

## Bus Users England Annual Report 2016/17



### Highlights

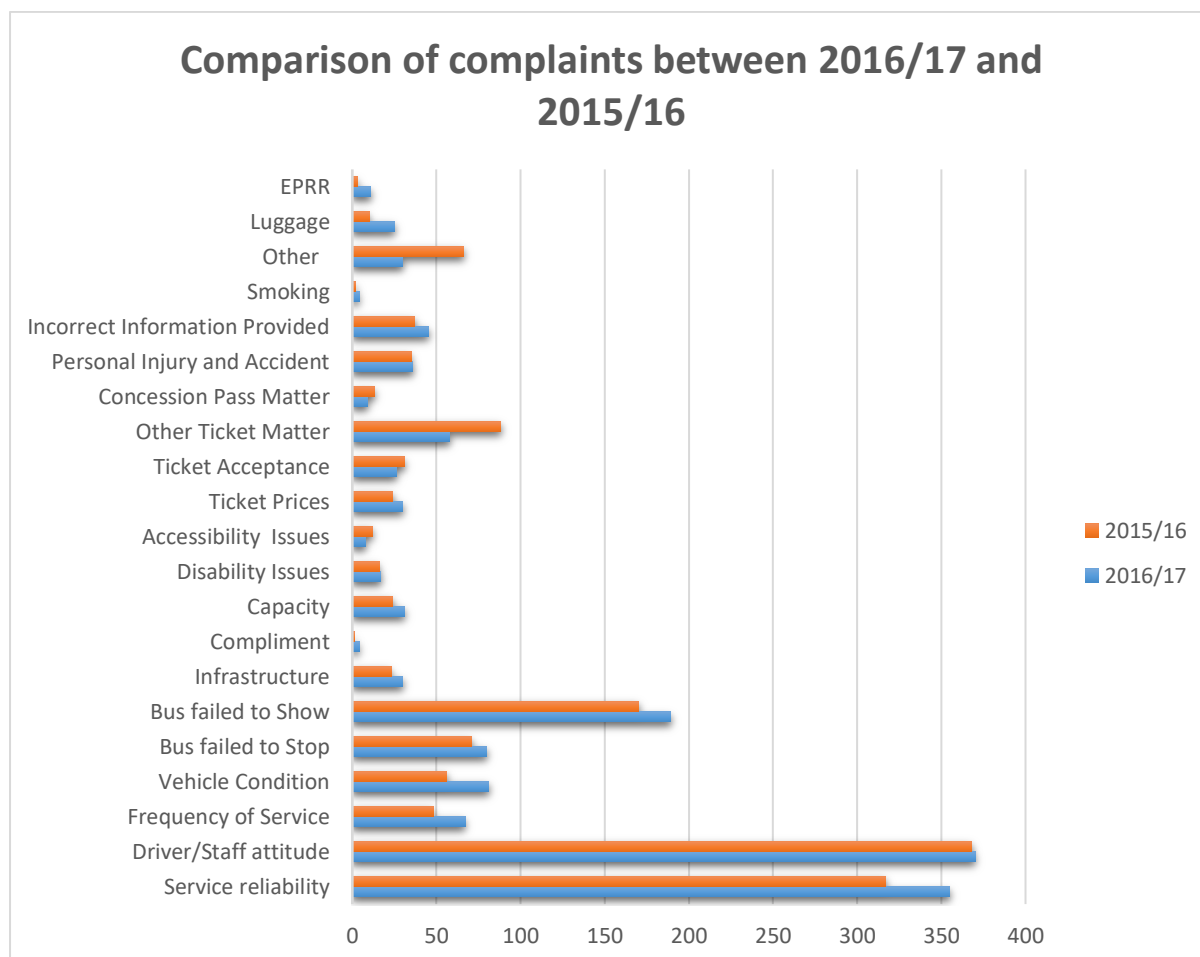
- Over 1,500 complaints were handled by Bus Users England in 2016/17. The biggest areas of complaint were driver/staff attitude and service reliability respectively
- We held 16 Your Bus Matters events across the country. New approaches were tested this year including on-bus route discussions
- More than 1,100 individuals had their say about local bus issues at meetings and events organised by Bus Users England
- Two former Bus User groups have now opted to become Branches as outlined and agreed at our AGM in Birmingham in September 2016
- Nine submissions were made to local authority consultations, ensuring local voices and opinions were heard
- 12 media campaigns were run highlighting the loss of local services, an increase on the previous year
- Three new partnerships were created
- A Bus Users UK AGM was organised and hosted in Birmingham in September
- The profile of the England team continues to rise, with invitations to make presentations at events and participate in radio and TV interviews
- A full England team is now in place delivering on the objectives set out in our Strategic Plan.

## Complaints

In 2016/17, 1,506 complaints were handled by the Bus Users England team with concerns covering a range of issues. As in previous years, driver/staff attitude continues to attract the greatest number of complaints, closely followed by service reliability.

In 2016/17, however, the gap between the two largest categories shrunk significantly, with service reliability attracting over 350 complaints, suggesting this is an area of increasing concern for passengers. There was also been an increase in the number of complaints relating to buses failing to show, which could be linked to service reliability and concerns around congestion.

The table below shows a breakdown of complaints received in 2016/2017 compared to 2015/2016.



In 2016/17 we saw a marked increase in the number of cases relating to the European Passenger Rights Regulation, demonstrating a slow but steadily increasing awareness of the legislation. Overall, complaints regarding ticketing appear to be in decline, despite a slight increase in complaints relating to ticket prices.

Bus Users England keeps operators updated with monthly reports of the summary data collected through our complaints handling system.

## **Your Bus Matters**

Our Your Bus Matters events give passengers an opportunity to talk to bus operators and local authority representatives about their concerns regarding bus services in their communities.

During 2016/17, Bus Users England ran 16 events, covering the breadth of England from Maidstone to Plymouth and from Workington to Newcastle upon Tyne.

Your Bus Matters events are arranged in partnership with local stakeholders – the various bus operators and relevant local authorities - at a place that can easily be accessed by members of the public so they can speak directly with the people responsible for running their bus services. They are an effective way to assess the impact of proposed changes in service provision, and to monitor changes that have already taken place. Locations are selected in response to a specific complaint or a sudden increase in complaints, either identified through our own data or via an operator or partner alerting us. We also visit areas where the local authority is carrying out a consultation on changes or cuts to services or funding.

Holding these events in the local community makes it easier to engage with local people, both passengers and non-passengers, and encourage them to share their views on local services. The events are informal and while many people raise concerns about bus services, many others tell us how happy they are with their service or operator, and we make sure that all feedback is passed on. The response we get from our partners for hosting Your Bus Matters events is extremely positive, with many telling us how well received the event was and what a great opportunity it has been for people to have their views heard.

The concerns that are raised generally reflect the type of complaints we receive at Bus Users England, and relate predominantly to service reliability and driver/staff attitude. As we are often in areas where a change or decline in service is being experienced or about to be implemented, this is invariably the issue of greatest concern for the customers and communities there.

Speaking to people locally enables us to challenge both local and national policy on issues such as proof-of-age cards and whether it is time to consider a standard national policy of young people's ticketing.

## **Branches**

Following the membership vote last summer and our AGM in September 2016, we are now offering passengers and groups new ways of working with Bus Users as non-fee paying supporters, branches and affiliates. We have been working closely with everyone concerned to make sure we find the best way to implement these changes and as a result, two of our former groups have already agreed to become branches. We look forward to many more groups – new and old - coming on board.

Our network of local branches is fundamental to everything we do at Bus Users England. With a unique understanding of the issues facing the communities they represent, these groups often act as a regional voice for Bus Users UK and work with us to champion the interests of passengers, share information, ideas and expertise and provide support to address the concerns of the local community.

If you would like to know more about developing a branch in your area, or find out how your group could become a branch, then please get in touch.

## Partnership Working

Partnership working remains a key focus for Bus Users England and we continue to identify ways to grow new partnerships and build on existing ones.

With the Buses Bill looming large in a lot of our work last year, we maintained regular contact with the Department for Transport. Throughout the design and consultation process of the Bill we worked hard to ensure that the legislation will, in fact, bring about the positive changes it promised for passengers, which we believe can only be achieved with the involvement of both bus users and non-bus users.

With the anticipated passing of the Buses Bill Act in 2017, we worked closely with Local Authorities, Combined Authorities and Passenger Transport Executives as they began to look at their own areas and the future of transport provision. As a result, we are now part of a number of committees and groups, including Transport for West Midlands and Derbyshire County Council, looking at bus and transport strategies.

As well as working with partners in the industry, we have been working extensively with the voluntary sector including Anxiety UK, Bipolar UK and Time to Change, on ways to support bus users with mental health issues. We have also been working with the Northern Youth Parliament, learning more about young people's concern about transport and bus travel.

Throughout 2016/17 we have been busy building on the good working relationships we have with operators at all levels to ensure that complaints are handled correctly and that the rights and interests of passengers are upheld. The big five operators in England receive monthly reports from Bus Users England outlining the complaints we have handled in partnership with them. We will continue to develop our partnership working in the coming year.

## The Year Ahead

The changes, challenges and hard work of 2016/17 has paid off for Bus Users England, helping to create solid foundations for our activities in 2017/18.

Complaints handling will, as ever, be a priority as we move forward in our role as the industry's dedicated Alternative Dispute Resolution body, and we will maintain dialogue with bus and coach operators to share best practice and improve standards in bus travel for everyone.

We will continue our work to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard in all arenas, and at all levels, particularly with the Buses Bill now legislation, and we will seek to ensure that the rights of the passenger are recognised and upheld.

## England Team

Dawn Badminton-Capps	England Director
Susan Dawson	Events Manager
Victoria Walker	Programme Manager
Dave Fairey	Administrator/Complaints Handler
David Gray	Administrator/Complaints Handler

I would like to thank all the staff at Bus Users UK who have continued to support the development of the England team whilst still delivering on our core activities. Thank you also to my staff at Bus Users England, who have worked tirelessly this year to ensure that we continue to deliver on our promises and grow into an ever-stronger and more collegiate team.

**Dawn Badminton-Capps**  
**Director for Bus Users England**