While the mayoral administration emphasises inclusive regional connectivity and equitable transport access, individual borough councils may pursue more locally specific or politically expedient projects. Such divergences can lead to uneven resource allocation, inadvertently reinforcing spatial inequalities. Better-resourced boroughs and economically vibrant areas are often more successful in attracting investment, while deprived communities remain underserved, perpetuating regional imbalances (Pike et al., 2007; Lupton et al., 2019).

National and Local Tensions

Despite the enhanced autonomy afforded through devolution, GM's transport infrastructure projects often remain dependent on national-level funding approvals and compliance with centralised government criteria. This dependency restricts regional flexibility and responsiveness to locally identified needs. As O'Brien and Pike (2015) argue, reliance on central government processes can introduce significant delays, limit innovation, and force regional projects to align with broader national political priorities rather than locally defined socio-economic objectives. Consequently, achieving genuinely integrated and responsive governance capable of supporting regional competitiveness requires addressing these national-local tensions through structural governance reforms.

5.3.4 Balancing Growth with Inclusion

To achieve sustainable competitiveness, GM must reconcile economic growth objectives with a stronger emphasis on social equity. Huggins and Thompson (2017) caution that prioritising high-growth sectors without addressing the needs of lower-income communities risks intensifying social and economic polarisation, thereby undermining regional cohesion. Effective transport policies must therefore move beyond simply facilitating economic expansion by actively embedding redistribution into their operational goals, ensuring that mobility benefits are equitably distributed across all communities rather than concentrated in strategically selected high-growth areas.

This approach requires explicit recognition and active management of the tensions between economic competitiveness and social equity. GM's transport strategy should incorporate frameworks to rigorously assess the distributional impacts of infrastructure investments, supported by governance processes that foreground meaningful participation from marginalised and historically excluded groups. Only by embedding these practices can the region move towards a genuinely inclusive model of regional competitiveness.

5.4 Society and Community Cohesion

As GM continues its trajectory of urbanisation and demographic growth, equitable transport provision becomes increasingly critical to sustaining community cohesion and achieving inclusive socio-economic development. Forecasts suggest that GM's population will surpass three million by 2040, with approximately a quarter of residents aged 60 or older (GM Transport Strategy 2040, 2022). These demographic shifts, coupled with intensified economic activity, necessitate a transport network capable of meeting increased demand while addressing diverse socio-spatial user requirements (Thondoo et al., 2020; Goetz, 2019).

Persistently high levels of deprivation and spatial inequality across GM exacerbate disparities in mobility and access. Many residents, particularly in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, face substantial barriers to accessing education, employment opportunities, healthcare services, and social networks due to inadequate transport provision. Although numerous policy interventions have sought to redress these inequalities, their impacts have often been fragmented and unevenly distributed. Chamseddine and Ait Boubkr (2020) argue that piecemeal approaches frequently fail to integrate marginalised communities effectively into key urban systems, thereby perpetuating structural exclusion.

Simultaneously, GM is witnessing significant generational shifts in mobility behaviours, with younger cohorts increasingly favouring public, shared, and digitally integrated transport solutions over private car ownership (Blumenberg et al., 2012). This trend is driven by factors such as heightened environmental awareness, financial considerations, and widespread digital connectivity. As a result, public transport provision must evolve to become more multimodal, adaptable, and technologically responsive, offering real-time information, digital payment platforms, and app-based journey planning tools that meet the expectations of younger, digitally literate users.

However, this technological transformation risks introducing new forms of inequality. Digitally mediated services may exclude individuals who are digitally disadvantaged, including older adults, low-income households, and residents in areas with poor digital infrastructure (Lucas, 2012; Shelley et al., 2020). Furthermore, infrastructural deficits in peripheral and rural areas restrict the applicability of such innovations, necessitating targeted policies and investments to ensure both digital and transport inclusion for all population groups.

Although the GMTS 2040 acknowledges the importance of improving transport connectivity to reduce social inequality and foster economic inclusion, achieving these objectives in practice requires more comprehensive measures than those currently deployed. Sustained investment targeted at low-income and underserved communities, more robust multimodal integration, and significant governance reforms are critical to realising genuine transport equity. Initiatives such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line represent important steps towards improving connectivity and enhancing youth mobility. However, their long-term effectiveness remains contingent on consistent funding, cross-sector collaboration, and strategic alignment with broader regional inclusion policies.

Moreover, ongoing efforts to establish an integrated multimodal network through the 'Our Network' initiative continue to encounter structural challenges. Fragmented governance arrangements, constrained fiscal autonomy, and historical underinvestment in marginalised areas persist as significant barriers. While incremental enhancements—such as improved passenger information displays and upgraded bus stops—may deliver short-term

improvements, they remain insufficient to address the systemic barriers that limit mobility for disadvantaged communities (Jones, 2017).

To advance genuine social and community cohesion, GM's transport policy must be reframed beyond technical efficiency to become a core mechanism of urban justice and social equity. Achieving meaningful cohesion necessitates a strategic focus on:

- Prioritising infrastructure investment in underserved and peripheral areas to address historical inequities.
- Enhancing participatory planning frameworks that actively and proactively engage marginalised and excluded communities in transport decision-making.
- Integrating transport policy with housing, health, and economic strategies to ensure coordinated, holistic regional development outcomes.

Without these transformative shifts, the aspiration for enhanced community cohesion articulated in GM's transport strategies risks remaining aspirational rather than being translated into tangible outcomes.

5.5 Greater Manchester Context for Our Pass

Building upon the broader governance challenges outlined in Chapter Three, the following sections provide a focused critical evaluation of two targeted transport interventions in GM— Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. These cases exemplify how theoretical governance complexities manifest practically in strategic policy implementation.

Addressing transport inequality remains central to GM's broader strategic ambitions for inclusive growth and spatial equity. Existing research (Carter, 2012; Ghosh, 2013; Hurley, 2024; Leach, 2018) highlights enduring structural inequalities across the ten GM boroughs, particularly regarding mobility, employment, and educational access. These disparities underscore transport's crucial role as an enabling factor for equitable access to opportunities, especially for younger populations. Consequently, policy interventions such as Our Pass must be understood within this complex socio-economic context, where transport provision significantly shapes youth outcomes and life trajectories.

Emerging literature further argues that effective regional development strategies should prioritise foundational services that fulfil basic community needs, rather than focusing exclusively on high-growth sectors (Berg and Duman, 2023; Sondermann, 2017; Williams and Vorley, 2017). These insights emphasise the need for inclusive economic frameworks that engage local communities as active participants and co-creators in shaping regional economic policies. They also reinforce the importance of devolved governance structures in enabling place-based, targeted interventions to address localised inequalities (Lucas, 2012; Graham and Gibbons, 2019; Wang, 2024).

Despite GM's policy rhetoric frequently advocating principles of co-production and user-led design, such approaches have rarely translated into deep structural change. The principle of "Nothing about us without us," central to inclusive policymaking, is not yet fully operationalised within GM's current governance practices (GM Independent Inequalities Commission, 2021). Rather than positioning young people as genuine co-creators of transport solutions, the implementation of Our Pass has predominantly focused on technical aspects and stakeholder coordination. This gap between aspirational discourse and practical application reflects broader systemic challenges within GM's social policy framework, where mechanisms to ensure accountability, meaningful participation, and equitable resource distribution remain underdeveloped.

The GM Independent Inequalities Commission (2021) highlights the necessity of removing both financial and geographic barriers to ensure that young people—particularly those from low-income households—can effectively access education, training, employment, and cultural opportunities. This objective is especially critical during the transitional period between ages 16–18, a pivotal life stage when transport accessibility can significantly influence long-term socio-economic trajectories.

Our Pass seeks to address this challenge by offering free bus travel to 16–18-year-olds across GM, aiming to reduce opportunity gaps and enhance youth participation in education, employment, and civic engagement. However, the practical efficacy of the scheme hinges on the broader capacity and coverage of GM's underlying transport infrastructure. In many underserved boroughs, inconsistent or inadequate service frequency and reliability can significantly limit the benefits of cost-free travel. Thus, while removing the financial barrier

is essential, it remains insufficient without simultaneous improvements in infrastructure, service quality, and geographic coverage.

Additionally, Our Pass's age-specific eligibility raises critical questions around horizontal equity. Other groups—such as adult learners, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) aged over 18, and individuals with disabilities—continue to face pronounced mobility barriers yet do not benefit from the scheme. This selective targeting risks unintentionally exacerbating new forms of exclusion, thereby complicating the region's equity landscape. These challenges are further intensified by broader financial pressures within GM's transport system, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of discretionary subsidy schemes like Our Pass unless integrated within a comprehensive, sustainable funding framework.

Finally, the scheme's dependence on public-private partnerships introduces additional complexity in ensuring consistent and equitable benefits across GM boroughs. In areas with robust commercial engagement—often wealthier boroughs—young people may receive supplementary benefits beyond free travel. Conversely, youth residing in economically disadvantaged areas with limited private-sector participation may experience fewer enrichment opportunities. This uneven implementation risks reinforcing the very socio-spatial inequalities the policy seeks to mitigate, highlighting the need for governance reforms to ensure spatially equitable delivery of transport initiatives.

5.5.1 Barriers to Social Mobility in Greater Manchester

Social mobility within GM continues to be significantly constrained by structural inequalities affecting young people's access to education, training, and employment. Research by Corak (2011) highlights a persistent relationship between income inequality and limited social mobility, indicating that higher levels of economic disparity typically result in reduced opportunities for intergenerational advancement—a pattern clearly reflected in GM.

Intersecting inequalities—including those based on gender, ethnicity, and geographic location—further intensify barriers for already marginalised groups. Casper et al. (1994) demonstrated that young women in lower-income households often face compounded exclusion due to both economic disadvantage and entrenched social biases. Spatial disparities across GM exacerbate these challenges; young people residing in peripheral boroughs

frequently encounter reduced educational and employment opportunities, further constrained by inadequate transport connectivity.

The Our Pass scheme seeks explicitly to mitigate one dimension of this multifaceted exclusion by removing the cost barrier associated with public transport. However, the intervention must be critically assessed within a broader context of systemic limitations. While free bus travel can immediately enhance physical access to education and employment, it does not inherently guarantee sustained participation or tangible improvements in socio-economic outcomes. Lucas (2012) argues that genuine transport equity must encompass more than affordability alone; factors such as service adequacy, reliability, and spatial coverage are equally critical.

Moreover, literature examining youth transport behaviours (Porter and Turner, 2019; Puhe and Schippl, 2014; Sakaria et al., 2013; Shin and Tilahun, 2022) consistently highlights that travel decisions among young people are influenced by multiple, intersecting factors, including perceived convenience, trip purpose, frequency of service, travel duration, and individual preferences (Forward, 2019; Casadó et al., 2020). Consequently, even when cost barriers are removed, young people may still struggle to utilise transport services effectively if frequency, reliability, or proximity to desired destinations is inadequate—particularly during evenings and weekends, when service levels often decline.

Furthermore, although younger populations exhibit higher dependency on public transport compared to older cohorts (Green et al., 2014), this reliance paradoxically increases their vulnerability to service disruptions and suboptimal provision. For young residents in economically deprived areas with limited public transport networks, this means the potential benefits of Our Pass may remain unrealised. Without complementary investments in infrastructure—such as expanded routes, increased service frequency, and improvements in service quality—structural barriers to youth mobility will persist.

Thus, Our Pass should not be regarded as a standalone solution, but rather as one component within a broader, multi-dimensional strategy aimed at enhancing social mobility. The scheme's effectiveness fundamentally depends on its alignment with interconnected policy areas, including housing affordability, educational access, employment opportunities, and community service provision. Critically, its long-term success relies on sustained

responsiveness to the lived experiences and practical needs of the young people it seeks to support, requiring an ongoing commitment to holistic, integrated regional planning.

5.6 Strategic Goals and Policy Alignment to Our Pass

Greater Manchester's policy ambitions related to inclusive growth and youth development have gained prominence through targeted initiatives such as Our Pass, which is framed both as a transport intervention and as a broader mechanism for promoting social inclusion. In articulating the scheme's objectives, Mayor Andy Burnham emphasised its dual role in supporting young people and contributing to regional recovery efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"It is more important than ever to support young people. As a city region, we need everyone to get involved, and I'm appealing today to all GM businesses to make an offer to young people via Our Pass to help them through the crisis. Before lockdown, we had 39,000 active users who took advantage of a range of experiences and made more than 7.4 million journeys across GM." (GMCA, 2020b).

This statement reflects a dual strategic intent: addressing mobility-related exclusion while also stimulating cross-sectoral partnerships between businesses and public authorities. Thus, the initiative aims to offer more than just fare reduction; it is conceptualised as a socio-economic infrastructure intended to mitigate the long-term scarring effects of the pandemic on younger populations. Despite this compelling vision, a critical evaluation of how effectively the initiative aligns with broader strategic goals of inclusive growth is necessary, particularly regarding its potential to reinforce, rather than resolve, existing inequalities.

According to Diane Modahl MBE, Chair of the GM Young Person's Task Force, the scheme's broader ambition involves fostering meaningful collaboration with local businesses to deliver not just free transport but also enrichment activities and enhanced employment prospects (GMCA, 2020b). However, the level of business engagement remains inconsistent across GM boroughs. Regions with stronger economic bases typically benefit from more substantial private-sector participation, whereas economically weaker areas experience relatively lower engagement. This spatial unevenness raises concerns about equity and highlights inherent challenges in policy approaches dependent on public-private partnerships.

Since the establishment of a devolved governance framework under Mayor Burnham, GM has articulated its strategic development goals through policies emphasising inclusive growth, spatial equity, and devolved decision-making (NIHR Clinical Research Network GM, 2024). Such policies are underpinned by an explicit agenda to redistribute opportunities equitably across GM's ten boroughs (Lupton et al., 2019). Within this policy context, Our Pass represents a targeted but partial response: while it effectively removes transport costs for a critical youth demographic, it does not directly address the underlying infrastructural deficits, fragmented governance arrangements, and resource constraints that continue to limit comprehensive regional mobility.

A critical risk is the scheme's potential to disproportionately benefit young people residing in areas already characterised by strong connectivity and reliable service coverage. Conversely, those living in poorly served districts continue to face infrastructural barriers—such as infrequent services, inadequate evening or weekend access, and substandard interchange facilities—thus undermining the intended equitable distribution of benefits. Consequently, the effectiveness of Our Pass is intricately linked to the transport geography of GM, underscoring significant challenges in achieving spatial equity.

Furthermore, uncertainties persist regarding the financial sustainability and governance framework of the scheme. Originally introduced as a pilot initiative supported by mayoral authority and regional funding, its continued viability depends on sustained political commitment, consistent private-sector engagement, and secure funding streams. In fiscally constrained contexts—particularly following the pandemic—there is a tangible risk that discretionary initiatives like Our Pass could be deprioritised in favour of statutory obligations, potentially curtailing support for future youth cohorts.

Importantly, evaluating the success of Our Pass cannot be limited to metrics such as user uptake or journey frequency. Instead, effectiveness must be assessed in terms of its capacity to disrupt entrenched intergenerational disadvantage and facilitate long-term economic opportunities for marginalised youth—outcomes that require robust, longitudinal, and place-based evaluation approaches, which are currently underdeveloped within existing frameworks.

To comprehensively fulfil its strategic aspirations, Our Pass must be embedded within a holistic, long-term approach to transport and youth policy. Specifically, this requires:

- Ensuring greater alignment between transport provision and areas with high levels of youth deprivation.
- Facilitating genuine co-creation and active participation of young people, moving beyond traditional top-down policy approaches.
- Implementing robust governance mechanisms to ensure borough-level consistency and equity in service benefits.
- Establishing ongoing, systematic monitoring frameworks to evaluate spatial, demographic, and socio-economic impacts.

Only through such integrated and sustained policy planning can Our Pass evolve beyond a singular subsidy intervention to become a central pillar within GM's strategy for inclusive, sustainable, and socially equitable transport policy.

5.6.1 Structural Challenges in Greater Manchester

Persistent spatial and socio-economic inequalities significantly shape the lived experiences of residents across GM, presenting critical barriers to the implementation of inclusive transport policies such as Our Pass. Despite explicit regional ambitions focused on poverty alleviation and promoting inclusive growth, systemic disparities remain deeply embedded, particularly in how deprivation is distributed across individual boroughs.

According to analyses conducted by the Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit (2017), approximately 620,000 people in GM live in relative poverty, with 61% of these individuals classified as of working age (Hughes, 2019). Notably, a substantial proportion of this group experiences in-work poverty, highlighting structural challenges related to wage stagnation and employment quality rather than employment levels alone. Among GM's ten local authorities, Manchester, Salford, and Rochdale have reported reductions in severe poverty indicators. However, as Fitzpatrick et al. (2018) caution, these declines do not necessarily reflect comprehensive socio-economic improvements. Instead, they may indicate internal redistributions or displacement of deprivation within and across boroughs, thereby masking rather than resolving underlying structural inequities.

Figure 4. Income Deprivation Domain Map

(Source: Manchester City Council's Indices of Deprivation, 2019)
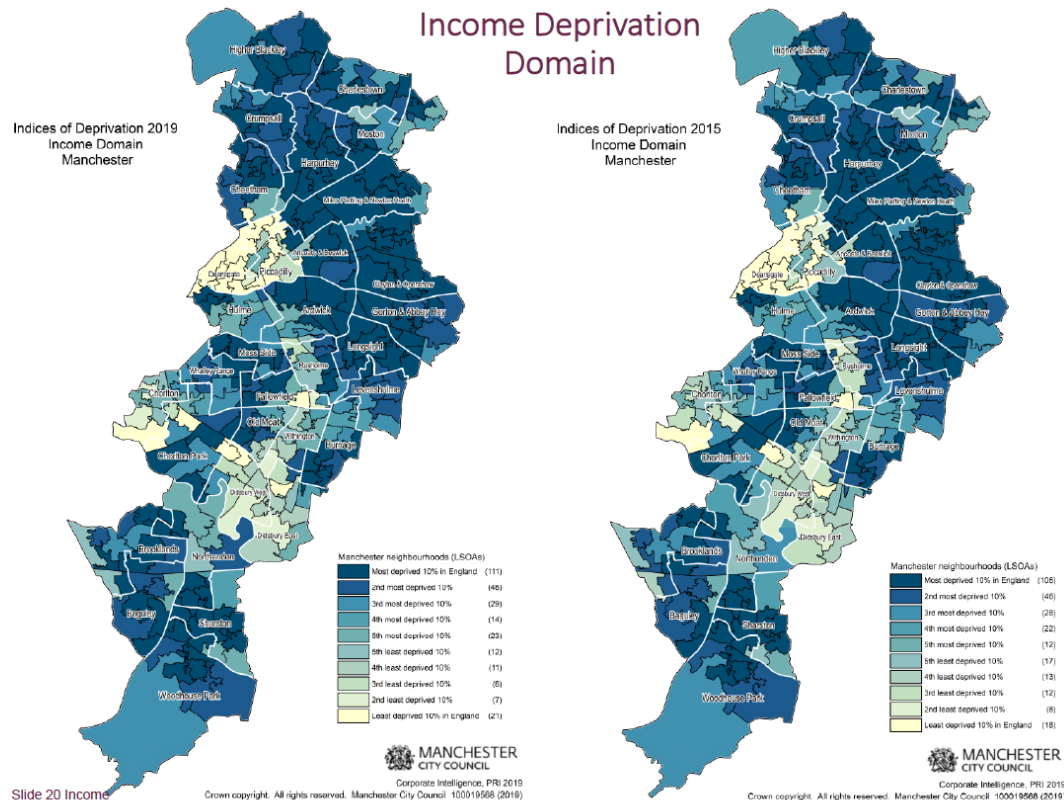
The Income Deprivation Domain Map (Figure 4) highlights significant disparities across the GM region, with 39.4% of Manchester's Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) ranked within the 10% most deprived nationally (Manchester City Council, 2019). In the absence of recent GM-wide deprivation data, Manchester serves as a representative proxy; however, intra-city variations emphasise uneven access to economic opportunities even within a single borough. Certain LSOAs exhibit moderate levels of deprivation, while others experience severe socio-economic challenges, underlining the need for granular, place-specific strategies rather than uniform policy solutions.

Figure 5 provides further insight into regional disparities, illustrating the uneven distribution of deprivation across GM boroughs. Manchester and Salford display concentrations of highly deprived LSOAs, whereas boroughs such as Trafford and Stockport exhibit higher proportions of LSOAs within the least deprived deciles (Manchester City Council, 2019). This spatial unevenness reflects a dual reality: affluence and economic growth concentrated in select areas alongside persistent disadvantage in others. These patterns reinforce urban-rural divides, with peripheral and semi-rural neighbourhoods often facing compounded

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issues—including inadequate transport infrastructure, historical underinvestment, and limited access to essential services—which collectively perpetuate socio-economic marginalisation.

Figure 5. Greater Manchester LSOA scores by decile in the IMD
(Source: Manchester City Council's Indices of Deprivation (2019).

Image courtesy of GMCA 2019
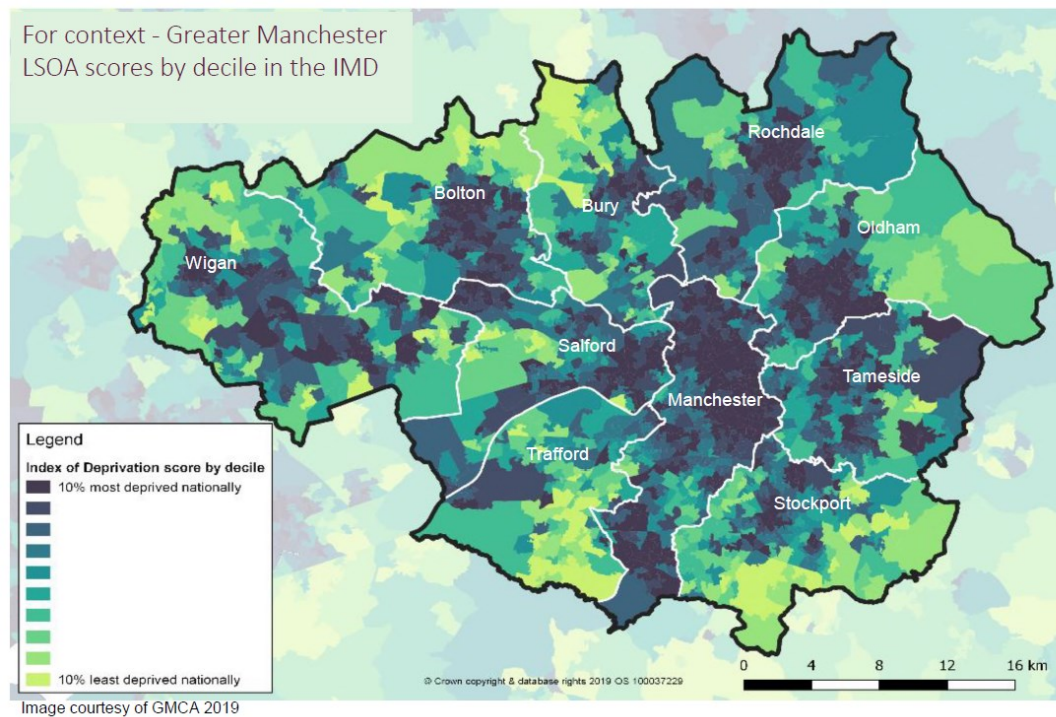
Historical data from 2001 to 2013 highlight critical shifts in deprivation patterns within GM. Lupton et al. (2019) found that areas located inside the M60 orbital motorway generally experienced reductions in measured deprivation, whereas outer districts either saw stagnation or deterioration. However, these improvements do not necessarily reflect a genuine reduction in poverty levels. Instead, they may indicate displacement effects resulting from gentrification, whereby more affluent populations move into previously deprived areas, artificially improving deprivation indices without addressing underlying structural inequalities.

Figure 6 illustrates this dynamic, showing that despite apparent reductions in poverty in central GM areas, deprivation has intensified in peripheral and outer regions. Consequently, this spatial redistribution of deprivation risks obscuring worsening conditions in areas increasingly marginalised by the city-region's growth strategies. These trends challenge the

effectiveness and equity of current policy interventions and highlight the need for more targeted, place-based approaches to address structural disadvantage.

Figure 6. Proportion of Neighbourhoods in Each Quantile Group of the IMD, 2004, 2010, 2015 and 2019.
(Source: Lupton et al., 2019)
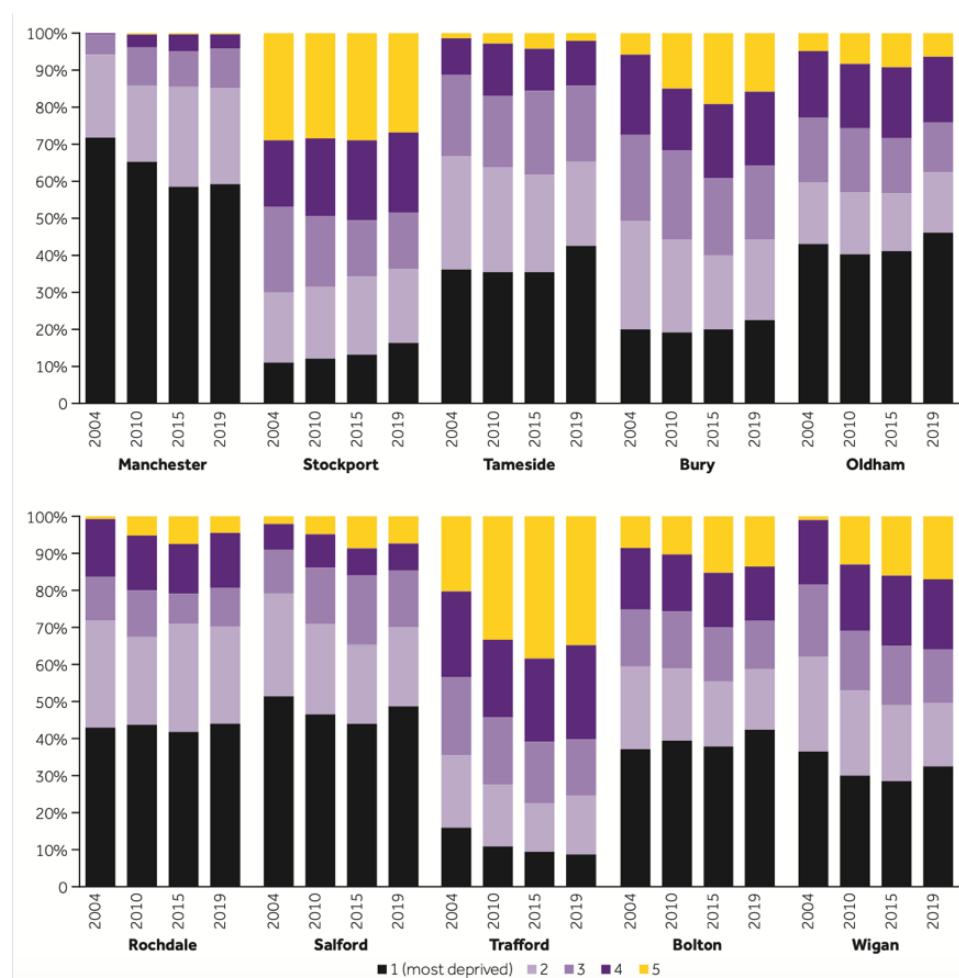
The persistence of spatial inequalities poses significant challenges for initiatives such as Our Pass, which aim to enhance social mobility by offering universal transport access to young people. If these structural disparities remain unaddressed—particularly in boroughs lacking robust, high-quality public transport infrastructure—the anticipated benefits of such interventions are likely to be unevenly realised. For instance, young residents in peripheral or economically marginalised communities may continue to experience lengthy, unreliable, or impractical commutes, substantially limiting Our Pass's ability to achieve its equity objectives.

Effectively addressing these issues requires GM to adopt a more comprehensive, spatially informed approach. This strategy must systematically integrate transport improvements with broader economic development objectives and public service reform agendas. Crucially, investment strategies must extend beyond physical transport infrastructure to encompass complementary social infrastructure, including community-based employment initiatives, affordable housing schemes, and enhanced digital connectivity. In doing so, transport policy should be reconceptualised not merely as a facilitator of economic growth, but as a deliberate instrument for promoting social equity and redistribution. Inclusive growth, therefore, necessitates actively prioritising and addressing the needs of populations structurally marginalised from transport and related opportunities.

5.6.2 The Role of Inclusive Growth

Inclusive growth has become a central tenet within GM's strategic policy framework, prominently articulated in successive city-region strategies since 2013 (GM Combined Authority, 2013). Despite rhetorical commitments to ensuring that all residents both contribute to and benefit from regional economic progress, operationalising this concept has proven challenging. For example, while the initial 2013 GM Strategy aimed to support high-growth firms and strategically important regional centres, it simultaneously relied on distinct 'reform' agendas targeting specific socio-economic challenges, including troubled families, skills development, and unemployment (Lupton et al., 2019). This dualistic approach illustrates a persistent tension between economic development and social inclusion objectives.

The subsequent 2017 GM Strategy (*Our People, Our Place*) marked a significant rhetorical and conceptual shift, placing greater emphasis on community engagement and social equity. It advocated participatory models of development and explicitly recognised the need to distribute the benefits of growth more equitably across GM boroughs. This shift also reflected increased recognition of the challenges faced by young people, highlighting the importance of equipping youth with the skills, motivation, and opportunities required to thrive in a changing labour market. Nonetheless, implementation has been uneven and incomplete. Despite shifts in strategic narratives, the structural mechanisms necessary for delivering inclusive growth remain underdeveloped, leaving considerable gaps between policy objectives and the lived realities of GM residents (Lupton et al., 2019; Lee, 2019).

The imperative for targeted policies becomes particularly pronounced when addressing youth inequality. Approximately 13% of young people in GM are categorised as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), a status that markedly increases their risk of prolonged economic exclusion (Fabian, 2013). Effective transitions from education into the workforce rely heavily on robust institutional support—including reliable transport access—which underscores the importance of integrated planning efforts among educational institutions, local authorities, transport bodies, and businesses. Transport initiatives such as Our Pass, by removing financial barriers, facilitate improved access to education, training, and extracurricular opportunities. However, their effectiveness depends heavily on broader structural support, including spatial coverage, service reliability, and coordinated investment.

Despite policy shifts towards greater inclusivity, the actual realisation of inclusive growth has often proved elusive. Current strategic frameworks continue to prioritise high-value economic sectors and spatial growth hubs, risking the exacerbation of socio-economic disparities by overlooking economically marginalised boroughs and communities (Lupton et al., 2019). Consequently, expanding economic opportunity alone is insufficient; deliberate efforts to ensure equitable distribution across neighbourhoods are critical. Areas benefiting from strong transport links and vibrant economic activity typically attract further investment, while peripheral or disadvantaged communities remain under-resourced. This dynamic perpetuates existing inequalities, compounding the barriers faced by marginalised youth in accessing employment, education, and social infrastructure.

In this context, the inclusive growth agenda must prioritise the active redistribution of opportunity, particularly for young people facing intersecting barriers linked to geography, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity. Achieving this goal necessitates leveraging the devolution framework available to GM to develop place-based strategies responsive to localised needs. Initiatives such as Our Pass demonstrate how devolved transport powers can specifically target youth mobility issues; however, their effectiveness remains contingent upon broader system-wide investment and integrated policy support.

The RSA Inclusive Growth Commission (2017) underscores that genuine inclusive growth requires the effective integration of economic development with social reform, advocating a departure from traditional GDP-centric models that neglect equity considerations. Our Pass encapsulates this integrative ethos by eliminating financial barriers to transport, thereby

facilitating improved youth access to education, employment, and civic engagement. Figure 7 illustrates this conceptual transition, highlighting the shift from conventional growth-focused frameworks towards more inclusive and redistributive development models.

Ultimately, to fully realise inclusive growth, GM must enhance structural alignment between transport provision, economic development, and social policy interventions, embedding equity principles more deeply within governance and planning mechanisms.

Figure 7. Moving to a New Model of Inclusive Growth
(Source: RSA Inclusive Growth Commission, 2017)
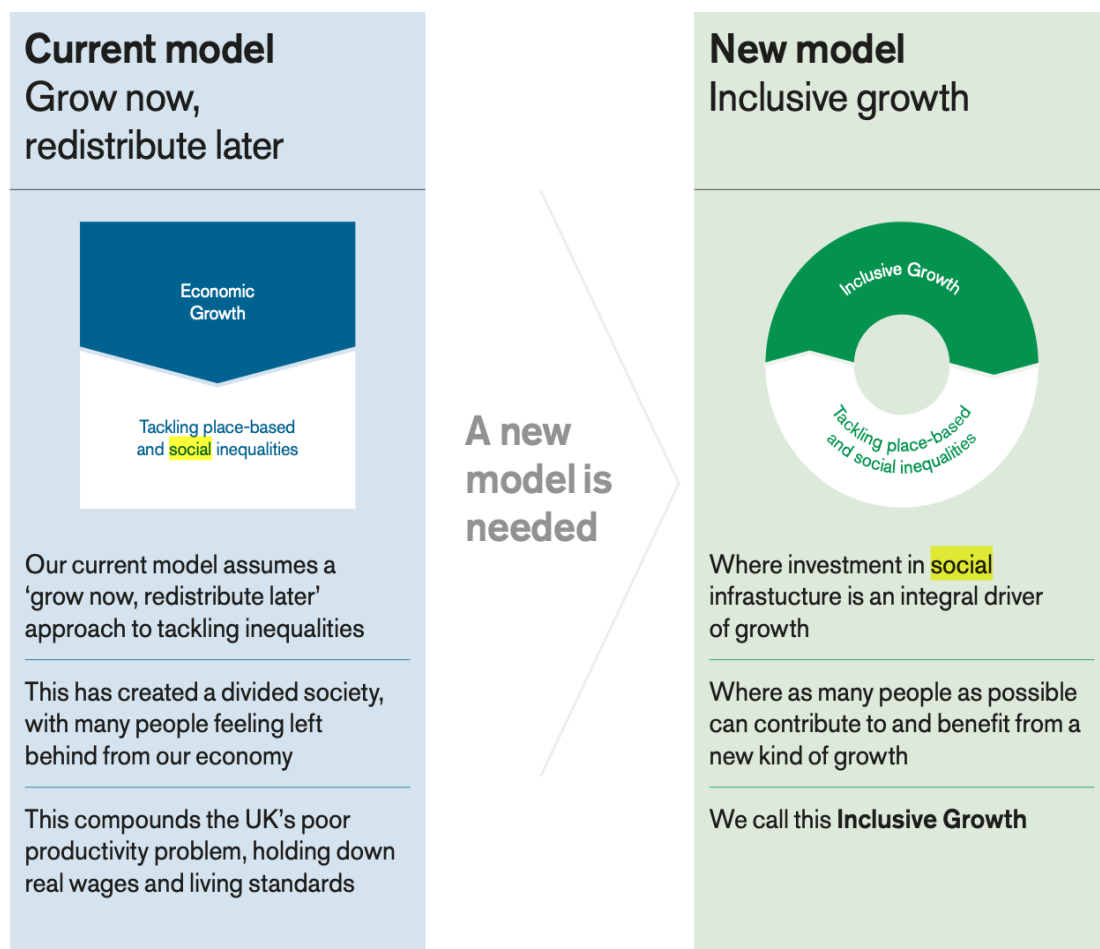
Effectively achieving a transition towards inclusive growth demands a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of spatial and social inequalities. Structural inequalities do not occur in isolation; they intersect and compound across generations, shaping persistent

disadvantage and limiting opportunities for upward mobility (Lupton et al., 2019; Pearce et al., 2006). Young people from marginalised backgrounds typically reside in neighbourhoods with limited access to reliable public transport, high-quality education, and secure employment opportunities. These intersecting barriers underscore the necessity for targeted interventions that explicitly recognise and respond to group-specific disparities, rather than relying solely on generic youth policies (Barker et al., 2024). Tailored measures, including targeted transport subsidies, improved service frequency in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and job-access schemes, are essential for making practical improvements in equity and mobility (Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019).

Increasing social mobility is not only an ethical imperative but also yields tangible economic benefits. As emphasised by the RSA Inclusive Growth Commission (2017), inclusive growth strategies can enhance regional productivity, economic competitiveness, and broader fiscal outcomes. These benefits include fostering skills acquisition, improving labour force participation, and facilitating smoother transitions from education into employment. However, prevailing policy frameworks often overemphasise university pathways as the primary route to success, neglecting vocational education and alternative career routes (Donnelly and Evans, 2015). Many disadvantaged school-leavers, particularly those navigating compounded barriers such as poverty, racial discrimination, or limited cultural capital, may not perceive higher education as an accessible or viable option (Granfield, 1991). A genuinely inclusive growth approach therefore requires explicit promotion of diverse educational and vocational pathways, better reflecting the varied needs and aspirations of young people across GM.

Sociological insights, notably Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, provide critical explanatory power for understanding these dynamics. Disadvantaged groups frequently lack the necessary knowledge and familiarity to navigate dominant social and institutional norms, resulting in exclusion or self-exclusion from opportunities perceived as culturally inaccessible (Shirley, 1986). Such mismatches exacerbate marginalisation and constrain social mobility. Thus, inclusive transport interventions, such as Our Pass, must be complemented by initiatives aimed explicitly at enhancing educational engagement, building confidence, and fostering cultural belonging among disadvantaged youth, thereby bridging both physical and symbolic divides.

Finally, GM's broader policy framework must be critically assessed for clarity in the prioritisation of specific groups and forms of inequality. Although age, race, and gender have become increasingly central to GM's strategic commitments to equity, evidence from the Inclusive Growth in GM 2020 and Beyond report indicates that practical implementation remains inconsistent and often inadequately resourced (Lupton et al., 2019). Despite prominent mayoral pledges and advocacy-driven momentum towards gender and race equality, inequalities affecting young people—particularly those from racially minoritised and economically deprived communities—continue to be insufficiently addressed. There remains a pressing need for clearer accountability structures, improved monitoring metrics, and more focused investment to operationalise inclusive growth principles effectively and move beyond aspirational rhetoric towards tangible and measurable outcomes.

5.7 Aims and Strategic Motivations for the Trafford Park Extension Line

The Trafford Park Extension Line represents a strategic transport intervention within GM's broader economic and spatial development agenda, explicitly aimed at supporting long-term regional objectives around economic growth, sustainable mobility, and spatial equity. The partnership between the Trafford Centre and TfGM demonstrates an evolving model of public-private collaboration, leveraging commercial interests to enhance the accessibility and appeal of high-footfall economic zones. This alignment exemplifies how commercial and public-sector priorities are increasingly converging in regional transport planning.

The extension line aligns closely with the mayor's Our Network vision, an integrated, multimodal transport framework designed to emulate the accessibility, coherence, and efficiency associated with London's public transport system (Raikes, 2015). The line specifically targets improved connectivity to Trafford Park—one of Europe's largest industrial estates and a critical employment, retail, and leisure hub. It thereby reflects the strategic priorities outlined in the GMTS 2040, emphasising the importance of enhanced multimodal connectivity and modal shift as means of reducing road congestion, boosting regional productivity, and fostering more inclusive economic growth (GMCA, 2019).

Projected increases of approximately 600,000 daily journeys across GM by 2035 (GM Workforce Futures, 2017; Public Sector Focus, 2019) underscore the pressing need for substantial improvements in transport infrastructure capacity and connectivity. Within this context, the Trafford Park Extension Line represents more than a mere transport upgrade; it

serves as a spatial intervention intended to redistribute the economic benefits of regional growth by enhancing connectivity between peripheral residential communities and core employment centres.

From a governance perspective, the Trafford Park Extension Line consolidates GM's strategic advantage through TfGM's direct control over the Metrolink network—an organisational structure unique within UK transport governance, where operations are typically more fragmented. This control enables more effective alignment between transport operations and overarching regional policy goals. The Metrolink network's guiding principles under the Our Network framework—convenience, affordability, sustainability, accessibility, and accountability—establish clear normative criteria for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the extension line.

These principles translate into the following specific objectives for the Trafford Park Extension Line:

- Convenience, focusing on enhanced reliability and predictability of transport services.
- Affordability, emphasising fare integration and equitable pricing structures across multiple transport modes.
- Sustainability, with an explicit commitment to decarbonisation targets and improved energy efficiency.
- Accessibility, reinforcing universal design standards and equitable infrastructure provision for all users.
- Accountability, ensuring transparent governance processes aligned with regional, rather than purely commercial, priorities.

Aligned with the 2040 Transport Strategy, the Trafford Park Extension Line explicitly aims "to stimulate regeneration and economic growth, to increase access to, and the potential catchment of, Trafford Park employment sites by increasing its level of connectivity; and to provide a viable alternative to car travel by enhancing the connectivity, capacity, and quality of the public transport network in Trafford Park" (Whitehead, 2016, p. 15). These ambitions reflect a dual policy approach: addressing urgent issues of car dependency and spatial exclusion through sustainable transport alternatives, while simultaneously promoting

economic competitiveness by improving access to strategically important sites such as the Trafford Centre, Old Trafford stadium, and the broader industrial estate.

Nevertheless, critical questions remain regarding the extent to which this major infrastructural investment will achieve its stated inclusivity aims. Effective transport interventions require not only enhanced physical connectivity but also robust integration with complementary policies and investments in housing, active travel infrastructure, digital access, and employment support. The following sections of this chapter critically examine the extent to which these strategic intentions translate into tangible, equitable mobility outcomes, particularly for marginalised and economically disadvantaged communities within Trafford and the wider GM region.

5.7.1 Trafford Park's Role in Regional Development

This section positions Trafford Park within the broader context of GM's strategic economic development, highlighting its dual significance as both a primary employment hub and a locus of persistent regional inequalities. While Trafford consistently ranks as one of GM's most economically productive boroughs, the area remains characterised by stark socio-economic contrasts. Affluent neighbourhoods coexist with deprived communities facing significant barriers in accessing employment, educational opportunities, and essential services. These internal disparities pose critical challenges for regional policy efforts aimed at achieving balanced economic growth, equitable connectivity, and spatial justice.

Trafford Park, notably Europe's largest industrial estate, is integral to both Trafford's local economy and GM's regional productivity strategy. According to the Trafford Economic and Housing Growth Framework (2017), approximately 25% of new jobs generated in GM over the last quarter-century have been concentrated within Trafford. The borough currently hosts more than 11,000 businesses and demonstrates the region's highest productivity per capita, contributing roughly £7.1 billion annually to GM's economy. However, these headline economic indicators obscure substantial intra-borough disparities. Significant pockets of deprivation, particularly in Trafford's northern and western areas, experience chronic exclusion from the benefits of growth, highlighting the limitations of transport infrastructure improvements alone in addressing deep-rooted socio-economic barriers.

Historically, Trafford Park has functioned as a major hub of industrial employment and logistics, reaching peak activity in the 1930s when it supported over 75,000 jobs and handled 3% of the UK's freight via its internal rail network. Subsequent decades saw marked industrial decline, driven by reduced utilisation of the Manchester Ship Canal and broader structural shifts in manufacturing and logistics. This prompted state-led regeneration initiatives, most notably through the establishment of the Trafford Park Urban Development Corporation in 1987 (Herron, 2015). While these revitalisation efforts succeeded in attracting investment from modern logistics and advanced manufacturing industries, critical questions persist regarding the estate's future resilience amidst accelerating technological change, automation trends, decarbonisation mandates, and global market volatility.

The Productivity in GM Report (Coyle et al., 2018) identifies Trafford Park, alongside Manchester Airport, as one of the most significant contributors to regional Gross Value Added (GVA). Despite notable productivity gains in sectors such as logistics, hospitality, and manufacturing, economic output remains unevenly distributed across GM. Trafford and neighbouring Stockport consistently exceed national productivity benchmarks, while other boroughs lag significantly behind. This disparity contributes to a persistent regional productivity gap, estimated at approximately £10 billion annually compared to national averages.

This productivity imbalance is particularly acute given Trafford's internal socio-economic geography, where economically disadvantaged communities such as Partington and Old Trafford face notable infrastructural deficiencies despite their proximity to thriving economic zones. These areas remain inadequately served by existing public transport networks, limiting resident mobility and access to economic opportunities. Within this context, the Trafford Park Extension Line is envisioned not merely as a transportation infrastructure upgrade but as a critical intervention aimed at bridging spatial divides. By improving connectivity to employment, retail, and leisure hubs, the extension seeks to address geographic inequities that continue to hinder equitable access to the region's economic resources.

Employment growth patterns across GM between 2010 and 2015 (illustrated in Figure 8) further underscore the concentrated nature of economic expansion, reinforcing the urgent need for enhanced regional connectivity and comprehensive spatial planning strategies. Without targeted infrastructural investments such as the Trafford Park Extension Line,

existing spatial inequalities risk deepening, undermining the broader strategic objective of achieving balanced, inclusive, and sustainable regional development.

Figure 8. Employment Change 2010-15
(Source: GMCA, 2018)

Area	Total employment Change 2010-15	% Change, 2010-15	Total employment (2015)	Share of Total GM employment (2015)
Greater Manchester	+61,000	+5.2%	1,252,000	100%
Regional Centre	+22,500	+12.1%	252,035	20%
Town Centres	-15,650	-14.3%	94,000	8%
Manchester Airport & Trafford Park	+9,250	+16.7%	64,625	5%

Economic Role of the Intu Trafford Centre

The Intu Trafford Centre illustrates the critical interplay between transport infrastructure and retail-driven economic development within GM. Attracting over 31 million visitors annually (BBC News, 2020), the Centre makes a significant contribution to regional economic activity, directly supporting over 7,000 jobs and generating substantial local consumer expenditure. Nevertheless, its dominant market position has also exerted negative impacts on surrounding local high streets, raising concerns about retail centralisation and the economic hollowing-out of smaller commercial districts in neighbouring boroughs (Oldham Council, 2013).

Persistent congestion issues, particularly along the M60 corridor and at key junctions such as Barton Bridge, reflect the Centre's substantial reliance on car-based travel. In response, the Trafford Park Extension Line has been strategically introduced to provide a viable public transport alternative, facilitating direct tram access to the Centre's entrance (Abdallah, 2017). However, the long-term effectiveness of this infrastructural investment hinges critically on

achieving a significant modal shift, encouraging visitors to transition from private vehicle use to public transportation options.

Moreover, sustained integration of the Trafford Centre into broader regional transport planning frameworks remains essential to ensure balanced development outcomes and to mitigate the negative externalities associated with its continued expansion. Without coordinated transport and spatial planning, there is a risk that the Centre's success could further entrench regional inequalities by concentrating economic activity and infrastructure investment within already prosperous zones.

Economic Role of Old Trafford Manchester United Football Club

The strategic rationale underpinning the extension of the Metrolink to Old Trafford centres on Manchester United Football Club's (MUFC) considerable economic and social contributions to the GM region. As an internationally renowned venue, Old Trafford Stadium attracts substantial revenue streams from matchday attendance and tourism, providing extensive benefits to associated hospitality and transport sectors. Additionally, the stadium acts as a pivotal community resource through the Manchester United Foundation, whose outreach programmes during the 2023/24 season supported over 42,000 young individuals and generated an estimated £50 million in combined economic and social value (Salter, 2024).

Economically, MUFC contributes significantly to GM's regional prosperity, with the North-West region accounting for approximately £2.1 billion of the Premier League's total economic footprint—£1.1 billion of which directly benefits GM (Ward, 2022). Employing over 900 permanent staff, in addition to thousands of temporary matchday roles, the club sustains a robust local micro-economy. The introduction of the Trafford Park Extension Line aims to enhance public transport accessibility to this key regional economic asset, facilitating broader and more equitable local participation in the economic and social opportunities generated by MUFC.

Statements by Manchester United's COO and the Mayor of GM affirm the strategic role of sport in regional identity and economic growth:

"We're proud of the contribution our club makes to the economy and society of GM and beyond…" (Ward, 2022)

"We are the powerhouse of the Premier League…" (Premier League News, 2022)

These narratives underscore a broader strategic understanding of regional growth that integrates sport, identity, and mobility. However, realising the full potential of such initiatives depends on ensuring that improved accessibility translates into tangible, equitable benefits for surrounding communities, rather than solely reinforcing existing economic concentrations.

5.7.2 Planning and Policy Significance of Trafford Park

Designated as a Priority Regeneration Area, Trafford Park remains central to both local and national economic strategies. TfGM and Trafford Council have explicitly integrated transport infrastructure improvements—notably the Trafford Park Extension Line—into statutory planning policies, reinforcing Trafford's strategic position as a globally competitive and agile industrial and logistics hub. Despite robust headline indicators such as productivity and business growth, recent data highlight underlying economic vulnerabilities, with local business survival rates continuing to lag behind national averages (UK Data, 2024).

Furthermore, sustained employment growth within the borough is increasingly contingent on the availability of suitable housing and the effective alignment of workforce skills with local industry needs. With GM's economy projected to grow at approximately 2.5% per annum between 2024 and 2026 (GM Business Board, 2023), the strategic integration of infrastructure and labour market policies becomes imperative. In this context, the Trafford Park Extension Line—if effectively aligned with complementary policies addressing housing, skills development, and spatial equity—has the potential to enhance Trafford's attractiveness to investors while simultaneously broadening inclusive access to the economic opportunities generated by the area's ongoing development.

5.7.3 Trafford's Skills Gap and Labour Market Challenges

Trafford exhibits a notable skills gap, highlighting significant disparities in educational attainment and workforce competencies within the borough. Despite hosting one of the largest populations of highly qualified residents in GM, Trafford experiences substantial intra-borough variability, particularly in areas such as Carrington and Partington, where

educational and skills outcomes significantly lag behind neighbouring localities. This disparity is particularly pronounced at higher qualification levels (Level 4 and above), revealing a mismatch between the skills profile of Trafford's residents and the requirements of the local economy.

Addressing these employment challenges necessitates targeted strategies aimed at improving social mobility through focused investment in education and skills development. Specifically, initiatives designed to upskill residents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are crucial for enabling equitable access to employment opportunities associated with projected economic growth. Such an approach would ensure that the benefits of economic prosperity are more broadly and inclusively distributed, reinforcing the foundational aims of inclusive regional development.

Although Trafford demonstrates high overall productivity, there remains considerable scope for enhanced innovation through improved partnerships between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and local enterprises. Strengthened collaboration between academia and industry presents opportunities for developing advanced skills among residents, facilitating greater local engagement with innovative economic activities and ensuring that growth is both inclusive and sustainable.

Despite existing initiatives, such as the Trafford Pledge—which provides apprenticeships, aligns job seekers with local businesses, and offers mentoring, work experience, and practical employment preparation (including CV support and interview training)—the persistent skills gap indicates that current measures are insufficiently comprehensive or targeted. Additional, more focused support is required to adequately equip the local workforce and ensure residents possess the competencies necessary to secure and sustain stable employment.

Moreover, the leisure sector—including Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports—has performed below initial employment expectations despite Trafford's wealth of cultural and recreational assets. Observed employment within these sectors remains lower than projected, indicating significant untapped potential, particularly within the hospitality industry. Given Trafford's existing tourism and recreational infrastructure, strategic investment to capitalise on these assets could stimulate broader employment opportunities, helping to address aspects of the borough's skills gap and supporting a more inclusive economic landscape.

5.7.4 Trafford Disparities

Trafford is frequently perceived as one of GM's most affluent boroughs; however, headline socio-economic indicators mask pronounced spatial inequalities within the borough. The latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019) positions Trafford at 191st out of 317 English local authorities, reflecting a deterioration from its 2015 ranking of 199th (MHCLG, 2019). This relative decline highlights intensifying levels of deprivation concentrated within specific neighbourhoods, particularly in Trafford's northern and western areas, underscoring deep-rooted socio-spatial divides (Lupton et al., 2019).

Critically, localities such as Bucklow-St Martins—ranked among the 5% most deprived areas nationally—and Clifford, where nearly 29% of working-age residents are economically inactive, starkly illustrate that Trafford's overall economic prosperity is unevenly distributed (MHCLG, 2019). Against this backdrop, the Trafford Park Extension Line represents a deliberate infrastructural intervention intended, at least in part, to ameliorate these spatial disparities by enhancing connectivity between deprived communities and Trafford Park's employment opportunities (GMCA, 2019). In doing so, it seeks to facilitate improved access to jobs, educational resources, and essential services, potentially contributing to the borough's broader inclusive growth objectives.

Figure 9 highlights the claimant rates for out-of-work benefits across Trafford's wards, vividly illustrating the pronounced spatial disparities. In April 2021, Clifford alone accounted for 880 claimants, representing over half of Trafford's total Universal Credit claimants. In stark contrast, affluent wards such as Hale Central and Bowdon reported significantly lower claimant numbers (approximately 150 claimants each) (ONS, 2022). Although modest declines in claimant rates were recorded in wards such as Bucklow-St Martins (–3.8%) and Clifford (–3.4%) between 2021 and 2022, unemployment and economic exclusion remain structurally entrenched in these localities. This suggests that the underlying drivers of socio-economic disadvantage persist beyond cyclical labour market fluctuations and require more systemic, place-based interventions.

Figure 9. Claimant Rate in Trafford Wards 2021/2022
(Source: ONS, 2022)
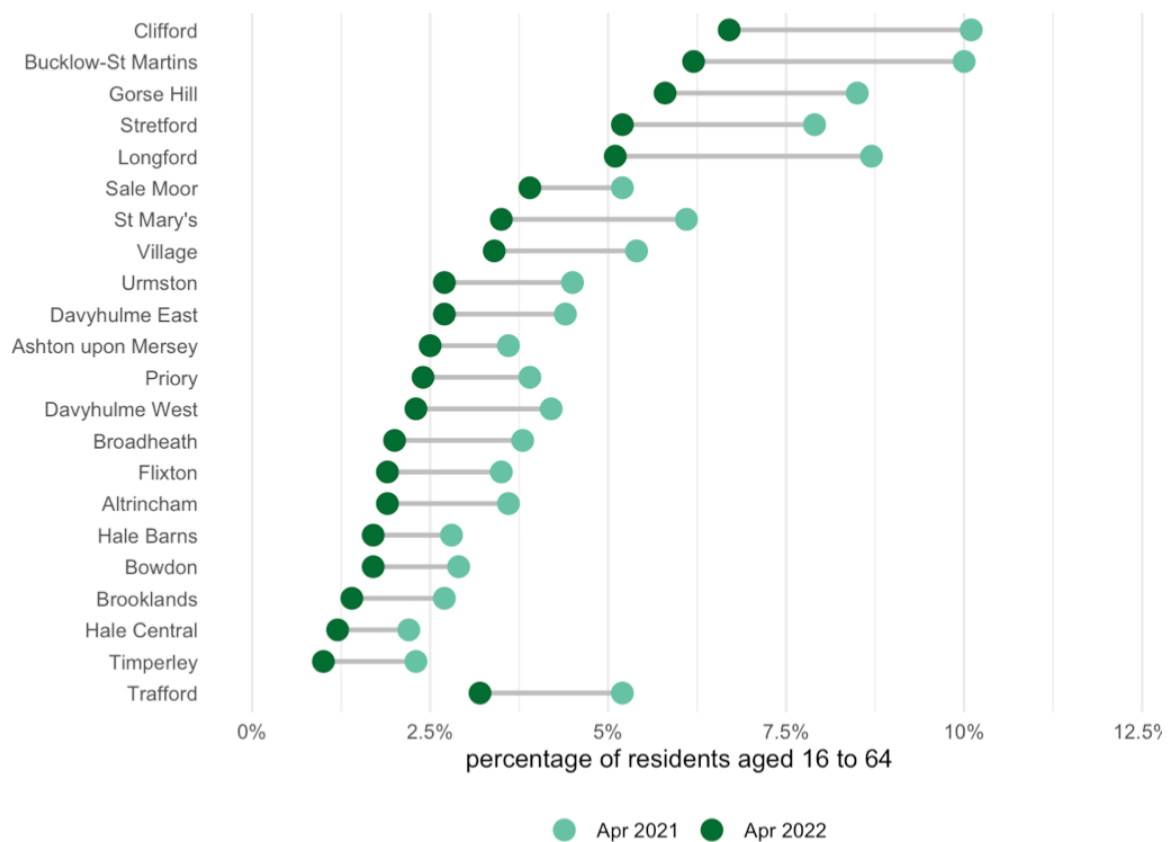
Although the Trafford Park Extension Line aims to improve physical connectivity, its capacity to directly redress entrenched socio-economic inequalities remains inherently limited. Transport improvements alone are insufficient to address the deeper structural factors underpinning socio-economic exclusion, such as inadequate access to affordable childcare, persistently low wages, constrained educational opportunities, and the limited availability of targeted skills training programmes (Lucas, 2012; Lupton et al., 2019). Additionally, the fixed-route nature of the infrastructure means that residents beyond convenient walking or cycling distances to Metrolink stops—or those lacking effective first-mile/last-mile connectivity—may derive minimal benefit from this intervention (Hodson et al., 2019).

To avoid inadvertently exacerbating existing socio-spatial inequalities, the implementation of the Trafford Park Extension Line must be integrated within a broader suite of complementary social policy interventions. Effective policy integration would include targeted investment in accessible employment support services, affordable childcare provision, and robust, inclusive

economic planning frameworks specifically designed to meet the needs of economically marginalised communities (Pike et al., 2007; RSA Inclusive Growth Commission, 2017). Without such comprehensive policy coordination, infrastructural enhancements risk reinforcing spatial divisions—facilitating increased economic participation among already advantaged populations while leaving marginalised communities excluded.

Thus, realising the full equity potential of the Trafford Park Extension Line necessitates deliberate, multi-dimensional, and inclusive policy approaches that explicitly address the intersectional barriers perpetuating socio-economic exclusion within Trafford and the wider GM region.

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has critically contextualised the two transport interventions explored in this thesis: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. Both cases have been embedded within GM's evolving governance frameworks and examined in relation to the socio-economic inequalities and spatial disparities that characterise the region. By situating these interventions within GM's complex political, economic, and spatial structures, the chapter provides essential groundwork for understanding how transport policies are designed and implemented in response to varied and occasionally conflicting strategic objectives.

The analysis highlights that, despite being framed as mechanisms to enhance regional mobility, equity, and inclusion, both interventions operate within a transport governance landscape shaped by fragmented decision-making, uneven investment distribution, and persistent socio-spatial inequalities. Our Pass, a financial intervention aimed at improving youth access to education, employment, and social participation through subsidised bus travel, has its effectiveness closely tied to the underlying structural conditions of the transport network, particularly in underserved and peripheral areas. Conversely, the Trafford Park Extension Line, as a large-scale infrastructure project, seeks to stimulate economic competitiveness and regional connectivity but raises critical questions regarding its potential to reinforce, rather than alleviate, spatial imbalances by prioritising economically prosperous locations.

Furthermore, this chapter has evaluated how these interventions align with broader regional policy frameworks, notably the GM Transport Strategy 2040 (GMTS 2040) and the Our

Network vision. Relevant theoretical perspectives, including New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG), have also been considered to assess the influence of public-private partnerships and collaborative governance mechanisms in shaping transport policy outcomes in GM.

A key conclusion of the chapter is that the effectiveness of these interventions in achieving inclusive growth, spatial equity, and sustainable mobility depends significantly on addressing systemic challenges. These include governance fragmentation, service disparities, structural skills gaps, and demographic inequalities, all of which continue to constrain policy effectiveness. Without actively confronting these structural conditions through integrated, holistic approaches, neither Our Pass nor the Trafford Park Extension Line can fully deliver on their stated equity and inclusion objectives.

Ultimately, this chapter contributes directly to the overarching thesis aim of critically examining how transport interventions in GM are governed, implemented, and experienced, particularly regarding their capacity to redress or reinforce socio-economic exclusion. The contextual insights and critical evaluations presented here establish a robust analytical foundation for Chapters 6 and 7, where stakeholder experiences and policy impacts will be critically assessed to provide deeper interpretive analysis.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6. Introduction

This chapter presents an interpretive thematic analysis of two transport interventions in GM: Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line. These two cases represent distinct policy approaches—one financial, the other infrastructural—to improving transport accessibility. The analysis critically assesses each intervention's alignment with strategic objectives related to social equity, regional competitiveness, and sustainable urban development. Our Pass operates as a financial intervention targeted at young people, aiming to reduce cost-related barriers to mobility. In contrast, the Trafford Park Extension Line exemplifies a capital-intensive infrastructure project designed to enhance connectivity to economic hubs. These contrasting interventions provide a valuable comparative lens for assessing the socio-spatial impact of transport policy in a devolved governance context. As outlined in Section 4.4, grey literature was used to contextualise participant testimony, triangulate themes, and extend interpretive insights from stakeholder interviews.

The analysis in this chapter is structured around the research objectives established in Chapter 1. It critically examines how these initiatives translate policy goals into tangible inclusion outcomes, analyses elite stakeholder interpretations of their socio-economic dimensions, evaluates their contribution to regional economic development, and assesses barriers that limit the effectiveness of their implementation. It is acknowledged that the findings and analysis chapters present more references and detail on Our Pass compared to the Trafford Park Extension Line. This reflects the richer and more extensive qualitative data collected for Our Pass, which involved greater stakeholder engagement and provided more diverse perspectives, thereby naturally generating more substantial discussion.

The chapter integrates qualitative findings from elite-level stakeholder interviews with analysis of relevant secondary sources. The structure reflects a combined findings and discussion approach, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm and thematic analysis methodology, allowing for nuanced exploration of how meaning is constructed and contested across stakeholder narratives (Luzeckyj et al., 2019).

Table 5 presents the overarching themes and sub-themes that structure the chapter's analysis while providing supporting coding categories and quotes that illustrate how these themes were developed from the interview data.

These tables provide a basis for thematic comparisons across the interventions and offer transparency in how insights were generated. The chapter also explores how these findings contribute to wider debates around inclusive mobility, infrastructure equity, and devolved policymaking. In doing so, it prepares the ground for the critical synthesis and recommendations presented in Chapter 7.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of Interview Data: Themes, Sub-Themes, and Implications

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting Quotes/Data	Implications
Access to Social Opportunities	Reducing Social Exclusion (Our Pass)	"Socially, it did the world of good for them, especially because of the extra opportunities like football, music, and gigs."	Tackles systemic social inequalities; promotes access to extracurricular activities and cultural experiences.
	Strategic Partnerships	"We work closely with organisations like GMEX… providing young people real-world incentives to use public transport."	Strengthens inclusivity through collaborations, but gaps in outreach to marginalised communities persist.
	Facilitating Educational Engagement	"They are now able to enrol in colleges that align with their objectives, rather than merely those that are close by."	Expands educational access but lacks concrete evidence linking the scheme to improved

			attainment outcomes.
	Cultural Participation	"Many young people had never been to the theatre before until they had access through Our Pass."	Enhances cultural inclusion but risks perpetuating inequities due to geographic disparities in service coverage.
Access to Economic Activity	Financial Mobility (Our Pass)	"With the cost of travel no longer a concern, young people can explore work placements, apprenticeships, or studies."	Reduces transport poverty, but benefits are diminished in areas with limited service provision or unreliable transport.
	Connectivity to Employment (Trafford Park Extension Line)	"The line effectively enhanced local commerce and job growth."	Provides access to retail and employment hubs, boosting regional competitiveness but limited to central regions.
Regional Competitiveness and Sustainability	Sustainable Travel Habits (Our Pass)	"If we can instil the habit of using public transport, it could stick for life."	Promotes eco-friendly behaviours; success depends on addressing infrastructure and service reliability gaps.
	Integrated Transport Planning (Trafford	"Given that active travel is already on the rise, there's great	Highlights the importance of integrated transport

	Park Extension Line)	potential to link transit highways with micro-mobility."	systems but emphasises disparities in geographic service distribution.
Disparities in Access	Geographic Inequities	"Communities beyond the direct reach of the queue feel marginalised from its advantages."	Reinforces the need for equitable infrastructure investment to ensure inclusivity across underserved boroughs.
Collaboration and Governance	Public-Private Partnerships	"Collaborations increased youth engagement with public transport for recreational activities by 30%."	Partnerships enrich initiatives like Our Pass, but inconsistencies in equity and outreach remain critical concerns.

Table 6 builds on the thematic framework outlined in Table 5 by breaking down the codes used to develop the higher-order themes. While Table 5 summarises key themes, sub-themes, and illustrative data excerpts, Table 6 offers a deeper view into how codes were derived and organised through the iterative thematic analysis process. Together, the tables provide a transparent and layered account of the analytical pathway from raw narrative data to thematic insights.

Table 6. Thematic Coding Structure: Codes and Illustrative Data

Code	Description	Quote/Evidence
Social Inclusion and Mobility	Policies promoting equitable access to cultural, educational, and leisure activities.	"Providing cheaper transport encourages young people to use the network, allowing them to participate in their community."
Economic Mobility	Reduction of financial barriers to improve access to work and education.	"Young people save on fares, but if buses in their area run infrequently, the financial mobility benefit is diminished."
Geographic Disparities	Uneven service provision limits benefits in peripheral regions.	"Most new transport schemes are concentrated in central areas, leaving outer boroughs underserved."
Sustainability Practices	Promotion of environmentally friendly transport habits.	"If we can instil the habit of using public transport, it could stick for life."
Collaborative Governance	Partnerships across sectors to enhance transport initiatives.	"We've partnered with organisations like GMEX to offer real-world incentives for young people."

Following the interpretivist approach set out in Chapter 4, secondary sources were used not as a means of triangulation in a positivist sense, but to contextualise and extend the interview-based analysis. Where appropriate, policy documents, performance reports, and academic literature are used to illustrate structural constraints, validate emergent themes, or identify tensions between stakeholder perspectives and institutional goals. As discussed further in Chapter 7, this integrated approach to combining stakeholder narratives with policy and performance data supports a more context-sensitive evaluation of intervention outcomes.

6.1 Theme One: Access to Social Opportunities

6.1.1 Our Pass: Role in Reducing Social Exclusion for Young People

Our Pass is a targeted financial intervention that aims to reduce transport-related barriers for young people in GM by providing cost-free bus travel for those aged 16–18. Positioned as a mechanism for promoting social inclusion, the scheme is intended to enhance access to educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities. This section critically evaluates the extent to which Our Pass supports social participation and addresses deeper structural inequalities, drawing on narrative interview data and secondary evaluation reports. While Our Pass reduces the financial burden associated with travel, interview responses suggest that its impact extends beyond affordability. Participants frequently referred to the ability of the scheme to promote cultural access, extracurricular involvement, and wider social engagement. For example, several respondents linked access to free transport with the capacity to attend events, explore the city, and participate in community life forms of social interaction often inaccessible to low-income youth.

However, the scheme's equity claims require closer scrutiny. Interviewees also highlighted gaps in awareness and uneven access to the non-transport opportunities embedded in the scheme. These disparities reflect shortcomings in communication strategies and the digital platforms used to promote bundled cultural offers.

Bundling Extracurricular Activities with Transport

Integrating extracurricular activities with transport access is a key feature of Our Pass, strategically designed to promote social inclusion by encouraging greater use of public transport among young people. This bundling of opportunities serves a dual function: it incentivises travel while simultaneously expanding access to civic and cultural life. As Participant 10 observed:

"Transport is really there to help you carry out the activities you want to do in your life. If travel is cheaper for a group, and access to the activity is cheaper, it helps you use the transport network." (Participant 10: Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning).

Similarly, Participant 14 reflected on the practical and symbolic value of the scheme:

"Honestly, it made a huge difference. It meant that I didn't have to factor transport costs into everything I did. Going to college, attending events in the city like the Trafford Centre." (Participant 14: VCSE Organisation: Trustee).

These accounts underscore how Our Pass links cost-free travel with access to experiences that might otherwise be restricted, particularly for those from lower-income households. The emphasis on utility and opportunity reflects an intentional design to improve both the functional and social value of public transport. The scheme, in this sense, aligns with broader literature on value-added transport (Metz, 2008), where increasing perceived usefulness drives ridership. This also echoes Lucas's (2012) framing of transport equity, where access to mobility is a necessary condition for social participation, not merely a question of physical infrastructure. Yet, the scheme's implementation reveals important limitations. As interviews with stakeholders show, awareness and understanding of these bundled opportunities are inconsistent, particularly among marginalised youth. Participant 8 noted:

"There have been instances where young individuals were unaware that these bundled opportunities were available specifically to them." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

Participant 12 echoed this concern:

"Without effective and focused outreach, even the most well-crafted programmes may struggle to connect with the specific groups they intend to assist." (Participant 12: Council Director).

These perspectives identify a structural gap between policy design and implementation. The scheme's reliance on digital platforms and standardised outreach strategies risks excluding those who lack digital access, transport confidence, or social capital, particularly in GM's outer boroughs. The unintended result is that a programme aimed at inclusion may inadvertently reproduce exclusionary dynamics, as suggested by Participant 15:

"Many young people, especially in the outer boroughs, don't know what the pass offers. They might have access, but not the confidence or knowledge on how to use it. This is where the role of community groups and youth workers come in, helping to guide these young people,

showing them how to access the services available to them." (Participant 15: VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager).

Addressing this challenge requires more than refining the messaging. It necessitates a shift in delivery strategy—one that recognises the need for community-led communication and tailored outreach. Participant 15 captured this need for localisation:

"Success hinges on engaging young people in their existing environments, be it social media, educational initiatives, or local gatherings. A one-size fits all approach doesn't work; we need tailored campaigns that connect with various groups." (Participant 15: VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager).

This point is critical: standardised models of engagement are insufficient for addressing complex inequalities. As interpretivist research reminds us, policies must be situated in the social and institutional contexts in which they are enacted (Yanow, 2000). The repeated comment from Participant 8 also points to the digital exclusion problem:

"There have been instances where young individuals were unaware that these bundled opportunities were available specifically to them. This shows how important it is to use collaborative policy in instances where disadvantaged young people might not have the same digital access to see what's on offer to them." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

The risk here is that digital-first policy implementation assumes uniform levels of digital literacy and access, an assumption widely critiqued in equity literature. It also reflects a broader governance challenge in GM: the lack of robust mechanisms for feedback and adaptation across boroughs, particularly in underserved areas.

To address these concerns, collaborative approaches must be broadened and deepened. Schools, youth services, and local community organisations should be formalised as delivery partners, not just as promotional conduits. Doing so would address awareness gaps and offer trusted, place-based entry points into the scheme for those less likely to self-enrol. These forms of collaborative delivery not only improve uptake but can also help foster the trust and confidence needed to transform formal access into actual use—a key distinction in debates around transport justice (Martens, 2017).

In summary, while the bundling of extracurricular activities with public transport under Our Pass demonstrates a progressive, equity-oriented logic, its success is conditional. The scheme's ability to enhance social inclusion depends not just on the presence of benefits, but on their visibility, usability, and embeddedness in everyday contexts. In its current form, the intervention risks falling short for those who most need it. Closing this gap requires greater attention to localised implementation, collaborative outreach, and the lived realities of disadvantaged youth across GM.

Promoting Social Opportunities Through Strategic Partnerships

A principal component of Our Pass lies in its collaborative delivery model, which aims to enhance youth access to cultural, educational, and recreational activities through strategic partnerships. These partnerships, with museums, music venues, sports institutions, and training providers, function as mechanisms for expanding the scheme's value beyond transport, embedding it in a broader ecosystem of social opportunity. Participant 5 explained:

"We have partnered with GMEX, which is an initiative out of the Combined Authority. It is like a one-stop shop for young people for work experience, employment, and training. They do lots of different events in schools." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

This form of multi-sector collaboration exemplifies the shift from hierarchical public service delivery to the principles of NPG, where cross-sector partnerships and citizen co-production are prioritised (Osborne, 2010). Within the NPG framework, services are no longer simply delivered by the state but are co-created through relationships among public, private, and third-sector actors. Our Pass, by engaging a broad network of stakeholders, reflects this pluralistic and relational form of governance.

Empirically, these collaborations have facilitated a 30% rise in youth participation in leisure and cultural activities across GM (GMCA, 2023b). This increased engagement has been attributed to partnerships that provide discounted or free access to venues such as sports arenas, theatres, and galleries. These initiatives seek to reduce socio-economic barriers to cultural inclusion, recognising that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are often priced out of such experiences (Gibson, 2016; Mazzolini, 2016). Participant 10 highlighted this access-enabling function:

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"Providing cheaper transport and access to activities encourages young people to use the network, allowing them to participate in their community and engage with activities that improve their quality of life." (Participant 10: Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning).

This suggests that transport, when integrated with cultural engagement, becomes a medium for social inclusion. It repositions the bus pass not simply as a financial mechanism but as a tool for community participation and urban belonging. This resonates with Lucas's (2012) concept of transport-related social exclusion, which defines mobility not only as a means of physical movement but as a right to participate in civic life. Participant 16 encapsulated this broader perspective:

"By connecting free travel with opportunities to engage in cultural and social events, we're not just helping young people travel, we're showing them how public transport can be a gateway to discovering their city and building a sense of belonging." (Participant 16: Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty).

This form of symbolic inclusion, where young people are not just moved through space but are enabled to experience the city, reflects the interpretivist concern with meaning-making. What public transport enables is not simply travel, but the possibility of forming identity, accessing networks, and envisioning alternative life trajectories (Shergold and Parkhurst, 2012).

However, such co-created value is not automatically distributed evenly. Participant 12 stressed the importance of facilitating structured pathways from transport to opportunity:

"Partnerships with schools, community groups, and employers can help make sure the mobility offered by the pass is fully utilised. For example, employers could tie internship opportunities to bus pass usage, creating a pipeline from transport to employment." (Participant 12: Council Director).

While this illustrates the potential of cross-sector alignment, it also draws attention to uneven stakeholder capacity. Not all organisations are equally equipped to engage with the scheme. Smaller, community-led groups often lack the administrative, financial, or strategic bandwidth to participate on equal terms. As Participant 16 cautioned:

"However, the dependence on partnerships frequently leads to inconsistent outcomes." Smaller organisations with limited resources are often overlooked, resulting in significant gaps in accessibility for those who require it the most." (Participant 16: Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty).

This critique echoes wider debates within the NPG literature. Although the model promises co-production and decentralisation, it can also reinforce existing hierarchies if dominant actors control resource flows or agenda-setting (Entwistle and Martin, 2005). Von Heimburg et al. (2021) similarly argue that partnerships within NPG frameworks risk becoming exclusionary if mechanisms for equitable participation are not explicitly embedded. In this regard, Our Pass may inadvertently reproduce governance asymmetries under the guise of collaboration.

Such dynamics speak to the tension between inclusive policy aims and structurally uneven implementation. While partnerships are meant to enhance outreach and engagement, unequal stakeholder capacities can restrict the initiative's reach—particularly in GM boroughs with weaker third-sector ecosystems or limited transport infrastructure. This gap between policy design and delivery highlights the need for targeted capacity-building support to enable small and community-based organisations to participate fully in the scheme.

Furthermore, this aligns with interpretivist critiques of technocratic governance, which emphasise that "inclusion" must be understood not as formal access, but as the situated capacity to engage meaningfully (Yanow, 2000). As such, equity in Our Pass is not only about who receives a travel benefit, but who can make use of it—and under what conditions. Ensuring that all young people, regardless of borough or background, can benefit from these partnerships requires governance structures that are reflexive, distributed, and attentive to place-based inequalities.

In summary, while strategic partnerships enhance the reach and value of Our Pass, their effectiveness is contingent on addressing disparities in organisational capacity and resource distribution. The NPG framework offers useful tools for fostering co-produced public value, but its success depends on building inclusive governance mechanisms that elevate marginalised voices and decentralise power. Without such safeguards, partnership models risk reinforcing rather than reducing transport and opportunity inequities in GM.

Facilitating Educational Engagement

An essential objective of Our Pass is to expand access to post-16 education by eliminating transport costs for young people. This financial support is designed to remove a key barrier to participation, allowing students to choose institutions based on academic fit rather than proximity alone. The scheme aims to promote more equitable access to educational pathways across GM, especially for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This goal was affirmed by Participants 1 and 2, who highlighted the scheme's influence on students' decision-making and engagement:

"By eliminating a significant obstacle, they are now able to enrol in the colleges and courses that are most aligned with their objectives, rather than merely those that are close by." (Participant 1: The Department for Transport: Northern Sector).

"I've seen firsthand how Our Pass facilitates access for students. It is not solely about getting to college but the support services that improve their overall educational experience." (Participant 2: Transport for GM: Research Officer).

Participant 1's observation underscores the pass's potential to transform educational decision-making by expanding spatial opportunity structures (Lucas, 2012). Participant 2 further emphasises the holistic benefits of increased mobility, such as access to pastoral and extracurricular support—which are frequently overlooked in narrow, outcomes-focused evaluations. These insights reflect the interpretivist emphasis on participants' own accounts of meaning and experience, situating mobility not merely as movement, but as a condition for educational and personal development (Titheridge et al., 2014).

Quantitative data from the *Our Pass Evaluation Report* (GMCA, 2023b) provides partial support for these claims. The report finds that 88% of respondents felt the scheme positively impacted their ability to engage in education or training, while 69% of recorded journeys were made to educational institutions. Additionally, 92% of first-year students reported that Our Pass improved their perception of educational opportunity, and the scheme was said to facilitate qualification completion for 88% of users, particularly those from the "Urban Adversity" socio-economic group.

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Participant 8 elaborated on the role of affordability in shaping educational persistence:

"Young people in areas like ours often don't finish their qualifications because they can't afford the daily travel. The pass has changed that, now they're staying in education and considering further studies." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

This quote supports the argument that cost-related transport exclusion can be a key determinant in early drop-out or educational disengagement (Jones and Lucas, 2012; Hine and Mitchell, 2001). It also illustrates the scheme's potential to improve retention, especially for disadvantaged learners in peripheral boroughs, by addressing affordability at a critical life stage.

However, while these findings suggest that Our Pass supports educational access, several analytical caveats must be noted. Firstly, much of the positive impact data is self-reported. While this is consistent with interpretive methods, which prioritise participant perspectives, it raises methodological questions about the robustness of causal claims (Koller et al., 2023). Social desirability bias or the conflation of correlation with causation may inflate the perceived effectiveness of the intervention. Second, there is an absence of baseline data to determine whether the high proportion of education-related journeys (69%) represents a significant shift in travel behaviour, or simply reflects typical youth travel patterns prior to the scheme.

A further limitation lies in the reliance on anecdotal evidence to support the idea that the pass enables students to explore a wider range of educational options. While this claim is frequently repeated—both in quotes and in the evaluation report—it is not substantiated by comparative data showing changes in enrolment patterns, course diversity, or travel distances pre- and post-intervention. As such, the claim remains interpretively compelling but empirically under-evidenced.

Even where positive effects are reported, their distribution is uneven. The evaluation report notes significant geographic disparities in pass uptake and impact, with boroughs like Oldham and Trafford underperforming relative to the GM average. This aligns with Participant 8's concern:

"There's still a gap in reaching young people in some boroughs, especially those without good transport links. If buses or trams don't run reliably, the pass feels like a token benefit, not a real opportunity." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

This highlights a critical issue: financial support alone cannot compensate for weak or absent infrastructure. As Lucas (2012) and Martens (2017) argue, transport justice requires not only affordability, but adequate spatial coverage and reliability. Without accessible services, particularly in low-density or infrastructure-poor districts, the pass's utility is fundamentally constrained. Furthermore, while respondents from marginalised groups report high satisfaction, there is little exploration of how intersectional factors, such as ethnicity, disability, or care responsibilities, shape pass usage or impact. This omission risks flattening the social complexity of access to education. The interpretivist concern with situated meaning suggests that more nuanced engagement with lived experience is needed to understand how and for whom the pass works, and where it fails.

In summary, the Our Pass scheme appears to offer meaningful support for educational access, particularly by reducing transport-related cost barriers. Participants report greater freedom in choosing institutions, improved engagement with support services, and increased retention. However, these benefits are moderated by gaps in service quality, geographic inequity, and limited empirical evaluation of long-term outcomes. The scheme's educational potential is contingent on a more integrated and context-sensitive approach—one that pairs financial interventions with targeted investments in transport infrastructure, localised outreach, and policy coordination across education, transport, and youth services.

Facilitating Cultural Engagement

Our Pass also seeks to promote social inclusion by improving access to cultural and leisure experiences. By partnering with cultural institutions, museums, concerts, sports venues, and workshops, the scheme aims to widen participation among young people who might otherwise be excluded due to financial or geographic barriers. Participant 2 articulated the developmental potential of these experiences:

"Some have mentioned how they were able to engage in other activities outside class that helped them develop and grow personally." (Participant 2: Transport for GM: Research Officer).

This theme is echoed in accounts of initiatives such as the Royal English Ballet masterclass, which exemplify the scheme's broader social aims. Participants 5 and 15 reflected on the transformative nature of these experiences:

"The Royal English Royal Ballet did a masterclass for some of our pass holders, so they used the Pass to get into Manchester and then participated in the masterclass with the Royal Ballet. They had never been to the ballet before." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

"We heard that many young people had never been to the theatre before until they had access through Our Pass." (Participant 15: VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager).

These examples illustrate how Our Pass can reduce barriers to cultural participation and facilitate engagement with new social spaces, particularly for young people from lower-income households or peripheral areas. The *Our Pass Evaluation Report* (GMCA, 2023b) supports these narratives, reporting that 86% of respondents engaged in new cultural or leisure experiences as a result of the scheme.

The findings align with literature on cultural mobility and youth development. Gibson (2016) notes that access to cultural spaces contributes meaningfully to identity formation and personal growth, particularly in adolescence. Similarly, Mazzolini (2016) argues that youth-focused mobility interventions can promote active citizenship by enabling participation in civic life and social networks. Through these theoretical lenses, Our Pass may be seen not simply as a logistical solution but as an enabler of civic inclusion and social capital development.

However, despite the promise of cultural access, several limitations constrain the initiative's impact. High-profile partnerships, such as with the Royal Ballet, are valuable but risk being episodic and unevenly distributed. As Participant 5 observed:

"For kids in more isolated regions, who still can't access this cultural experience because they're still out of reach, Our Pass remains less accessible..." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

This reinforces concerns in the transport equity literature that interventions often fail to reach those with the greatest need due to persistent geographic inequalities (Lucas, 2012; Charnavalau et al., 2022). The impact of cultural engagement initiatives is closely tied to reliable infrastructure and local accessibility. When cultural offers are concentrated in central urban areas, young people in outlying boroughs remain excluded, not because of cost, but because of spatial disconnection.

Relying on sporadic or flagship events, such as free tickets to major performances, risks reinforcing these divides. Cairns et al. (2004) caution that short-term incentives alone do not create enduring behavioural change. Similarly, Participant 12 highlighted the practical limitations of partnerships that fail to address underlying mobility barriers:

"You can have the best partnerships with cultural organisations, but unless young people can reliably and affordably get to those places, the impact is limited to those who already have good transport links." (Participant 12: Council Director).

This points to a systemic flaw: cultural participation cannot be engineered solely through promotional access without addressing the spatial and infrastructural context in which young people live. Without tackling these structural barriers, even the best-intentioned initiatives risk offering symbolic inclusion rather than substantive access.

The need for a more sustained and embedded strategy is evident. As Cairns et al. (2004) suggest, durable engagement requires integrated planning that includes service frequency, infrastructure investment, and awareness campaigns tailored to marginalised communities. Without such coordination, interventions remain vulnerable to replicating the inequalities they aim to disrupt.

"To deliver equitable social inclusion, we need to address service gaps and ensure consistent connectivity across all areas, not just urban centres." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

Participant 8's observation reinforces the notion that genuine inclusion must be underpinned by spatial justice (Soja, 2010), the fair and equitable distribution of public infrastructure and services across all communities. In this light, Our Pass's cultural partnerships should be

understood not as add-ons but as essential components of a wider ecosystem of inclusion, contingent on infrastructure, awareness, and equitable distribution.

The data suggest that to achieve greater cultural equity, the scheme should move beyond occasional access to high-profile events. Future iterations must integrate sustained outreach, improved connectivity, and collaborative planning with local organisations. Initiatives should be grounded in youth co-production, ensuring that the cultural experiences offered reflect the interests, identities, and geographies of diverse youth populations.

In summary, while Our Pass presents a compelling model for expanding cultural access and supporting personal growth, its success hinges on the reliability and equity of the broader transport system. Without attention to these structural issues, the scheme risks amplifying existing disparities—offering access in principle, but not always in practice. The findings underscore the importance of aligning cultural engagement strategies with inclusive transport planning, ensuring that cultural inclusion is not episodic or urban-centric, but embedded, distributed, and sustained.

6.1.2 Trafford Park Extension Line: Links to Social Hubs and Impact on Community Cohesion

The Trafford Park Extension Line establishes critical connectivity between residential areas and major social destinations in GM, including MediaCityUK and the Trafford Centre. These locations are not only economic drivers but also key sites of cultural engagement and collective identity. As Participant 6 explained:

"The Trafford Park tram line connects to the MediaCityUK line and is such a huge way of showing young people that we've got the BBC here. You can get work experience, apprenticeships, or even just see what's possible." (Participant 6: VCSE Organisation: CEO).

This quote captures the line's dual function: as a conduit for both tangible economic opportunity and aspirational engagement, particularly within the creative sectors. It reflects a broader view in transport equity literature that transport infrastructure can act as a pathway not just to places but to life chances (Martens, 2017).

The Metrolink Service Performance Report (2023) evidences a strong post-pandemic recovery, with ridership at 85% of pre-pandemic levels and weekend travel nearly fully

restored, much of it linked to leisure and retail activities. The Trafford Centre, a major retail hub attracting millions annually, benefits directly from the tramline's alignment. Participant 10 illustrated the wider social implications:

"The tramline to Trafford Centre is about more than just shopping, it is about connecting people to a space where they can gather, socialise, and experience the city in new ways." (Participant 10: Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning).

This supports existing literature on public transport as a tool for enhancing social cohesion and access to urban public life (Pereira et al., 2017; Lucas, 2012). Public transport plays a crucial role in enabling diverse populations to access shared spaces, fostering inclusive forms of urban engagement. Moreover, increased weekend travel for social and community purposes suggests a behavioural shift where public transport serves not only functional but experiential purposes (Sheller, 2018).

Participants 7 and 11 emphasised the reduction of transport poverty and the broadened reach of community events enabled by the tramline:

"Reliable public transport is essential for tackling transport poverty. For many, the tramline is the difference between being able to visit the Trafford Centre or being left out of these activities altogether." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

"Since the extension line we've seen that the Trafford Centre is attracting a wider range of visitors, not only for shopping but also for social and community events." (Participant 11: Expert Commentator: Sport Economist).

These comments reinforce the idea that social participation—often taken for granted in urban policy, is contingent on equitable infrastructure access. However, the equity benefits of the Trafford Park Extension Line are unevenly distributed. As TfGM (2023) and the Metrolink Service Performance Report (GMTC, 2023) indicate, outer boroughs like Wigan and Rochdale continue to experience limited service coverage. Participant 14 raised this concern:

"Most new transport schemes are concentrated in central or affluent areas where demand is already high, leaving outer boroughs under-served." (Participant 14: VCSE Organisation: Trustee).

This aligns with Charnavalau et al. (2022), who argue that infrastructure investments often follow existing demand, rather than redistributing opportunity to underserved regions. These investment patterns risk deepening existing socio-spatial inequalities—particularly when new routes fail to account for first-mile/last-mile connectivity.

Indeed, the Trafford Park Extension Line's limited geographic reach raises questions about its efficacy in tackling transport-related exclusion. Households beyond walking distance from tram stops, particularly those without cars or access to feeder services, remain effectively disconnected. As the GMCA Congestion Intervention Plan (2023c) shows, only 65% of bus services in peripheral boroughs meet reliability and frequency standards, compared to over 90% in central areas. Participant 12 succinctly articulated this structural shortfall:

"The problem isn't just the tram stops themselves, it is what surrounds them. For people in outlying areas without reliable feeder services, the tram is a distant benefit, not an immediate solution." (Participant 12: Council Director).

Lucas (2012) and Martens (2017) similarly warn that infrastructure-led interventions frequently neglect the broader ecosystem of accessibility, where issues such as distance, interchange reliability, and connectivity to opportunity destinations remain critical determinants of use.

Calls for a multimodal approach are therefore urgent. Participant 7 highlighted the value of micro-mobility and feeder modes:

"Micro-mobility options like e-scooters and bike-sharing can bridge the gap for people in areas with poor first-mile/last-mile connections, but they need to be affordable and accessible to work effectively." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

Urban Transport Group (2020) recommends such multimodal integration as a cost-effective way to expand the reach of existing infrastructure. However, equity remains a concern. Without ensuring that options such as bike hire and e-scooters are both affordable and equitably distributed, these solutions risk reproducing the same patterns of exclusion they aim to resolve (Smith et al., 2019).

The data also indicate persistent disparities in Our Pass uptake—55% in Trafford and 50% in Oldham compared to a 63% average across GM (GMCA, 2023b). This reinforces the need for coordinated investment across both financial and infrastructure dimensions. Participant 12's earlier observation—that infrastructure alone is insufficient—highlights the critical importance of cross-policy alignment.

Martens (2017) argues that meaningful equity in transport policy can only be achieved when both financial and infrastructural interventions are designed to complement one another. In this case, Our Pass can offset financial barriers, while the Trafford Park Extension Line provides the physical backbone of access. Yet, without synchronising their reach and scope, each intervention risks falling short. As the evidence shows, the Trafford Park Extension Line primarily benefits areas that are already economically vibrant, while underserved communities remain disconnected due to poor network integration or limited coverage.

In conclusion, the Trafford Park Extension Line makes important contributions to regional connectivity and social cohesion by linking high-profile destinations to GM's transport network. However, its benefits remain geographically uneven. Only by embedding it within a broader equity-led strategy, combining first-mile/last-mile solutions, multimodal integration, and outreach to marginalised communities, can the intervention fulfil its full social potential. This underscores the necessity of a holistic transport strategy, where infrastructural expansion and inclusive planning go together to redress spatial inequalities and deliver meaningful mobility for all.

6.2 Theme Two: Access to Economic Activity
6.2.1 Our Pass: Improved Economic Mobility
Our Pass represents a targeted financial intervention aimed at addressing the affordability barrier to education, training, and employment for young people in GM. By eliminating transport costs, it seeks to enhance economic mobility, reduce transport poverty, and expand opportunity, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The estimated average cost of a weekly bus ticket throughout an academic year is £570, while Our Pass provides savings of around £546 annually, factoring in the one-time £10 pass fee and Mayoral Precept contribution (GMCA, 2023b). For apprentices, who often travel between multiple locations, savings can exceed £650 per year.

Participant 6 described the initiative's immediate impact on decision-making among low-income youth:

"It has given them a chance to actually take up whatever college course they want. At 16, you're on a pittance, so the free travel boosts their wage because they don't have to pay to get there." (Participant 6: VCSE Organisation: CEO).

This perspective aligns with broader findings from the Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b), which found that 71% of Our Pass journeys supported educational travel, while 29% facilitated employment or other economic activities. By easing financial burdens, the scheme removes one of the most immediate barriers to mobility, particularly for 16–18-year-olds who lack financial independence.

Participant 5 further illustrated the financial strain that preceded the scheme:

"I remember another young lad in Salford who told me that before Our Pass, he had to choose between bus fare and lunch." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

This underscores the significance of transport poverty, which Hine and Mitchell (2001) define as the condition where individuals are unable to participate in essential activities due to a lack of affordable and accessible transport. By removing this burden, Our Pass increases disposable income, enabling young people to reallocate funds towards other essentials, such as food, digital resources, or education-related materials—key contributors to economic mobility (Lucas, 2012).

Studies such as Jones and Taylor (2018) and the Scottish Government's evaluation of its Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (Transport Scotland, 2023) similarly demonstrate that free travel initiatives reduce financial pressure and expand access to training, employment, and leisure. In Scotland, average savings of £700 per year have been recorded for families with young people in full-time education.

Participant 2 elaborated on the economic rationale for the intervention:

"Price sensitivity in this group is often tied to their limited financial autonomy, they're more likely to rely on allowances, part-time jobs, or financial support from family. So, when

initiatives like Our Pass provide free or discounted travel, it removes a significant barrier." (Participant 2: Transport for GM: Research Officer).

The Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b) shows that 62% of respondents reported greater financial security, reinforcing the scheme's ability to alleviate daily economic strain. This enhanced sense of financial control was illustrated by Participant 5:

"A young person I worked with in Bolton could finally afford to save for a laptop for college because they no longer had to spend their weekly allowance on bus fares." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

Such anecdotes exemplify how mobility interventions can produce second-order benefits, such as long-term educational investment, which support broader aims of socio-economic resilience (Titheridge et al., 2014).

The Evaluation Report also found that 91% of respondents said Our Pass had increased their personal freedom. Of those, 76% felt more invested in their future, and 73% said it made decision-making about their futures easier. These figures correspond with Transport Scotland's (2023) findings, which similarly note that free bus travel contributed to reduced stress and increased independence among young users.

Participant 7 framed this shift in terms of access to opportunity:

"With the cost of travel no longer a concern, many young people now have the freedom to explore work placements, apprenticeships, or further studies they once deemed inaccessible." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

Such experiences are echoed in Lucas's (2012) and Church et al.'s (2000) analyses of transport-related exclusion, which argue that financial and spatial barriers jointly shape access to opportunity.

However, as Participant 7 cautioned:

"It is great that young people save on fares, but if buses in their area run infrequently... the financial mobility benefit is diminished." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

This insight underscores the importance of service quality in realising economic mobility goals. As highlighted by Hine and Mitchell (2001), cost savings are insufficient if not paired with frequent, reliable, and geographically equitable transport provision. This point is further substantiated by the finding that although 62% of respondents reported improved financial security, 38% did not pointing to service disparities and deeper structural barriers. Participant 12 reinforced this:

"It is great to see more young people getting to college or part-time jobs, but if the bus routes are unreliable... they'll still be at a disadvantage." (Participant 12: Council Director).

These quotes affirm the position articulated by Martens (2017), who argues that transport justice requires both affordability and availability, what he terms "just access". Likewise, research by Abrantes et al. (2013) and Public Health England (2014) notes that cost interventions must be accompanied by operational improvements if they are to meaningfully support engagement in education, employment, and training.

Participant 14's view encapsulates this structural dilemma:

"The infrastructure needs to support the scheme. Otherwise, it is like giving someone a tool they can't use..." (Participant 14: VCSE Organisation: Trustee).

This reflects a broader challenge: while financial interventions like Our Pass offer a critical foundation for economic inclusion, their effectiveness is contingent upon transport service provision, reliability, and spatial equity. In areas where service quality is weak, such as parts of Oldham and Wigan, the scheme risks functioning as a symbolic intervention rather than a transformative one.

In summary, the evidence strongly supports Our Pass as a financial mechanism that enhances perceived economic security and opportunity for many young people in GM. However, its transformative potential is undermined when not paired with targeted investment in service reliability and geographic coverage. This suggests the need for more integrated planning, where financial and infrastructural policies work in tandem to dismantle the systemic barriers that constrain mobility, autonomy, and opportunity.

6.2.2 Trafford Park Extension Line: Spatial Distribution

The Trafford Park Extension Line was developed as a strategic infrastructural intervention intended to strengthen spatial connectivity and stimulate economic activity across key retail, industrial, and service nodes in GM. Consistent with principles of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), the line's design sought to co-locate tram stops with areas of high footfall and economic potential—such as the Trafford Centre, MediaCityUK, and Trafford Park itself—to enhance access and reduce reliance on car travel (Cervero and Kockelman, 1997; Bertolini et al., 2005). This approach aligns with research indicating that densification around transit corridors increases ridership, supports retail and labour markets, and fosters urban productivity (Canales et al., 2019).

Participant 10 reflected on the rationale behind the line's spatial configuration:

"We aimed to strategically position each stop along the Trafford Park Extension Line to fulfil a distinct purpose, some located near key retail hubs, others adjacent to manufacturing areas or residential neighbourhoods." (Participant 10: Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning).

Participant 13 also affirmed the importance of accessibility in shaping user behaviour:

"Convenience matters, and the closer the stop, the higher the likelihood of repeat visits." (Participant 13: Transport for the North)

This spatial design was also explicitly aimed at resolving 'first-mile/last-mile' constraints to retail accessibility. Previously, over 90% of Trafford Centre visitors travelled by car (Schouten, 2019), often facing long walks from remote car parks. By locating stops directly outside key destinations like Selfridges, the tramline promotes modal shift, supporting GM's aim to reduce car dependency while encouraging repeat visits and expanded economic activity (Banister, 2008; GMCA, 2019).

The Metrolink Service Performance Report (2023) confirms a rolling annual ridership of 1.7 million on the Trafford Park Extension Line, with weekend travel nearing pre-pandemic levels, largely driven by retail and leisure travel.

This reflects the alignment of TOD principles with economic regeneration goals and corroborates Graham and Gibbons' (2019) findings on agglomeration economies, which link transport investment to productivity via increased accessibility.

Participant 3 reinforced this connection:

"The improved transport connections have led to a noticeable increase in foot traffic, we expect it to attract interest from new investors in the long-term." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

The strategic placement of stops also supports spatial equity goals, but as several participants observed, success is contingent on integration with broader network functions—particularly interchange quality. Both Participant 7 and Participant 9 highlighted the pivotal role of interchanges:

"If connections are seamless and dependable... unreliable interchanges introduce uncertainty, increasing frustration..." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

"If people have to deal with clunky interchanges... they'll default to cars." (Participant 9: Expert Commentator: Transport Geography).

This aligns with Luo et al. (2019), who emphasise that journey reliability—not just connectivity—is critical in influencing modal shift. However, issues with interchange design, particularly at Cornbrook, undermine these aims. As Participant 9 noted:

"Cornbrook is a good example of an inefficient interchange station... it is not very comfortable... and it is not a terminal type of station." (Participant 9: Expert Commentator: Transport Geography).

Cornbrook lacks both comfort and functional integration with its surroundings. Unlike successful TOD nodes, which typically co-locate interchange points with retail, employment, and public services, Cornbrook serves only as a transfer point—lacking amenities and

contributing little to the user experience. This represents a missed opportunity to design interchanges as community assets and economic anchors (Monzón et al., 2016).

The broader issue here is one of spatial equity. While central hubs like St Peter's Square and Market Street benefit from strategic investments and higher footfall (GMTC, 2023), peripheral areas continue to face relative neglect. This is reflected in both usage patterns and policy critiques (Martens, 2017; Lucas, 2012). Despite a 2.1 million annual trip count on the Trafford Park Extension Line (Metrolink Service Data, TfGM, 2023), the benefits are concentrated in already prosperous areas—further entrenching spatial divides. Participant 11 captured this tension:

"We're creating a hub where businesses, talent, and customers naturally converge. It is the backbone of regional growth." (Participant 11: Expert Commentator: Sport Economist).

This vision reflects the economic logics of agglomeration (Graham and Gibbons, 2019) but risks marginalising areas that lack direct tram access. Participant 12 underscored the resulting inequity:

"The problem isn't just the tram stops themselves, it is what surrounds them... for people in outlying areas... the tram is a distant benefit, not an immediate solution." (Participant 12: Council Director).

This critique echoes Lucas's (2012) and Martens's (2017) arguments about "just access"—the notion that infrastructure must be coupled with inclusive access planning. Without complementary investments in bus links and micro-mobility (Urban Transport Group, 2020), first-mile/last-mile deficits will persist. Participant 7 reiterated the value of multimodal approaches:

"Micro-mobility options... can bridge the gap... but they need to be affordable and accessible to work effectively." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

However, GMCA (2023c) data reveals that only 65% of bus services in peripheral boroughs meet reliability standards, compared to over 90% in central areas. This disparity, coupled with limited e-mobility infrastructure in areas like Wigan or Rochdale, reinforces a cycle of exclusion.

In summary, while the Trafford Park Extension Line contributes to enhanced connectivity, economic vibrancy, and sustainable transport objectives, its impact is spatially uneven. High footfall and investment continue to accrue in already affluent areas, while underserved communities remain disconnected. Without integrated land-use planning, improved interchanges, and multimodal feeder systems, the line risks becoming another case of "infrastructure-led inequality" (Charnavalau et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps is vital if GM's transport strategy is to fulfil its commitment to regional cohesion and inclusive growth.

Connectivity to Key Employment Areas and Economic Activity

A key function of the Trafford Park Extension Line lies in its potential to support economic development by improving connectivity between residential areas and employment hubs. Increased access to economic centres can strengthen labour market fluidity by enabling better matching between job opportunities and workers (Glaeser, 2011; Johnson et al., 2017). It may also enhance consumer mobility and support agglomeration economies by concentrating demand and fostering economies of scale in commercial activity (Sari, 2015). This was exemplified by Participant 3, who reported:

"We probably would not have built this hotel had you not then come in and built Metrolink." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

The statement reflects the catalytic potential of transit infrastructure to attract private investment, consistent with established literature on transport-led development (Chen et al., 2019; Felbermayr and Tarasov, 2022; Pathak et al., 2017). Participant 3's observation suggests that the Trafford Park Extension Line reshaped investor confidence in Trafford's development potential by connecting previously less-accessible spaces to GM's broader economic geography. Empirically, this is supported by local market indicators such as the 91% increase in house prices in Trafford, attributed to job growth in tech, finance, and media sectors (Byers, 2024).

However, critical questions must be raised about the distributive outcomes of such connectivity. While the development of new hotels and commercial facilities near new tram stops signifies economic vitality, infrastructure-led regeneration may also exacerbate socio-spatial inequalities. Participant 1 echoed this concern:

"We must remain cautious, these benefits often fail to extend outlying communities, leaving them at a comparative disadvantage." (Participant 1: The Department for Transport: Northern Sector).

This aligns with Lucas's (2012) critique of transport exclusion, where interventions may inadvertently benefit those already within reach of well-connected corridors while excluding residents of peripheral or underserved areas. Moreover, as Smith and Clarke (2020) caution in their study of London, TOD risks driving up property prices and displacing low-income communities unless accompanied by measures such as affordable housing provision and equitable planning frameworks. Participant 16 reinforced the need for integrated urban policy:

"Transport policy studies show that transport must be paired with other economic strategies to initiate successful economic output. This includes housing people can actually afford." (Participant 16: Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty).

This reinforces Wu et al.'s (2021) call for multi-sectoral integration in urban planning. Without policies that actively pair improved accessibility with social infrastructure—such as housing, education, and employment support, transport infrastructure may merely redistribute growth rather than create it. In this regard, the Trafford Park Extension Line must be seen as a necessary but insufficient condition for inclusive economic development (Banister, 2008; Butkus et al., 2023).

This challenge is reflected in continued car dependency across GM. Participant 14 noted:

"Efforts to expand public transport often face pushback from groups that see car dependency as a non-negotiable part of regional development. This can slow down projects or dilute their impact." (Participant 14: VCSE Organisation: Trustee).

This cultural resistance is echoed in data from the TfGM Travel Survey (2022), which indicates that 61% of trips are still made by private car, compared to only 12% by public transport. Such figures not only reflect behavioural inertia but also underline the limited success of modal shift policies, despite infrastructure investments. Participant 11 noted:

"The Trafford Park extension line will have enhanced access to key economic centres for some people, especially with the integration to other Metrolink lines." (Participant 11: Expert Commentator: Sport Economist).

This acknowledgment of selective access reveals that the benefits of the line remain geographically concentrated. This concern is substantiated by the Metrolink Service Performance Report (GMTS, 2023), which shows lower ridership in outlying boroughs like Rochdale and Wigan due to service unreliability and limited feeder networks. Participant 12 offered a frank assessment:

"The problem is that the network isn't built to serve everyone equally. Central areas get the priority, but that leaves outer boroughs stuck with poor coverage and fewer reliable options." (Participant 12: Council Director).

This view supports findings from the Bee Network Committee Report (2023), which identified significant spatial disparities in transport investment and reliability. For instance, only 65% of bus services in outer boroughs meet reliability standards, compared to over 90% in the city centre. These gaps directly hinder access to employment, training, and economic participation in less-connected areas. Martens (2017) refers to this as an issue of "just access," arguing that transport equity requires policies that prioritise those most in need, not merely those easiest to serve. Similarly, Banister (2008) and Lucas (2012) highlight that planning must shift from efficiency-driven logics to inclusion-driven frameworks that explicitly address socio-economic marginalisation. Targeted funding for peripheral boroughs, enhanced local bus connectivity, and transit-oriented affordable housing are some of the mechanisms required to close the opportunity gap.

The empirical evidence and interview data presented here confirm the thesis's core proposition: that infrastructure alone does not guarantee equitable development outcomes. Instead, as Participant 1 stressed:

"To truly drive economic growth in areas like Trafford Park, transport solutions need to be specifically tailored to its unique mix of industrial hubs, retail destinations, and residential areas." (Participant 1: The Department for Transport: Northern Sector).

In the absence of integrated planning and equitable investment strategies, the Trafford Park Extension Line risks entrenching patterns of spatially selective growth, wherein enhanced connectivity and associated economic benefits accrue to already affluent or commercially strategic areas. This dynamic not only bypasses underserved outer boroughs, such as Rochdale and Wigan, but also perpetuates existing inequalities in access to employment, infrastructure, and public services. As a result, the intervention may inadvertently reinforce the spatial concentration of opportunity in GM, rather than functioning as a catalyst for region-wide inclusive development.

6.3 Theme Three: Regional Competitiveness and Leveraging Sustainability

The intersection of sustainability and regional competitiveness forms a central pillar in GM's current transport interventions, as articulated in strategic frameworks such as the GMTS 2040 (GMCA, 2021b). These policies emphasise the dual imperative of reducing carbon emissions while fostering inclusive economic growth. By embedding sustainability within transport planning, GM seeks not only to address environmental obligations but also to strengthen its competitive positioning in a rapidly evolving global economy. Participant 3 encapsulated this integrated approach, stating:

"Transport interventions contribute to urban regeneration with a greener focus. When you improve connectivity, you attract investment, but when that investment aligns with sustainability goals, like building residential developments near tram stops to encourage walking and cycling, you're creating a virtuous cycle." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

This "virtuous cycle" reflects a foundational logic within sustainable urbanism, whereby improvements to mobility infrastructure simultaneously deliver environmental, social, and economic returns (Cervero and Kockelman, 1997; Bertolini et al., 2005). Such integration is not merely aspirational but is structurally embedded within GM's policy architecture. The GMTS 2040 outlines a target for at least 50% of all journeys to be undertaken via public or active transport by 2040—an explicit attempt to reverse car dependency and achieve modal shift (GMCA, 2021b). Achieving this target is positioned as critical to meeting the city-region's 2038 carbon neutrality goals.

The commitment to sustainability aligns with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 1998), which foregrounds the simultaneous pursuit of environmental protection,

social inclusion, and economic viability. Transport initiatives such as Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line are emblematic of this approach. Both aim to decarbonise mobility—by encouraging modal shift through fare incentives or providing high-capacity light rail infrastructure—while improving access to employment and services for traditionally marginalised groups. In doing so, they contribute to a more inclusive form of competitiveness that does not rely solely on market efficiency but integrates social equity into long-term planning (Banister, 2008; Martens, 2017).

Sustainable transport systems are also critical to regional economic resilience. They support labour market flexibility by enabling easier commutes, reduce operational risk by offering alternatives to congestion-prone road networks, and enhance the quality of place—an increasingly important factor for investors and high-skilled talent (Rodrigue, 2020; ECMT, 2004). By developing low-emission, multimodal transport infrastructure, GM is signalling alignment with global urban development trends that prioritise climate adaptation and clean growth. This alignment is particularly important given investor shifts towards ESG-compliant locations, where low-carbon infrastructure is not just desirable but expected (OECD, 2020). However, as highlighted in earlier sections, the distributional outcomes of these interventions remain uneven. While sustainability objectives have been embedded within transport planning, their benefits risk being concentrated in areas with existing infrastructure and higher demand, thereby excluding those in peripheral communities with limited service access. As Lucas (2012) warns, sustainability strategies that fail to account for spatial inequality can inadvertently exacerbate exclusion, reinforcing the mobility divide rather than resolving it.

Thus, the current approach to leveraging sustainability for competitiveness must be tempered with a critical understanding of its limitations. Transport interventions must not only reduce emissions or attract investment, but also enhance mobility justice—ensuring that the social and economic benefits of decarbonisation are shared equitably across all geographies and demographics within GM (Sheller, 2018). This requires coordinated policy across transport, housing, and land-use planning, underpinned by participatory governance structures that elevate underrepresented voices in transport decision-making (Haughton et al., 2016).

In summary, GM's emphasis on sustainability as a lever for regional competitiveness represents a progressive and necessary shift in urban transport policy. By aligning

infrastructure development with environmental and social priorities, GM positions itself at the forefront of sustainable urbanism. However, the effectiveness of this model will depend on its ability to distribute benefits equitably, dismantle structural barriers to access, and remain adaptable to the complex interplay between mobility, governance, and economic transformation.

6.3.1 Our Pass: Reinforcing Sustainable Travel Behaviours

The emphasis on sustainable transport through Our Pass demonstrates GM's strategic ambition to promote behavioural change among young people while enhancing its long-term regional competitiveness. This initiative, which combines cost-free travel with incentivised access to leisure and cultural events, attempts to normalise public transport usage during a formative stage in individuals' lives. This approach resonates with research on behavioural economics and habit formation, which suggests that mobility behaviours developed in youth tend to persist into adulthood (Verplanken and Wood, 2006; Smart and Klein, 2017). Participant 5 captured the scheme's underlying logic:

"Let's put the idea of green travel in the mind and let's encourage them to use different things. So, if you've never been to a football match, there's your free travel. But at the other end of it, you've got a free ticket to get in as well." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

This framing aligns with wider sustainability goals by linking low-emission travel behaviour to positive, memorable experiences. In doing so, the intervention aims to not only facilitate immediate mode shift, but also instil long-term affinity with public transport. Participant 4 similarly noted:

"I think younger generations are a little bit more tuned in than maybe the likes of myself at that age to sustainability issues. It's more likely to be seen as doing the right thing by investing in programmes like this." (Participant 4: Expert Commentator).

This intergenerational emphasis reinforces the connection between public transport incentives and broader sustainability awareness. The targeting of 16–18-year-olds reflects a strategic intervention point, as noted by Participant 6:

"It's also a time when habits are formed. If we can instil the habit of using public transport, it could stick for life." (Participant 6: VCSE Organisation: CEO).

The Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b) further evidences this potential, indicating that 82.5% of former users continued to use public transport after their pass expired. Participant 4 built on this by pointing to the importance of contextual factors in shaping future transport behaviour:

"What's particularly important here is the role of normalisation. If young people grow up in an environment where public transport is accessible, reliable, and even free for a period, they use it." (Participant 4: Expert Commentator).

These perspectives affirm that Our Pass acts as a gateway to sustainable mobility by embedding public transport into daily routines. The UN-Habitat (2013) highlights that early exposure to accessible mobility services, particularly during the school years, can create lasting modal preferences. Similarly, Smart and Klein (2017) find that youth with early access to reliable transport infrastructure demonstrate lower long-term car dependency, even when they later relocate to areas with weaker public transit systems.

However, while the initiative may successfully introduce and normalise sustainable behaviours, it does not automatically ensure behavioural permanence. The scheme's reliance on promotional strategies—free event tickets, one-off cultural engagements—risks being perceived as temporary incentives rather than structural enablers of sustainable behaviour. As Buffa (2015) argues, sustainability initiatives based on short-term rewards often struggle to maintain momentum unless supported by durable infrastructural and institutional change. Participant 5 raised this concern:

"We can't just rely on the promotional strategies as they end up being a short-term trend and not result in long lasting travel behaviour." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

Additionally, Participant 7 issued a caution grounded in everyday mobility experience:

"If there's no reliable service or if routes are limited, free travel alone won't attract users, time and distance still matter." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel, and Mobility).

This reinforces a key limitation of Our Pass: the structural integrity of the underlying transport network. Initiatives that aim to build sustainable habits must also ensure spatial equity in service provision (Lucas, 2012; Martens, 2017). When transport systems are patchy or unreliable—particularly in outer boroughs such as Oldham or Wigan—young people may struggle to adopt public transport, regardless of cost.

This presents a broader conceptual tension between sustainability and access. As Vlados and Chatzinikolaou (2020) note, sustainable regional development must not only pursue environmental goals but ensure social inclusion through equitable infrastructure. A transport incentive can only be considered sustainable if it is also spatially and socially just. Without concurrent investment in service reliability, safety, and user accessibility, Our Pass risks becoming emblematic of superficial sustainability—a gesture rather than a systemic intervention.

Finally, the integration of sustainability into Our Pass contributes to GM's environmental objectives and enhances its identity as a climate-forward, youth-oriented city-region. The GM Transport Strategy 2040 and GMCA's ambition for carbon neutrality by 2038 rely heavily on modal shift, particularly among younger generations who represent the future base of ridership. However, to move from behavioural intention to structural transformation, Our Pass must be aligned with comprehensive improvements in physical infrastructure, policy coordination, and service design.

In summary, Our Pass provides a valuable entry point into sustainable mobility, particularly through its focus on young people and its bundling of travel with opportunity. Yet, its long-term impact on travel behaviour and regional competitiveness hinges on more than incentives—it requires durable, equitable, and accessible transport systems that make sustainable choices both viable and desirable.

6.3.2 Trafford Park Extension Line: Integrating Sustainable Transport Modes
The Trafford Park Extension Line exemplifies GM's attempt to embed sustainability within a wider regional competitiveness agenda through infrastructural investment. By integrating low-carbon transport with key employment zones and leisure hubs, the line demonstrates how targeted investments can support modal shift, reduce car dependency, and enhance urban connectivity. At the same time, however, its design and implementation raise critical

questions about equity, governance, and inclusivity, particularly in relation to spatially uneven access to sustainable transport infrastructure.

The concept of 'transit leverage' (Newman and Kenworthy, 1999) is central to the Trafford Park Extension Line's role in promoting sustainable mobility. By encouraging a transition away from private car use, the line contributes to decarbonisation efforts, mitigates congestion, and supports GM's carbon neutrality target by 2038. It represents an example of how metropolitan regions seek to strategically align transport infrastructure with environmental and economic goals—a point emphasised by Participant 3:

"Given that active travel is already on the rise in GM, there is a great potential to link rapid transit highways with people's back yards through e-scooters and GM Bike Hire schemes. It is about ensuring that people can get to the nearest tram stop and then continue their journey in an environmentally friendly manner." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

This sentiment reflects the aspiration behind multi-modal integration: that first-mile/last-mile issues can be addressed through micro-mobility solutions, aligning with the GM Transport Strategy 2040 vision of a connected, low-carbon city-region (GMCA, 2021b). Banister (2008) similarly argues that integrated transport systems are critical to both reducing emissions and improving regional competitiveness. Yet, realising this potential requires more than technological innovation, it demands inclusive access, spatial coordination, and behavioural change. Participant 9 reinforced the economic rationale for integration:

"A robust transport network signals to investors that the city is prepared for sustainable growth. Linking residents to employment hubs fosters economic resilience and broadens the labour market." (Participant 9: Expert Commentator: Transport Geography).

Data from the Metrolink Service Performance Report (2023) indicates that approximately 27% of trips on the Trafford Park Extension Line are employment-related, with annual ridership rising from 1.7 million in 2021 to 2.1 million in 2023. These figures suggest that the line has begun to support commuting flows and industrial shift patterns in Trafford Park, offering potential for productivity gains through better labour-market matching (Graham and Gibbons, 2019).

Nonetheless, both Participant 7 and Participant 9 draw attention to the challenge of achieving inclusive sustainability in practice:

"The effectiveness of micro-mobility depends on geography. In areas without reliable fixed transport infrastructure, solutions like bikes and scooters can bridge gaps, but these options must be accessible to all." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

"At the make moment, non-car cars journeys are as there a 24/7 norm…this is where public transport and micro-mobility need to compete with." (Participant 9: Expert Commentator: Transport Geography).

These reflections point to deeper structural barriers that risk undermining the inclusive potential of micro-mobility and modal shift. Geographic inequality in infrastructure provision across GM—particularly between well-connected boroughs like Trafford and less resourced areas such as Wigan or Rochdale—risks entrenching exclusion unless actively addressed. As the Transport Performance Review (2023) highlights, micro-mobility coverage remains uneven, reinforcing spatial privilege for central districts. Lucas (2012) and Smith et al. (2019) caution that unless carefully planned, mobility innovations can reinforce rather than challenge existing inequalities. Even as infrastructure like the Trafford Park Extension Line is praised for advancing sustainable goals, its relationship with high-intensity commercial development requires scrutiny. Participant 4 emphasised the perceived benefits of green infrastructure as a competitive advantage:

"The city's commitment to sustainable transport isn't just about cutting emissions; it is about creating an ecosystem where people want to live, work, and invest. It is a competitive advantage." (Participant 4: Expert Commentator).

However, developments such as the Trafford Centre raise sustainability paradoxes. As noted by Asante-Darko et al. (2024) and Brida et al. (2023), large-scale commercial hubs contribute significantly to energy demand, waste, and car travel, particularly in regions dominated by out-of-town retail patterns. Unless accompanied by strategic land-use policies and transport demand management measures, such infrastructure may exacerbate environmental burdens.

Pucher and Buehler (2010) stress that sustainable mobility transitions require enabling infrastructure—safe cycling lanes, walkable environments, and secure, affordable access. In many peripheral areas of GM, these conditions remain unmet, limiting the reach of even high-profile interventions. Participant 7's earlier comment underscores the importance of matching service quality and spatial equity with sustainability goals.

Crucially, the line's integration within a broader urban strategy is what determines its long-term value. As Buffa (2015) argues, sustainability should be embedded structurally rather than treated as a promotional feature. While connecting tram use to leisure events or eco-marketing campaigns might create short-term modal shifts, enduring behavioural change depends on structural consistency and reliable alternatives to car use. This concern was articulated by Participant 7:

"The Trafford Park Extension Line has the potential to be a flagship example of how well-designed public transport can meet diverse needs and challenge the car-centric mindset. By combining high-quality service with effective marketing of its advantages, the line could attract a broader demographic and set a precedent for other regions in the UK to follow." (Participant 7: Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel and Mobility).

The framing here highlights the Trafford Park Extension Line's symbolic and functional potential. Yet, as Verplanken and Wood (2006) emphasise, transport habits are formed not only by incentives but also by reliability, routine, and systemic reinforcement. Achieving a meaningful and enduring modal shift requires more than promotional messaging or isolated service upgrade, it necessitates a cohesive, cross-sectoral strategy that integrates infrastructure investment, urban design, service coverage, and behavioural policy. This includes ensuring that tram services are frequent, affordable, safe, and well-integrated with active travel modes and bus networks, particularly in low-income or underserved communities where car ownership may be low, but access remains constrained (Marsden and Docherty, 2013; Lucas, 2012). Urban environments must be deliberately designed to reduce the friction of sustainable travel modes through walkable neighbourhoods, protected cycle infrastructure, and seamless interchange facilities. These are not merely aesthetic or logistical enhancements but critical enablers of sustained behavioural change, particularly for new or reluctant users (Banister, 2008; Pucher and Buehler, 2010). Additionally, research by Chatterton et al. (2016) highlights the importance of policy coherence across spatial planning,

transport, and public health domains, noting that fragmentation between departments and inconsistent funding streams often undermines the systemic conditions required for long-term modal transition.

Furthermore, behavioural policies—such as mobility education in schools, employer travel plans, or targeted incentives for low-carbon travel—must be designed to reinforce infrastructure-led shifts. These policies should be sensitive to socio-cultural norms, income-level barriers, and time-use constraints, all of which influence transport decision-making (Anable, 2005; Urry, 2007). Without such alignment, even well-designed infrastructure projects risk underperformance, as they fail to embed themselves within the daily mobility routines of diverse urban populations. The Trafford Park Extension Line, while a promising intervention, must therefore be supported by broader efforts to foster a culture of sustainable mobility—one that not only provides viable alternatives to private car use but actively reconfigures the social, spatial, and economic conditions in which transport choices are made.

In sum, while the Trafford Park Extension Line aligns with GM's vision of integrated, sustainable growth, its success depends on more than technical delivery. Ensuring equitable access, embedding multi-modal connectivity, and addressing spatial disadvantage are essential for turning the promise of sustainable infrastructure into an inclusive and regionally balanced reality. Without such commitment, the intervention risks reinforcing uneven patterns of growth, where sustainability remains aspirational rather than operational.

6.4 Cross-case Analysis: Differences Between the Interventions
6.4.1. Complementary yet Distinct Approaches:
The previous sections identified several shared themes between the two cases, including their contributions to reducing social exclusion, improving connectivity, and supporting regional regeneration. However, important differences in their strategic design, target demographics, and operational outcomes reveal their complementary but distinct roles in GM's evolving transport ecosystem. The Trafford Park Extension Line exemplifies a long-term infrastructural intervention intended to strengthen physical connectivity, boost labour market access, and stimulate economic growth in high-demand areas. It functions as a high-capacity transit corridor that links commercial, retail, and industrial zones across the city-region. Participant 11 underlined this purpose:

"The tramline extension is focused on establishing a lasting, high-capacity link for individuals travelling between essential employment hubs, shopping centres, and residential neighbourhoods." (Participant 11: Expert Commentator: Sport Economist).

This observation is supported by operational data: the Metrolink Service Performance Report (GMTS, 2023) documents that by 2023 the Trafford Park Extension Line had facilitated 2.1 million annual trips, indicating strong demand linked to its alignment with employment and retail centres. Moreover, this infrastructure-led intervention aligns with theories of agglomeration and productivity (Graham and Gibbons, 2019), which emphasise the benefits of physical proximity and mobility for labour market flexibility and economic efficiency.

From a policy standpoint, the Extension Line supports GM's competitiveness agenda, bolstering spatial connectivity while reducing road congestion and enhancing environmental performance. It also reflects a vision of transit-oriented development (TOD), where strategic infrastructure investment encourages sustainable travel behaviours and high-density land use near transport nodes (Cervero and Kockelman, 1997; Bertolini et al., 2005). However, as discussed in earlier sections, its benefits may be spatially concentrated, raising concerns about equitable access across more peripheral communities.

In contrast, Our Pass offers a financial intervention designed to enhance accessibility for a narrowly defined demographic, 16 to 18-year-olds, with a focus on immediate social equity gains. As Participant 11 noted:

"Our Pass focusses on ensuring that young individuals, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, have the financial means to access the system that has been established." (Participant 11: Expert Commentator: Sport Economist).

This quote underscores a key dimension of transport justice (Martens, 2017): affordability. While the Extension Line creates opportunities by expanding the system's reach, Our Pass ensures that those with the least financial agency can meaningfully access it. In this way, the scheme exemplifies a redistributionist (RED) model of social inclusion (Levitas, 1998), which centres on alleviating economic barriers and enabling full civic participation.

Moreover, the two interventions differ not only in their scale but in their operational logics. One emphasises capital investment in infrastructure, while the other operationalises demand-

side subsidies to address affordability gaps. Yet their complementarity is clear. The infrastructural intervention creates the platform for mobility, while the financial intervention ensures that young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, can use it. Participant 13 articulated this dynamic succinctly:

"While the tramline may link Trafford Park to the city centre, it is Our Pass that guarantees young individuals from Wythenshawe or Rochdale can afford to make that journey." (Participant 13: Transport for the North).

This interplay is central to understanding how GM's transport strategy blends physical and financial mechanisms to pursue transport equity. As Newman and Kenworthy (2015) argue, sustainable transport systems must integrate both infrastructure and social policies to deliver environmental, economic, and equity outcomes. Participant 15 reinforced this complementarity:

"The tramline serves as the backbone of the network, yet Our Pass ensures that access to that network is democratised, particularly for groups that may otherwise be excluded." (Participant 15: VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager).

This comment reflects a broader normative vision of inclusive transport planning, one that views accessibility not merely as the physical presence of infrastructure, but as a function of cost, information, and confidence (Lucas, 2012; Preston and Rajé, 2007). In this light, Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line can be seen as mutually reinforcing interventions that speak to different but interconnected challenges: the former addressing economic exclusion, the latter addressing spatial connectivity. Together, they represent a multi-dimensional approach to tackling mobility inequalities, one that aligns infrastructure-led investment with user-focused social policy. However, as the subsequent section will discuss, this complementarity is limited unless coordinated planning addresses both systemic transport gaps and the socio-spatial asymmetries that persist across GM.

6.4.2 Addressing Divergent Objectives and Challenges

Despite their conceptual and functional complementarity, the Trafford Park Extension Line and Our Pass interventions reveal divergent scopes, mechanisms, and structural constraints. The Trafford Park Extension Line exemplifies a capital-intensive, supply-side infrastructure strategy geared toward long-term regional benefits such as enhanced physical connectivity,

urban regeneration, and modal shift. Its logic is fundamentally developmental and strategic. However, its impact is contingent on the degree to which infrastructure provision aligns with the actual mobility needs of diverse user groups, particularly those historically excluded from transport planning processes. While the line enhances links between economic anchors such as Trafford Park, the Trafford Centre, and the city centre, its capacity to serve equity objectives is undermined where routes bypass or inadequately connect areas with high concentrations of young people, low-income communities, or groups underrepresented in planning processes. As Participant 4 noted:

"It doesn't work outside GM, so if your training is just over the border, it is not as helpful." (Participant 4: Expert Commentator).

This comment highlights a recurrent issue in sub-regional infrastructure policy: the misalignment between administrative boundaries and lived geographies of mobility. As Hine and Mitchell (2001) and Preston and Rajé (2007) argue, effective transport networks must respond to both spatial and social geographies of exclusion, particularly for users whose access needs transcend formal jurisdictional borders.

The limitations of the Trafford Park Extension Line echo issues observed in other light-rail systems, such as the Sheffield Supertram, where disconnections between route planning and socio-economic targeting limited uptake in deprived areas (Jones et al., 2017). Similarly, in GM, research by TfGM (2023) shows that nearly 40% of residents in low-accessibility zones report difficulty reaching tram stops, often due to missing first-mile/last-mile infrastructure (e.g., inadequate walking paths or lack of bus integration). Without multimodal alignment, including active travel and local bus feeder routes, tram infrastructure risks reinforcing accessibility asymmetries rather than resolving them (Banister, 2008).

Affordability compounds this spatial misalignment. Despite the Trafford Park Extension Line's potential for congestion relief and environmental benefit, Metrolink fare structures remain prohibitive for some residents. This barrier is particularly salient for young people and those in precarious employment, for whom fare levels can significantly influence modal choice (Lucas, 2012; Martens, 2017). The National Travel Survey (2021) reinforces this, noting that affordability remains one of the most cited deterrents to public transport use among low-income groups. While infrastructure may be technically available, its practical

utility is contingent upon users' economic capacity to engage with it, a concern frequently neglected in infrastructure-led policy discourse.

The cumulative effect of these barriers, spatial, economic, and institutional, is a risk of reinforcing the "Matthew effect" in urban development, where resources and benefits accrue to already advantaged areas, while structurally marginalised groups remain underserved (Merton, 1968; Martens, 2017). This effect is particularly acute in GM's outer boroughs, where historic underinvestment, fragmented governance, and weak intermodal integration have entrenched transport inequalities (Bee Network Committee Report, 2023).

To overcome these challenges, a shift toward integrated and equity-oriented planning is necessary. This involves coupling infrastructure investment with complementary policies addressing affordability, service coordination, and spatial equity. As Martens (2017) contends, transport justice demands "just access" — a framework that prioritises the needs of those least served, rather than privileging high-demand or commercially viable routes. This imperative aligns with calls from scholars such as Lucas (2012) and Banister (2008) to reconceptualise transport not only as a growth enabler but as a redistribution tool capable of addressing structural inequalities in access to opportunity.

For the Trafford Park Extension Line, this could involve targeted fare subsidies, enhanced active travel infrastructure, and co-design of services with communities currently on the periphery of the network. Only through such integrative and participatory approaches can infrastructure investment serve both economic and equity goals, advancing GM's stated ambition of inclusive, sustainable, and regionally balanced development.

6.4.3 Lessons for Integrated Policy Design

The Trafford Park Extension Line and Our Pass exemplify two fundamentally distinct yet strategically complementary dimensions of transport policy: infrastructure-led connectivity and socially targeted financial access. Their juxtaposition offers important insights into how integrated interventions can address the multifaceted nature of transport inequality, particularly when planned with a view to spatial justice, intergenerational inclusion, and long-term regional competitiveness. While each initiative engages with a different axis of mobility, physical and economic, respectively, their combined impact is contingent on alignment with

broader goals of social equity, spatial integration, and accessibility for underserved populations.

Critically, the Trafford Park Extension Line operates as a supply-side intervention rooted in infrastructural modernisation and agglomeration economics, while Our Pass is a demand-side measure focused on overcoming individual-level cost barriers. Together, they reflect a hybrid model of transport policy, echoing Lucas's (2012) argument that accessibility is shaped by both availability and affordability. However, the academic literature and stakeholder feedback suggest that these interventions remain insufficiently integrated. For instance, while the tramline enhances access to employment zones, it may fail to benefit young people in peripheral areas if it is not supported by inclusive service design and subsidised access — a concern raised by Martens (2017), who contends that infrastructure without redistributive planning can exacerbate, rather than resolve, mobility inequalities.

Participant 15 captured the importance of this synergy, noting:

"The tramline serves as the backbone of the network, yet Our Pass ensures that access to that network is democratised, particularly for groups that may otherwise be excluded."
(Participant 15: VCSE Organisation: Campaign Programme Manager).

This comment aligns with the equity lens proposed by Farrington and Farrington (2005), who argue that transport systems must be designed not only to maximise connectivity but to account for the differentiated needs of socially marginalised communities. As such, the promise of integrated transport policy lies in designing systems that do not merely facilitate movement but actively dismantle socio-spatial barriers to opportunity.

Moreover, the complementary nature of these interventions points toward a holistic planning model that unites long-term infrastructural investment with short-term affordability schemes, a recommendation supported by Kamruzzaman et al. (2016), whose research finds that combined policies yield higher resilience and equity outcomes than those pursued in isolation. The Our Pass initiative, in enabling youth participation in education and training, addresses socio-economic exclusion directly, while the Trafford Park Extension Line enhances regional capacity and sustainable commuting. Yet, Hine and Grieco (2003) caution that such duality must be critically managed to avoid temporal and demographic mismatches,

where short-term benefits fade before long-term gains are realised — or worse, where the latter are captured primarily by already advantaged groups.

To avoid these pitfalls, integrated transport strategies must confront systemic barriers embedded within spatial mismatches, affordability constraints, and modal fragmentation. This is especially salient in light of findings from the National Travel Survey (2021), which show that infrastructure improvements alone do not eliminate mobility inequalities if they fail to address cost and service disparities for low-income users. Likewise, Preston and Rajé (2007) highlight the risks of concentrating investment in core zones while peripheral areas remain disconnected or poorly served.

Within this context, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 1998) provides a valuable evaluative structure. It suggests that transport policy should aim to balance environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, and social equity. The Trafford Park Extension Line contributes to carbon reduction and economic growth, while Our Pass promotes inclusion and intergenerational fairness. Yet, as Stehlin (2019) warns, misaligned or siloed interventions risk reinforcing user hierarchies, for example, by privileging urban professionals over marginalised youth, or commuters over non-working residents, thereby undermining the very inclusivity they seek to promote.

Critically, these tensions reflect wider debates about transport justice and the ethics of mobility (Sheller, 2018; Martens, 2017). For policies like Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line to operate as genuinely equitable interventions, they must be embedded within a wider governance framework that integrates affordability, spatial coverage, and participatory decision-making. This would require, for instance, youth-informed tram route planning, cross-subsidised ticketing models, and co-designed micro-mobility solutions that extend benefits beyond core zones and dominant user groups.

Ultimately, the two cases illustrate that physical infrastructure and financial inclusion are not binary or sequential steps but interdependent pillars of a just mobility system. Their intersection must be operationalised through deliberate design choices, investment priorities, and accountability mechanisms that centre equity and sustainability at all stages. Addressing these requirements will allow GM to move beyond a fragmented or piecemeal approach to

mobility and toward an integrated system that supports collective well-being and long-term urban resilience.

6.5 COVID-19 Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted public transport systems across the globe, and GM was no exception. Both of the interventions under analysis, Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, were significantly affected by the pandemic's impact on mobility patterns, institutional closures, and public behaviour. These disruptions offer a critical lens through which to evaluate the resilience and adaptability of transport policy in crisis contexts and the enduring implications for regional recovery and inclusion strategies.

The launch of the Trafford Park Extension Line on 22 March 2020 was significantly overshadowed by the UK's first national lockdown, announced just three days later. The line, which was intended to facilitate access to Trafford Park's commercial and industrial zones, faced an immediate and severe decline in anticipated ridership. Metrolink patronage across GM fell to just 5% of pre-pandemic levels at its lowest point, a pattern mirrored globally as travel restrictions, remote work, and public health concerns curtailed public transport usage (GMTS, 2023; Iogansen et al., 2024).

According to the GM Transport Committee Metrolink and Rail Networks Sub-Committee Report (2023), although Metrolink usage has steadily recovered post-pandemic, the Trafford Park Extension Line's ridership has rebounded more slowly than older lines such as the Altrincham route. This divergence can be attributed to the lack of an established commuter base for the new line, as well as the interruption of promotional and behavioural change campaigns. Participant 3 contextualised this underwhelming uptake, stating:

"The tram opened in March 2020, three days later we went into lockdown, there needs to be a change in policy, to get those people back." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

The absence of sustained promotional engagement and user familiarity due to lockdowns hindered the development of habitual ridership, an essential factor in securing long-term modal shift (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). The pandemic's onset therefore constrained not just short-term adoption but may have disrupted the trajectory of behavioural normalisation and mode loyalty among new users. Our Pass similarly encountered operational barriers

during the height of the pandemic. With school closures, remote learning, and curtailed extracurricular activity, young people were largely unable to utilise the pass, diminishing its immediate utility. Nonetheless, as lockdown measures eased, the scheme regained relevance, particularly in supporting re-engagement with education, apprenticeships, and employment. Its post-pandemic recovery also highlights the scheme's flexibility as a policy tool, capable of responding to young people's changing needs in periods of socioeconomic upheaval.

The pandemic catalysed structural changes in commuting patterns that extend beyond short-term restrictions. Long-term shifts toward hybrid and remote working models have significantly reshaped daily mobility demand (Cantisani, 2023). While the Trafford Park Extension Line was designed for high-capacity commuter travel, its original assumptions regarding peak-time demand now appear increasingly misaligned with emerging patterns of decentralised work and staggered commuting (Iogansen et al., 2024). As such, a re-evaluation of the line's operational model, including service frequency, targeted marketing, and land-use integration, may be required to ensure alignment with the region's evolving socio-spatial dynamics.

The case of the Trafford Park Extension Line reinforces the argument that infrastructure-led interventions must be flexible and responsive to shocks. As Sheller (2018) argues, transport systems do not operate in isolation but are embedded within broader socio-political and technological ecosystems. When those systems shift, due to pandemics, economic shocks, or technological changes, transport strategies must adapt in tandem. In this light, resilience is not simply the maintenance of service but the capacity to recalibrate planning assumptions and delivery mechanisms in real time. From a policy learning perspective, the pandemic presents both a disruption and an opportunity. The collapse in ridership illuminated the fragility of fare-reliant public transport financing, raising urgent questions about sustainability, equity, and funding models in times of crisis. Equally, it has underscored the importance of building redundancy and flexibility into systems, lessons that can inform the design of future infrastructure, including tramline expansion and integrated multimodal strategies.

The pandemic has also spotlighted the importance of inclusive planning. As noted by the GMCA and external commentators (Cantisani, 2023), the most vulnerable populations—such as low-income young people, carers, and essential workers—were disproportionately reliant

on public transport during lockdowns, even as broader ridership collapsed. This paradox challenges conventional demand-led funding models and highlights the role of transport as a social utility, not merely a commercial service.

Ultimately, the experience of COVID-19 reveals the need for a transport strategy that is resilient, inclusive, and responsive. Both the Trafford Park Extension Line and Our Pass will require post-pandemic recalibration—not just in operational delivery but in how they are embedded in GM's long-term strategy. Integrating behavioural insights, equity metrics, and flexible planning into future transport initiatives will be crucial for aligning infrastructure development with the realities of an evolving urban landscape. By engaging with the pandemic's disruptions not as anomalies but as a test of system resilience, GM can refine its approach to sustainable mobility and ensure that transport remains a cornerstone of inclusive and adaptive urban development. The vision outlined in the GMTS 2040 must now reckon with a new baseline, one where user needs, behaviour, and risk have been permanently altered, demanding not only recovery but transformation.

6.6 Type of Policy Intervention

6.6.1 Our Pass – Financial Intervention

Eliminating Obstacles for Under-represented Communities.

Our Pass operates as a demand-side financial intervention, explicitly designed to reduce economic barriers for young people in GM by offering free bus travel across the region. According to the GMCA Our Pass Report (2021), passholders saved an average of £500 annually on transport costs. This represents a significant intervention in a demographic group often reliant on part-time jobs, family allowances, or limited public support. By removing immediate cost barriers, the scheme aims to foster greater access to education, employment, and civic life for marginalised youth.

Crucially, the equity rationale behind the intervention aligns with Lucas's (2012) argument that transport affordability is a precondition for access to opportunity, particularly for young people facing spatial disadvantage. By subsidising public transport, the scheme attempts to rectify systemic inequalities in mobility and reframe transport access as a social right, rather than a market good. However, despite its affordability success, Our Pass has not addressed the uneven geography of opportunity across GM. Patronage data highlights that uptake and usage vary significantly by borough, with areas like Wigan and Rochdale showing

persistently lower participation rates (GMCA, 2023b). This disparity reflects broader structural deficiencies in service coverage, where outer boroughs remain underserved by high-frequency and reliable bus routes. Without addressing these operational inequalities, the risk persists that Our Pass will deliver uneven benefits, disproportionately favouring those in better-connected areas.

As Martens (2017) argues, equitable transport policy must consider both financial and spatial dimensions of access. Simply reducing cost is insufficient if the physical transport infrastructure does not support frequent, reliable, and inclusive travel across the region. The financial savings provided by the scheme, while meaningful, are ultimately constrained by the quality and extent of the network itself. Consequently, the effectiveness of Our Pass as a transformative intervention is contingent upon strategic enhancements in infrastructure and spatial equity, necessitating coordinated investments and targeted operational improvements across underserved areas.

Non-Infrastructure Solutions for Social Exclusion

The Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b) notes that 75% of surveyed users reported accessing opportunities they would not have otherwise considered due to cost. This suggests that the scheme has expanded the perceived opportunity space for many young people. However, qualitative data from interviewees indicates that a critical disjuncture remains between affordability and actual accessibility. Participant 5 offered a pointed observation on this tension:

"Lowering travel costs is important, but if the buses are not punctual, it remains impractical." (Participant 5: Social Enterprise in GM).

This comment illustrates how reliability is central to the utility of financial subsidies. Without addressing punctuality and service consistency, especially in areas with poor network performance, Our Pass risks becoming a symbolic intervention rather than a functional one. Cairns et al. (2004) similarly caution against the over-reliance on non-infrastructural measures as substitutes for structural change. In their study of travel behaviour interventions, they found that incentives alone are rarely sufficient without system-level improvements that underpin behaviour change.

From a policy design perspective, the case of Our Pass underscores the limitations of standalone financial interventions in addressing transport-related social exclusion. As Farrington and Farrington (2005) argue, sustainable inclusion requires policies that go beyond reducing entry barriers, they must ensure that the mobility on offer is functional, dependable, and meaningful. Moreover, the scheme highlights the challenge of operationalising inclusive mobility in a deregulated and fragmented transport system. The potential for enhanced freedom is real, but its realisation depends on addressing the systemic mismatch between financial access and physical availability. Without parallel investments in service quality, frequency, and coverage, especially in peripheral areas, the intervention risks creating a "perception of inclusion" that is not borne out in practice.

In summary, Our Pass represents an attempt to democratise mobility through financial intervention. Its strengths lie in its ability to reduce immediate cost burdens and broaden access to opportunity. However, its success is contingent on the structural responsiveness of the transport system itself. For Our Pass to meet its full potential, it must be situated within a wider framework of transport justice—one that couples affordability with spatial equity, reliability, and inclusivity.

6.6.2 Trafford Park Extension Line – Infrastructural Intervention
Integrated Infrastructure Planning for Economic Development and Connectivity.
The Trafford Park Extension Line (Trafford Park Extension Line) represents a capital-intensive, supply-side infrastructural intervention aimed at enhancing spatial connectivity and unlocking regional growth. As a case of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), it seeks to anchor economic activity around high-capacity public transport infrastructure. Data from the Metrolink Performance Report (TfGM, 2023) indicates that this expansion has catalysed economic activity across key commercial and industrial zones, particularly within Trafford Park and the intu Trafford Centre. By linking these high-demand areas with the broader Metrolink system, the intervention supports wider ambitions for agglomeration economies and regional productivity (Graham and Gibbons, 2019; Cervero and Kockelman, 1997). However, as Participant 12 observed:

"The line is great for retail hubs, but the surrounding residential areas still struggle with direct access." (Participant 12: Council Director).

This quote points to a critical spatial disconnect while the line succeeds in connecting commercial zones, its immediate utility for local residential communities remains limited. This reflects the broader challenge of infrastructural interventions that prioritise high-demand corridors while overlooking the socio-spatial diversity of surrounding populations (Lucas, 2012). If complementary access mechanisms—such as improved bus integration or active travel infrastructure—are not introduced, the project risks reinforcing spatial inequalities under the guise of regional development.

To ensure that economic gains are spatially inclusive, urban planning must go beyond infrastructure delivery and implement supporting policies. This includes tax incentives for businesses that invest in less-connected areas, or multimodal integration strategies that extend the network's reach to employment-poor peripheries. Banister (2008) and Cervero and Kockelman (1997) have shown that without such targeted planning, TOD projects often benefit already prosperous regions while bypassing structurally disadvantaged ones.

Planning for Sustainability in Large-Scale Transport Projects Over the Long-Term
A key lesson from the Trafford Park Extension Line is the importance of designing for flexibility in a post-pandemic urban context. As hybrid working reshapes commuting patterns, public transport systems must adapt to reduced peak-hour demand and increased travel variability. According to the Metrolink Sub-Committee Report (TfGM, 2023), average weekday patronage across the system has recovered to 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with some lines, including Trafford Park Extension Line—underperforming relative to forecasts. Participant 16 echoed these concerns:

"Remote work has transformed travel requirements, and areas like Trafford Park may never experience the same level of commuter demand as traditional routes." (Participant 16: Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty).

This observation necessitates a shift in strategic assumptions. Infrastructure built for rigid, peak-centric commuting must now support distributed, multi-purpose, and off-peak mobility. As Newman and Kenworthy (2015) argue, sustainable transport planning must embrace system adaptability. This includes the incorporation of flexible service models such as electric feeder buses and demand-responsive transport services that align more closely with evolving usage patterns. Investing in green infrastructure—such as solar-powered tram

shelters or low-emission vehicles—further enhances the line's contribution to GM's 2040 carbon neutrality target and supports its regional positioning as a climate leader.

Yet, sustainability must not be confined to environmental metrics alone. As Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model highlights, long-term success depends on balancing environmental, economic, and social returns. To fulfil this model, infrastructure must serve not only the high-density economic core but also contribute to equitable and inclusive growth.

Confronting Disparities and Engaging Marginalised Communities

The spatial logic underpinning the Trafford Park Extension Line illustrates both the promise and the pitfalls of infrastructural expansion. While the line connects commercial nodes efficiently, it bypasses key residential communities who lack reliable first-mile/last-mile access, such as Partington. As Participant 16 noted:

"Communities beyond the direct reach of the queue feel marginalised from its advantages, despite being included in the initial commitment." (Participant 16: Expert Commentator: Transport Poverty).

This sentiment reflects a recurring theme in transport justice scholarship: access is not merely about proximity to infrastructure but about the capability to use it meaningfully (Martens, 2017). Pucher and Buehler (2010) similarly warn that infrastructure designed without consultation with affected communities risks failing to meet their needs—and, in some cases, exacerbates exclusion.

The line's current limitations in equitable access signal the need for a participatory approach to planning. Engagement with residents in marginalised areas must inform future enhancements to service delivery, routing, and affordability structures. Integrating tram operations with local bus routes, enhancing pedestrian and cycle links, and exploring community-led mobility hubs could all help close the gap between provision and use. More broadly, these disparities expose the infrastructural bias in regional planning that privileges visibility and investment in high-profile, economically strategic spaces while neglecting slower-burning forms of equity-building in socioeconomically vulnerable zones. Unless these imbalances are addressed through policy frameworks that embed redistribution into planning,

the Trafford Park Extension Line risks becoming an emblem of exclusion rather than inclusion.

6.6.3 Partnerships as a Mechanism for Delivering Equity-Oriented Transport Policy

Partnerships are a cornerstone of the success of both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, although their delivery mechanisms, funding structures, and collaborative frameworks diverge significantly. While both aim to enhance accessibility, foster user engagement, and drive regional development, critical disparities in reach, inclusivity, and stakeholder participation expose underlying tensions within the governance and operationalisation of these interventions. These gaps must be interrogated not only in terms of delivery consistency but also with reference to their alignment with the normative aims of equitable, sustainable transport policy underpinned by New Public Governance (NPG) principles.

Collaborative Delivery Models

Our Pass exemplifies a highly collaborative, NPG-informed delivery model that integrates public, private, and third-sector partnerships to amplify its reach and enrich its offering. Collaborations with cultural and leisure institutions, such as the National Football Museum, theatres, and sporting venues, enable the scheme to deliver discounted or free access to events and facilities. In doing so, the initiative explicitly moves beyond narrow transport functionality to encompass broader social inclusion goals. Participant 12 acknowledged this multi-stakeholder effort:

"The success of Our Pass comes from involving multiple stakeholders—transport providers, local businesses, and cultural organisations. It is not just a government scheme; it is a shared effort to give young people better opportunities." (Participant 12: Council Director).

This reflects NPG's core premise—that public services are increasingly co-produced through complex networks of actors (Osborne, 2010), requiring relational rather than hierarchical coordination. Our Pass builds this ethos into its architecture by leveraging cross-sector relationships to deliver a flexible and responsive programme. Such co-creation generates public value (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012), particularly when oriented toward socially marginalised demographics, as is the case here. These collaborations facilitate access not only

to mobility but also to cultural capital, which Bourdieu (1984) identifies as integral to youth empowerment and longer-term inclusion.

However, Participant 12's remarks also subtly allude to a challenge inherent in NPG arrangements—namely, the dependency on sustained and balanced stakeholder commitment. Uneven capacity or willingness to participate can undermine delivery. Participant 13 underscored this fragility:

"The success of Our Pass depends on all partners being equally invested, but inconsistencies in participation can make the experience uneven for young people, especially in less connected areas." (Participant 13: Transport for the North).

This concern was further elaborated by Participant 8, who pointed to structural inequalities between partners:

"Some smaller organisations struggle to fully participate in the programme because they lack the resources or capacity to engage at the same level as larger partners. This creates gaps in what's offered to young people." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

Such disparities reveal the potential for dominant partners to shape agendas and extract value, while less-resourced actors may be marginalised—an imbalance long noted in critical public management literature (Entwistle and Martin, 2005). Participant 10 cautioned against this risk:

"Partnerships are a strength, but they can also be a weak link if organisations don't have the commitment to sustain their involvement long-term." (Participant 10: Expert Commentator: Transport and City-planning).

Although the Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b) celebrates a 30% rise in youth engagement via these partnerships, it does not fully address the governance asymmetries that participants flagged. Nor does it offer a framework for embedding long-term accountability or resourcing to mitigate these inequalities. As a result, the scheme's inclusivity and geographic reach may be contingent upon the presence and strength of third-sector partners,

which vary by locality. To move from aspirational co-production to structurally embedded partnership governance, Our Pass must extend its application of NPG principles. This includes developing robust support mechanisms for smaller actors, formalising collaborative governance structures, and adopting equity-based resource allocation models. Such reforms would reflect von Heimburg et al.'s (2021) argument that NPG must be grounded in principles of justice and parity to avoid simply reproducing neoliberal logics under the guise of collaboration.

Trafford Park Extension Line: Infrastructure-Centric Partnerships

In contrast, the Trafford Park Extension Line is driven by a more traditional infrastructure delivery model, marked by operational partnerships between Transport for GM (TfGM), local authorities, and private contractors. Participant 3 described the functional orientation of these collaborations:

"Our partnerships with developers were essential for ensuring the line was integrated into existing retail and industrial hubs, but there's scope to expand partnerships to include cultural initiatives along the route." (Participant 3: Transport for GM).

This approach demonstrates effective coordination to align the infrastructure with commercial priorities but lacks the layered, participatory engagement seen in Our Pass. Such narrow partnership arrangements risk limiting social value generation. Unlike community-embedded models, such as the Community Rail Development Strategy in the UK—which integrates rail infrastructure with place-making, wellbeing, and cultural programming—the Trafford Park Extension Line remains bounded by economic connectivity aims. This risks rendering it a "monofunctional" intervention (Smith and Clarke, 2020), rather than one capable of fostering broader civic or social transformation.

Community rail examples, in contrast, show how rail infrastructure can be embedded into a more holistic, socially responsive framework. By encouraging local partnerships through station adoption schemes, education projects, and heritage outreach, they generate broader buy-in and long-term sustainability (Department for Transport, 2023). If such models were adopted along the Trafford Park Extension Line, it could function not merely as a conduit to economic zones but as a tool for reweaving fragmented urban geographies and promoting inclusive civic identity. Applying NPG thinking to this context therefore calls for reimagining

the tramline as part of a distributed governance system, not merely as an output of technical delivery. Currently, the line risks being perceived as a 'closed system', serving predominantly commercial interests without integrating community-oriented goals. Without expanding its collaborative network beyond developers and economic stakeholders, the intervention may entrench spatial disparities rather than alleviate them.

Both cases highlight the role of partnerships in advancing transport outcomes in GM, yet also illuminate divergent interpretations and enactments of collaboration. Our Pass embraces a community-driven NPG framework but struggles with participation inequality and geographic unevenness. The Trafford Park Extension Line illustrates technically effective infrastructure planning yet stops short of embedding itself within a wider ecosystem of civic or cultural co-creation.

To fulfil the inclusivity objectives of the 2040 Transport Strategy, GM must recalibrate its collaborative governance models. This means not only building participatory capacity among smaller actors, but also expanding partnership horizons to embrace social, cultural, and equity-based priorities across all transport initiatives. Only through such alignment can partnerships serve not merely as a delivery mechanism but as a vehicle for equitable and sustainable urban transformation.

Funding Structures and Objectives

The funding structures underpinning Our Pass, and the Trafford Park Extension Line reflect their divergent policy goals and intervention logics—namely, targeted social redistribution versus capital-intensive infrastructural investment. These models carry distinct implications for scalability, durability, and impact, particularly when assessed against long-term objectives for equitable and sustainable transport in GM.

Our Pass is financed through public funding from the GMCA, with resources allocated to cover the cost of providing free travel to 16–18-year-olds. This core funding is supplemented by in-kind contributions from third sector and private partners, such as cultural venues offering discounted or complimentary event access. The initiative thereby embodies a redistributive model of transport intervention, rooted in the mitigation of economic barriers to mobility. Participant 9 reinforced this rationale:

"The funding for Our Pass is a clear example of how public investment can remove barriers for young people. By taking transport costs out of the equation, it lets them focus on education, work, or even just exploring the city without financial stress." (Participant 9: Expert Commentator: Transport Geography).

This perspective aligns with transport justice principles articulated by Lucas (2012), who argues that eliminating cost barriers is central to supporting the mobility rights of economically marginalised populations. However, while the initiative successfully addresses affordability in the short term, its dependence on politically mediated funding introduces structural vulnerabilities. Public transport schemes that rely solely on state subsidies, such as Our Pass, are subject to fluctuations in political will and fiscal policy—issues acknowledged in the National Bus Strategy for England (Hansard, 2023), which notes the unsustainability of funding bus services exclusively via public expenditure.

Indeed, the temporary nature of England's £2 fare cap initiative (Gov.uk, 2024) exemplifies the fragility of such subsidy models in periods of austerity or policy redirection. Without diversification of revenue streams, the long-term viability of Our Pass remains uncertain. While it currently provides substantial cost savings for young people—estimated at £500 annually (GMCA, 2021)—its future impact is contingent upon continued political prioritisation. In this respect, the initiative risks becoming a temporally bounded solution to a structurally entrenched problem.

To futureproof such schemes, GM must pursue hybridised funding approaches that blend public investment with sustainable private-sector engagement. For example, congestion charging, developer levies, or workplace parking taxes could generate ring-fenced revenues for inclusive mobility programmes (Marsden et al., 2018). Additionally, expanding private-sector co-funding agreements could mitigate fiscal risk while aligning corporate social responsibility agendas with youth mobility goals. Without such strategic financial innovation, Our Pass may struggle to evolve from a well-meaning intervention to a stable fixture of GM's transport policy landscape.

By contrast, the Trafford Park Extension Line represents a more conventional infrastructural investment model, funded through a mix of central government grants, local authority budgets, and private-sector contributions. As an upfront capital-intensive intervention, it

benefits from a comparatively durable funding structure that is less dependent on recurring budget allocations. Lucas (2012) notes that such funding models are typically more insulated from fiscal volatility, thereby supporting long-term infrastructure planning.

This security enables a broader strategic vision—though, as Participant 7 observed, such potential has yet to be fully realised:

"While the tramline funding has achieved its primary goal of improving connectivity, there's untapped potential in using the line to foster deeper cultural and economic collaborations." (Participant 7, Expert Commentator: Transport, Travel, and Mobility)

This quote points to an underexploited policy opportunity: to leverage the extension's robust funding base not only for economic efficiency but also for inclusive placemaking. However, the limited evidence of cultural or third-sector engagement in the planning and delivery of the Trafford Park Extension Line suggests a gap between infrastructural capacity and socially embedded use. In contrast to Our Pass, where funding actively facilitates stakeholder participation, the tramline's financial model appears largely confined to technical delivery, with less emphasis on community integration or adaptive governance.

Furthermore, while infrastructural funding offers stability, it does not inherently guarantee inclusive outcomes. The line's spatial orientation toward commercially strategic areas raises concerns about distributive equity. Without complementary policies to integrate low-income or peripheral communities—such as enhanced bus-tram interchange planning or fare subsidies—the benefits of infrastructural investment risk being geographically concentrated.

In summary, the funding architecture of these two interventions reflects contrasting theories of change. Our Pass seeks to reduce individual mobility costs through targeted, but politically contingent, redistribution. The Trafford Park Extension Line, by contrast, relies on front-loaded capital investment to support system-wide connectivity, albeit with limited social embedding. For both interventions to reach their full potential, their respective funding models must evolve: Our Pass through fiscal diversification and long-term budget protection, and the tramline through expanded co-creation and inclusive planning mechanisms. As such, funding should not be viewed as merely an enabler of delivery, but as a strategic tool that shapes the values, reach, and resilience of transport interventions.

Addressing Access and Equity

A critical divergence between the Trafford Park Extension Line and Our Pass lies in their respective approaches to equity and access. While both initiatives are underpinned by aspirations of inclusivity, the mechanisms they employ—and the constraints they encounter—differ significantly. Our Pass is explicitly designed to remove financial barriers for young people, yet its capacity to deliver equitable outcomes is compromised by geographic and infrastructural inconsistencies. The Our Pass Evaluation Report (GMCA, 2023b) identifies notably lower uptake rates in boroughs such as Oldham and Trafford, attributed to weaker transport connectivity and a limited number of partner venues. As Participant 8 observes:

"Places like Oldham just don't have the same transport infrastructure or access to partner opportunities. Young people there often feel left out because the scheme doesn't reach them in the same way it does in better-connected areas." (Participant 8: Expert Commentator: Public Transport, Planning, Management and Operation).

This testimony reflects entrenched spatial disparities within GM, where core boroughs enjoy concentrated investment while peripheral areas face systemic neglect. This uneven development pattern is consistent with Lucas's (2012) critique that affordability interventions—while necessary, are insufficient in isolation. Without structural improvements in service frequency and reliability, Our Pass risks functioning as a symbolic rather than substantive response to transport poverty.

Moreover, this disconnect reveals a missed opportunity for regional cohesion. Our Pass aspires to enable access to education, employment, and social engagement, yet it is most effective where robust infrastructure already exists. Consequently, the initiative risks exacerbating rather than ameliorating the regional accessibility gap. The spatial limitations of the scheme suggest the need for a hybrid policy approach—one that combines fare subsidies with targeted infrastructure enhancements and more equitable distribution of cultural and institutional partnerships.

Future versions of Our Pass should therefore adopt a place-based strategy. In areas like Oldham and Trafford, where uptake remains low, increasing service frequency, expanding tram-bus interchange points, and widening the partner venue network could significantly

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strengthen the scheme's impact. Localised outreach campaigns tailored to digitally excluded or economically marginalised youth may also help address knowledge and confidence gaps that limit engagement. In doing so, the initiative would better reflect Martens' (2017) concept of "just access," which asserts that transport justice depends not only on affordability but also on the capacity of individuals to convert mobility into opportunity.

The Trafford Park Extension Line presents a contrasting model: a capital-intensive investment designed to increase spatial connectivity and stimulate economic activity. However, its approach to equity is less direct. The line enhances access between key employment hubs and central retail zones, yet it does not offer fare reductions or directly engage with affordability constraints. Participant 14 reflects this limitation:

"Communities further from the line still feel disconnected, and this underscores the need for better integration with local bus routes or micro-mobility options." (Participant 14: VCSE Organisation: Trustee).

This view aligns with critiques of infrastructure-led development models which, without sufficient integration with feeder services, often reproduce existing access barriers (Preston and Raje, 2007). While the extension line expands spatial reach, its benefit is filtered through socio-economic and geographic stratification. Areas without strong secondary networks—such as bus services or affordable micro-mobility schemes—remain marginalised despite the physical presence of rail infrastructure.

Conceptually, Our Pass aligns with Levitas' (1998) Redistributionist (RED) discourse of social exclusion, focusing on direct intervention to offset economic disadvantage. It is also consistent with Lucas's (2012) and Martens' (2017) frameworks, which view transport equity through the lens of affordability and functional access. The Trafford Park Extension Line, by contrast, is rooted in agglomeration theory (Capello and Nijkamp, 2019), privileging spatial connectivity and productivity. Its objectives are closely aligned with the economic and environmental pillars of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model (Elkington, 1998), but it lacks a direct mechanism for addressing economic vulnerability or redistribution.

This divergence illustrates the limitations of siloed approaches. Our Pass mitigates cost but lacks spatial breadth; the tramline increases reach but offers no concessionary mechanisms. Taken together, they point to the potential for a more integrated and strategic transport

ecosystem—one in which financial assistance is scaffolded by reliable, affordable, and regionally equitable infrastructure. Such an approach would acknowledge that inclusivity is not a singular intervention but a policy ecology of interdependent strategies.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically explored the socio-spatial effects of two transport interventions in GM—Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, as situated responses to transport exclusion. Adopting a thematic interpretivist approach, the chapter synthesised narrative interview data with grey literature to analyse how these initiatives differentially address access, equity, sustainability, and regional development. Findings were organised around three core themes: social opportunity, economic mobility, and sustainability and competitiveness. The analysis revealed that while both interventions aim to enhance mobility, their impacts remain constrained by wider structural factors such as uneven service coverage, governance fragmentation, and car dependency.

Our Pass was shown to lower financial barriers for young people, supporting access to education, cultural life, and early-stage independence. However, limited infrastructure in boroughs like Oldham and Trafford and reliance on public funding challenge its longer-term sustainability and equity potential. The Trafford Park Extension Line aims to improve regional connectivity and economic clustering but showed limited engagement with peripheral or marginalised communities. Despite aligning with GM's low-carbon and competitiveness agenda, its benefits were unevenly distributed due to poor first-/last-mile integration and a narrow operational delivery model.

While the two interventions reflect divergent policy logics—redistributive affordability (Our Pass) versus infrastructural competitiveness (Trafford Park Extension Line)—their combined impact is undermined by institutional silos and insufficient policy integration. As discussed in Section 6.4, without coordination between financial and infrastructural levers, the capacity to address entrenched spatial inequities remains partial.

Methodologically, the chapter applied thematic analysis to participant narratives, contextualised by relevant grey literature. The emphasis on Our Pass reflects the richness of empirical material rather than an imbalance of analytical focus.

In conclusion, the chapter highlights the need for more integrated and inclusive transport planning, where affordability, connectivity, and community engagement are treated not as discrete goals but as interdependent elements of sustainable urban mobility. These insights lay the foundation for the thesis's concluding arguments on policy coherence and the governance of equitable transport futures in GM. The final chapter now turns to synthesising these findings, clarifying the contribution to knowledge, and outlining recommendations for more coherent, inclusive, and context-sensitive transport governance in GM.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7. Introduction

This thesis has critically examined two distinct transport interventions in GM—Our Pass, a financial initiative providing subsidised bus travel for young people, and the Trafford Park Extension Line, an infrastructural investment aimed at enhancing regional connectivity. Through an interpretivist comparative analysis using thematic examination of stakeholder narratives and contextual grey literature, the research explored how these interventions operationalise GMCA's strategic transport goals concerning inclusive mobility, regional economic development, and sustainable urbanism.

The analysis identified significant contributions and limitations within each intervention. Our Pass effectively addressed affordability barriers, increasing youth access to education, employment, and cultural activities, yet its inclusivity was constrained by persistent spatial disparities and infrastructural inadequacies in peripheral boroughs. Conversely, the Trafford Park Extension Line successfully enhanced connectivity between strategic economic hubs but faced significant challenges in delivering equitable spatial outcomes due to limited multimodal integration and weak feeder networks, particularly in underserved areas.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that achieving genuinely inclusive and sustainable mobility requires integrated policymaking that combines affordability measures, equitable infrastructure planning, and coordinated governance strategies. The concluding chapter synthesises key insights, evaluates theoretical and policy implications, outlines the thesis's contributions to knowledge, and proposes directions for future research and policy development within GM and comparable devolved city-regions.

7.1 Revisiting the Research Objectives

The research was guided by four core objectives and structured around four research questions, designed not only to assess the performance of the two cases, but to evaluate their alignment with GM's broader policy goals. These objectives were addressed as follows:

- **Objective 1: To critically examine how Greater Manchester's flagship transport initiatives (Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line) translate policy goals on youth mobility and social equality into specific services and inclusion outcomes**

  This was achieved through the analysis of *Our Pass* in Chapter 6, which demonstrated its success in reducing cost-related barriers to transport for 16–18-year-olds. However, the findings also revealed inconsistent uptake across boroughs and limited service reach in underserved areas, thereby constraining its equity outcomes.

- **Objective 2: To analyse how elite stakeholders (policymakers, transport professionals, and academics) interpret the socio-economic aspects of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, and evaluate the alignment of these interpretations with regional policy objectives.**

  Drawing on interview data presented in Chapters 5 and 6, the research showed that stakeholders generally supported inclusive mobility aims but often expressed tension between social justice imperatives and the constraints of political funding, institutional silos, and economic competitiveness.

- **Objective 3: To evaluate the contribution of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line to GMCA's economic development and regional competitiveness, situating them clearly within Greater Manchester's broader growth and regeneration strategies.**

  This was addressed through the case of the *Trafford Park Extension Line*, which supports agglomeration in high-growth zones but was shown to risk concentrating benefits in already-prosperous areas. The analysis highlighted concerns about its alignment with inclusive growth, particularly in light of limited feeder integration and spatial equity gaps.

- **Objective 4: To assess how effectively financial and infrastructural interventions deliver measurable outcomes aligned to GMCA's inclusive mobility and socio-economic goals, and identify key operational, institutional, and contextual barriers constraining their delivery.**

  This was explored throughout Chapters 6 and 7. Both interventions were found to correspond with GMCA's stated ambitions around decarbonisation, regeneration, and inclusion, but fall short in delivery due to operational and governance limitations—particularly in integrating affordability with spatial accessibility.

7.2 Synthesis of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The thesis has critically assessed two transport interventions, Our Pass and the Trafford Park

Extension Line—evaluating their alignment with the GMCA's policy goals of inclusive mobility, regional growth, and socio-economic development. The analysis directly addressed the four research questions guiding the thesis, with the findings summarised below:

Research Question 1: How do Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line reflect the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's aims for inclusive mobility and regional growth?

Both interventions align clearly with GMCA's high-level ambitions for enhancing inclusive mobility and regional growth. Our Pass has successfully reduced cost barriers for youth, facilitating improved access to education and leisure. Nonetheless, disparities in uptake and service quality—particularly in boroughs with limited public transport infrastructure, such as Wigan, Rochdale, and Oldham—illustrate ongoing spatial inequalities. Similarly, the Trafford Park Extension Line connects strategically important economic and leisure zones, supporting GM's growth agenda, but its benefits remain concentrated around already-advantaged economic hubs, raising questions about equitable access across the city-region.

Research Question 2: How do key policymakers, transport professionals and academics interpret the potential of these two interventions to deliver social equality and economic opportunity?

Stakeholder narratives revealed broad consensus on the potential of both interventions to deliver social equity and economic mobility. However, analysis also exposed tensions between policy aspirations and implementation realities, particularly around funding limitations, fragmented governance, and political pressures. Stakeholders emphasised the necessity of integrated planning and reliable service provision, noting that financial incentives (Our Pass) and infrastructural expansion (Trafford Park Line) alone are insufficient without addressing underlying systemic challenges, including spatial disparities and institutional silos.

Research Question 3: In what ways do Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line support Greater Manchester's broader economic development and competitiveness goals?

The interventions demonstrate tangible contributions to GM's economic objectives, particularly through enhanced connectivity and access to employment hubs. Our Pass supports youth engagement in the economy by removing financial barriers to education and

training, while the Trafford Park Extension Line improves labour market connectivity, facilitating economic activity around major employment clusters. However, the distribution of economic benefits remains uneven; peripheral areas receive fewer direct gains, underscoring the need for complementary policy measures that address spatial equity and workforce inclusivity alongside transport connectivity.

Research Question 4: To what extent do these financial (Our Pass) and infrastructural (Trafford Park Extension) interventions translate GMCA's inclusive-mobility and socio-economic policy objectives into tangible outcomes, and what barriers emerge in their implementation?

The findings reveal partial success in translating GMCA's inclusive-mobility goals into measurable outcomes. Our Pass significantly reduces affordability barriers but faces limitations in coverage and service quality in underserved areas. The Trafford Park Extension Line delivers notable connectivity benefits but struggles to extend these gains into economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods due to limited integration with feeder networks and wider housing and employment policies. Critical barriers identified include governance fragmentation, uneven investment across boroughs, spatial inequities, and operational constraints exacerbated by the pandemic.

7.3 Key Thematic Findings

The key thematic findings of the research are synthesised as follows:

1. Access to Social Opportunities

Our Pass has effectively addressed economic barriers to youth mobility by providing cost-free bus travel, thereby facilitating improved access to education, leisure, and cultural services (analysis presented in Chapter 6, Section 6.1.1, 6.2.1, and 6.3.1). Strategic partnerships with community organisations and cultural institutions have enhanced these benefits, particularly by enabling young people to engage more readily with extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, the uptake of Our Pass has demonstrated notable geographic disparities, particularly within peripheral boroughs such as Wigan, Rochdale, and Oldham. These spatial inequalities reflect deeper structural issues related to service reliability, frequency, and digital accessibility. Consequently, while the scheme effectively alleviates immediate cost barriers, it remains constrained in its capacity to achieve comprehensive social inclusion without complementary infrastructural investment.

The Trafford Park Extension Line similarly supports improved social participation by enhancing connectivity to major social and leisure destinations such as the Trafford Centre and MediaCityUK. However, the spatial concentration of benefits around economically advantaged areas indicates a risk of exacerbating rather than alleviating existing inequalities. Peripheral communities with historically limited access to reliable transport services continue to experience weak integration with the tramline, underlining the need for policy approaches that explicitly prioritise spatial equity and redistributive infrastructure planning.

2. Access to Economic Activity

Our Pass addresses transport poverty effectively by mitigating the financial burden of mobility for economically disadvantaged youth (discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.1, and 6.6.1). By enabling easier access to education, training opportunities, and employment placements, the scheme contributes positively to socio-economic engagement among its target demographics. Nevertheless, the impact of this intervention is moderated by geographic variations in transport service provision. Boroughs experiencing inconsistent or infrequent bus services have seen limited gains, suggesting that financial interventions require alignment with robust operational policies, particularly in spatially marginalised areas.

The Trafford Park Extension Line enhances economic connectivity and supports regional development by facilitating improved labour market fluidity and access to key employment zones. However, its economic impact risks being concentrated within already prosperous or commercially strategic locations, notably the Trafford Park industrial area and the Trafford Centre retail hub. The absence of integrated strategies that link transport investment with affordable housing, local employment schemes, and comprehensive feeder services undermines the potential for inclusive growth. Thus, to maximise socio-economic outcomes, policy interventions must explicitly connect infrastructural developments with complementary urban development and spatial equity initiatives.

3. Regional Competitiveness and Sustainability

Both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line align effectively with GM's strategic vision for sustainable, low-carbon mobility (explored within Chapter 6, Sections 6.3, Section 6.3.1, and 6.3.2). Our Pass notably encourages modal shift amongst young people by fostering early adoption of public transport habits, thus contributing to longer-term environmental sustainability objectives. Meanwhile, the Trafford Park Extension Line offers

a sustainable alternative to car-based travel, particularly by linking major employment and leisure zones directly with the Metrolink network, thereby reducing road congestion and associated emissions.

Nevertheless, these sustainability benefits remain unevenly distributed. Infrastructure-led approaches tend to privilege economically vibrant urban centres, potentially deepening existing mobility divides unless complemented by targeted redistribution measures and cross-sectoral planning. Stakeholder narratives highlighted significant gaps in access and reliability in outer boroughs, underscoring the need for comprehensive and equitable approaches to infrastructure deployment. Effective decarbonisation strategies must therefore integrate considerations of spatial justice and equitable user accessibility, particularly for lower-income areas where alternative transport options remain limited.

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate that both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line individually reflect key components of GMCA's policy ambitions for inclusive mobility, sustainable development, and regional competitiveness. However, their transformative potential remains significantly constrained when deployed in isolation or without explicit integration. The evidence presented underlines the necessity of coordinated policy interventions that combine affordability with spatial equity, operational reliability, and robust institutional frameworks. An ecosystem approach to transport governance, recognising the complex interdependencies of social, economic, and environmental dimensions, is essential if GM is to effectively address persistent structural determinants of transport exclusion.

7.4 Theoretical Implications

This section outlines the theoretical contributions of the thesis, specifically in relation to the integration of financial and infrastructural transport interventions within GM, addressing core themes of social exclusion, mobility justice, and sustainable regional development. It engages critically with theoretical frameworks including NPG and the TBL, highlighting their strengths as well as exposing limitations within devolved urban governance contexts. The theoretical advances of the thesis directly respond to scholarly demands for deeper examination of governance structures, spatial inequities, and the distributive impacts of urban transport policy. Key theoretical contributions include:

- **Expanding the Conceptualisation of Transport-Related Social Exclusion**

  This thesis extends the conceptual understanding of transport-related social exclusion by illustrating the interdependence of affordability and spatial accessibility as simultaneous constraints. Existing scholarship, notably Lucas (2012), primarily highlights financial barriers; however, this research reveals that even when economic barriers are alleviated—as demonstrated by Our Pass—the effectiveness of such financial interventions is significantly diminished by inadequate spatial coverage and inconsistent service quality. Empirical findings, particularly from under-served boroughs such as Tameside and Bolton, indicate that uptake is substantially constrained by persistent infrastructure deficiencies rather than the design of financial incentives alone. The analysis thus substantiates a comprehensive, integrative policy approach that aligns economic accessibility with equitable service provision, offering a nuanced extension to existing conceptual frameworks.

- **Critical Evaluation of NPG in Transport Governance**

  Through a critical examination of collaborative governance arrangements underpinning initiatives such as Our Pass, this thesis challenges prevailing assumptions within NPG. While NPG advocates collaboration, decentralisation, and cross-sector partnerships as essential for effective service delivery (Osborne, 2010), the thesis reveals significant practical tensions and limitations within this model. Stakeholder interviews demonstrated disparities in organisational capacity among third-sector partners and uneven representation, particularly affecting peripheral boroughs such as Wigan and Oldham. These findings critically reinforce Entwistle and Martin's (2005) assertion that NPG arrangements can inadvertently entrench existing power imbalances if not deliberately structured to promote equitable participation. The thesis thus deepens existing critiques by empirically illustrating how partnership-based governance can exacerbate geographic and socio-economic disparities unless robust equity-centred mechanisms are embedded explicitly within governance frameworks.

- **Interdependence of Financial and Infrastructural Transport Interventions**

  By comparatively analysing Our Pass (a demand-side subsidy) and the Trafford Park Extension Line (a supply-side infrastructural project), this research advances the understanding of transport policy integration. It demonstrates clearly that sustainable and equitable urban mobility cannot be achieved by isolated policy approaches; rather, it necessitates a synergistic relationship between financial measures and physical infrastructure provision. This aligns with earlier insights from Cervero and Kockelman

(1997), extending their theoretical contributions into the specific context of a devolved city-region governance system. The thesis distinctly highlights how neither financial nor infrastructural interventions, when isolated, sufficiently address mobility justice. However, when strategically integrated, these complementary approaches can significantly mitigate structural transport inequalities, providing a critical expansion of existing theoretical perspectives on urban transport integration.

- **Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of Policy Impacts**

  A significant theoretical insight offered by this thesis is its nuanced exploration of temporal and spatial dimensions within transport policy interventions. While financial subsidies such as Our Pass offer immediate relief from economic barriers, their long-term impacts depend significantly on continued political commitment and stable funding streams. Conversely, infrastructural investments like the Trafford Park Extension Line typically unfold over extended periods, influencing spatial patterns of urban growth and agglomeration gradually. By highlighting these differential temporalities, the thesis enriches transport justice scholarship by advocating policy planning that consciously balances immediate equity gains with long-term spatial outcomes. Such a perspective underscores the necessity of sustained institutional support and adaptive governance frameworks capable of managing both immediate needs and evolving urban challenges.

- **Integration of Transport and Urban Planning**

  The thesis identifies a persistent and problematic disconnect between transport investment decisions and broader urban planning and development strategies. By stressing the critical importance of aligning transport policy with land-use planning, housing affordability, and workforce development, the thesis advances a holistic model of urban governance. Drawing upon Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (1998), the research demonstrates how environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, and social equity objectives are interdependent and can only be fully realised through comprehensive spatial governance strategies. This contribution is particularly salient in complex, multi-borough governance contexts such as GM, emphasising the necessity of institutional coordination to ensure coherent policy outcomes across varied spatial scales and administrative boundaries.

- **Advancing Resilience and Adaptive Capacity in Transport Governance**

  Finally, the thesis contributes significantly to theoretical debates on urban resilience and adaptive capacity, as articulated by Newman and Kenworthy (2015). The empirical examination of Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic exposes vulnerabilities within conventional transport governance

approaches—specifically in service uptake, financial sustainability, and rigid assumptions regarding commuting patterns. By advocating scenario-based planning, participatory foresight methodologies, and adaptable governance structures, the thesis enhances the theoretical understanding of how urban transport systems can be structured to withstand and respond effectively to external shocks. This adds critical depth to existing theories of urban resilience, particularly highlighting governance flexibility and stakeholder involvement as central components of resilient, adaptive urban mobility systems.

Collectively, these theoretical contributions reinforce the argument that inclusive, sustainable urban mobility requires a comprehensive, integrated governance approach. Infrastructure provision and financial subsidies alone remain insufficient without institutional coherence, equitable representation, and strategic cross-sector collaboration. By critically adapting frameworks such as NPG and devolution, this thesis bridges theoretical gaps between governance theory, transport justice literature, and the operational realities of policy implementation, providing an enriched and contextually grounded theoretical contribution to transport governance scholarship.

7.5 Implications for Government
7.5.1 Holistic Policy Integration

To effectively address transport exclusion in GM, policymakers must adopt a holistic strategy that integrates financial interventions, such as Our Pass, with capital-intensive infrastructural investments, exemplified by the Trafford Park Extension Line. While Our Pass has significantly reduced immediate financial barriers to mobility for young people, the impact of such financial support remains constrained without robust and dependable transport networks that extend comprehensively across all boroughs. Conversely, although the Trafford Park Extension Line has enhanced connectivity to key employment and leisure zones, without targeted financial support or strategic service integration, it risks reinforcing existing spatial inequalities, especially in peripheral and economically marginalised areas.

Policymakers must therefore ensure transport interventions are synchronised with wider socio-economic objectives such as affordable housing, inclusive workforce development, and meaningful community participation. For example, aligning infrastructure projects such as the Trafford Park Extension Line explicitly with affordable residential developments near tram stops would directly facilitate access for low-income residents, thereby amplifying the

intervention's equity impacts. Furthermore, transport policy should proactively engage with education and employment strategies, ensuring that improved physical connectivity translates effectively into tangible socio-economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities.

For urban governance beyond GM, this integrated approach emphasises the risks associated with siloed policymaking. Urban regions pursuing transport equity must ensure alignment between financial incentives, infrastructural enhancements, land-use planning, and socio-economic policies. Only through such comprehensive and joined-up strategies can transport interventions meaningfully address entrenched issues of mobility injustice, transport poverty, and spatial inequality, delivering sustained, inclusive, and equitable benefits across all community segments.

7.5.2 Adaptive and Responsive Policymaking

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of adaptive, evidence-based policymaking in GM's transport sector. Both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line experienced significant disruption due to changes in commuting behaviours, educational closures, and shifting economic conditions. Early ridership on the Trafford Park Extension Line fell substantially below forecasts, while Our Pass saw reduced usage in response to school and college closures, illustrating the vulnerability of rigid transport strategies to external shocks.

Consequently, policymakers in GM must prioritise the continuous collection and analysis of transport usage data, leveraging tools such as real-time passenger monitoring, stakeholder surveys, and scenario modelling to enable rapid and informed policy adjustments. For instance, integrating real-time analytics into Our Pass could swiftly highlight gaps in service delivery, particularly in underserved areas such as Wigan, Rochdale, or Oldham, facilitating targeted route adjustments or frequency enhancements in response to actual demand patterns.

This data-driven adaptability is essential not only for GM but also for other urban regions seeking resilience against similar disruptions—whether from future health crises, technological advancements, or climate-related events. Establishing flexible frameworks informed by ongoing feedback ensures that transport investments remain aligned with evolving community needs, reducing the risk of underutilisation and maximising the equitable distribution of benefits across all demographics and areas of the city-region.

7.5.3 Meaningful Engagement and Partnerships

Greater Manchester's experience with transport initiatives, particularly through collaborative schemes such as Our Pass, underscores the critical importance of robust stakeholder engagement involving local authorities, businesses, youth organisations, and cultural institutions. Nevertheless, evidence from boroughs such as Wigan and Oldham indicate that these partnerships have not always translated evenly into inclusive outcomes, largely due to limited outreach, varying organisational capacities, and inconsistent local engagement.

Policymakers in GM should therefore prioritise strengthening partnerships at the grassroots level, ensuring active and meaningful participation from community groups and residents in underserved areas. This could involve deeper collaboration with local youth organisations, community leaders, and voluntary groups to co-design transport solutions that are context-sensitive, locally relevant, and responsive to specific community needs and aspirations.

Other city-regions can similarly learn from GM's experience by recognising the significance of genuine co-production in transport policy. Sustained engagement and transparent governance processes not only foster trust and credibility but also enhance policy relevance and resilience by embedding diverse local perspectives directly into decision-making frameworks.

7.5.4 Long-Term Vision and Incremental Progress

In GM, financial interventions such as Our Pass have provided immediate, tangible benefits by addressing cost-related barriers to youth mobility. Conversely, the Trafford Park Extension Line illustrates the strategic value and potential long-term benefits of substantial infrastructure investments in enhancing regional connectivity and economic development. However, these cases highlight the necessity of integrating immediate, short-term interventions with sustained, incremental investment to create a comprehensive and inclusive transport strategy.

Policymakers in GM should therefore implement a phased approach, whereby short-term measures—such as fare subsidies and financial incentives—are strategically aligned with progressive improvements to transport infrastructure, especially in under-served and peripheral boroughs. For example, targeted enhancements to feeder bus services and

improved first-mile/last-mile connectivity to the Trafford Park Extension Line could significantly increase accessibility for marginalised communities.

City-regions elsewhere could similarly benefit by combining easily implemented, short-term policies such as cost-reduction schemes with longer-term infrastructure strategies. This balanced, incremental approach ensures efficient use of resources, allows continuous monitoring and adjustment, and systematically addresses both immediate needs and deeper structural challenges related to spatial and socio-economic exclusion.

7.6 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis contributes to the field of transport governance through a detailed comparative analysis of two distinctive transport interventions in the devolved city-region of GM: Our Pass, a financial intervention aimed at enhancing youth mobility, and the Trafford Park Extension Line, an infrastructure initiative designed to improve regional connectivity and economic competitiveness. By examining these interventions simultaneously, the research offers novel insights into how financial and infrastructural transport policies intersect within the spatial, institutional, and governance contexts characteristic of devolved city-regions.

Methodologically, the thesis employs narrative stakeholder interviews analysed through thematic analysis. This qualitative approach, while well-established in broader social science literature, remains relatively underutilised within transport governance research. Consequently, the thesis advances methodological understandings by demonstrating the value of capturing stakeholder narratives to critically unpack the lived experiences, policy interpretations, and governance dynamics underpinning transport interventions.

Theoretically, the thesis enhances existing frameworks around mobility justice and transport equity (Lucas, 2012; Martens, 2017). It demonstrates that financial interventions, such as Our Pass, and infrastructure-led projects like the Trafford Park Extension Line, must be analysed in tandem to fully comprehend their implications for accessibility and inclusion. The thesis highlights how financial measures, while essential for immediate affordability, are insufficient without corresponding investment in spatially equitable transport infrastructure. Thus, it contributes to refining theoretical understandings of how economic and spatial dimensions of transport exclusion are mutually reinforcing and must be addressed holistically.

The research also contributes critically to the literature on devolution and urban governance (Ayres and Stafford, 2018; Bache et al., 2016). While devolution is often advocated as facilitating place-based policymaking, this thesis demonstrates how competitive funding structures and uneven institutional capacities within GM produce stark disparities in transport investment—most notably in peripheral boroughs like Wigan and Oldham. By providing empirical evidence of these disparities, the thesis underscores the importance of aligning local autonomy with fair resource distribution mechanisms to realise the inclusive potential often attributed to devolution.

In addition, the thesis advances scholarship on collaborative governance and NPG. Although NPG emphasises the benefits of multi-stakeholder partnerships and decentralised governance (Osborne, 2010), the research identifies inherent limitations, such as uneven capacities among partners and the potential reproduction of geographic inequalities through partnership-led models. This critical assessment extends the work of Entwistle and Martin (2005), highlighting the risk of NPG arrangements unintentionally reinforcing existing power asymmetries rather than promoting equitable participation.

Further, the thesis enriches debates on urban resilience and adaptability in transport governance (Newman and Kenworthy, 2015). Analysing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line, the research demonstrates the necessity of scenario-based planning and flexible governance structures capable of adapting swiftly to unexpected shocks. The findings underline that integrating resilience thinking into both financial and infrastructural policy interventions is crucial to maintaining equitable access and service continuity during socio-economic disruptions.

Collectively, these theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions offer a comprehensive and context-sensitive analysis. They show how financial affordability, spatial accessibility, and institutional governance intersect within devolved city-region transport planning. The thesis addresses a key gap between normative frameworks of transport justice and the operational realities of governance. It offers a robust foundation for advancing research on inclusive and sustainable mobility policy.

7.7 Evaluating Policy Effectiveness and Alignment with Objectives

Both Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line demonstrate alignment with GM's stated policy objectives, such as enhancing social equity, increasing accessibility, and supporting economic development. However, the extent to which these initiatives fully achieve their intended outcomes varies and remains subject to ongoing assessment.

Evidence suggests that Our Pass has effectively addressed immediate financial barriers, reducing travel costs for young people and supporting their participation in education, training, and social activities. Nevertheless, stakeholder feedback indicates persistent limitations, particularly regarding uneven service availability in peripheral boroughs such as Wigan, Oldham, and Rochdale. Additionally, non-financial barriers, including service reliability, safety, and convenience, continue to constrain the intervention's broader impact. Consequently, while Our Pass has shown initial positive outcomes, further evaluation is required to determine its sustained effects on educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Similarly, the Trafford Park Extension Line aligns closely with regional goals related to economic development, improved connectivity, and sustainability. Initial findings indicate enhanced accessibility to key economic nodes such as the Trafford Centre and MediaCityUK, suggesting potential to support localised economic activity and employment accessibility. However, evidence also highlights uneven geographical benefits, with lower-than-expected ridership and integration challenges in areas beyond the primary corridor. Limited feeder services and network integration appear to be key barriers. This partial achievement underscores the importance of ongoing investment in complementary transport infrastructure, integrated land-use planning, and housing strategies to realise equitable benefits across the region.

Collectively, these findings emphasise the complexity involved in translating strategic policy goals into clear and equitable outcomes. The evidence indicates that while financial interventions such as Our Pass can deliver immediate and visible improvements, their long-term efficacy relies on complementary investments in infrastructure and service integration. Similarly, infrastructure-based interventions like the Trafford Park Extension Line require sustained commitment, targeted planning, and comprehensive integration with broader socio-economic policies to fully realise their potential. The research therefore highlights the value

of integrating financial and infrastructural approaches within a holistic, context-sensitive framework to effectively advance GM's objectives for inclusive and sustainable regional mobility.

7.8 External Influences and Enduring Structural Issues

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered travel patterns, reduced early ridership, and hindered stakeholder involvement. The interventions were tested under unusual conditions, which complicated the assessment of their performance relative to pre-pandemic expectations. Remote working patterns, changes in consumer habits, and persistent health concerns about public transport undermined key assumptions underpinning these policies.

Long-standing structural challenges, such as entrenched inequalities, varied geographical conditions, and shifting economic landscapes, further shape outcomes. While interventions like Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line address immediate mobility needs, the persistence of urban sprawl, funding disparities, and limited service integration across boroughs suggest that such measures must be embedded within a broader strategy targeting systemic urban inequalities. For example, Wigan and Rochdale's historically limited access to public transport networks highlights how spatial inequalities persist even when new initiatives are introduced. Even in the absence of pandemic-related disruptions, achieving sustainable, inclusive transport systems demands comprehensive strategies that integrate land-use planning, robust service quality, and ongoing stakeholder dialogue. Without addressing these broader constraints, interventions may only partially fulfil their objectives, indicating that success depends as much on adaptive policymaking and holistic support frameworks as on the interventions themselves.

7.9 Summary of Research Approach and Limits to Research

The interpretation of this thesis's findings is subject to a few limitations. The data collection involved sixteen narrative interviews, which provided valuable, in-depth qualitative insights into the perceptions and decision-making processes of a specific group of stakeholders. The subsequent thematic analysis of these interviews employed a well-established qualitative methodology, enabling the extraction of key patterns and themes. However, these interviews may not fully represent the diversity of experiences within GM or all viewpoints relevant to transport policy. Additionally, as participants were primarily high-level individuals and

experts, their perspectives might differ from those of regular users, which could influence the analysis toward policy-focused views.

The thesis focused on two specific interventions within one devolved city-region. This approach allowed for a detailed and context-aware analysis but may limit the ability to generalise the findings to other regions. The particular conditions in GM, including its governance, economy, and social context, may not fully apply elsewhere, requiring some care in considering broader applications.

The COVID-19 pandemic overlapped with key stages of both interventions, affecting travel behaviour, delaying stakeholder engagement, and limiting the ability to evaluate the interventions in usual circumstances. Changes such as shifts to remote work and reduced public transport use may mean short-term findings do not fully reflect long-term trends.

Finally, the lack of detailed longitudinal data reduces the ability to evaluate the longer-term effects of these interventions, such as changes in travel behaviour or economic outcomes. These impacts often take time to emerge, making initial assessments more tentative.

Nonetheless, these factors do not detract from the insights offered and highlight the value of ongoing monitoring and further research to better understand the broader implications of the interventions.

7.10 Opportunities for Further Research
7.10.1 Longitudinal Impact Assessments
Future research may monitor the enduring effects of financial and infrastructural interventions. Through the accumulation of data across several years, researchers can gain deeper insights into whether early advantages—like improved access to education or slight increases in ridership—result in lasting shifts in behaviour, economic prospects, and comprehensive regional growth. This type of longitudinal analysis would aid in distinguishing the effects of the interventions from short-term disruptions, such as those brought about by the pandemic.

7.10.2 Comparative Analysis Across City-Regions
Investigating similar interventions in other devolved city-regions, both in the UK and internationally, could provide valuable insights into the applicability and adaptability of this

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research. For instance, Birmingham's Bus on Demand service could be compared to Our Pass to evaluate which models of transport accessibility better serve youth in economically diverse areas. By examining how governance structures, demographic profiles, particularly the experiences of young people, and economic contexts influence the success of financial measures like Our Pass and infrastructural projects like the Trafford Park Extension Line, future research could refine best practices in transport policy.

Within the UK, Birmingham and the West Midlands Combined Authority provide a relevant case. The region's Bus on Demand service and transport-led regeneration efforts aim to address access issues in underserved areas. Comparative analysis could explore whether direct financial subsidies like Our Pass or flexible, on-demand mobility solutions have a greater impact on social mobility, particularly for young people seeking education or employment opportunities. Birmingham's approach to aligning transport with housing and economic policy offers additional insights into the importance of integrated planning in fostering regional growth and inclusivity.

In South Yorkshire, the Tram Train pilot scheme offers a parallel to GM's infrastructural projects. Analysing its effects on connectivity, economic activity, and access to opportunities could highlight how such investments support young people and marginalised groups. South Yorkshire also provides an opportunity to examine how spatial disparities within a single city-region influence the outcomes of transport policies, with implications for designing targeted interventions.

Internationally, Stockholm, Sweden, provides a useful comparison with its comprehensive public transport system and congestion pricing model. A study of Stockholm could reveal how financial measures designed to encourage public transport use impact social equity, particularly among younger populations. Additionally, Stockholm's economic success as a regional hub might illustrate the role of transport in driving labour market access and regional competitiveness, offering lessons for city-regions with diverse economic profiles. Similarly, Portland, Oregon, with its MAX Light Rail system, offers insights into how multimodal transport investments address sustainability while supporting social mobility. Portland's focus on public engagement, including outreach to young people, could inform strategies to foster long-term behavioural change and increase public buy-in for transport policies.

Beyond comparing city-regions, it is also essential to study variations within city-regions themselves. For example, GM demonstrates significant contrasts in transport needs and outcomes across its boroughs, from affluent areas to those with high deprivation levels. Understanding how interventions like Our Pass benefit young people in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods compared to more affluent ones could help refine policy designs. Similarly, exploring the economic ripple effects of infrastructure projects, such as the Trafford Park Extension Line, across different areas within the same region could offer a more nuanced picture of spatial equity.

By focusing on governance, economic activity, social mobility, and demographic impacts—particularly those affecting young people—this comparative and intra-regional research could provide practical guidance for policymakers. They would also help identify scalable and context-sensitive strategies to ensure transport interventions effectively address social exclusion, promote regional competitiveness, and foster sustainable development across diverse settings.

7.10.3 Exploration of Emerging Mobility Trends

The rapid evolution of urban transport landscapes through new technologies, micromobility options, and shifts in work patterns, such as hybrid working, presents an important avenue for future research. These trends introduce complex interactions with established interventions like Our Pass and Light Rail (LR) expansions, such as the Trafford Park Extension Line. Understanding how these changes reshape user behaviour, accessibility, and overall transport equity is critical to ensuring that transport policies remain relevant and effective. For example, integrating MM solutions like e-scooters with Our Pass could improve last-mile connectivity, particularly in areas where bus services are sparse.

Interactions Between New Technologies and Established Interventions

The integration of new transport technologies with established systems provides an opportunity to examine how these elements can coexist or complement one another. For example, the adoption of electric scooters and bike-sharing schemes in city-regions like London and Bristol has altered last-mile connectivity, particularly for young people and low-income groups who may lack access to personal vehicles (Smith and Jones, 2020). Comparative research could investigate how micromobility options integrate with existing financial measures like Our Pass to enhance multi-modal journeys. In GM, research might

explore whether young users rely on free bus travel to connect with bike-sharing or scooters for short-distance trips and how this affects travel efficiency and inclusivity.

Shifts in Work Patterns and Transport Policy

The shift toward hybrid working, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has fundamentally altered commuting patterns. Transport policies like Our Pass were designed to cater to daily and consistent travel needs, such as commuting to school or work. Future research could assess how reduced or irregular travel demand, such as fewer peak-hour journeys, affects the usage and effectiveness of these interventions.

For example, the Trafford Park Extension Line was designed to improve regional connectivity to employment hubs. With more individuals working remotely, it is important to understand how this shift has affected the demand for transport infrastructure. Additionally, it is crucial to examine whether students or part-time workers use financial interventions like Our Pass differently in the context of less regular commuting patterns. A study of these dynamics in regions like Leed**s** or Edinburgh**,** which also support multi-modal transit systems, could reveal broader patterns applicable to GM.

Environmental and Inclusivity Implications

Micromobility and technological advancements also present opportunities to further sustainability objectives. For instance, bike-sharing initiatives in Cambridge and Oxford, where cycling is deeply embedded in urban culture, have been shown to significantly reduce car dependency for short trips (Smith et al., 2019). Comparing such initiatives with GM's micromobility initiatives could help identify policy tools that align with environmental goals, particularly in areas where cycling culture is less established.

Research could also assess how these tools address equity. While MM options often appeal to younger, more affluent users, integrating them with financial interventions like Our Pass might bridge accessibility gaps for underserved communities. For instance, providing discounts or subsidies on bike-sharing or e-scooter rentals for Our Pass users may increase usage among disadvantaged groups. Research on integrated transport policies in cities such as Copenhagen, where cycling infrastructure effectively accommodates diverse demographics, could offer valuable insights into enhancing the inclusivity of MM initiatives.

By combining these insights with the findings of this thesis, future research can offer detailed, context-sensitive recommendations for creating adaptable and equitable transport systems that respond to technological, social, and environmental changes.

7.10.4 Integrated Policy Research

A thorough examination of the intersections between transport initiatives and other policy areas, like housing, education, and healthcare, has the potential to produce more comprehensive strategies for tackling social inequality and fostering regional development. For example, integrating transport policies with housing developments, as seen in London's approach to TOD, ensures that affordable housing is located near transport hubs, enhancing accessibility for low-income communities (Smith and Clarke, 2020). Similarly, collaborations between transport and education policies, such as discounted travel schemes for students in Scotland, have demonstrated how easing mobility barriers can increase participation in higher education (Jones and Taylor, 2018). Interdisciplinary research can uncover synergies like these, amplifying the effectiveness of individual interventions and ensuring that future policies are technically robust while being socially and economically viable.

7.11 Concluding Remarks

The comparative analysis demonstrates that addressing transport exclusion, social equity, and economic development requires a multifaceted approach, as no single policy instrument can sufficiently address these interconnected challenges. An integrated approach combining incentives, infrastructure, partnerships, and community engagement is likely to yield more equitable and sustainable outcomes. These insights underscore the need for policymaking that responds to shifting demographics and technological advances. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the value of transport systems that can adapt to sudden changes in demand and mobility patterns. Transport planning must be flexible so governments and stakeholders can adjust to changing social and economic needs while ensuring systems are fair, accessible, and sustainable. Future research can build on these findings to inform interventions and strategic frameworks in GM and other cities facing similar transport challenges. As decision-makers utilise devolved powers and explore complementary policy tools, they can create environments where enhanced connectivity, diminished barriers, and comprehensive long-term planning can thrive together. Such measures can improve mobility, foster social cohesion, and bolster economic resilience, contributing to broader efforts toward equitable and sustainable urban development.

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Appendix A: Thematic Analysis Process

Step 1: Familiarisation with the Data.

The following process was conducted:

- The survey responses were carefully reviewed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences and perceptions.
- Both closed-ended quantitative results and open-ended qualitative comments were examined to uncover initial patterns, trends, and areas of divergence.

Some application examples include:

- The quantitative survey results revealed a significant emphasis on sustainable transport, with an average rating of 4.7, highlighting a robust interest in eco-friendly initiatives.
- Responses such as "Talking to people on the tram makes me happy" highlighted themes of social interaction and community engagement.

Step 2: Generating Codes.

The following process was conducted:

- Every survey response was carefully coded to identify common themes, phrases, and trends pertinent to the research focus. Codes emerged from the data in an inductive manner, enabling the results to naturally inform the thematic structure.
- Codes informed by quantitative data included access to opportunities, transport affordability, and disruption due to COVID-19.
- Qualitative comments were utilised to enhance or confirm these codes (e.g., social benefits, and connectivity gaps).

Some example codes include:

- Access: social opportunities, cultural activities, job accessibility.
- Barriers: geographic inequalities, pandemic disruptions.
- Values: sustainability, transport habits.

Step 3: Searching for Themes.

The following process was conducted:

- Codes were organised into overarching themes that captured the core concepts of the data. Themes were crafted to embody the key narratives arising from the pilot survey responses.
- Sub-themes were developed to illustrate particular facets of the overarching themes.

Some examples include:

- Theme: Access to Social Opportunities, Subtheme: Reducing Social Exclusion, Cultural Participation.
- Theme: Disparities in Access, Subtheme: Geographic Inequities, Connectivity Gaps.
- Theme: Regional Competitiveness and Sustainability, Subtheme: Sustainable Travel Habits, Integrated Transport Planning.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes.

The following process was conducted:

- The initial themes were examined in relation to the survey data to confirm they truly represented the participants' responses.
- Themes were polished to guarantee coherence and consistency, making certain that each theme was unique and well-supported by the data.

The following validations were made:

- Quantitative responses indicating that activities have become easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass, along with high ratings for recreational and cultural activities, corresponded with the theme of Access to Social Opportunities.
- Qualitative insights (e.g., "Socially, it did the world of good for them") emphasised these themes and underscored the implications for enhancing social inclusion.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes.

The following process was conducted:

- Every theme and sub-theme were distinctly articulated and connected to relevant data, providing a strong foundation for additional investigation.
- Quotes and data points were included to exemplify each theme.

Example Theme Table.

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting Quotes/Data	Implication

Access to Social Opportunities	Reducing social exclusion	"Socially, it did the world of good for them…"	Tackles social inequalities and promotes extracurricular engagement.
	Cultural participations	"Many young people had never been to the theatre before..."	Expands cultural access, but geographic disparities remain a concern.
Access to Economic Activity	Financial Mobility	"With the cost of travel no longer a concern..."	Reduces transport poverty but depends on reliable service provision.
Regional Competitiveness	Sustainable Travel Habits	"If we can instil the habit of using public transport..."	Encourages eco-friendly behaviours, reliant on infrastructure improvements.

Step 6: Using Themes to Guide Narrative Interview Questions

The following process was conducted:

- The identified themes served as a framework for structuring the narrative interview questions, thereby ensuring consistency with the survey findings.
- The interviews delved deeply into each theme, confirming and elaborating on the findings from the survey.

Some example questions include:

- *"How has access to Our Pass influenced your participation in cultural activities or social events?"*
- *"What barriers do you face in using public transport to access employment or education?"*

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. General Perceptions of Transport and Inclusion

- What do you think are the biggest challenges in addressing transport-related inequalities in Greater Manchester?
- How would you describe the impact of current transport interventions on social mobility and inclusivity?
- Can you share your views on the importance of affordable transport for young people in Greater Manchester?

2. Reflections on Our Pass

- In your opinion, has Our Pass succeeded in reducing barriers to education and employment for young people?
- What do you see as the key strengths and weaknesses of Our Pass as a financial intervention?
- How do you think Our Pass influences the long-term behaviours of young transport users?
- What are your thoughts on the geographic and service coverage limitations of Our Pass?

3. Perspectives on the Trafford Park Extension Line

- How has the Trafford Park Extension Line influenced economic development and accessibility in its serviced areas?
- Do you think the Trafford Park Extension Line is achieving its intended objectives of enhancing connectivity and reducing car dependency?
- What challenges do you think this project has faced in ensuring equitable access across all boroughs?

4. Stakeholder Involvement and Collaboration

- How do you perceive the role of stakeholder collaboration in shaping the success of these interventions?

- Are there specific examples of effective partnerships in delivering transport policy goals that stand out to you?
- What gaps do you think remain in stakeholder engagement processes for transport planning in GM?

5. Governance and Policy Implementation

- How does the governance structure in GM influence transport policy delivery and effectiveness?
- Do you think the current governance model sufficiently addresses disparities between central and peripheral boroughs?
- What are your thoughts on the integration of transport policy with other sectors like housing, education, and economic development?

6. Evaluating Success and Sustainability

- From your perspective, how should the success of these interventions be measured?
- Do you think these interventions are sustainable in the long term, particularly in terms of funding and service reliability?
- What additional measures would you recommend to improve the inclusivity and sustainability of GM's transport policies?

7. Impact of External Factors

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the uptake and impact of transport initiatives like Our Pass and the Trafford Park Extension Line?
- What lessons can be learned from the pandemic in terms of making transport systems more resilient to external shocks?
- How might future technological or societal changes influence the effectiveness of these interventions?

Appendix C: Interview Transcripts
Participant 1 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for meeting with me today. I know how busy you are, so I really appreciate your time. To start, could you tell me a bit about your role and how it relates to the transport initiatives in Greater Manchester?

Participant 1: Of course, no problem. I'm the Senior Regional Transport Official, and my role is a bit of a bridge-builder, really. I work with local authorities, Combined Authorities like Greater Manchester, and national bodies to ensure that transport strategies align and deliver on both local and national priorities. It is a mix of working with policy at a strategic level and understanding the local needs and challenges.

Greater Manchester is fascinating because it is so forward-thinking with its 2040 Transport Strategy. A lot of my job is helping bring their vision to life—whether that's through funding, expertise, or aligning it with broader national strategies like decarbonization. So, for example, I've been heavily involved in initiatives like Our Pass and infrastructure projects like the Trafford Park Extension Line.

Interviewer: It sounds like your role gives you a really unique perspective on how these projects come together. Could we start with Our Pass? What do you think its main purpose is, and how does it advance Greater Manchester's economic and social goals?

Participant 1: Our Pass is, well, it is transformational, really. It is about addressing transport as a barrier. For many young people, especially those from lower-income households, the cost of travel can be a significant obstacle. And that doesn't just limit their access to education or work—it limits their horizons altogether. With Our Pass, they're not only able to afford the journey; they're empowered to explore opportunities that align with their aspirations. By eliminating a significant obstacle, they are now able to enrol in the colleges and courses that are most aligned with their objectives, rather than merely those that are close by. That's a big deal, especially in a region like Greater Manchester where opportunities can be quite spread out.

It is also about social mobility. If you think about it, transport connects people to education, jobs, culture, and leisure. When you give young people free travel, you're not just giving

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them a bus ride; you're giving them access to a future they might not have had before. And that aligns perfectly with Greater Manchester's broader goals of reducing inequality and building a more inclusive economy.

Interviewer: That's such a compelling point. Could you give me an example of how you've seen Our Pass make a tangible difference?

Participant 1: Sure, there's one story that always sticks with me. A college principal shared this with me—it was about a young person who'd always dreamed of studying engineering. The best course for them was across the city, but the travel costs made it impossible for their family to afford. Once they got Our Pass, that obstacle disappeared. They could finally enrol in the course that was the best fit for them, not just the one that was closest. That's the kind of real-life impact we're talking about.

And it is not just education. I've heard from cultural organizations about young people attending museums, theatres, or concerts for the first time because travel was no longer a barrier. Those experiences are just as important in shaping their aspirations and sense of belonging.

Interviewer: That's really inspiring. Do you think Our Pass also has an impact on shaping long-term travel behaviours? For example, encouraging young people to use public transport more regularly?

Participant 1: Absolutely. Habits formed in those teenage years tend to stick with you, don't they? If a young person gets used to taking the bus or tram, they're much more likely to continue doing so as an adult. And that's crucial for sustainability. Greater Manchester has ambitious goals for reducing car dependency and cutting emissions, and schemes like Our Pass are a key part of that puzzle.

But, you know, it is not just about giving them free travel. The system has to work. If the buses aren't reliable or the trams don't go where they need to, young people won't use them, no matter how free or cheap they are. So, it's about creating a positive experience—reliable services, safe journeys, and good connectivity.

Interviewer: That makes sense. Speaking of connectivity, let's move on to the Trafford Park Extension Line. What makes this project unique, and why do you think it's so important for the region?

Participant 1: The Trafford Park Line is a great example of how transport can drive economic growth and social inclusion at the same time. Trafford Park itself is such a unique area—it's this mix of industrial hubs, retail destinations like the Trafford Centre, and residential neighbourhoods. To truly drive economic growth in areas like Trafford Park, transport solutions need to be specifically tailored to its unique mix of industrial hubs, retail destinations, and residential areas. That's what the tramline does.

It's about making it easier for workers to get to the industrial sites, for shoppers to access the retail parks without needing a car, and for residents to connect to the wider city. And because it's integrated into the broader Metrolink network, it's not just benefiting Trafford Park—it's connecting it to places like MediaCityUK, the city centre, and beyond. That kind of connectivity is what makes a city-region work. If you get what I mean.

Interviewer: That's a great point. Have there been any challenges with the Trafford Park Line? Anything you think could be improved?

Participant 1: Oh, absolutely. No project is perfect, right? One of the biggest challenges is ensuring that the benefits are evenly distributed. The tramline is fantastic for the areas it directly serves, but if you live further out—say, in a place without good bus links to the tram stops—it's less useful. So, there's still work to do in terms of first-mile, last-mile connectivity.

Another challenge is affordability. While the tramline is great, not everyone can afford to use it regularly. That's why schemes like Our Pass are so important—they make the network accessible to young people who might otherwise be excluded.

Interviewer: That's a good point. Do you think there's a case for expanding schemes like Our Pass to other groups, or is it better to keep them focused on young people?

Participant 1: Hmm, that's an interesting question. I think there's definitely a case for expanding it in the future. Young people are the right focus for now because it's such a pivotal age, but you could see how something similar could work for other groups—maybe

apprentices, people in low-income jobs, or even older adults who are retraining. The challenge is making sure it's financially sustainable and doesn't overstretch the system.

Interviewer: Speaking of financial sustainability, how do you see hybrid working trends affecting transport funding models? Has it changed how projects like the Trafford Park Line are planned?

Participant 1: Oh, hybrid working has been a game-changer. Before the pandemic, a lot of transport planning was based on peak-hour commuting—getting people into city centres for work. But now, those patterns have changed. People are working from home more, traveling at different times, and for different reasons. That's had a big impact on fare revenues, which traditionally funded a lot of the network.

It means we need to think differently about how we fund and design transport. Maybe it's about focusing more on off-peak travel or introducing more flexible ticketing options. And we'll need to look at alternative funding models—things like local taxation, land value capture, or partnerships with the private sector. It's a big shift, but it's also an opportunity to create a more resilient and adaptable system.

Interviewer: That's a really interesting perspective. To wrap up, what do you think is the most important thing for Greater Manchester's transport system to focus on moving forward?

Participant 1: Integration. It's got to be integration. And I don't just mean physical integration—connecting buses, trams, cycling, and walking—but also policy integration. Transport needs to work hand-in-hand with housing, skills development, and economic strategy. That's how you create a system that doesn't just move people around but actually enhances their lives. It's about making sure no one is left behind, whether they're in the city center or the outer boroughs.

And it's also about being bold. Greater Manchester has always been a leader in transport innovation, and I think it can set an example for other cities. By combining physical infrastructure with policies like Our Pass, it can show how to create a system that's inclusive, sustainable, and future proof.

Interviewer: Are there innovative approaches you think the region should explore?

Participant 1: Innovation is essential. Dynamic pricing models could encourage off-peak travel and ease congestion. Value capture mechanisms, where increases in property values near transport hubs are reinvested into the system, are another option. With the rise of remote and hybrid working, we also need to rethink traditional commuting patterns. Transport services should adapt to cater to changing needs, such as shorter, more flexible trips.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing such detailed insights. Before we finish, is there anyone else you'd recommend I speak to for further perspectives?

Participant 1: Certainly. I'd recommend speaking to [name], who has been heavily involved in transport projects across Greater Manchester. They'll have a wealth of knowledge to share, particularly on some of the operational aspects we've discussed today.

Interviewer: Could you share their contact or email address? And Thank you again for your time and expertise. This has been incredibly valuable.

Participant 1: No problem. And yep will do. Good luck with it.

Participant 2 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today. I understand you've worked closely with TfGM on projects like Our Pass. Could you start by telling me a bit about your role and how it connects to understanding transport for young people?

Participant 2: No problem. My role at TfGM is focused on research and evaluation, looking at travel behaviour and understanding its broader social and economic impacts. With Our Pass, specifically, I've been involved in assessing how it's been used, who it's reaching, and what difference it's making for young people. A lot of that means understanding the barriers that young people face when it comes to transport, especially those from lower-income backgrounds.

We look closely at things like price sensitivity—how cost influences decisions—and accessibility. Our Pass is interesting because it removes a big financial barrier. For young people, that can mean the difference between having opportunities and missing out on them altogether.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. Can you expand on what you mean by price sensitivity? How does that play into young people's decisions about transport?

Participant 2: Absolutely. Price sensitivity, especially for this group, is a big factor. A lot of young people don't have financial independence. Price sensitivity in this group is often tied to their limited financial autonomy, they're more likely to rely on allowances, part-time jobs, or financial support from family. So, when initiatives like Our Pass provide free or discounted travel, it removes a significant barrier.

For example, a student who might have to think twice about spending money on a bus fare can now travel without that worry. That might mean they're more willing to attend a school or college that's further away but better suited to their needs.

Interviewer: Have you seen any examples of how this plays out in real life?

Participant 2: One of the most striking examples I've seen is how Our Pass facilitates access to education. I've seen firsthand how Our Pass facilitates access for students. It is not solely about getting to college but the support services that improve their overall educational experience.

For instance, students have told us that they've used the pass to travel for tutoring sessions, extracurricular activities, or even mental health support. These aren't things they would've prioritized or been able to afford otherwise. It's helping to create a more holistic support system for young people, not just giving them access to the classroom but everything that supports their learning and growth.

Interviewer: That's really inspiring. What about outside of education? Are there other areas where you've seen Our Pass having an impact?

Participant 2: Definitely. Education is a big one, but it's not the whole story. We've had feedback from young people who've used the pass to take up part-time jobs, attend training, or even explore hobbies and interests that they wouldn't have pursued before.

[Inserts Quote:] Some have mentioned how they were able to engage in other activities outside class that helped them develop and grow personally. I've heard of young people joining sports teams, taking up volunteering, or just exploring the city in ways they never

could before. That kind of personal growth is invaluable, it builds confidence, opens doors, and creates a stronger connection to the community.

Interviewer: That's incredible. It seems like the impact goes far beyond just getting people from one place to another. Would you say it also influences longer-term habits or behaviours?

Participant 2: Absolutely. That's one of the really exciting parts of a scheme like this. When young people start relying on public transport regularly, they're more likely to stick with it as they grow older. It normalizes the idea that buses or trams are the default way to get around.

That's especially important for sustainability. Greater Manchester has big ambitions to reduce car reliance and tackle emissions, and programs like Our Pass are part of that. If we can make public transport the norm for the next generation, we're not just helping them now, we're laying the groundwork for a more sustainable future.

Interviewer: Hmmm. But every scheme has its challenges. What do you think are the biggest gaps or limitations in how Our Pass is currently implemented?

Participant 2: There are definitely areas for improvement. One of the biggest challenges is accessibility. The pass is great, but it's only as good as the transport network itself. If you're in a part of Greater Manchester with limited or unreliable bus routes, the pass doesn't help you much. It's something we hear a lot from young people in outlying areas.

Another issue is awareness. Not everyone knows what Our Pass offers or how to use it. That's especially true in communities where public transport isn't as widely used. We need to do more to ensure that young people understand what's available to them and how to make the most of it.

Interviewer: Those are important points. What steps do you think could be taken to address these issues?

Participant 2: I think there are a few things we could do. First, improving the transport network itself—making sure services are reliable and that all areas are well-connected. That might mean more buses, better integration with other modes like cycling, or even new routes to fill in the gaps.

Second, partnerships are key. We could work more closely with schools, colleges, and local businesses to create direct links between young people and opportunities. If there's a cluster of apprenticeships in a certain area, for example, we could focus on ensuring there's good transport access to that location.

And finally, we need to improve outreach. Whether it's through schools, social media, or community events, we need to get the word out about Our Pass and show young people how it can benefit them.

Interviewer: You mentioned partnerships earlier. Can you expand on how these could work in practice?

Participant 2: Sure. One idea could be creating formal agreements between transport providers and local employers or educational institutions. For example, businesses in Trafford Park could sponsor shuttle services for apprentices or work with TfGM to ensure their employees have reliable transport options.

Trafford Park is actually a great example of where tailored solutions could make a big difference. To truly drive economic growth in areas like Trafford Park, transport solutions need to be specifically tailored to its unique mix of industrial hubs, retail destinations, and residential areas.

That might mean flexible bus schedules to match shift patterns or ensuring that nearby residents can easily access the job opportunities on their doorstep. It's about creating a system that works for the specific needs of the area.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Looking ahead, what do you think the long-term role of Our Pass should be in shaping Greater Manchester's future?

Participant 2: I think Our Pass is a critical policy. It's not just about free travel—it's about creating a culture where public transport is seen as the go-to option. That aligns with Greater Manchester's broader goals for sustainability, inclusion, and growth.

But to maximize its impact, it needs to be part of a bigger strategy. That means connecting it with other policies—like housing, skills development, and economic planning—so that the

benefits are spread evenly across the region. If we can do that, Our Pass could be a model for other cities looking to create more equitable and sustainable transport systems.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and insights. This has been incredibly helpful. Is there anyone else you'd recommend I speak to for further information?

Participant 2: It's been a pleasure. I'd suggest speaking to [name], who's worked on some of the policy side of things. I'll follow up with them and make sure they're okay with me passing on their contact details.

Interviewer: That's great. Thanks again for your time and for sharing so much valuable information.

Participant 2: Anytime. Best of luck with your research!

Participant 3 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer:
Good afternoon, and thank you so much for joining me today. How are you doing?

Participant 3:
Hi there. Yeah, I'm doing alright, thank you. It's been a bit of a busy week. How about yourself?

Interviewer:
I'm good, thanks! Busy sounds like par for the course in your role, I'd imagine?

Participant 3:
Oh, absolutely. Especially when you're juggling a few different priorities. But, you know, it keeps things interesting.

Interviewer:
That's great to hear. I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me. Just to set the stage, my research focuses on understanding the socio-economic impacts of two transport schemes in Greater Manchester: the Trafford Park Line and Our Pass. Specifically, I'm looking at how these initiatives affect mobility, accessibility, and broader economic outcomes.

Participant 3:

That sounds fascinating. I mean, both projects have such different purposes and impacts, so I'm sure there's a lot to unpack.

Interviewer:

Exactly. And from what I understand, your role at TfGM is quite central to these sorts of discussions?

Participant 3:

Yeah, in a way. As a Metrolink sponsor, my job is to oversee the interface between operations, projects, and strategy. Essentially, I make sure the projects deliver what's promised in their business cases, from concept to execution, and that we're monitoring the benefits. So, yeah, I've had quite a bit of involvement with projects like Trafford Park and the broader Metrolink network.

Interviewer:

That's really helpful context. Let's start with the Trafford Park Line. What was the main rationale for this project?

Participant 3:

So, the Trafford Park Line had three key goals. First, it was about boosting economic growth in the area. Trafford Park is a unique space—it's the world's first purpose-built industrial estate and still a major economic hub, but it needed better connectivity. Second, we wanted to improve accessibility for both workers and visitors. The area's transport options were too reliant on cars, which wasn't sustainable. And finally, the line aimed to reduce car use overall, aligning with Greater Manchester's environmental goals.

Interviewer:

Interesting. So, it was as much about supporting businesses in Trafford Park as it was about connecting communities to opportunities?

Participant 3:

Exactly. The businesses in Trafford Park rely on a steady workforce, and for people in places like Eccles or Salford, getting there wasn't always easy. The line connects them to jobs, education, and leisure opportunities. And then you've got places like the Trafford Centre,

EventCity, and Old Trafford, which are big draws for visitors. It's not just about moving people from A to B—it's about creating a network that makes sense for the area.

Interviewer:

That's a great point. I imagine the design of this line had to address some specific challenges unique to Trafford Park?

Participant 3:

Oh, absolutely. For one, Trafford Park is different from other parts of the network because of its bidirectional flow. Most of our lines are focused on bringing people into Manchester in the morning and taking them out in the evening. With Trafford Park, it's more about people commuting in and out for work or leisure throughout the day. That required some adjustments in service frequencies and planning.

Interviewer:

That's really interesting. What about the businesses themselves? Did you involve them in the planning process?

Participant 3:

We did, yeah. Our partnerships with developers were essential for ensuring the line was integrated into existing retail and industrial hubs, but there's scope to expand partnerships to include cultural initiatives along the route. For example, with other lines, we've worked with employers to create travel plans for their staff. I think there's potential to do something similar here, maybe even involving cultural institutions or leisure facilities to promote the line further.

Interviewer:

It sounds like there's a lot of potential there. How do you think the line has been performing so far?

Participant 3:

It's a bit of a mixed bag, honestly. The tram opened in March 2020, three days later we went into lockdown, so we've not really had a chance to see its full impact yet. There needs to be a change in policy to get those people back. COVID-19 really shifted travel patterns, with remote working and people being cautious about public transport.

Interviewer:

That must have been challenging. What's being done to address those changes?

Participant 3:

We're looking at a few things, like promoting the line through campaigns and partnerships. There's also been a push to make public transport more attractive—things like integrating it with active travel options, like GM's bike hire scheme or e-scooters. It's about creating a seamless experience, so people can easily transition between modes of transport.

Interviewer:

That makes sense. Are you seeing any specific trends in how people are using the line post-pandemic?

Participant 3:

Well, one interesting thing is that leisure travel seems to have bounced back faster than commuting. Weekends are busier than weekdays, especially with people heading to places like the Trafford Centre or EventCity. That's not something we anticipated when planning the line—it was primarily designed for work commutes. It's made us rethink how we market and adapt our services.

Interviewer:

That's fascinating. So how are you adapting to this shift toward leisure travel?

Participant 3:

We're experimenting with targeted promotions for families and tourists. For instance, we're considering packages where tram tickets are bundled with discounts at local attractions. We're also tweaking service frequencies during weekends to match the demand. And honestly, it's about listening to users. We've set up feedback loops through surveys and social media to understand what people need and what would make them use the tram more.

Interviewer:

It sounds like you're really trying to meet people where they are. Have you noticed any barriers that are still stopping people from returning to the tram?

Participant 3:

Definitely. One big issue is perception—some people are still wary of crowded spaces

because of COVID. Others feel like the convenience of working from home or driving outweighs the benefits of public transport. Then there's the economic factor; with the cost of living rising, even affordable public transport can feel like a stretch for some families.

Interviewer:

How do you address those concerns?

Participant 3:

For the health concerns, we've focused on promoting cleanliness and safety. We've introduced regular cleaning schedules, contactless ticketing, and real-time updates on crowd levels. For the economic concerns, we're exploring subsidies or discounts for low-income families. We're also trying to highlight the long-term savings of using the tram compared to driving. It's about showing people that public transport is not just an option but a better one.

Interviewer:

And how about businesses? Are they engaging with the line now that things are reopening?

Participant 3:

It's been a slow process, but we're starting to see more interest. For example, some employers are now considering subsidized travel passes for their staff as an incentive to get them back into the office. Others are partnering with us to offer perks, like discounted tram rides for customers. It's a collaborative effort, and we're trying to build those relationships to keep the momentum going.

Interviewer:

Do you think the pandemic has permanently changed how people use public transport?

Participant 3:

I think so, yes. Remote and hybrid working have definitely reshaped peak travel patterns. People aren't commuting five days a week anymore, so the traditional morning and evening rush hours aren't as pronounced. That's both a challenge and an opportunity—it gives us the flexibility to rethink service schedules and explore new ways of meeting demand.

Interviewer:

What kind of long-term adjustments do you think will be necessary to adapt to these changes?

Participant 3:

We'll need more dynamic scheduling, for sure. That might mean fewer trams during traditional rush hours but more during midday or weekends when people are out for leisure or errands. We're also looking at integrating more real-time data into our operations so we can respond quickly to demand spikes. And of course, expanding connectivity is key—making sure people can get to the tram easily from wherever they are, whether that's through better bus services or active travel options.

Interviewer:

It sounds like there's a real focus on flexibility. Are there any lessons from other cities or transport systems that you're looking to implement here?

Participant 3:

Absolutely. We've looked at examples from European cities like Amsterdam and Copenhagen, where multi-modal transport is seamless. Their systems combine trams, bikes, and buses effortlessly, and that's something we're aiming for here. Another great example is Vienna, where affordable annual passes have boosted ridership significantly. It's about making public transport not just an option, but the best option.

Interviewer:

That's really insightful. Do you think Greater Manchester is on track to achieve that vision?

Participant 3:

We're getting there, but it's a marathon, not a sprint. The infrastructure is a strong foundation, but we need to keep evolving—whether that's through partnerships, policy changes, or innovative solutions. The Trafford Park Line has incredible potential, and I think we'll see that more clearly as we adapt to the post-pandemic landscape.

Interviewer:

What about the broader socio-economic impacts of Trafford Park? Have you seen any early signs of change?

Participant 3:

Yeah, there have been some positive indicators. For instance, the improved transport connections have led to a noticeable increase in foot traffic, and we expect it to attract interest

from new investors in the long term. One example is the Premier Inn near Trafford Park. They've told us outright, "We probably wouldn't have built this hotel had you not then come in and built Metrolink." It's a clear example of how transport infrastructure can drive investment and growth.

Interviewer:

That's a great example. Do you think the line could also have social benefits, particularly for lower-income communities?

Participant 3:

Definitely. Reliable and affordable transport can be a game-changer for families who don't have cars or are on tight budgets. It's not just about getting to work; it's about accessing education, healthcare, and even leisure activities. If you're a young person in Eccles and you can now get to a job interview in Trafford Park or enjoy a day out at the Trafford Centre, that's a big deal.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. Do you see any challenges in ensuring those benefits are widely felt?

Participant 3:

The main challenge is ensuring accessibility is equitable. Some areas are better connected than others, and without feeder services or first-mile/last-mile solutions, some people might still be left out. It's something we need to address as part of a wider transport strategy.

Interviewer:

You've touched on environmental impacts as well. How does the line contribute to Greater Manchester's sustainability goals?

Participant 3:

It's a big step forward. Reducing car use in an area like Trafford Park, which is so traffic-heavy, can have a significant impact on emissions. Plus, integrating the line with active travel options promotes a greener, more connected urban environment. The ultimate goal is to create a virtuous cycle—improving connectivity, attracting investment, and encouraging sustainable practices.

Interviewer:

That's a great vision. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you think is important to note about the Trafford Park Line?

Participant 3:

I'd just say that it's a work in progress. We're seeing positive signs, but there's still a lot to do to maximise its potential, whether that's through policy changes, partnerships, or further integration with the wider transport network.

Interviewer:

That's interesting. Also do you recommend anyone you think I should speak to who could provide further insight into my research area.

Participant 3:

Umm. Yeah there are a few people I can suggest. I'll compile a list and email it you over.

Interviewer:

That would be great. Thank you so much for your time and insights. This has been incredibly valuable.

Participant 3:

You're welcome. Good luck with the rest of your research.

Participant 4 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer - Kamila:

Hello! Thank you so much for joining me today. How are you doing?

Participant 4:

Hi, Kamila! Yeah, I'm good, thanks. It's been a bit of a hectic week, but I'm glad we could carve out this time. How about you?

Interviewer - Kamila:

I'm good, thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to chat with me. I think your insights will be really valuable for my research.

Participant 4:

No worries at all. It's a great opportunity to share some thoughts.

Interviewer - Kamila:

So, to get us started, you've had a chance to look at the abstract I sent over, right?

Participant 4:

Yeah, I gave it a read. It's interesting stuff, focusing on the impact of transport initiatives like Our Pass. It's an area where there's a lot to unpack, especially with how it aligns with Greater Manchester's broader goals.

Interviewer - Kamila:

Exactly. I'm looking at how schemes like Our Pass can tackle barriers to mobility, particularly for young people, and how that contributes to broader socio-economic outcomes. To start, could you tell me, in your view, what's the main rationale behind Our Pass?

Participant 4:

Well, at its core, Our Pass was created to eliminate barriers. It's about giving young people, especially those aged 16 to 18, the freedom to access education, apprenticeships, or training opportunities without worrying about the cost of getting there. Transport can be a huge barrier, especially if you're from a low-income family or live in a harder-to-reach area of Greater Manchester.

Interviewer - Kamila:

That's so true. Could you elaborate on the kinds of barriers young people faced before Our Pass was introduced?

Participant 4:

Sure. Let's say you're a teenager in, I don't know, maybe Bolton or Wythenshawe. You've got your eyes set on a college or apprenticeship programme in the city center, but the cost of commuting is just too much for your family to manage. Or maybe there's a job interview in Trafford Park, but there's no reliable transport link nearby. Without schemes like Our Pass, these kids might not even bother applying—they're effectively cut off from those opportunities.

It's not just about education or work either. There's also that social and personal growth aspect—things like being able to meet up with friends, participate in sports, or visit cultural events. Our Pass helps open those doors too.

Interviewer - Kamila:

That's a really important point. Do you think this scheme is influencing the travel habits of young people in Greater Manchester?

Participant 4:

Oh, absolutely. What's particularly important here is the role of normalization. If young people grow up in an environment where public transport is accessible, reliable, and even free for a period, they use it. And those habits stick with them.

When I was younger, public transport wasn't seen the same way—it was a bit of a last resort. But I think younger generations are a little bit more tuned in than maybe the likes of myself at that age to sustainability issues. It's more likely to be seen as doing the right thing by investing in programs like this.

Interviewer - Kamila:

That's really interesting—how normalizing public transport could create a lasting cultural shift. Do you see this aligning with Greater Manchester's broader transport goals?

Participant 4:

Definitely. Greater Manchester is moving towards an integrated public transport system— buses, trams, cycling routes, you name it. The idea is to create a seamless network that makes public transport the obvious choice. When schemes like Our Pass are part of that system, it's not just about addressing immediate needs; it's about shaping long-term behaviour.

And it's not just about sustainability. It's about telling young people they don't need to rely on a car to be mobile. That's a powerful message, especially in areas where car ownership is still seen as a necessity.

Interviewer - Kamila:

You've touched on some really important points about accessibility and equity. What do you think about the idea of expanding schemes like Our Pass to address other gaps in mobility?

Participant 4:

That's an interesting thought. I think there's definitely room to look at how it could evolve. For instance, there's this middle ground between just providing free travel and ensuring the network itself works better for everyone. It's not only about financial barriers sometimes the issue is that the network just doesn't connect certain areas efficiently. I'd say the focus needs to be on filling those gaps and making sure it's not just about providing the Pass but about ensuring the system works for the people who use it.

Interviewer - Kamila:

Could you elaborate on what those gaps might look like?

Participant 4:

Yeah, sure. For example, think about someone living in one of the outer boroughs of Greater Manchester. They might have free travel, but if their nearest bus only comes every hour, or if the route doesn't take them anywhere useful, what good is it? I've spoken to people who've said, It's great that my travel is free, but it still takes me two buses and a tram to get to where I need to go. So, it's about improving the whole system alongside offering schemes like this.

Interviewer - Kamila:

So, how do you see that kind of improvement happening?

Participant 4:

It's about integration, really. You can't think of public transport in silos. Buses, trams, walking routes—they all need to work together seamlessly. I've always thought there's potential for small-scale community-led solutions to fill in those gaps. Like, what if you had local shuttle services or partnerships with community organizations to provide that first link to the main network? It could make a massive difference for areas that feel disconnected right now.

Interviewer - Kamila:

Do you think Our Pass could play a role in those kinds of partnerships?

Participant 4:

Oh, definitely. It's already shown that there's an appetite for collaboration. For example, Our Pass has partnered with cultural venues to encourage young people to explore the city. Why

not extend that model to involve local transport providers? Imagine if there were subsidies for minibuses or car-sharing schemes in less connected areas, all tied to Our Pass. It's about thinking creatively and using the framework of the Pass to do more than just remove fares.

Interviewer - Kamila:

It seems like there's a lot of potential for growth. How do you think that ties into Greater Manchester's long-term goals?

Participant 4:

I think it fits perfectly. Greater Manchester has this vision of becoming a place where mobility is seamless, sustainable, and accessible to everyone. Schemes like Our Pass lay the foundation, but the real success will be in how they evolve. It's about constantly asking, "What's next?" Maybe it's connecting rural areas better, or maybe it's about targeting other demographics who face mobility barriers. There's no reason why we can't look at expanding this model to meet a wider range of needs.

Interviewer

Could you elaborate on what last-mile connectivity might look like in practice? How do you think it could be implemented effectively in a city like Greater Manchester?

Participant 4:

Sure, so last-mile connectivity is really about bridging that gap between where someone lives and their nearest public transport hub, whether that's a tram stop, bus station, or even a shared mobility point like a bike or scooter dock. In Greater Manchester, you'd need to tailor it to the area. In urban neighbourhoods, it could mean adding more e-scooter stations near residential blocks or high streets, so people have an easy option to get to the tram.

For suburban or semi-rural areas, it's about improving walking paths and bike lanes—making sure they're well-lit, safe, and direct. You could also look at community shuttle buses to link people in more isolated spots to the main transport network. It's about removing those small but significant barriers that stop people from choosing public transport over driving.

Interviewer -

And do you think residents would take to these options, like e-scooters or bike hire schemes? What might encourage people to make that shift?

Participant 4:

I think so, but it depends on how it's introduced and how convenient it feels to use. Affordability is key—if it's too expensive, people won't bother. And then there's accessibility. You've got to make sure the infrastructure is in place. Imagine trying to ride a bike to a tram stop if the roads are unsafe or there's no designated space to leave it once you're there.

Another thing is awareness. You'd need to launch campaigns showing people how these options fit into their daily lives—make it easy to understand. Something as simple as an app that integrates tram times with available bikes or scooters nearby could go a long way.

Interviewer

That's a really good point. It seems like education and outreach would be a big part of this. How do you think these kinds of initiatives could tie into the broader sustainability goals of Greater Manchester?

Participant 4:

Well, they're almost inseparable, really. If you want people to ditch cars and embrace sustainable travel, the whole journey—from their doorstep to their destination—has to feel seamless. That's where the environmental benefits come in. If people know they can hop on a bike or scooter, catch a tram, and then walk the final stretch without hassle, they're much more likely to make that choice.

It's also about building a habit. If you normalize using these alternatives as part of everyday life, they stop feeling like a novelty and become the default. It's a small shift, but it can have a massive ripple effect—reducing emissions, easing congestion, and even improving public health through active travel.

Interviewer - Kamila:

Do you think there's potential for partnerships with local businesses or community groups to support these efforts?

Participant 4:

Definitely. Local businesses could sponsor bike docks or scooter stations near their premises. It's a win-win—they get increased foot traffic while supporting sustainable initiatives.

Community groups, on the other hand, could help with outreach and education. They'd be vital in ensuring these schemes are tailored to local needs, especially in areas where transport links are weaker.

You could even have employers offering incentives for their staff to use these modes—like subsidies for bike hire or discounted tram passes. The more stakeholders you involve, the stronger and more inclusive the system becomes.

Interviewer - Kamila:
I love that idea of inclusivity. Are there any challenges you foresee in rolling out these kinds of schemes?

Participant 4:
The biggest challenge is ensuring equitable access. It's all well and good adding bike docks or scooters in affluent areas, but what about neighbourhoods with less infrastructure? If you're not careful, these schemes can end up widening existing inequalities. That's where local councils need to step in, working with TfGM to make sure resources are distributed fairly.

Another challenge is perception. Some people still see bikes or scooters as impractical or unsafe, especially in areas with heavy traffic. So, improving infrastructure—dedicated bike lanes, safer crossings—is crucial. And of course, maintenance is key. If people see broken bikes or cluttered scooter docks, they'll lose faith in the system pretty quickly.

Interviewer
That's true. So, looking ahead, how would you measure the success of these initiatives if they were integrated into Greater Manchester's transport strategy?

Participant 4:
I think success would be multi-faceted. You'd want to look at hard data—how many people are actually using these options, what percentage of trips involve active travel, and how much car usage has decreased. But there's also the qualitative side—do people feel more connected? Do they see these options as reliable and convenient?

It's also about long-term impact. Are we seeing better health outcomes from increased walking or cycling? Are emissions levels dropping in key areas? And are we seeing an uptick

in public transport usage as a whole because these last-mile options are making it more accessible? It's about building a picture of how these pieces work together to create a more sustainable, livable city.

Interviewer:

Thank you. That's such a comprehensive view. It really highlights the potential and the challenges of integrating these initiatives.

Interviewer

Just to backtrack slight, how do you see the long-term impact of Our Pass? Will it continue to evolve, or do you think it's already achieved its main goals?

Participant 4:

I think it's a foundation—a starting point. In the long run, schemes like Our Pass need to be integrated into a broader framework. That means combining it with other measures, like improving feeder services or creating more comprehensive travel plans for young people.

It's not just about making transport free; it's about making it intuitive and reliable. If we can get that right, Greater Manchester won't just be more competitive—it'll also be a better place to live.

Interviewer

That's a hopeful vision. Do you have any final thoughts or insights you'd like to share about Our Pass?

Participant 4:

I'd just say that it's a powerful tool for change. By erasing transport barriers, it connects young people to opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. It's not perfect, but it's a step in the right direction.

Interviewer

Thank you so much for your time and insights today. This has been incredibly helpful for my research.

Participant 4:

You're welcome, Kamila. Best of luck with your study. It's an important topic, and I'm glad I could be part of it.

Interviewer

Thank you again. Take care!

Participant 4:

You too. Bye!

Participant 5 Interview Transcript.

Participant 5:

Good morning.

Interviewer:

Hi, good morning.

Participant 5:

I thought it was you. I'm really sorry. I've been dragged out of the house by my dad.

Interviewer:

Oh no, no worries at all. That's fine. I'm fine with the call, don't worry about it.

Participant 5:

Fabulous. I've just dropped him off, so I'm on the way to get into the car. I'm all yours.

Interviewer:

OK, perfect. Would you prefer I call you back in a couple of minutes?

Participant 5:

No, I'm fine if you don't mind the noise and my walk to the car park. I'm ready.

Interviewer:

No problem at all. Right, I'll jump straight in. Firstly, I want to thank you for participating in this. I know it's not something you have to do, so I really appreciate your time.

Participant 5:

Not a problem at all. I'm happy to help.

Interviewer:

Great. I'll start with the first one. From your perspective, what would you say is the underlying rationale for Our Pass?

Participant 5:

So, Greater Manchester is a really diverse area, and public transport here isn't cheap. When Andy Burnham was running for mayor, he spent time speaking directly to people. One story he always tells is about a young girl called Olivia. She was about 14 at the time, and she told him very bluntly: "Nobody wants kids in their venues, and even if we can afford to get there, we can't afford to get in." That stuck with him.

Around the same time, we also had something called the Life Readiness Survey. Schools across Greater Manchester participated, and while many kids expressed enthusiasm and optimism about the future, there were pockets—certain areas you'd probably guess if you know GM—where kids felt completely hopeless. They weren't traveling beyond their neighbourhoods, weren't exploring opportunities, and essentially didn't see the point in trying.

Andy lives in Wigan and Leigh, and he was meeting kids who had never left those areas. For them, traveling into Manchester was unthinkable—it was too expensive, so why even try? He couldn't let that go. It was clear that if we wanted to tackle inequality, exclusion, and those entrenched boundaries, something had to change. That's when the idea of a free travel pass came into play.

Interviewer:

So, it's about addressing both the practical and the psychological barriers to travel?

Participant 5:

Exactly. It's not just about making buses free; it's about creating opportunity and aspiration. Travel habits are another huge factor. Those pivotal years, 16 to 18, are when young people are making big decisions—about education, work, and how they navigate their world. If they get used to public transport then, they're more likely to keep using it as adults.

Then there's the environmental aspect. The fewer cars on the road, the better for everyone. And honestly, the public transport system struggles because fewer people are using it. The fewer passengers, the higher the costs. It's a vicious cycle. Our Pass was designed to break that. It's not perfect, but it's a step in the right direction.

Interviewer:

That's fascinating. And Olivia's story is so powerful. What other problems do you think Our Pass addresses?

Participant 5:

At its core, it's a free travel pass for 16- to 18-year-olds. But honestly, it's so much more than that. I've had kids tell me they've used Our Pass to attend football games for the first time in their lives. Others have accessed cultural opportunities they never thought possible. *The Royal English Royal Ballet did a masterclass for some of our pass holders, so they used the Pass to get into Manchester and then participated in the masterclass with the Royal Ballet. They had never been to the ballet before.* Imagine kids from places like Cheetham Hill or Crumpsall participating in that.

It's not just about leisure, though. One story that sticks with me is a lad from Queens Road, his mum was a single parent with four kids, struggling to make ends meet. He wanted to study fashion and design, but the only college offering the course was in Pendleton. Without Our Pass, the cost of the daily bus journey would've made it impossible. Thanks to the pass, he could follow his passion. For kids in more isolated regions, who still can't access this cultural experience because they're still out of reach, Our Pass remains less accessible. It ultimately strengthens the very gaps it aims to bridge.

Interviewer:

That's such a striking example. It really shows how removing financial barriers can open up so many doors.

Participant 5:

Absolutely. And it's not just about education. I remember another young lad in Salford who told me that before Our Pass, he had to choose between bus fare and lunch. He lived with his grandmother, who was doing her best, but money was tight. No teenager should have to make that kind of choice. Another, young person I worked with in Bolton could finally afford to

save for a laptop for college because they no longer had to spend their weekly allowance on bus fares.

Their situations also reflect a wider issue. When young people grow up in circumstances where even basic needs like transport or food are uncertain, it limits their vision of what's possible. If you can't afford to get out of your neighbourhood, how can you imagine pursuing opportunities that might be just a bus ride away? It's not just about missing out on a better school or college. It's about missing out on seeing the world beyond your immediate surroundings—on feeling like your part of something bigger.

This is where Our Pass really steps in. It's more than just a pass; it's an equaliser. For that boy, it meant he didn't have to make those impossible choices anymore. He could get to school and have lunch. But it's also symbolic, he now has the freedom to dream a little bigger. He's not just thinking about how to get through the day; he's thinking about what he can achieve. That's transformative.

When you think about the ripple effects, it's even more profound. If that young man stays in school, does well, and goes on to college or a job, he's not just changing his own life; he's changing the trajectory for his family and community. That's why initiatives like this are so critical—they don't just address immediate needs; they lay the groundwork for long-term change.

Interviewer:
It's heartbreaking but also uplifting to hear how the scheme is making a tangible difference. I'd like to shift slightly to sustainability. Where do you think Our Pass fits within the sustainability agenda?

Participant 5:
It's an interesting one. The main aim is to encourage public transport use, which ties into reducing car dependency and emissions. But there's also the social sustainability aspect. If we can normalise bus travel for this generation, it becomes part of their routine. More people on buses means better services, and that's a sustainable cycle in itself. Let's put the idea of green travel in the mind and let's encourage them to use different things. So, if you've never been to a football match, there's your free travel. But at the other end of it, you've got a free ticket to get in as well.

Interviewer:

That's a great point. And do you think this could lead to long-term changes in how young people travel?

Participant 5:

Definitely. Many of the young people we spoke to had never even considered using public transport, and it's not just because they didn't need to—it's because they didn't see it as an option. For some, it was a question of comfort and convenience. They had parents who drove them everywhere, so they never had to think about getting on a bus or reading a timetable. For others, the issue was far more profound: they simply didn't go anywhere at all. Their world was so limited by financial, social, or even cultural barriers that the idea of hopping on public transport to explore their city felt completely out of reach.

What Our Pass does, in this context, is so much more than just free travel. It normalises the use of public transport for young people who might otherwise never have considered it. By making it accessible and familiar, you remove that initial fear or hesitation that can be so paralyzing. For someone who has never used public transport, the idea of figuring out how to pay, what route to take, or even how to navigate a bus journey can be intimidating. It's not that they're unwilling; it's that they're unsure.

I remember a young girl who told me she had no idea how to even board a bus—she didn't know where to stand, what to say to the driver, or how to use her pass. It sounds small, but these little uncertainties can feel like massive obstacles when you're 16. By giving them a pass and a reason to use it, you're not just removing a financial barrier—you're empowering them to engage with their city in a way they've never done before.

This shift in mindset is critical because it lays a foundation for independence. When a young person realizes they can navigate the city on their own, it opens up a world of possibilities. Suddenly, they can consider attending a college further away, taking a job they'd have thought was out of reach, or even just exploring cultural and leisure opportunities they never dreamed of experiencing. It's a subtle but profound transformation, taking something that once felt intimidating and turning it into something that feels second nature. However, we can't just rely on the promotional strategies as they end up being a short-term trend and not result in long lasting travel behaviour.

Interviewer:

Do you mind expanding on your last point about short-term trends?

Participant 5:

Yeah sure, for example, initiatives like free travel days or marketing campaigns can encourage people to try public transport, but without addressing the underlying barriers to continued use, such as service reliability, coverage, and integration, you know what I mean, then these efforts risk becoming short-term trends that do not translate into sustained habits. To create long-lasting changes in travel behaviour, promotional strategies must be embedded within a broader framework of systemic improvements and user-centric policies. This includes addressing the "push and pull" factors that influence transport choices. Also, lowering travel costs is important, but if the buses are not punctual, it remains impractical.

Interviewer:

What do you think the partnerships aspect offers in the way of increasing impact?

Participant 5:

Well, we have partnered with GMEX, which is an initiative out of the Combined Authority. It's like a one-stop shop for young people for work experience, employment, and training. They do lots of different events in schools. For this reason, we *work closely with organisations like GMEX to not only promote public transport but also to give young people real-world incentives to use it, like access to unique events or discounted tickets.*

Interviewer:

Do you think these partnerships have helped increase our pass uptake?

Participant 5:

Oh for sure. They have incentivised many young people I've worked with to expand beyond their normal social routines and networks and to actually go out and see what's going on in GM. They have also helped massively market the pass and increase coverage to the intended audience.

Interviewer:

I can imagine. We've talked a lot about social aspects, but economically, what impacts do you think Our Pass has on Greater Manchester?

Participant 5:

It's planting seeds for the future. If young people can access the education or training, they want, they're building the skills they need to contribute to the economy. It's about creating a workforce that's not limited by geography or cost.

There's an immediate impact too. With Our Pass, you've got young people traveling into the city for all sorts of things, going to a coffee shop, catching a football game, visiting a theatre. That's money being spent locally. It's not massive amounts per person, but when you add it up, it's a lot of small businesses benefiting, cafes, corner shops, even big venues like the Trafford Centre.

Interviewer:

Like you said earlier, a ripple effect?

Participant 5:

Exactly! And think about it, once they start exploring, they're getting used to spending time in these places. You go to a football match, you grab some food after, you might pop into a shop, it all adds up. And it's not just boosting businesses; it's about making the city feel more alive, more vibrant. It's young people getting involved in the culture of the city, not just sitting at home feeling like they can't afford to join in.

It's like a loop, isn't it? They start small, maybe just grabbing a coffee or going to a match—but over time, as they grow, they contribute in bigger ways. And it all starts with removing that initial barrier, making it possible for them to actually get out there in the first place. It's not just a bus pass; it's the start of a whole journey, literally and figuratively.

Interviewer:

That's really insightful. I know we're running out of time, we've been speaking for almost an hour, but before we wrap up, is there anyone else you think I should speak to?

Participant 5:

I'll have a chat with some of the people who worked closely with me on this and see if anyone's available. And what about some of the young people who've used Our Pass? ----- would be brilliant. She's sharp, confident, and has been involved from day one. Another

name that comes to mind is ----- his pass expires soon, but he's been a big advocate for the scheme.

Interviewer:

That would be amazing! If you could send me their details, I'd really appreciate it. Thank you so much for your time today—it's been incredibly enlightening.

Participant 5:

No problem at all, Kamila. Best of luck with your PhD and let me know if there's anything else I can help with.

Participant 6 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for joining me today. It's such a pleasure to have someone with your experience and insight involved. Let's start with the basics—could you introduce yourself and your work a little, especially as it relates to young people in Greater Manchester?

Participant 6:

Of course, Kamila. I'm the Chief Executive of -----, based in Salford but operating across Greater Manchester. Our focus is on supporting young people to develop their skills and access opportunities that will help them succeed in the working world. I've also served as a Social Mobility Commissioner, which really shaped my understanding of how barriers—be they financial, social, or structural—limit young people's potential. For me, anything that breaks those barriers down is vital.

On a personal note, I grew up in the care system in Bolton, and I've experienced firsthand what it means to face those barriers. It's interventions like the ones I benefited from that led me to where I am today. So, I'm deeply passionate about creating those same opportunities for others.

Interviewer:

Thank you for sharing that—it's incredibly inspiring. It sounds like you've lived and worked through some of the very challenges we're discussing. Let's dive into Our Pass. From your

perspective, what do you see as its primary rationale? Why is it so critical for young people in Greater Manchester?

Participant 6:

The key purpose of Our Pass, in my view, is breaking down barriers, specifically financial and geographical barriers, that prevent young people from accessing education, training, or employment opportunities. For too long, cost has been a huge obstacle for young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

But it's more than that. It's about showing young people that there's a world beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Too often, I've seen young people grow up in communities where leaving the estate or even their postcode is unimaginable. Our Pass challenges that—it's about making Greater Manchester accessible to everyone, regardless of where they're starting from.

Interviewer:

That's such a critical point—especially about challenging those geographical limitations. You mentioned young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. How do you think schemes like Our Pass address the unique challenges they face?

Participant 6:

You can't overstate how significant cost is for young people from low-income families. But it's not just about the financial aspect—it's also about habits and mindset. If you've never seen your family travel far from home, or if you've never had the chance to explore the city, it creates an invisible barrier. You begin to feel like those opportunities aren't for you.

Our Pass opens those doors. It's not just the bus fare—it's the cultural shift that comes with it. It says to young people, "The city is yours to explore. These opportunities are for you." Whether it's accessing a college course that's miles away or attending a work placement in the city center, that mobility creates a sense of belonging and possibility.

The psychological impact of this shift is significant. With the freedom to travel, a young person can attend a college course tailored to their aspirations, even if it's miles away. They can participate in a work placement that could be the stepping stone to a future career. They can attend events, museums, and cultural venues they may never have thought were within

reach. This isn't just about mobility—it's about fostering a sense of belonging and possibility.

Importantly, initiatives like Our Pass have the potential to disrupt the cycle of isolation that often plagues disadvantaged communities. When young people venture beyond their neighborhoods, they not only access opportunities but also form connections, broaden their horizons, and build confidence. These experiences can have a cascading effect, reshaping how they view the world and their place in it.

Interviewer:
That idea of mobility shaping mindset is so powerful. I wonder—how do you think Greater Manchester's unique context plays into the importance of Our Pass? What makes this region particularly suited to an initiative like this?

Participant 6:
Great question. Greater Manchester is such a diverse and dynamic region. We've got two major cities, eight towns, and a population of nearly three million people. That brings incredible opportunities, but it also creates challenges—especially in terms of inequality. You've got pockets of wealth sitting right next to areas of severe deprivation.

Our devolved government under Andy Burnham has been a game changer. Unlike many other regions, we have the political and legal mechanisms to make initiatives like Our Pass happen. That's huge. Combine that with the geography of Greater Manchester—where you can go from urban centres to rural outskirts in 20 minutes—and you see why mobility is such a big deal here. If you can't afford to travel, you're missing out on so much.

Interviewer
Absolutely. And the age group Our Pass targets—16 to 18-year-olds—seems so intentional. Why do you think this specific age range is critical?

Participant 6:
That age is pivotal—it's when everything's up in the air. You're leaving school, deciding on college, an apprenticeship, or even your first job. For many young people, it's a make-or-break moment. If you can't afford to travel to the college you want or the apprenticeship that suits you, you might settle for less—or miss out entirely.

Beyond that, it's also a time when habits are formed. If we can instil the habit of using public transport, it could stick for life. That's good for them and good for the region's sustainability goals. And for care-experienced young people, who face even greater challenges, schemes like this can be a lifeline. It's why Greater Manchester extends some travel support to care leavers up to 25.

Interviewer:

You've touched on social mobility and integration a bit already, but I'd love to hear more about how you think mobility impacts those broader issues, like moving out of poverty or fostering social cohesion.

Participant 6:

It's massive. Mobility isn't just about getting from A to B—it's about opening your eyes to the possibilities beyond your immediate surroundings. The Trafford Park tram line connects to the MediaCityUK line and is such a huge way of showing young people that we've got the BBC here. You can get work experience, apprenticeships, or even just see what's possible.

Social cohesion is another big one. When young people travel, they're exposed to people from different backgrounds—different races, religions, and economic statuses. That exposure is invaluable. It breaks down stereotypes and builds empathy. I've seen young people from wealthier areas and those from more disadvantaged backgrounds come together through initiatives we run, and it's transformative. They learn from each other, support each other, and create networks that benefit everyone.

Interviewer:

And what about sustainability? How does Our Pass contribute to a more sustainable future, both for young people and the region?

Participant 6:

It's a step in the right direction. First, it encourages the use of public transport over cars, which is a win for the environment. The more young people use buses and trams, the less congested and polluted our roads become. It's about setting those habits early making public transport the default option.

But sustainability isn't just environmental. It's about creating systems that work long-term. If more people use public transport, it becomes more viable financially. That means more routes, better services, and eventually, greener vehicles. And for young people, learning to navigate the city sustainably equips them with skills they'll carry into adulthood.

Interviewer: That's a great point. Do you think young people see it that way? Or is it more about the immediate benefits for them, like free travel?

Participant 6: You know, I think it's a mix. For a lot of young people, the immediate benefit is the big draw—it's free, it's easy, and it opens up opportunities. But I've noticed that this generation, more than any before, is tuned into the idea of sustainability in the broader sense. They care about the environment. They know what's at stake. So, when they choose the bus or tram over a car, even if it's subconscious, there's often an understanding that they're contributing to something bigger.

Interviewer: That's really encouraging. But do you think the infrastructure is there to fully support that shift? Are public transport systems in Greater Manchester ready to handle a big increase in users, especially if schemes like Our Pass keep growing?

Participant 6: That's the challenge, isn't it? We're at this crossroads. The demand is growing, which is great—it shows schemes like Our Pass are working—but the infrastructure needs to keep pace. I mean, some areas are still underserved, and there are parts of Greater Manchester where buses are infrequent or unreliable. If public transport is going to be the go-to option, it has to feel seamless, like you don't even need to think about it. That's where investment comes in—more routes, better timing, and greener, more efficient vehicles.

Interviewer: Speaking of greener vehicles, what's your take on how Our Pass could play into the wider push for electric buses or even other innovations in public transport?

Participant 6: Oh, absolutely. Schemes like Our Pass make the case for those investments. If you've got thousands of young people consistently using the service, it becomes easier to justify the cost of upgrading to electric or hybrid buses. It's not just about meeting environmental goals; it's about creating a better experience for passengers. Nobody wants to ride a bus that's noisy, polluting, and feels outdated. If you make the service modern and enjoyable, people will use it.

Interviewer: And I suppose that also ties into the long-term sustainability of the system. If young people develop a preference for public transport now, they're more likely to stick with it as they grow older, right?

Participant 6: Exactly. Habits are key. If you've been using the bus since you were 16, it becomes second nature. You're less likely to rush out and buy a car the moment you can afford one. That has a ripple effect—less congestion, lower emissions, and a transport system that's less reliant on subsidies because more people are paying to use it. It's a win-win.

Interviewer: Beyond cost, what else do you think would make a difference?

Participant 6: Absolutely. Cost is a big one, but comfort and convenience are just as important. Young people are used to everything being fast and easy—think about how they order food or shop online. Public transport needs to match that. Real-time updates, easy-to-use apps, integrated ticketing—those are the kinds of things that make the system feel modern. And then there's the social aspect.

Interviewer: and what about the cost removal aspect? What does that do for them?

Participant 6: It's given them a chance to actually take up whatever college course they want. At 16, you're on a pittance, so the free travel boosts their wage because they don't have to pay to get there.

Interviewer: Hmmm. Do you think there's room to incorporate more of that community aspect into the system?

Participant 6: Definitely. Imagine if buses or trams had spaces where young people could collaborate or study, or even areas for local art or music. It doesn't have to be a massive overhaul, but little touches like that can make a huge difference. It shifts the perception of public transport from being just functional to being something you actually enjoy using.

Interviewer: And I suppose it would also help with making public transport more inclusive, wouldn't it? A space where people from all walks of life can come together.

Participant 6: Absolutely. Inclusivity is huge. Public transport is one of the few places where people from all backgrounds literally sit side by side. That's powerful. If we can make

that experience positive, it goes beyond just getting people where they need to go—it starts to break down barriers, build connections, and create a more cohesive community.

Interviewer:

This has been such a fascinating discussion. I can't thank you enough for your insight—it's added so much depth to my research. Before we wrap up, is there anyone else you'd recommend I speak to?

Participant 6:

Definitely! You should connect with -----. They work closely with the GM Youth Combined Authority, which was instrumental in shaping Our Pass. If you email me, I'll do my best to make an introduction.

Interviewer:

That would be amazing, thank you. And again, thank you so much for your time and your thoughtful responses. This has been invaluable.

Participant 6:

No problem at all. Best of luck with your PhD—I'm sure it'll be brilliant. Take care, Kamila.

Interviewer:

Thank you! Take care!

Participant 7 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer

First of all, thank you so much for making the time to speak with me today. I completely understand how busy things can get, especially around this time of year, so I really appreciate it.

Participant 7

No problem at all. I'm glad to be here. Sorry for keeping you waiting earlier—I had a bit of a delay.

Interviewer

Just to give you a quick overview, my PhD looks at Greater Manchester's transport system, specifically focusing on two case studies: the Our Pass scheme for 16–18-year-olds and the Trafford Park Metrolink extension. These are both part of the region's 2040 transport strategy. The aim is to understand how transport initiatives can address social and economic inequalities, promote labour market participation, and foster social inclusion.

But beyond the benefits, I'm also interested in where these policies might fall short. I'm trying to explore not just how transport can be used as a vehicle for social and economic change, but also the limitations of this approach. That's where I think your insights will be really valuable.

Participant 7

That sounds fascinating. I know a bit about Our Pass—it's similar to what Transport for London and the Scottish Government have done with their schemes, although I think Scotland's version goes up to age 26, right?

Interviewer

Exactly, yes. And London extended theirs to 18-year-olds at some point. So, with that background in mind, let's dive in. One of the key themes I'm exploring is the importance of aligning transport policy with broader societal goals. In your view, why is it important to combine a transport agenda with a social agenda, as we see with Our Pass and its focus on both mobility and membership benefits?

Participant 7

At its core, transport is an enabler. Schemes like Our Pass highlight this. If you're trying to improve access to education, training, or part-time work, you need to provide a way for people to physically get there. Transport becomes the bridge between where someone is and where the opportunities are. Without that bridge, the opportunities might as well not exist for a lot of people.

Interviewer

That's a really interesting way to put it—transport as the bridge.

Participant 7

Exactly. It's a mindset shift. When transport becomes accessible, it removes a barrier that might have felt insurmountable. Take young people who've never travelled far from their neighborhoods because of cost or logistics. For them, this pass says, "The city is yours. You can explore, learn, and grow here." It's a subtle but powerful message.

Interviewer

And beyond the social benefits, what about the economic angle? How does improving transport access tie into labour market participation?

Participant 7

Oh, it's huge. Let me give you an example—not from Manchester, but from Birmingham. A recent study found that the actual size of the labour force there is much smaller than you'd expect based on population size. Why? Because transport links don't efficiently connect people to jobs. Employers might be hiring, but if potential workers can't get to those jobs, it creates a kind of economic bottleneck. Improving transport connectivity, like with Our Pass or expanding Metrolink, can make a significant difference by widening the talent pool.

Interviewer

So, it's not just about creating jobs but ensuring people can access them?

Participant 7

Exactly. And that's why you can't separate transport policy from economic policy. They need to support each other. If you're trying to create more jobs or improve access to education, transport has to be part of the equation. It's about aligning those agendas so that one policy reinforces the other. *While the tramline funding has achieved its primary goal of improving connectivity, there's untapped potential in using the line to foster deeper cultural and economic collaborations.*

Interviewer

That makes a lot of sense. Let's pivot slightly to micro-mobility—bikes, scooters, and similar options. How do you think these can complement systems like Metrolink, especially in a city like Manchester?

Participant 7

It depends on what you're trying to achieve and the geography of the area. Micro-mobility can play a few roles. It can serve as a feeder system, helping people get to Metrolink stations or bus stops that might otherwise be too far to walk. Alternatively, it can relieve congestion on busy routes by offering an alternative mode of travel. And then there are the added benefits, like improved health from cycling or walking and reduced emissions. The effectiveness of micro-mobility depends on geography. In areas without reliable fixed transport infrastructure, solutions like bikes and scooters can bridge gaps, but these options must be accessible to all.

Interviewer

So, it's a flexible solution depending on the specific needs of an area?

Participant 7

Exactly. The key is to integrate it thoughtfully. You don't want bikes and scooters competing with public transport—you want them complementing it. For example, strategically placing bike docks near tram stops or student housing could encourage people to combine modes of travel rather than relying on cars or taxis.

Interviewer

That's a good segue into spatial planning. When it comes to infrastructure like the Trafford Park Metrolink, how critical is it to consider spatial placement?

Participant 7

The success of any public transport system lies in its ability to connect people to the destinations they value most, such as workplaces, schools, healthcare facilities, or leisure venues. Infrastructure planning, therefore, should not exist in a vacuum but as part of a holistic spatial strategy designed to serve community needs effectively. This is exemplified by projects like the Trafford Park Metrolink extension, which goes beyond simply linking residential areas to a shopping centre. Instead, it embodies a deliberate effort to connect the economic and social nodes of Greater Manchester, thereby fostering accessibility, economic growth, and social inclusion.

A robust spatial strategy ensures that transport infrastructure is developed with purpose, targeting areas of high demand and potential impact rather than simply adding lines or stops

for the sake of expansion. The placement of infrastructure must align with where people live, work, and engage in their daily lives. This strategic alignment reduces commuting times, eases congestion, and enhances the attractiveness of public transport as a practical alternative to private car use. Importantly, it also supports regional economic development by increasing access to job markets and driving footfall to local businesses.

However, even the best spatial planning can be undermined by issues of reliability. Interchanges between modes of transport, such as tram-to-bus or bus-to-train transitions, are a critical juncture where the user experience can either be reinforced or break down entirely. If connections are seamless and dependable, they bolster the overall system's usability. In terms of our pass, it's great that young people save on fares, but if buses in their area run infrequently or don't connect them to key opportunities, the financial mobility benefit is diminished. On the other hand, unreliable interchanges introduce uncertainty, increasing frustration and potentially driving users back to private cars or other less sustainable modes of transport.

Reliability is not just a technical issue but a psychological one. Passengers need to trust that their journey will proceed as planned, without long waits or missed connections. When that confidence erodes, even an otherwise well-designed system can lose its appeal. Frequent delays insufficiently coordinated schedules, or poor communication can transform a carefully planned spatial strategy into an underutilized network.

Thus, infrastructure development and operational reliability must go hand in hand. A strategic approach to spatial planning must be coupled with ongoing investment in system reliability—synchronizing timetables, minimizing delays, and providing real-time updates to passengers. This integrated approach ensures that transport systems are not only well-placed but also well-used, maximizing their economic, social, and environmental benefits for the community.

Interviewer

Yes, it's the ability to plan your journey confidently.

Participant 7

When it comes to the Trafford Park Metrolink line, stop frequency is a key consideration that shapes user experience and perceptions of efficiency. Adding more stops can provide greater access and convenience, especially in a densely populated or commercially vibrant area like

Trafford Park. For some users, this increased accessibility is a significant advantage, as it brings more destinations within easy reach. However, there's a trade-off: more stops inevitably slow down the overall journey, which can be perceived as a disadvantage by others, particularly commuters focused on minimising travel time.

What stands out, though, is the finding that reliability often outweighs concerns about journey duration. For many passengers, predictability is the defining feature of a good transit system. If the Trafford Park line consistently operates on schedule, passengers are more likely to tolerate slightly longer travel times because they can plan their journeys with confidence. Whether they are heading to work, shopping at the Trafford Centre, or attending a football match at Old Trafford, knowing that the tram will arrive and depart as expected reduces stress and enhances the overall experience.

This insight highlights the importance of balancing accessibility with efficiency while prioritizing reliability. For the Trafford Park line, ensuring that services run on time, even with multiple stops, can help cement its role as a dependable link in Greater Manchester's transport network. By maintaining consistency, the line can cater to diverse user needs— whether they value access, speed, or simply a predictable commute.

Interviewer

So reliability is really the core factor in minimising dissatisfaction with interchanges.

Participant 7

It is. If you're building or managing a system, reliability is the foundation. Without it, you're losing passengers who might otherwise be willing to put up with other inconveniences.

Interviewer

Let's shift to Our Pass and its financial sustainability. While the scheme eliminates monetary barriers for young people, I keep wondering about its longevity. Can it remain free? And if it were extended to older age groups, would it still be feasible?

Participant 7

That's an excellent question, and one that's come up in similar contexts. ------ and I wrote a book that examined this in the case of free travel for older people. The debate centred on the balance between social benefits and financial costs.

Interviewer

I think I cited that!

Participant 7

Yes, that's right! It's always nice to hear when our work is being used—thank you. What we found in that case was that free travel undeniably had significant social benefits for older people—better access to services, reduced isolation, all of that. But the costs were substantial.

Interviewer

So, what did you propose as an alternative?

Participant 7

We suggested something like a nominal fare—say 50p per journey. That way, you generate some revenue to reinvest into the transport system. This could go toward better buses, increased frequency, improved reliability—all of which benefit everyone, including older users.

Interviewer

And for younger people, do you think the same argument applies?

Participant

It's a bit more nuanced for younger users. With the cost of travel no longer a concern, many young people now have the freedom to explore work placements, apprenticeships, or further studies they once deemed inaccessible. That's critical. If you're in a devolved system like Greater Manchester under Andy Burnham, you can integrate transport policy with broader economic and social policies. But for places without such integration—where budgets are fragmented—it's much harder to sustain. However, if there's no reliable service or if routes are limited, free travel alone won't attract users—time and distance still matter.

Interviewer

So, it's really about seeing transport as part of a broader system, not an isolated cost centre.

Participant 7

Precisely. And even if financial pressures mean introducing a small fare, it has to be minimal—just enough to offset costs without undermining the accessibility goals. The trade-off is always between maintaining affordability and ensuring long-term viability.

Interviewer

Another theme in my thesis is transit leverage—encouraging people to shift from private vehicles to public transport by emphasizing the benefits. How important do you think it is to promote these advantages?

Participant 7

Promoting transit leverage—the shift from private vehicles to public transport—is crucial, particularly in the context of infrastructure like the Trafford Park Metrolink line. In the UK, we face unique challenges compared to many of our European neighbours, where public transport is normalized as a practical and efficient option for everyone, regardless of status. Here, cars are often viewed as symbols of independence and success, making the cultural shift to public transport a more complex challenge.

The Trafford Park line offers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the practical benefits of public transport. It connects key economic and social hubs, such as the Trafford Centre, Old Trafford, and employment zones, making it a competitive alternative to driving. For transit leverage to succeed, we need to emphasize these benefits: reduced congestion, lower costs, convenience, and environmental impact.

One key advantage the Trafford Park line can highlight is the ability to avoid the stress of parking—a significant issue in areas like the Trafford Centre during peak times. Similarly, it allows passengers to use their travel time productively, whether catching up on emails or simply relaxing, which is a stark contrast to the concentration and effort required for driving.

However, making these advantages resonate with people requires more than just infrastructure; it demands a shift in perception. This means not only providing reliable, clean, and efficient services but also reframing public transport as a modern, desirable, and sustainable choice. The cultural shift observed in cities like Frankfurt and Nice, where public transport is embraced by people from all walks of life, shows that such a transition is possible.

The Trafford Park line has the potential to be a flagship example of how well-designed public transport can meet diverse needs and challenge the car-centric mindset. By combining high-quality service with effective marketing of its advantages, the line could attract a broader demographic and set a precedent for other regions in the UK to follow.

Interviewer

How do we shift that mindset?

Participant 7

Awareness is key. Studies—like those on smarter choices—show that simply informing people about public transport options can lead to significant behaviour changes. There's often a latent demand; people just don't realize the alternatives exist.

Interviewer

And does quality matter here—like the high-end buses you mentioned earlier?

Participant 7

Absolutely. Services like Stagecoach Gold, with leather seats and free Wi-Fi, are examples of how you can make public transport appealing to those who might otherwise stick to their cars. It's about creating a positive perception, not just of the cost but of the experience.

Interviewer

And tying this back to Our Pass, how do you think it's shaping travel habits in young people?

Participant 7

That's an interesting one. There's research on how childhood travel habits influence adult behaviour. If kids see buses as inconvenient or unpleasant, they're more likely to ditch public transport as soon as they can afford a car. With Our Pass, there's an opportunity to flip that narrative—to show young people that public transport is a viable, even preferable, option.

Interviewer

So, it's about building positive associations during those formative years.

Participant 7

Exactly. And there are ways to reinforce that. For instance, apps that reward sustainable travel—like offering points for bus use that can be redeemed for coffee—are great tools for encouraging long-term habits.

Interviewer

It's about maintaining those habits even after the free period ends.

Participant 7

Yes, whether it's through continued convenience, additional incentives, or the intrinsic benefits of public transport, the goal is to make the transition seamless. And, as we discussed earlier, the better the overall system—coverage, reliability, safety—the more likely people are to stick with it.

Interviewer

Speaking of safety, what's your take on making public transport feel safer, especially for women?

Participant 7

That's a complex issue. Engineering solutions—better lighting, CCTV, visible staff—are a start. But deeper cultural problems, like misogyny, can't be fixed with infrastructure alone. It requires sustained social and policy interventions.

Interviewer

It's a perception issue too, isn't it?

Participant 7

Absolutely. Perception is reality. Even with visible safety measures, a threatening environment—or just the absence of other people—can make someone feel unsafe. That's why increasing overall ridership helps—it creates a natural sense of security through numbers.

Interviewer

It sounds like consistent policy and cultural shifts are essential.

Participant 7

They are. Take the Netherlands and cycling—it wasn't always a cycling nation. It took decades of policy and infrastructure investment to normalize it. Public transport can follow a similar trajectory with sustained effort.

Interviewer

That's a great example of long-term change. Thank you so much for your insights. This has been incredibly helpful for my thesis, and I'm excited to integrate these points.

Participant 7

You're very welcome. Best of luck with the final stages and let me know how it all turns out.

Interviewer

Will do. Thank you again!

Participant 8 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer

Hello, is this Peter? Hi Peter, it's Kamila. I'm the PhD student who contacted you regarding the interview.

Participant 8

Yes, that's fine. I was expecting your call.

Interviewer

Thank you for agreeing to participate. How are you? That's great to hear. I'll jump straight in if that's okay. How much time do you have? Just so I can be mindful of it.

Participant 8

About half an hour.

Interviewer

Perfect, that's plenty. Let me give you a brief overview of my research. I'm doing a PhD on transport systems in Greater Manchester, focusing on two initiatives: the Our Pass scheme and the Trafford Park Metrolink line.

Participant 8

To start with some general context, it's worth noting the background of bus services in Manchester, as they represent the majority of public transport trips. Before COVID, Stagecoach, which covers the southern part of the region, generally outperformed First Group, which operated in the north.

Interviewer

Yes, I've noticed that difference.

Participant 8

First Group sold parts of their operation to Rotala and Go Ahead, focusing on a smaller area around Wigan, plus the guided busway service to Leigh. The disparity partly reflects different levels of prosperity between North and South Manchester, but it's also influenced by the operators' policies. For example, First Group tended to push up fares more aggressively than Stagecoach, resulting in weekly bus fares being notably lower in South Manchester. These regional differences in the bus industry are worth bearing in mind.

Interviewer

Absolutely. I live in South Manchester and often travel to the city centre and the north. The price discrepancies are glaring and have informed some of my discussions on transport inequalities in the PhD. Moving on, are you familiar with the Our Pass scheme in Greater Manchester?

Participant 8

I'm aware of similar schemes in other areas, but feel free to explain its specifics.

Interviewer

Of course. Our Pass offers free bus travel for 16 to 18-year-olds and discounted tram fares during certain times. It also includes membership benefits. From your perspective, how effective do you think such a scheme is in addressing social exclusion among young people?

Participant 8

It should have a significant impact. Young people, particularly those in this age group, often have limited financial resources, as many aren't in full-time employment or well-paid jobs. By reducing costs, the scheme can make education, employment, and leisure activities more accessible. This age group is highly price-sensitive, so even modest reductions in travel costs can lead to noticeable changes in mobility patterns. However, to deliver equitable social inclusion, we need to address service gaps and ensure consistent connectivity across all areas, not just urban centres.

Interviewer

Could you develop the last point?

Participant 8

In cities, public transport is usually more frequent and easier to access, which is great for people living there. But that's not the case for those in more remote areas or places with fewer services. Even with a free travel pass like Our Pass, young people in these areas might still struggle to get to school, work, or social activities if buses don't run often enough or don't match up with their schedules. If a bus only comes every hour or doesn't run at the right times, it can make the idea of "free and accessible travel" feel a bit pointless.

To fix this, there needs to be a focus on improving services in areas that don't have enough. This could mean adding more bus routes, running buses more often, or creating better links to key transport hubs like Metrolink stations. It's also important to think about how people get to and from these stops, things like safe walking paths or bike routes can make a big difference for those first and last parts of a journey.

Another way to help is by using tech solutions like journey-planning apps. These apps can help people plan trips that involve different types of transport, which is especially useful in places where buses or trains don't run often. Knowing exactly when your next bus or tram is coming can make travel feel a lot less stressful.

At the end of the day, making transport fair and accessible for everyone means ensuring that where you live doesn't decide what opportunities you can reach. It's not just about building more infrastructure; it's about addressing the gaps in the system so that everyone has a fair chance to get where they need to go. When that happens, schemes like Our Pass can truly make a difference, giving all young people the ability to connect with education, jobs, and everything else life has to offer.

Interviewer

That's interesting. The scheme also represents a collaborative policy, using public transport to address wider societal goals. How effective do you think such an approach is?

Participant 8

It makes a lot of sense because the goal of public transport is to provide access to opportunities, education, work, or leisure, not travel for its own sake. Schemes like Our Pass are particularly impactful because they integrate transport policy with broader societal goals, using a collaborative approach that extends beyond mobility alone. For example, Our Pass not only offers free travel for young people but also includes partnerships with cultural,

recreational, and educational institutions to provide membership benefits such as discounted or free access to activities and events. T*here have been instances where young individuals were unaware that these bundled opportunities were available specifically to them. This shows how important it is to use collaborative policy in instances where disadvantaged young people might not have the same digital access for example to their counterparts to see what's on offer to them.*

It's also worth looking at what kinds of trips the scheme is actually encouraging. While it's great that more young people are using public transport, most of these trips are new ones or expanded options, rather than replacing car journeys—aside from the occasional parental lift. So, while it does a good job of making travel easier and tackling social exclusion, it might not have a huge impact on reducing car use or easing congestion.

What really stands out about Our Pass is how it goes beyond just getting people from A to B. With perks like free entry to sports events, theatre tickets, and educational workshops, it's about more than transport—it's creating a whole package that makes public transport genuinely appealing to young people. This not only gets more people riding buses and trams now but also helps build habits for the future, encouraging sustainable travel long-term.

For the scheme to reach its full potential, though, it can't stand alone. Things like more reliable services, better route coverage, and safe ways to get to bus stops or tram stations are essential. Keeping the partnerships with cultural and educational groups going is also key to keeping it exciting and relevant. Our Pass shows how a joined-up approach to policymaking can tackle multiple challenges at once, offering both practical benefits and wider social impact.

Interviewer

Thank you. Let's move to another area—light rail transit. I know you've written about this in the past. How do you see light rail integrating with micro-mobility options like shared bikes or e-scooters to support sustainability goals?

Participant 8

In principle, micro-mobility options can extend the catchment areas of light rail stations beyond what people would typically find within a comfortable walking distance. For example, they can be especially useful in city centres, where density and activity levels are

higher. However, in suburban areas, they're less effective unless complemented by secure cycle parking to support people using their own bikes.

Interviewer

What challenges do you foresee in implementing such systems effectively?

Participant 8

One challenge is ensuring a high density of shared bikes or scooters to make the system convenient. Another is the charging infrastructure, particularly for e-scooters. For suburban areas, the lack of shared bikes often limits their use, emphasizing the need for infrastructure like secure cycle parking.

Interviewer

That's very insightful. Shifting focus slightly, have you observed how the spatial placement of public transport can impact local economies?

Participant 8

It depends on the local context. In well-established urban areas, transport hubs often act as focal points for shops and services, becoming community anchors. Successful examples combine transport with mixed land uses, enhancing the area's economic and social vibrancy beyond just peak commuting hours.

Interviewer

Regarding interchanges, some research suggests passengers often perceive them negatively. Do you think this perception applies to the Trafford Park line?

Participant 8

Interchanges can be a barrier due to the inconvenience and unpredictability they introduce. For example, combining bus and light rail can add uncertainty about overall travel time. However, appropriate fare structures—such as free transfers—can reduce this penalty. Trams tend to have fewer interchange penalties compared to buses because they operate within well-labelled, predictable environments.

Interviewer

Do you think the Trafford Park line adequately addresses the needs of the area, particularly as it transitions from industrial to retail and leisure?

Participant 8

It serves an important role, especially given the retail and office developments in Trafford Park. However, its effectiveness depends on where users are coming from. If most are traveling from areas not well-connected by trams, they may continue using cars or buses. Mapping the wider bus network could provide additional insights into how it integrates with the Metrolink.

Interviewer

That's a good point. Returning to Our Pass, what travel behaviour trends do you expect to emerge in the short and medium term from its implementation?

Participant 8

In the short term, you'll likely see increased leisure and social travel. Over time, it could encourage young people to explore education and employment opportunities further afield. However, compensating operators for revenue loss and managing peak-time capacity could pose challenges.

Interviewer

Do you think expanding such schemes to other age groups would be beneficial?

Participant 8

Potentially, but funding is a major constraint. Current concessions, like free travel for pensioners, already take up significant resources. It's a question of equity—targeting support where it's most needed, such as low-income families or working-age individuals with children.

Interviewer

Finally, where do you see these initiatives—Our Pass and the Trafford Park line—within Greater Manchester's 2040 sustainability strategy?

Participant 8

Both align with sustainability goals by reducing car dependency. Light rail, in particular, is effective for diverting car trips. However, buses remain the backbone of the system. Improvements like bus priority lanes could have an even greater impact on reducing emissions and increasing reliability.

Interviewer

Thank you so much for your insights, Peter. This has been incredibly valuable for my research.

Participant 8

You're very welcome. Best of luck with your work, and let me know how it progresses.

Interviewer

Thank you! Take care.

Participant 9 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer Kamila: Hi, can you see me?

Participant 9: No, I can't, but I can hear you fine. Must be my old computer causing issues again.

Interviewer: That's alright. As long as we can hear each other clearly, that's what matters. Let's jump in. Thanks so much for taking the time to join me for this interview. Did you get a chance to read through the abstract I sent?

Participant 9: Yes, I did. I found it interesting, and I'm happy to contribute.

Interviewer: Great to hear. Let's begin with Our Pass, the scheme offering free travel for young people in Greater Manchester. Are you familiar with it, and what do you think its impact has been?

Participant 9: Yes, I'm familiar. It's an excellent initiative for 16 to 18-year-olds. By covering travel costs, it frees young people from the financial constraints of mobility. Parents benefit too, as they often bear the responsibility of funding their children's transport. It's a real relief for families on tight budgets.

Interviewer: I agree. Removing barriers to mobility can open up opportunities. Do you think it's changing how young people perceive public transport?

Participant 9: Absolutely. It normalizes the idea of public transport as a reliable and practical choice. For example, the inclusion of extras like gym memberships or discounted

event tickets goes beyond mere transportation. It integrates public transport into their broader lifestyle, making it more appealing.

Interviewer: That's a great point. Do you think there are parallels to similar initiatives elsewhere? For instance, programs that have managed to change cultural habits around transport?

Participant 9: Definitely. Take Gordon Brown's off-peak free bus travel for pensioners. While not everyone needed it, those who relied on it saw significant benefits. It's similar to Our Pass—targeted to a specific group but with broader societal implications. Another example is Cologne, Germany. Students there were offered cheap public transport during their studies. That habit of using public transport carried over into adulthood, embedding it as a norm.

Interviewer: It's interesting you bring up Cologne. Do you think the same cultural shift is likely here in the UK, given our reliance on cars?

Participant 9: It's possible, but it will take consistent effort. In the UK, many young people already face barriers to car ownership, high insurance premiums, stricter tests, and growing environmental awareness. These factors align with Our Pass's goals, but for it to succeed, the transport system itself must be reliable, accessible, and convenient.

Interviewer: Absolutely. And with that in mind, let's shift to the Metrolink. How do you think the Trafford Park line could better integrate with micro-mobility options, like e-scooters or bike hire?

Participant 9: Integration is vital. Without it, public transport is at a disadvantage compared to cars. In London, for example, you can move seamlessly between buses, trains, and the Underground using a single ticket. In Greater Manchester, we're not there yet. The introduction of bus franchising could change that by creating a more cohesive system.

Interviewer: What would a successful integration look like to you? Could you give an example?

Participant 9: Sure. Imagine this: you leave your house, and there's a bike or scooter docked right outside. You take it to the nearest tram stop in five minutes, park it, and hop on the

tram. That kind of convenience encourages people to leave their cars at home. But for this to work, we need proper cycling infrastructure, like safe bike lanes, and an integrated payment system.

Interviewer: It sounds like convenience and safety are key. But what about areas that don't have high population densities? How can micro-mobility work there?

Participant 9: That's a challenge. Micro-mobility thrives in urban areas because they're denser and more lucrative. Suburban and rural areas often miss out. For these areas, reliable public transport is even more critical. Without proper connectivity, micro-mobility alone won't solve the issue.

Interviewer: And there's the environmental aspect too. What about concerns over waste from things like single-use scooters or poorly maintained bike stations?

Participant 9: That's a valid concern. Sustainable design and maintenance of these systems are crucial. For instance, companies could prioritise reusable or recyclable components and establish repair programs to reduce waste. The environmental benefits of micro-mobility must outweigh any negative impact.

Interviewer: Let's move to interchanges. They're often cited as a barrier to using public transport. Do you think the Trafford Park line's design, with its many stops, addresses or exacerbates this issue?

Participant 9: Interchange penalties are a major barrier. If switching between modes of transport is inconvenient or unpleasant, people are more likely to stick with their cars. Cornbrook is a good example. It's exposed to the weather, uncomfortable, and doesn't function as a terminal station. People don't want to wait there, especially during bad weather.

Interviewer: What could make interchanges like Cornbrook more user-friendly?

Participant 9: For starters, better shelter, real-time information screens, and integrated ticketing would help. It's about making the experience as seamless as possible. If the interchange process is clunky or unpleasant, it pushes people away from public transport. The key is to design with the user's needs in mind.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate further on how the design of the Trafford Park line, apart from its lack of direct city-centre access, impacts its effectiveness? Are there other design features or decisions that you think hold it back?

Participant 9: Beyond its lack of direct city-centre access, there are a few other design choices that impact its overall functionality and appeal. One major issue is the placement and spacing of stops. While having frequent stops might seem convenient, it can actually slow down travel times significantly. On a line like this, which serves both industrial and commercial areas, the balance between accessibility and efficiency is crucial. If the stops are too close together, the line feels sluggish and discourages use, especially for people traveling longer distances.

Another factor is the way the stations themselves are designed. Many of them lack adequate facilities, like sheltered waiting areas, clear signage, or real-time service information. For someone unfamiliar with the system, navigating it can be frustrating. A well-designed station isn't just a place to board or exit; it should feel integrated into its surroundings, making it easy to transition between transport modes or connect to nearby amenities. When this isn't the case, it can make the system feel disconnected and harder to use.

Also, the visual and functional design of the line doesn't seem to prioritize attracting discretionary riders—people who have the choice between public transport and driving. For example, park-and-ride facilities are limited or poorly located. If someone lives just outside the tram's catchment area, they're likely to drive all the way rather than partially relying on public transport.

Also, the line's integration with walking and cycling infrastructure is inconsistent. For a tram line to be truly effective, the surrounding environment must support active travel modes. Safe pedestrian crossings, well-lit pathways, and secure bike parking should be the norm around each station. Without these, the line feels isolated rather than part of a cohesive transport network.

Interviewer: thanks for sharing that insight. You mentioned that station design could impact usability. How do you think these design aspects could be improved, especially for the Trafford Park line?

Interviewer: Hmm thanks for those points. You've mentioned some structural and design challenges. Do you think transport infrastructure impacts economic development as well?

Participant 9: Absolutely. Transport and land-use planning should go hand in hand, but they often don't. Look at Trafford Park—the Metrolink extension came 22 years after the Trafford Centre opened. By then, people's travel habits were entrenched, and it became harder to shift them to public transport.

Contrast this with MediaCityUK, where the Metrolink was extended before the BBC moved in. When infrastructure aligns with development, you see the benefits immediately. It connects people to jobs, broadens the labour market, and signals to investors that the city is prepared for sustainable growth.

Interviewer: One last question. Do you think Our Pass has the potential to create long-term changes in travel behaviour?

Participant 9: Yes, but it depends on the system's reliability. If young people have positive experiences with public transport during their formative years, they're more likely to use it as adults. Our Pass introduces them to the system, but for it to stick, it has to be consistent and accessible. If someone grows up in an area where buses are infrequent or unreliable, they'll likely turn to cars once they can afford them.

This isn't just about free travel, it's about building a culture of trust in public transport. If that's achieved, Our Pass could play a key role in reducing car dependency and supporting sustainable urban mobility.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your insights. Would you like me to send you the final thesis once it's complete?

Participant 9: Yes, I'd appreciate that. Best of luck with your research.

Participant 10 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Hi, can you hear me?

Participant 10: Yes, I can.

Interviewer: Great. Thank you for joining. Just to provide some background, I'm doing a PhD on transport initiatives in Greater Manchester, focusing on Our Pass and the Trafford Park Metrolink line. I'm exploring social and economic impacts, particularly in relation to social exclusion and spatial planning. Can you tell me more about your expertise in this area?

Participant 10: I work on transport strategy and policy, particularly in areas like climate change and transport social equity. I've also worked on accessibility planning, which looks at how transport intersects with urban design.

Interviewer: That's great. Let's start with Our Pass. It's a travel card offering free bus travel for 16 to 18-year-olds, along with discounts on activities like gym memberships and cultural events. What do you think about this kind of initiative?

Participant 10: Initiatives like this are incredibly important for breaking down barriers to transport access. Transport is really there to help you carry out the activities you want to do in your life. If travel is cheaper for a group, and access to the activity is cheaper, it helps you use the transport network. For young people, this is especially significant because it removes a key obstacle—cost. It allows them to engage with their community and participate in activities that enhance their quality of life.

Participant 10: The bundling approach is clever. For example, if the gym is cheaper, and travel to the gym is free or discounted, it's more likely they'll use both. It's a holistic way to promote not just mobility but participation in life-improving activities. This is a model that could be replicated in other cities.

Interviewer: Does it have long-term potential for influencing behaviour?

Participant 10: Absolutely. When young people get used to using public transport, rather than relying on cars, it can establish lasting habits. At 16 to 18, they're at a formative stage, transitioning to adulthood. If public transport becomes a reliable and normal part of their routine, it could reduce car dependency in the long-term. Environmentally, this aligns with sustainable goals, and socially, it broadens their horizons, helping them access education, work, and leisure opportunities more easily.

Interviewer: How about its role in addressing inequality?

Participant 10: Inequality is a huge factor here. For wealthier families, participation in extracurricular activities or cultural events is often a given. But for lower-income families, costs create significant barriers. Providing cheaper transport and access to activities encourages young people to use the network, allowing them to participate in their community and engage with activities that improve their quality of life. It's not just about mobility—it's about inclusion and opportunity.

Interviewer: Moving on to governance and partnerships, initiatives like Our Pass often require collaboration between various stakeholders, local councils, transport providers, education institutions, and even cultural organizations. How important do you think governance and partnerships are in ensuring the success of such schemes?

Participant 10: Governance and partnerships are absolutely critical for the success of a scheme like Our Pass. Without a strong governance structure and effective collaboration between stakeholders, the initiative could easily lose direction or fail to meet its objectives. For instance, local councils need to work closely with transport operators to ensure the network has the capacity to handle increased ridership during peak times. This might involve coordinating schedules or increasing the frequency of services in key areas where young people travel the most, such as routes serving colleges or large residential neighbourhoods.

Partnerships with cultural and leisure organizations are equally vital. Offering discounted access to gyms, theatres, and football clubs is a brilliant way to make the scheme more appealing, but it requires ongoing collaboration to keep those benefits relevant and accessible. For example, if a popular local theatre offers free or discounted entry for Our Pass holders, it not only benefits young people but also creates new audiences for the theatre, building a mutually beneficial relationship.

From a governance perspective, having a central coordinating body, such as Transport for Greater Manchester, helps to streamline these collaborations. Imagine a scenario where there's no clear leadership; transport operators might focus solely on ticketing logistics, while cultural partners might prioritize their own promotion, and the councils might only think about funding. A lack of coordination could result in disjointed communication and diminished impact for the scheme.

Another aspect of governance is the financial sustainability of the program. Partnerships with private companies could help offset some of the costs. For example, a collaboration with local businesses to sponsor parts of the initiative, like branded buses or promotional discounts for pass users, can create a revenue stream without placing the full burden on public funding. In a city like Manchester, which has a vibrant sports and cultural scene, there's a real opportunity to involve corporate sponsors in a way that aligns with the goals of the pass.

Interviewer: what do you think good governance structures look like in GM?

Participant 10: Umm.. Good governance ensures accountability. Metrics like ridership data, user satisfaction, and economic impact should be regularly reviewed to assess the scheme's effectiveness. This kind of feedback loop is essential for refining and expanding the program. For instance, if data shows that a particular college or neighbourhood has low uptake, targeted campaigns or improvements to service coverage in that area could help address the gap. Governance and partnerships are not just an administrative necessity, they're the foundation of a successful, sustainable initiative like Our Pass. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yes, incredibly insightful. Thank you. Moving on to the Trafford Park Metrolink line, what do you think about its design and placement?

Participant 10: The line's design is strategic in some ways. We aimed to strategically position each stop along the Trafford Park Extension Line to fulfil a distinct purpose, some located near key retail hubs, others adjacent to manufacturing areas or residential neighborhoods. We evaluated various station placements to determine which locations would benefit the most from heightened foot traffic, ensuring that the line effectively enhanced local commerce and job growth. It's an example of transport planning trying to integrate with urban development.

Participant 10: That said, the line doesn't connect directly to the city centre, which is a drawback. The city centre is the hub for employment, shopping, and entertainment. Without that connection, its potential is limited. The surrounding environment is also a factor—low-density areas like industrial zones or sprawling retail spaces don't naturally encourage high ridership. Ideally, these areas should be developed with mixed-use, high-density planning to better support public transport.

Interviewer: How could micro-mobility integrate with the Metrolink system?

Participant 10: Micro-mobility options like e-scooters and shared bikes have a lot of potential, particularly for first- and last-mile journeys. If someone lives a few miles from a tram stop, having access to a bike or scooter could make public transport much more viable. Strategically placing hubs near residential areas and tram stops could widen the network's catchment area significantly.

Participant 10: However, it's essential to ensure these systems are equitable. They shouldn't just cater to urban centres but also suburban and lower-density areas. Infrastructure like bike lanes is also critical for safety. Integration with public transport needs to be seamless, not just physically but also digitally shared ticketing and apps could make the experience more user-friendly.

Interviewer: Interchanges are often seen as barriers to public transport. How do you view their role?

Participant 10: Interchanges can be a significant deterrent. People tend to perceive the time spent waiting for a connection as more frustrating than the same amount of time spent traveling. If the interchange involves multiple modes, like a bus and a tram, it can feel even more inconvenient. This is a major psychological barrier that pushes people toward using cars.

Participant 10: To address this, interchanges need to be as seamless as possible. Integrated ticketing systems, real-time information displays, and comfortable waiting areas can make a big difference. For major destinations like the Trafford Centre, ensuring multiple direct connections from various parts of the city would also help. The goal should be to minimize perceived inconvenience and make public transport the more attractive option.

Interviewer: What about the economic benefits of the Trafford Park line?

Participant 10: Public transport systems like this can deliver significant economic benefits by connecting people to key destinations—whether it's the Trafford Centre, industrial zones, or office parks. High-capacity systems like Metrolink can move far more people than cars, with less congestion and environmental impact. This makes areas more accessible and attractive to businesses and investors.

Participant 10: However, to maximise these benefits, the surrounding urban planning must support the transport network. High-density, mixed-use development around stops would increase ridership and economic activity. Without this, you risk underutilizing the potential of the line. For example, in cities like Copenhagen and Vienna, tram and metro stops are often surrounded by residential buildings, offices, and amenities like cafes, grocery stores, and schools within walking distance. This creates a self-sustaining ecosystem where public transport becomes the obvious choice for daily commuting, shopping, and leisure.

If a stop serves an area dominated by low-density industrial estates or retail parks surrounded by large parking lots, it becomes difficult to attract riders. For instance, imagine a commuter who lives in a residential area far from the Trafford Park line. If their nearest stop is surrounded by industrial units with no residential or recreational facilities nearby, they might decide it's easier to drive directly to their destination.

Interviewer: Can you give more context to this for GM?

Participant 10: In Greater Manchester, there's potential to integrate transport hubs with urban renewal projects. For example, converting vacant land near tram stops into affordable housing complexes, co-working spaces, or public parks could make these areas more vibrant and increase foot traffic. Similarly, if stops near the Trafford Centre had more pedestrian-friendly pathways and bike-friendly infrastructure leading to adjacent neighbourhoods, it could expand the catchment area of the line. This kind of mixed-use development makes the transport system not just a tool for mobility but a catalyst for economic and social vibrancy.

Interviewer: Hmmm. That's interesting. Could you give another example?

Participant 10: Another example could involve creating destination zones around tram stops, where cultural or community hubs are built. A stop might anchor a new library, arts centre, or sports facility, drawing visitors who use the line for access. Over time, this would also attract small businesses like cafes, retail outlets, or markets that cater to the increased foot traffic, fostering local economic growth.

On a broader scale, aligning transport planning with long-term urban development strategies could transform Greater Manchester's landscape. A well-planned transport hub with mixed-use development could become a focal point for growth, reducing urban sprawl and

promoting sustainable living. This kind of intentional design is key to unlocking the full potential of the Trafford Park line and similar projects.

Interviewer: Thank you. This has been incredibly insightful. Do you recommend anyone else I could interview to give more insight?

Participant 10: Yes, I know someone who worked for transport policy in GM for a number of years. I will give you their email.

Participant 11 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate it. Just to give you some context, I'm exploring transport initiatives in Greater Manchester, particularly how they intersect with social and economic policies. I've read some of your work on sports economics and community impacts, and I think your insights could be invaluable.

Participant 11: Of course, happy to help. What specifically are you focusing on within transport?

Interviewer: I'm looking at two initiatives: the *Our Pass* for 16–18-year-olds and the Trafford Park Metrolink extension. I'm interested in their social and economic implications, especially in areas with high deprivation. I'd also like to touch on your work with football and community development. Shall we start with some background on how you see transport's role in broader urban planning?

Participant 11: It connects people to jobs, education, and leisure. But it also goes deeper than that—when transport infrastructure is done well, it can transform how people experience their city. For instance, the Metrolink's extension to Trafford Park wasn't just about moving people; it was about connecting industrial zones to residential areas in a way that sparks economic activity.

Interviewer: Do you think the *Our Pass* fits within that broader vision of transformation, or does it serve a different purpose?

Participant 11: The *Our Pass* is interesting because it goes beyond basic mobility. It's an experiment in combining social policy with transport. By giving young people not just free travel but access to activities like sports or the arts, you're expanding their horizons. Take a teenager from Gorton, for example. Without the pass, they might not afford regular trips to the city center for extracurricular activities. With it, they can visit museums, attend sports training, or even access part-time jobs. Over time, that shapes their aspirations.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier the role of sports volunteering programs. Could you expand on how they contribute to social cohesion, especially for young people from marginalised backgrounds?

Participant 11: Football, and sports in general, has always been a community hub. Volunteering through football clubs doesn't just engage young people—it teaches them responsibility, teamwork, and leadership. For instance, there's a programme in East Manchester where teenagers run youth football tournaments. It's a small initiative, but the skills they develop—time management, budgeting, and even public speaking—are profound. You see these young people gain confidence and start envisioning futures they hadn't considered before.

Interviewer: And does the *Our Pass* directly support these types of activities?

Participant 11: Indirectly, yes. By eliminating transport costs, young people can participate in programs they might otherwise skip due to financial constraints. However, the initiative could be more effective if paired with structured outreach programs. For instance, local councils could coordinate with schools and sports clubs to ensure young people know about and take advantage of these opportunities.

Interviewer: That's a great point. What about the governance behind *Our Pass*? How do you see partnerships between transport providers and local councils influencing its success?

Participant 11: Partnerships are crucial. You need strong governance to make sure the pass serves its purpose. For example, Greater Manchester's Combined Authority worked closely with transport operators to implement the scheme. But it doesn't end there. Partnerships with schools, community organizations, and employers are equally important to ensure the pass delivers maximum value. If you're offering free transport but not creating programs to utilize

that mobility, like internships or training opportunities, you're missing a key part of the equation.

Interviewer: Do you have any criticality of these partnerships?

Participant 11: While the Combined Authority's collaboration with transport operators ensures the logistical feasibility of the pass, governance must go further to bridge systemic gaps between mobility and opportunity. Schools and community organizations are vital in making the pass more than just a subsidy they can leverage it as a tool for social inclusion, providing students access to extracurricular activities, educational trips, or career fairs.

Similarly, partnerships with employers are underutilised. For example, creating tailored programs such as apprenticeship commutes or discounted passes tied to internships could transform the pass into a gateway for economic mobility. Without these efforts, the pass risks being a logistical solution that stops short of addressing deeper socioeconomic challenges. It also points to a potential governance gap: who takes responsibility for ensuring these partnerships materialize and remain effective?

Another layer of complexity arises in evaluating the outcomes of such partnerships. Are the programs created truly inclusive, or do they inadvertently favour those who are already somewhat mobile or socially advantaged? This is where consistent monitoring, feedback loops, and adaptability in policy design are essential. Transport schemes like the pass cannot operate in isolation; they must be embedded within a wider framework of equitable urban development and social planning.

Interviewer: That's really good discussion, thanks. Shifting focus a bit—how do you see the design of transport infrastructure influencing its success? For instance, with the Trafford Park Metrolink line, what role does spatial placement play in maximizing economic benefits?

Participant 11: Since the extension line we've seen that the Trafford Centre is attracting a wider range of visitors, not only for shopping but also for social and community events. However, spatial placement is major. A well-placed stop can completely transform a neighbourhood. For the Trafford Park line, we deliberately evaluated the potential economic impact of each station location. Stops near retail hubs, for example, were designed to boost footfall and support businesses. Industrial zones were connected to nearby residential areas to

reduce commuting times. If the placement had been less strategic, you'd see underutilisation and wasted potential.

Interviewer: Are there examples where placement went wrong?

Participant 11: Absolutely. One example is a tram stop on an industrial estate with no clear pedestrian routes. Workers couldn't safely or easily reach the stop, so they avoided it altogether. It's a reminder that transport isn't just about stops—it's about the entire ecosystem around them.

Think about the wider implications: poorly designed placement often creates a ripple effect. Businesses in the area lose out on attracting potential employees who might rely on public transport. It also discourages shifts toward sustainable travel, as workers find it less convenient than driving. For example, if a stop is surrounded by warehouses or industrial buildings without proper pathways, adequate lighting, or even signage to guide pedestrians, it becomes an isolated node rather than an integrated part of the transport network.

A good counterexample is when infrastructure design complements the transport stop. Take a stop in a similar industrial area that incorporated pedestrian-friendly pathways, well-lit cycling lanes, and bus connections feeding into the tram. That stop saw increased ridership because workers had seamless and safe ways to access it. Ultimately, it's not enough to say, "We've built a stop." You have to consider the user experience—the journey from home to tram, and then to the workplace or destination. Without that holistic approach, you risk the infrastructure becoming an expensive underused feature. The Trafford Park extension line will have enhanced access to key economic centres for some people, especially with the integration to other Metrolink lines."

Interviewer: This has been incredibly insightful. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to add? Maybe something about the long-term sustainability of initiatives like *Our Pass*?

Participant 11: I'd just emphasise that sustainability depends on continuous investment and adaptation. If young people use the pass to build habits around public transport and participation in community activities, the long-term benefits could be immense. But that requires monitoring and tweaking the scheme as it evolves.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time. One last thing—do you happen to know anyone else I should speak to for this research? Maybe someone with expertise in transport governance or community engagement?

Participant 11: You might want to reach out to (name). She's done some fascinating work on transport equity. Also, there's a council officer, (name), who's been involved in youth-focused transport initiatives. I can send you their contact details.

Interviewer: That would be fantastic. Thanks again for your insights—it's been incredibly helpful.

Participant 11: You're welcome. Best of luck with your research. Let me know if you need anything else.

Participant 12 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Hello. Hi, how are you?

Participant 12: Hi. I'm good, thank you. How are you?

Interviewer: I'm great, thank you. Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and taking the time to support my research. I really appreciate it.

Participant 12: No problem at all. I think what you're doing sounds absolutely fascinating. I'm not sure how much help I'll be, but I think it's a really important topic. Thanks for reaching out.

Interviewer: It's really nice to meet you as well. To start, I know you've worked on travel behavior and its influences—does your work focus on public transport or a mix of modes?

Participant 12: It's across all modes. There's a concept called Travel Demand Management, which is all about influencing how people move. One of the biggest examples was during the London Olympics, where we had to move 10 million spectators through a city designed for 8 million. It was about understanding capacity—walking, cycling, buses, and trains—and creating campaigns to influence behaviour. We mapped how we wanted people to move and made it easy for them to do so.

Interviewer: That sounds like a significant undertaking. Are there strategies you think could apply here in Greater Manchester, particularly with its focus on active travel and sustainable mobility?

Participant 12: Definitely. Greater Manchester is focusing on creating a well-integrated system with walking, cycling, buses, and trams. The aim is to make these modes easy to use, affordable, and appealing while gradually phasing out private car reliance. But the key is knowing your audience and what influences their behaviour. For example, promoting e-bikes might work for short trips under three miles but won't appeal for longer journeys. You need data to guide these decisions.

Interviewer: Speaking of e-bikes and scooters, do you think micro-mobility complements public transport?

Participant 12: Absolutely. Micro-mobility is part of the toolkit for creating a fully integrated transport system. For example, if someone lives a mile from the nearest tram stop but has access to a scooter or e-bike, they're more likely to connect to the wider network. It's called "trip chaining"—where one mode of transport connects to another. But to make it work, the infrastructure needs to be seamless. Imagine having docking stations right by tram stops or a reliable bike lane network that feeds into the system. Without that, the potential for micro-mobility is limited.

Interviewer: I'm researching the Trafford Park Metrolink line, particularly how spatial placement of transport infrastructure influences behaviour. Do you think stops like the one at Trafford Centre are effective?

Participant 12: Spatial placement is critical. The stop at Trafford Centre is a no-brainer— putting it right at the entrance makes it convenient. But it's not just about placement; it's about creating a holistic experience. For instance, if the stop serves retail hubs but residential areas nearby still struggle with direct access, the benefits are uneven. The effectiveness of placement relies on how well it integrates with surrounding areas. The line is great for retail hubs, but the surrounding residential areas still struggle with direct access.

There's also the issue of parking. If parking is free at Trafford Centre but public transport costs time and money, many will stick with their cars. Changing behaviour requires more

than a well-placed stop; you also need policies like parking charges or incentives to make alternatives more attractive.

Interviewer: How important is transport in connecting people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to opportunities?

Participant 12: Transport is foundational—it's not just about moving people, it's about tackling social exclusion. A reliable, affordable system links people to education, jobs, leisure, and social networks. **For instance, in areas like Wythenshawe or Rochdale in Greater Manchester, where unemployment rates are higher, improved transport can provide critical access to job opportunities in city centres or industrial hubs like Trafford Park.** Similarly, ensuring affordable tram connections allows young people in deprived areas to commute to colleges and training centres without financial strain.

But it's not just about having transport options—it's about making sure they're equitable. **For example, if a young person in Tameside needs to travel to a college in Salford, long bus travel times or infrequent schedules could mean missing out on educational opportunities compared to someone with easy access to a nearby Metrolink line.** In Greater Manchester, the Our Pass scheme helps to address this by removing cost as a barrier, but without reliable and frequent bus services, the full potential of the scheme may not be realized.

That's why connectivity, frequency, and affordability are so important. **Look at the example of the Vantage bus service connecting Leigh to central Manchester—it's a rapid bus route that reduces commute times significantly, making jobs in the city more accessible for Leigh residents.** Similarly, expanding tramlines to underserved areas, such as the Metrolink to Oldham, has provided quicker and more direct routes to economic and educational hubs, transforming access for residents.

Without these considerations, the risk remains that those in areas with high deprivation will still face systemic disadvantages, perpetuating cycles of exclusion. Ensuring that transport options are not only available but also equitable is what truly bridges the gap between isolation and opportunity.

Interviewer: The Our Pass scheme has partnered with gyms and leisure centres to encourage young people to use the bus pass. How important are these partnerships?

Participant 12: Without focused outreach, even the best-designed programs struggle to reach the people they're intended for. For example, if you're offering gym discounts but students don't know about them, the benefit is lost.

What's also crucial is ensuring the partnerships align with transport goals. It's great to see more young people getting to college or part-time jobs, but if the bus routes are unreliable, the pass loses its value. Partnerships with schools, community groups, and employers can help make sure the mobility offered by the pass is fully utilized. For example, employers could tie internship opportunities to bus pass usage, creating a pipeline from transport to employment.

Interviewer: How do you see governance impacting transport initiatives like Our Pass? Should these decisions be locally driven or nationally funded?

Participant 12: You need a balance. National funding sets the framework, but local input ensures initiatives meet specific needs. For example, **Our Pass responds to Greater Manchester's specific challenges, such as high youth unemployment rates in areas like Oldham and Wythenshawe. Local leaders identified these issues and tailored the pass to address them by providing free bus travel, ensuring young people could access education and work opportunities across the region.** Andy Burnham engaging directly with young people—through forums, schools, and even social media—is a great example of tailoring a policy to its audience. He used their feedback to shape not just the structure of the pass but also the additional perks like gym memberships and discounts, which are aligned with the interests and needs of that age group.

But local influence needs more power. **For instance, in Cheshire West, where I'm involved, non-devolved governance means rural areas often struggle to secure funding for initiatives like demand-responsive transport (DRT), which is essential for scattered populations without regular bus services.** In contrast, Greater Manchester, with its devolved authority, could launch a comprehensive scheme like the Bee Network to integrate cycling, walking, and public transport. National funding alone often doesn't account for these

nuanced local challenges, like the need for reliable last-mile connectivity in rural regions or specific urban interventions like affordable tram links in low-income neighbourhoods.

True collaboration across all levels—local, regional, and national—is essential for successful transport initiatives. **For instance, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority working with Transport for the North helped secure funding for key projects like the Metrolink expansion. Meanwhile, at the national level, the Department for Transport's involvement ensures these projects align with broader strategic goals, such as reducing emissions or meeting net-zero targets.** Without this multi-level approach, the distinct needs of local communities' risk being overshadowed by blanket policies that don't fit diverse contexts.

Interviewer: This has been incredibly insightful. Thank you so much for your time. Before we wrap up, is there anyone else you'd recommend I speak to for further perspectives?

Participant 12: You're welcome, and I'm glad to help. I'd recommend reaching out to someone involved in the active travel programs or anyone working on the Bee Network project in Manchester. They'd have valuable insights, especially on integrating cycling and walking with public transport. Let me follow up with a few contacts for you.

Interviewer: That would be amazing. Thank you so much, and I'll be sure to share the final research with you once it's done.

Participant 12: I'd love to read it. Best of luck with the rest of your PhD!

Interviewer: Thank you. Take care!

Participant 13 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Hi, I'm well. Thank you. How are you?
Participant 13: Yeah, very well, thank you.

Interviewer: That's great to hear. Thank you for joining me today and supporting my PhD research. Just to give you some context, I'm exploring the social and economic impacts of transport initiatives in Greater Manchester, focusing on policies like Our Pass and the Trafford Park Metrolink line. Themes like social inclusion, accessibility, and economic

regeneration are central to my work. So, this is more of an informal discussion to gather your perspective on these issues.

Participant 13: Sounds really interesting. I'll do my best to contribute.

Interviewer: Based on your experience, what role do you think transport plays in addressing social exclusion in a city like Greater Manchester?

Participant 13: A key part of this discussion is understanding how transport-related social exclusion occurs. It's often a combination of poor access to key destinations, like jobs, schools, and healthcare, and the burdens that come with using the transport system—costs, travel times, and stress. Even in Greater Manchester, where the public transport system is relatively well-developed compared to other northern areas, you still see exclusion due to high income inequality and concentrated poverty.

For example, cost-related exclusion is a significant factor in GM. Even if the network can physically get people where they need to go, affordability often remains a barrier for many. The issue isn't just access—it's about the cumulative impacts of using that transport system. Stress, time spent traveling, and financial strain all compound the problem.

Interviewer: Initiatives like Our Pass aim to reduce these financial barriers. Do you think they have a lasting social impact?

Participant 13: Absolutely. For populations where cost is the primary barrier—particularly young people—schemes like Our Pass can be transformative. By removing financial hurdles, they enable access to education, employment, and social opportunities. That said, its success depends heavily on the reliability and connectivity of the broader transport network. If services are fragmented or unreliable, the benefits of a free pass won't be fully realized.

The long-term value of such initiatives could also extend beyond immediate mobility. For example, encouraging young people to develop public transport habits early can reduce car dependency later in life, with positive knock-on effects for urban congestion and the environment.

Interviewer: Thanks, that's very interesting! any more examples?

Participant 13: Yeah. A good example of this can be seen in cities like Zurich, Switzerland, where public transport is heavily integrated into the daily lives of residents from a young age. By offering affordable, well-connected, and frequent services, Zurich has seen a steady decline in car ownership among younger generations. This shift has contributed to lower levels of urban congestion and improved air quality, demonstrating that early exposure to reliable public transport options can have a lasting impact on mobility choices.

Additionally, less reliance on cars often translates to healthier lifestyles. Walking and cycling, integrated into the public transport system for first- and last-mile connectivity, encourage physical activity, which can reduce public health costs in the long run. Cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam have long been champions of this approach, with widespread cycling infrastructure contributing to healthier citizens and lower health-related expenses, while also alleviating traffic congestion.

Interviewer: What about the Trafford Park Metrolink? Do you think adding new lines addresses spatial deprivation?

Participant 13: New tramlines like the one to Trafford Park can have significant benefits, particularly for connecting populations with poor access to employment hubs. For example, linking neighbourhoods with limited transport options to Trafford Park might help reduce car dependency, which is vital in the current cost-of-living crisis.

However, there are risks. Connecting smaller local centres to major hubs like the Trafford Centre can sometimes divert economic activity away from those smaller centres. By positioning tram stops closer to key retail entrances, we've seen a noticeable increase in footfall, especially among non-driving demographics. Convenience matters, and the closer the stop, the higher the likelihood of repeat visits. However this can create a net positive for the region overall, but for individuals relying on their local economies, the impact might be less favourable.

Another concern is the potential for gentrification. In cities across the United States, we've seen this play out vividly. Take, for example, the expansion of light rail systems in cities like Portland or Denver. Initially, the new transit links were celebrated for connecting underserved neighbourhoods to employment hubs and city centres. But as accessibility improved, developers moved in, eager to capitalize on the rising desirability of these areas.

Property values skyrocketed, rental prices followed suit, and the very communities the projects aimed to help found themselves priced out, forced to move further away from the transit they had just gained access to.

It's a cautionary tale—one that hasn't been observed in Greater Manchester yet but remains a significant concern. Imagine an area like Wythenshawe, historically affordable and home to many low-income families. A new tramline could make it easier to commute into the city, but it might also attract new residents and businesses, pushing housing prices out of reach for longtime locals. This dynamic, while unintended, often accompanies well-meaning transit developments.

Interviewer: Do you think GM can learn from the internation examples?

In Greater Manchester, there's a real opportunity to learn from these international examples. By closely monitoring property markets around new tram stops and proactively creating affordable housing policies, the city could ensure that improved transport doesn't inadvertently displace the very people it aims to benefit. It's about striking a balance—welcoming growth while safeguarding inclusivity.

Interviewer: Do you think collaborative governance can address these challenges effectively?

Participant 13: Collaboration is essential. Addressing transport-related social exclusion starts with identifying the populations most affected, which requires local insight. But the scale of investment needed to solve these issues is often beyond the capacity of local authorities, making central government funding crucial.

Regional bodies like Transport for the North play a pivotal role in setting the regional vision and coordinating between local and national levels. TfN has been instrumental in creating a strategic framework for transport that balances the needs of rural areas with those of urban centers. For example, the North East's "Connect" programme links remote rural communities to city hubs by adapting transport routes and timetables to better fit local needs. This initiative wouldn't have been possible without TfN's coordination and funding strategies, ensuring that both local expertise and national resources were effectively combined.

Interviewer: How do you think devolution impacts this?

Participant 13: Devolved funding structures could make a significant difference. If local authorities had control over budgets across transport, health, and housing, they could adopt more holistic approaches to tackling these interconnected issues. In Greater Manchester, the Devo-Manc agreement granted the region more autonomy over health and social care funding, enabling a more integrated approach to addressing health inequalities. Applying similar principles to transport would allow local councils to better integrate transport improvements with other public services like housing and education. For instance, public transport routes could be designed to support access to healthcare facilities or timed to align with school schedules, enhancing overall community well-being.

By allowing local authorities to have a say in how funding is distributed across various sectors, it's possible to create a more integrated approach to social inclusion, where transport is not just a standalone issue but one that intersects with housing, health, and employment, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the opportunities they need.

Interviewer: How do policies like Our Pass influence young people's mobility and long-term habits?

Participant 13: They're incredibly impactful. Building a habit of public transport use early in life increases the likelihood of continued use as an adult, particularly within the same environment. Beyond that, better mobility for young people has tangible benefits—improved access to education and employment can prevent cycles of poverty and isolation. While the tramline may link Trafford Park to the city centre, it is Our Pass that guarantees young individuals from Wythenshawe or Rochdale can afford to make that journey.

There's good evidence showing that experiences of unemployment or poor access to opportunities early in life can have long-term effects on well-being and economic outcomes. Initiatives like Our Pass can play a part in breaking that cycle.

Interviewer: How can planners mitigate unintended consequences, like gentrification, when implementing transport projects?

Participant 13: It's difficult under current funding structures. One option could be adjusting business rates to support local economies near new transport links. However, this requires coordination beyond what most transport authorities can manage.

Mitigation also depends on understanding the social dynamics of an area before making changes. For example, identifying areas at risk of displacement and ensuring affordable housing options remain accessible could help. Unfortunately, the resources and political will to address these issues aren't always there.

Interviewer: Thank you. This has been incredibly insightful. Before we wrap up, are there any contacts you'd recommend for further interviews?

Participant 13: I can suggest a couple of colleagues from local authorities and regional bodies. I'll send over their details.

Interviewer: That would be fantastic. Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your expertise—it's been invaluable.

Participant 13: No problem at all. Best of luck with the rest of your research, and feel free to get in touch if you have further questions.

Interviewer: Thank you

Participant 14 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Hi, thank you so much for making the time to speak with me. I know you've had a hectic year, so I really appreciate it. I've heard some great things about you from (name) and (name), and I'm really excited to hear your perspective on the Our Pass initiative. To start off, could you share what prompted the need for Our Pass, both from your personal experience and the conversations you had with policymakers?

Participant 14: Well, for me, it really started with my involvement in the change-making world from a young age. I've been working with an organization called XXXX since I was 11. One of the key barriers we faced was transportation—getting young people to events, opportunities, and even meetings. For example, there was this manifesto co-creation event for Andy Burnham's campaign when I was about 13 or 14. Most of the other people in the room were much older, and it was clear there was a lack of youth representation, especially young people who were from outside the city centre. I spoke up about it, and I pointed out that transport was a major barrier. Events were often held in places that weren't accessible for

people from outer boroughs, which directly contributed to the lack of young people at these kinds of events.

Interviewer: That's a really powerful moment. So, it sounds like the Our Pass was a response to that?

Participant 14: Exactly. After that event, we worked closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Youth Authority to push for the Our Pass, and Andy Burnham was really supportive. The goal was to create something that would make transport more accessible for young people, especially in areas where the cost and availability of transport were major issues. The pass was launched in 2018, and for me personally, it was perfect timing because I was going into college that year. I didn't have to worry about how to get to places for extracurricular activities or social events—it was all covered.

Interviewer: So, on a personal level, how did the Our Pass change your day-to-day life, especially in terms of education, work, and socializing?

Participant 14: Honestly, it made a huge difference. It meant that I didn't have to factor transport costs into everything I did. Going to college, attending events in the city like the Trafford Centre, or even just visiting friends became much easier. It also opened up a lot of opportunities socially. I could go to gigs, football matches, and cultural events without stressing over bus fare. I think that's something a lot of young people in my situation benefit from—just the freedom to access those opportunities without being constrained by money. I remember hearing one of my peers say that they had never visited all the boroughs of Greater Manchester before and used the Our Pass to go around and explore. It's things like that that really expand your horizons.

Interviewer: That's great to hear, and it's clear that the pass had a broad social impact. Have you noticed any changes in your peer group or even in yourself in terms of work or income opportunities due to this kind of mobility?

Participant 14: Definitely. Being involved in the creation of the pass boosted my profile in ways I didn't expect. I was headhunted for my current role because of the work I did with the Our Pass and the networks I built through that project. The pass itself didn't directly create income opportunities, but being part of something so impactful opened doors for me

professionally. It made me a part of a larger network of change-makers. But there's a funny side to it too—at some point, I was seen as 'the bus pass girl,' which was great at first, but now I feel like I need to move beyond that.

Interviewer: I can imagine! Moving beyond a label is definitely important, but it sounds like it has been a significant stepping stone for you. Looking back, how would you say transport impacts the quality of life for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in Greater Manchester?

Participant 14: Transport is absolutely key—it's the foundation of so much of life. If you think about someone with a low income who needs to visit family across the city, or go to work in one part of Manchester and then take a course in another, transport becomes the critical link that allows them to maintain those connections and opportunities. Without affordable and reliable transport, those things can't happen. The Our Pass, for example, provided young people with not just the chance to get from one place to another, but to access life-changing opportunities that they might have been excluded from otherwise.

Interviewer: Do you see transport as a tool for bringing together people from different backgrounds and creating opportunities for social mobility?

Participant 14: 100%. It's one of the best ways to level the playing field, particularly for young people from lower-income households. Transport is more than just getting from point A to point B—it's about access to everything: education, jobs, leisure activities. That's why policies like the Our Pass are so important. They provide that connection to opportunities that can shape someone's future. And when everyone, regardless of background, has the same access to those opportunities, it helps bring communities together.

Interviewer: I know Greater Manchester has been making strides to improve transport with initiatives like the Bee Network. How do you think these improvements can impact the region's social and economic landscape?

Participant 14: It's incredibly positive to see. The Bee Network, for example, will help ensure that public transport is integrated and accessible for everyone, particularly in areas that have been underserved. If we want to make Greater Manchester a place where everyone can thrive, these improvements are essential. I think we're heading in the right direction, but we

need to continue listening to the communities that are most affected by these changes, particularly those in the outer boroughs. If we keep focusing on equitable access, we'll be able to create a city region that works for everyone, not just those who are already well-off.

Interviewer: Absolutely, listening to communities is key. Just before we wrap up, do you have any recommendations for others who work in policy or transport development on how they could further improve the impact of initiatives like the Our Pass?

Participant 14: I'd say the focus needs to remain on inclusivity. It's easy for new transport initiatives to be concentrated in areas where the demand is already high, but we can't forget the outer boroughs. That's where the Our Pass really made a difference—by targeting young people who lived outside of the city centre. I also think we need to continually assess and adapt these schemes based on the real, lived experiences of people in the community. It's not just about the design or the implementation of a program—it's about the impact it has in the day-to-day lives of the people it's supposed to serve. Policies should be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of the people they aim to help.

Interviewer: That's great advice. Thank you so much for sharing your insights. It's been really valuable.

Participant 14: No problem at all, happy to help. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

Participant 15 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer:
So, just to get started, in terms of the free bus pass, there's an element in my research where I discuss the importance of diverse social networks, people from different backgrounds coming together. How do you think that mixing of diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic groups plays a role for young people, particularly from 16 to 18, when they're at such a formative age?

Participant 15:
It's absolutely crucial. From a youth work perspective, getting young people from different backgrounds, with different experiences, together is really important. And, while transport in general is a key barrier, initiatives like the Our Pass can break down some of those gaps. Many of the young people we work with haven't even ventured out of their immediate

community before, let alone travelled to other boroughs within Greater Manchester. For them, even the idea of a 30-minute bus ride is daunting. And so, transport really becomes the first step in helping them broaden their horizons, both socially and culturally.

We've heard that many young people had never been to the theatre before until they had access through Our Pass. This kind of cultural exposure is so valuable. It opens up new worlds and new opportunities, and when young people can access places that they never thought they could, it changes the way they see the city and their own possibilities within it. But there is still a need for that extra encouragement—sometimes just knowing that someone is there to help them get on the bus or train makes a huge difference.

Interviewer:

That's really insightful. So, do you think the Our Pass could be more effective if there was additional guidance or support for these young people to help them navigate using public transport and accessing opportunities?

Participant 15:

Definitely. I think there's a huge opportunity to complement the Our Pass with guidance and structured support, particularly for young people who might not be as familiar with public transport or are anxious about travelling. While the pass is incredibly valuable, we do still face the challenge of engagement. Many young people, especially in the outer boroughs, don't know what the pass offers. They might have access, but not the confidence or knowledge on how to use it. This is where the role of community groups and youth workers comes in—helping to guide these young people, showing them how to access the services available to them. And yes, that guidance also promotes regular use of public transport, which will only help foster long-term sustainable habits.

Interviewer:

That's an important point. Do you think expanding the Our Pass beyond buses to include other modes of transport like trams or trains would improve its impact, especially in areas with limited bus access?

Participant 15:

Absolutely. Expanding the pass to include trains and trams would make a significant difference, especially for young people living on the outskirts of the city where buses are the

only option, but they may have limited frequency or accessibility. For instance, in areas like Rochdale, young people are often restricted to buses and if there are disruptions like bad weather or strikes, it can severely limit their ability to get to important places like college or job interviews. The tramline serves as the backbone of the network, yet Our Pass ensures that access to that network is democratised, particularly for groups that may otherwise be excluded. Expanding the pass to include more transport options would ease a lot of those barriers.

Interviewer:

That makes a lot of sense. It's about giving people more freedom to move around, especially in regions where public transport networks aren't fully interconnected yet.

Participant 15:

Exactly. We hear from young people all the time that the transport system, while good in the city centre, becomes fragmented once you move to the suburbs or more rural areas. You can easily get to central Manchester from places like Rochdale or Bury, but for those in peripheral areas, like Middleton, it's more difficult to reach other parts of Greater Manchester.

The lack of integration in the transport system limits opportunities for young people to engage in everything from education to jobs. For instance, in areas like Wigan, young people might have to spend over an hour on a bus just to reach the nearest train station, while others in the more central parts of Manchester have much quicker access to a full array of transport options, including buses, trams, and trains. This discrepancy means that students in more peripheral areas often miss out on key educational opportunities, such as accessing after-school clubs, university open days, or internship opportunities in central Manchester, simply because they don't have the same level of mobility.

For example, we've heard from a young person in Salford who was unable to attend a series of career workshops because the bus she needed to take was unreliable and often late. She missed out on the chance to network with employers and improve her job prospects. If the Our Pass could be extended to cover other transport modes, like trams or trains, it would drastically improve her ability to participate in opportunities like that and, in turn, help bridge the gap between those living in high-density urban areas and those in the outskirts.

Another case that stands out is a young man from Oldham, who works part-time at a retail store in central Manchester. He's eager to take additional shifts, but due to a lack of direct tram access, he's often left with just the bus, which takes longer and isn't as reliable. The extension of Our Pass to trams and trains would allow him to travel faster, work more hours, and ultimately earn more income to support himself. More reliable and integrated transportation options would not only help him financially but also support his social development, as he could take part in community events and activities outside of work.

Interviewer: What issues do you think these examples raise?

Participant 15: These examples highlight the gap that still exists in the current transport system. The fragmentation, especially in terms of which areas are served by which modes of transport, hinders young people from accessing important life-changing opportunities. Extending the Our Pass to include trams, trains, and even connections to buses running into surrounding boroughs would open up the entire transport network to young people, giving them the freedom and ability to fully engage with everything Greater Manchester has to offer—whether it's pursuing education, securing employment, or simply exploring new parts of the city and connecting with different communities.

Interviewer:
Absolutely. It seems like there's a real need for transport services to be more interconnected for young people to truly benefit. How do you think transport choices impact young people's mental health and well-being?

Participant 15:
Transport access is hugely linked to mental health for young people. When they don't feel like they can get out and about, or they feel restricted by transport limitations, it can lead to isolation. And that's particularly tough for young people dealing with anxiety or mental health issues. The freedom to move around, to go to social events, to access work or education, is so important. When transport barriers get in the way, it can lead to young people feeling disconnected from their communities, and in turn, it impacts their overall mental well-being. Feeling like they are trapped in their environment can have long-term consequences on their confidence and ability to thrive.

Interviewer: Do you have any examples where you've seen this firsthand?

Participant 15: I have loads. An 18-year-old student from a low-income area, felt increasingly overwhelmed with school deadlines and work obligations. She had a part-time job in the city centre, but the cost and time involved in getting to her shifts meant she often had to cut back on both work and school activities. One day, a group project meeting was scheduled at a café across town, but she couldn't get there in time due to public transport delays. She didn't feel like she could explain to her group members why she was late, and the feeling of not being able to participate led to her withdrawing more. She began to feel isolated from both her peers and her academic journey. The transport barriers made her feel disconnected from her responsibilities, exacerbating her stress and anxiety about failing in her education and her job.

Young people like XXX, and XXX are not isolated cases—many face similar struggles. The freedom to move around, to go to social events, to access work or education, is so important, especially during those formative years. When transport barriers get in the way, it can lead to young people feeling disconnected from their communities, and in turn, it impacts their overall mental well-being. For instance, young people with mental health conditions might already feel as if they're "trapped" in their environment, and when they can't move freely to access places that could uplift their spirits, it only adds to their sense of being stuck.

For someone like XXX, whose social anxiety makes it hard for her to leave the house on her own, transport access could be the key to connecting her to the support network she needs. A simple, reliable way to get to social events, therapy, or her friends' homes could drastically reduce her anxiety and open up new opportunities for growth. Similarly, for XXX, the ability to access reliable transport could make a significant difference in his mental health by helping him stick to the routines his therapist has set, such as exercise, which directly impacts his mood and energy levels.

The reality is that when young people are left feeling confined due to lack of transport access, it can have long-term consequences on their confidence and ability to thrive. This is especially true for those already dealing with mental health challenges. It's not just about the physical act of traveling; it's about the emotional toll that comes with feeling like you're not in control of your own life. When transportation issues create barriers to access and engagement, it takes away the very things that support their mental and emotional growth. This sense of restriction and isolation can limit their potential for success in both their

personal and professional lives, reinforcing a cycle of disconnection and poor mental well-being.

Interviewer:

That makes total sense. So, would you say that access to public transport helps create a sense of community and autonomy for these young people?

Participant 15:

Definitely. Having that autonomy to decide where you want to go and who you want to meet is a fundamental part of growing up. It's part of building independence. The more young people feel empowered to use public transport, the more they feel a sense of ownership over their lives. It's not just about transport; it's about building their confidence to engage with the world. And when you take that away from them, it's like stripping away their ability to make choices, and that can be devastating, especially at a time when they're shaping their identity and figuring out where they fit in.

Interviewer:

That's a powerful point. Moving to a broader scale, what would you say is the most important challenge that young people face in Greater Manchester, particularly when it comes to transport policy?

Participant 15:

The biggest challenge for young people right now is accessibility and affordability. Even though Our Pass has made transport more affordable for 16-18-year-olds, there are still gaps for younger and older age groups, and those gaps mean that young people can't fully participate in society. It's not just about getting to school or college; it's about enabling young people to engage in their community, to build social networks, to take part in cultural and leisure activities. And that's crucial for their development, both personally and professionally. So, I think policy needs to address these gaps by making transport more inclusive and accessible for a broader range of young people.

Participant 16 Interview Transcript.

Interviewer: Hi, I'm well, thank you. How are you?

Participant 16: Good. Thank you. Yeah.

Interviewer: Amazing. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research. I really appreciate it. And as I said earlier, I've cited you a lot. I was speaking to a professor in XXXX a couple of months ago, XXXX.

Participant 16: That's fine.

Interviewer: I think it was or. I can't remember if it was him or someone else, but he mentioned you and he said, "Oh, I think..." He either spoke to you recently or there was some sort of affiliation, and then I was like, "Oh, I wonder if I email her if she'll respond or if I'll be able to speak to you." So I really appreciate it.

Participant 16: No, it's great. I mean, actually, we've been doing quite a lot of research recently in Manchester University with some colleagues on transport, poverty, economic austerity, and the cost of living crisis. And so your research is quite relevant because we were working with Transport for Greater Manchester, and they were talking about various different concessionary fares, and this one, the bus pass scheme, was one of them.

Interviewer: Yes. Oh, excellent. OK. Right. So, Our Pass specifically, offers the free travel card, and there's an element in my PhD where I'm discussing how it promotes the use of social networks among this cohort. What benefit do you think the free travel has in promoting the diverse social networks amongst young people?

Participant 16: OK, so I think that with this research that we've undertaken, young people often become excluded as a result of a lack of transportation. They're both, I mean, even just in terms of basically getting to school. If you're living in a low-income family, the cost of bus fares for multiple children going to school can be quite considerable, and therefore, there is definitely at least anecdotal evidence—although not that much recent research—that children do not turn up at school towards the end of the week or the end of the month because they can't afford transit costs. So, even in terms of schools, there's also good evidence that shows that a lot of people turn down apprenticeships because they can't physically afford to get to them. We've been working with some people at the University of Birmingham, and they've been working with young offenders and post-offenders. They can't often meet their probationary requirements and so forth because they just literally haven't got transport to get them there. Particularly, obviously, because young people don't drive—it's very expensive to get driving lessons and a driving licence these days—and so they're more reliant on public

transport. And, like you say, public transport networks are not always very well integrated, and they don't always get you where you need to go very easily. And then again, there's multiple affordability challenges. You've got to get one or more buses, then maybe switch to the rail or Metro. Those journeys add up because there's not a sort of Network Rail card. So I think having the free bus pass is really great in reducing those financial burdens and giving young people not only access to economic and educational opportunities but also just generally a social opportunity. Youth clubs, sports, meeting with friends—these things, if you add transport costs on top of admission charges, become considerable burdens. If transport is free, it may mean there's a little bit more leftover income for other things. But it's really important. By connecting free travel with opportunities to engage in cultural and social events, we're not just helping young people get from point A to point B, we're showing them how public transport can be a gateway to discovering their city and building a sense of belonging.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think that's so true. So, just building on that, do you think young people from lower-income backgrounds, particularly, find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to engaging in these activities due to transport barriers?

Participant 16: Absolutely. And that's why the Our Pass scheme is vital. It breaks down that barrier, opening up opportunities for young people to access places they might otherwise never go. These are the sorts of things that can have a lasting impact on their development. But the challenge we see is that communities beyond the direct reach of the queue feel marginalised from its advantages, despite being included in the initial commitment. For example, areas in the outskirts of Greater Manchester, like Partington, still find it difficult to take full advantage of the network because they don't have direct access to the metro or convenient bus routes that connect to it. Even though these areas were considered in the development of the transport network, the access they have still doesn't meet their needs.

Interviewer: Right. Yes, and that's where things like the extension to Trafford Park come in, which is closer to some of these underserved areas. How do you think the extension impacts these spatial deprivation patterns across Greater Manchester?

Participant 16: Well, the metro extension does begin to address some of those areas of deprivation by better connecting parts of the city with key destinations. For instance, places like Cornbrook have long been difficult to access via public transport, and with the extension,

you are opening up new opportunities for people to access employment and services in Trafford Park and beyond. However, while it addresses a central issue, transport poverty remains widespread in other areas, especially those beyond the core city centre. The critical thing here is that the metro can't be the sole solution—it is a limited infrastructure. Metro access is always going to be constrained geographically, and so buses will always play a crucial role. Without buses reaching the communities outside the metro reach, you are only addressing part of the problem. The extension helps, but we need more integrated solutions across all modes of transport to truly address social exclusion and poverty.

Interviewer: Do you think the changes in working patterns—like the rise of remote work—affect the transport needs in these areas?

Participant 16: Absolutely. Remote work has transformed travel requirements. Areas like Trafford Park may never experience the same level of commuter demand as traditional routes. Previously, areas that were major commuter hubs saw large-scale transportation needs—lots of people commuting in and out for work. Now, remote work means that many of these areas are not seeing the same volume of daily commuters. This shift in the labor market has changed transport demand, and the patterns we once relied on no longer reflect the needs of today's workers. We need to be thinking about transport differently—looking at where people actually need to go and adjusting our networks to meet those needs, which might not always align with traditional work hours or even destinations.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a really good point. So, shifting a little bit, how important are partnerships in driving local policy change, especially when it comes to social impacts and transportation?

Participant 16: The partnerships are key. They help raise the issues and advocate for the right changes. For example, it was only through pressure from groups like the Youth Parliament and schools that the importance of providing free transport for young people really came to the forefront. It's not just young people who benefit—it's also communities dealing with poverty and other social exclusion factors. If we only relied on transport planners, the focus would likely be on profitability and getting the most people on routes, which doesn't necessarily help those who need it the most. By lobbying, youth organizations and others can ensure that social factors are considered, and that the benefits are truly inclusive. The work of these groups can provide a more nuanced evidence base, one that not

only looks at usage but also tells the qualitative stories of how transport makes a difference in people's lives.

Interviewer: Yes, definitely. And just as a final thought, do you think the Our Pass initiative will be sustainable in the long run?

Participant 16: I think so. Once it's introduced, it will be hard to take away. It would be politically difficult to introduce a program like this and then remove it. While it started as a pilot, I believe it will continue, and possibly even expand. The challenge will always be funding—whether the government and GMCA will see the long-term value of this and continue to support it. But I'm hopeful that, as more evidence emerges of its positive impacts on youth engagement, education, and employment, it will be sustained.

Interviewer: As you mentioned, the social impact can be huge, do you think that will resonate more as people see the results.

Participant 16: Yes, exactly. I think the long-term benefits outweigh the initial cost, especially when you consider how much it impacts young people's ability to engage in education and the workforce. Once they get used to public transport and see it as an option, it can change their mindset and reduce reliance on cars. That in itself supports wider environmental goals as well.

Interviewer: Interesting. How important do you think these broader social impacts are when it comes to transport policies?

Participant 16: Very important. Take, for example, a young person who lives in a more isolated or economically deprived part of Greater Manchester. Without the ability to access public transport, that person may miss out on opportunities for social activities, education, or even part-time jobs simply because the cost or availability of transport limits their options. Public transport allows people to experience life beyond their immediate surroundings and exposes them to different communities, cultures, and opportunities.

In my line of work, I've met several people who had never ventured outside their local areas. With Our Pass, I'm sure the same young people will be able to take part in community projects, attend football matches, or visit cultural events such as the theatre—experiences they might have never considered before. Suddenly, they have the chance to engage with the

arts and culture, activities that are often out of reach for those from lower-income families due to travel and entry costs.

Additionally, when we talk about social inclusion, public transport is absolutely a gateway to that. It's not just about getting to work or school; it's about opening doors to social connections, friendships, and shared experiences. If young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds can meet at community events or social hubs—because they have equal access to transport—they're more likely to develop a sense of shared identity and belonging. This, in turn, creates more cohesive communities. I've seen this firsthand, particularly with local youth groups and community-led projects that bring together young people from different areas. Without affordable transport, many would be excluded from participating.

Interviewer: That's so true.

Participant 16: Think about the impact of the Trafford Park Metrolink extension. This extension has provided people in more outlying areas with easier access to employment opportunities in the Trafford Centre and other major business districts. The people living in these areas, many of whom were previously struggling with high levels of unemployment and poverty, are now better connected to a wider job market. This connectivity is key not just for economic mobility, but also for improving self-esteem and personal development. If these individuals were isolated without public transport access, the mental and emotional burden of not being able to access opportunities would be far more significant.

Interviewer: Glad to hear your perspective on that, especially from an expert view. I'm also really interested in expanding this perspective, and as part of my methodology, I ask every interviewee if they can suggest others who might be able to provide additional insights on this subject. Given your vast network, do you know anyone else you think would be beneficial to speak with on this topic? Particularly those with hands-on experience or different perspectives on transport access and its broader impacts?

Participant 16: Well, one person who comes to mind is [Name of Contact], who works with the community outreach team at [Organization Name]. They've done extensive work on public transport accessibility in underserved areas. Another person who might be useful is [Name of Contact], who has worked on transport policy for years and has a good grasp on

how to advocate for infrastructure development in marginalized communities. I can send you their contact information after this call.

Interviewer: That would be amazing, thank you. I've been using the snowballing technique to connect with more people in this field, and it's been really insightful to get such diverse perspectives. It would be great to continue expanding this network and hearing more about practical experiences.

Participant 16: Absolutely. I think the more voices we have in these discussions, the better. We need to make sure that transport policies serve everyone, especially those who have been historically left out of the conversation. I'm happy to help however I can.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. This has been incredibly helpful. I really appreciate your time and insights, and I will definitely reach out to the contacts you mentioned. Once again, everything from this conversation will remain anonymous, and your input will be vital to the work I'm doing.

Participant 16: No problem at all! I'm glad I could help. I look forward to seeing how your research develops. Best of luck with the next steps, and I hope it goes well.

Interviewer: Thank you. I'll definitely keep you updated, and I'm excited to share the findings once they're all put together. Have a great rest of your day, and take care!

Participant 16: You too, Kamila. Take care. Bye.

Appendix D: Pilot Survey Questions

Socio-economic Impact of Trafford Park Line and Our Pass Survey

April 2021

1* Do you work?

| A | Yes | B | No |

| # | Other (Please Specify) |

2* Where do you work?

3* Do you use public transport within Manchester? If so what type?

4* Do you use the Trafford Metro/our pass to travel to work/education/social purposes? (if so, please state which one and if not, why)

| A | Yes | B | No |

| # | Add comments here |

5* How has COVID-19 impacted your public transport use?

6* On a scale of 1-5, how difficult is it for you to get public transportation to health services?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Extremely difficult   Extremely easy

7* On a scale of 1-5, how do you assess the level of air pollution that you experience in your usual trips?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Extremely Poor Extremely Good

8* On a scale of 1-5, how much has COVID-19 disrupted your public transport usage and access?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Significant impact   No impact

9* On a scale of 1-5, how important is it for you to have access to sustainable modes of transport?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Not important   Extremely important

10* On a scale of 1-5, how do you evaluate your access to job opportunities through Our Pass/Metro link?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Extremely Poor Extremely Good

11* On a scale of 1-5. how would you rate your current access to employment using public transport?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Extremely Poor Extremely Good

12* On a scale of 1-5. how would you rate your current access to access skills/education using public transport?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Extremely Poor Extremely Good

13* On a scale of 1-5, how much impact do you think Our Pass/Metro link has had on accessing job opportunities?

1	2	3	4	5

No impact   Significant
impact

14* On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the duration of a usual trip from your home to your work or main activity?

1	2	3	4	5

1 hour plus   0-20 minutes

15* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?
Visit family/friends

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult   Very easy

16* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Recreational activities

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult   Very easy

17* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Cultural activities

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult   Very easy

18* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Sport/physical activities

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult · Very easy

19* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Food shopping

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult · Very easy

20* On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Social activities

1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult · Very easy

21* On a scale of 1-5, how much does your quality of life depend on the access to Our Pass/Metro link?

1	2	3	4	5

No impact · Significant impact

22* On a scale of 1-5, how much do you think your quality of life will increase if you have better access to Our Pass/Metro link?

1	2	3	4	5

No impact · Significant impact

420

23* On a scale of 1-5, how important is it for you to interact with others during your usual trips?

1	2	3	4	5

Not important   Extremely important

24 Please leave any additional comments

[   ]

Finish survey

Appendix E: Pilot Survey Results

Survey close-ended results.

Do you work?			
	Yes	**No**	**Other (Please Specify)**
	28	2	0

Do you use the Trafford Metro/our pass to travel to work/education/social purposes? (if so, please state which one and if not, why)				
	Yes	**No**	**Add comments here**		
	17	13	0		

On a scale of 1-5, how difficult is it for you to get public transportation to health services?				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Extremely difficult	2	1	9	10	8

On a scale of 1-5, how do you assess the level of air pollution that you experience in your usual trips?				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Extremely Poor	7	9	11	2	1

On a scale of 1-5, how much has COVID-19 disrupted your public transport usage and access?				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Significant impact	16	5	5	3	1

On a scale of 1-5, how important is it for you to have access to sustainable modes of transport?				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Not important	0	0	2	4	24

On a scale of 1-5, how do you evaluate your access to job opportunities through Our Pass/Metro link?

	1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Poor	1	2	10	5	12

On a scale of 1-5. how would you rate your current access to employment using public transport?

	1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Poor	0	4	6	6	14

On a scale of 1-5. how would you rate your current access to access skills/education using public transport?

	1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Poor	0	1	7	9	13

On a scale of 1-5, how much impact do you think Our Pass/Metro link has had on accessing job opportunities?

	1	2	3	4	5
No impact	5	0	6	3	16

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the duration of a usual trip from your home to your work or main activity?

	1	2	3	4	5
1 hour plus	4	9	5	6	6

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Visit family/friends

	1	2	3	4	5

Very difficult	0	1	11	4	14

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Recreational activities

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very difficult	0	1	9	6	14

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?
Cultural activities

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very difficult	0	0	11	8	11

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Sport/physical activities

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very difficult	0	1	14	8	7

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Food shopping

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very difficult	0	2	10	8	10

On a scale of 1-5, which of the following activities are easier to perform since the introduction of Our Pass/Metro link?

Social activities					
	1	2	3	4	5
Very difficult	0	0	10	6	14
On a scale of 1-5, how much does your quality of life depend on the access to Our Pass/Metro link?					
	1	2	3	4	5
No impact	5	2	5	6	12
On a scale of 1-5, how much do you think your quality of life will increase if you have better access to Our Pass/Metro link?					
	1	2	3	4	5
No impact	3	2	7	5	13
On a scale of 1-5, how important is it for you to interact with others during your usual trips?					
	1	2	3	4	5
Not important	9	3	5	3	10

Survey open-ended results.

3. Do you use public transport within Manchester? If so what type?	5. How has COVID-19 impacted your public transport use?	24. Please leave any additional comments
Yes - train	I use less public transport	
Yes - trams, sometimes buses	Yes - decreased it	I do not use Our Pass/Metro link so hard to say on lots of Qs (so I put 3)
Metrolink, bus, train	Yes	

Train	More, reluctant to travel. Even more so relevant with no social distancing or masks on trains which is very frustrating.	
Tram line	No	
Yes, train	Used it much less because of enforced working from home. I have been returning to work occasionally from June 2021, and from September 2021 am using it much the same as before Covid-19.	
Yes, tram	It's become more difficult due to social distancing restrictions. Capacity on services is lower than usual, consequently increasing the time it takes to get to work, meaning I have to plan ahead and allow enough time to get on the Metro	
Yes, mostly train.	No.	
Yes - buses, trains, trams	It made me scared to use public transport initially but now I use it with a mask on and it's fine	No additional comments

Yes. 192 Bus	I still use is as much as I used to just with a mask	No additional comments
Train and bus	Haven't used it as much due to fear of catching it	
Yes - trams	Ceased entirely	"Our pass/Metro link" could do with a bit of explanation- for the answers above, I basically assumed you meant the tram service, but that wasn't entirely clear (especially as it is usually written without the space). Hope the answers are helpful still, and best of luck with the project!
No	Prefer not to use it	
Yes - trams and buses primarily	Significantly. I rarely used public transport during the pandemic. When I did need to leave the area where I lived, I tried to use my partner's car.	I would recommend you provide more info on Trafford Metro / Our Pass in future surveys.
No	I have stopped using public transport and I now drive to work	
Tram	It has reduced it	
Yes - bus and train	Less frequent	
Yes, bus and train	I did not use public transport throughout 2020 and most of	Without the Trafford Park metro I would be unable to

	2021 because of COVID. I felt I was putting myself in danger using public transport during a pandemic.	travel to work or visit my family members who also live in Trafford. It has made travelling into the region much easier for me, and being able to access employment, which is the most important thing for me.
Yes, bus and tram	yes, it reduced it during lockdown and a little bit after as I was apprehensive to sit in public spaces (fear of catching covid).	Our pass provided me with free travel which alleviated financial burden for my family and it meant I was able to travel to a college of my own choice where I could pursue the courses right for me.
Tram	Quite badly, I could not travel to work during this time as the spread of COVID-19 was to worrying so I did not use public transport during the initial outbreak period	The introduction of the metro line has allowed me to get to Trafford centre much easier and therefore I dont have to rely on family members for a lift to work or think about getting my own car!
Yes, bus 142	I was not able to travel on public transport during this time and had to get a lift from my family once I could return to work	Our pass allowed me to travel into the town centre without having to ask for money from my parents who could hardly afford my bus ticket anyway. I also was able to get a job in town as I had access to the 142 bus

		from where I live and did not have to pay for the bus.
Bus	I was not able to use public transport for weeks at a time during 2020/21 as me and my family feared we would contract COVID-19 on public transport	Our pass allowed me to attend a sixth form that I wanted to attend for the opportunities available rather than what was closest to me (to save money on travel). my parents are both were classing and were very happy as there was no cost of travel for them to pay towards.
yes, the tram	I did not use public transport during the outbreaks of covid. I used to walk/cycle during this time	I live 5 minutes from the Trafford metro line, therefore it is SO convenient for me to travel to work using the metro. using public transport encourages me to walk as well so Its keeping me healthy :)
yes, I use the 142 bus	I did not travel on public transport during the COVID-19 outbreak	I used my our pass card when I was attending sixth form, this encouraged me to use the 142 bus more often, and now I use it daily to travel to uni as well as when I go into town to meet friends. I am not working yet but I will look for a job after I finish my degree
yes	I was driving at the time so It did not impact me heavily	

No	I did not use public transport during COVID-19	I drive to work as public transport is to unreliable especially during peak hours like 9am when I have to be in work
yes I use the train and bus	I stopped using the train and bus during this time and got a lift from my mum instead	I dont use the tram but I think if I had access to a tram in my local area it would be much easier for me as I wouldn't need to use 2 transport methods train and bus to travel to work. our pass removed the financial burden as the train cost was enough, I could not afford the bus ticket as well when I was travelling everyday to college. now I am working its not too bad but as a student it was expensive relying on my parents income
Yes	it stopped me from using the bus	talking to people on the tram makes me happy :) I do not use our pass but I would love to have free travel it would help so much!
yes, I use the tram	I did not use the tram during covid as the service was shortened	I only applied to work in primark once I knew there was a direct tram that stopped right outside, made travelling to work much easier.

Yes - bus and train	I used the bus until lockdown	Our pass helped me so much during sixth form!! I could not afford to go out everyday using the bus, even in half term. Our pass made this possible, so I could still meet friends in town during half term.

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet

The socio-economic impact of transport initiatives on the development of the Greater Manchester Community.

1. Invitation to research

My name is Kamila, and I would like you to take part in this PhD research project. Before you decide to do so, you must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This research project aims to investigate two major transport initiatives in Greater Manchester: Our Pass and Trafford Park Metro line. The primary aim is to analyse the social and economic impact that these initiatives will bring to Greater Manchester. This research project is being funded by Manchester Metropolitan University.

2. Why have I been invited?

You have been chosen because you are either directly or indirectly affected by one or two of the transport provisions under study.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

4. What will I be asked to do?

Interview

Please answer the questions during the interview. The interview can last anywhere between 30-60 minutes. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating. The interview will be recorded using an audio device. All responses will be transcribed in the final thesis.

Survey

Please answer the questions in the survey. This can take up to 15 minutes. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating. Responses will be published in the final thesis.

5. Are there any risks if I participate?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort.

6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on the transport system in Manchester. Results will be shared with participants in order to inform their professional work.

8. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, we will collect from you personally identifiable information.

The Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

We collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest we rely upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When we collect special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

We will not share your personal data collected in this form with any third parties.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose. The participant's confidentiality will be preserved in that all participants will remain anonymous.

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the University's Data Protection Pages.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Results of the research will be published. You will not be identified in any report or publication. Your institution will not be identified in any report or publication. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put you on our circulation list.

Who has reviewed this research project?

A supervisory team at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

If you have any complaints, please contact the [faculty's head of Research Ethics and Government Dr Ian](#)Ashman by emailing i.ashman@mmu.ac.uk. If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the legal@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see: https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Appendix G: Ethical Approval Documentation

Manchester Metropolitan University

07/03/2021

Project Title: The socio-economic impact of transport initiatives on the development of the Greater Manchester Community.

EthOS Reference Number: 25529

Ethical Opinion

Dear Kamila Sahibzada,

The above application was reviewed by the Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee and, on the 07/03/2021, was given a favourable ethical opinion. The approval is in place until 01/09/2022 .

Conditions of favourable ethical opinion

Application Documents

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Recruitment Media	Screenshot 2020-09-09 at 00.31.09	09/09/2020	1
Consent Form	consent form ethics	01/10/2020	2
Information Sheet	PIS ETHICS	09/02/2021	2
Project Protocol	research proposal	09/02/2021	2

The Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is granted with the following conditions

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies and procedures

This ethical approval is conditional on adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies, Procedures, guidance and Standard Operating procedures. These can be found on the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages.

Amendments

If you wish to make a change to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment. Please visit the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages or contact your Faculty research officer for advice around how to do this.

We wish you every success with your project.

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

For help with this application, please first contact your Faculty Research Officer. Their details can be found here