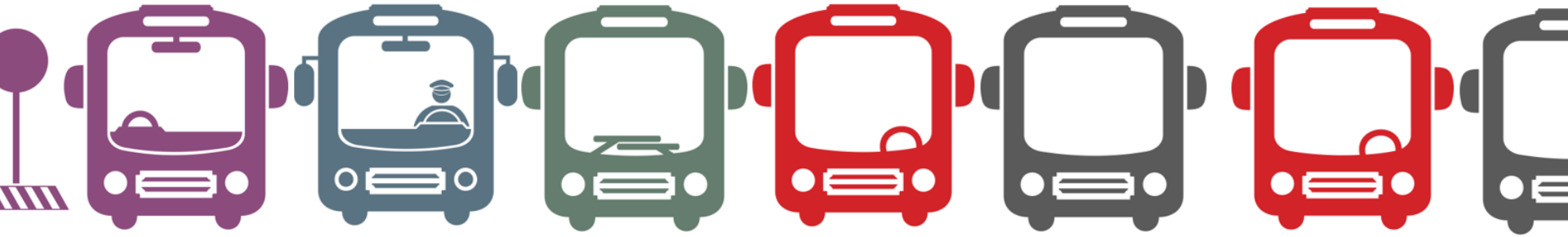


Demystifying the Bus Network



SYSTRA



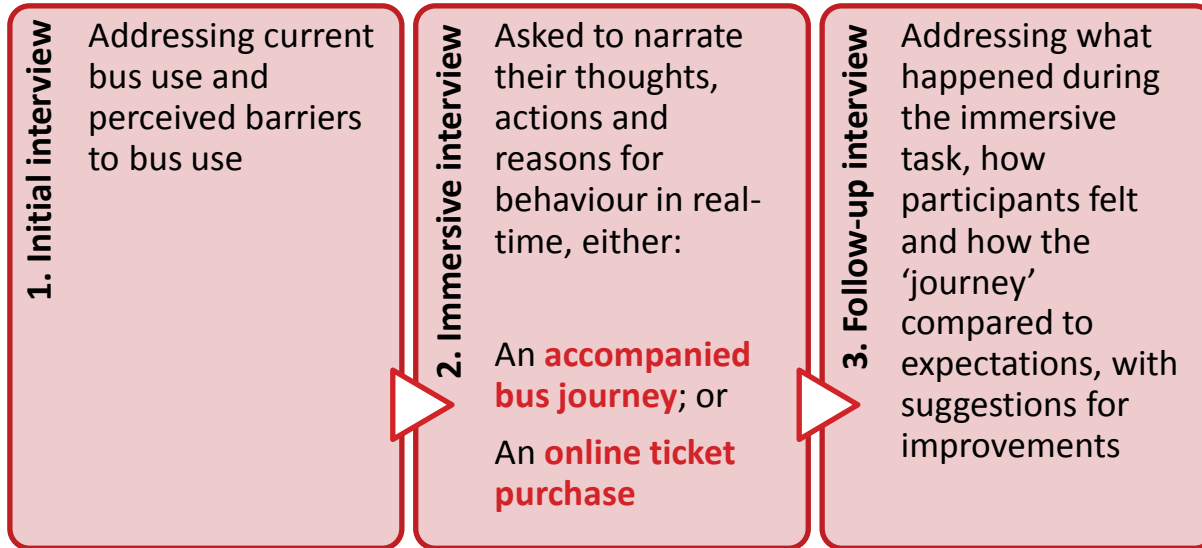
Context and Methodology

The **West Midlands Bus Alliance** aims to improve bus services in the West Midlands, increase bus passenger satisfaction and ensure continued investment in the bus network.

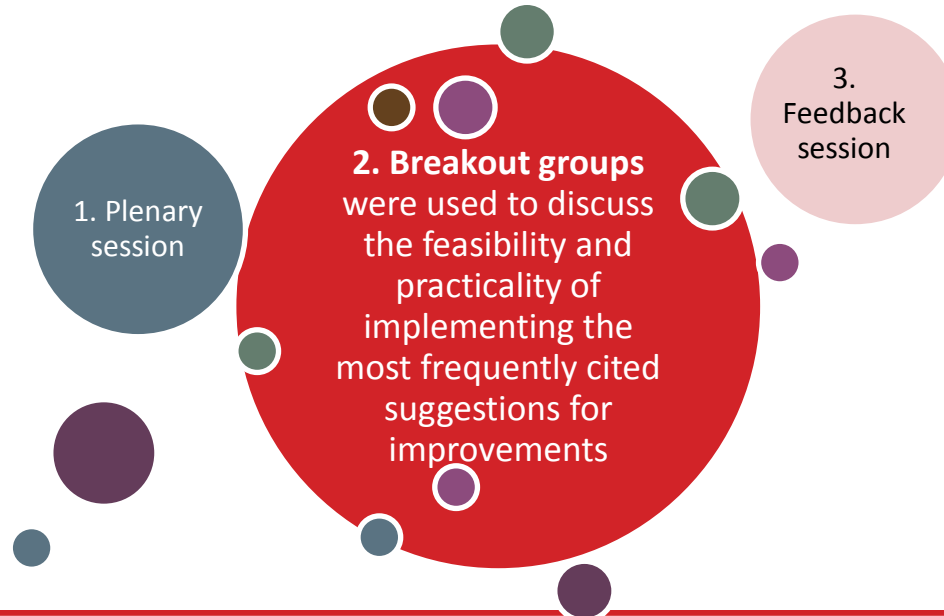
SYSTRA were commissioned to undertake **qualitative research** with new and unfamiliar bus users, and Bus Alliance representatives, to:

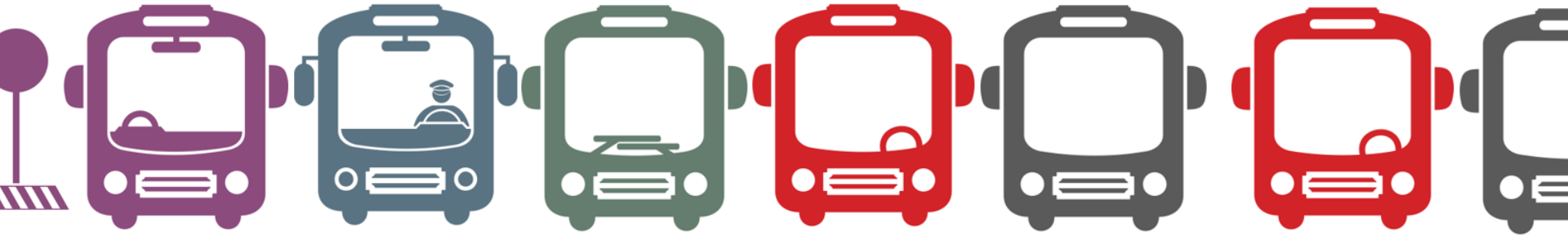
- dig deeper into barriers to bus use, to understand what it is about the West Midlands bus network that mystifies users;
- identify the improvements people would like made to bus travel; and
- provide practical and realistic recommendations for change.

In Phase 1, **Twenty-seven 'journeys'** with **infrequent and non-bus users**, willing to consider (increased) bus use, were completed in Coventry, Solihull and Wolverhampton. 'Journeys' consisted of:



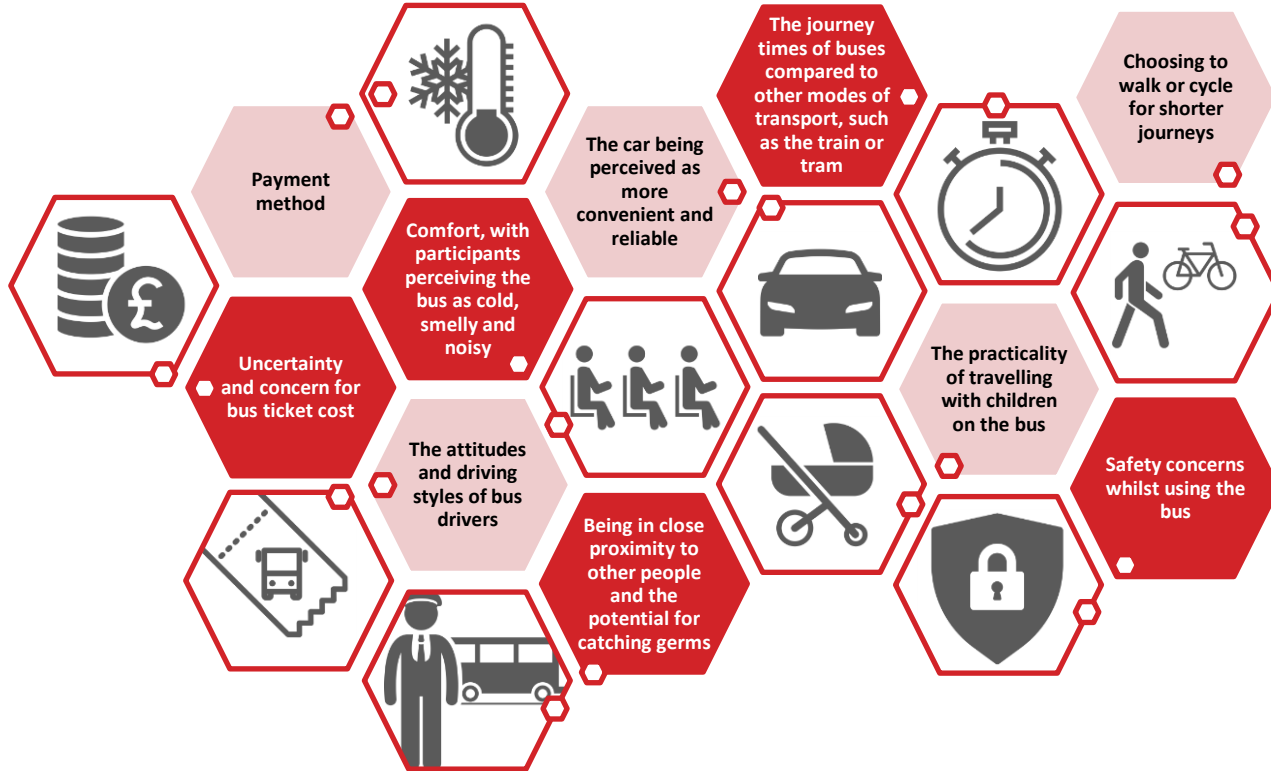
In Phase 2, key findings were presented at a **workshop** attended by **15 representatives from the Bus Alliance**.





Findings

Reasons for not using the bus prior to the accompanied journey



Most aspects of the journey – from accessing the bus stop/station through to alighting the bus – met participants expectations

Above expectations

Participants thought the buses were cleaner, less smelly and more physically comfortable than expected:

“It seems like the buses have changed...years gone by the windows were always dirty and it felt a bit grubby but that [bus] was bright and clean and new.”

Below expectations

For both the full accompanied journey and the online ticket purchase journey, the majority of participants found buying a ticket more difficult than expected:

“You’ve gotta get the change...it was long, I had to find the cash point, draw out £10 then it’s like go somewhere to get change...so then you’re buying something, just to then go to the bus stop...I thought it would be way quicker.”

Suggested improvements

The **top three improvements**, which participants would like prioritised, were:

- o better **information provision**, including real-time information, and information on fares and when and where different ticket types can be used;
- o the ability to **pay using a contactless** payment card; and
- o the provision of **better information on upcoming stops** whilst on the bus.



Most participants felt that they would use the bus in the future. Likelihood of future use depended on:

- **cost** of fares;
- the **weather**;
- travel **companions** (i.e. children); and
- whether **suggested improvements** are implemented.

Bus Alliance representatives discussed how these **suggestions could be enhanced/ adapted to ensure feasibility**, what the **next steps** would be to implement these and where the **priorities should lie**.



Providing improved information at bus stops was identified as a key priority, including: stops serviced by route; payment methods accepted; and fares. The space available and level of detail required means providing all the information may not be possible, but signposting to locations that include the information should be provided.



Enhancing existing real time information provision at bus stops was not considered feasible, primarily due to limited funding. However, an alternative to this was the development of a new app, or of existing apps, to better reflect ticket and journey information. This could be used both at stop and on-board the bus.



Providing contactless payment to users was also a key priority, although there was debate as to exactly how this would work and what was most realistic.



A slightly lower priority, but highlighted by members of the Bus Alliance as easily achievable, was updates to websites, particularly to: Promote apps; provide information on when and where different ticket types can be used; and allow for ticket purchases directly from the website (using mobiles).