

Epsom Square’s Music Festival in the round

17 June 2025



Saturday 14th June. In a town better known for its racecourse than rock and roll, Epsom discovered a new spirit last weekend with the first-ever Epsom Square Music Festival – an ambitious, joyful celebration of grassroots talent and community spirit.

“We just wanted to get more music into Epsom,” said Toy, the festival’s organiser, speaking from Metropolis (formerly Epsom Social) which served as the hub of the day-long event. “As a new venue, it felt right to do something for the community.”

The result was ambitious by any measure: three outdoor stages and over 100 performers across 39 acts, playing everything from acoustic soul to funk and rock. The diversity wasn’t only musical, either. “We had performers as young as four, maybe younger,” Toy said, “and then, of course, we had the proper grown-ups too.” The result was a line-up that reflected the whole community, mirroring Epsom in all its lively charm.

The festival came together in just six weeks, a feat made possible by local support and backing from sponsors such as Epsom Picturehouse, Go Epsom, Epsom & Ewell Families, and music retailers Guitar Guitar and Realistic Music Academy, both of which sponsored their own stages. “We’re so lucky in this town,” said Toy. “There are so many individuals who are brilliant at what they do that, if you decide to throw together a music festival in six weeks – it’s entirely doable,” she laughed. “Though next time, I’d like a bit more lead time.”

Toy, who also runs the Realistic Music Academy, knows the town’s creative undercurrent better than most. Attracting performers was “actually really easy”, she said, as she “just put out a post, and suddenly we had 38 acts signed up... the interest is absolutely there.”

The crowds clearly agreed. Nearly 500 free tickets were ‘sold’ in advance, but many more drifted into the square over the weekend, drawn by the buzz of the music and conversation.

On stage, highlights came thick and fast from a variety of performers, but it was local newcomers Vault, a four-piece with an average age of just 14, who perhaps best captured the festival’s mission. “This is the only way for us to get out there,” they said. “There should be more venues – other than Metropolis, there’s not many places for us to play.”

Toy, who also runs Realistic Music Academy, agrees. “There’s definitely a need for more places to play music in Epsom,” she said. “I’d love to do this again next year. I just want more of it – more stages, more performers, more everything.”

But beyond the lively crowds and standout performances, the weekend carried a deeper message: local music matters, community matters – and when Epsom comes together, it’s capable of creating something genuinely special. A triumph of town spirit – and, with any luck, the start of something much bigger.

For those who love jazz Epsom’s own Epsom Jazz Club stages monthly live jazz nights with quality national and international artists at the Epsom centrally located Comrades Club in The Parade Epsom. The next jazz evening at 7.30pm is Thursday 26th June featuring Atlanticus. See www.epsomjazzclub.com for details.

Donovan Livesey

Photo is of the band “Vault”.

Epsom Choral Society to stage world premiere

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A world premiere blending sharp wit, choral storytelling, and jazz rhythms will take centre stage at Epsom Choral Society’s summer concert this month.

On **Saturday 21st June at 7.30pm**, the Society will unveil *True Story*, a brand new choral piece composed by **Russell Hepplewhite** with text by renowned writer and former Children’s Laureate **Michael Rosen**. The performance takes place at **St Andrew’s Church, Cheam (SM2 2HF)**.

Described as “witty and wonderfully offbeat”, *True Story* is based on Rosen’s chaotic and comic account of the birth of his son Joe. Known for his distinctive humour and accessible lyricism, Rosen’s writing lends itself to vivid musical interpretation. Composer Hepplewhite’s score is full of energy and character, promising a premiere that’s both playful and poignant.

The new work forms part of *Living Voices*, a national project from publishers **Stainer & Bell** pairing contemporary British poets with composers to explore modern life through choral music. Other pieces in the collection reflect on themes including youth, memory, health, and landscape—ranging from the light-hearted to the deeply moving.

For Epsom audiences, *True Story* headlines a lively summer programme entitled ‘**All That Jazz**’, which also features:

- **Mass in Blue** by **Will Todd** – a jazz-infused setting of the Latin Mass blending gospel influences with the classical choral tradition. The Society will be joined by soprano **Lisa Swayne** and a professional jazz trio for this soulful and energetic work.
- **Birthday Madrigals** by **John Rutter** – a playful, jazz-inspired cycle of songs combining Renaissance style with swing-era harmonies.
- **Evening Prayer** by Norwegian composer **Ola Gjeilo**, offering a more serene interlude with choir, piano, and saxophone.

Speaking ahead of the concert, the Society’s musical director **Julian Collings** said the programme celebrates the range and vitality of contemporary choral music:

“This concert combines the best of tradition with innovation—bold new work alongside modern classics. We’re especially proud to present a world premiere here in Epsom as part of a major national project.”

Tickets are £20 (under-25s half price) and are available at:

□ www.ticketsource.co.uk/epsom-choral-society/t-molojed
□ Box Office: 01372 274418

Image of St Andrews – Google Street view.

Epsom Joins National ‘Great Get Together’ Inspired by Jo Cox’s Legacy of Unity

17 June 2025



A celebration of community spirit and shared humanity is coming to Epsom on Saturday as part of a nationwide initiative inspired by the late MP Jo Cox.

Hosted by local charity *Good Company (Surrey)*, the free event—branded *The Great Get Together*—will take place in Epsom and promises an afternoon of food, music, games and family entertainment. The day will begin with a formal welcome from the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, accompanied by the Mayoress.

The event is one of hundreds taking place across the UK this weekend to honour the message of Jo Cox, the Labour MP for Batley and Spen who was murdered in 2016. Cox is remembered for her powerful maiden speech in Parliament, in which she said: *“We are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.”* Her words have since become the cornerstone of an annual campaign celebrating unity and community cohesion.

In Epsom, the programme includes live performances from the Ukrainian Choir, a Disney singalong, and the Freedom Pulse Brass Band. Children will be kept busy with games, crafts, a treasure hunt, and even Crazy Golf. There will also be henna hand-painting and a showcase of artisan goods.

Jo Sherring, who leads the *Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network*, said the day is about bringing people together:

“Hosting a community event like The Great Get Together allows us to bring people from all walks of life together in a spirit of unity, friendship and shared humanity. It’s an opportunity to celebrate our diversity, forge new connections, and show that Epsom is a place where everyone belongs.”

Good Company (Surrey), the charity behind the event, also operates the Epsom & Ewell Food Bank, the local Refugee Network, and community pantries in Epsom and Banstead.

While the event is free to attend, organisers ask that attendees book tickets in advance via the QR code on promotional flyers or the charity’s website, where a full afternoon timetable is also available.

The *Great Get Together* campaign is run by The Jo Cox Foundation and aims to encourage people across the UK to bridge divides and build stronger, more connected communities. The Foundation states: *“Change starts at the community level; we all have the power to make a difference.”*

Further information about the national initiative can be found at:

□ <https://www.jocoxfoundation.org/our-work/stronger-communities/great-get-together/>

Contact for local event:

Jo Sherring

Lead, Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network

□ 07849 631747

□ jo@goodcompany.org.uk

Epsom Red Cross Volunteer honoured by King

17 June 2025



A British Red Cross volunteer from Epsom who has spent 40 years with the organisation has been awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the King’s Birthday Honours.

Jon Richards, 61, followed in his mum’s footsteps as a volunteer with the British Red Cross and has worked across a number of different services during his four decades with the charity.

Jon enjoys helping individuals and families, having attended numerous callouts across the South East as well as helping at rest centres. This included an incident in 2014 when Jon volunteered for four days straight, supporting people caught up in severe flooding in London and Brighton, and in 2017, when he supported the response at Grenfell Tower.

Jon, who also met his wife through the British Red Cross, said: “It’s a real honour to be given a British Empire Medal in the King’s Birthday Honours for my time volunteering with the British Red Cross.

“We work hard to help people who face the most difficult challenges in life and I’m very proud to be recognised with this award.”

Described as a modest and quiet man by his colleagues, Jon’s knowledgeable, methodical, and calm approach builds trust with both service users and partner agencies. On one of his most recent callouts, Jon supported in a case of hoarding, where the member of the public would not allow firefighters or social services into their home, but felt comfortable allowing Jon in to discuss alternative accommodation options.

Jon added: “It’s important to show kindness and compassion whenever you’re carrying out volunteering duties and having met so many brilliant colleagues over

the years at the British Red Cross, I know that everyone here will do everything they can to help those in need.

“Throughout the last 40 years, I’ve worked in so many different areas of the British Red Cross and had a chance to see how big an impact the work we do can have on communities.”

British Red Cross Chief Executive Béatrice Butsana-Sita said: “Jon is an incredible ambassador for the British Red Cross and a fantastic example of the brilliant staff and volunteers that support our vital work.

“For 40 years he has been a huge figure in our Surrey services, giving up his time to support people when they need it most.

“I am delighted to see Jon rewarded for his work with a British Empire Medal in the King’s Birthday Honours list and would like to congratulate him on this amazing achievement.”

Epsom Library celebrates refurbishment this week

17 June 2025



To celebrate its extensive refurbishment, Surrey Libraries is holding a **Taster Week** at **Epsom Library** from **Monday 16 to Saturday 21 June**. The newly transformed Library Hub in the heart of Epsom town centre will offer a vibrant programme of free and ticketed activities for all ages.

What’s On

Throughout the week, visitors can enjoy face painting, yoga, author talks, and the library’s regular sessions including **Rhymetime**, **Storytime**, **digital support**, and **craft groups**.

Councillor Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

‘We know that our Library Hubs are in the heart of our thriving and bustling communities. Every effort has been made to ensure that this investment delivers essential services, event, work, study and socialising spaces that our local residents need and want, creating a lasting legacy to serve our communities now and for years to come.’

Two special exhibitions will be on display during the week:

- **‘In the Margins’** – celebrating the voices of marginalised disabled artists.
- **Conquest Art Exhibition** – showcasing work by individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Daily Activities Schedule

Monday 16 June

- 10:00am–4:00pm: Digital Skills Support – NHS App help (Drop-in)
- 10:30–11:00am: Rhymetime (Under 5s, free)
- 3:00–4:00pm: Knit & Natter Group (Free)
- 3:45–4:15pm: Craft: *Medieval Flags* (Ages 4+, £1 suggested donation)

Tuesday 17 June

- 10:15–10:45am: Storytime (Ages 4–8, free)
- 3:45–4:15pm: Craft: *Helicopters* (Ages 4+, £1 donation)
- 4:00–5:00pm: Author Talk – **S.J. Bennett** (£6, book via Eventbrite)

Wednesday 18 June

- 10:00am–12:00pm: Bourne Hall Museum
- 12:00–2:00pm: Digital Buddy Session (Free, book in person)
- 2:00–3:00pm: Talk by Surrey History Centre Archivist **Julian Pooley** (Free, book via Eventbrite)
- 3:00–4:00pm: Exercise Class with Rainbow Centre (Free, book in person)
- 3:45–4:15pm: Craft: *Pirate Flags* (Ages 4+, £1 donation)

Thursday 19 June

- 10:30–11:00am: Rhymetime (Under 5s, free)
- 3:45–4:15pm: Craft: *Dinosaurs* (Ages 4+, £1 donation)
- 6:00–6:30pm: Choir Performance – Refugee Network Choir (Free, book in person)

Friday 20 June

- 10:00am–4:00pm: **Smoothie Bike** – pedal for a fruity reward
- 2:00–3:00pm: Yoga (All abilities, free, book in person)
- 4:00–5:00pm: Craft: *Butterflies* (Ages 4+, £1 donation)

Saturday 21 June – Family Fun Day

- 9:30–11:00am: Face Painting (Ages 4+, £1 donation)
- 12:30–2:00pm: Balloon Modelling (Ages 4+, £1 donation)
- 2:00–3:00pm: Children’s Author Workshop with **Sam Stewart** (Ages 8–14, £4, book via Eventbrite)
- 3:45–4:15pm: Craft: *Create Your Own Bookmarks* (Ages 4+, £1 donation)

Explore the New Library Hub

Epsom Library now features:

- Flexible event and performance space
- Upgraded furniture and study areas
- Two new meeting rooms
- **Super Access technology**: extended access for members beyond staff hours (book an induction in person)

This refurbishment is part of the first phase of the **Surrey Libraries Transformation Programme**, supported by Surrey County Council’s Land and Property and Capital Projects teams.

The initiative aims to improve accessibility, modernise facilities, and offer more to Surrey’s communities.

Get Involved

- Visit the Epsom Library webpage for more event details.
- **Joining your local library is free** – sign up at the Surrey Libraries website.

Epsom born band give birth to first single

17 June 2025



From the parks of Alexandra Rec to the playlists of rock fans across the country, a new local band with deep Epsom roots is making waves with their debut single.

Penny Rebels, a blues-rock outfit formed by long-time friends and musicians, are preparing to release their first original track, *“Bad Man”*, on **July 1st**. The single, described by the band as “gritty, blues-infused rock with big energy and attitude,” marks the culmination of years of songwriting, performing, and musical collaboration.

The band’s connection to Epsom is woven into its story. Two of its members grew up in the town – attending local schools including **St Martin’s**, **Wallace Fields**, and **Glyn** – and spent their formative years playing at **Alexandra Recreation Ground**. The group’s bass player, a long-time resident of **Ewell Downs Road**, still calls the borough home.

Formed in **Farnham**, Penny Rebels emerged from a shared passion for music among friends balancing work, family, and creative life. “We were in bands when we were younger, but life took over,” the band explained. “Now, with more space in our lives, we’ve returned to music — and we’re loving every minute of it.”

Their debut single is accompanied by a newly completed music video, available via a private link ahead of the public release. The band has also released an **electronic press kit (EPK)** featuring promotional images and media resources for broadcasters and press.

With all members contributing vocals and a sound described as “originals with soul and grit,” Penny Rebels are setting their sights on **festival stages** and **high-energy live performances** throughout the region and beyond.

The band welcomes opportunities to share more about their journey and would be delighted to speak to local media or take part in community music features.

- Website: www.pennyrebels.com
- Instagram | YouTube | TikTok | Facebook: *Penny Rebels*
- Email: pennyrebelsband@gmail.com

Listen to “Bad Man” from July 1st on all major platforms.

Surrey leaders review spending review

17 June 2025



Government Spending Review Falls Short for Surrey Councils and Epsom Hospital, Say Local Leaders

The UK Government’s latest Spending Review has drawn a mixed reaction from Surrey leaders, with concerns mounting over local council finances and delays to urgently needed hospital upgrades in the Epsom area.

Surrey County Council: Welcome Commitments, Ongoing Pressures

Responding to the Chancellor’s announcements, Surrey County Council Leader Cllr Tim Oliver acknowledged “important announcements,” including increases in core funding for local government, funding pledges for children’s services, and a renewed commitment to reforming Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision.

However, Cllr Oliver warned that the headline increase in “core spending power” rests on councils raising council tax by the full 5%—a move that may place strain on households during a cost-of-living crisis. Even with that assumption, county and unitary authorities across England are projected to face a £2.2 billion funding gap next year.

“Whilst our finances have been transformed to a point where we have delivered stable, balanced budgets year after year,” Oliver said, “we are not exempt from the financial challenges faced by councils.”

Oliver stressed the urgency of the upcoming *Fair Funding Review*, calling for a “fair and proportionate” outcome to ensure long-term stability for local authorities like Surrey.

Locally, the council has invested an additional £15 million into a three-year SEND recovery plan, begun in September 2023, which is reportedly beginning to bear fruit. But Oliver added that the government’s announcements stop short of tackling deeper issues. “Provision and support for children with SEND is a systemic issue... and the current system does not work for families, schools or councils,” he said.

SEND Deficits and Budget Certainty

Perhaps the sharpest criticism came over the government’s silence on the spiralling SEND deficits many councils face. Without intervention, these deficits—currently kept off balance sheet—will be formally accounted for from next April.

“Many local authorities, including Surrey, are facing a continuing increase in demand in comparison with levels of funding received,” Oliver said. “Councils will soon start planning their budgets for next year and cannot afford to have this can kicked down the road any longer.”

Future of Local Government in Surrey

The Spending Review did include a continued commitment to *Local Government Reorganisation* (LGR)—a development welcomed by Surrey County Council. Surrey recently submitted a proposal to transition to two unitary authorities, a move that could reshape local government in the county.

“We have worked hard to form that proposal,” said Oliver, “to deliver the best possible outcome for Surrey residents.”

Local MPs Condemn “Missed Opportunity” for Epsom & St Helier Hospitals

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrat MPs for Epsom & Ewell, Carshalton & Wallington, and Sutton & Cheam expressed deep disappointment over the absence of additional investment in the long-delayed redevelopment of Epsom & St Helier Hospitals.

Despite a known £150 million repair backlog, the government has only committed £12 million to date, with the timeline for a new specialist emergency hospital now postponed until 2033 under the Labour government. Local MPs Bobby Dean, Helen Maguire, and Luke Taylor said this continued delay threatens the “very future of our hospitals.”

“The Government has missed a massive opportunity to deliver real change for Epsom & St Helier Hospitals,” they said in a joint statement. “£12 million is simply a drop in the ocean.”

The trio highlighted years of cross-party pressure in Westminster, including Prime Minister’s Questions and debates, aimed at securing vital upgrades for the “crumbling” estate. “After 14 years of broken promises, the Government has an opportunity to do better,” they added.

Rising Council Tax on the Horizon

Further national analysis has added to concerns around the financial implications of the Spending Review for local authorities. Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), noted that while English local government fared “perhaps a little bit better than it might have expected,” there is a “sting in the tail”: council tax bills are now set to rise at their fastest rate of any parliament since 2001–2005.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves confirmed that councils’ *core spending power* will rise by 2.6% annually from next year. However, this figure is based on the assumption that councils will impose the full 5% annual increase in council tax—an option many local authorities may feel compelled to take. “We won’t be going above that,” Reeves said. “That is the council tax policy that we inherited from the previous Government, and that we will be continuing.”

Liberal Democrat deputy leader Daisy Cooper described the overall package as a “missed opportunity,” warning that council budgets—especially in areas such as social care—remain “very, very stretched.” She added: “The Government is now looking to local councils to put up council tax to plug the gap in these particular areas... We cannot wait. This can’t be kicked down the road any longer. The Government has got to act now.”

For residents of Epsom and Ewell, the message is clear: whether through delays to vital infrastructure or increasing local taxation, the burden of national decisions may be felt most acutely at the community level.

The Surrey school run or walk?

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Parents want their children to walk to school, but what holds them back?

Children are the power brokers that can shift parents’ habits on the school run – and could be key to making healthier, greener travel choices the norm, according to a new report from the University of Surrey. Commissioned by Surrey County Council and delivered through the University’s Institute for Sustainability Innovation Hub, the report looked at how schools across the UK and internationally are encouraging families to walk, cycle or wheel to school instead of driving.

The report’s authors found that while families are generally supportive of safer, more active travel, they’re often held back by concerns over road safety, time pressures and infrastructure. The most effective initiatives, the report argues, are those that bring together schools, local authorities, planners and families to tackle these issues head-on.

Professor Benjamin Gardner, lead-author of the report from the University of Surrey, said: “The school run is rarely straightforward. Families support safer, active travel, but if we want more children walking or cycling, we need to stop seeing this as just an issue for school staff and parents to deal with. Schemes and reward programmes can spark interest, but they won’t bring about changes to the school run unless the wider system supports change. Parents worry about safety, time and whether their child can travel independently. We need a joined-up approach. Lasting change depends on schools, councils, planners and families working together to make walking or cycling feel like the easy and safe option.”

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said: “We’ve commissioned this report to better understand how we can support and encourage parents, carers and children to travel to school sustainably. We’re investing £5.5m over the next five years to improve road safety to encourage more walking, cycling and wheeling so children can take safer journeys, and to reduce pollution around schools. We’re also continuing to deliver Feet First walking training and Bikeability cycling training to provide lifelong road safety skills for Surrey’s school children. We’re looking forward to working with our schools and others, to design tailored initiatives and infrastructure that will benefit children now and in the future.”

The research team reviewed travel initiatives in the UK, Europe and beyond, including Canada, Australia and Brazil. They found that even young children can play a crucial role in influencing their parents’ school run choices, especially when schools engage children through activities, lessons or competitions.

Surrey researchers conducted two focus groups with staff and caregivers at Surrey schools, analysed a range of international case studies, and reviewed both academic and grey literature. They used the COM-B model – which looks at capability, opportunity and motivation – to understand what stops or supports families from choosing active travel on the school run. The findings will help shape the Council’s new School Travel Effectiveness of Planning (STEP) tool, designed to measure what’s working – and what’s not – in encouraging active school travel across Surrey.

About the Innovation Hub

The Innovation Hub is the delivery arm of the University of Surrey’s Institute for Sustainability. It brings researchers together with local authorities, businesses and communities to co-create practical responses to real-world challenges. By supporting projects like the School Travel Plan report, the Hub helps translate research into action and strengthen partnerships that benefit both Surrey and the wider region.

To learn more about the project, read the full report at www.surrey.ac.uk/news/promoting-active-school-travel

Image: Benjamin Vautier Snow scene (Children leaving school) VA – PICRYL – Public Domain Media

Surrey jail addresses prison population crisis

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Sixty six temporary prisoner cells, built at HMP Coldingley during the Covid-19 pandemic, will be made permanent in an effort to “ease” the crisis facing the service. Nationally, the prison population has doubled in the past 30 years while only 500 new cells have been built in the past 14 years. It has left the service scrambling around looking for a series of short-term ways to increase capacity until four new prisons come online by 2031, creating 14,000 extra spaces.

The latest stop gap has been the approval of 66 cells in HMP Coldingley in Bisley by Surrey Heath Borough Council on Thursday, June 6. The cells were approved unanimously during a brief two-minute item with no questions or debate from members. Case officers addressing the meeting said: “No objections have been raised by any statutory consultees, while there is a national need for prisoner accommodation. The application is therefore recommended for approval.”

The plans were reported to committee due to its size – although details were scant on the advice of the Ministry of Justice, which said the application contained officially sensitive information, including the layout. The confidential information has not been shared in the public domain however the publicly available aspects of the report said the overall site comprises a variety of buildings of up to four storeys in height, predominantly concentrated towards the north-western flank and centre. Among them are a central accommodation block, an engineering workshop and a laundry building. Sports pitches and open spaces are at the south-west with the prison entrance at the north-eastern corner of the site. The entire perimeter of the category C site, that is male prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions, is secured by a 5.2-metre-high security fence.

The report read: “The proposed development supports a demonstrable national infrastructure need and aligns with national and local policy objectives.” It added: “The installation of the cells was considered necessary in the event of a national emergency to allow for safeguarding procedures to be implemented during COVID-19. There is also an on-going national shortfall of prison spaces, with the prison population having roughly doubled in the last 30 years with only 500 places added to the country’s stock of jail cells in the last 14 years. At national level four prisons are being built as part of the Plan for Change to create 14,000 extra spaces by 2031 to assist with the crisis. Until then, however, short term measures such the installation of Rapid Deployment Cells, and the retention of the temporary accommodation installed during the pandemic such as this site, help to ease the burden of rising demand.”

The application is supported by comment from the Department of Justice (see confidential paper). “There is a clear need for existing prison sites to support the increased demand and shortage of supply of prison places across the country. The proposed development therefore helps to support a demonstrable national need.”

Related reports:

Surrey prison failed IPP prisoner

HMP Coldingley (image Google)

Smarter tickets would boost bus travel

17 June 2025



Public transport in Southern England is struggling, not just because of cost or convenience, but because it has failed to keep up with the digital age, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

In a study published in Public Transport, researchers simulated improvements in areas like payment convenience and real-time service updates. The study found that these tech-driven changes could boost bus ridership by over 30%.

Researchers have found that simple innovations, such as easy payment systems, e-ticketing, and mobile applications, can transform public transport, boost ridership, and improve passenger satisfaction.

The study employed a novel analytical approach, Machine Learning Influence Flow Analysis (MIFA), to understand the attitudes and behaviours of bus passengers in Southern England. The team also analysed detailed survey data, which helped them identify the key factors that influence whether people choose the bus over their private cars. These factors where: addressing issues around payment convenience and real-time information can make buses far more appealing.

Dr Wolfgang Garn, one of the authors of the study and Associate Professor in Analytics at the University of Surrey, said:

“We discovered that passengers want a seamless, hassle-free experience. If paying for a bus journey feels complicated or outdated, people are more likely to opt for driving instead. By introducing smart ticketing and contactless payments, alongside mobile apps that provide real-time updates, we can not only make bus travel easier but also more attractive. This isn’t just about technology, it’s about fundamentally changing how people view public transport.”

The study used advanced machine learning methods, including neural networks and random forests, to create predictive models from survey responses. These models enabled the researchers to identify the factors that most strongly influence bus usage decisions. By simulating improvements in passenger sentiment, such as increased satisfaction with payment methods, the MIFA framework can predict how these changes may alter people’s willingness to use buses. The results suggest that these technological enhancements could increase bus ridership by over 30%.

The findings also highlight several critical issues that undermine bus usage, including inconvenient payment processes, a lack of clear information about bus routes and fares, and concerns about reliability and security. The research recommends practical solutions such as integrated smartcard payment systems, real-time travel apps, and expanded bus lanes to reduce journey times. Together, these measures can create a public transport system that competes with the convenience of private cars.

Dr Garn continued:

“Integrated ticketing is an option that needs to be further explored. It allows passengers to travel across different public transport modes using a single ticket or system, typically a smart card, for their entire journey. This means a traveller can switch between buses, trains, trams, and other modes of transport without needing to purchase multiple tickets or navigate different payment systems - an issue that arises when governmental policies do not sufficiently guide multiple private bus transport companies. A related study I worked on demonstrated that increased frequency, low fares, and an improved bus network significantly boost bus ridership.

The future of bus travel in Southern England depends on embracing digital convenience and improving the passenger experience. With smart payments and better information at the heart of this transformation, buses can become the preferred mode of travel for many, not the last resort.”

Image credit: Geoff Charles, National Library of Wales. Public domain