

Bus User

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**What do
passengers want?**



Bus Users
Working for passengers

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represent the views of bus
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Complaints

If you have a complaint
about a bus or coach
service, you need first to
contact the bus or coach
company concerned to try
and resolve the issue. If
you're unsuccessful in doing
this, we will investigate
your complaint and follow
it up with the bus or coach
company. Please contact:
enquiries@bususers
or 0300 111 0001



Bus Users

Working for passengers

www.bususers.org

While we face political uncertainty over the next twelve months, the same is also true for passenger transport and transport policy.

The new report from Campaign for Better Transport, *Buses in Crisis*, paints a bleak picture for bus services. And alongside the funding cuts highlighted by the report, bus services are being squeezed from all sides, with increasing demands from customers and the growing expectation that buses hold the key to more sustainable transport solutions in the future.

The role of organisations like Bus Users will be ever more critical as we work to assess the impact of policy changes and meet the diverse needs of the people who rely on buses. With our new strategic plan in place and a programme of restructuring under way, we will continue to work with operators and local authorities to ensure that bus passengers get the very best services possible.

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If there is a theme that emerges from the content of this issue, it must be 'Talk to your passengers', or even better, 'Listen to them'.

In a recent blog, Bus Users' Chief Executive Claire Walters challenged bus manufacturers to put passengers at the heart of vehicle design. Gavin Booth explores this idea further in his article 'What do passengers

want?', pointing out that while the manufacturers' primary customers are the bus companies, they would do well to consider the views of passengers from the outset.

'Dialogue works!' is another article that illustrates the benefits that bus companies can draw from listening to their passengers. First West of England consulted its passengers about fares, and then acted on the results: some fares were significantly reduced, and overall passenger numbers rose as a result. Other FirstGroup companies have run successful 'swap me' events where young people, for instance, have had the chance to swap places with the bus driver, allowing both groups to see things from the other's perspective.

Communication is important at all levels, and John Marsh's piece 'Getting it right' highlights the importance of the attitude of bus company staff when things go wrong. A cheerful, communicative driver who shows passengers that he or she really cares can make all the difference.

Passengers may not, of course, always agree about what's best. While Bus Users as an organisation is clear about its commitment to improving the lot of the passenger, there are often genuinely different views on the best ways to achieve this. Encouraging debate and discussion in the pages of this magazine is one way to help move issues forward, and we are grateful for all contributions received.

Simon Norton puts forward some interesting ideas in this issue's letters pages about the development of new mobile phone apps to assist the blind and partially sighted (see 'App suggestions', p23). Would any of the bus operators like to follow up his suggestions?

Nicola Parkins

Consultation done well

Bus Users was asked by Surrey County Council to comment on their proposals for cuts to subsidies for local bus services. Both Bus Users HQ and the local group provided them with comments and had meetings to discuss the issues.

The proposed cuts include restricting the use of concessionary passes to the required minimum of 9.30am-11pm Monday to Friday, curtailing extra fare concessions for disabled people, including the free companion pass, and a range of other possibilities including the removal of support from a variety of subsidised services.

At the meetings, it was suggested that Surrey CC could do more to ask local people how the proposals would affect them, in order to assess the true impact of such potential cuts. We began to work out how this could be done, and this resulted in Bus Users being asked to organise a series of consultation events, in partnership with local associations and voluntary organisations, to gather the views of representatives of different sections of the community: elderly and disabled people, unemployed job-seekers, local employers. We also held a series of roving Your Bus Matters events across the county.

Surrey CC has extended its consultation deadline to enable the analysis of these responses to be thoroughly reviewed and the results fed back to the Council before any decisions are taken.

While it seems unlikely that cuts can be avoided entirely, Surrey CC does seem to be taking its responsibility to consult on proposed cuts rather more seriously than some other authorities, and they should be commended for this approach. We would expect that the final outcome, properly explained, can reasonably be said to have taken affected passengers' views into consideration, and will be accepted more readily by the local population. We hope that other local authorities might follow Surrey's example.

Claire Walters

Bus Users Cymru move

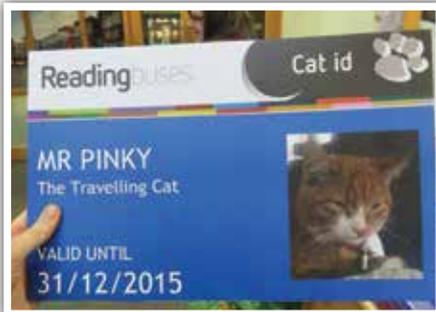
It was with mixed feelings that the staff of Bus Users Cymru closed the door for the last time on their office in Sloper Road in December.

'We had been in this office for over ten years and it had served us well,' says Margaret Everson, BUC's Director. 'We had a good landlord and it was a difficult decision to move.'

However, lack of space and accessibility dictated the move and Bus Users' Welsh team are now housed in an office in the centre of Cardiff with enough room to accommodate all its staff, including the Bus Compliance Officers. The Traffic Commissioner for Wales and the West Midlands also has his room within their office.

The new office is bright and airy and is close to the railway and bus stations. BUC's PO Box address remains unchanged, but there is a new phone number: 029 2034 4300.

Social media success



We're pleased to report that our Facebook and Twitter feeds are growing, with a particular surge over the Christmas period.

At a recent count, we had almost 1,163 Facebook 'Likes' and 1,753 Twitter followers. The conversations taking place on these range from the very useful and

thought-provoking to the downright hilarious!

As well as being able to give your opinion on transport policy or cuts proposals, they're handy ways to find out about local transport problems in many areas and very simple to sign up to and use. It's entirely up to you what you show an interest in and it's easy to keep your personal details private.

Of course, it's not all about serious issues – you get to see some of the light-hearted side of bus life too. One recent story featured Mr Pinky, a cat who regularly travels with his owner on Reading Buses, curled up on a shopping trolley. In recognition of this regular traveller, Reading Buses issued Mr Pinky with his own smartcard!

We hope you'll join in the conversation soon.

Local Group's Passenger Charter

Rural East Lothian Bus Users (RELBUS) has worked with the five local bus companies serving the area to the east of Edinburgh to agree a Passenger Charter. The aim is to improve cooperation and dialogue between bus companies, passenger groups, and the local council, and to achieve minimum levels of service.

The charter sets out responsibilities for the bus operators, including clean buses, easy to understand fares, and consultation over service changes. East Lothian Council's responsibilities include ensuring that the environment at bus stops is clean and welcoming, timetable displays are up to date, and clear route information is available at all major stops.

The 'passenger' part of the bargain includes being courteous to the driver and other passengers, taking litter home, and taking care not to distract the driver when the bus is moving.

This is a good common-sense document that has been produced following cooperation with all the interested parties. Other Bus Users local groups could consider working locally to produce something similar in their areas.

The charter can be viewed on the RELBUS website, www.relbus.org.uk, or is available from East Lothian Council.

Farewell to Tudor

Tudor Thomas, until recently Stakeholder Liaison Officer at Bus Users Cymru, has left to take up a new job as Commercial Officer at Stagecoach in South Wales.

Tudor joined Bus Users Cymru in March 2012 as a representative, covering the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan area. He carried out valuable mystery passenger work and was a major contributor to BUC's Annual Report, as well as helping to develop responses to consultations.

In his new post, Tudor's responsibilities will include helping to monitor bus service reliability, planning new networks, and creating timetables and crew schedules. He says that his experience at Bus Users will be valuable: 'Stagecoach is a bus operator which deliberately tries to be customer-focused, and I will certainly take with me a keener idea of what bus users want.'

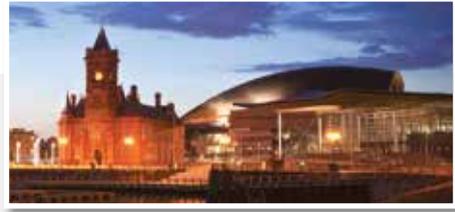
We wish Tudor well in his new role – Bus Users' loss is Stagecoach's gain!

TfL Control Room Day

Bus passengers around the UK could benefit from an initiative by Transport for London.

TfL's bus controllers organised a networking day for some of the other organisations that control bus networks around the UK using gps, cameras and other technologies. Network controllers from Brighton, Reading, Oxford, the West Midlands, Bristol, Cardiff, Nottingham, Tyneside and Edinburgh attended and shared experiences. In all these areas, some form of joint working between bus companies and highway authorities is in operation, to regulate traffic flows and help bus services to run reliably and on time.

The idea for the networking day developed out of an earlier exercise between Bus Users and National Express West Midlands. The event was a great success, with many ideas shared and information exchanged on local initiatives that could be of interest for other areas.



AGM 2015

The 2015 Annual General Meeting of Bus Users UK Ltd will take place in Cardiff at the Pierhead Building on 11 July. This is later in the year than members may be expecting, but reflects the fact that our financial year end is changing from 31 December to 31 March.

We are delighted that the AGM is being sponsored by Ms Jane Hutt AM, Business and Finance Manager, National Assembly for Wales, who is very supportive of the work of Bus Users Cymru. We are lining up a range of speakers, and members can be assured of an interesting day.

Further details will be circulated with a future issue of *Bus User*.

Dementia Safe Havens

Two sister companies in south-east England have launched Dementia Safe Havens in their local Travel Shops. These offer help and support to anyone presenting themselves as needing assistance or who is unsure of their surroundings. Customer service staff have been trained to be 'dementia friends' so that they can recognise and help if someone needs assistance or is confused. Staff can offer something as simple as a cup of tea and a safe place to sit, or can call upon expert help if required.

The bus companies, Brighton & Hove and Metrobus, worked closely with the Alzheimers Society and Speak Out on this initiative. Speak Out is an independent advocacy for adults with learning difficulties in Brighton & Hove, which asks organisations and businesses to offer 'safe places' if someone with learning disabilities is scared, bullied or lost when they are out in the city.

The Brighton & Hove bus company's Safe Havens are in the company's 1 Stop Travel shop at 26 North Street and at its head office at 43 Conway Street, Hove. In the Metrobus area the Safe Haven is at the company's Travel Shop in Friary Way, Crawley.



What do passengers want?

For those who design and manufacture our buses, the 'customers' are the bus companies. But are manufacturers missing a trick in not asking passengers what they want?

Last November, the Euro Bus Expo at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre brought together a glittering selection of the bus manufacturing industry's latest hardware for customers and passengers to examine with a critical eye.

Of course the customers for these shiny new buses are not the humble passengers – not at this stage, anyway – but the bus companies, who shell out hundreds of thousands of pounds per bus to keep their fleets up to date and up to scratch. The passenger is 'the customer' further down the line but, as bus companies are regularly finding out, buses that suit the operators don't always suit the passengers.

Claire Walters, Bus Users' Chief Executive, threw down a challenge to bus manufacturers to put passengers at the heart of bus design. Participating in a panel debate on the second day of the show, Claire called on the industry to consider the views of bus users in the next generation of vehicle designs.

She pointed out that to the people who design and build our buses, the 'customer' is the bus company, which means that those of us who actually use the

bus are a long way removed from the design and build process. The philosophy, she said, is often 'You tell us what you want and we'll build it', tempered by what's legal, physically possible and affordable. But manufacturers are missing a marketing trick: if they were to carry out passenger research prior to designing their buses, they could use those passenger views to sell the vehicles to companies which haven't done any research themselves.

By the industry, for the industry

Alexander Dennis, the leading British bus manufacturer, labelled one of its new double-deckers at the show 'Designed by the industry for the industry'. The company does ask its customers what they are looking for, but its customers are the Arrivas, Firsts and Stagecoaches of this world, so maybe a bit of joint research by the manufacturers and the operators, involving real passengers, could produce the ideal bus. After all, the only way the operators can afford to buy new buses is through the fares from real-life passengers.

Blind or partially sighted people, for example, can still bump their heads on unexpected handrails (see 'By bus with partial sight' in our last issue). Buses that tell people where they are remain far from commonplace, despite the fact that the technology is readily available. As well as being invaluable to blind and partially sighted people, this facility can be much appreciated by sighted passengers, particularly new or irregular bus users.



conditioning? Is it hard to see out of the windows, either because of road dirt or the inaccurately-named 'see-through graphics'? Will we bang our heads if we have to sit right at the back, over the engine? And, a common complaint: Is there enough room to stow shopping or luggage?

Many of us will still shiver in the winter and melt in the summer, when drivers are unable to control the heaters. And while posh 'e-leather' seats may look and smell lovely, do we actually prefer them, when a lead-booted driver can have us sliding all over the place? Or would we rather sit on moulded plastic with a thin bit of padding?

There are other issues. In terms of ventilation, do we prefer windows that open, or decent air

Throwing down the gauntlet

Bus manufacturers really build empty boxes that meet all the legal and practical requirements, and bus operators decide where to put the seats, and how many; where the wheelchair space should be situated, and how many of these there should be; where handholds are needed; whether seats should be covered in e-leather or moquette; and whether windows should be opening or fixed.

Claire has thrown down the gauntlet to the manufacturers and operators to consult with the people who will use their shiny new buses on a daily basis. Bus Users would be delighted to work to produce something approaching the perfect bus – the perfect bus for passengers rather than the engineers, operations staff or the accountants, as often appears to be the case.

Of course the perfect bus will never exist, but us Users can help the industry to move closer to perfection. **BU**



▲ An interior that ticks many boxes – double wheelchair/buggy space, flat floor right to the back, lots of handholds – plus a couple of features that are more contentious: e-leather seats and opening windows.

◄ One of the less user-friendly buses on display at Euro Bus Expo. The steeply-tiered seats don't really encourage any but the most agile to venture beyond the second row.

What seat covering do passengers prefer?

One supplier who did recently seek the views of bus passengers is Camira (formerly Holdsworth). Camira contracted Bus Users to research passengers' views on moquette and e-leather as seat coverings.

Our market researchers showed bus passengers samples of both and sought their views. Almost all the passengers preferred the more traditional moquette covering, but younger people – and people in Nottingham, for some reason – preferred the e-leather.

Bus Users was glad to help Camira with this research and encourages other bus industry manufacturers and suppliers to follow their lead!

Doug Paulley v FirstGroup plc

The legal battle over the rights of wheelchair users on buses continues. Gavin Booth reports

The Court of Appeal has ruled that bus companies do not have a legal duty to make parents with baby buggies move out of the wheelchair space on a bus in order to allow a wheelchair user to use it.

This is the latest development in a long-running legal battle following an incident in 2012 when a wheelchair user, Doug Paulley, was unable to board a bus because a woman was unwilling to move her pushchair. An initial ruling, at Leeds County Court, said that FirstBus was in breach of its duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, but in December 2014 the Court of Appeal unanimously allowed an appeal by First.

In the judgement, Lord Justice Underhill said: 'It has to be accepted that our conclusion and reasoning in this case means that wheelchair users will occasionally be prevented by other passengers from using the wheelchair space on the bus. Sometimes there will be a reasonable justification for that happening, but sometimes there will not.'



'I do not, however, believe that the fact that some passengers will – albeit rarely – act selfishly and irresponsibly is a sufficient reason for imposing on bus companies a legal responsibility for a situation which is not of their making and which they are not in a position to prevent.'

'In the present state of the law something must still be left to the good sense and conscience of individuals.'

Some observers believe that there is still a need to introduce legislation that would strengthen the powers

of bus drivers, so that they could require people to vacate the wheelchair space, or would create new duties on other passengers. Unity Law, the disability rights specialist which has acted for Mr Paulley in this case, says that it remains committed to the principle that 'if it's fine to have someone thrown off a bus for eating a kebab, or committing a general nuisance, then it's both practical and legal to enforce the principle that disabled people who can only travel in the space designed and designated for wheelchair users have an absolute right to occupy it over non-disabled people.'

Clarification

Commenting on the Court of Appeal decision, Giles Fearnley, Managing Director of FirstBus, said: 'The verdict has given our passengers, drivers and the wider transport industry much-needed clarification about the priority use of the wheelchair space on board buses, following two previous conflicting rulings.'

'Our current policy, which is to ask other passengers in the strongest polite terms to make way for those who need the space, will remain in place. We recognise how important it is that bus services are accessible for all customers – indeed we are leading the industry in improving bus travel for disabled customers. That good work will continue.'

Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users, acknowledged that the Court of Appeal's ruling would offer bus drivers greater clarity, particularly when they are called on to intervene in tensions between passengers. But she pointed out that while innovative design and investment have given wheelchair users greater access to buses, the ruling may make it more difficult for them to travel unless the law is changed to give wheelchair users a legal priority over the designated space.

'Ultimately, everyone should have equal access to public transport,' she said. 'And while the full impact of this case may still be unknown, we would like to see bus designers, manufacturers and operators thinking more creatively about how buses can meet the needs of all passengers.'

You can read the full Court of Appeal ruling at: www.unity-law.co.uk/media_area/documents. Unity Law has launched an appeal to the Supreme Court and we will report on the outcome in due course.

Hay Ho!

It's a familiar picture across the UK. A local authority has to reduce its supported bus network to fit a reduced budget, and a community is threatened with losing a vital bus service. But as **BARCLAY DAVIES** reports, action by passengers and others can sometimes make a real difference

Hay-on-Wye is a small market town on the Welsh side of the border between England and Wales. It's famous, among other things, for its annual literary festival, and for being the national 'book town' of Wales. The most popular bus service is the 39, which connects Hay with Brecon at one end and Hereford at the other. The nearest railway station to Hay is Hereford, some 21 miles away, and a number of residents of Hay, the villages on the route, and tourists use the bus to visit the city and to connect with the rail network.

Service 39 is operated commercially by Stagecoach on Mondays to Saturdays, and until last year Herefordshire and Powys Councils supported a number of Sunday journeys on the 39A service.

Early last year, Herefordshire and Powys Councils announced that they were withdrawing their subsidy for service 39A at the end of September, leaving residents along the route without a Sunday service. Such was the concern of bus users and businesses that a public meeting was held in Hay in April 2014 to discuss the situation.

A working party was established to set up a campaign to try and save at least the section of the service between Hay and Hereford.

The working party decided that they needed research evidence to support their belief that the Sunday service was needed. They approached the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, who agreed to fund a study. This revealed that most usage of the service was between Hay and Hereford, and that visitors wanted to stay in Hay and surrounding areas for weekend breaks and then catch a bus on Sunday to Hereford to connect with the rail network.

Costings were made for three return journeys on Sundays from Hay to Hereford, and the cost was underwritten by Hay Tourism Group. They have been joined in support of the project by the chamber of commerce, Rail for Herefordshire, and Herefordshire Ramblers. Herefordshire Council agreed to contract the service on behalf of the group, and local operator Yeomans Canyon Travel were contracted to operate the service.

Winter fuel donations

Bus users and local businesses have responded with donations of varying amounts to help fund the service, with some passengers donating their winter fuel payment allowance to the fund. Hay Tourism Group have set up a supporter scheme whereby users can sign up and pay £5 to become a supporter of the service. 'Our vision is to make the bus an integral part of the tourist experience,' says HTG representative Anna Heywood. 'The scenery during the wonderful

ride through the Golden Valley to Hay is as good an introduction to our area as you'll get.'

Les Lumsdon, chair of the Rail for Herefordshire group, has also been heavily involved in the project, along with some local Bus Users members. 'This is an innovative approach where groups and communities get to plan the timetable and fares,' he says. 'We've decided to call it 'Hay Ho!' as we wanted it to be a fun and enjoyable way to travel between Hereford and Hay.'

So how has the service been received? It started operating on 5 October 2014 and the first departure rolled out of Hereford with around 20 people on board, mainly individuals who had been involved in making the dream become a reality. There are three journeys a day leaving Hereford at 10.10, 13.10 and 16.10, with return journeys from Hay at 11.50, 14.50 and 17.20. So far the bus has performed well and has attracted new users to the service. A family day ticket at £15 and the Hay Day Rover ticket at £7.50 have been introduced to encourage more people to get on board.

If you would like to receive more information on the service or indeed become a supporter and receive a newsletter, the email contact is bus39a@gmail.com. There is also a facebook page, Hay Ho Bus.

It is inspiring for us at Bus Users UK to report such a good news story, where concerned users have got together and have worked hard to turn a negative situation into a positive one – and Hay Ho! is the result. **BU**



Bus Users Scotland

It is nearly two years since Bus Users Scotland was set up as part of the Bus Users family to provide services to benefit Scottish bus passengers. What has been achieved?

Bus Users Scotland was established in April 2013 following the award of funding from Transport Scotland, an agency of the Scottish Government.

BUS, as it is appropriately and widely known, has three principal areas of activity: complaints handling, gathering the views of bus passengers to feed into bus policy, and monitoring bus services to ensure they run reliably and punctually and meet the terms of their registrations and contracts.

Gavin Booth, Director of BUS, had been a one-man band in Scotland before BUS was set up. His first task was to recruit staff and find a suitable office. 'We were fortunate on both counts – appointing Greig Mackay

BUS also provides a complaints service for the new Edinburgh Tram.

as Deputy Director and Patrycja Kwapiszewska as Office Manager, and securing first-class office space in McDonald Road in Edinburgh, not far from the city centre.' Shortly afterwards BUS recruited two Bus Compliance Officers to fulfil its bus monitoring responsibilities.

BUS quickly established contact with the many stakeholders with an interest in looking after bus passengers in Scotland, and works closely with the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, Joan Aitken, and her colleagues. Traffic Commissioners are responsible for the licensing and regulation of those who operate buses and coaches as well as the registration of local bus services, and it is important that Joan has knowledge of the complaints that pass through the hands of BUS and any problems identified at Your Bus Matters events. Bus Users was pleased to welcome Joan as guest speaker at its 2014 AGM, which was hosted by BUS in Edinburgh.

Handling complaints

Complaints can be referred to BUS in various ways: directly by email, phone or post from passengers; from the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland; from CPT Scotland; from Transport Scotland; and from the Bus Compliance Officers. The first port of call for people unhappy with any aspect of their bus service is the bus company itself and/or the local transport authorities, but an important part of BUS's role is to help resolve complaints where passengers are unhappy with the responses they have received.

If complainants contact BUS directly without first having taken up the issue with the operator concerned, their complaint will be directed to the relevant bus company or local transport authority, but BUS monitors the progress of these complaints to ensure that passengers receive appropriate responses. In most instances the operators resolve complaints quickly. However, where an operator has either resolved a complaint and the complainant is not satisfied with the response, or has simply failed to act on the complaint, then BUS will take up these complaints and liaise with the bus company concerned to secure a positive outcome for the complainant.

Passengers now have an even easier way of getting in contact with BUS, as they can submit a complaint online via the Bus Users website (see 'How to submit a complaint' in the last issue of *Bus User*). This means



that complaints can reach BUS more quickly, especially when this is done via a smartphone or tablet at the time of the incident. This also allows operators to review CCTV footage more promptly if it is required in order to investigate a complaint.

Complaints received by BUS are analysed and the results fed back to operators and other stakeholders, to help them to see where improvements are necessary and, hopefully, forestall other complaints of a similar nature. Where BUS is unable to bring about a satisfactory resolution to a case, it may be referred to the Bus Appeals Body Scotland (BABScot).

'Our aim is to resolve complaints quickly,' says Greig Mackay. 'We work with bus companies and local transport authorities to resolve problems wherever possible, but where disagreement continues, BABScot will adjudicate on the case.' BABScot comprises a convener and two members – one representing the bus industry, and the other representing bus passengers. They consider all the correspondence and evidence from both parties, before reaching a decision which may favour the passenger or the bus company.

At the request of the Scottish Government, BUS also handles unresolved complaints for the new Edinburgh Tram, which began operation at the end of May last year. Despite the protracted difficulties with the construction of the network, passenger satisfaction with the service itself seems to be high: to date, BUS has not handled any complaints from tram passengers.

Your Bus Matters events

Bus Users members will be familiar with these events, which give bus passengers the opportunity to meet bus company and local authority staff face to face and discuss any matters of concern about their local bus services. BUS has hosted these events throughout Scotland, and has an ongoing programme for 2015.

YBM events may be held in a bus station or in a prominent central location. Bus companies are encouraged to provide buses and staff, and the events >



BUS has hosted Your Bus Matters events throughout Scotland.

are advertised locally in the weeks leading up to the event. The choice of location may be the result of concerns about bus services in that area, or may follow major route or service changes. Sometimes the bus operators take the initiative and ask BUS to organise an event for them, as a means of gathering useful market research from passengers.

All of the major operators in Scotland have been involved in YBM events, and many local independent operators have also attended. The events are very informal affairs and allow passengers to feel relaxed and confident in discussing issues or concerns about the buses they use.

The main themes concerning complaints at the YBM events centre on cutbacks to subsidised services, punctuality, ticket prices and frequency of services. BUS seeks to have the widest range of local transport representatives on hand, to give passengers access to staff who can deal with all the issues they raise. All comments are logged, and BUS maintains contact with the passengers and the bus companies/local authorities, to ensure that comments and complaints are properly followed up. And YBMs are not all about complaints, by any means; much positive feedback is also received, including praise for helpful drivers, good standards of buses and good time-keeping.

Bus compliance

Transport for Scotland asked BUS to take on the bus compliance monitoring role, continuing the on-street work formerly carried out by other agencies. The two Bus Compliance Officers underwent intensive induction and training, learning about the bus industry and the legislative framework. They worked with Strathclyde

Partnership for Transport's bus monitors, met with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner and her staff, and visited major bus companies to learn of the practicalities of bus operation. Bus Users Cymru, which has carried out a similar role in Wales for many years, provided a useful model which BUS was happy to emulate, and the Welsh BCOs provided helpful input to the training of their new Scottish counterparts.

The BCOs monitor the reliability and punctuality of bus services throughout Scotland, working to the times originally registered by bus operators with the Traffic Commissioner. They measure performance against the window of tolerance laid down by the Traffic Commissioners throughout the UK (currently up to one minute early and five minutes late) at prescribed timing-points, using radio-controlled watches for accuracy.

The BCOs work in response to calls from the Traffic Commissioner's office, complaints received by BUS, and concerns expressed by passengers or local authorities, as well as carrying out random monitoring throughout Scotland. They work incognito and report back to the Traffic Commissioner and the bus operators or local authorities. They also monitor vehicle condition, information at bus stops, and driver attitude and skills, as part of a range of matters that concern passengers.

THE SCOTTISH BUS INDUSTRY

- Over 80% of bus services in Scotland are run on a commercial basis (significantly higher in urban areas)
- Other 'socially necessary' services, mostly in rural areas, can be supported by local transport authorities
- Two large international operators with headquarters in Scotland, FirstBus and Stagecoach, provide services throughout much of the country
- Other important operators in central Scotland include Lothian Buses in the east and McGill's in the west
- Significant smaller operators provide essential rural services and operate important interurban services
- Scottish Citylink and Megabus provide regular interurban services linking Scotland's main towns and cities, and serving many important communities en route

BUS works to ensure that bus users in Scotland have:

- A reliable and punctual bus service
- Good-quality information at every stop
- A clear indication of buses serving each stop
- Advance notice of service changes
- Friendly, helpful drivers
- Clean and well-presented buses
- Clean and comfortable seats
- Adequate heating and ventilation
- Safe and smooth driving standards
- In-bus information – ideally audio/visual next stop information
- Prompt and appropriate complaint handling by bus and coach companies
- Bus priority measures and strict parking controls to allow buses to run punctually

A significant benefit of the way the BCOs work is that they report back on how services operate on a normal day. The drivers and bus companies do not know who the BCOs are, and this enables them to provide invaluable feedback to the operators from a passenger perspective. The feedback received from operators regarding the BCOs' activities has been positive – indeed some operators have even requested that they carry out some monitoring on their routes, to provide them with an overview of their service to passengers.

Bus compliance reports are routinely sent to the Traffic Commissioner's office, and where concerns have been expressed about aspects of a company's operations, BUS staff will contact the operator to discuss how matters can be improved. The BCOs also investigate causes of complaints on behalf of BUS, which has made for a speedier resolution of complaints.

By Scotland, for Scotland

BUS has built up invaluable working contacts with other stakeholders, including the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) in Scotland, local transport authorities and bus operators. BUS staff deal with senior complaints staff in all of the principal bus companies, with a direct line to the most senior staff in the case of serious or unresolved complaints.

Setting up BUS from scratch has been exciting and rewarding, according to Gavin, and he is looking forward to recruiting more staff in the coming months. 'We will be developing a network of local part-time reps, who will be our eyes and ears on the ground. In doing this, we will again look at the successful model already developed by our colleagues in Bus Users Cymru.'

Since last year's Scottish Referendum on Independence, Gavin says there has been a groundswell to ensure that matters relating to Scotland and the Scottish people are handled in Scotland. This reinforces the importance of BUS's role in relation to this vital mode of travel in Scotland: 'Around 423 million journeys are made by bus in Scotland every year, and BUS is well placed to ensure that the voice of Scotland's bus passengers is heard loud and clear.' **BU**



Gavin, Patrycja and Greig at Bus Users' 2014 AGM in Edinburgh.

Nudging car drivers towards buses

Encouraging wider bus use, particularly amongst motorists, is a laudable aim. But how can they be persuaded to make the switch?

It's a fairly safe bet that everybody reading this is a bus passenger – regularly or occasionally – and there's no shame in admitting that many of us are also car drivers; bus use and car ownership are not mutually exclusive. And many of the readers of *Bus User* will have sat in buses stuck in a sea of private cars thinking that a few buses could easily accommodate the occupants of all these cars, allowing everybody to get to their destination more quickly.

The car drivers among us only use our cars when the bus is not a practical alternative – don't we? But what about those car drivers who would have to be surgically removed from their beloved motors, the ones who haven't set foot in a bus for 20 or 30 years, but who somehow seem to know that buses are dirty, smelly things, full of people they wouldn't wish to sit beside, with surly drivers charging crippling fares for a service that is always late – if the bus even bothers to turn up. We've all met people who feel the need to defend their dependency on the car with a string of outdated prejudices.

But how do we persuade car drivers to make the switch to the bus, thus helping to reduce congestion and carbon emissions? The lobby group Greener Journeys has developed new techniques to tackle this problem, including targeting drivers when they are most likely to be frustrated with driving – such as when they are trying to find parking spaces, sitting in traffic or paying for petrol – and encouraging them to try using the bus with a free ticket.

City projects

Greener Journeys worked with more than 20 bus operators, local authorities, passenger transport executives, charities and community groups over a period of two years. Their 'Behaviour Change Lab' has developed and tested methods through a series of projects in cities across the UK aimed at encouraging drivers to take the bus. Projects were run in Sheffield, Leicester, Manchester, Bristol and the North East, with 10,000 trial bus journeys being taken and 1,470 evaluation questionnaires completed.

The research findings and tested techniques have been compiled into a 'toolkit' entitled *Driving modal shift from car to bus*, which was launched at the Euro Bus Expo exhibition in Birmingham last November. The toolkit is designed as a practical guide that can be used by other companies and authorities who wish to encourage car drivers to switch to the bus.

As well as creating poor air quality, congestion and noise disturbance, the 28 million cars in this country contribute significantly to carbon emissions. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that climate change has already increased the risk of severe heatwaves and other extreme weather, and cautions of worse to come if carbon emissions continue to rise to record levels. Claire Haigh, Chief Executive of Greener Journeys, points out that one area in which we can all make a positive difference is how we choose to get around: 'Road transport is one of the biggest sources of pollution in the UK, accounting for 22% of total UK emissions of carbon dioxide. And 58% of these domestic transport carbon emissions come from cars.'

Tackling car dependency will be essential if the UK is to succeed in reducing its carbon emissions, and buses have a key role to play. Greener Journeys' research estimates that the best-used bus services in Britain's urban centres reduce carbon emissions by as much as 75%.



Community radio was also found to be a highly effective way of targeting local areas and communities. And when young drivers learned of the true cost of owning and running a car, over a fifth of those targeted said they could 'do better things with the money'.

Bus Users supports any moves that will promote the key role that buses play in reducing car dependency. The Greener Journeys toolkit shows that

targeted initiatives really can work, and provides a very practical resource that others can draw on to persuade car drivers that the bus is a sensible and practical alternative. **BU**

Find the report *Driving modal shift from car to bus* at www.greenerjourneys.com.

Nudge tactics

Greener Journeys' experiments across the UK found that it is possible to target non-bus users accurately, and encourage car drivers to make the switch to the bus. Most of the approaches involved the offer of free tickets or vouchers, with drivers being targeted at 'moments of pain', for instance when parking, stuck in traffic or buying petrol. The results were impressive. In Manchester and South Yorkshire, around a quarter of those who used a free bus ticket said they would otherwise have driven that day, while in Sheffield the figure was 51%. There was also evidence that the use of free tickets changes behaviour in the longer term, with just over half of infrequent bus users making more trips in the weeks after their trial trip.

One of the most successful elements of the experiments in targeting car drivers was the use of street teams to distribute the trial ticket vouchers. Street teams operated at weekends, and focused on leisure trips into the centre of a town for shopping or other purposes. Not only are people in this situation more likely to interact with street teams, they are also more likely to consider switching to the bus for a leisure journey than for a regular commute.

Greener Journeys also worked directly with community groups and other local organisations to engage with parts of society that are sometimes seen as 'hard to reach'. As well as delivering better targeting of car drivers, this approach highlighted the vital social role that the bus can play for vulnerable groups. In Manchester, an organisation supporting Asian women fleeing from domestic abuse ran introductory outings on the bus to local attractions for women who usually relied on lifts or taxis.

TIPS ON TARGETING CAR DRIVERS

- ★ Base your activity around good bus services into the town centre
- ★ Target drivers at a 'moment of pain', eg parking, congestion, buying petrol
- ★ Encourage drivers to try the bus with a free ticket voucher
- ★ Use the ticket voucher as a means to capture data about people's behaviour
- ★ The validity period of the vouchers affects the proportion of car drivers redeeming them
- ★ Street teams are a good way of achieving scale on a low budget
- ★ 'Cost-conscious' shopping areas are the best places to target with street teams
- ★ Working with local authorities can provide extra targeting opportunities, for instance following the routes of traffic wardens
- ★ Community groups play a useful supporting role in accessing hard-to-reach audiences
- ★ Very low car parking costs will affect the attractiveness of a trial day bus ticket



Dialogue works!

Some bus companies are good at consulting their passengers, others less so. The results can be very positive, as two FirstGroup companies have demonstrated recently

FirstGroup is one of the 'big five' bus operators in the UK, and many Bus Users members will have used First buses in their local area, with their distinctive purple-and-pink liveries. Two companies in First's South West of England and Wales region entered into dialogue with their passengers recently, with very positive results.

Fairer fares

First's 'Fairer Fares for All' consultation early in 2014 covered its substantial West of England territory and involved distributing 14,500 questionnaires supported by 16 customer roadshows. In total 1,890 responses were recorded, 1,254 of which were completed online, and the data was analysed by independent transport consultants.

The main findings were that more than half of the respondents thought single and return fares were very expensive, compared with 40% who considered day tickets to be reasonably priced. Three-quarters of respondents agreed that people aged 16-21 should get discounts on the cost of travel, while two-thirds said they would be interested in buying a card that would entitle them to a percentage off the cost of travel for up to a year.

First asked people what would make them use its buses more. The responses showed that the cost of fares was the main issue for many, with 53% wanting

cheaper fares generally, and 38% asking for cheaper day, weekly or monthly tickets. Better punctuality was cited as an issue by 38% of respondents, with around a third wanting more frequent services.

One in five of those who responded were keen to see the introduction of smartcards, with a preference for a card that could cap the cost of daily travel at the price of a day ticket. Other issues that people said would make them use the bus more were the introduction of short-hop fares (25%) and friendlier drivers with a greater emphasis on customer services (20%).

As a result of its consultation, First West of England introduced more attractive discounts for children and young people as well as family day tickets in some of its main towns. Many single fares were reduced and return fares were withdrawn.

In a separate exercise in 2013, First West of England went out and spoke to its passengers in Bristol. This led to a substantial revision of its approach to fares, which has resulted in a year-on-year increase in passenger numbers of more than 17%, equating to around 68,000 extra people using its buses each week. First estimate that 9% of the passenger increase was directly linked to the fare reductions it introduced in November 2013.

The passenger increase in Bristol is a positive step, but First still faces some challenges. With demand for

its services rising, there has been an increase in the average time taken to board its buses. This, combined with worsening traffic congestion in the city – compounded by the number of roadworks – has created problems that need to be addressed.

Under its recently-appointed Managing Director, James Freeman, First West of England will be unveiling more solutions to speed up average boarding times. It is working with Bristol City Council to include information about the cost of travel at bus stops and in council-owned displays, to allow people to have the right money ready before the bus arrives. It also plans to give wider promotion to First's Smartphone app, which enables people to work out the cost of single fares before they travel, and will be extending its Touchcard (smartcard) to children, young people and students.

Seeing the other side

First in the South West of England and Wales has been a leader in mounting successful 'swap me' events, reports **Julian Osborne**. These initiatives bring together bus company staff and various sections of the community to discuss, and experience, each other's situations. Many of these events have involved people with sight, hearing or mobility difficulties, but there have also been some featuring other groups such as cyclists.

First Hampshire and Dorset was involved in a joint initiative with Dorset County Council in Weymouth in October. The Council's Youth Services team had identified a range of issues around transport that affected young people, so an event was organised that brought together students from three local schools and drivers from First's Weymouth garage.

The day started with the young people and drivers working in separate groups to identify all the stereotypes associated with the opposite group. This was followed by the groups 'designing' the Perfect Passenger and the Perfect Driver. After this information had been shared, it was perhaps no surprise that the 'Perfected' were almost identical: the youngsters wanted drivers to be polite with a smile, while the drivers wanted youngsters to be polite with the right money.

An empathy and role-play exercise followed, where everybody worked through a number of scenarios faced by drivers and young people with roles reversed, using a double-decker bus. The young 'drivers' were faced with scenarios such as passengers who had lost their bus pass, did not have change, or who paid with very large notes. They also had to cope with people boarding the bus while speaking on the phone or who

flashed their pass too quickly, and they experienced what it was like to have to deal with passengers who got 'narky' when challenged over noisy or disruptive behaviour.

Then there was the familiar conflict in the buggy zone. The rep from the council was very good as a difficult passenger sitting in the wheelchair space. 'Well what am I supposed to do?' he asked aggressively. 'Stand,' said the schoolboy bus driver very evenly, to immediate nods of approval from the actual bus drivers.

For the drivers, it was an opportunity to appreciate what it's like for young people who might feel stressed about their journey, who might not have the correct change or enough money for their fare, or who might find themselves ignored or judged for wearing a hoody. And the youngsters were given an insight into the problems faced by people with visual impairment, by trying on the simulation glasses the bus company uses in training its own staff.



There was lunch and a full debrief where next steps were considered, and the young people were given an opportunity to offer comments and feedback on how the bus company's current literature could be improved. Finally, participants were invited to leave feedback about their experience of the day on a flipchart. The comments were overwhelmingly positive, and more similar days are planned for the future. **BU**

Bus priority schemes and enforcement of parking restrictions can both help to ensure that services run on time.



Why are buses late?

A simple question with a complex answer! GAVIN BOOTH explores some of the reasons why our buses don't always run on time

We all know that buses are sometimes late, and in a perfect world they wouldn't be, but *why* are they late, and does anybody know or care what causes these delays?

Bus operators today can know more about the exact location of their buses than ever before, thanks to satellite technology that can pinpoint where every bus is. Companies that have invested in the technology can readily identify which buses are running late and can take action to sort this – but satellites don't tell you why any bus is running late.

The same technology can keep passengers advised about late-running buses, through roadside real-time

information or phone apps. It's useful to know when a late-running bus is due to arrive at your stop, but again, passengers will rarely discover *why* it's late.

There are many reasons why buses run late: breakdowns, accidents, roadworks, diversions, road closures, inconsiderate parking, processions, heavy traffic, adverse weather. Passengers will realise that few of these are under the control of the bus company, and there are limited remedies that bus companies can apply. CCTV coverage of city centre streets can allow quick-fix solutions, and central control rooms can radio drivers to arrange diversions or even turn buses short to fill in gaps. But this implies investment in the latest technology, and not every operator can afford this.



Passengers can do their part by minimising delays when boarding.

“ Passengers getting on and off buses was highlighted by bus companies as the reason for many delays ”

Delays that occur only occasionally are equally frustrating for the bus company, trying to provide a timetabled service, and the delayed passenger. But there are those delays that occur on an almost daily basis and which suggest a degree of optimism when the timetable was compiled. Traffic Commissioners are regularly telling bus operators that if, say, the 08.30 bus or the 17.45 bus is chronically late because of the sheer volume of road traffic, then the timetable should reflect this and allow more time between A and B. This of course disturbs carefully-created schedules that assume fairly consistent running times in the interests of economical use of buses and drivers.

Bus punctuality project

Passenger Focus recently carried out a bus punctuality project and discovered that while bus companies today have access to large amounts of data, often little time is devoted to analysing this to pinpoint the reasons for delays. Drivers, for instance, could probably provide first-hand knowledge of where, when and why buses are delayed, but this intelligence is not always gathered.

Passengers getting on and off buses was highlighted by bus companies – without any hint of irony – as the reason for many delays, with complex ticket offers, slow smartcard readers, tourists and foreign students, elderly people and parents with buggies listed as some of the delaying factors. Just think what it would be like if they didn't have all these pesky passengers to deal with...!

Traffic volume, poor junction design, traffic signal phasing – these were some of the road-related causes of delay, along with the problem of having to wait to join other traffic when leaving bus stops and bus stations.

So – what's the answer? Well, everybody has to play their part. As passengers, we have to move more quickly, know what ticket we want – wherever possible – and have our passes ready. Highway authorities and police have to play their part in designing and policing roads so that the bus is not at a disadvantage. Bus operators have to make ticket transactions simpler, easier and quicker – and why are fares often a closely-guarded secret until you are standing facing the driver with a handful of loose change?

The bus punctuality project concluded that 'everyone seems to agree that getting the buses to run on time is the key to increasing passenger numbers, profits and passenger satisfaction levels'.

For bus passengers, who consistently complain about bus punctuality, it might look as if delays are nobody's fault but everybody's responsibility. The holy grail of 100% punctuality is probably unattainable, but improvements are certainly possible. Dialogue and action is needed between all the parties involved if bus passengers are to get the service they deserve.

BU



Despite the clear route indication, this bus wasn't going all the way to Peterborough, but only as far as Huntingdon.

Getting it right

Bus travel that's entirely trouble-free is probably unachievable, but how bus company staff handle problems when they do arise can make the world of difference to passengers. Bus Users member JOHN MARSH reflects on some contrasting experiences last summer

Ever since Stagecoach extended to Peterborough its service from Cambridge to St Ives via the guided busway, I had intended to give it a try. Last summer I had the opportunity to do so, and set out on a round trip from Peterborough to Cambridge and back.

The outward journey from Peterborough was fine, other than feeling some frustration at traversing what seemed like every housing estate and building site in the county between Peterborough and St Ives. The drivers were helpful and courteous and handled the bus well, and the leather seats were more than comfortable.

I had been assured by my driver from Peterborough that there was no need to change in Huntingdon. I posed the question as I admit to being the world's worst when it comes to reading timetables but, in my defence, the busway timetable is anything but clear on this aspect!

That said, we arrived in Cambridge only five minutes behind schedule, which is satisfactory in my book for a journey of that nature.

Missed connection

Having enjoyed a few hours in the beautiful city of Cambridge, things on the return journey were rather different!

A couple of minutes after arriving at Huntingdon bus station I was informed by a fellow passenger, who kindly took the trouble to find me on the upper deck, that the bus was terminating here and that we therefore had to change.

When I alighted our driver was in the midst of a lengthy mobile telephone conversation, at the conclusion of which he announced that the connecting bus had left and, although he was sorry, we would have to wait for the next one! With that he disappeared, along with his bus, back to Cambridge. I might have been on the bus with him had that message not been communicated to me by my fellow passenger!

Before leaving us stranded the driver had intimated that the connecting bus might be turned back to pick us up but, as we all suspected, we were wise to treat that possibility with a pinch of salt.

I was not the only one travelling through to

Peterborough and some, like me, were using the service for the first time. As you can imagine, we were all pretty disgruntled and several people said it would be the last time they would attempt to make that journey.

The result of all this was that what should have been a two-hour bus journey took three hours and twenty minutes, and we eventually arrived in Peterborough at 19.05.

In fairness to Stagecoach I received an apology from their Operations Manager, Terry Mead, who assured me that the connecting bus at Huntingdon bus station should have waited for any through passengers, and that the driver concerned had been interviewed to ensure he operates in the correct manner in the future.

Admittedly, everyone can make a mistake, but getting it right first time has a lot to commend it as a management philosophy.

Someone who really cared

Fortunately I was in time at Peterborough to connect with Delaine's service to Bourne for the last leg of my journey home, somewhat later than planned admittedly, and on their penultimate service of the day.

I thought from the sounds the bus was making as it left Peterborough that all was perhaps not well. I was proved correct when, halfway between Peterborough and Market Deeping, where I was to leave the service, the bus lost power and came to a standstill.

The Delaine driver was most concerned that our journey had been interrupted, and kept us continually updated on what was happening as he made every effort to get us back on our way with minimal delay.

He was chatty and cheerful throughout, resulting in all the passengers remaining in good spirits – including me, even though this was my second delay that day.



Delayed, but not dismayed: passengers awaiting the replacement Delaine bus remained cheerful, thanks to the caring driver.

Some people walked the short distance to the next village, one was picked up by car after making a phone call, and the rest of us remained, knowing we were in the hands of someone who really cared.

The driver had immediately telephoned the Delaine depot in Bourne, who promptly sent out a replacement bus which was to take us on our way should it arrive before the last service from Peterborough caught us up. The replacement bus arrived first and, with hearty thanks to our caring driver, we were on our way again in the knowledge that all that could have been done had been done.

So, there you have it. With both delays, what should have been two and a half hours of bus travel had taken a good five hours. Travel by bus can of course be an enjoyable experience, but from time to time we are subjected to the kind of journey which helps us to understand why so many of the travelling public do not always see it the way we do! **BU**

OPINION: Was the busway worth it?

I have never been able to understand why the 'guided busway' between Cambridge and St Ives was thought to be a good idea. Surely a few miles of tarmac and a handful of rising bollards would have done the job just as well and without all the expense, legal wrangling and delays which accompanied the construction of the busway.

Yes, the busway might give a dedicated direct link between places several miles apart, although not necessarily giving the smoothest of rides. Concrete is not the most sympathetic material for a road surface, and now it appears that around an extra £30m is needed to repair a series of defects, which Cambridgeshire County Council is laying firmly at the door of the contractor.

And after all the expense and excitement of building this dedicated bus route, our bus back to Cambridge had to stop at every single set of traffic lights along the way, even when there were no vehicles waiting on the side roads we had to cross. Surely a dedicated busway should have a system of priorities for the very vehicles it was built to accommodate. Who knows, had our bus had priority we might not have missed the connection at Huntingdon.

Views on the busway vary; what do others think? **BU**



Have your say

Are there issues about bus travel that you feel strongly about, or have you had an experience as a passenger that you'd like to share? These pages are for our readers' letters and photos, so we'd love to hear from you.

Inter-available ticketing



It is really good news how the Country Bus Return 360 tickets from Ide into Exeter are valid for return on the Stagecoach South West X9 evening journeys. I find the inter-availability of bus tickets is helpful, convenient and helps encourage local bus use.

It is also helpful how Stagecoach have extended the Exeter area Dayrider zone to include Ide on the X9 journeys.

Steven Hallett, Dawlish

Window graphics



I read the article 'By bus with partial sight' in BU56 with interest.

Recently, I travelled between Chester and Ellesmere Port on the Stagecoach Service No 1 which terminates at Liverpool. I was amazed to find that all the windows with the exception of the windscreen were completely covered in a type of frosted film which allowed light in, but meant that passengers could not see out of the vehicle. I was sitting towards the back of a busy bus and had to watch intently through the windscreen to get any idea, as a visitor, of where I was in relation to my destination. The overall effect was like sitting in the back of a van – very disorientating.

I don't know how your partially sighted bus user would have coped. It would be impossible to see where you were at night, and for me as a visitor to the area, the view was too blurred to see any landmarks for location.

Cheshire bus users must have built-in GPS to know where they are! It's the first time I've felt travel-sick on a bus.

Derek Fearnside

Bus Users shares Derek's views and has long campaigned against this practice. The people who produce the vinyls describe these adverts as 'see-through graphics'; the only problem, as Derek discovered, is that you can't see through them! **BU**



On the wheelchair/buggy debate...



Wicks Margo Pollock

A wheelchair user has the greatest need. How to solve this? No buggies or prams unless folded. End of!

Rick Cornwall

Buses have always been first-come first-served. When they're full you wait for the next one. Disabled people may have special needs but if the wheelchair space is already in use, then like the majority they too might have to wait. We are all equal; disabled are not more equal than others.

Andrea Stanton

When my boys were little I had to fold their pushchairs when I used a bus. Or horror of horrors, I even walked to wherever I was going.

Andy Fear

Ultimately the whole matter is a sad indication of how dreadful British society has become at communicating and cooperating with each other.

Oyster defence

I was really surprised by the attack on the Oyster Card in the last issue.

The Oyster did something essential in London: it sped up boarding times, and meant that passengers didn't have to worry about change, tickets etc. I'm surprised that BU UK's Chief Executive puts no store by this. It also allows the bus companies to monitor ridership more accurately than in the past. Given that only 2% of fares were cash by the time they were abandoned, the ability to buy an Oyster easily seems a strange thing to go on about. If it was that hard to get one surely take-up would be much lower?

Given where the Bus Users office is surely members of staff have appreciated the frustration of queuing for a local bus, compared to the speed of getting on in London. TfL listened to the concerns about people without money being unable to ride, and of course the cost of an Oyster is so much

cheaper than an old cash fare.

We mustn't be seen as anti-progress. Most young people expect to 'swipe' or 'touch in' to pay for something and while many of us miss conductors, those days have largely gone. Opposing a one-off cost for something which is then much cheaper for daily use seems wrong-headed.

Of course if the argument was really against the cost of registering for an Oyster then that is a point of view. But that is a political decision; during the previous Livingstone administration there were a number of reduced-rate tickets for people on benefits. These could be re-introduced if there was the will – indeed, if there was the will, politicians could look at reducing the cost of bus travel for all in the UK. The bus is essential to the UK economy and doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

Simon Martin



App suggestions

I was interested in the article in BU56 about the problems poorly-sighted people have in using buses. I wonder whether some more technological approach might be worthwhile.

There are essentially two problems: knowing where to get off a bus, and requesting a bus to stop to pick one up.

The first problem has a simple low-tech solution: tell the driver where one wants to get off. However, as an alternative, could one use the 'tracker' feature on mobile phones which tells the system where one is at any time? I don't know how sensitive these are, but it would presumably be possible to let poorly-sighted people have a system powerful enough to identify the bus they are on. Then they could use an app to get a list of forthcoming stops, and – assuming they couldn't see for themselves – ask a fellow passenger to identify the one they wanted and press a button which would automatically activate the bell when that stop was approaching. Or it might be possible for the information to be provided audially so that they could press the button themselves.

The second problem is more difficult, but I don't see why people couldn't activate another app

which would identify where they are and send out a message to all buses approaching the area stating something like: 'There's someone at this group of stops who is poorly sighted and wants to board a bus. Please make sure you check whether there's someone waiting as you pass that stop.' This message would turn off when the tracker showed that the person with the relevant mobile phone had left the area, presumably on the bus they wanted.

Both apps would also be useful for people without a visual impairment. There have been lots of times, especially travelling at night, when I have been worried about missing my stop or not hailing the bus I wanted in time – or, with some community or school buses, not being able to identify the vehicle I needed. For the second app, well-sighted people could be given a list of forthcoming buses approaching the area (preferably with real-time information), and asked to identify the one they wanted. If there were any doubt, the system could even tell them which stop they needed to wait at – another problem sometimes faced by people in unfamiliar areas.

Simon Norton

Some interesting ideas here; would any bus companies like to take up Simon's suggestions? BU

Email your letters and photos to nicola.parkins@bususers.org or post to:

Bus User magazine, Terminal house, Shepperton TW17 8AS. **Deadline for Bus User 58: 4 March**

Views and opinions expressed in 'Have your say' are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of Bus Users UK. The editor reserves the right to shorten or edit letters.

Membership Matters

Welcome

To new members

William Armstrong, Oakwood, Northumberland; Hermione Edwards, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire; Steven Hallett, Dawlish, Devon; Colin Howard, Bracknell, Berkshire; Karen King, Hanworth, Middlesex; George Muir, Ayr, South Ayrshire; Michael Palmer, Taunton, Somerset; Anne Pickering, Hexham, Northumberland; Peter Risegari, Lexden, Essex; Geraldine Sweetland, Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire; Andrew Turpin, South Chard, Somerset; Rena Verlander, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire; Nora Wallace, Oakwood, Northumberland; Anne Wariner, Bridgnorth, Shropshire; Roderick Williams, Brecon, Powys.

To new local groups (contact details below)

Bus Users West Midlands
Lostwithiel Transport Users Group
Tynedale Bus Users Group

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

Age UK Colchester peter@ageconcern.org.uk
Association of Devizes Passengers
www.facebook.com/Devizes Passengers
BABUS (Bedford Area Bus User's Society) www.babus.org.uk
BBUG (Bath Bus Users Group) chair@bath-bus-users.org.uk
Bradford & District Older People's Alliance (BOPA)
www.bopabradford.org.uk
Brighton Area Buswatch brightonbuswatch@gmail.com
BUGS Bus Users Group Stevenage www.betterbuses.org.uk
Bus Users Shropshire bususersshropshire@hotmail.co.uk
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Cardiff People First cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.com
City of Hull & Humber Environment Forum
info@hullenvironmentforum.org.uk
Colchester Bus Users Support Group
peterkay.essex@btinternet.com
Dengie Hundred Bus Users Group (DHBUG)
contact@dhbug.org.uk
Devon Senior Voice Transport Group
Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Ivybridge PL21 9DD
Ealing Passenger Transport Users Group www.eptug.org
East Suffolk Travellers' Association (ESTA)
The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft NR32 3AW
Friends of DalesBus www.friendsofdalesbus.org.uk
I.W. Bus & Rail Users Group iwbususers@fsmail.net
Kendal & District Bus Users (KADBUS) 01539 740761
Lostwithiel Transport Users Group Prof J Scott CBE,
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Milton Keynes Bus Users Group
www.mkbug.co.uk
Norfolk Bus Forum fedsec@norfolkwi.org.uk
North Herts Bus Users Group (NHBUG)
marilyn.kirkland@north-herts.gov.uk
North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum www.nptf.co.uk

North West Surrey Bus Users Group

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Radstock Public Transport Group
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Railfuture www.railfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Severnside www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside+Branch
Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group
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Rural East Lothian Bus Users www.relbus.org.uk
The Senior Council for Devon Transport andrea@scfd.org.uk
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St Neots Area Bus Users Society info@snabus.org.uk
Swale Senior Forum 01795 424725
Swindon Climate Action Network www.swindonclimate.org.uk
TravelWatch NorthWest admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
TravelWatch SouthWest www.travelwatchesouthwest.org
Tring Bus Users Group 01442 824508
Tyne and Wear Public Transport Users Group
ne11ee@fsmail.net
Tynedale Bus Users Group Mrs N Wallace, Viewlands, Oakwood,
Hexham, Northumberland NE46 4LJ
West Cumbria Bus Users Group
David Andrews, tel 01946 695373
West Leigh Residents Association
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
Wirral Transport Users Association www.wirraltua.org.uk



Joining Bus Users

We always welcome new members; membership is available to anyone who uses buses for whatever purpose. It doesn't matter if you only use them occasionally. It's also open to groups of bus users and organisations that share our concern for better public transport.

You can join online (www.bususers.org) and pay by debit card via Paypal, or by Direct Debit. If you wish to pay by BACS, please contact finance@bususers.org for details and, of course, existing members can pay by cheque if you prefer.

Annual subscriptions

£15 for individuals

£10 for senior citizens, under-18s and unwaged.

The subscription for local groups is **£20 (£10** in the first year).

Bus companies and local authorities that share our desire to improve communication with passengers and who support the Confederation of Passenger Transport's Code of Good Practice can take out associate membership; please contact us for details at the Shepperton address or email enquiries@bususers.org.