



How to Implement a Social Value Strategy For Public Transport Companies

Who is this guide for

In the world of public transport, where contracts are won and lost in the shadows of boardrooms and the backchannels of procurement, only the most astute operators thrive. This guide is written for:

- Public transport operators plotting their next bid

- Infrastructure companies seeking to outmaneuver rivals in construction and maintenance tenders

- Social value managers determined to embed lasting impact, not just tick boxes

- Bid directors and writers who know the difference between a winning narrative and an also-ran

- Procurement professionals who have to see through the smoke and mirrors to real, deliverable social value

If you're preparing for the next round of high-stakes negotiations—where every point of social value could tip the scales—this dossier is your secret weapon.

What is social value strategy for public transport?

What's the problem?



Transport tenders in 2025 aren't won on price alone. The rules have changed: social value isn't a nice-to-have, it's mission-critical. But with shifting policies, evolving expectations, and a risk of "box-ticking" fatigue, how do you build a social value strategy that's both authentic and competitive?

What will you get from this?



- Jargon-free frameworks for social value in public transport
- Insights from the frontlines of UK and global procurement
- Actionable checklists for your next bid cycle
- A dash of wit, because-let's face it-tenders are dry enough

Why trust us?



We've helped operators and infrastructure giants win contracts from Manchester to Melbourne, embedding social value into everything from route planning to station design. Our team has sat on both sides of the table-writing bids and evaluating them. We know what works, what flops, and what gets you shortlisted.

Strip away the jargon, and a social value strategy is your playbook for ensuring every pound spent delivers more than just passenger miles. It's about embedding public benefit at every phase—planning, operations, and investment. The pillars of sustainability are a good guide to create social value:

- **Economic:** How many local jobs can be created? What services can be procured locally?
- **Social sustainability:** What training opportunities can be provided to staff?
- **Environment:** What waste can be upcycled? Is there an environmental monitoring system in place? Zero emissions fleet in the supply chain?

A true strategy makes social value the main event, not an afterthought. It shapes decisions, not just documents and shouldn't be an afterthought.

Why a social value strategy is now mission-critical for public transport bids

Today's public procurement, particularly in UK, is a high-stakes game. Here's why:

Mandates & Metrics

Social value weighting is at minimum 10% and in some cases can be up to 30% of quality score. Miss the mark, and you're out—no matter how shiny your rolling stock.

Competitive advantage in transport bids

Social value is the tiebreaker. When bids are close, the one with real, measurable community impact can play a part.

Sustainability Commitments

Net-zero is the goal and supporting if your bid doesn't help decarbonise, it's dead-on arrival.

Reputational Risk

One "greenwash" scandal, and your brand is front-page news—for all the wrong reasons.

Social value is the new currency. Ignore it, and your bid is yesterday's news.

Key policy drivers behind the rise of social value weighting in transport procurement

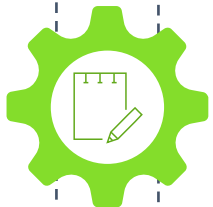
What are the key drivers? Let's decode the alphabet soup of acronyms:



Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012: The original mandate, making social value a must in public procurement.



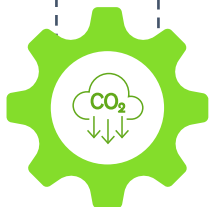
UK Green Book: Treasury guidance that now bakes social impact into value-for-money assessments.



Levelling Up Agenda: The government's push to close regional gaps—if your bid doesn't help, it's not getting funded.



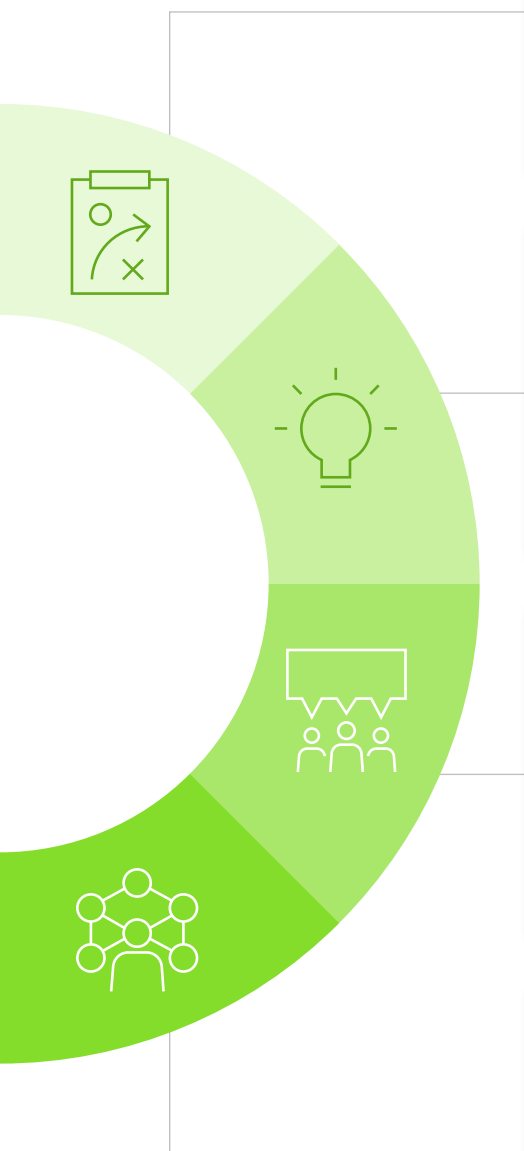
National Procurement Policy Statement: Social value, innovation, and sustainability are now front and centre.



Transport Decarbonisation Plan: Every bid must show a credible path to net-zero in line with different net zero dates

**If your strategy doesn't hit these above notes,
you're not even in the orchestra.**

How to make the leap from “compliance box-ticking” to a fully integrated social value strategy for transport



Strategic Embedding: Beyond the Minimum Tender Requirements: Too many operators treat social value like a side salad—necessary to have and undoubtably of benefit but not the main course. The winners make it the steak.

Innovation: Don't recycle last year's "community engagement" plan. Show how you are pushing boundaries—think digital inclusion, green jobs, or urban greening and have future credible plans linked with stakeholder feedback and local policies and strategies.

Culture: Build social value into your DNA. It's not just the bid team's job; it's everyone's. On this point it is worth regular briefings and updates to the business on social value so the rest of the business can talk knowledgeably about social value and identify opportunities regarding this.

Capability: Invest in training, tools, and partnerships to deliver on your promises so that there is demonstratable progress year on year.

Mindset shifts transport operators must make to embed social value, not overlay it

Change is constant. However to deliver social value it is important to move it from a salad to a steak perspectives requires a change in mindset encompassing the following:

Long-Term Investment



See beyond the contract term. Real community impact takes time.

Leadership Commitment



Social value needs board-level champions, not just middle managers.

Outcomes-Focused Design



Start with the end in mind—what changes for people, not just for your KPIs?

Stakeholder Co-Creation



Bring communities into the design process. Don't just consult—co-create wherever possible

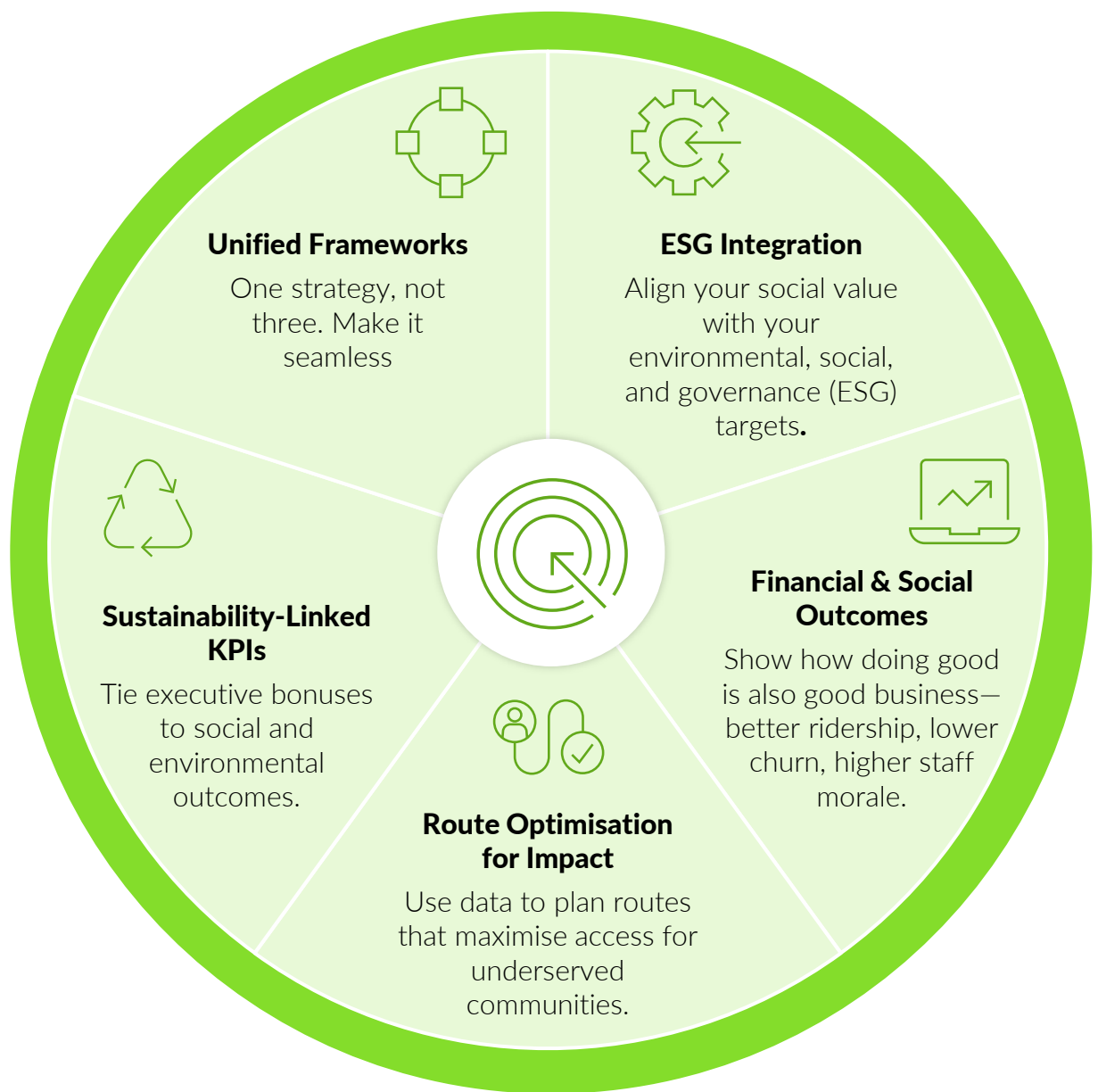
Resilience & Inclusion



Build systems that serve everyone, especially the most vulnerable.

Linking corporate purpose, ESG goals and route economics into one coherent plan

Social value can also be described as weaving into corporate purposes, ESG goals and route economics into one coherent plan.



How to create a future-ready social value strategy for public transport

To create a **future-ready social value strategy** for public transport, operators must prioritise adaptability and innovation. Building flexible models that respond to emerging trends—such as AI, micromobility, and shifting commuter patterns—ensures your strategy remains relevant as the industry evolves also known as **adaptable social value model**.

Keeping a close watch on **emerging social impact trends** like climate adaptation, digital accessibility, and the circular economy will help your organisation stay ahead of the curve and deliver lasting impact. Embracing **innovative procurement methods**, such as outcome-based contracts and social impact bonds, can unlock new funding streams and community benefits, supporting sustainable transport solutions.

Data-driven social value reporting is essential: investing in robust tools to track, measure, and transparently communicate your social value outcomes not only builds trust with stakeholders but also enables continuous improvement. By integrating these elements—**adaptability, trend awareness, innovative procurement, and transparent reporting**—public transport providers can deliver social value that meets current needs and is resilient to future challenges. This approach supports financial sustainability, enhances service equity, and positions your organisation as a leader in the future of public transport.

① Required foundational steps public transport operators should take before developing their social value strategy

I would recommend the following 4 foundational steps to ensure success.

1

The first is a thorough **stakeholder needs assessment**, mapping out who is affected by your services, what they need, and what matters most to them. This process uncovers key priorities and helps tailor your approach.

2

Next, conduct a **baseline analysis** to understand your current impact—knowing where you stand is essential for setting realistic goals and tracking progress. **Strategic alignment** is also critical: ensure your social value goals fit seamlessly with your wider business objectives and bid strategy, so that social impact is embedded in your organisational DNA.

3

Identify **internal social value champions**—leaders who will drive the agenda, inspire teams, and maintain momentum.

4

Finally, perform a **capability gap analysis** to pinpoint strengths and areas needing development. This clear-eyed view of your organisation's readiness enables targeted investment and upskilling, ensuring your public transport social value strategy is built on solid ground.

By following these foundational steps, operators can lay the groundwork for a strategy that delivers measurable, meaningful benefits to communities and stakeholders.

② Essential components of a robust social value strategy for public transport providers

A robust social value strategy for public transport providers is built on several essential components. Start with **clear objectives**: define what you aim to achieve, whether it's creating jobs, boosting skills, improving health, or driving inclusion. These objectives should be supported by **measurable KPIs**—targets that can be accurately tracked and reported. **Cross-functional governance** is critical; involve teams from HR, operations, communications, and finance, not just the CSR department, to ensure a holistic approach. **Continuous improvement** should be embedded in your strategy—establish feedback loops to learn from results and adapt to changing needs. Finally, risk mitigation is vital: proactively identify potential challenges and develop plans to address them, ensuring your social value initiatives remain resilient. By integrating these essential components, public transport providers can create a social value strategy that is actionable, accountable, and capable of delivering lasting community impact, while also supporting business goals and regulatory requirements.

③ The importance of developing metrics that capture both the direct and indirect social impacts of your social value strategy

Developing robust metrics that capture both the direct and indirect social impacts of your social value strategy is crucial for public transport operators where contracts increasingly demand transparency:

Measurement Frameworks



Use recognised models—like TOMs (Themes, Outcomes, Measures) or the Social Value Portal.

Indirect Metrics



Don't just count jobs; measure wellbeing, local spend, and community cohesion.

Wellbeing Indicators



Track how your services impact mental and physical health.

Data Standards



Collect data you can trust—and share.

Longitudinal Studies



Measure impact over time, not just at project close.

4 How to approach budgeting and resource allocation for your social value strategy

Approaching budgeting and resource allocation for your social value strategy requires a shift in mindset: treat social value as an investment to win business as well as positive PR, not just a cost and remember the following principles.



Investment Models

Treat social value as an investment, not a cost.



Cost-Benefit Analysis

Show the return on social initiatives.



Dedicated Funding

Ringfence budgets for social value delivery.



Resource Planning

Allocate people and tech to deliver on your promises.



ROI Analysis

Track what works—and double down.



Social value strategy examples in everyday transport operations

Infusing route planning, scheduling and passenger experience with social value principles

Infusing social value principles into route planning, scheduling, and passenger experience is essential for creating a truly inclusive and equitable public transport system. **Accessible design** should be at the forefront—routes must cater to disabled and elderly passengers, not just the typical 9-to-5 commuter, ensuring everyone can access vital services and opportunities. **Community consultation** is key: involving local voices in service planning helps tailor routes and timetables to real community needs, fostering engagement and trust.

Prioritising **safety and wellbeing**—from improved lighting and regular staff training to pandemic prevention measures—boosts passenger confidence and satisfaction, making public transport a more attractive option for all. **Inclusive scheduling** means rethinking timetables to support shift workers, carers, and students, providing reliable services outside traditional peak hours and reducing social exclusion. Finally, targeted **equity initiatives** are suggested to address “transport deserts” and underserved areas, helping bridge gaps in access and opportunity. By embedding these social value principles, operators not only fulfil legal and moral obligations but also build stronger, more resilient communities. This approach enhances ridership, supports economic growth, and ensures public transport delivers maximum social benefit for every passenger, every journey..

Using infrastructure design choices to hard-wire inclusivity and community benefit

Examples of the infrastructure choices to include inclusivity and community benefits are given below:

● **Universal Design:** Make every station, stop, and vehicle accessible to all.

● **Community-Centred Development:** Turn stations into community hubs, not just transit points.

● **Green Infrastructure:** Invest in solar panels, green roofs, and biodiversity.

● **Public Realm Improvements:** Upgrade surroundings—think benches, trees, and safe crossings.

● **Accessibility Upgrades:** Go beyond minimum standards.

Common social value strategy pitfalls public transport bidders should avoid

The top five most common mistakes that I see most often are outlined below. Ignore these at your peril.



Ignoring End-User Perspectives

If you don't ask, you'll miss what matters. For example, holding customer focus groups can provide invaluable feedback to improve your strategy.



Treating Social Value as a Checkbox

Evaluators spot copy-paste jobs a mile off and even worse if you don't change the mode



Overpromising

Don't pledge what you can't deliver.



Failing to Measure

If you can't prove it, it didn't happen.

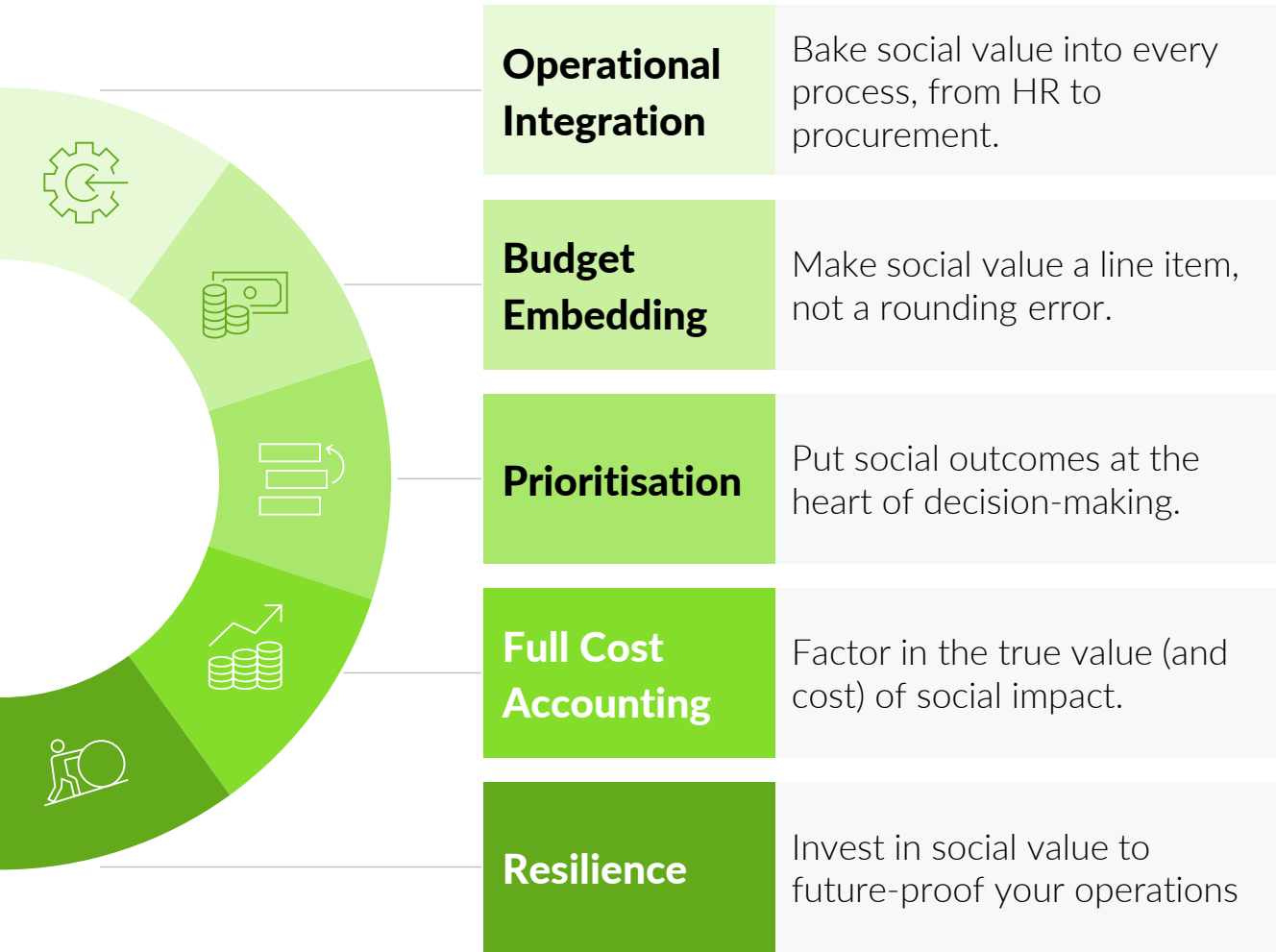


Neglecting Stakeholder Engagement

Social value is a team sport and stakeholders need to include

Treating social value as an add-on instead of pricing it into core operations

It is very common for some clients to treat social value as an add-on, rather than embedding it at the heart of their business model. Treating social value as an add-on instead of pricing it into core operations can undermine both the impact and credibility of your public transport bid. To achieve genuine and sustainable results, social value must be operationally integrated—baked into every process, from HR and recruitment to procurement and supply chain management. This means making social value a budget line item, not just a rounding error or afterthought, and ensuring that resources are allocated to deliver on your commitments summarised below:



Key takeaways and an action-plan checklist for your next bid cycle

Creating a winning social value bid in today's competitive public sector landscape requires more than just good intentions—it demands a strategic, evidence-based approach that integrates social value into your core business and bid strategy. Strategic integration ensures your social value commitments are not just add-ons, but central to your organisation's goals, maximising your competitive advantage and aligning with client priorities.

Your Social Value Bid Toolkit should start with comprehensive stakeholder mapping. Identify your allies, critics, and influencers to ensure your proposal addresses the needs and expectations of all key groups. Next, set clear objectives that are both ambitious and achievable, and define measurable KPIs to track your progress and demonstrate impact. Build cross-functional teams by involving HR, operations, communications, and finance, ensuring your social value response is robust and deliverable.

Tender Preparation Checklist:

- ✓ Map stakeholders and conduct stakeholder mapping exercises to understand local needs.
- ✓ Set clear, contract-specific objectives that align with both business and client priorities.
- ✓ Define KPIs and measurement frameworks—use recognised models like TOMs or Social Value Portal for consistency.
- ✓ Build cross-functional teams and appoint internal champions to drive delivery.
- ✓ Plan measurement and reporting with robust data systems in place before you bid.
- ✓ Draft compelling narratives using real case studies, testimonials, and clear evidence of past success to make your social value impact relatable and credible.

Measurement readiness is critical—have your data collection and reporting systems ready to quantify and monetise your commitments, supporting your bid with robust evidence and financial proxies. Bid storytelling is equally important: go beyond metrics by weaving in community impact stories, stakeholder testimonials, and qualitative benefits that demonstrate genuine, lasting value.

By following this action-plan checklist—strategic integration, stakeholder mapping, clear objectives, defined KPIs, cross-functional teams, measurement readiness, and compelling storytelling—you will significantly increase your chances of success, stand out in the evaluation process, and deliver social value that is both meaningful and measurable.

Book a consultation

We've helped operators win-and deliver- contracts by making social value more than a slogan.

Want real-world case studies?

Curious how to tailor your strategy for your next bid?

Ready to turn your social value promises into measurable results?

Next steps



Let's make your next bid a winner-on paper, and in the real world.

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