
Passenger Safety

Bus Users UK policy on Passenger Safety

Bus Users UK policy

Safety is of course a paramount consideration

- The bus industry has a good safety record and safety is generally well-enforced
- Bus Users UK would like to see improved funding for the Traffic Commissioners to enable them to be even more effective on enforcement across the board
- Drivers' primary duty is to ensure the safety and comfort of their passengers: operators need to be vigilant to ensure their drivers meet this requirement
- the Driver CPC training regime should reinforce the driver's duty on safety and should include safe driving instruction
- Drivers should wait for boarding passengers to be seated before starting
- Driving in a manner which is not commensurate with passenger safety should be a disciplinary offence, and overtly driving in an unsafe manner, including using a handheld mobile phone while driving, should lead to dismissal
- Safety considerations on vehicles need to be appropriate and proportionate
- Seatbelts on urban buses would cause delays, would add to the cost (and therefore need fares to rise) and would lead to the greater likelihood of buses being taken out of service for failures to seatbelts, leading to greater unreliability of services. The benefits they give do not outweigh the difficulties they would create.

Background

Travelling by bus or coach is by far the safest form of road passenger transport in the UK: statistically it is more than seven times safer than travelling by car. Fatality rates in bus and coach transport are 30 times lower than those of cars (three times lower even than trains and 305 times lower than motorbikes).

A 60% reduction in road fatalities was achieved by the bus and coach industry between 2001 and 2008. This makes the bus and coach industry, for the time being, the only road transport mode to have met the EU road safety policy objective of halving the number of deaths on European roads.

Drivers have always trained to a high standard, and the current requirement for getting a PCV (Passenger Carrying Vehicle) licence are more stringent than ever. Drivers also have to undergo 35 hours of training every five years to retain their licence.

Drivers are required to check all safety-related items on a bus before taking it out in service and to report all defects (typically on a defect card).

Vehicles are subject to certification before they can run in service, and this process centres largely on safety-related items. Vehicles undergo an MoT test every year from new (not after three years as is the case for cars) and again safety-related items are fundamental.

As part of the requirements for bus companies to receive a licence to run buses, they have to have a rigorous maintenance regime in place. Typically this will require buses to be serviced every four weeks (though where vehicles are only on light duties this may be reduced to every six weeks). Strict records have to be kept and are open to inspection by VOSA (The Vehicle & Operator Services Agency). Any irregularities are likely to result in the bus company being called to Public Inquiry and could result in the licence being taken away or in heavy fines.

There have been incidents of passengers falling when the bus pulls away. It is not always immediately obvious that passengers may be frail or have hidden disabilities so drivers should ensure that people are seated before pulling away. If a passenger goes upstairs it could however be assumed they are sufficiently steady on their feet, though the driver should at least give passengers time to reach to upper deck before starting off. Services need to be scheduled to allow for this.

Some companies have notices on buses telling passengers to remain seated until the bus has stopped. Many passengers ignore this instruction, but drivers should not assume all passengers will do so and allow alighting passengers time to get up from their seat and to leave the bus safely.

Seatbelts

It is often suggested that local buses should be fitted with seatbelts to improve safety. Indeed all buses and coaches built after 1 October 2001 not used for urban transport are required to be fitted with seatbelts, as are all vehicles used primarily by children.

Drivers are not responsible for ensuring everyone is wearing a seatbelt, but there have to be signs on the vehicle reminding people to fasten seatbelts and drivers should remind passengers. Where a vehicle has seatbelts, drivers are required to check seatbelts visually before the bus leaves the depot.

Buses that run in urban areas, or into urban areas, are not required to have seatbelts. In practice vehicles on urban services tend not to be able to reach considerable speeds, and it is impractical for passengers to wear seatbelts for what are often short journeys. The economics of local bus services often require passengers to be able to stand at busy times, in which case seatbelts would not be able to be worn by all passengers. In practice the risk has been shown to be very low. As far as the risk to standing passengers is concerned it should be remembered that the UK offers a much higher proportion of bus passengers a seat than is the case in most countries; in most countries standing on the bus is considered the norm.