

**Greater Manchester Transport Committee**

Date: 13 September 2019

Subject: Free Bus - Forthcoming Changes and Performance Update

Report of: Alison Chew, Interim Head of Bus Services, TfGM

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform Members of proposed changes to the Manchester Free Bus service and provide an update on performance.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Members are asked to:

- i. Approve the proposed changes to the Manchester Free Bus service.
- ii. Note and comment as appropriate on the performance of the service.

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Risk Management – n/a

Legal Considerations – n/a

Financial Consequences – Revenue – n/a

Financial Consequences – Capital – n/a

Number of attachments included in the report: main report only

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Metroshuttle Performance (2017/18) and Metroshuttle Contract Award reports to TfGMC's Bus Network and TfGM Services Sub Committee, 24 August 2018

<b>TRACKING/PROCESS</b>		
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution		No
<b>EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN</b>		
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?		None
GMTC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
n/a	n/a	

## **1 MANCHESTER METROSHUTTLE/FREE BUS**

- 1.1 The Manchester Metroshuttle services 1, 2 and 3 were operated by First Manchester through a contract with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) between September 2002 and 27 October 2018. A procurement exercise was carried out in the summer of 2018 which resulted in First winning a new contract to operate a revised service, branded Free Bus.
- 1.2 The Free Bus service replaced the previous Manchester Metroshuttle service on 28 October 2018.
- 1.3 Free Bus has been operated by Go North West since 2 June 2019, following the sale of the Queens Road bus depot and operations from First to the Go Ahead Group.
- 1.4 The Free Bus service includes two routes (1 and 2), both commencing from Piccadilly Station and reaching the most popular trip attractors, with a ten minute frequency. Service 2 extends to Salford Central Station during peak hours and the operational hours of both routes were extended in October 2018 to offer a later evening service on Mondays to Saturdays (until 2200).
- 1.5 Free Bus has vibrant, Manchester specific branding and is a free service, including free wi-fi.
- 1.6 This report provides detail of some proposed changes to the service from 27 October 2019, and gives an update on performance.

## **2 PROPOSED SERVICE CHANGES TO FREE BUS FROM OCTOBER 2019**

- 2.1 Several changes are proposed to the Free Bus service following a review of performance during its first year of operation, including ongoing operational issues and recurring themes in customer and operator feedback. TfGM officers have worked with the operator to find a cost-neutral but effective way of improving the service for customers.
- 2.2 Since the start of the new contract in October 2018 there has been an issue serving the 'Spinningfields loop' and a frequent need to divert the service to avoid Byrom Street and Hardman Street due to parked cars/heavy good vehicles. Additionally, there is a current diversion in place to avoid Mount Street/Albert Square, which is closed due to recabling and has been since June. Along with the likely long-term closure of Albert Square to facilitate pedestrianisation, the combination of these issues mean that change is required to ensure reliability for the customer, reduce complaints about diversions, and futureproof the routes in light of future changes.

2.3 In addition to operational considerations; feedback from the operator; customer satisfaction surveys; and social media feedback has strongly indicated that customers would welcome the re-instatement of a link between Shudehill/Victoria and Spinningfields.

2.4 Additional customer feedback indicates that the current 2200 finish time is too early to provide a post-show or bar service. The changes proposed seek to address all these concerns and provide a more robust and reliable service for customers which considers the night time economy in Manchester and social, as well as commuting, requirements.

2.5 Subject to final agreement with the operator, the route amendments proposed are as follows:

2.5.1 Route 1 -

The Salford Central extension will be moved from Route 2 to Route 1 enabling those interchanging at Salford to penetrate business and shopping districts including Spinningfields.

The current diversion route around Spinningfields, operating via Gartside St, will be formalised to take into account the operational difficulties caused by Byrom Street/Hardman Street.

The current diversion route avoiding Mount Street and Albert Square will be formalised and made permanent to future proof the route.

The route will be extended to MOSI and Castlefield on weekends to accommodate visitor demand.

The evening service, which was under utilised with low demand, will be removed.

2.5.2 Route 2 –

This service to operate in the reverse direction to run an anticlockwise orbital route around the City Centre, providing morning trips from Victoria to Spinningfields.

The route to be amended to operate via Peter Street in order to maintain links to Manchester Central, following the diversion of Route 1 away from Mount Street.

Evening hours will be extended to midnight thus providing links to transport interchanges via night time economy destinations.

2.5.3 Route 3 –

This route is the introduction of an evening only service (replacing the Route 1 evening service).

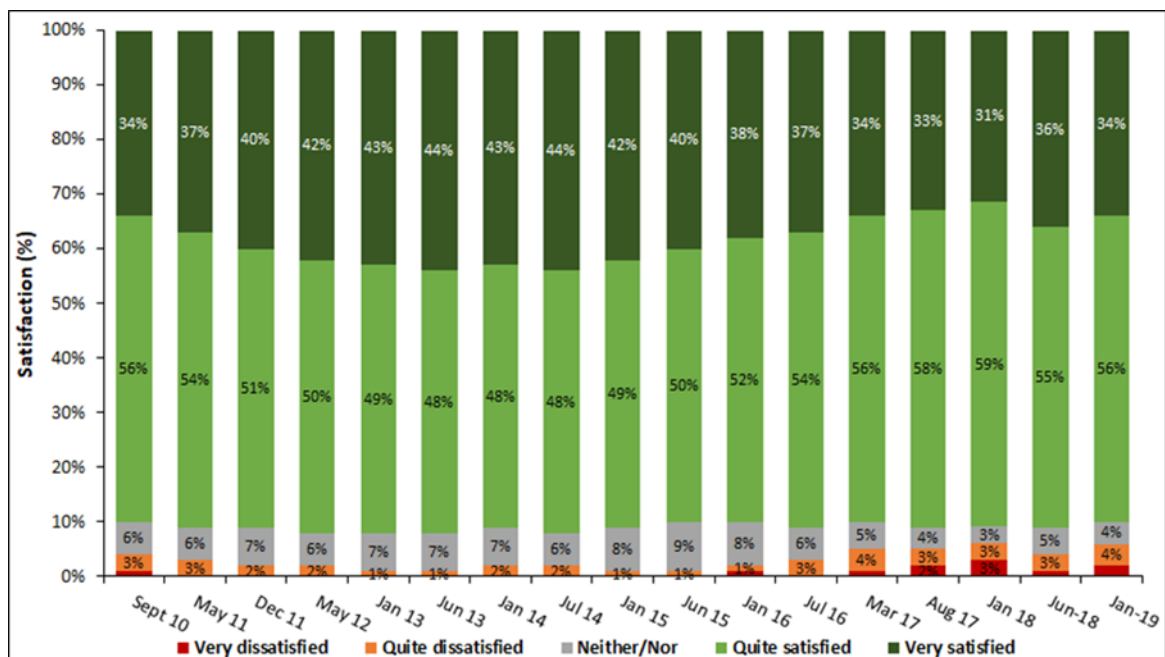
The service will operate until midnight and replicate the current Route 2 (a clockwise, orbital service), providing links to transport interchanges from night time economy destinations, including Deansgate Locks and Home.

### 3 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY (JANUARY 2019)

3.1 On behalf of First Manchester, Illuma Research undertook a twice yearly satisfaction survey of the Manchester Metroshuttle/Free Bus service. A total of 1,200 interviews were undertaken (600 interviews on each service) during January 2019. This was the first survey undertaken since Free Bus was launched at the end of October 2018.

3.2 The overall level of satisfaction (Figure 1) was recorded at 90.5% (January 2019) which had slightly decreased from the level achieved in June 2018 (91.3%). There was no significant difference in satisfaction between the routes. The latest survey indicated that 34% of customers were 'very satisfied' with the service compared to 36% in June 2018. Only 6% of customers classified themselves as 'dissatisfied' with the existing level of service provision.

**Figure 1: Customer Satisfaction (January 2019)**

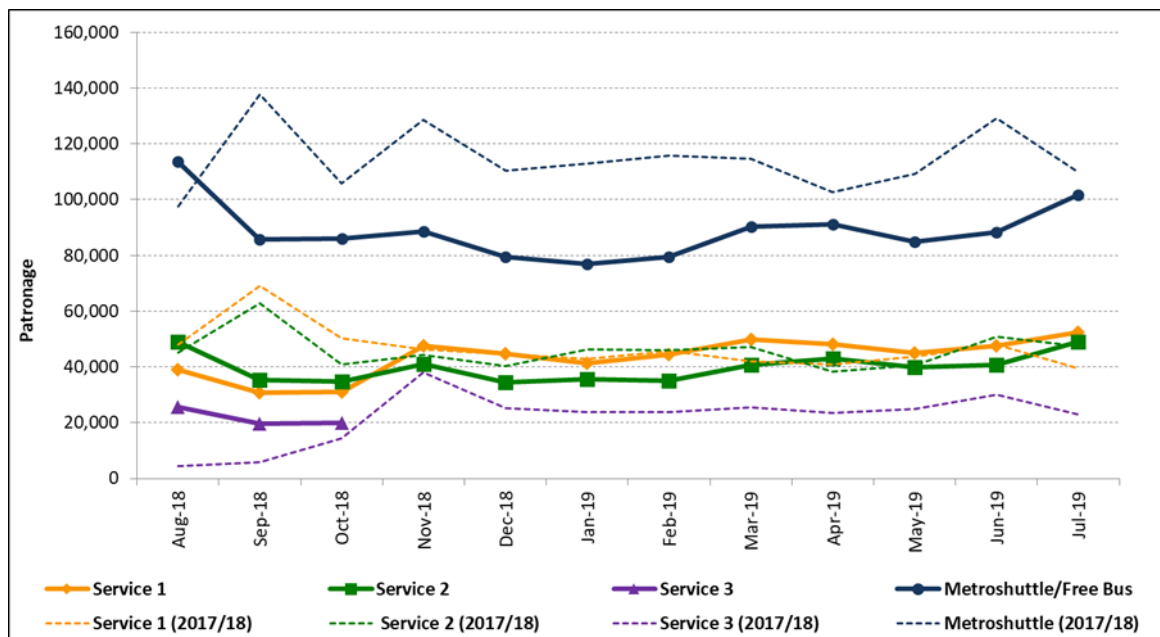


3.3 The service attributes showing the highest levels of satisfaction in January 2019 were safety of driving, driver attitude and driver appearance. The attributes showing lowest levels of satisfaction were Space for bags, buggies etc., Legroom and Safety of bus stop environment.

## 4 PATRONAGE

- 4.1 Overall patronage for 2018/19 was 1,124,586. This represented a notable reduction of 15.7% (209,040) from the 2018 figure (1,333,626) and continued a declining trend in passenger numbers.
- 4.2 At service level, all services have experienced a decline in their respective patronage levels, noting that Service 3 stopped running in October 2018. The reduction in passenger numbers was more pronounced on Service 2 with a decline of 9.7% (-51,141) from 529,277 during 2017/18 to 478,136 in the 2018/19 financial year, compared to a 5% (-25,437) decline on Service 1.
- 4.3 Monthly patronage profiles for 2018/19 (August to July) are presented in Figure 2 along with a comparison with the equivalent figures for 2017/18.

**Figure 2: Metroshuttle / Free Bus Patronage (2018/19 – August 2018 to July 2019 Vs 2017/18)**

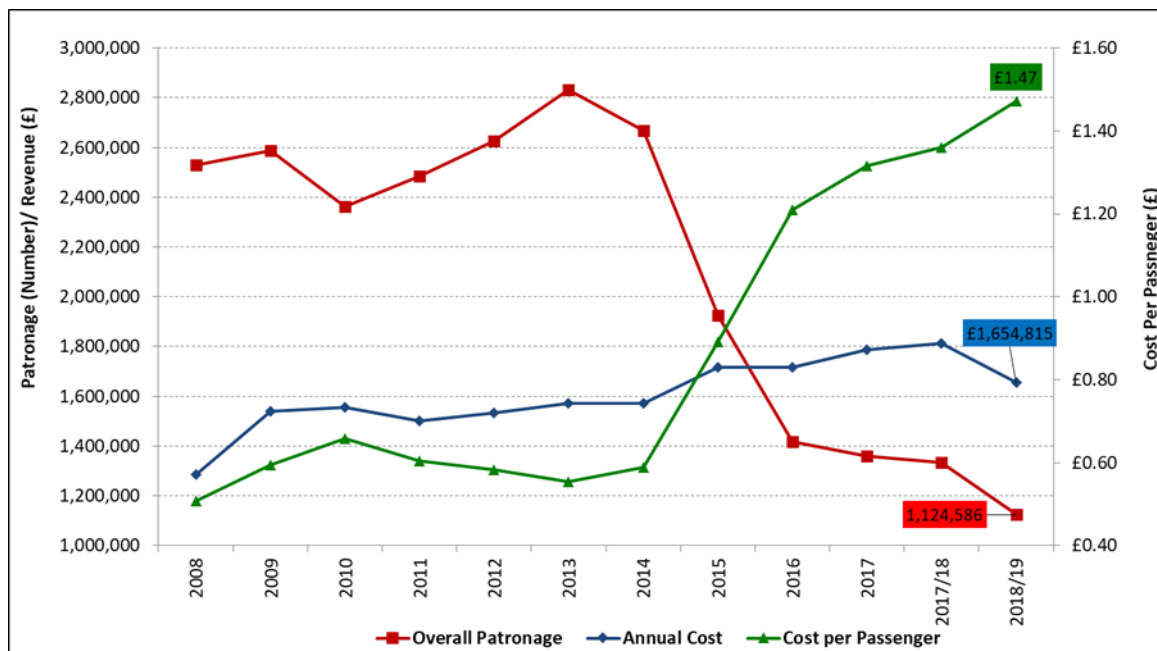


- 4.4 Despite a gradual overall decline in Metroshuttle patronage in the period to October 2018, overall patronage on Free Bus has remained largely constant, despite the removal of Service 3. The same trends are replicated in both remaining services. Overall patronage is lower than in the same period in 2017/18.
- 4.5 The weekday profile of average patronage per journey (2018/19) for each service is outlined in Appendix C.

4.6 The 2017/18 annualised contract cost for the Metroshuttle services was £1.813 million. The annualised contract cost for the new Free Bus contract is £1.440 million, therefore the overall annualised cost for 2018/19 was £1.654 million.

4.7 The cost per passenger for the Metroshuttle/Free Bus services since 2008 is shown in Figure 3 and currently stands at £1.47. It has continued to increase as the patronage has declined.

**Figure 3: Cost per Passenger (2008 onwards)**



## 5 OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

5.1 TfGM monitors the performance of the Free Bus service using the Punctuality and Reliability Monitoring System (PRMS). Observations are undertaken at Shudehill Interchange and Piccadilly Railway Station, where services are sampled during specific time bands throughout the day.

5.2 The operational performance of the Metroshuttle contract/service, determined through PRMS, is outlined in Figure 4, and for the Free Bus contract/service in Figure 5.

**Figure 4: Metroshuttle Service Performance (Regularity) – to 27/10/18**

Service	2018/19 – to 27/10/18	Change from 2017/18	Trend
1	100.0 %	0.4%	Improving
2	99.6%	0.9%	Improving
3	100.0%	1.4%	Improving
<b>Overall</b>	<b>99.9%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>Improving</b>

**Figure 5: Free Bus Service Performance (Regularity) – from 28/10/18**

Service	2018/19 – from 28/10/18	Change from 2017/18	Trend
1	99.6%	0.0%	Stable
2	97.8%	-1.0%	Declining
<b>Overall</b>	<b>98.7%</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>Stable</b>

- 5.3 The overall regularity performance for all three Metroshuttle services was observed at 99.9% for the period up to 27/10/18. The overall regularity performance for both Free Bus services was observed at 98.7% for the period from 28/10/18 to 31/07/19, which was a decline of 0.3% compared to the performance level attained for the Metroshuttle services in 2017/18 (98.9%).
- 5.4 Free Bus is however operating over one percentage point above the Code of Conduct minimum standard (97%) and significantly higher than the equivalent network wide average for frequent services.
- 5.5 Ongoing events in Manchester city centre continue to directly impact on the service, often resulting in lengthy diversions or suspension of service. These include high profile events such as Parklife, Manchester Day, Chinese New Year and Pride, but other events such as political marches or sporting events can also impact on service delivery performance. Operational issues referred to in paragraph 2.2 have also impacted on performance since October 2018.



## **6 CUSTOMER COMMENTS**

- 6.1 TfGM received 19 comments from customers about the service during 2018/2019, for the period between 31 October 2018 and 30 June 2019, compared to seven in the same period in 2017/2018. Service 2 received 12 comments predominantly for driver related issues and complaints about diversions, which had to be implemented due to significant sets of roadworks. Service 1 received seven comments.
- 6.2 Overall, this equates to one complaint/comment for every 35,732 journeys undertaken on the Manchester Metroshuttle / Free Bus service.
- 6.3 TfGM is in regular contact with the operator to ensure that positive action is taken by them with regards to both service performance standards and customer comments.

## **7 MARKETING**

- 7.1 The marketing teams at TfGM and the operator have worked together to implement an awareness raising campaign, including a summer poster and social media campaign. This has focused on the number of summer holiday visitor destinations that the service serves, including libraries and museums.
- 7.2 The bus stops on Piccadilly Approach have also been 'wrapped' in the Free Bus livery, in order to give a strong visual impact to visitors to Manchester arriving at Piccadilly station.
- 7.3 Subject to approval of the changes outlines in this report, including the extended evening service, additional marketing plans are in development to promote the changes.

## **8 BOLTON AND STOCKPORT METROSHUTTLE SERVICES**

- 8.1 The Stockport Metroshuttle (service 300) was launched in November 2008 and was jointly funded by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and TfGM. It was operated by Manchester Community Transport (MCT) using TfGM hybrid vehicles, and linked Stockport rail station with the bus station, shops and leisure facilities in the town centre. The service operated a 15-minute frequency from 08:00 until 18:00 on Mondays to Saturdays, and from 10:30 until 17:00 on Sundays. Following a decision by Stockport Council to withdraw funding, the service ceased after operation on 27 April 2019.
- 8.2 The Bolton Metroshuttle (service 500) was introduced in November 2008. It was operated by Cumfybus until 3 January 2018 but is now provided by Vision Bus on a one-year contract (until 31 December 2019). The service is provided using TfGM hybrid vehicles and

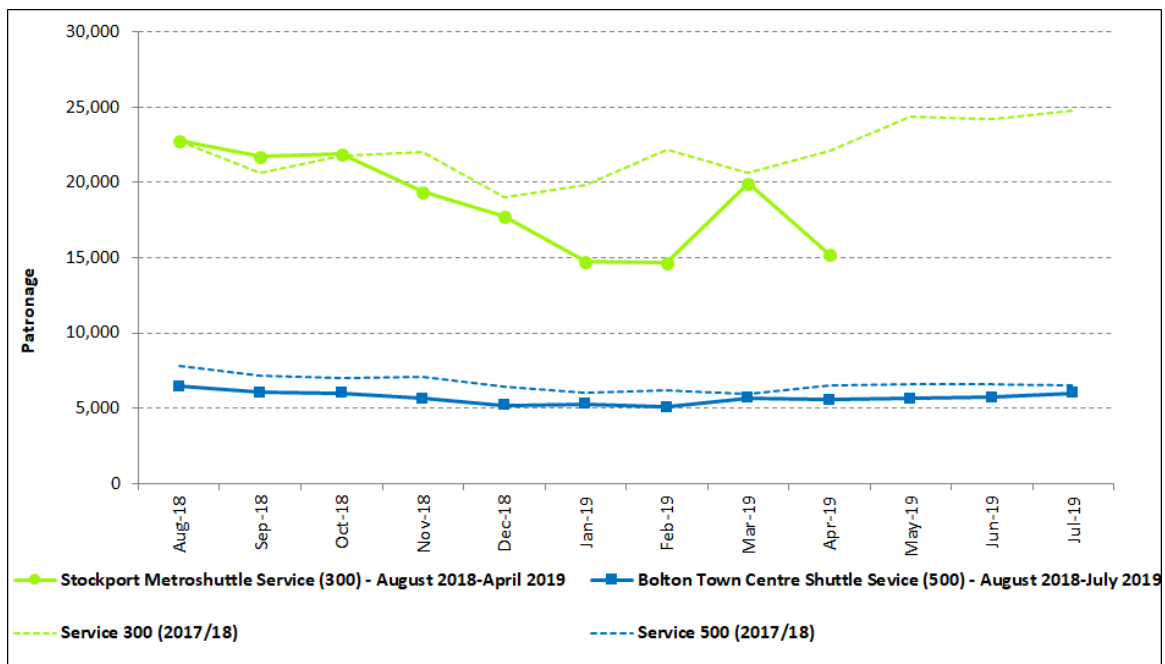
supported by funding from Bolton Council and TfGM. This service links the bus and rail interchange and Bolton town centre and, during the period covered by this report, operated a 15-minute frequency from 9:00 until 17:00, Mondays to Saturdays.

## 9 PATRONAGE (BOLTON AND STOCKPORT METROSHUTTLE)

9.1 The Stockport (300) Metroshuttle patronage for the 2018/19 financial year (until 27 April 2019) had decreased (14.3%; -39,044) to 233,235 compared to 272,279 in 2017/18. The Bolton (500) Metroshuttle patronage had decreased by 3.6% (2,595) from 72,203 to 69,608 over the same period.

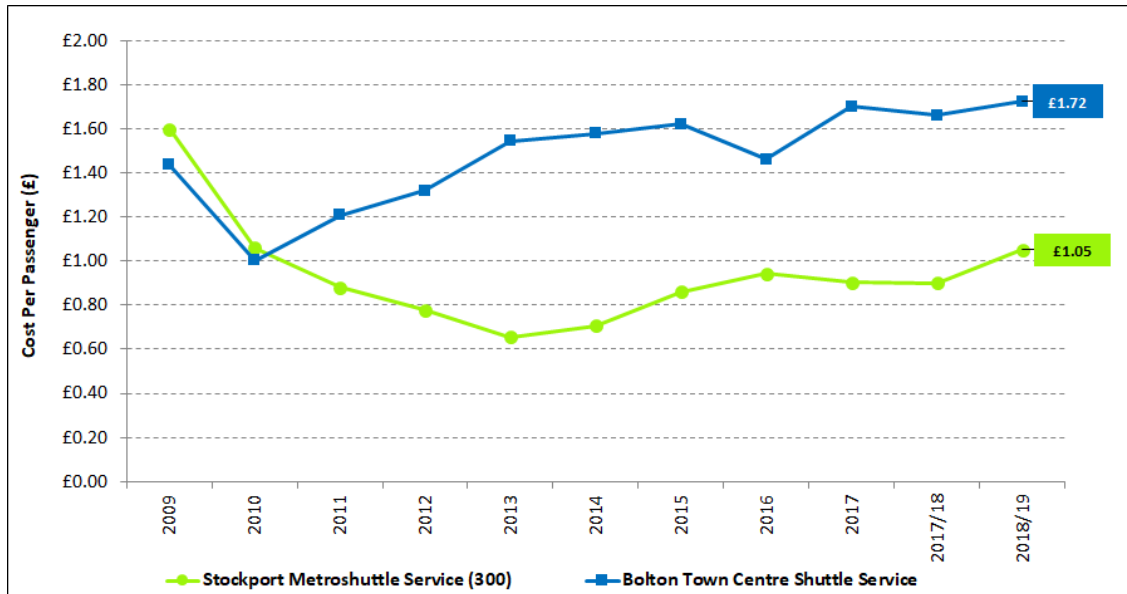
9.2 Monthly patronage profiles for 2018/19 (August to July) are presented in Figure 6 along with a comparison with the equivalent figures for 2017/18.

**Figure 6: Bolton and Stockport Metroshuttle Patronage (2018/19 – August 2018 to July 2019 Vs 2017/18)**



9.3 The cost per passenger for the Bolton and Stockport Metroshuttle services since 2009 is shown in Figure 7 and was £1.72 and £1.05 in 2018/19 for Bolton and Stockport respectively.

**Figure 7: Bolton and Stockport Metroshuttle Cost per Passenger (2009 onwards)**



**10 OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE (BOLTON AND STOCKPORT METROSHUTTLE)**

10.1 Operational performance of the Metroshuttle services is measured through the Punctuality and Reliability Monitoring System where each service is sampled during specific time bands throughout the day and over three days during a quarter.

10.2 The Performance of both services exceeded the Code of Conduct standards in 2018/19 with regards to the key operational performance indicators (punctuality and reliability).

**Figure 8: Bolton and Stockport Metroshuttle Service Performance (Regularity)**

Service	Start Point Punctuality		Mid-Point Punctuality		Reliability	
	2018/19	change from 2018	2018/19	change from 2018	2018/19	change from 2018
Stockport Metroshuttle	n/a	n/a	94.3%	-1.9%	99.7%	0.2%
Bolton Metroshuttle	100.0%	8.3%	n/a	n/a	100%	1.3%

## **11 CUSTOMER COMMENTS (BOLTON AND STOCKPORT METROSHUTTLE)**

- 11.1 Between August 2018 and July 2019, six customer comments were raised about the Bolton Metroshuttle service, mainly in relation to staff performance issues. Seventeen customer comments were received regarding the Stockport Metroshuttle service, with seven related to withdrawal of the route and the remaining majority related to staff performance issues.

## **12 BOLTON METROSHUTTLE MARKETING**

- 12.1 A marketing campaign designed to encourage patronage was in place throughout July and August 2019. This campaign was aimed at shoppers, who were identified as the primary users of the service. A multi-channel approach was chosen to promote the service, which included advertising on billboards near the bus stops sites and shopper areas. The campaign also included Facebook advertising and newspaper adverts. Patronage levels from before and after the campaign will be analysed to determine its effectiveness. An example of the leaflets and bus shelter posters can be found in Appendix D.
- 12.2 The current Bolton Metroshuttle contract is due to run until the end of the year and Bolton Council is currently reviewing its on-going funding position.

## **13 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 Recommendations are set out at the front of the report

**Alison Chew**

**Interim Head of Bus Services**

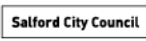
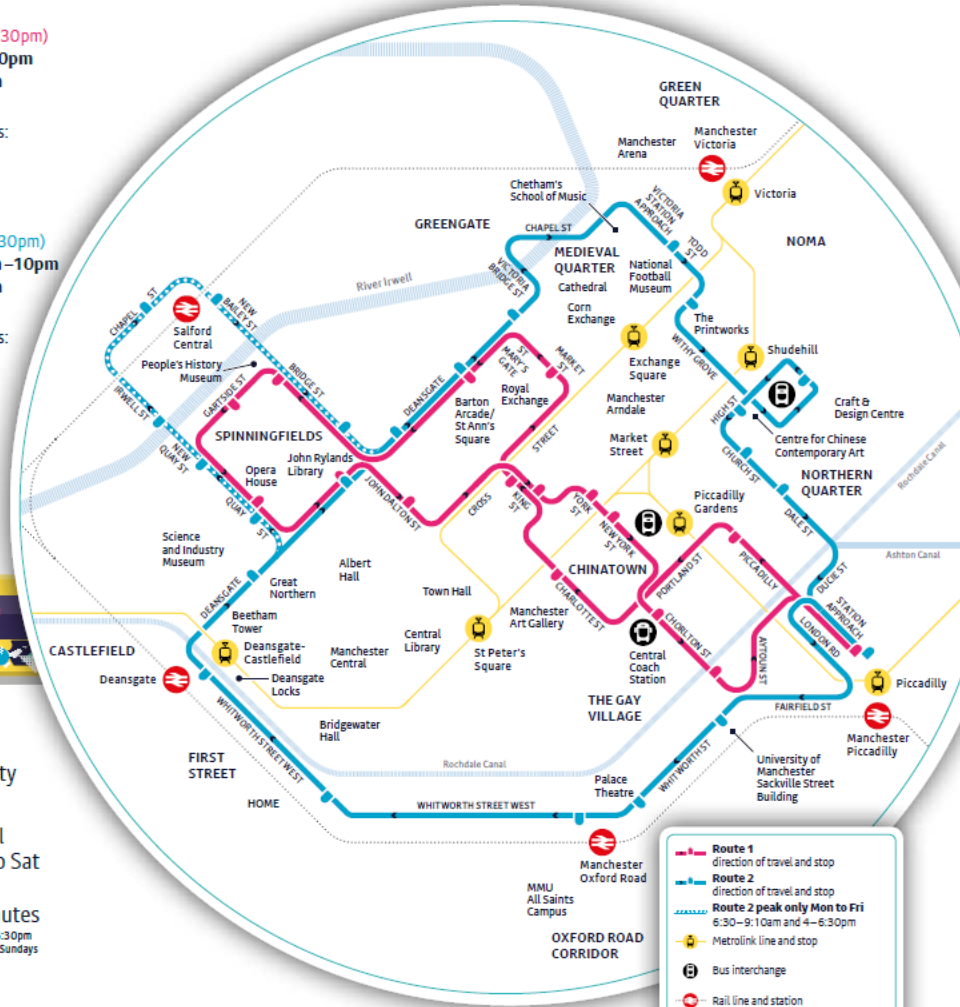
# Appendix A: Map of the current Free Bus routes

**①**  
**Every 10 minutes**  
 (Every 15 minutes after 6:30pm)  
 Monday to Friday: 7am–10pm  
 Saturday: 8:30am–10pm  
**Every 12 minutes**  
 Sunday and public holidays:  
 9:30am–6pm

**②**  
**Every 10 minutes**  
 (Every 15 minutes after 6:30pm)  
 Monday to Friday: 6:30am–10pm  
 Saturday: 8:30am–10pm  
**Every 12 minutes**  
 Sunday and public holidays:  
 9:30am–6pm  
**Peak only**  
 Monday to Friday:  
 6:30–9:10am  
 and 4–6:30pm

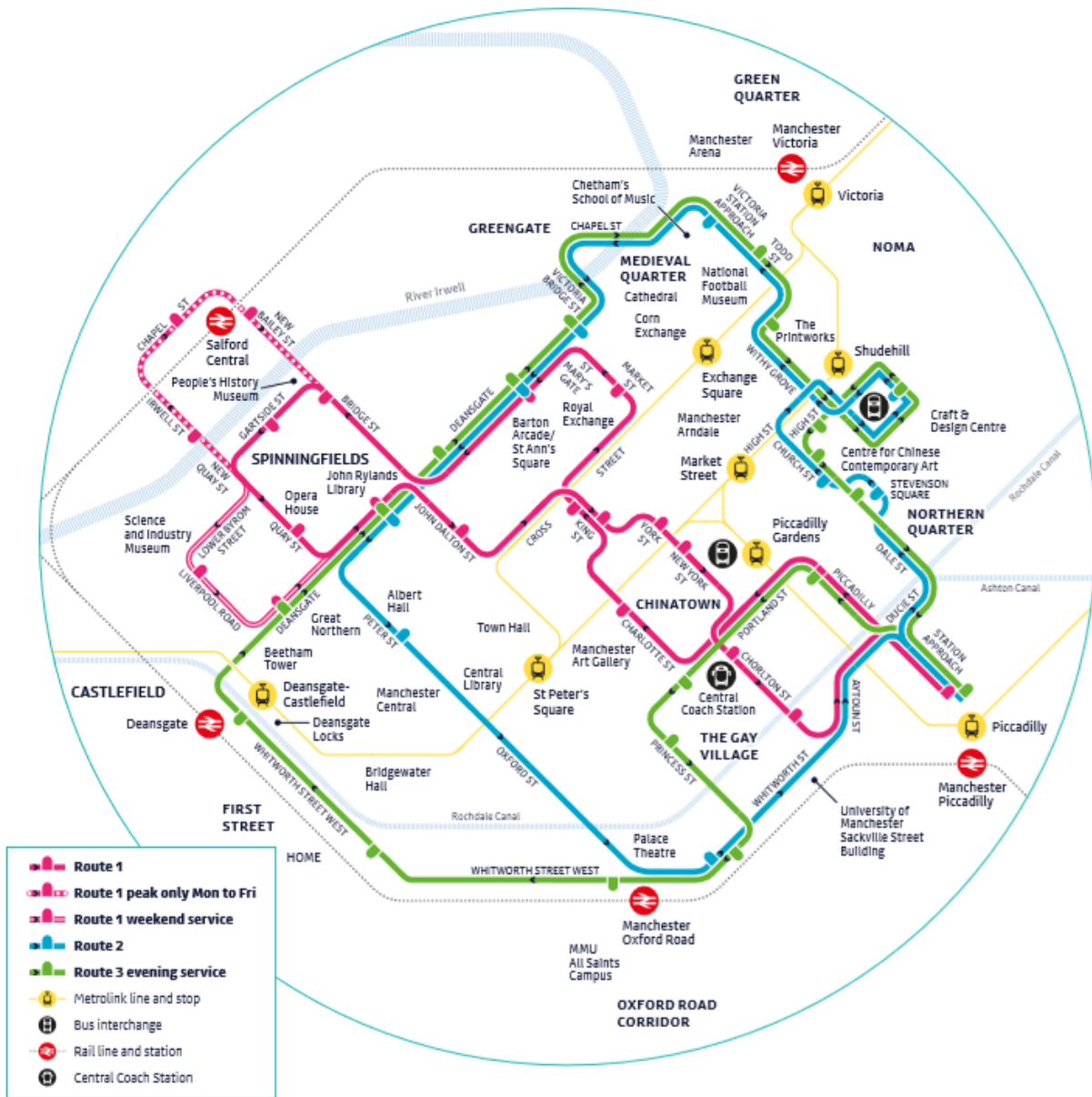


**①** Two routes  
**②** around the city  
 Running until  
 10pm Mon to Sat  
 Every 10 minutes  
 (every 15 minutes after 6:30pm  
 and every 12 minutes on Sundays  
 and public holidays)



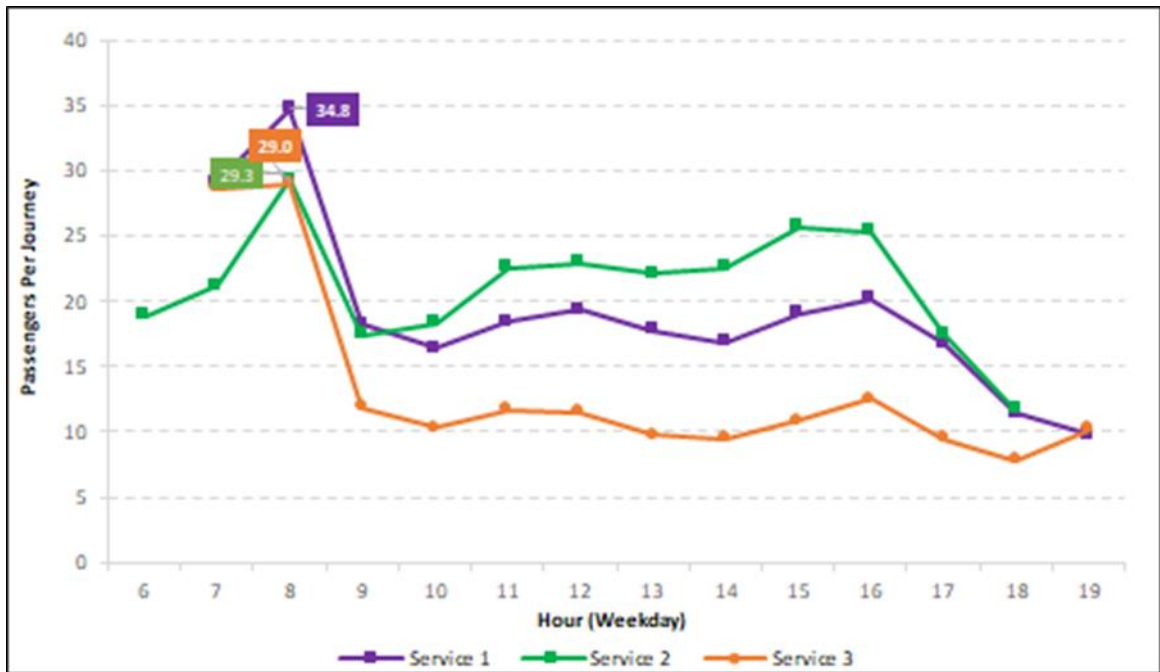
- Route 1 direction of travel and stop
- Route 2 direction of travel and stop
- Route 2 peak only Mon to Fri 6:30–9:10am and 4–6:30pm
- Metrolink line and stop
- Bus interchange
- Rail line and station
- Central Coach Station

## Appendix B: Map of the proposed Free Bus routes

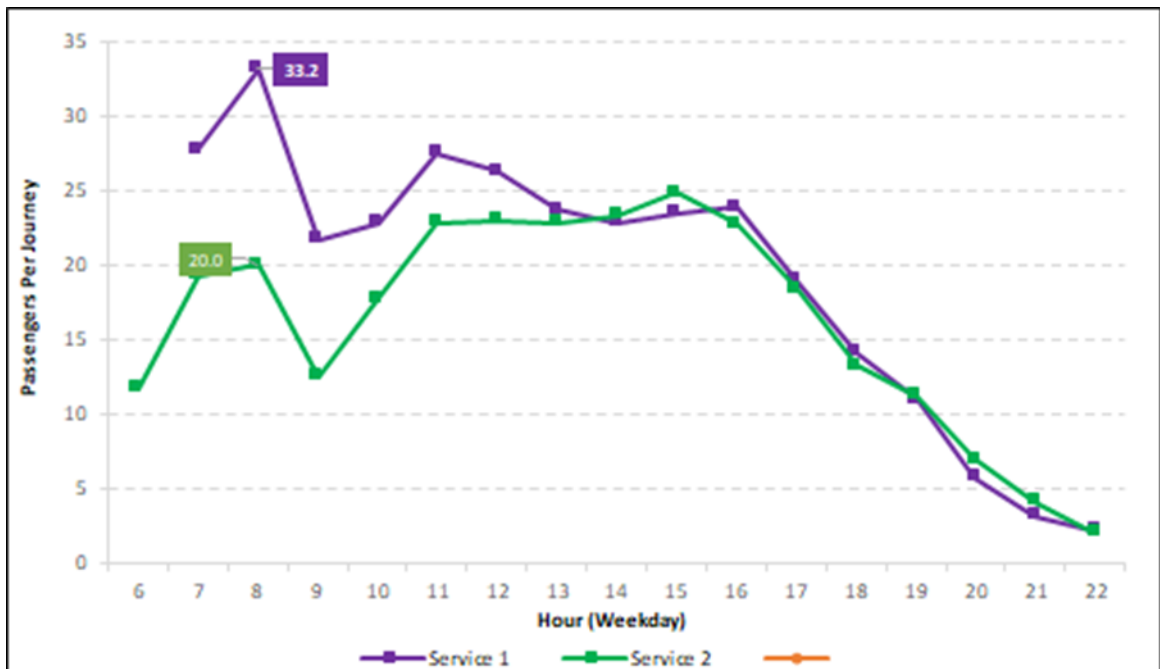


**Appendix C: Weekday profile of average patronage per journey (2018/19)**

**Weekday Patronage per Journey Profile – Metroshuttle (2018/19: to 27/10/18)**



**Weekday Patronage per Journey Profile – Free Bus (2018/19: from 28/10/18)**



**Appendix D: Example of Bolton Metroshuttle Marketing**

**You shop**



**We drop**



Free buses around Bolton town centre — hop on and off as often as you like.

For maps and times:  
[tfgm.com/metroshuttle](http://tfgm.com/metroshuttle)

**METROSHUTTLE**  
Free travel in Bolton town centre



**Bolton Council**