

Bus User

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A photograph of a middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a dark suit, a light blue striped shirt, and a blue and green striped tie. He is sitting on a bus seat, leaning forward with his hands clasped. The background shows the interior of a bus with blue and yellow handrails.

**First's top man
interviewed**



Bus Users
Working for passengers

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Join Bus Users to help us
represent the views of bus
users and make a difference
to bus services.

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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

We started off the last issue of *Bus User* talking about political uncertainty over the next twelve months, and that's certainly proving true for public transport and transport policy.

Ever since legislation was introduced 15 years ago to allow local authorities to take control of the public transport in their area, Passenger Transport Executives have explored the possibility. You can see their point; public transport in large urban areas is complex and difficult to coordinate effectively purely through market forces, regardless of what other benefits the market can bring to bus services.

What took almost everybody by surprise was the current Government giving Greater Manchester powers to franchise its public transport service. Transport services there have settled down pretty well, and First and Stagecoach have both improved their game considerably, so it wasn't what anyone was expecting.

As we head for the General Election it seems the next Government is likely to look at more regulation for buses. To help you make your mind up, we've been hearing from the transport people in the main parties: see what they've said. on p8 And we've produced our own Manifesto: we're not going to be standing for Parliament, but we hope you'll vote for it anyway!

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Buses show their green credentials



It goes without saying that every person who leaves their car behind and travels by bus is reducing the impact of carbon emissions. However bus companies are also doing more to reduce their carbon footprint through new technology.

There has been a lot of publicity given recently to the 'evils' of diesel engines. However the latest Euro6 specification does a lot to address the worst of these. Nonetheless bus companies are not obliged to buy Euro6 buses just yet. However other technologies ensure buses do not emit damaging toxins.

York City Council has been awarded Government funding to help convert older diesel buses into electric vehicles. This follows the launch of the world's first double-decker conversion of a City Sightseeing tour bus in York to fully electric drive last year. The DfT's Clean Vehicle Technology fund will enable the conversion of an five more buses into zero emission electric buses.

Transport for London has also announced the conversion of a complete route in North London to battery electric buses following trials on the Waterloo-London Bridge service.

Meanwhile Stagecoach and First have announced routes in Aberdeen which will be worked by Europe's biggest fleet of hydrogen buses, the X17 Aberdeen-Westhill route and the X40 Kingswells-Bridge of Don Park-&-Ride as part of the £19million Aberdeen Hydrogen Bus Project.

The hydrogen fuel cell vehicles carry hydrogen in tanks on the roof which feeds fuel cells to create electric power. They emit only water vapour, and are almost silent. Range is about 300 miles. The vehicles are extremely quiet to travel in and are fitted with the same bell system used on Edinburgh trams so pedestrians can hear them approaching.

Franchising for Greater Manchester?

New powers are being granted to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority as a first move towards increased devolution for city regions outside London. Surprisingly the powers include franchising the bus operations along similar lines to that being pursued in Tyne & Wear.

Translink consultation

Translink, which runs most public transport in Northern Ireland including Ulsterbus and the Metro services in Belfast, is consulting with passengers in the light of cuts in funding. Have your say on www.translink.co.uk/servicechanges

First accepts tickets after Cornish operator goes

Well-known Newquay-based bus operator Western Greyhound suddenly ceased trading on 13 March. The company was only sold to new owners last December.

First has taken on more than 20 drivers from Western Greyhound and is accepting Western Greyhound tickets and passes on all its services.

Managing Director of First Kernow, Alex Carter, said: 'We don't want to see bus users left out of pocket. We'll be accepting all Western Greyhound tickets on our bus services over the next few weeks. In the meantime, we are working with our Cornwall Council partners to provide replacement services as soon as possible.'

First Kernow operates services on the same or similar routes between Newquay and Truro via Indian Queens and Trispen/Perranporth, and between St Austell and Newquay, Fowey, Par, Mevagissey, Bodmin and Truro.

European Bus Forum 2015

Registration is now open for Eurotransport's third edition of European Bus Forum 2015, an event which brings together key decision makers from bus operators, manufacturers and local authorities and transport executives all under one roof over a single day.

Supported by Bus Users, European Bus Forum 2015 will take place on Thursday 2 July in the Renold Building, The University of Manchester.

Hot topics to be covered at this year's event include:

- Bus Rapid Transport (BRT)
- RTP1 & New Technologies
- Fuel for Thought
- SMART Ticketing & Payments
- Vehicle Specification
- Making Bus the Mode of Choice

in a number of focused workshops, panel discussions and keynote presentations.

Book before **Friday 10 April** and save £200 on the price of your delegate pass.

The early bird discount will run for a limited time only, so *book your place today* and save more than 35% on the standard price of a delegate pass.

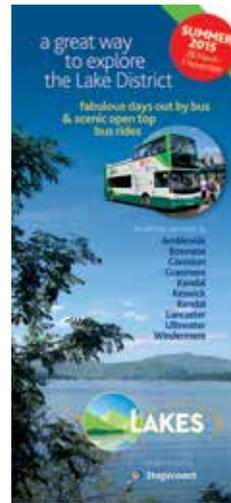
For the early bird rate of £349 + VAT, your delegate pass includes:

- Seat at the exclusive gala dinner, on Wednesday 1 July at The Manchester Museum
- Access to all conference sessions
- Refreshments throughout the day and networking lunch
- Delegate pack
- Attendee list and speaker presentations (post-event)

Book today at www.europeanbusforum.com

Increase in Coachcard postage

National Express has increased the postage on Bus Users discount Coachcard. Bus Users members can get an annual Coachcard for £5, but the postage and packing on top of the price is now £2 rather than £1.50. The card offers a third off all National Express adult standard coach fares in Great Britain. For more details contact us on membership@bususers.org or 01932 232574.



Improved bus service for the Lake District

Stagecoach is improving bus services in the Lake District this summer.

There are also new family tickets available, including a combined bus and car parking ticket available in certain car parks giving parking and unlimited bus travel in the Central Lakes zone for up to five adults for £18.

Full details on Stagecoach's website, www.stagecoachbus.com.

Nicola Parkins moves on

Nicola Parkins, who has helped to edit this magazine for some years, has moved on to pastures new. Nicola, who edited the previous issue of *Bus User* and helped organise our AGMs is now Executive Officer (Governance) with the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation and we wish her well in her new role.

Bus Users' AGM Cardiff 2015

**Save the date: Saturday 11 July
is Bus Users UK Ltd's AGM**

Following last year's highly successful event in Edinburgh run by Bus Users Scotland, this year's general meeting is being organised by Bus Users Cymru and will be held at the iconic Pier Head building in Cardiff Bay.

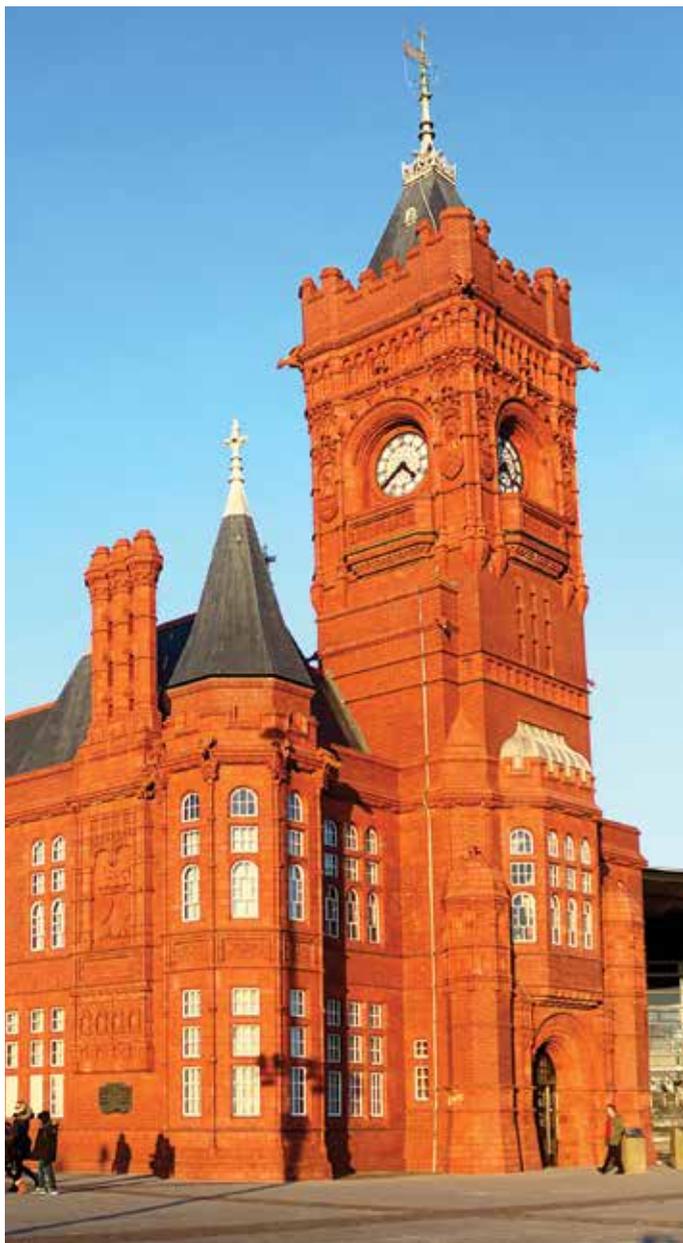
Our 2015 AGM will be a little later than in previous years to reflect our new financial year. While we have previously mirrored the calendar year, we will now be working to the tax year 1 April - 31 March. We will also publish a 15-month 2014/15 annual report, covering the accounting period 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2015, in time for the AGM.

If you haven't been to Cardiff recently, it's a lively and thriving city with a great shopping centre. Our AGM will be in Cardiff Bay, an area that has been transformed in recent times and houses the new, environmentally sustainable home of Welsh Government, the Senedd. Cardiff Bay is easily accessible from Cardiff by Cardiff Bus service 6, every 10min, or by train from Queen Street station.

We will be meeting in the Pier Head, Cardiff Bay's historic Grade One listed Victorian building described as 'Wales's very own Big Ben'. It was built in 1897 for the Bute Dock Company, which was renamed the Cardiff Railway Company in the same year.

Full details of our AGM will be sent out with the next issue of *Bus User*, which will be out slightly earlier than usual, towards the end of May, allowing plenty of time for the required official notice period for the meeting.

In addition to the usual AGM business and our ever-popular 'Just a Minute' event, we'll have presentations from Welsh Traffic Commissioner Nick Jones; Jane Hutt AM, Business and Finance Minister, National Assembly



Cardiff Bay's iconic Pier Head, the venue for our AGM.
MA PHOTOGRAPY/Shutterstock.com

for Wales; Graham Walter, Managing Director of Traveline Cymru; Andrea Gordon from Guide Dogs Association; Alex Clarke, Passenger Transport Information Officer, Caerphilly Council and our own Barclay Davies, Deputy Director of Bus Users Cymru.

We're hoping to round off the day with a bus tour with a difference so keep an eye out for details.

Bus Users UK in 2014

Bus Users UK has changed its financial year, which had been January-December, to the more usual April-March. That means this year our annual report will cover a period of 15 months, from 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2015, and will be available in time for the AGM.

However to give members the opportunity to compare our 2014 achievements with those of 2013 we have produced a brief report to cover the calendar year 2014. Accounts will be produced as usual for the AGM so this brief review of our activities does not include any financial information.

Claire Walters, our chief executive, joined the organisation in 2012 to bring stronger, more directional management to Bus Users to prepare it for the challenges ahead. After a major review of all our activities a new structure is being finalised which will provide a consistent approach across the UK, strengthen our activities in England and create a distinct UK headquarters.

Bus Users Cymru and the recently-formed Bus Users Scotland have continued to thrive, thanks to their funding from respective Governments, and we aim to emulate this success by giving our England operations a similar structure and focus.

A major achievement in 2014 was the launch of our much acclaimed new website, enabling passengers to complain directly to us and giving member groups their own web pages within the main site.

In 2013 Bus Users UK was appointed as the National Enforcement Body for complaints for the European Bus Passenger Rights Regulations, which has brought us some funding from the Department for Transport for the first time. We are making good progress towards understanding and implementing the regulations. If we don't manage to resolve a complaint under the regulations we can refer the bus company to the Traffic Commissioner who has powers to place an Improvement Order on the company or to place them. We've not had to use those measures yet.

Bus Users Scotland hosted an excellent AGM in Edinburgh last May, which was well-attended and very

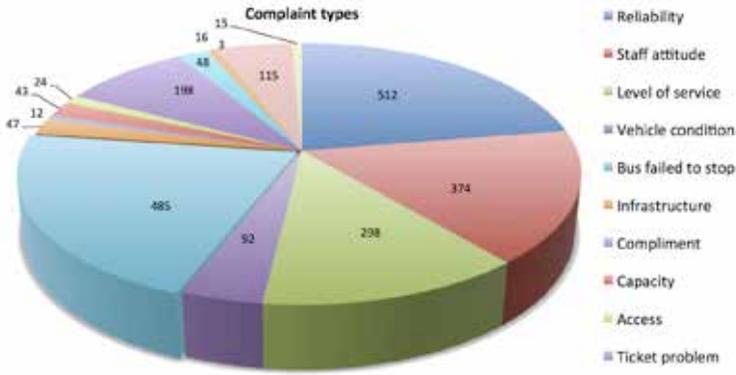
enjoyable. Sadly Gillian Merron was appointed to a new post and had to step down as our Chair. Fellow director Tracy Jessop stepped in as Acting Chair.

Bus Users Scotland has continued to develop well and both it and Bus Users Cymru continue to monitor compliance of local bus services, giving evidence when required to the Traffic Commissioners. Bus Users Cymru has moved to new offices in Cardiff City Centre which are shared with the Traffic Commissioner. The Cymru team has run seminars for bus companies, including introducing them to their responsibilities under the Passenger Rights Regulations.

A theme throughout the year for all our offices has been trying to help where services are being reduced due to local authority cuts. There are at least hints that the message is beginning to filter through to decision makers, that cuts in services have profound effects on individuals' lives and that economic recovery is hampered without good bus services.

Individual membership of Bus Users UK has declined this year, and stood at 554 at the end of 2014 (686 in 2013). However we are now running a supporters' scheme, which will be promoted further this year. By the end of 2014 we had 72 supporters (30 in 2013). We also have 1,173 'likes' on Facebook (2013: 988) and 1,910 followers on Twitter (2013: 1,404).



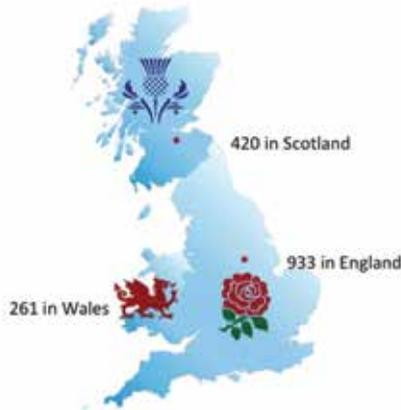


Complaints 2014

The number of complaint appeals handled in England during 2014 saw a slight reduction over 2013, 933 compared with 996 in 2013. In Wales we saw an increase, to 261 from 227 in 2013.

Bus Users Scotland took on a complaint-handling role for the first time in 2013 and handled 281 complaints from April to December 2013. It handled 420 complaints in the whole of 2014.

1,164 complaints handled nationally



Your Bus Matters

Compared with 2013, we undertook rather more Your Bus Matters events in 2014 across Great Britain, with 55 events against 47. However the increase was due to a bumper year for events in Wales, where our Bus Users Cymru team managed to stage an impressive 37 events, some of which were in more than one place, an increase of 15 over 2013. Bus Users Scotland once again put on six events, and in England we trialed a number of different types of consultation event, with more intensive input, resulting in a smaller number of events overall, with 12 against 19 in 2013.

Involvement in wider-ranging consultation was a theme of the year; Bus Users Cymru engaged with Denbighshire's consultation and followed up the demise of Padarn Bus with an event in Bangor, while in England a new departure was a successful event at the Cribbs Causeway shopping centre near Bristol, aimed particularly at staff dependent on bus services for commuting. Also significant this year were events in major city centres, in Manchester, Liverpool and Edinburgh while Swansea had both daytime and evening events.

YBM events 2014

21 January	Bristol (John Lewis, Cribbs Causeway)
23 January	Didcot
10 February	Cardigan
10 February	Aberaeron
11 February	Holywell
11 February	Rhyl
11 February	Abergele
17 February	Lampeter
17 February	Aberystwyth
18 February	Carmarthen
20 February	Bala
20 February	Corwen
20 February	Llangollen
21 February	Dolgellau
21 February	Barmouth
7 March	Cramlington
25 March	Corwen
25 March	Llangollen
29 March	Dolgellau
29 March	Aberystwyth
7 April	Porthmadog
7 April	Pwllheli
8 April	Bangor
8 April	Caernarfon
9 April	Manchester
9 April	Blaenau Ffestiniog
29 April	Dalkeith
1 May	Hanley
20 May	Stirling
14 June	Dundee
25 June	St Albans
30 July	Oswestry
19 August	Bangor
29 August	Plymouth
29 August	Dumfries
17 September	Port Talbot
26 September	Colchester
29 September	Swansea (evening)
2 October	Bridgend
17 October	Wrexham
20 October	Llanelli
21 October	Llandudno
22 October	Mold/Buckley/ Broughton
23 October	Rhyl
27 October	Leicester
29 October	Liverpool

The transport politicians have spoken...



You may have noticed from all the political posturing and wrangling on TV debates going on, there's a General Election coming up on Thursday 7 May.

One thing that we can probably take for granted is that bus services won't be as high on the agenda as we would like, or as we think they should be, but as we suggest on p12, there is likely to be change in the way bus services are provided — whichever party, or combination of parties, forms the next Government.

Campaign for Better Transport organised meetings for transport politicians from the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats — traditionally regarded as the three 'major parties' — to set out their respective agendas on transport.

As you'll see overleaf, we have produced our own manifesto for bus services in the next Parliament. First, here's what the three major party transport players had to say:



Patrick McLoughlin
Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales and Transport Secretary

- 1 'This Government has been a very good one for transport, producing, for example the Northern Powerhouse and £38billion investment in rail. The Northern Powerhouse means a fast track line across the Pennines.'
- 2 'There are two fundamental truths: one, that demand is going to continue to grow and technology will change; secondly, more people will want to go about more in a quicker, greener way.'
- 3 By 2040, the strategic road network will grow by half; a quarter in London. Government has committed £24billion for roads between this and the next Parliament.
- 4 Cars will become cleaner, quicker and much more automated.
- 5 'I want good transport to be a natural part of life — it needs to be more geared towards passengers and fares need to be kept down.'
- 6 The £4 million Total Transport Fund is a way of joining up different forms of funding to support good transport particularly in rural areas.
- 7 'Rural areas need different transport, not no transport. The traditional one service a week on market days local bus isn't fit for purpose. That's why we have launched a £25 million fund to help buy buses for rural community operators and in the next Parliament there is more that we can do for local transport - not just buses but cycling.'
- 8 McLoughlin raised the need to:
 - Get rid of ugly unnecessary road signs;
 - Plan and design at all levels to make transport work well;
 - Ensure new housing has access to rail and bus and the roads can cope; and
 - Understand a basic but sometimes overlooked truth: that different places have different needs.

9 'I believe the vision should not come from Whitehall. We don't always know what is best for towns and cities and businesses. We will do deals with cities which come forward with imaginative proposals; in Manchester, we want to see co-operation between the bus industry and council. We want to see bus companies working hand in glove with local authorities, not against each other.'



**Baroness
Susan Kramer**

Lib Dem Minister of State
for Transport (former MP
for Richmond Park)

For Baroness Kramer there are two key issues:

- 1 Accessibility of transport – her biggest priority; and
- 2 Smart ticketing.

'I make it my USP to always talk about disability access on transport. There's still so much more we need to do.'

'I'm furious the bus industry is not doing more on audio visual on buses. It's expensive but there must be a cheaper option.'

'We're going to have push much harder on smart ticketing to get what the public want. It is time there was progress from Transport Scotland on the stalled Saltirecard.'

(The Saltirecard is a planned smartcard that will allow passengers in Scotland to pre-load money for their fares on buses, trams, trains, subway and ferries.)



Michael Dugher

Labour MP for Barnsley and
Shadow Transport Secretary

Michael Dugher committed to legislation on regulating buses within the first 100 days of office; this and rail reform are Labour's priorities. 'It is about getting more bang for buck. I recognise this is traumatic for some of the bus companies but it is possible for them to make money. You can run profitable routes but also recognise services, which are public and vital routes. It is not about spending more but standing up for tax payers.'

- 1 'Buses are the lifelines in cities, towns and villages – like the energy market, the bus market is broken and all power lies with five firms and not with the communities who are key to the service, which is why we've said we would regulate buses.'
- 2 Comprehensive Quality Contracts are needed, he said, so operators can run the most profitable services but also the most vital networks, as in London. 'Why shouldn't other regions be able to set fares and networks?'
- 3 'Proper devolution and integration, on which we are far from where we should be, with the absence of co-ordination on ticketing and timetables. Instead, there are barriers. We need to look at transport in terms of networks rather than competing modes.'
- 4 'Too often you see organisations pitching themselves against each other and forgetting the travelling public use a network. If you cycle, that means you're anti-car but people are both cyclists and motorists; both are road users. People aren't bus passengers and not rail commuters.'
- 5 'RAC said 65% of motorists use the train one or two times a week, walk between one and three times a week and use the bus once a week. We can't be in denial about people's choices in transport.'
- 6 'How can we create smooth door-to-door journeys – we are a long way from having this in the UK. In Europe, rail is integrated into regional and transport planning. There is a lack of similar schemes to the Oystercard – we need the transport authorities' ability to plan across the modes.'

The Bus Users' manifesto

If society is to benefit fully from what the bus has to offer then **the next UK Government needs to take action.**

Bus Users' 10-point plan

Buses reduce congestion, build communities and enable people from all social groups to access health services, education and employment. Buses are in particular a lifeline to women, older and disabled people and those living in remote or deprived communities. We want to see policy and decision makers give priority to the bus through:

- 1** Enhanced bus priority measures in town centres to improve reliability and journey times, encouraging people out of their cars and onto the bus
- 2** Accessible stopping points with better facilities and passenger information, positioned closer to shopping and business centres to boost local economies
- 3** Fully funded concessions made available to unemployed people and those on low incomes to open up better life chances
- 4** Widespread on-board facilities such as audio visual information, phone charging and Wi-Fi
- 5** Better timetable coordination with schools, colleges and employment
- 6** Improved integration across all transport modes
- 7** Mandatory driver training to improve awareness of issues relating to mobility, disability and mental health and improve communication skills
- 8** Measures to improve the passenger experience, providing a consistent and reliable service offer to help encourage more sustainable travel choices
- 9** More late and weekend services to reflect changing working patterns
- 10** A simplified fares system across all modes to remove barriers to travel.

Buses are vital to the economy and to social inclusion. According to Government statistics,ⁱ 7% of all journeys were made by bus in 2013 – more than twice the number for rail (compared with 64% by car) of which:

- 25% of journeys were for shopping
- 21% for education
- 19% for commuting.ⁱⁱ

There were 5.2 billion bus journeys in Great Britain in 2013/14. These vital bus journeys contribute considerably to the retail economy, especially in town centres, and give people greater access to opportunities. This in turn lessens the burden on the overall economy.

Without bus services people are unable to access increasingly centralised and more remote health services. Indeed, buses have a powerful outreach: they are accessible by almost the entire population of the UK.

Cars have become a victim of their own success; they contribute 40% to transport-related greenhouse gas emissions and according to the *Financial Times*, congestion cost the UK economy more than £13 billion in 2013.

Priority needs to be given to reversing decline in passenger numbers in the major City Regions outside London; bus ridership in London has doubled since 2000 and halved in the other major conurbations.

Rail services have improved considerably in the UK in the 21st century and ridership has increased dramatically. The same has happened on buses in London. **The challenge for an incoming Government is to achieve the same improvement for bus services in the rest of the UK.**

Such a success would:

- Free city centres from traffic congestion
- Encourage cities to become more popular and enjoyable places to live and work
- Develop the 'night economy', enabling towns and cities to become active 24 hours a day
- Improve land use, with less requirement for car-parking spaces
- Improve air quality
- Bring back prosperity to declining town centres
- Boost health by reducing pollution, increasing walking to bus stops, improving the well-being of people who currently suffer 'transport poverty'
- Open up opportunities for employment and education
- Over time, diminish the need for financial support for bus services.

ⁱ Transport Statistics Great Britain 2014

ⁱⁱ Transport Statistics Great Britain 2014

Keeping passengers satisfied

Satisfaction with bus services across the country is still high, as Passenger Focus has found in its latest Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey report. Bus Users Cymru's **Barclay Davies** went along to the launch in Manchester on 12 March.

Passenger Focus's latest Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey shows that people who actually use bus services are generally pretty satisfied. Evidence from 47,000 bus users' surveys across 38 areas in England and four areas of Scotland show that 88% of passengers in England and 92% in Scotland are overall satisfied with their bus services.

Surveys were conducted in autumn 2014, with users being asked to base their responses purely on the last journey they have undertaken.

Overall satisfaction with the journey across all areas ranged from 83% to 93%, the same as in 2013. Satisfaction with value for money from fare paying passengers across all areas ranged from 45% to 73%, compared with 48% to 69% in 2013 while satisfaction with punctuality across all areas ranged from 67% to 84% compared with 76% to 80% in 2013. 80% to 92% of people in different areas were happy with on-bus journey time, compared with 79% to 89% in 2013.

There was a slight reduction in concern about anti-social behaviour; last year between 3% and 10% of people in different places had cause to worry or feel uncomfortable about the behaviour of other passengers during the journey: this year the figure ranged from 3% to 9%.

One of the questions asked was concerning journey times and if there was a delay, what was the reason.

- Congestion ranged from 12% to 31%
- Passenger boarding times ranged from 14% to 23%
- Roadworks ranged from 6% to 21%
- Waiting too long at bus stops ranged from 4% to 12%
- Poor weather conditions ranged from 2% to 12%
- Bus driver driving too slowly ranged from 2% to 7%

'Passengers tell us that value for money is key to their satisfaction with a service', said David Sidebottom, Passenger Director at Passenger Focus, 'along with being able to get decent information and a friendly, helpful driver'.

Before the survey was published, Passenger Focus had visited all the operators and various local authorities to discuss the results and interrogate the detail to understand them. 'When bus companies act on the findings of the survey', says David, 'it has a direct result for passengers. I've been to Isle of Wight where the bus company listened to what passengers said from our research, and reinstated a route with new, bigger buses plus cutting some fares.'



Once again bus passengers show good levels of satisfaction with the service they get.

FirstGroup had some impressive results, with First Scotland East and First York recording overall satisfaction levels of 92%. As we report on pp16-19 First has been cutting fares in some areas, and the effects of this showed in the survey this year: in Greater Manchester the company scored 73% for value for money while in the West of England Partnership area, 61% of people surveyed were happy with value for money as opposed to just 33% two years ago.

David Sidebottom concluded that there is still room for improvement. 'We call on operators to look at their colleagues with better scores to learn from them and make a difference for passengers', he said.

As usual the report is quite comprehensive, but the website has a search function so that you can explore the report by a particular operator or region or individual local authority as well as by types of user.

The report can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk and to dig into the data further, go to data.passengerfocus.org.uk/bus



Partnership in Brighton has worked well without the need for regulation.

Bus services after the election

Whoever wins the General Election in May, there is a strong likelihood of greater regulation being applied to Britain's bus services. But is this a Good Thing for bus users?

The policy to deregulate and privatise bus services 30 years ago was always a controversial one, striking at the heart of what bus services are all about. Are they a universal public service, like electricity supplies or the Royal Mail; or are they a retail service, needing to stand or fall on how well they are provided and how great the demand is?

The debate has raged ever since. Nicholas Ridley, Margaret Thatcher's Transport Secretary whose reforming zeal started the whole thing off, could never see why bus services were any different from sweet shops and foresaw thousands of owner-drivers all competing for our custom. It was an ideal which never reached its perceived potential.

But with all good debates there are pros and cons. Many of today's really successful bus services have

become successful as a direct result of being freed from the old regulatory regime and having to work that bit harder to provide attractive services in a competitive environment. At the same time, passenger numbers have declined in large urban areas where an integrated service would have served people's complex journey patterns better.

Since 1985, no Government has seriously sought to re-regulate bus services – so far. There is no doubt that the deregulated regime creates a much smaller demand on the public purse to keep it going.

But things are stirring. The last Labour Government brought in the possibility of localised re-regulation through the mechanism of Quality Contracts. And while, 15 years on, no-one has so far succeeded in introducing

“Passengers want punctual, reliable, affordable services, not a particular policy or structure”



Will Manchester Town Hall be the new powerbase for Greater Manchester's public transport?

Picture by Kevin George

one, Labour is now seriously revisiting the whole topic of re-regulating bus services. There is a view abroad that the trend towards deregulating everything in sight has led to the increased divide between rich and poor in 21st Century society: some sort of regulated, franchised system of bus service provision suddenly looks more attractive politically.

What is more surprising is the way the present Government has offered Greater Manchester the possibility of taking back local control of public transport services. This is one of a raft of powers granted to the region in the aftermath of the Scottish devolution vote, which unleashed demand for more devolved power not only for Scotland and Wales, but for regions of England. This comes on top of Tyne & Wear's push towards a Quality Contract to take back control of the local bus network in Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland.

But is re-regulation a Good Thing?

Bus Users never loses sight of the fact that passengers want punctual, reliable, affordable services, not a particular policy or structure. Indeed one of things we most welcomed about the 2000 and 2008 Transport Acts was that no longer did one size fit all: the 2000 Act introduced a suite of possible models for the provision of bus services and the 2008 Act refined those options.

There are still too many places where bus services are in decline. In many rural locations, the volume of passengers is too small to deliver a profit for private-sector operators and cuts in local-authority funding are reducing ridership. More worryingly, the big city regions outside London have seen major decline in use over the last 20 years, although there are now welcome signs that this trend may be beginning to reverse. While London's bus use has doubled, the other Metropolitan >



London gets an excellent integrated public transport service: but at a cost to the public purse.

areas have seen ridership halve: the roughly 11million inhabitants of our major city regions now make just half the number of bus journeys made by the 8million or so Londoners, whereas 20 years ago the converse was the case.

Bus use in the city regions outside London ought to be soaring: cars are not a satisfactory solution for passenger transport in major conurbations for a whole host of reasons. Good, well-used public transport is vital to ensuring those city regions remain viable and healthy places to live, work, shop and visit.

Applied to other areas, London's regulated approach could provide a unified, integrated network, with common standards of publicity, fare levels, ticketing etc. It would also allow the network to be planned in accordance with local transport objectives and may, for instance, contain provision for improved evening and weekend services. The effect Oystercard has had in London should also not be underestimated as part of a wide-ranging, holistic approach to the provision of passenger transport.

Bus Users is watching the developments in Tyne & Wear and Greater Manchester with interest. We would expect that the holy grail of bus priorities would improve under a scheme where the local authority took overall responsibility for the bus network and finally dispel any view that bus priorities simply bolster bus company profits.

However it is disappointing that Tyne & Wear's proposed Quality Contract network does nothing, for example, to improve evening frequencies. Evening and weekend services have been one of the major casualties of deregulation: a real bar to economic development and acceptance of bus services as viable for all users' needs.

Deregulation has served some local markets well, but it has been unkind to others. The same was true of regulation in the 'good old days'. In those areas where deregulation has worked, the main service network, catering for the majority of the demand, has been immune from local-authority cuts. Would it remain immune when run by a local authority under great pressure to cut costs? And what happens if a franchised network costs too much: is there an exit strategy for local authorities that won't leave passengers high and dry? London's success has been at considerable expense to the public purse.

What matters is that whatever regulatory model is used, passengers need to be the winners. There are different horses for different courses, and providers need to consult passengers rather than using a blanket approach that is unlikely to fit all environments. Bus Users will look for the best outcome for passengers in any proposed scheme.



Passenger Claire Randall, with her guide dog, Ben, tries out the Next Stop app at Leeds United's ground. Behind from left to right are Ian Morgan from CPT-UK, Paul Matthews from First West Yorkshire and Nigel Featham from Arriva Yorkshire.

Next stop in your pocket

A 'Next Stop Announcement' smartphone app has been developed by First and Arriva in partnership with the bus industry trade organisation CPT UK. An eight-week pilot of this journey assisting technology – designed specifically with blind and visually impaired bus passengers in mind – was launched in Leeds during March. Victoria Walker was there for Bus Users.

An 'app' that gives independence to people who are blind and visually impaired is a big claim indeed. But this claim was endorsed by Claire Randall, a regular bus user who is not only blind herself but was instrumental in the app's design.

Like many people, Claire benefits greatly from the audio visual displays on London buses. But she also travels frequently on buses outside the capital where this facility is not universally available.

It was evident from Claire and others at the launch who were also blind or visually impaired, what a massive difference this app will make. No more having to memorise routes which, according to Claire, 'takes up so much energy' or, worse still, getting off at the wrong stop.

The Next Stop Announcement app uses both the GPS and built-in voiceover features on a user's mobile phone to provide real-time audio and visual alert notifications for the next bus stops along your route. It's easy on the eye and simple to use: you enter the bus route that you are travelling on (we had it demonstrated on the 52 bus from Leeds towards Morley), the app locates your position on the route and announces the next bus stop 20 metres after the previous stop, allowing you enough time to prepare to get off the bus. You can save your favourite routes and the app can be left running so you can continue listening to music or use the other functions on your phone.

At the moment the app is only available on the iPhone which raised a few concerns, and requests for it to be made available on Android were noted. Anyone who'd like to take advantage of the app can contact Arriva or First direct.

This is a great app and was received very positively at the launch. It's incredibly simple to use and benefits everyone, not just people who are blind or visually impaired.

Giles Fearnley,
managing director of
First UK Bus: a man
with a mission.



First and foremost

Giles Fearnley has been transforming the fortunes of First by giving it what every bus business needs: greater local focus.

Chances are, wherever you live in Great Britain, you won't be very far from a First bus. Having recently sold some of its smaller operations to Stagecoach, and having then decided to sell its London operations to Metroline and Australian company Tower Transit, it's now second in size to Stagecoach. With a particular penchant for large-scale urban operations, First buses still serve many rural locations too.

It's probably true to say that First hasn't always been the passengers' favourite operator. Despite some very high-profile initiatives, its services were often felt to be expensive compared with other operators and reliability not always all it could be. So the appointment of Giles Fearnley as managing director of First's UK bus

operations some four years ago attracted a great deal of interest.

First was known for a corporate approach, with regional directors covering vast swathes of the country and comparatively little empowered management at ground level. Giles on the other hand came from a company with a very different ethos; Blazefield.

Blazefield was never going to be one of the major transport operators: it had what may best be described as 'niche' operations concentrated on both sides of the Pennines. It was credited with being the first bus company to try to push bus services up-market, with its distinctive leather-seated double-deckers trying to prise commuters from Harrogate into Leeds out of



Ticketing by mobile phone is available across First's operations. 45,000 mobile phone fare renewals are made every month.

Investment in new buses, alongside investment in depot facilities, is having a tangible effect on reliability. In the second six months of last year the number of breakdowns reduced by 12% and problems caused by engineering issues were down 15%.

Giles also recognises that there was 'a perception that we were overpriced in some areas'. Notable was Bristol, even though the price of a day ticket there had stayed the same for four years. Thought to be unique in the bus industry, First consulted passengers about fares levels. It held 30 roadshows in the area and received 6,500 responses. The result was that a new zonal system was introduced, giving 70% of passengers a reduction in fares while some 10-15% saw no change.

Inevitably in a new system some fares did rise, but the overall effect has been an increase in bus use of 20%. Now some of the investment in new vehicles will result in more double-deckers for Bristol, where some services run by single-deckers were becoming overcrowded, and 12 additional buses and 70 new drivers to cope with longer journey times as more people board the buses.

This success is being replicated in Bath, Weston-super-Mare and Wells, where fare reductions last year have led to 'double-digit growth'. Similar effects have been created in Manchester, Sheffield and Rotherham, and in Sheffield the growth in bus use has resulted in a 2% reduction in car traffic.

Work is also going into new fare payment methods. Ticketing by mobile phone is available across First's operations, and there are currently 45,000 mobile phone fare renewals every month. Progress is also being made towards smartcards; several schemes are already in place and multi-operator smartcard systems are being introduced to all major city regions, with First helping and encouraging some of the smaller bus companies to get involved. These will generally be used for season tickets and day tickets: the technology enabling stored value smartcards to be used for individual journeys is altogether more complex but is expected to be introduced at a later stage. Having focused on mobile ticketing, which rolled out very quickly through 2014 and is proving an increasingly popular payment mechanism,

First is now working closely with local authorities to meet their aspirations with smartcards, and will also be exploring emerging debit card payment systems.

First is intent, says Giles, on 'growing each and every network'. At one time the emphasis was on ensuring every route was profitable; now the emphasis is on ensuring each network is profitable. He wants to see buses serving the public at times of day 'when people reasonably expect it'. The recent experience of services in Somerset, where the council simply cut any revenue support for evening and Sunday journeys, made the point well; as people could no longer get home in the evening, revenue on daytime journeys fell as well. The perception of passengers on a network 'shattered by the loss of evening service' was also damaging.

Now a more 'holistic' approach is being adopted. As pressures fall on bus services which need local authority revenue support in times of austerity, bus companies throughout the country are working with local authorities to try to minimise the effect on passengers. While First is not alone in this, it represents a significant change of direction for the company. Where possible, supported journeys are being wrapped into the commercial network and services run seven days a week. In West Yorkshire, turning previously supported early-morning journeys into commercial services has saved Metro, the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, £3million a year.



Operations in these major conurbations are of particular importance for First. In addition to being the main operator in Bristol and surrounding areas, it is the biggest operator in Glasgow, South and West Yorkshire and a major operator in Greater Manchester. Where there are talks of bringing in franchised operations rather than a partnership approach, First is involved in discussions as to how aims and local aspirations can be achieved by a partnership approach. This has worked particularly well in South Yorkshire, where formal partnerships with local authorities cover Sheffield and Rotherham. These, says Giles, have been 'hugely successful', with inter-operator smartcard ticketing, reduced fares and in the case of Sheffield, a 10% increase in passengers. Rotherham is also showing good growth and reliability has improved considerably, with 97.9% of journeys on schedule. This has been accompanied by a 19% reduction in the number of complaints received while in Sheffield, 30% fewer complaints are being recorded.

Meanwhile Bristol, believed to be Britain's worst city for traffic congestion, has recently gained European Green Capital status for 2015 and the Mayor is particularly supportive of bus service initiatives. Its Metrobus bus rapid transit system is due to start in 2016 and the city is being used as a testbed for green transport initiatives.

First is working on growing all its local networks. A new network for Glasgow was announced with a blaze of publicity.

The Passenger Focus bus passenger survey results for 2013 and 2014 showed an overall improvement in satisfaction from First passengers over 2012, and particularly noteworthy was the substantial improvement people perceived in value for money. Essex tended to return poorer statistics than other places, but saw a 5% increase in overall satisfaction in 2014. The elderly fleet in the area is being improved as is engineering; competing with the London labour market for engineers meant engineering had to be contracted out and this, too, is now being resolved by bringing it back in house. More new buses will be making their way to Essex over the coming months and service review is imminent.

It's certainly been a major job to transform First, but many issues are now being addressed and satisfaction is genuinely improving.

What's your experience? Tell us what you've noticed about First services in your area.
Email editor@bususers.org



Despite low fares, and a typically busy scene in Rome, Italians use public transport less than we do in the UK.

Public transport in the EU

It's often thought that we are wedded to our cars in the UK, while people in Continental European are far more likely to use public transport. We tend to compare ourselves unfavourably with Europe, with visions of wonderful tramways and cheap bus tickets offering a whole range of travel opportunities.

A survey conducted by the European Union late last year, however, suggests that if anything, we Brits are more likely to use public transport and less likely to use cars than in most of Western Europe. Eastern European states show less car usage and more public transport use, but viewed alongside those countries with which we compare ourselves less favourably, we are not quite so inclined to use our cars as you might imagine.

We have to add a bit of a rider here though. While it seems highly likely that public transport use in London is much higher than the European norm, and car use much lower, the same may not apply to the rest of the UK. More than half of all bus use in England is now in London: last year 2.4billion bus journeys were made in London compared with 2.32billion in the whole of the rest of England, and only about 1billion of these were

in the other major English urban regions.

Across the EU only 19% of daily journeys are made by public transport, whereas 54% were made by car while in the UK, 57% of daily journeys were made by car. In the Netherlands, where the bicycle is used more than anywhere else in Europe, car use represented 45% of daily journeys and in France it was 65%. Cyprus and Ireland had the highest dependency on cars, at 85% and 73% respectively and Germany, Belgium and Italy all recorded higher car usage than the UK.

In the UK, 20% of daily journeys were made by public transport. In Malta, despite there being no railway, public transport use was slightly higher as was Greece (24%) and Spain and Portugal (both 23%). All other countries with higher public transport use than the UK were in Eastern Europe, with Latvia recording the highest at 31%.

Unsurprisingly in the Netherlands, where the bicycle is a major factor, only 7% of daily journeys were by public transport, 36% by bike and just 4% (the lowest in the table) were made on foot. In the UK 14% of journeys were made on foot and a mere 3% by bike.

Even Sweden and Germany came below the UK for public transport use, at 17% and 16% respectively, with France (15%), Ireland and Denmark (9%) and Italy (8%) all lagging way behind.

Interestingly, while 20% of daily journeys in the UK were by public transport, only 4% of journeys were by train, suggesting the bus is responsible for a much heftier slice of daily journeys than we sometimes think.

The survey also asked people what would be more likely to get them using public transport. Across Europe, the four biggest factors were higher frequency, better public transport coverage, cheaper fares and reliability/punctuality, though 20% of people said that nothing would induce them to use public transport.

In the UK the biggest requirement suggested by 30% of people was for cheaper fares followed by frequency, better coverage, punctuality and accessibility. Worryingly, however, 28% of British respondents said that nothing would encourage them to use public transport.

Perhaps surprising were those countries where even more people refused to consider using public transport with the greatest resistance in Latvia, at 32%, followed by Estonia, Bulgaria and Denmark. Yet in Malta, where the desire for greater reliability was sky high (not surprising given recent fiascos with their bus service) just 14% of people would not consider using public transport.

More than half of all bus use in England is now in London

While it would be interesting to see how the figures compare between London and the rest of the UK, overall, it looks as though the UK may not be quite the public transport backwater we often think it is.

The full report can be found on http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_422a_en.pdf, or if that's too much of a mouthful for you, try the General tab in the publications section of our website, www.bususers.org.



The Spanish use public transport slightly more than we do in the UK. Bus passengers in Madrid make 450million journeys a year.

Picture: Tupungato / Shutterstock.com



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.

'Consultation done well'?

Can I take issue with Claire Walters' views (p3 *Bus User* January 2015) on the consultation carried out by Surrey County Council (SCC)?

When SCC carried out a similar 'review' five years ago there was indeed a best practice consultation on the route-by-route proposals. At the North West Surrey Bus Users Group (NWSBUG), the 'local group' to which Claire refers, we appreciated our opportunity to meet SCC before the consultation principles were finalised and also that the 'Your Bus Matters' roadshows were organised in our area. Some of these were poorly attended through low awareness.

This consultation has been more like a survey of bus use and how much passengers 'value' their bus services with only vague information about what might happen.

Given the one-year-plus timescale over which these cuts have been planned it should have been possible to include a consultation on the final detailed proposals. However the SCC cabinet votes on the final proposals on 26 May, just after the elections and only three months before implementation. This short timescale allows little or no time for route contracts to be let, never mind a proper consultation.

Despite our best efforts, the review has had very little media coverage. It is likely this will change



when the final proposals are made public in late May at which time passengers will realise the significance of the changes.

Through the best efforts of SCC officials, in conjunction with bus operators, most roads which currently have a bus service in this already poorly-served urban area will probably still have some sort

of service, but it is also likely that real hardship will be caused by a further reduction in already infrequent services and the loss of vital links.

Mark Worley (Chair NWSBUG, on behalf of the NWSBUG committee)

Mark makes a fair point about not being given much time to comment on the outcomes of the consultation in terms of the actual services likely to be cut, a point which we have raised in our report on the consultation. While we are happy that Surrey County Council has gone to some effort to gather opinions, we have also said that the proof of the pudding will be in whether the opinions voiced are taken in to account. Once the details of the cuts are announced, we will be having further discussions. Claire Walters

In *Bus User* 57 Simon Martin wrote a letter about our chief executive Claire Walters' apparent 'attack' on London's Oystercard. Claire replies:

My article about cashless buses in *Bus User* 56 was not intended to attack the convenience of the Oystercard, just the assumption that everybody has enough spare funds to leave some of it sitting on a payment card. Also, 2% of payments by cash adds up to millions of pounds from people who may well now not bother to catch the bus. I'm sure we all agree that we don't need new obstacles to bus use, especially for occasional or vulnerable passengers.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive

Bus Users on social media

In the latest *Bus Users' Blog*, *Barclay Davies*, Deputy Director of *Bus Users Cymru* touched a nerve when he made this plea about the dreaded bus driver changeover: "It's not rocket science. Tell us what is happening, treat us with some respect and we will be far more understanding."



Darren Bevan:

We can't let you onto the bus unattended due to health and safety in case of a fire or an accident. Think of the real reasons why us bus drivers do the things we do - we are not being awkward, we have rules to protect you the customer, just like you have rules in your place of work.

Richard Cook and Jason Freeman:

We board passengers before changeover unless the bus is not due out for a while.

Jonathan Morse:

London is now cash free but before, if a bus driver's takings were stolen he/she was responsible and had to make up the difference: one reason why they might not want people around during changeover.

Joanna on Wordpress:

Try being a bus driver then re-read your article! Driver changeovers are not always that simple as the new driver may be coming in from another service that has run late. The driver getting off the bus could have another service to cover and so has no choice but to leave. We cannot let passengers on then leave them unattended on the vehicle. The ONLY thing I agree with is that they should communicate with those waiting. I do, even if it's to say that another driver will be along shortly.

Terry on Wordpress:

The replacement driver should be there before the bus arrives and even if he is not (tut tut), he should stay there until the new driver arrives. That's what we did in Brighton when I worked there.

Our favourite post was in response to our Facebook story 'Looking for love', about a bus driver who married a former passenger after she proposed at a bus stop.

Jim Morey on Facebook:

I met my wife on the bus. It was the no 69 from Fareham to Winchester. That was over 10 years ago and we're still together.

What passengers want

In the last issue we asked the question 'What do passengers want?' A couple of members have responded and told us what they *don't* want.

No thanks to plastic seats

In answer to the question on p7 of *Bus User 57* ('Would we rather sit on moulded plastic with a thin bit of padding?'), I can't think how anyone can possibly prefer to sit on moulded plastic. For those of us with bone disease, they can be excruciatingly painful and would increase the risk of spinal damage when buses hit potholes or speed humps. Surely even healthy people find plastic less comfortable than padding?

The Disability Discrimination Act should include a minimum number of cushioned seats on single-deckers and the lower deck of double-deckers - certainly more than the mere 14 provided on Stagecoach's current double-deckers.

We also need to find a way of stopping the growing practice of passengers hogging two seats by sitting in the aisle seat, leaving the window seat unoccupied. Seat blocking is another inconvenience for customers, making them more likely to find alternatives including, ultimately, the car.

Phil Longdon, Denton, Greater Manchester

Ban the rattles!

Well done on the story in the last issue of *Bus User*, 'What do passengers want?'. If we're compiling a shopping list, then in the 'unwanted' column I nominate an entry: 'buses which rattle'!

Even some new buses suffer from this problem, and as they get older, they get worse.

Keep up the good work.

John Rose, Birmingham

What's your pet peeve? Let us know on editor@bususers.org or tweet us on @bususers.

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

Bus User magazine, Terminal House, Shepperton TW17 8AS.

Deadline for *Bus User 59*: 27 April

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

Jill Clark, Waringham, Surrey
Patricia Clarke, Hexham, Northumberland
Keith Francis, Leatherhead, Surrey
Steven Howell, Watford, Hertfordshire
Dennis Money, Leatherhead, Surrey
K. J. Rabbetts, Sturminster Newton, Dorset
Fred Roger, London

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

Age UK Colchester

peter@ageconcern.org.uk

Association of Devides Passengers

www.devidespassengers.org.uk,
www.facebook.com/Devides 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

Bus Users UK Northampton

13 Dryden Avenue, Daventry NN11 9DJ

Bus Users UK Oxford

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Bus Users West Midlands

philipc.green@yahoo.co.uk

Bus Watch West Haringey

chrisjbarker46@gmail.com

Campaign for Better Transport – Cambs

6 Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG

Campaign for Better Transport – West Yorkshire

rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk

Cardiff People First

cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.com

Colchester Bus Users Support Group (C-BUS)

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, 9 Meadow Breeze, Lostwithiel,

Cornwall PL22 0BJ

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

mjworley@btopenworld.com, www.facebook.com/nwsurreybug

Railfuture

www.railfuture.org.uk

Railfuture Severnside

www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside+Branch

Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group

g.cadwallader@btinternet.com

Rural East Lothian Bus Users

www.relbus.org.uk

The Senior Council for Devon Transport

andrea@scfd.org.uk

Southend Area Bus User Group

donaldfraser17@btinternet.com

Swale Senior Forum

01795 424725

Swindon Climate Action Network

www.swindonclimate.org.uk

TravelWatch NorthWest

admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

TravelWatch SouthWest

www.travelwatchsouthwest.org

Tring Bus Users Group

01442 824508

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



Bus Users

Working for passengers

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.