

Encouraging greater interaction and kindness on London buses:

## Trial findings and impact summary



# Buses are important social spaces

Buses act as red blood cells of connectivity in communities:

- Providing people with access and connection to different locations/services/facilities
- Providing spaces for people to mix and connect with one another as part of day to day life

This is an invaluable social resource, especially when we consider that

**1/3 Britons report having taken the bus intentionally to have contact with another person<sup>1</sup>.**



So what can be done to supercharge these spaces for social connection? Our trial sought to explore just that, focusing on promoting interactions between passengers and bus drivers.

# 3 key elements inspired our trial design

## 1. Learning how difficult life was for drivers throughout the pandemic

Bus drivers provided an invaluable service helping people (including healthcare workers) get around during the pandemic. And the protective screens that were put in place, made the role more challenging and isolating for many drivers.

## 2. Understanding how much interactions mean to drivers

Drivers told us time and again of the positive impact that passengers saying 'good morning' or 'thank you' has on their role. How it makes them feel respected, seen and appreciated.

**Bill, a depot manager, reflects on some of the changes he's noticed in his team:**

*"The pandemic has changed drivers, guys who used to be so friendly and chatty just don't engage now. We need to do something to try and get these conversations happening again. I hope this project might do that!"*

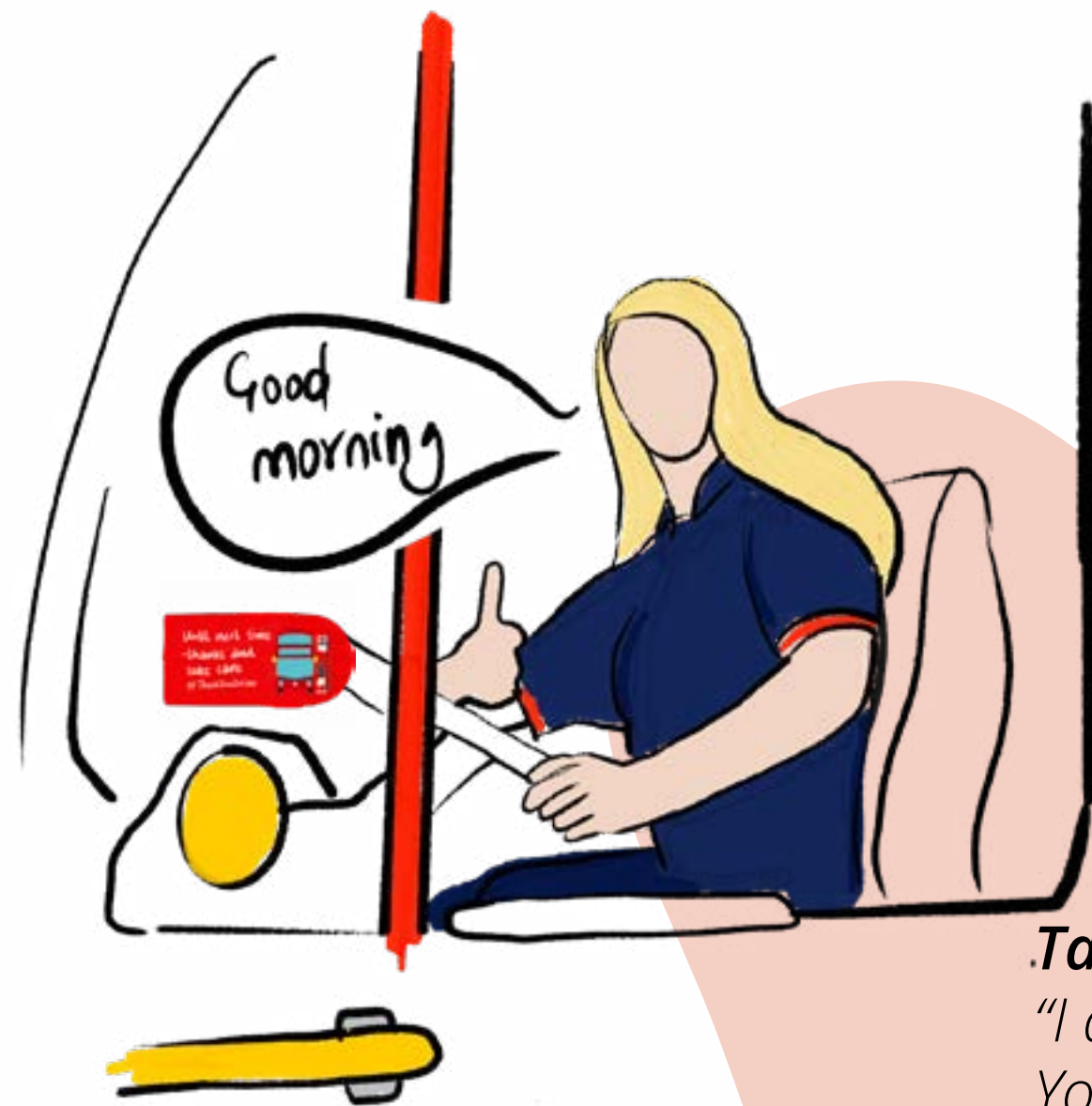
**John has been driving buses for 14 years:**

*"It seems like something small but if a person, especially a young person, hops on my bus and says 'thanks driver' it can change my whole mood. It's like they're saying 'I see you. I appreciate you'... if everyone said hello and thank you, well that would be something really special"*



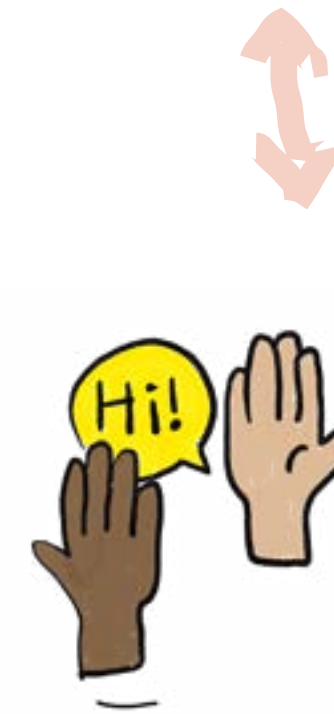
### 3. Observing a 'say-do' gap amongst passengers

Whilst passengers acknowledged the importance of engaging with drivers, very few passengers were actually doing so in reality. Presenting a gap in what passengers say/believe vs what they actually do.



**Tatiyana has been driving buses for 6 years:**  
*"I always try to smile and say welcome to passengers. You don't always get it back but when you do it's a two way respect thing. I drive on a friendly route so I'm fortunate that lots of my regulars say hello but friends who drive other routes - people don't even bother looking at them"*

**84%** of passengers believed that engaging in this way had a **positive impact** for drivers<sup>2</sup>



But only **2 in 10** greet a driver when boarding

less than **1 in 10** acknowledge the driver when alighting



<sup>2</sup> Intercept interviews of 116 passengers at a bus station  
<sup>3</sup> Based on 2,929 counts of passenger behaviour on the control route

# We used stickers to prompt passengers...

To encourage to engage with drivers when boarding and alighting the bus, we decided to trial signs on board the bus - on the driver cab door and exit doors - **to see if in the moment reminders would help to prompt interaction.**

There were four different versions of the signs and each drew on different principles from behavioural science - reciprocity bias, pro-social framing, endowment bias, time scarcity.

These **signs were installed on over one hundred fifty buses across Hammersmith, London (our pilot site)**, and the impact of the signs measured via on bus observations, interviews and surveys with drivers and interviews with passengers. Findings were compared with a similar set of 'control' buses that also operate in Hammersmith, but with no signs installed.

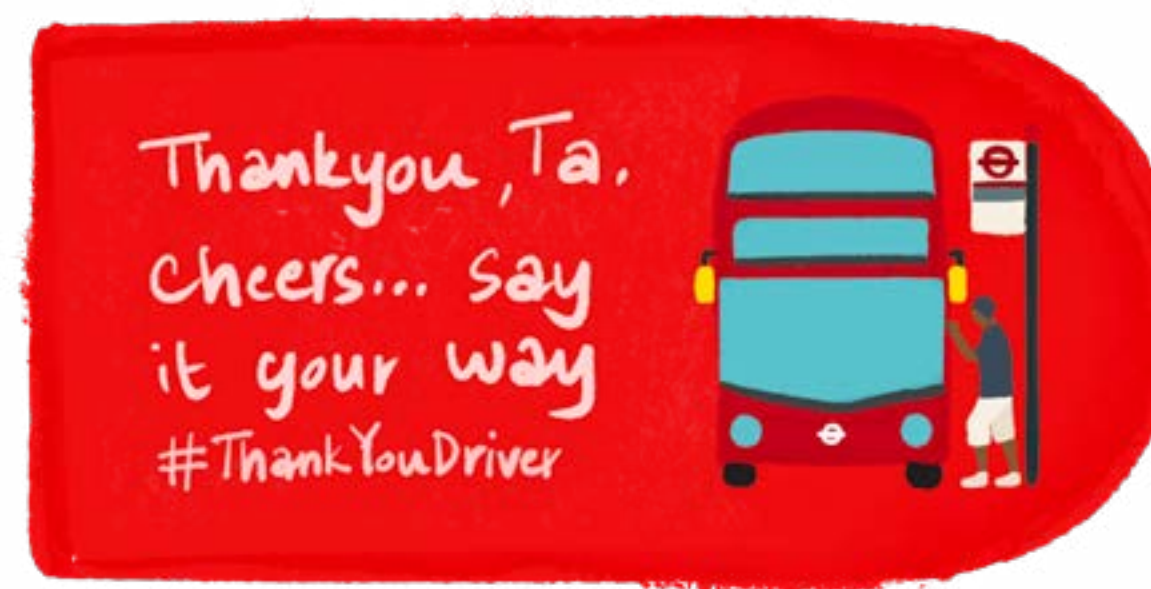
## Time scarcity



## Pro-social framing



## Endowment & Personalisation



## Reciprocity



# ...which resulted in significantly higher interactions

Buses with signs installed saw significantly higher rates of engagement than those without:

**30%** of passengers on buses with signs greeted the driver when entering the bus (vs. 23% on buses without signs).

**140 million** more interactions could occur per year (contextualising that 7% increase using 2019/20 bus data)

This effect was seen on...

Double decker buses

Non busy bus

Busy bus - even more significant impact



<sup>1</sup> Department of Transport, Annual Bus Statistics England 2019/20  
Based on 7,250 counts of passenger behaviour

Many drivers noticed this increase, appreciated the kindness and would like to see more of this

*"Put in every bus"*  
- Bus Driver

*"Maybe automated announcements could make passengers more aware of the signs"*

- Bus Driver

*"I strongly feel it makes some passengers aware of the drivers being responsible for taking them from point a to point b safely."*

- Bus Driver

*"I would love to have seen this signage on our "route 23"*  
- Bus Driver



**Manuel has been driving buses for 4 years:**

*"They say good morning and thank you. Since having posters on the door that tell passengers to say thank you, they acknowledge us more... It's nice, it reminds passengers that we are human beings as well"*

# The next stop on the journey

We were delighted to see the impact of our small scale trial and are excited by the potential of refining and scaling this initiative across the London bus network, to other areas of the UK and beyond. We will continue to advocate for the power of buses in promoting social connection.

But we can't do this alone, **we all have a role to play...**

- We call on **operators** and others in the bus sector to consider implementing and promoting signs like these across bus networks to encourage greater engagement.
- We call on **passengers** to engage with bus drivers whenever you get the chance - it does make a big difference.
- We call on **drivers** to engage further with passengers aboard your bus to build stronger relationships in communities.





# A word of thanks

A brief word of thanks to all of our partners in this trial.  
We could not have done it without you:

- To the brilliant **bus drivers**, who helped us develop intervention ideas and provided their honest experiences throughout the trial
- To Louise, George, Michelle, Leon, Hana, Marco, Mo and all at **Transport for London** who were unwavering and supportive partners in the implementation of this work
- To the operators who kindly supported us in engaging with their driver teams time and again, and advised on the development of the trial stickers - **RATP Dev, Metroline, Abellio** and **GoAhead**.
- To our academic partner, **Gillian Sandstrom**, who has worked tirelessly to help us design and evaluate the impact of the trial
- And finally, thank you to the **National Lottery Community Fund** and their Bringing People Together Grant, without which none of this would have been possible



*"This trial birthed a wider Bus Staff Appreciation Campaign and I would love to see both pieces of work live on in museums and bus stations across London and especially in a neighbourhood near me. Keen to collaborate with Neighbourly Lab and others across the bus industry to do all we can to continue to drive this work forward."* - Michelle Awosusi, Bus Customer Development Planner, TfL

*"Drivers are at the heart of our bus services and it is important to showcase all their hard work and what they do everyday to serve London's bus users."* - George Marcar - Driver Communications Manager, TfL

*"Building rapport between customers and drivers is the right thing to do for all sorts of reasons as this trial has shown. Recognition and acknowledgement of each other is something we should encourage more, and I hope we can expand on this across London."* - Tom Cunnington - Head of Bus Business Development, TfL

*"This campaign has shown the positive impact a small gesture can make, and with increased support we can continue to build relationships within communities across London."* - Tolu Ogedengbem, Apprentice (Management), TfL

*"It is very easy to overlook the positive difference a simple 'hello' or 'thank you' can have on someone's day. Bus drivers do an incredible job helping people navigate their way across London. This is a great initiative to encourage customers to show just how much they appreciate drivers and the work they do."* - Jamie Cole - Senior Advisor to the Director of Bus, TfL

*"CPT research has shown that a little bit of appreciation goes a long way, with bus drivers telling us that a 'thank you' is one of the things that is most satisfying in their work. It's great to see how far the simple steps described in this report can go in getting more drivers the thanks they deserve."* - Graham Vidler - CEO, Confederation of Passenger Transport

If you are interested in **learning more** or discussing **potential partnerships** in encouraging kinder and friendlier behaviour on buses, please get in touch.

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