TODMORDEN TOWN COUNCIL

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Josh Fenton-Glynn MP
House of Commons
London
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Subject: Bus Services in the Upper Calder Valley – The Need for Fair and Effective Bus Franchising

Dear Mr Fenton-Glynn,

Following consideration of this matter at its Full Council meeting on 28 October 2026, Todmorden Town Council is writing to raise its concerns regarding bus services in the Upper Calder Valley and the implications of the forthcoming bus franchising arrangements for Todmorden.

The Council has approved the accompanying briefing paper, *Bus Services in the Upper Calder Valley: Why Franchising Must Work for Todmorden's Cross-Boundary Travel*, which sets out the background to the decline in cross-boundary bus services and the changes the Council believes are necessary to secure a reliable and accessible network for residents.

Since 2019, the bus connections linking Todmorden with Burnley and Rochdale have been significantly weakened, including the withdrawal of the 589 Burnley–Rochdale service and reductions in the frequency and availability of other routes. These services are vital for residents accessing employment, further education and social opportunities beyond West Yorkshire.

The Council is also concerned that service reductions introduced in May 2025 relied on passenger data from ticket machines that were widely reported to be faulty. Following the introduction of updated equipment in November 2025, passenger data indicated a significant increase in usage on the Burnley service. This raises serious questions about whether previous decisions were based on an accurate assessment of passenger demand.

As West Yorkshire progresses towards bus franchising, the Council believes there is an important opportunity to address these longstanding issues. However, the current arrangements risk leaving key cross-boundary routes outside the effective control of the Combined Authority, creating a two-tier network that could disadvantage communities such as Todmorden.

This disparity is already evident in the limitations of the Combined Authority's MY Card. While the provision of free bus travel for 19–25-year-olds is very welcome, the card is valid only within West Yorkshire. For many young people in Todmorden, whose journeys for education, employment and social activity routinely take them across the county boundary towards Burnley or Rochdale, this

significantly limits its value. It is a clear example of how residents in boundary communities can receive a less effective service than those whose everyday journeys remain within West Yorkshire.

Todmorden's position on the western edge of West Yorkshire should not result in residents having less access to reliable and frequent bus services. The Council is therefore calling for a franchising model that properly recognises the travel needs of communities on the county boundary. Specifically, Todmorden Town Council is seeking:

- **A cross-boundary franchising approach** that reflects the model operating in Greater Manchester and provides a fair and effective network for communities on the county boundary.

- **The inclusion of all bus routes originating in West Yorkshire** within the franchising framework.

- **The restoration of half-hourly services** towards Burnley and Rochdale.

- **The reinstatement of the 589 Burnley–Rochdale route via Todmorden** to restore an important cross-boundary connection.

- **Strong leadership from the West Yorkshire Mayor and Combined Authority** to address these issues and ensure that the franchising arrangements meet the needs of all communities across the region.

The Council would welcome your support in raising these concerns with the West Yorkshire Mayor and Combined Authority, and in advocating for a franchising scheme that delivers fair, reliable and accessible bus services for Todmorden and the wider Upper Calder Valley. Should the Mayor and Combined Authority be unwilling to address these concerns, or should meaningful progress be unduly delayed, we would also ask you to raise the matter with the Prime Minister. Given Mr Burnham's direct experience of establishing a franchised bus network in Greater Manchester, we believe his insight and support could be particularly valuable in securing a fairer and more inclusive approach to bus franchising in West Yorkshire.

Residents should not be disadvantaged by administrative boundaries when travelling to work, accessing education or participating in social and community life. The introduction of bus franchising presents an opportunity to improve connectivity and address the decline in services experienced over recent years. It is essential that Todmorden is fully included in these improvements, rather than left with a network that fails to meet the needs of its residents.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. The Council looks forward to your response and would welcome your support in taking these concerns forward.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Crewe
Town Clerk, Todmorden Town Council

Enclosure: *Bus Services in the Upper Calder Valley: Why Franchising Must Work for Todmorden's Cross-Boundary Travel* – Briefing Paper, October 2026

Bus Services in the Upper Calder Valley Information Sheet

Why franchising must work for Todmorden's cross-boundary travel
Prepared by: Todmorden Town Council – Bus Working Group
Date: October 2026

Executive summary

Todmorden sits at the western edge of West Yorkshire, and most residents travel towards Burnley or Rochdale for post-16 education, social activity and employment. Since 2019 the bus links serving those journeys have been progressively reduced. The 589 service that connected Burnley and Rochdale through the town has not run since.

The Combined Authority is franchising bus services through West Yorkshire. As currently designed, it will leave Todmorden with a two-tier network: franchised services, and commercial "permitted" services that terminate outside the county boundary and over which the Combined Authority will have far less control. This briefing sets out the background, the issues and the changes the Council is seeking.

Key Messages

- Todmorden's cross-boundary bus links to Burnley and Rochdale have been steadily weakened since 2019.
- The May 2025 cuts were supported by passenger data from ticket machines that were widely reported as faulty.
- As currently designed, West Yorkshire franchising risks a two-tier network in which Todmorden's most important routes sit outside the Combined Authority's control.

Todmorden Town Council calls for a franchising model that covers all routes originating in West Yorkshire, restores half-hourly frequency and reinstates the 589 route.

Background

A pattern of reductions since 2019

First West Yorkshire implemented drastic bus service cuts in October 2019: The 589 Burnley–Rochdale service via Todmorden was withdrawn; and the 590 Rochdale–Halifax and 592 Burnley–Halifax services, both via Todmorden, were reduced to hourly.

The 592 was restored to half-hourly in September 2020, but the 589 was not reinstated. This confirmed the end of fluid connectivity between the Combined Authority services operated by First. The September 2020 changes were introduced during the Covid pandemic, at a time when many bus drivers had left the industry because of pay and conditions. First was consequently unable to staff a full service, and reliability suffered.

The 2019 reductions were agreed by the then Managing Director of First West Yorkshire, Paul Matthews, who is now the Combined Authority's Director of Bus Franchising.

Timeline

Date	**Development**
2018	First introduces its Ticketer ticket machines, enabling card payment and digital tracking of passenger data.
October 2019	Drastic cuts by First West Yorkshire. The 589 (Burnley–Rochdale via Todmorden) is withdrawn; the 590 (Rochdale–Halifax) and 592 (Burnley–Halifax) are reduced to hourly.
September 2020	The 592 is reinstated half-hourly. The 589 is not reinstated. Driver shortages during the Covid pandemic leave First unable to staff a full service, and reliability suffers.
May 2025	New cuts across the upper Calder Valley: the Burnley route returns to hourly, Sunday and Bank Holiday services are reduced, and no buses run after 9.00 pm.
November 2025	First introduces a new version of Ticketer. Reported problems fall drastically, and data shows a large increase in passenger usage on the Burnley service.

Ticket machine data and the evidence base

First introduced its Ticketer ticket machines in 2018, allowing card payment and digital tracking of passenger numbers. In practice, the machines were inadequately supported and were frequently out of action:

- Daily, and at times hourly, reports of buses running with non-functioning ticket machines.
- Drivers unable to issue tickets, and passengers simply waved on board.
- Recorded passenger usage of zero on journeys that were carrying upwards of 40 passengers.

Drivers documented these incidents, including service numbers, fleet numbers, dates and times, and submitted the records to First and to the Combined Authority. The Combined Authority responded by tasking First with monitoring itself and reporting back.

The service cuts described above were introduced were introduced in May 2025 using data drawn from flawed ticket machines.

First introduced a new version of Ticketer in November 2025, and far fewer problems have been reported since. Councillor Sarah Courtney, then Calderdale Council's representative on the Combined Authority, confirmed that the new data shows a large increase in passenger usage on the Burnley service.

Implication: decisions that cut services were made on data that undercounted real demand. The corrected data now points the other way.

Issues for Todmorden

A two-tier bus network

Franchising as currently being set up will divide Todmorden's services into two categories. Franchised services will be planned and controlled by the Combined Authority. Permitted services are commercial, unfranchised services that operate within a franchised area but terminate outside the county boundary. The Combined Authority will not have the same control over these, and they will remain exposed to the operator's internal commercial assessments.

Because the majority of Todmorden residents travel towards Burnley or Rochdale, it is precisely the routes that matter most to the town that are most likely to fall into the less protected tier.

Limits of the MY Card offer

The Combined Authority's MY Card now provides free bus travel for 19–25-year-olds. While welcome, it is valid only within West Yorkshire and is therefore of little use to Todmorden residents, whose journeys for education, work and social life commonly cross the county boundary.

Recommendations

The Council is asking for a bus franchising scheme that is fair and fit for purpose for communities on the edge of the county.

Specifically:

	Recommendation	What this means in practice
1	**Adopt a Greater Manchester-style franchising model**	A fair and fit-for-purpose scheme for West Yorkshire that acknowledges and mirrors the cross-border model currently operated in Greater Manchester.
2	**Bring all West Yorkshire-originating routes under the franchise**	Every route that originates within West Yorkshire should sit under the franchise umbrella, as under the former West Yorkshire passenger transport executive, Metro.
3	**Restore half-hourly frequency**	Return the Burnley/Rochdale valley services to a half-hourly frequency.
4	**Reintroduce the 589 route**	Reinstate the Burnley–Rochdale service via Todmorden to enable quick and smooth connectivity.
5	**Change direction at the top**	The West Yorkshire Mayor and Combined Authority to lead a change of direction to address these issues.

Conclusion

Todmorden's bus network has been weakened in stages since 2019, and some of the decisions behind that decline rested on unreliable data. Franchising offers a genuine opportunity to correct course, but only if it covers the routes people in Todmorden actually use. The Council urges the Mayor and Combined Authority to adopt the changes above so that the town is a full participant in West Yorkshire's bus network, rather than an exception to it.