

April 2026

The Next Chapter

Quarterly Insights from The Recruitment Story

“As the transport sector moves into its next chapter, the pace of change is unmistakable, from shifting demand patterns & accelerating devolution to rising customer expectations & the growing complexity of franchising.

This quarter’s insights draw on what I’m seeing across operators, authorities & leadership teams nationwide. They’re designed to help you anticipate what’s coming, strengthen your commercial capability & stay ahead of the talent curve.”

Caroline Wilson, Founder & MD, The Recruitment Story

Demand Patterns Are Shifting, Your Commercial Capability Must Keep Up

Patronage is rising in some regions, flat in others, and volatile in student heavy cities. These localised swings mean one thing:



You need leaders who can read micromarkets not just manage macro trends.

The next quarter will reward operators who have:

- **Strong commercial analysts**
- **Leaders who understand segmentation**
- **People who turn data into action, not only dashboards**



Devolution Is Accelerating, Combined Authorities Are Raising the Bar

Mayors are becoming more ambitious, more vocal and more demanding about:

- Integration
- Value for money
- Local accountability
- Customer experience

Your next hires need to be:

- Politically aware
- Comfortable in public-sector partnership environments
- Skilled at navigating governance, scrutiny and stakeholder complexity

The days of “pure operator” thinking are gone. Leaders now operate in a political, commercial hybrid world.

Franchising Momentum Is Creating a Capability Gap

With West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales all moving, the market is shifting from run the network to win the network.

That requires a different skillset:

- Bid-ready commercial thinking
- Pricing and revenue strategy
- Customer proposition design
- Market insight and modelling
- Partnership and integration capability



If you don't have these skills in-house, you'll feel it when the next tender drops.



Customer Expectations Are Rising Faster Than Recruitment Pipelines

Passengers want:

- Reliability
- Real-time information
- Seamless multimodal journeys
- Fair, transparent pricing
- A human experience

To deliver that, you need leaders who can:

- Build customer-centric propositions
- Work cross-functionally
- Influence without authority
- Drive cultural change, not just operational performance



What This Means for Your Next Quarter

If you're planning to hire, the market is telling you three things:

1. Commercial capability is becoming the biggest differentiator, not fleet, not depots, not tech.
2. Stakeholder navigation is now a core competency, not a "nice to have."
3. You can't wait until the bid lands or the numbers dip, the leaders you need will already be delivering somewhere else.

Want a Clearer View of the Talent Landscape?

If you're thinking about strengthening your commercial, customer or operational management teams, I'm happy to share what I'm seeing across the market.

Caroline Wilson · Founder & MD · The Recruitment Story
caroline@therecruitmentstory.co.uk · 07711 293144