



Passenger counts help Transport for NSW make informed decisions about planning and service delivery to meet our passengers' needs.

We're trialing Bluetooth technology on the fare-free Southwest Link buses to better understand passenger numbers and travel patterns, to improve the way we plan services.

About the trial

What is the Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) trial?

The BLE trial is a short-term test of new technology - that uses Bluetooth technology - to count the number of passengers travelling on Southwest Link buses.

If successful, the technology will enable Transport for NSW to better understand passenger demand levels, and in turn, allocate services more efficiently, by optimising timetables to reduce crowded or underutilised services.

Improved planning across the bus network is a key recommendation of the *Bus Industry Taskforce*.

Why are you doing the BLE trial?

As Southwest Link services are fare-free, the Opal system is not in use. This means we have limited information about passenger demand levels and travel patterns.

We're trialing the BLE technology to gain information and insights that will help improve the way we plan services for passengers.

What other benefits does the technology aim to deliver?

Knowing passenger numbers helps Transport for NSW:

- Understand the demand for services
- Provide information to refine service times when people need them most
- Reduce waiting times for passengers by allocating services according to demand
- Enhances service reliability and convenience, encouraging more people to use public transport

How long will the trial last?

The trial on Southwest Link will last four weeks.

How will you know if the trial is successful?

To validate the passenger numbers recorded by the BLE technology, a third-party person will ride the bus to manually count the number of passengers getting on and off the service. We'll then compare the BLE count with the manual count to ensure they are consistent.

Third-party staff will be present on ten of the Southwest Link buses to manually validate the BLE results.

What is BLE technology and how does it work?

BLE technology counts the number of passengers on a bus by recognising and counting the number of nearby Bluetooth signals.

Please note: the technology does not collect or record personal data; only the number of nearby Bluetooth signals.

The Bluetooth signals are captured every 15 seconds and converted to a 'digital headcount'. The count is then collected for processing. The signals cannot be used to identify individuals or their device.

How many Southwest Link buses are involved in the trial, and how will I know which ones are using BLE technology?

The trial will involve all Southwest Link buses and routes between Sydenham and Bankstown. Staff will be on ten trial buses to manually validate the BLE results.

Bus shelters and stops along the route will display a poster with information and a QR code that links to further information about the trial.

Who is involved in the trial?

The BLE technology has been developed by a Sydney-based vendor. Transport is also partnering with bus operators U-Go Mobility and Transit System, which operate Southwest Link.

Has Transport trialled the BLE technology before?

Transport has tested the BLE technology on Opal-enabled buses operated by Transit System. This trial achieved 96% accuracy when compared to the Opal data from the same trips, so it is highly effective.

Does Transport plan to use the BLE technology on other buses?

Future use will be decided once trial results are analysed. Transport may use the technology for trackwork or other temporary bus services, where the Opal system is not enabled.

Participating in the trial and opting out

Do I have to participate? Can I opt out?

Passengers can opt-out by turning off Bluetooth connections coming from their phone, tablet, laptop, or other electronic device during their trip.

Please note: the technology does not collect or record personal data; only the number of nearby Bluetooth signals.

Bus shelters along the route will display a poster with information and a QR code that links to further information about the trial.

Do I need to keep my Bluetooth off for the duration of my trip? Can I still listen to music using Bluetooth headphones, for example?

Devices that use a Bluetooth connection need remain off during the bus trip to avoid being counted. Headphones that connect via a cable, instead of Bluetooth, can still be used.

Why are passengers automatically opted-in to have their Bluetooth signal counted? Don't you need my permission to collect my data?

The BLE technology does not collect or record personal data, only the number of nearby Bluetooth signals. Transport is committed to protecting your privacy and ensuring that your personal information is managed according to law.

Further information, including a copy of Transport for NSW's privacy policy can be found at: transport.nsw.gov.au/about-us/transport-privacy/privacy-statement.

Data safety and security

What data does BLE technology collect?

BLE technology creates a 'digital headcount' by recognising and counting the number of Bluetooth signals within the bus.

No personal or phone data is collected using the BLE technology – only the presence of a Bluetooth signal.

Once the BLE technology registers a Bluetooth signal, it converts the signal into a sequentially assigned number that is sent to an Australian-based back-end server for processing. The sequence numbers reset at the end of each trip and cannot be used to identify individuals or devices.

Why is access to a passenger's Bluetooth signal required? Why can't Opal readers or a simple sensor be used to count people getting on and off the bus?

Southwest Link buses are fare-free, so the Opal machines are not in use.

Using a sensor would require new technology and introduce additional security concerns. The BLE technology works from a tablet using a mobile app, which is simple and easy to install and maintain.

Who holds the data that is captured, and how long is the data held?

The vendor will initially capture the passenger counts, then share the data with Transport overnight for processing.

The data will be retained for 90 days.

Will the data be publicly available?

No.

How will Transport ensure the data is collected, held and used safely and not accessible to others?

Transport is committed to protecting the privacy of your personal information in accordance with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) (PPIP Act).

Please note: the technology does not collect or record personal data; only the number of nearby Bluetooth signals.

Can I request that my data be deleted?

No personal data is captured or stored.

Who reviewed and approved the technology and the trial to ensure it meets all necessary security and legal requirements?

Transport for NSW is responsible for the trial in line with the Transport for NSW's privacy policy: transport.nsw.gov.au/about-us/transport-privacy/privacy-statement

Engagement

Who can I speak with about this trial if I have questions or concerns?

For any concerns or questions, please contact 131 500.