

# Journeys taken care of

Go North East  
Sustainability Report 2021



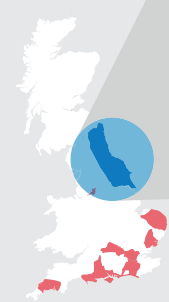
For over 100 years, Go North East has connected the region's towns and villages with the cities of Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland and operates across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and into Tees Valley. Our East Yorkshire subsidiary that runs across Hull, Scarborough and York is also covered in a separate report.

We are proud to employ 1,900 local people who help keep the region moving with our fleet of around 600 buses and coaches.

By providing essential bus services Go North East helps people connect with each other and get where they want to go, enabling access to education, retail and employment.

We place great importance on partnerships, adopting a collaborative approach with local governments, local communities and strategic partners. We are committed to providing our communities with affordable and reliable access to employment, education and leisure activities.

Go North East is part of the Newcastle based Go-Ahead Group plc, which is one of the UK's leading public transport providers.



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## Find out more...

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## Our reporting structure

We are committed to operating our buses in a way which helps to put our services at the heart of the communities we serve. This report is split into five sections:

### Better teams

To perform all job roles and tasks competently to allow further growth.

→ Read more on page 4

### Happier customers

To gain more happy customers and reward colleagues for receiving positive feedback.

→ Read more on page 6

### Stronger communities

To support the region through a number of activities and initiatives.

→ Read more on page 7

### Safer working

To implement safer working across the business.

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### Cleaner environment

To improve air quality and encourage fuel efficiency at all locations across the business, with the added introduction of our Climate Change Strategy.

→ Read more on page 9

# Managing Director's message



## 2020/21 highlights

- **£3.7million joint-funded project to introduce the region's first zero-emission, fully-electric buses**
- **£10million investment into new buses for our premium X-lines express routes which connect the region's towns and villages with Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland**
- **The launch of a new website to help our customers travel with confidence, as well as a new app with ratings now sitting at around 4.6 out of 5**
- **New ticket offers and simplification of others to make travel even more affordable**
- **Continued work with NEbus, a collaboration of North East bus operators to call for buses to have a higher profile, and for stakeholders to recognise the huge steps forward the industry has made in recent years**

**“Welcome to our Sustainability Report for 2020/21. In what has been a challenging year due to the pandemic, there have still been many highlights, including the introduction of the region's first zero-emission, fully-electric buses, and the launch of our climate change strategy.”**

**Martijn Gilbert**  
Managing Director

Since the start of the pandemic, we have been committed to building back better in an effort to ensure that we are in the best possible place to recover.

In November 2020, we flipped the switch on 'VOLTRA', our new brand for our electric zero-emission bus fleet in the North East, which are capable of all-day service with a single overnight charge, supporting the company's commitment to improve air quality and help to tackle climate change.

We have also continued the rollout of our premium interurban X-lines brand for our express routes, with a £10million investment into new buses for routes linking the region's towns and villages with the cities of Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland.

These new buses feature all the latest mod-cons, including free Wi-Fi, USB and wireless charging, seat-back phone holders, next-stop audio-visual announcements, including live rail connection times, and tables on the upper-deck.

We've also introduced bike racks on some of our buses to aid active travel and we're trialling an extra wheelchair space on the X-lines services between Hexham and Newcastle.

X-lines promotion has continued with the recent "don't drive, get driven" marketing campaign, which included a TV advert for a bus like never before.

At the start of the pandemic, we also showed our commitment to improving technology with the introduction of a new website with the help of industry-leading provider Passenger.

The new website delivered a whole host of new features, including live times and interactive maps, improved journey planner and enhanced service updates, as well as giving key workers and those making essential journeys the ability to favourite their most used bus stops, journeys and timetables for quick and easy access.

To complement the introduction of the new website, we also teamed up with CitySwift to develop a dynamic big data artificial intelligence prediction engine that forecasted which journeys would be quieter (or busier), when and where, whilst capacities were restricted due to social distancing.

This feature could be used to look two weeks in advance, with customers also able to check live data on the day using our website to see how many seats are left on their bus, and if it has any features such as free Wi-Fi and USB charging.

We worked with Passenger again in recent months to deliver a new app, ensuring the user experience for our customers is the same whether they're using the website or app, with favourites displaying no matter which device is used.

Throughout the pandemic, despite all of the challenges, colleagues across the company have united and raised thousands of pounds for local charities and causes, whilst also delivering exceptional service for our customers.

In May of this year, we improved our ticket offering with the introduction of a £1 evening fare that's available after 7pm, to support local businesses and help get the region back on its feet.

Across the summer, we also introduced a range of 'summer saving fares', with tickets capped at single, return, day and weekly levels to make travelling with us even easier and, more importantly, great value for money.

Both campaigns have delivered passenger growth, with any losses from the introduction of the discounts already offset by the increased passenger numbers.

Due to the success of the offers, they've now been extended and, should they remain popular, there's a good chance they will be made permanent.



The launch of our game-changing 'VOLTRA' electric buses in November 2020



# Better teams

In October 2020, as part of National Inclusion Week, we launched our new 'One Team GNE' inclusive engagement initiative. At Go North East, we want to celebrate diversity in all its forms, by working together to make sure colleagues feel valued and respected.

Our One Team GNE initiative addresses six key themes selected by members of our workforce:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Disability and inclusion
- Community engagement
- Gender equality
- Ethnicity
- LGBTQ+

To help drive the initiative forward, we enlisted the help of 29 'One Team GNE champions' who put themselves forward from across the company.

Representing colleagues from all depot locations and across different roles, the initiative aims to get everyone working together to make a better company for all our employees.

We also want to create a more inclusive and supportive team for colleagues, as well as forming a platform to reach out to more community groups across the region.

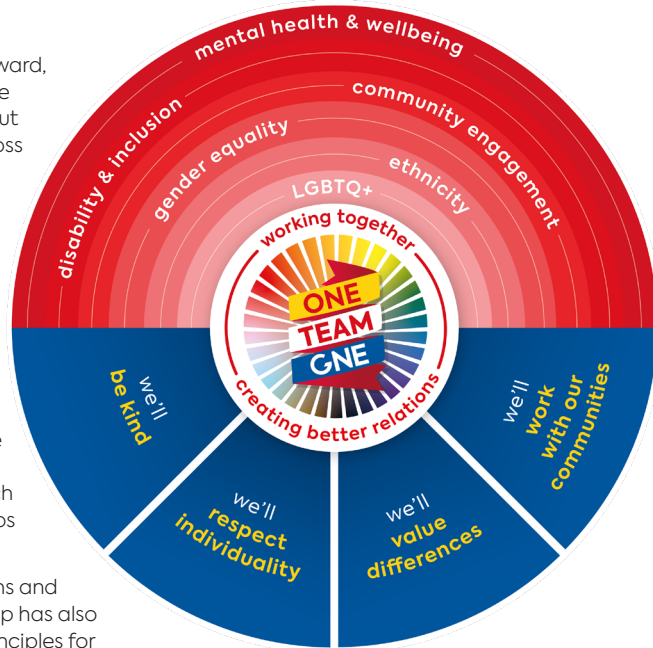
Following online group sessions and surveying, the champion group has also devised four underpinning principles for

colleagues as part of One Team GNE – be kind; respect individuality; value differences; and work well with communities.

Since the launch of the initiative, there have been a whole range of activities that have supported the key six themes, including Pride Month, Time to Talk Day, World AIDS Day, Blue Monday, LGBTQ+ History Month, Trans Awareness Week, National Inclusion Week, and Show Racism the Red Card's Wear Red Day, plus many more.

Earlier this year, to build upon all of these activities, we also hosted an 'Everyone Matters' week-long celebration of diversity, inclusivity, health and wellbeing.

During the week of celebration, each team member received an informative programme booklet containing information about each



of the key themes and some helpful tips and guidance on matters such as healthy living, and mental health and wellbeing.

Throughout the week, there were live talks with external speakers, including Show Racism the Red Card, Newcastle Carers and Quality First Family Support.

Videos were also produced by One Team GNE Champions on different topics, as were profiles on colleagues in different parts of the company. The week was rounded off with a fancy dress day and a social event for all colleagues.



🔍 **Women in bus**

# 20%

target for female representation in the workforce by 2025

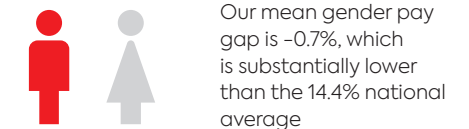
### All employees



### Senior Management



### Gender Pay Gap



## Happier customers

### Doing our bit for the people of the North East and the local economy.

We've introduced a number of fares offers to help the region get back on its feet, and provide people with even more affordable travel at a time where money is tight for a lot of households.

We launched our £1 evening fare back in May which is valid for any bus journey after 7pm, and, due to its success, it still remains today.

Likewise, over the summer we introduced a wide range of money saving fares for our customers in County Durham, the Gateshead borough and the City of Sunderland, with tickets capped at single, return, day and weekly rates.

Again, these have proved very popular and we've received some great feedback from customers, so these have been extended too, as well as the addition of offers in North Tyneside.

A new website and app has also been launched to provide our customers with better tools and strengthen our relationship with them, whilst also boosting their confidence at a critical time.



### Customer feedback



"Your driver on the 11:06 10A service from Greenside to Newcastle is a credit to you. I told him my autistic daughter was doing a test run on the bus independently before starting school and he was amazing with her. We need more people like him."

1 September 2021



"I'm a support worker and your driver Stephen Howe was aware that the young adult I was travelling with was a fan of buses and took time to answer all of his questions. This completely made his day and he has not stopped talking about it. Thank you!"

1 October 2021



Connect with us on social media:

Twitter: @gonortheast

Facebook: simplyGNE

Instagram: @gonortheast

## Stronger communities

This year at Go North East, we were proud to be involved with a number of activities in the community, but nothing makes us as proud as looking back to see how our colleagues, customers and the rest of the region has united as one driving force against coronavirus.

Throughout lockdowns and beyond, we've been involved in a series of activities to help put smiles back on people's faces, such as branded 'Come on England' buses during Euro 2020.

The branding of the buses went down really well on social media, and helped contribute to something that the region and nation as a whole could get behind, and help lift spirits at an important time.

In December, with most normal Santa events cancelled, we decided to launch #GNESantaBus.

Our open-top bus commenced on a two-week tour of the region's villages, towns and cities, helping to spread some much-needed joy.

The feedback on social media was phenomenal with people posting photos and videos, thanking us for putting on such a show and thousands of people lining the streets.

We also celebrated Global Community Engagement Day in January, with Martijn Gilbert, our managing director, hosting a Q&A session for our customers on Facebook Live, answering pre-submitted questions from customers, and then holding a live session towards the end of the video.



Our Santa bus on its two-week long tour across the region's villages, towns and cities

Despite all of the challenges, our team have gone the extra mile, not only by keeping the region moving but also with their charity work, raising over £10,000 for various charities and local causes.

We also commemorated VE Day, showed racism the red card on Wear Red Day, supported World AIDS Day, raised money for Children in Need, relaunched our Poppy Bus, took part in Football Shirt Friday for Cancer Research UK, and a whole lot more throughout the year.

Once restrictions were lifted in the region, we hosted an open day at our Gateshead Riverside depot, allowing the community to come and engage with us, seeing bus displays, viewing workshop areas, vintage bus rides and electric bus demonstrations.

We were proud to be recognised as a UK Business Hero by the British Chamber of Commerce for the support we gave our local community.

## Safer working

**At Go North East, we're proud of the working environments we offer for colleagues, and what we've done to sure our buses are as safe and comfortable as possible for our customers.**

Throughout the pandemic, as regulations were introduced and constantly changing, we acted swiftly for both the benefit of our colleagues and customers.

One-way systems and extra measures to ensure social distancing were introduced, allowing our team members to work safely across their locations.

Additional cleaning regimes of vehicles were brought in at depots, with touch point cleaning also introduced at main interchanges across the region.

Drivers and support teams were also issued with additional PPE, including face coverings, hand sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes.

We have also introduced the use of Zonitise, a new cleaning product on our buses, after an initial successful trial.

The new product helps to constantly protect from bacteria and viruses on shared surfaces, prevents cross-contamination, and offers the equivalent protection of physically disinfecting more than 100 times a day.

Once the two-part antimicrobial coating is applied to surfaces and touchpoints throughout the bus, the finished areas are not only protected with an invisible layer of sealant but with its unique physical barrier that terminates the life of microbes on contact, 24/7 for 12 months.

### Mental Health

We have continued important work to help the mental health of colleagues, with the launch of our One Team GNE group, and held various activities for things like World Mental Health Day and Time to Talk Day.

We're also in the process of training mental health ambassadors, with the aim of having representatives from each of our locations, and continued to provide our Employee Assistance Programme.

## Cleaner environment

In July 2021 we launched our first Go-Ahead Group Climate Change Strategy detailing how the Group as a whole is reducing our impact on the climate and also how we are managing the impact of climate change on our operations. As a public transport company we have an exciting opportunity to help the transport sector decarbonise; a full bus can take around 75 cars off the road and so modal shift is critical to decarbonise the transport sector.

→ [go-ahead.com/sustainability](https://go-ahead.com/sustainability)

Our Group Climate Change Strategy addresses 5 priority areas:

- 1 Climate change adaptation:** identify how climate change is affecting us and plan how we are managing those impacts and opportunities.
- 2 Decarbonisation:** of our premises, ancillary fleet and bus fleet. Our Group target is to reduce our carbon footprint by 75% by 2035 and achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2045.
- 3 Air quality:** from our fleet but also cleaning air via our innovations such as air filtering bus. We have a series of ambitious reduction targets for carbon monoxide (17%), hydrocarbons (49%), nitrogen oxide (63%) and particulate matter (50%) by 2025.
- 4 Water:** including our use, leaks and sourcing. As a Group we are aiming to reduce water use by 25% by 2025.
- 5 Waste:** including recycling and waste to landfill. As a Group we are aiming to increase recycling rates to 60% by 2025.

Here at Go North East, our strategy focuses on developing plans to encourage modal shift away from cars, the removal of the oldest vehicles from our fleet, a long-term aim of achieving 100% zero-emission fleet (predominantly electric), a more sustainable approach to property management and improvement, reduction of facilities carbon footprint, and employee awareness and engagement programme.

Our strategy highlights include:

- 1 Climate change adaptation:** enhanced engagement with colleagues to monitor the climate change impacts on our operation, aiming to better manage the associated risks.
- 2 Decarbonisation:** investing to upgrade our fleet and depot infrastructure, and ongoing efforts to improve fuel efficiency by using Mix Telematics scores.
- 3 Air quality:** removal of remaining Euro III buses by 2021/22, the introduction of more zero-emission buses by 2022/23, with a 100% zero-emission fleet by 2035.
- 4 Water:** monitoring of monthly usage data to identify any increase or leaks, working with the team to identify opportunities for efficiency improvements, and any changes to sites will be made with reduce-consumption mindset.
- 5 Waste:** building improved data on waste source and methods for disposal to develop further targets, increase recycling opportunities at all depots, and educate employees across the company about how they can help to deliver targets.



# Our climate change strategy



## Climate change adaptation

1. Identify risks and vulnerabilities
2. Quantify costs and source funding
3. Identify risks to properties
4. Work with suppliers to identify and reduce exposure and vulnerabilities
5. Develop business cases for adaptation measures
6. Work with partners

### We are:

1. Reviewing flooding predictions
2. Identifying the top 10 suppliers at risk of climate change related interruptions
3. Conducting property assessments

### Group targets:

1. Risk assessment, mitigation plan, and measures embedded by 2023
2. Identify mitigation activities for critical suppliers by 2022
3. Identify local extreme weather predictions, develop premise safeguarding plan, assess high-risk areas, and embed actions and reviews by 2022



## Mitigation: Decarbonisation

1. Bus fleet decarbonisation
2. Rail fleet decarbonisation
3. Ancillary fleet decarbonisation
4. Decarbonisation of properties
5. Develop net/carbon zero commitment

### We are:

1. Investing in electric vehicles rather than diesel
2. Looking to reduce gas and electric usage by 5% by 2021/22

### Group targets:

1. Net zero business by 2045
2. Zero-emission bus fleet in the UK by 2035
3. Non-diesel rail fleet by 2035 Non-diesel rail fleet by 2035
4. By 2035 reduce carbon emissions by 75%



## Mitigation: Air quality

1. Improve bus fleet by procuring electric vehicles
2. Purchase new buses at the latest emissions standards
3. Remove older lower emissions standards vehicles from the fleet
4. Work on bus priority solutions with local authorities

### We are:

1. Making ongoing fleet improvements
2. BSIP development\*
3. Working in partnership with our suppliers

### Group targets:

- By 2025, reduce:
1. Carbon monoxide (CO) by 17%
  2. Hydrocarbons (HC) by 49%
  3. Nitrogen oxides (NOx) by 63%
  4. Particulate matter (PM) by 55%



## Mitigation: Water

1. Address leaks better
2. Reduce third party use of our water
3. Reduce water use
4. Improve water sourcing

### We are:

1. Monitoring usage
2. Identifying efficiency opportunities
3. Improving our sites' efficiencies

### Group target:

1. By 2025, reduce water use by 25%



## Mitigation: Waste

1. Improve rail and bus waste management contracts
2. Increase recycling rates
3. Behaviour change programmes for customers and colleagues
4. Reduce waste in supply chain and operational activities

### We are:

1. Improving our data
2. Reviewing contracts
3. Reducing on bus ticket printing

### Group target:

1. By 2025, increase waste recycling rate to 60%

\* The region's first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has unveiled a new £804 million bid to Government which transport leaders are confident will dramatically transform bus services across the North East, helping to deliver national and local objectives that include reducing carbon emissions and responding to climate change.



# Summary

As an operator with a business spanning coastal areas and with some major rivers, the risk of flooding coupled with storms and high temperatures could have a major impact on our customers and colleagues as well as the communities that we serve.

## Adaptation

Climate change is already upon us. Here at Go North East, we have already experienced hotter summers, impacting on our drivers and passengers; and wetter winters, affecting things like road flooding and causing service disruption.

We have started to develop our risk register, which includes top strategic and operations risks.

To continue tracking impacts we are leveraging our existing incidence report process to flag weather-related events. We will revise this data on a 3-month basis to improve our risk and opportunities register. This will help us to quantify those risks and then understand how we need to adapt.

## Decarbonisation

As a bus company, our biggest carbon impact comes from our bus fleet. With that in mind, we have set targets to transition to a 100% zero-emission fleet by 2035, predominantly with electric buses.

To help us on our road to having an improved fleet and being a Net Zero Carbon business by 2035, we have already pulled together our fleet investment roadmap and developed ZEBRA bids.

We also have an ancillary fleet of 31 vans which we intend to transition to 100% electric by 2024.

## Air quality

We are putting in place key milestones and completion dates to improve air quality and reduce our emissions. These include the removal of the remaining Euro III in 2021/22, the introduction of more electric vehicles next year and having a 100% zero-emission fleet by 2035.

## Water

We currently use 35,041 m<sup>3</sup> of water per year. We're ensuring that our maintenance programme is sufficient, covering all water outlets, tanks, and bus washes, with reduced bus washing in summer months.

We'll also be monitoring usage each month to identify any increases or leaks, and working with the team on opportunities to reduce current usage in areas with high consumption.

## Waste

In 2020/21, we produced 538.6 metric tonnes of waste, of which 99.5% is diverted from landfill. Our recycling rate is 45.7%.

Our tactics to reduce waste includes looking at source of waste (e.g. suppliers packaging), improving how we manage waste (e.g. segregation) and how waste is managed when removed.

We'll be looking to decrease waste production with a reduction of on bus ticket printing, whilst also trying to convert as many customers as possible over to other payment methods such as our app.

# Key data: Go North East

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
<b>Better teams</b>			
Average number of employee	1,823	2,000	2,086
Average length of service (years)	12.2	11.5	11.5
Employee engagement - UK bus (%)	63	N/A	56
Turnover (%)	11.4	12.3	12.9
Absenteeism (%)	5	3.4	3.5
Training spend per employee (£)	242.78	29.77	N/A
Female employees (%)	9.6	9.7	10.2
Ethnic minorities (%)	0.5	0.3	0
<b>Happier customers</b>			
UK customer satisfaction - regional bus (%)*	N/A	93	92
UK regional bus punctuality (%)	92.6	91.2	91.4
<b>Stronger communities</b>			
Total cash contributions (£)	10,500	0	3,200
Community spend per employee (£)	5.73	0	1.53
<b>Safer working</b>			
Bus accidents per million miles	9	15	18
RIDDOR accidents per 100 employees	0.4	0.4	0.1
Bus fleet which is DDA compliant (%)	100	100	100
Total DVSA and PSV bus test pass rate (%)	97.4	97.6	100
<b>Cleaner environment</b>			
CO <sub>2</sub> total from all scope 1&2 sources (tonnes)	40,569	45,273	54,073
Carbon emissions per vehicle mile (all energy) (kg)	1.32	1.48	1.49
Total waste generated (tonnage)	538.6	542.6	902.6
Waste - landfill diversion rate (%)	99.5	99	96.9
Recycling rate (%)	45.7	44.7	N/A
Amount of water consumed (m <sup>3</sup> )	35,041	37,570	39,569
% of bus fleet that is zero or low carbon emission <sup>†</sup>	44.9	18.8	14.5
Average fleet diesel efficiency (MPG)	8.96	8.22	8.12
Average fleet electric efficiency (kWh/mile)	1.1	N/A	N/A
Adaptation: yearly target completion: 2020/21 risk register & mitigation plans for top risks (Y/N)	Y	N/A	N/A

### Key

Note: For our Climate Change Strategy, new metrics have been introduced and reporting on these will start from 2020/21 which is why there are some indicators in 2019/20 without data. Air quality is also a key focus of our strategy but this is reported in Group annual ESG reporting. Further verified energy & environmental data can be found in the annual Group ESG report.

\* No customer satisfaction was conducted in this year due to the pandemic  
<sup>†</sup> Electric and hydrogen powered buses and Euro VI diesel buses.



For information on the full Group data, please visit our corporate website: [go-ahead.com](http://go-ahead.com)

\* ZEBRA is the Zero Emission Buses Regional Area scheme, which allows local transport authorities to bid for funding to purchase zero-emission buses. The Department for Transport (DfT) hopes this will reduce transport emissions and improve urban air quality significantly across the UK. The funding aims to deliver up to 500 zero-emission buses nationally, supporting the government's wider commitment to introduce 4,000 zero-emission buses.



## More information

You can find out more about Go North East by visiting our website [gonortheast.co.uk](http://gonortheast.co.uk) and more information on how Go North East manages sustainability can be found by visiting: [go-ahead.com/sustainability](http://go-ahead.com/sustainability)

If you have any comments, views or ideas on how we might improve, or have any thoughts on other issues that we should address in this report, please write to:

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## Summary Verification Statement from Bureau Veritas UK Ltd

Bureau Veritas UK Limited (Bureau Veritas) has provided verification for The Go-Ahead Group plc (Go-Ahead) over selected sustainability indicators contained within the Group Sustainability Report. The information and data reviewed in this verification process covered the period 28th June 2020 to 3rd July 2021.

The full verification statement including Bureau Veritas' verification opinion, methodology, recommendations and a statement of independence and impartiality will be released alongside the Group Sustainability Report and can be found on the Go-Ahead Group website:

[go-ahead.com/sustainability](http://go-ahead.com/sustainability)



Bureau Veritas UK Ltd  
November 2021

Designed by:

**designportfolio**