



Bus Users
Working for passengers

England Annual Report 2015/16

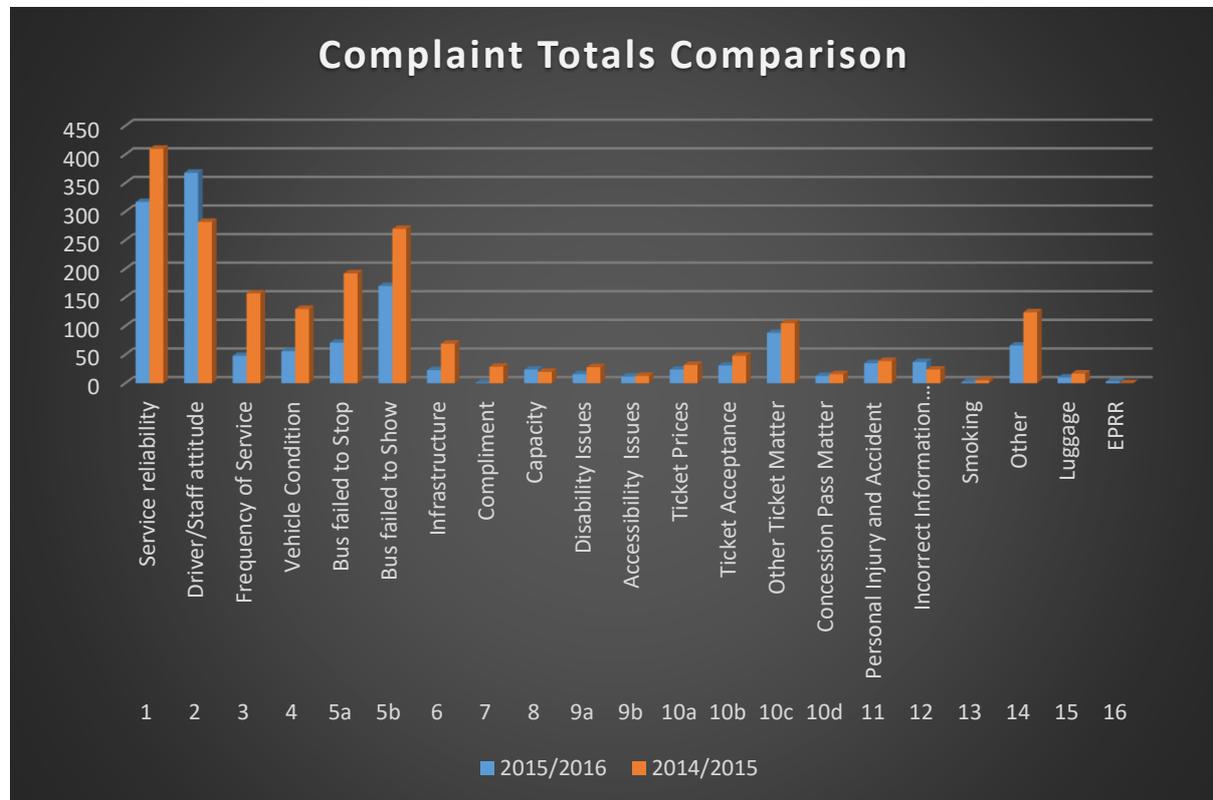
Highlights

- Over 1,415 complaints were handled by the team in 2015/16. The biggest areas of complaint were driver/staff attitude closely followed by service reliability
- 32 Your Bus Matters events were held across England
- More than 1,600 people had their say about local bus services at meetings and events organised by Bus Users England and 6 new groups were established
- 13 submissions were made to local authority consultations, ensuring local voices and opinions are heard
- 8 media campaigns were run highlighting the loss of local services
- 3 new partnerships were created
- Bus Users profile raised the existence of a dedicated England team
- A new England office was established

Complaints

1,415 complaints were handled by the team this year from 944 individual complainants. Concerns covered a whole range of issues with driver/staff attitude receiving the highest number of complaints followed by service reliability. This is a change from the previous year when service reliability received the highest number of complaints.

The table below shows the comparison of complaints received against the previous year.



It should be noted that the reporting period from which the data was collected for 2014/15 covered 15 months.

Ticket-related issues appear to be attracting relatively low levels of complaint, suggesting that operators have made some improvements.

Summary data collected through our complaints handling system is shared with operators at Board level in the form of a monthly report.

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 2015/16, Bus Users England arranged 32 events, covering the breadth of England from Norwich to Ormskirk and Bridport to Redcar.

Your Bus Matters events are arranged in partnership with local stakeholders – the various bus operators and relevant local authorities, at a place which can easily be accessed by members of the

public in order to share their views. They are an effective way to assess the impact of proposed changes in service provision and to monitor changes that have already taken place, with locations selected in response to a specific complaint or a sudden increase in complaints, or in an area where the local authority is holding a consultation about changes or cuts to services or funding.

Holding the event in the local community makes it much easier to engage with both bus users and non-bus users and to understand what their feelings are regarding local services. The events are set up in an informal manner, allowing a variety of people to share their views. It is important to note that many individuals tell us they are happy with their service or bus operator, feedback we ensure the bus operator hears.



The main issues raised at our events reflect what we hear through our complaints and relate to service reliability and driver/staff attitudes, as well as changes to routes or services.

The events are also an opportunity for bus users to challenge local policy, for example the need for registered disabled people to renew their bus pass every year or having forms printed on coloured paper to assist people with dyslexia. All feedback is shared with the stakeholders and, wherever possible, a response is given to the individual bus user who raised the issue.

It is anticipated that an increasing number of Your Bus Matters will be needed in 2016/17 as ever-shrinking local authority budgets place growing pressure on funding subsidised services.

Groups

We continue to rely on the local knowledge and expertise of Bus User groups to support our activities and provide valuable, strategic input when problems arise in their areas.

As so many areas face funding cuts and changes to their services, a growing number of passengers are concerned that their voice is not being heard. In 2015/16, six new groups in England joined Bus Users UK, either as new groups responding to a local issue or existing groups who have been made aware of our work through our local campaigning.



During the year, we consulted with Bus User groups about the best way to work with them in future, and how we might provide them with more support. As a result of this work, groups will now have the option to work with Bus Users UK in two ways: as an affiliate where they remain independent but continue to share some of the aims of Bus Users, or as a local branch, working more closely with Bus Users and receiving additional support. Resources will be made available to all groups and anyone wanting more information should contact the England office.

Partnership Working

One of the key aims of setting up a Bus Users England team was to focus on England partnership working and profile-raising. We have approached this in a number of ways, meeting with organisations that represent constituencies with a clear requirement for bus travel, and taking a broader perspective when responding to local authority consultations, opening new lines of communication and strengthening existing ones.

We have been in regular contact with the Department for Transport, raising a wide range of issues and concerns affecting passengers and ensuring those concerns are built into the forthcoming Buses Bill and accompanying guidance. We have also supported the Guide Dogs for the Blind campaign to ensure that all buses are equipped with full audio-visual information options.

A strong relationship has been established with ATCO (Association of Transport Coordinating Officers), so that Bus Users England can make local authorities aware of our presence and the ways

in which we can support them in protecting subsidised bus services during this time of public funding austerity.

Building strong local authority links as well as relationships with Passenger Transport Executives is of particular importance in areas opting for devolution. Bus Users England has been working hard to establish those connections, to ensure that passengers are at the forefront of the planning and delivery of public transport and that their voices are heard.

As well as working with partners in the industry, we have been working with partners in the voluntary sector, such as the Intergeneration Foundation, on ways in which we can support each other's work. We were also able to recruit the first ever Youth Ambassador to Bus Users UK, Ella Beevers, following our attendance at the Northern Bus Summit.

Throughout 2015/16 we have been busy building good working relationships with all operators at all levels to ensure that complaints are handled correctly and that the rights and interests of passengers are protected.

We will continue to develop our partnership working in the coming year.

The Year Ahead

2016/17 will be another busy year for Bus Users England as we continue to grow as a team and build on the work started in 2015/16, against a backdrop of central and local political uncertainty.

We will carry on our work to make the bus user's voice heard in the forthcoming Buses Bill and we will seek to ensure that passengers are included in the process of devolution.

Complaints handling will, as ever, be a priority and we will maintain dialogue with bus and coach operators to share best practice and improve standards in bus travel for everyone.

A lot has been achieved this year and we now have a solid foundation on which to support the work of Bus Users UK as the passengers' champion.

England Team

Dawn Badminton-Capps	England Director
Susan Dawson	Events Manager
Claire Mantle	Administrator/Complaints Handler
Jessica Heaven	Administrator/Complaints Handler

I would like to thank all the staff at Bus Users who have worked tirelessly in helping us to establish the new England team whilst still delivering on our core activities. Thanks must also be extended to colleagues in other countries for their support, their knowledge and their expertise.

Dawn Badminton-Capps