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Train and bus firms must work together to make journeys easier, says minister

Joined-up-transport scheme designed to persuade passengers to use buses and trains instead of cars for door-to-door journeys

Fiona Harvey, environment correspondent
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The transport minister, Norman Baker, says 'a sustainable journey is only as attractive as its weakest link'.
Photograph: Sheila Barry for the Guardian

Train companies are to be forced to work with bus operators and local authorities to make it easier and safer to make long journeys by public transport.

The move is part of a government-backed scheme for "joined-up transport", which will enable people to make door-to-door journeys using public transport. Most people – about 80% – take the car for journeys of longer than five miles and research shows many of them do so because it is hard to find out about public transport for the complete journey.

"If you had to get to somewhere just outside Nottingham, you might know you can get a

train to Nottingham, but you wouldn't know how to travel the last two miles from the train station at the other end, and whether there was public transport available," Norman Baker, transport minister, told the Guardian. "You might decide to take the car instead."

That uncertainty – not only of routes but of timetables for connecting public transport services, such as changing from a train to a bus – deters many people, he said. Under his plans, train companies will also have to work with bus firms to ensure their timetables are complementary. "You don't want to get off at a station and the bus has just left, with two hours to the next one," Baker said. "A sustainable journey is only as attractive as its weakest link."

At present, even when the train and bus services are owned by the same company, they often do not take account of these factors. Under the so-called door-to-door scheme, train operators would also provide through tickets, so that passengers could buy a bus ticket for the connecting journey at the same time.



Baker claims the uncertainty surrounding routes deters passengers. Photograph: PA
"When people are thinking about their journey, they naturally think about the cost and complexity of the entire trip, door to door, not just the ride on the train or bus. So as well as cutting out the hassle of travelling by bike, foot and public transport, we need to make it simpler and more reliable to combine different ways of travelling to get the whole way from A to B," Baker said.

In a report to be published on Thursday, the government sets out ways to remove some of these key barriers putting people off public transport use – not only ticketing, routes and timetables but also factors such as safety and comfort. Baker cited passengers concerned about the safety of stations that are vandalised, poorly lit or unstaffed late at night. The solution, for train and station operators, is to clean up stations and make them more accessible.

He also pledged to double the number of stations with bike racks, to make it easier for people to cycle to and from stations, and for local authorities to make it simpler for people to get to stations by bicycle or pedestrian routes.

However, there is no new funding for the door-to-door initiative. Baker said many of the activities were covered by current funds, such as the £600m local sustainable transport funding, and £100m to make stations more accessible. He added that passengers would be able to find door-to-door journey information on the internet, and by other means.

Baker pointed to examples of pilot schemes such as one in South Yorkshire where a multi-operator ticket is valid on buses, trams and trains, and in Oxford where bus and train companies are working together on timetables.

The government's plans have the backing of several campaign groups and transport firms.

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