
Good Practice Guide

Bus Users

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Contents

Before the journey	2
Bus stops and bus stations	2
Bus services	3
Fares and tickets	5
Punctuality and Reliability	6
Complaints and suggestions	6
Consultation	7

Good Practice Guide

Many bus companies get most things right most of the time. But some could definitely make more effort. We all deserve a reliable bus service, no matter where we live. Our Good Practice Guide defines what we as bus users should expect bus companies and local authorities to deliver.

Before the journey

- Passengers should be able to view accurate timetable information at the bus stop/station, enquiry office, and on the bus company website.
- Timetables should be easy to understand and must take into account the needs of partially-sighted users.
- Ideally, local timetables should also be displayed at libraries, local leisure centres and other public buildings.

Bus operators can assist passengers by providing service information via:

- Real-Time information displays
- mobile phone text alert services
- social media
- printed timetables distributed throughout the community and on buses
- timetables available in downloadable formats
- journey planners – online and leaflet

Timetable changes

It's essential that proper notice of service is given. Notices on buses and at bus stops are useful, but rarely provide enough information. Household leaflet drops, local press and social media are much better means of communication. A local call rate (or even free) telephone enquiry service should be available to mobile and landline users.

Best practice: Revised timetables should be available for passengers at least two weeks ahead of the changes.

Bus stops and bus stations

Bus stops are an integral part of every bus journey and should be:

- easily accessible and well situated
- bright and welcoming
- sheltered, ideally with a seated area.
- And most important of all – safe

Service information

Timetables should be clearly displayed at each stop, positioned in such a way that wheelchair users, smaller adults and children can access the information.

Real-Time displays are excellent. They offer reassurance to passengers, particularly in rural areas where service frequency can be low. If the display is simply detailing scheduled departure times, bus operators should indicate this.

Fare information

Should be made available at bus stops, especially on bus services where the exact fare is required.

Bus services

Passengers have a right to expect a bus to be:

- easy to identify
- wheelchair and buggy accessible
- equipped with adequate handrails and luggage provision
- comfortable and clean
- properly heated and ventilated
- driven professionally
- a safe environment

Easy to identify

Clear destination information on the front, side and rear of buses is essential. Inside the bus, GPS systems can help passengers follow their journey and are particularly useful in 'tourist' and routes which span several communities.

Best practice: Audio-visual information advising passengers on the next bus stop is incredibly helpful - and invaluable to passengers who are blind, partially-sighted or deaf.

Wheelchair and buggy accessible

Where it's not possible to offer accessible buses throughout a service, timetables must reflect when accessible buses will run. It goes without saying that operators should then adhere to this.

Best practice: Drivers should be encouraged to draw close into the kerb wherever possible in order to assist less-able passengers.

Adequate handrails and luggage provision

Proper provision for a wheelchair or buggy is essential. The allocated space shouldn't make it difficult for other passengers - especially those less mobile - to find their way safely to a seat. When buses are busy, buggies should be folded and not be allowed to obstruct the gangway

Instructions regarding the use of space should be clearly displayed and adequate luggage provision should be available, particularly on services which run to mainline stations and airports.

Best practice: Drivers should be well briefed and enabled to take action when there is any confusion or dispute over the use of these spaces.

Comfortable and clean

Passengers should feel comfortable even on the shortest of journeys. This means a comfortable seat with adequate legroom - ideally not just the legal minimum. A clean bus isn't just more pleasant, it's safer. Discarded litter can cause slips and falls, particularly amongst more vulnerable travellers.

Best Practice: Companies should ensure buses are cleaned thoroughly before service and then sweep them out and remove litter at the end of journeys during the day.

Heating and ventilation

We frequently receive complaints about ‘freezing cold’ buses in the winter and ‘hot, stuffy,’ buses in the summer. It’s essential that operators ensure that existing heating and ventilation systems are in full working order and are well-maintained.

Best Practice: Bus companies should ensure buses are specified with heater controls so the temperature can be regulated.

Considerate drivers

We expect nothing less than safe driving at all times, but bus drivers also have a duty to be responsive to the needs of passengers who may require a little more time to get on and off. This includes less able-bodied passengers, parents with pushchairs or young children – even passengers with luggage.

Best Practice: Drivers should always allow passengers enough time to be seated safely. The time ‘lost’ for this courtesy is negligible, but the value in terms of passenger safety and confidence is immense.

A safe environment

Travelling by bus should be safe for everyone. Bus operators have a responsibility to both their staff and their passengers by implementing a zero-tolerance policy to anti-social or intimidating behaviour. All buses should be in two-way radio contact to reassure passengers that a fast response is possible when necessary.

Best practice: An increasing number of operators are adopting closed-circuit television, sometimes even with audio, with cameras positioned throughout the bus.

A little extra effort can go a long way

We’re pleased to say that there are some operators out there who do go the extra mile. They appreciate that their role goes beyond simply transporting the masses from A to B. Good bus companies know that the way to get repeat custom is to keep passengers happy. Thinking from a passenger’s viewpoint separates the *great* from the *could try harder*.

Considered marketing

Using the inside of windows is a good way for bus operators to convey information, but not to the point where windows are covered. After all, passengers need to see where they’re going – especially those unfamiliar with the route.

Best practice: bus companies should ensure we are kept well-informed when we travel, but should not use marketing materials that cover up the windows.

Helpful staff

Whilst drivers on large networks can’t be expected to know every detail of every service, they should have a working knowledge of at least their own company services to advise passengers on connections and alternatives. Driver briefings are essential ahead of new services and major changes to existing services.

Enquiry offices

Offices should be staffed by knowledgeable, customer-focused people who can supply information clearly and simply. They should be open all the time bus services are running, but where that’s not possible, an alternative point of contact should be available.

Best practice: Members of the public should be served within three minutes in an enquiry office. At bus stations, information should be readily available as long as bus services are operating.

Fares and tickets

The price of bus fares can vary dramatically, depending on where you live. What should be consistent though, is how bus operators deliver these fares. Customers are entitled to expect:

- fair fares for everyone
- clear fare information
- easy ways to buy tickets

Fair Fares for everyone

Fare pricing will always be controversial. Putting the fact that bus operators are in the business of making a profit to one side, sufficient income needs to be generated to run services efficiently. That said, affordable fares are the only way to ensure that bus travel remains accessible to everyone, particularly those people who have no other form of transport available to them.

Day Tickets: These offer unlimited use of the bus company's local network and are available on-board. As well as offering customers value for money, they make for speedier passenger boarding.

Weekly/monthly tickets: Not all regular bus users travel often enough to justify an annual season ticket. By offering value weekly and monthly passes, bus companies can encourage greater uptake of the bus. Tickets offering a number of days travel rather than set periods are useful for part-time workers and other people who travel often but not every day. These tickets should be available to buy at bus offices, stations, newsagents, online as well as on the bus.

Joint Ticketing: Operators are often reluctant to provide opportunities for joint ticketing with other bus operators, but combined rail and bus tickets are becoming increasingly available. [Plusbus tickets](#) are available on many train journeys throughout the UK. For a flat additional fare on top of your rail fare you can enjoy unlimited local bus services at the start, end or both legs of your rail journey.

Clear fare information

Bus fare information should be displayed at bus stops. On routes serviced by more than one operator, it should be clear which fares apply to which services – especially Day Tickets. And if the service is 'exact money only', this should also be stated.

Easy ways to buy tickets

Many passengers find 'exact money only' services a nuisance, but they have the advantage of speeding up boarding dramatically, and make a significant difference to passenger flow on busy urban routes.

In built-up areas the addition of fare machines at bus stops can be invaluable. Passengers can help services to run smoothly by buying before they board.

Weekly and monthly bus passes should be available to buy at bus stations, bus enquiry offices, key newsagents and online. Whilst there should be a facility to purchase these tickets on the bus, customers should, where possible, buy before boarding.

Smartcards: The development of smart ticketing (smartcards, M-cards, wave and pay) lets passengers 'add money' to their card, which is then deducted as a fare on each journey; taking into account any multiple journey discounts (e.g. Day Ticket fare). These tickets not only speed up pick-up times at bus stops, they save passengers having to hunt for change - especially useful on 'exact money only' services.

Punctuality and Reliability

Although punctuality and reliability can sometimes be out of the bus company's control, companies should aim to provide:

- a punctual and reliable service
- information on likely delays
- compensation for passengers who have been inconvenienced by lengthy delays

A punctual service

Punctuality is important on all bus routes, whether urban or rural. However, accidents, congestion, road works and public events can all impact on services. Bus companies can't help it if buses are caught up in these situations, but they can at least keep passengers informed of the reasons for delays:

- Advance warnings of known delays such as road works or processions should be posted on buses and at bus stops as soon as possible.
- Audio visual displays (where available) should be used to inform passengers of problems.
- Drivers should relay information to passengers when it is possible to do so, and apologise to them for late running (even when it's not their fault).

Repeated delays should lead to service and timing revisions.

Compensation

In the event of significant delays within a bus company's control, for example a vehicle breakdown or staff absences, compensation should be offered. We'd like to see drivers being able to administer on-the-spot refunds when things go wrong.

Best practice: One award-winning company provides a free journey if passengers reach their stop destination more than 20 minutes late – other bus companies take note!

Complaints and Suggestions

Bus users with complaints or suggestions should feel confident that:

- complaints will be dealt with promptly and efficiently
- suggestions for service improvements and changes will be considered and acknowledged
- an appeal procedure can be accessed if they feel their complaint has been handled inadequately by operators.

What to expect when you complain

Complaints procedures vary widely between bus companies, and unfortunately many bus users are now cynical about the value of complaints after receiving 'brush-off' or standard letters.

However, you have the right to complain and bus companies have a duty to listen.

Complaints should be dealt with by dedicated, knowledgeable staff with sufficient seniority to take action. Vouchers or refunds should be offered where justified, or in the interest of goodwill. Ultimately, complainants should feel they have been taken seriously and treated fairly.

Accidents and other incidents

Proper procedures should be in place for consideration of claims lodged by passengers involved in accidents or other incidents. Bus companies should appreciate that sympathetic handling of

correspondence does not constitute an admission of liability, but rather can be the first step in restoring passenger confidence.

Best practice: Complaints should be acknowledged and preferably dealt with within five working days. Whilst standard letters are acceptable to acknowledge a complaint, there should be a personal response to every complaint.

Why bus operators should listen

Feedback from passengers is a fantastic source of market information – and it's free.

Trends in complaints can paint a picture of problems management really ought to know about, whether it be issues with staff, vehicles or services.

Bus companies should allow for sensible redress. Saving a pound or two by refusing a refund may also alienate a passenger who might otherwise spend several hundred pounds in the course of a year.

Best practice: When stating company complaint procedure, bus operators should reference Bus Users UK and make passengers aware that there they can contact us if they're not happy with how their complaint has been dealt with.

What to do when bus operators don't listen

That's where we come in.

Bus Users UK works on behalf of passengers who are dissatisfied with a bus company's response to their complaint. We can help with operational complaints, for example, reliability, a driver's behaviour or an issue with information. We'll contact the company and if there's still no resolution, the issue will be referred to the Bus Appeals Body.

At present there is no appeals machinery for commercial issues. This includes service patterns, frequencies and fares. However, if a commercial bus service is curtailed or withdrawn, we'd encourage passengers to appeal to local authorities to provide financial support for a new service.

What to do when a service is curtailed or withdrawn

Get in touch with your local authority. If enough people in a community show that there is a genuine need for a service, they may provide financial support.

Consultation

Customer insight

Talking to customers can offer bus companies an invaluable insight into their business. They may suggest the need to re-time or re-route existing services, or it may become apparent that there is enough demand for additional services. Smart bus companies listen.

Changes to routes or services

It's essential that passengers are consulted on any service or route changes as early as possible. Bus operators will never be able to please everyone, but the concerns of all passengers need to be taken into account.

Customer Forums

Passengers should be able to discuss their concerns face to face with bus company management and their local authority. Bus Users UK has pioneered 'Your Bus Matters' events, which offers a forum for dialogue between passengers and operators.

Find out more about Your Bus Matters events by going to; www.bususers.org/get-involved/your-bus-matters