

BUS PERFORMANCE IN HACKNEY (MAY 2021)

The rollout of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN) has been an important part of London and Hackney's response to the pandemic and a key to preventing a car-led recovery. The LTNs are designed to physically prevent motor vehicles from cutting through residential areas while maintaining motor vehicle access to residents and creating space, cleaner air and better conditions for walking and cycling. As part of the ongoing interim evaluation of the LTNs, this note looks at the impact of these measures on bus services using information available as of July 2021.

Bus Performance across London¹

Until 2017/18, average bus speeds had been in consistent decline. The deterioration had been reversing over the previous two years, although speeds remained much slower than in 2014. Overall bus speeds in the Autumn and Winter 2020 were significantly higher than the previous year. This was the case in all areas of London and reflected increased speeds of general traffic, having been boosted by the impacts of reduced traffic levels during the Covid19 lockdown restrictions.

Another useful measure to examine bus performance is Excess Waiting Time (EWT). Prior to the initial lockdown EWT had been slightly worse than the previous year; though in general terms was still achieving some of the best ever results. Before the start of the pandemic Inner London EWT had been improving whilst Outer London had recorded a deterioration. Covid restrictions have brought about significant improvements to EWT across all areas of London and the gradual return towards more normal levels from April 2021 has also been similar Londonwide. Punctuality of low frequency services also saw a similar boost due to the Covid19 impacts whilst night buses departing on time recorded the best ever performance in 2020.

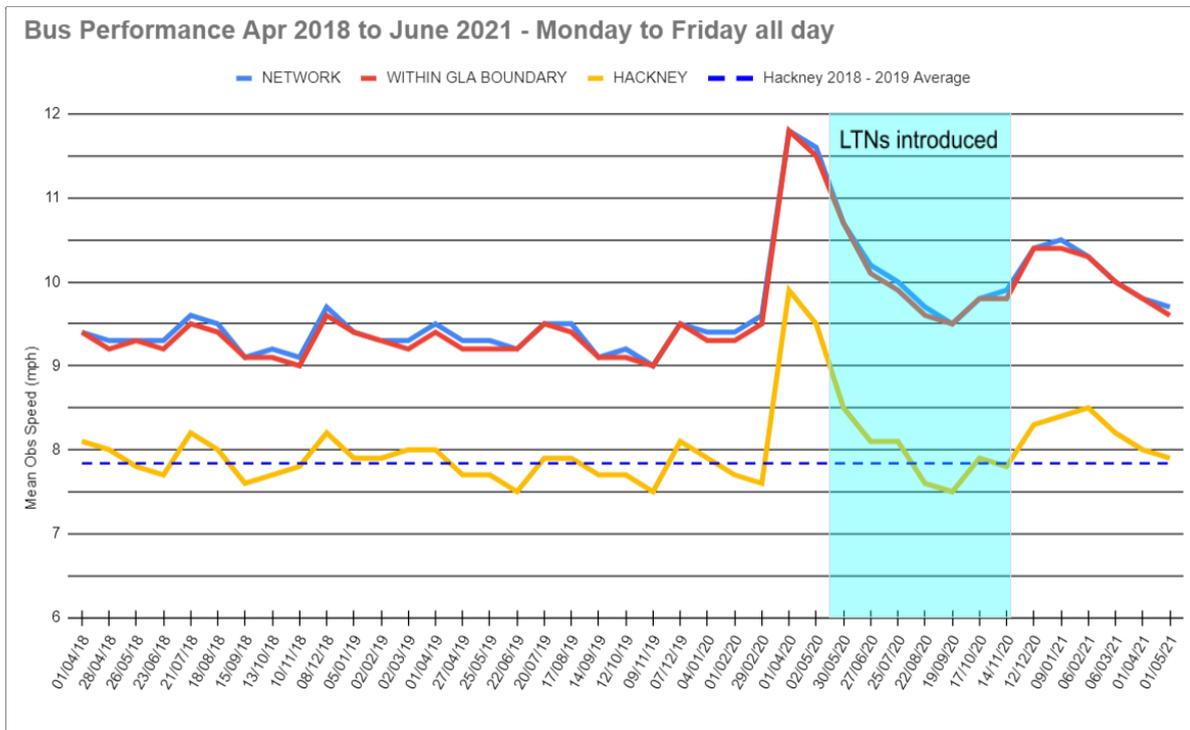
Bus speeds in Hackney

Average bus speeds in Hackney were 7.9mph in 2018 dropping to 7.8mph in 2019 and 7.7mph in 2020. Taking the two year period prior to the pandemic, average speeds by month ranged between 7.5mph to 9.6mph, with an overall average of 7.8mph. The lowest bus speeds of 7.5 mph were recorded in June 2019 and November 2019. Following the pandemic, speeds ranged between 7.5mph (Sept 2020) to 11.8mph (April 2020). These are boroughwide figures and no information is currently available on individual roads.

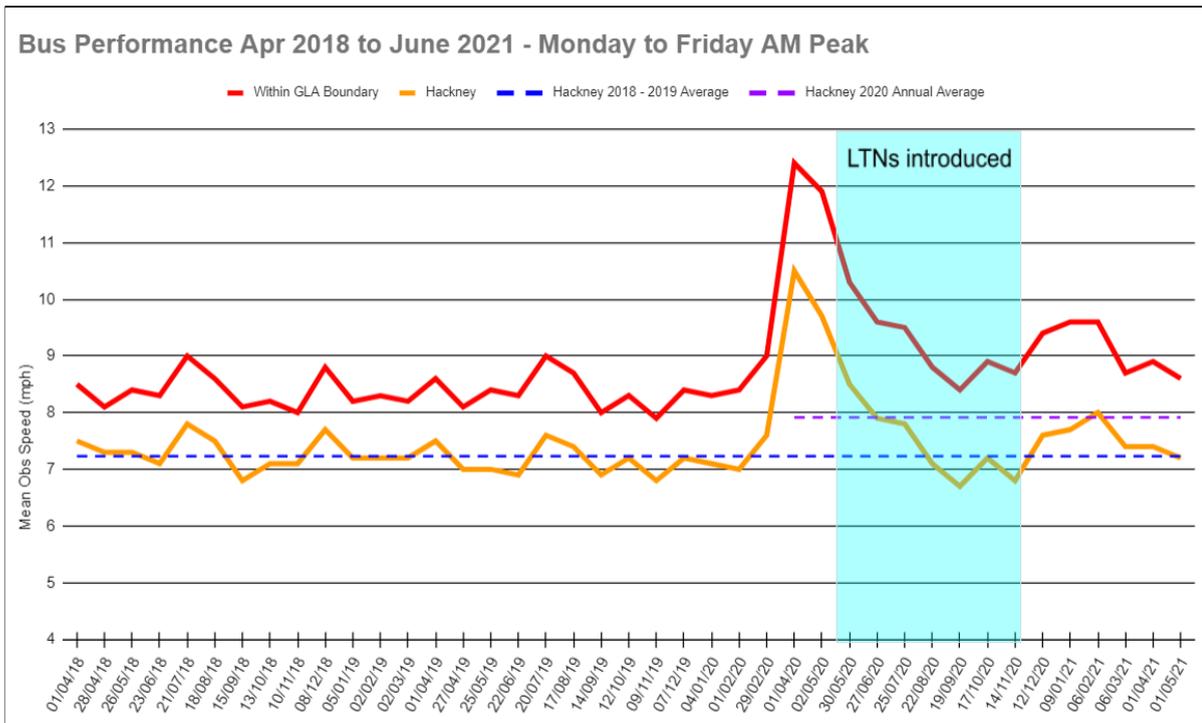
Bus speeds in Hackney have varied significantly during the pandemic with the highest speeds recorded at the height of lockdowns. For the first two periods of the 2021 reporting year (April -

¹ Source: <https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/publications-and-reports/buses-performance-data>

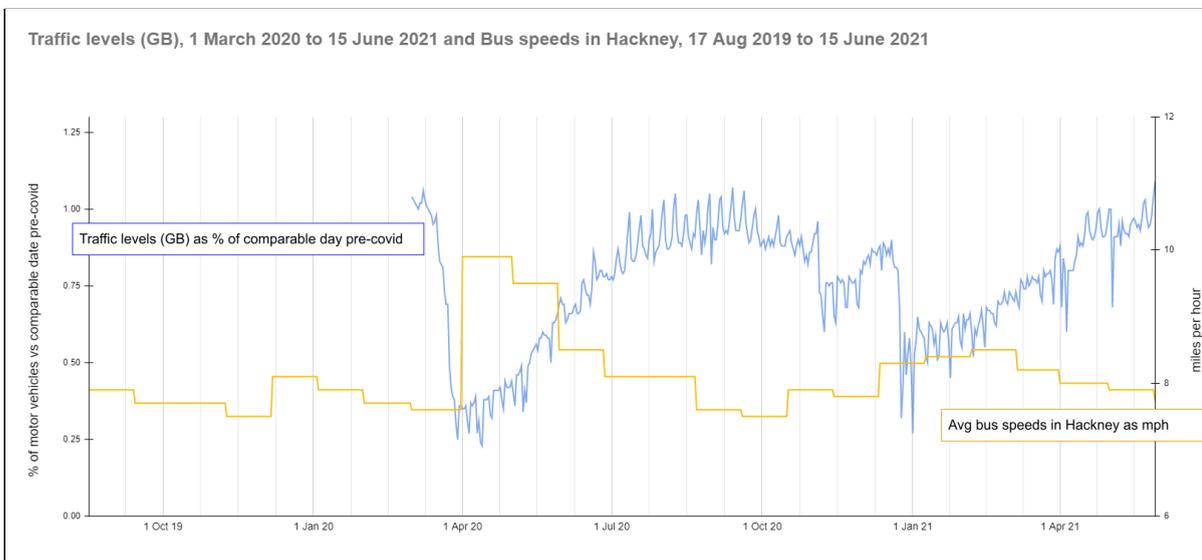
May 2021), the average speed in Hackney is 8mph. The figures for Hackney bus routes follow the trends for bus services Londonwide.



Looking more specifically at the morning peak hours (from 7am-10am), for the two years prior to the pandemic, average bus speeds in Hackney were 7.2mph. A similar trend to the all day bus speeds has followed since the pandemic, with AM peak speeds ranging from 6.7mph to 10.5mph albeit with greater increases in speed (compared to the pre-pandemic average) during the heights of the lockdowns. For the first two periods of the 2021 reporting year (April - May 2021), the average speed during the AM peak in Hackney is 7.3mph, 0.1mph faster than the pre-pandemic two year average.



A further pattern can be seen when comparing the overall trend in traffic across the country against the trend for average bus speeds in Hackney, with the two trendlines mirroring each other.



LTNs in Hackney

Low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) involve using planters, camera gates, bollards or other measures to restrict motor vehicle use in residential streets. In London, over seventy were

introduced in six months of 2020. LTNs have generated significant debate and it is important that their impacts are studied.

The bus is especially important for Hackney residents, which is why buses are allowed full and free access through Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and School Streets.



A bus passes through the LTN in Downs Road

Impact on Hackney bus routes

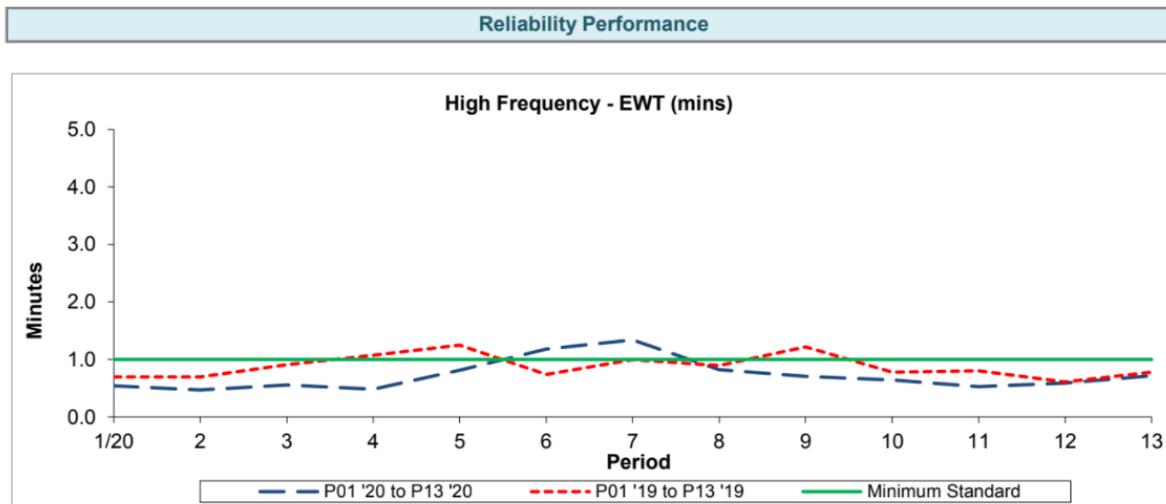
As bus access was maintained on roads subject to general traffic restrictions no diversions for buses were required so the impact was positive allowing buses to flow freely in these locations. Downs Road is an example of this. Where traffic was reassigned to the principal road network buses would have suffered some delays in line with the increase in general traffic but the impact of this would have been reduced by mitigation. For instance the decision taken by TfL to make a number of bus lanes on the TLRN operate on a 24 hr basis (from September 2020). In Hackney this helped to maintain bus speeds on principal corridors such as the A10 and Lower and Upper Clapton Road. As a result of this mitigation there is no direct evidence to link reductions in bus speeds to specific LTNs although this is kept under constant review.

In order to further illustrate the impact of LTN measures on the bus network in Hackney, a sample of routes which travel in the vicinity of LTNs can be investigated in further detail.

Route 394

This route (Angel to Homerton Hospital) which runs mainly in Hackney and parts of Islington is a good example as this passes 4 LTNs (Morning Lane, Homerton South, London Fields East and West.)

Looking at the EWT for the period Jan 2019 to Dec 2020 this does not show a large variation. Some peaks can be explained by external factors such as the return of school traffic in September 2019 and by Council road works in Wardle Street Homerton in the Summer of 2020 which disrupted the service.

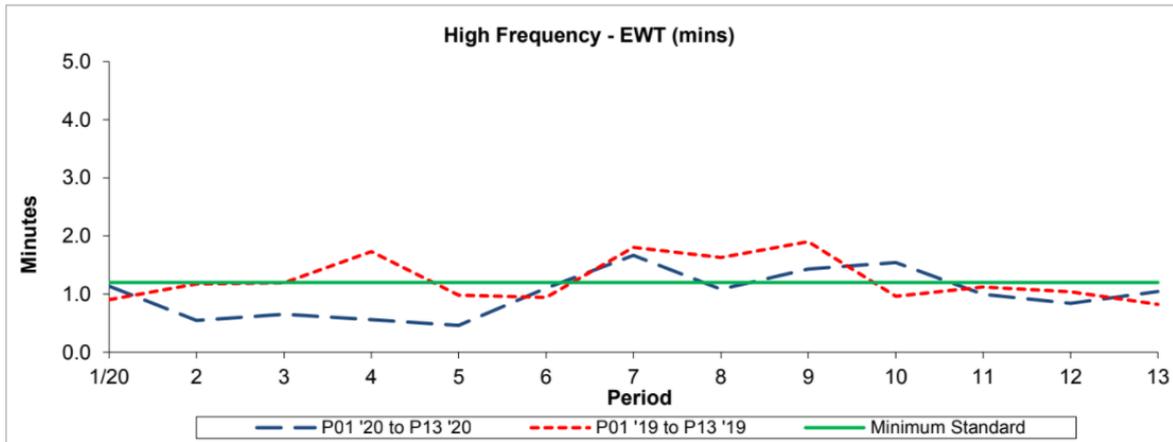


Route 236

This route runs from Finsbury Park to Hackney Wick via the LTNs in Homerton and London Fields and is Hackney's least reliable bus route. It has benefitted from the school street measures introduced in London Fields.

Looking at the graph the route records the best performance in the first half of 2020 with the worst in the summer months of 2019 and 2020. The route has been impacted hugely by roadworks in the London Fields area as well as roadworks in the Homerton area last summer. In addition the operator has experienced staff shortages which at times has led to cancellations with increased EWT.

Reliability Performance



Conclusions

Bus services across Hackney have been impacted as a whole by the pandemic and our analysis suggests a large variation in bus speeds and excess wait times. It is not possible to link any of the bus speed variations or EWT to any LTN. Bus speeds rather reflect national patterns of lockdown trends rather than showing signs of increasing or decreasing at the times that LTNs were installed. A number of other factors have impacted on bus speeds though. Roadworks in connection with reconfiguration of the Old Street roundabout have had significant impact on the bus network to the south of the Borough together with a number of works being carried out by utility companies across the borough as well as junction improvements at Dalston and on Cambridge Heath Road. Buses achieved the highest speeds when lockdown was at its most severe (and when schedules were reduced to reflect falling passenger numbers). The impact of the LTNs continues to be monitored as traffic levels increase to see if any adjustments need to be made.