The waiting game
But how late is ‘late’?
Bus Users UK AGM in Edinburgh

The 2014 Annual General Meeting of Bus Users UK is being held in Edinburgh on Saturday 17 May. The venue is the Augustine United Church on George IV Bridge in the city centre, and details of the arrangements are included with this issue of Bus User.

An interesting day is planned in this beautiful city, and we hope as many members as possible will come to Scotland for this event. In addition to the formal AGM business, there will be opportunities for members to speak for ‘Just a Minute’ on bus-related matters that concern them, and there will be senior representatives from the Scottish bus industry to talk about what they are achieving. Following the AGM there will be an opportunity to see something of Edinburgh’s history and transport developments.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users UK, said: ‘We are glad to be celebrating our increased presence in Scotland by holding the AGM in this wonderful city for the first time.’

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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

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Once again our Annual General meeting is approaching and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in Edinburgh on Saturday 17 May. This has been an exciting year for Bus Users, as the strategy you helped us develop is being put into place. One highlight of the year of course was the establishment of Bus Users Scotland and the opening of our new office in Edinburgh, so it’s particularly appropriate that we should hold our AGM there this year. Thanks are due to our Edinburgh office manager Patrycja Kwapiszewska who is doing much of the groundwork to organise the AGM alongside our usual team.

Joan Aitken, the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, has agreed to speak at the AGM, and Lothian Buses will also be providing a speaker. Following the meeting there will be a short tour of Edinburgh by bus. If you have never been to Edinburgh – it is a fine city to visit. I’m sure many of our members will make a weekend of it. One important task for the AGM is the election of directors. Our board comprises three directors, myself, Jeff Anderson as vice-chair and Tracy Jessop of Norfolk County Council, who was elected last year and has brought valuable fresh insights to us.

The Board is responsible for the strategic oversight of Bus Users UK, helping us to focus more effectively. We are also responsible for developing policy issues, and you can find some of our policy papers on the new website: more will follow in due course. It’s also up to us as a board to ensure we have robust financial management in place, to provide risk assessments and to ensure that the organisation continues to develop in an effective and structured way.

I’m particularly pleased to see the new Bus Users website up and running. It is a project I’ve personally been very keen to see developing, as it gives us a fresh and vibrant new look. As well as giving greater functionality and making it much easier for the public to find us and make complaints about bus services, it promotes us as the truly 21st century organisation we aspire to be. It should also bring us new members and help us to be truly representative of bus users everywhere. The website is also a starting point for us to increase our support for our local groups, which are so vital to the work we do, by enabling them to promote themselves and supporting them with materials etc. We will be developing the web-based support we give to local groups further, and we will be looking to support them with another local groups day later in the year.

We are concerned about the plans by a number of local authorities to reduce their funding for bus services: indeed at least two county councils have threatened to stop funding bus services altogether. Local Authorities are proposing to cut more than £20million off supported bus services this year across the country, twice what was cut in 2013. We have made our case known, particularly in Worcestershire and Cumbria, the two counties threatening to drop bus service funding altogether, and I asked our Chief Executive to sign a letter from various agencies reminding the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne that buses are excellent value for money. Bus commuters help generate over £64billion of economic output and every £1 of public investment in buses provides between £3 and £5 of wider benefits to local economies and social and environmental wellbeing.

On a more positive note, we are supporting Greener Journeys’ Catch the Bus Week initiative on 28 April-4 May. Greener Journeys point out that if everyone replaced just one car journey a month with a trip on the bus, we’d have a billion fewer car journeys a year. Catch the Bus Week features a number of local initiatives to remind people of the benefit of bus services and encourage them to give it a try. We are working closely with Greener Journeys on this initiative, and 2014’s event will be much higher profile than the pilot event staged last year.
www.e have a new website!

Even if you’ve not been on Bus Users’ website for a bit you will hopefully have noticed from this issue of the magazine that we have a whole new look.

Bus Users has come a long way since we were formed as the National Federation of Bus Users in 1985. We changed our name to Bus Users UK in 2006, with a new image to go with it, and now we are growing more quickly as an organisation. We’re becoming higher profile, serving more bus users and getting more official recognition. So it’s been time to refresh the way we present ourselves to the outside world.

First of all, we need to say a big thank you to FWT, one of the leading companies in producing publicity materials for bus companies. For the last 10 years or so they have very kindly given us our website free of charge. But as websites become more elaborate and sophisticated so has our need for something altogether more exciting and contemporary, something that could no longer be supplied on a ‘grace and favour’ basis.

FWT have been very helpful in helping us through the transition, but decided not to tender to give us a new website. Our tendering process led us to an Edinburgh-based agency, Whitespace, who were able to give us what we wanted in terms of a website with much more functionality and had the design skills to give Bus Users a makeover.

The process began in earnest at last year’s AGM. We had a few roughs of potential new logos and asked for your input. One logo that combined the b and u of Bus Users, was the one the largest number of people liked. From that rudimentary beginning Whitespace developed our new look. Logos were tweaked, other ideas were played with and discarded until eventually we agreed the new logo and new style you can see in this issue of Bus User. And bit by bit, we are rolling out replacement leaflets, banners for Your Bus Matters events and other items that reflect our new image.

The website itself has been very well-received, both for its stylish good looks and for its ease of use. Now for the first time you can use our website to lodge a complaint with us; an easy-to-use interactive page takes you through the process. We can’t handle complaints in London or Northern Ireland and we only handle complaints once the bus company has tried to resolve it. So when you come to our site with your complaint we take you through the process step by step. If you’re in London or Northern Ireland we give you links to London Travelwatch or Northern Ireland Consumer Council websites. If you’ve not been to the bus company, we give you links to help you find the right website so you can complain direct to the bus company. And if you still need to put your complaint through us, you can then input all your details and the details of the complaint, which automatically links into our own complaint handling system. And if you wish, you can conduct the entire transaction in Welsh.
There’s also a nice picture of a tranquil rural scene on the complaints page which is intended to calm your ragged nerves as you vent your spleen on us.

Another new feature of the site is pages for local groups. If you go to the local groups part of the site you can input your postcode or town and it will find the nearest local bus users group to where you live. Local groups will be able to post news and events on their pages, and you can contact your local group directly through the site. Once you’ve selected your local group, that group will come up automatically for you in future, but if you want to find out what other groups are up to that’s fine, you can either put in a different postcode or ask it to show you all the groups and select the one you want.

A news and events section enables us to keep you up to date with what’s going on around the country and where and when events are being held. Previously putting anything new on the site was quite an involved process but now some of our staff have been trained in the Content Management System so we can update news and events much more easily and generally keep the site up to date.

There are also some downloadable materials on there. You can download back numbers of *Bus User*, or you can see what we’ve said in consultations. You can also download the annual report, policy papers and publications such as our Good Practice Guide. And there is a host of information in our Frequently Asked Questions, so you can find out about concessionary fares, how the bus industry works, why it’s different in London and plenty more. We will add to the publications and Frequently Asked Questions as time goes on.

There will also be areas that members can visit to download materials; we’ll be letting members have usernames and passwords to enable them to access materials. The site will also carry details of any campaigns we’re embarking on; and you can expect to see more of those from now on. We’re also enabling people to support us without actually committing to full membership: the more members we have the greater will be our influence.

If you have internet access do go and have a look; the web address is www.bususers.org and there are Scottish and Welsh variants on www.bususers.org/Scotland, www.bususers.org/wales and, for the Welsh language version, www.bususers.org/cymru. We hope you like what you see: a dynamic organisation, fit for purpose and fit for the 21st century!

We won’t rest on our laurels: the site will continue to develop and more items will be added to it. And Whitespace have also developed a new website for the Bus Appeals Body; though much simpler it too has a clean and contemporary new look. You can view it on www.busappealsbody.co.uk.  

Spring 2014  Bus User
Brian Nye who has campaigned tirelessly for better bus services in York, was recently honoured by Bus Users.

A committed volunteer, Brian has made an extraordinary contribution to bus travel in York. Over the past 30 years, his work alongside organisations like Bus Users has helped to ensure that local bus services continue to meet the needs of the community.

Bus Users wanted to recognise the time and energy that Brian has dedicated to his work.

Chief Executive of Bus Users, Claire Walters, visited York to thank Brian in person and present him with a framed certificate and a year’s free membership of Bus Users.

Claire said: ‘Brian has been a relentless campaigner for local bus users in York and we are extremely grateful for the tremendous work he’s done on their behalf.’

‘Sadly but understandably, after 30 years as a volunteer Brian has decided to pass on the baton and we’re now looking forward to building on his achievements and working with the people of York to give them the bus services they deserve.’

Brian himself has been genuinely surprised by the recognition: ‘I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my association with the bus operators and Bus Users over the years, and I’m just happy to have had this experience.’

The Bus Appeals Body, which reviews complaints arising from the operation of local bus and scheduled coach services, has made new appointments to its membership.

Chris Heaps has been appointed Chair, in succession to Lord Peter Snape who held the position for four years. Chris is a former Traffic Commissioner with a strong legal background. He has held a number of advisory roles across the transport industry including passenger representative bodies.

Roger French OBE has been appointed as Operator Representative. He replaces Dennis Flower who was a founding member of the Bus Appeals Body. Roger is a well-known and highly respected member of the bus industry, who until his retirement last year was Managing Director of the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach Company overseeing the operation of buses in the area for 30 years.

Bus Users will continue to represent the passengers, as well as providing administrative support to the Bus Appeals Body.

Gillian Merron, Chair of Bus Users and Simon Posner, Chief Executive of the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) both expressed their thanks to Lord Snape and Dennis Flower for their time and commitment to the Bus Appeals Body. Lord Snape and Dennis Flower approached their roles with sensitivity and fairness, and maintained the very highest levels of impartiality and professionalism.
New Scottish Appeals Body

**Bus Users Scotland** has set up the Bus Appeals Body Scotland, sister organisation to the well-established Bus Appeals Body. This will consider complaints that have not been resolved through the normal processes, and replaces Bus Passengers’ Platform, which carried out this role for Transport Scotland over several years.

Convener of the Scottish body is Ian Longair, who has a distinguished background in education, spending 29 years at Abertay University as a lecturer, senior lecturer and divisional leader in Engineering. Since 2008 he has been a lay member partner with NHS Education Scotland, is a director and company secretary for The Brae Riding for the Disabled charity in Dundee and an associate lecturer with the Open University. Ian was a panel member on Bus Passengers’ Platform (BPP) from 2009 until it was superseded in 2013 by Bus Appeals Body Scotland.

Representing the bus industry is John Elliot, who has spent 49 years ‘on the buses’ in various roles from bus conductor to managing director and is a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. For the past 12 years John has been Chief Executive of Traveline Scotland. He is also Chair of One Ticket Ltd and advises CPT Scotland on economic aspects of Concessionary fare reimbursement. He was also the first convener of the Public Transport Users Committee (Scotland).

Bus Users Scotland will continue to represent the passengers, as well as providing administrative support to the Scottish body.

Time to get out and about

With spring in the air, it’s time to get out and explore Britain by bus. Nicky Gardner and Susanne Kries have released a second compendium of favourite British bus journeys. *Bus-Pass Britain Rides Again* was published by Bradt Travel Guides last autumn. As with their earlier book in 2011, Susanne and Nicky have worked with some four dozen members of the public, all keen bus users, to map the best of Britain as seen from the top deck of a bus. Many contributors to the project are readers of *Bus User*.

The mix of routes in the 2013 volume is more adventurous than in the first book. *Bus-Pass Britain Rides Again* complements a classic diet of rural rides with some grittier urban explorations. And there is an especially good selection of journeys that go to the very nerve ends of Britain. You’ll catch that “end of civilisation” feeling on the bus that runs up to the northern end of Jura or on the service that terminates at Hushinish on the Isle of Harris (in the Outer Hebrides).

The book has a wider selection of London journeys than the first volume. And the authors and editors have a knack of discerning interest, even beauty, in unsung suburbs. The list price of *Bus-Pass Britain Rides Again* is £14.99. Find out more at www.webhe.eu/bpbra.

Your Bus Matters venues

Your Bus Matters events over the next few months are planned for Aberystwyth (29 March), Dolgellau (29 March), Glasgow, Livingston, Manchester, Oswestry, Stirling and Telford. The new Bus Users website (www.bususers.org) will provide more details when these are available.
Local authorities in England are once again turning their attention to public transport budgets to help them meet tough Government targets for reducing their expenditure.

Local councils are being put in an invidious position, as grants they receive from Central Government are being cut and at the same time they are being prevented from increasing local council charges. This is resulting in large sums being shaved off their budgets. By the time they’ve met their obligations for education, housing and social services, for which they are required by Central Government to pay, there is little money left over for the ‘discretionary’ services: which include provision of public transport.

The spending round a couple of years ago saw millions wiped off budgets for socially-necessary but unprofitable local bus services, though the effects on bus users were reduced to some extent anyway as they were soaked up by increases in efficiency and by bus companies trying to keep some services going.

There is further pressure on local authorities; according to the LGA (the Local Government Association), Government funding for concessionary fares has fallen by £261m, or 39%, since 2010. Nearly one-third of all bus journeys are made on concessionary passes and councils have to find the money to reimburse bus operators. This in turn has further reduced the funds available for other services.

More cuts coming?
It is inevitable that more cuts are in the pipeline, and it seems highly likely that they will bite more deeply this time: there is little ‘fat’ left to cushion us against the impact of the cuts.

Campaign for Better Transport has identified major reductions in funding in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, North Yorkshire, Dorset, Essex and Nottinghamshire. Of greatest concern however are Worcestershire and Cumbria, which are both proposing to eliminate subsidy for local bus services altogether.

We have responded to the consultation in both counties – that in Worcestershire elicited 8,500 responses, such that the whole process has had to be delayed to enable the council to assimilate all the responses. Worcestershire isn’t a huge county: its population is around 570,000, so a response that largely shows the depth of feeling. As well as responding to the consultation we took part in a debate on BBC Radio Hereford & Worcester and commented again later in a news broadcast.

It seems that whole towns could end up virtually devoid of bus services; Pershore and Upton in the case of Worcestershire will be left with virtually nothing, as will some of the housing estates in the more urban parts of the county, and the rather remote West Cumbrian town of Millom is also threatened with even greater isolation.

In both cases we have questioned whether the councils are actually meeting their obligations under the 1985 Transport Act. Although rather vague, the...
Act does confer on county councils, unitary authorities and Integrated Transport Authorities a duty to procure services where the commercial market is unable to provide services. While it is up to the local authorities to decide where those places are that should have a bus service, it seems highly unlikely that all social need has disappeared in those two counties, which have large rural areas and towns that struggle economically.

In Worcestershire our questioning of that particular situation was reinterpreted by the local press as us saying they were actually breaking the law, which caused quite a few feathers to be ruffled in the council chamber.

You can download the full responses to both consultations from the publications section of our website, www.bususers.org/publications.

In another response to the cuts, East Yorkshire, the important Hull-based bus operator, plans to close its Driffield depot following news that East Riding of Yorkshire Council is to cut £240,000 from its concessionary travel budget. The company chairman, Peter Shipp, says that cuts in the fuel duty grant, paid to bus operators since the 1960s, has reduced EY income by £600,000 each year since 2012 and the company cannot absorb these funding cuts without taking fairly serious action.

### BUSES in numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5bn</strong></td>
<td>The number of journeys made by bus a year in Great Britain, with 1bn to or from work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1,245</strong></td>
<td>The number of bus companies operating in England, Scotland and Wales.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.5m</strong></td>
<td>The number of people who commute to work by bus – a further 1 million use bus as a back-up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20%</strong></td>
<td>Of working-age population outside of London use buses at least once a week.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7,500</strong></td>
<td>The number of iconic red buses managed by London Buses. They carry more than six million passengers each weekday.</td>
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Source: Greener Journeys

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**Concern over cuts in Wales**

Meanwhile Welsh Government is also cutting its reimbursement rate for concessionary fares from 73.59% of the average cash fare to 64%. This comes on top of the reduction in Regional Transport Services Grant as from 1 April 2013.

Cardiff Bus, one of the biggest bus companies in Wales, has announced it will be making cuts to most of its services from 20 April with an estimated loss of around 80 jobs; across Wales it is estimated that 10% of all buses on the road could be taken out of service.

Our Senior Officer for Wales Margaret Everson, is ‘extremely concerned’ to hear the warnings made by bus operators about funding cuts in the wake of the cut in Welsh Government funding for concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people. ‘Cuts in services will make connections with other services more difficult, affecting accessibility to towns and cities without direct services. The impact will particularly fall on rural areas and will reduce access to employment for people who do not have their own transport or who are looking for work’, she says.

Once again things are looking grim for people off the main bus corridors. For many there is no ‘plan B’, for ‘public transport’ read ‘bus’, and the withdrawal of services leaves many without a sustainable alternative, and some with no means of accessing essential services whatsoever. BU
The consumer magazine Which? recently published a valuable guide to how to get a complaint resolved and how social media is shaking up customer service, following interviews with more than 2,000 people.

The results offer some tips that might help bus users get more satisfactory responses from bus companies. The survey showed that email is now the most popular method to make a complaint, because there is no cost and there is of course a record of sending the email, but suggests that for overall satisfaction, consumers might consider complaining in person, which offers immediate results because ‘they can’t fob you off because you are actually there’.

Some people complain by letter because they want to be taken seriously; others use Facebook or Twitter hoping they will publicly embarrass the company they are complaining about. Some transport providers, including a number of major bus companies, have social media teams in their control rooms to provide real-time information to passengers on delays and incidents, which may well reduce the number of complaints received.

Which? reported that some experts think social media will change customer service dramatically over the next few years, but it seems likely that many will still prefer to use more traditional methods to complain.

Although 36% of those surveyed by Which? said that email or a website was the most popular method of complaining, it was not regarded as the most satisfying method – complaining in person topped the list. Using a phone to complain was the next most popular method of complaining (28%) then letter (14%) and in person (12%).

Which? offered these tips to get the best results from complaints:

- **Contact the company directly, in writing for serious complaints.**
- **Use an alternative dispute resolution service/ ombudsman (such as the one offered by Bus Users) where a company has failed to resolve a complaint in the normal way.**

While not all of this will be relevant for bus and coach complaints, it is useful advice if you have a problem and would like to see it resolved quickly and effectively. And Bus Users would add that a measured tone gets you a lot further than showing your anger, and you will probably get a better response if you complain about one problem at a time. You should keep a careful record of when things were said or offered, whether you are complaining by phone, by email or in person. This can speed the whole process of resolving your complaint.

We are making it easier for bus users to complain with the pages on our new www.bususers.org website that guides members through the whole process.
Among the messages that should be promoted are:

- Bus travel is good for your health and wellbeing – it’s a third less stressful to commute by bus than by car. The bus helps support local communities and brings people together as buses help improve accessibility for the young, elderly and those on a low income.

- The bus can be an effective mode of transport for everyone, whether they are travelling to school, work or leisure activities – it brings communities together and helps local economies to thrive by connecting people who don’t have regular access shops and services.

- The bus is good value for me and everyone else – more people commute by bus than all other forms of public transport combined, and bus users generate £64 billion of benefits to the UK economy.

- It’s greener to get about by bus – buses are a cost-effective way to cut carbon emissions and reduce traffic congestion, reducing the carbon footprint from transport and improving local air quality. If everyone switched just one car journey a month to bus that would be one billion fewer car journeys on our roads, and a saving of two million tonnes of CO₂.

Catch the Bus Week brings campaigns together from across the country under one umbrella to raise awareness about the benefits of the bus and to encourage people to change some of their journeys and get on a bus, and it’s a fun initiative, which could lead to long-term travel change.

Catch the Bus Week

Bus Users is supporting this year’s Catch the Bus Week, which is taking place between 28 April and 4 May. Bus users and groups can help to spread the message locally and help promote the idea that travelling by bus can be an effective and less stressful way to travel.
Bus Users has welcomed a new scheme by The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT UK) to help passengers with hidden disabilities. Journey Assistant Cards will be made available to passengers via local bus operators following discussion with local disability groups and individual passengers. The Cards are not a ticket to travel, but when presented to the driver the Cards indicate that the passenger requires specific assistance.
Journey Assistant Cards have the potential to remove a real barrier to bus use and to open up a whole range of opportunities to people who currently find travel difficult. The scheme demonstrates the industry’s awareness of the difficulty some people with disabilities experience when travelling by bus, particular where those disabilities are ‘hidden’, such as deafness or learning difficulties. Journey Assistant Cards will enable those passengers to obtain help from drivers without drawing attention to their condition.

Welcoming the new scheme, Claire Walters of Bus Users said: ‘Bus services are a lifeline to many people, but especially so for people with hidden disabilities’.

Simon Posner, CPT’s Chief Executive Officer said his organisation is keen to help the industry to do all it can to ensure its services are fully accessible. ‘I am encouraging our member operators to sign up and take part in this important initiative’, he said. ‘I believe the Journey Assistant Cards will go a long way to helping ease the concern many people with hidden disabilities have using public transport.’

Minister of State for Transport Baroness Kramer also welcomed the Journey Assistant Card. Commending the CPT and the bus operators for developing this ‘exciting initiative’, she said that enabling bus journeys to be more accessible for customers with hidden disabilities is a ‘key part’ of the Government’s ‘disability confident’ agenda. ‘These Journey Assistant Cards will enable customers to discreetly obtain help from the bus driver relevant to their hidden disability, thereby making their bus journey a more pleasant and rewarding experience’, she said.

Bus users who feel that these cards would be useful to them should contact their local bus companies, referring to the CPT initiative.
At Bus Users we know from our work on complaints that many passengers are unhappy with the punctuality and reliability of their bus services. Passenger Focus carried out focus group discussions and individual ‘depth’ interviews with bus passengers in Hertfordshire, Devon, Manchester and Leeds recently, speaking to a range of passengers making frequent and infrequent trips and using the bus for different journey purposes. Eight in-depth interviews were undertaken with passengers with a disability.

Their findings are, perhaps, not entirely surprising but with new statutory guidance being put together the research helps everyone to understand what people think of bus punctuality and timetable information – and what they want in future.

So what did the research find? That perceptions of punctuality are largely determined by their experience of lateness at the stop where they got on the bus and that delays in arrival at the destination are considered differently; when passengers are already in transit, anxiety and frustration tend to be lower. When buses are cancelled this is frustrating, but cancellations are not normally considered in terms of punctuality unless they happen a lot.

Much depends on the type of service, so passengers using services that operate to a fixed timetable, with each bus scheduled to arrive at a particular time, deliberately go to the bus stop early to make sure they do not miss their bus. They measure whether the bus is early or late against the timetable, and have more of an expectation that this information will be accurate.

Passengers using ‘turn-up-and-go’ services like the frequent services found in many urban areas, go to the bus stop expecting a bus to come in the next few minutes rather than at a set time. These passengers tend to have less of an idea of when buses are running late.

Passengers in the research said that they do not expect ‘perfection’ in terms of punctuality and will accept some flexibility, through windows of tolerance – however, passengers’ tolerance is not unlimited. They expect their goodwill to be rewarded, in terms of good service from bus operators and drivers. This involves trying hard to be punctual, improving where there are issues and providing good communication to help passengers with their bus travel.

And what about timetables?

Not all passengers use timetables all the time, but they might be consulted for journeys they make irregularly, for journeys that might already be familiar but at a new time or completely new journeys on unfamiliar routes or in unfamiliar areas.
Passengers largely agreed that timetables should provide a relatively high degree of detail that gives the most amount of information an individual might require. And they are happy to see more complex schedules to get information that is more accurate. They prefer this to a simple, easy-to-remember timetable that does not reflect traffic patterns and is less accurate.

If timetables are not accurate, at best passenger travel experience is frustrating, with more waiting and longer journey times than anticipated. At worst, it is highly stressful (for example, for passengers with disabilities that make travelling difficult) or resulting in significant negative impact for the passenger (for example, missing other travel connections or lateness resulting in loss or penalty).

How late is ‘late’?

Passengers generally consider it acceptable for buses to arrive at their stop of departure up to five minutes after the scheduled time, whether the service is frequent or scheduled (and irrespective of interval). Five minutes waiting time is the threshold after which satisfaction with punctuality decreases markedly. When passengers have to wait six to nine minutes for their bus, satisfaction falls considerably (87% of passengers are satisfied with a wait time of five minutes, compared to 77% when waiting between six and nine minutes). A similar drop in satisfaction can be seen for those passengers waiting 10 minutes.

For more frequent services, particularly ‘turn-up-and-go’ services, passengers consider it acceptable for buses to depart from a stop early. This is because the impact on the passenger is relatively limited should they miss the bus and there is a potential gain to them if they are able to catch a bus that arrives early.

By contrast, for buses operating at less frequent intervals (particularly those operating to a fixed timetable and over 20 minutes apart), passengers feel it is unacceptable for buses to leave stops early. This is because the impact on the passenger of missing the bus is felt to be more significant than waiting at stops whilst on the journey (since for the latter, the bus is still running as per the schedule).

Passengers tend to tolerate more delay in getting to their arrival stop – they see it as a delay to the journey rather than a late bus. Regardless of which type of service they are using, when they are on a bus and in transit, passengers say they are tolerant because they can typically see the cause of the problem. They understand, however, that this could mean a significant impact on anyone catching the bus further along the bus route.

Keep passengers informed – and on-side

Passengers’ experience of bus travel is improved significantly when they receive information about scheduling updates and delays that assists with their journey planning, management and understanding of why problems have happened at a particular time. Channels for such information include live information panels at bus stops and potentially on buses; satisfaction with punctuality increases if there is a digital display at the stop showing when the next bus will arrive. Many passengers now receive live information through digital sources such as apps and websites and sometimes receive information about delays available from drivers.

Setting the goal

Passengers in this research felt that bus operators should aim to run all of their buses on time. They do not expect this to be achieved but they feel that this aim is likely to be necessary for operators to achieve what they feel is a good standard of delivery, around 80% punctuality.
The British bus and coach industry rose to the challenge when floods caused so much misery in parts of England in the early months of this year, but there were many stories of bus companies rising to the challenge to provide some kind of service for their passengers, many of whom would otherwise have been completely cut off.

Oxford Bus operates in a very low-lying area with two rivers and a canal running through the city, so a period of concentrated rainfall leaves it liable to flooding.

The New Year started off with quite a bit of dramatic weather – fortunately, says the company, ‘no snow but a lot of wind and an awful lot of rain’. And so it came – first in Kidlington, then the predicted...
closure of Abingdon Road. As there are only five roads in and out of Oxford, a closure of one of them puts considerable additional pressure on the bus service. This became exponentially worse when Botley Road closed, as all services through west Oxford had to take a long (and heavily congested) diversion. This in turn led to Oxfordshire County Council opening the High Street bus gate, leading to the migration of congestion to the most vital access road to central Oxford.

At its worst, services city2, city4, city35, park&ride300 and heartbeat services X3/ X13 were subject to extensive diversions, whilst neither city3 nor city5 could reach the rail station. Park&ride400 was terminating at the rail station as the Seacourt car park was closed – there was no point in servicing a lake!

Closures of sections of railway between Oxford and London boosted patronage on the X90 Oxford to London coach service as well. On this service at least, in a time of major public transport chaos across the south-east, regular passengers noticed little disruption.

‘Thanks must be given to our drivers, many of whom worked considerable extra hours in highly stressful conditions’, said Oxford Bus. ‘Perhaps most importantly, we must thank our passengers for their patience and understanding in what was an incredibly challenging few days.’

Bus companies rose to the challenge throughout the affected areas, with many providing services to replace disrupted train services. First Rail Support provided more than 1,000 coaches in the first two weeks of February, and in the Dawlish area where the main line to Cornwall was badly damaged, it was supplying 66 vehicles a day. Stagecoach also provided a fleet of over 80 buses to keep rail passengers on the South West Trains network moving.

In mid-February National Express reiterated that it was ‘open for business’ as the Transport Secretary highlighted the crucial role played by coaches in severe weather conditions.

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin welcomed the work done by National Express to support people affected by the weather early in 2014. The company had committed to add up to 20,000 extra seats on its coaches to help people affected by the unprecedented conditions that caused extensive damage to large parts of the rail network.

National Express also pledged that it would increase services – including on its standard network – in line with demand in order to help keep Britain’s transport network moving.

Five daily express services were quickly added each way between Plymouth and London in response to the closure of the line at Dawlish, reaching London or Plymouth in as little as four hours, faster than the rail replacement alternative.

Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin was reassured that the companies running

Thanks must be given to our drivers, many of whom worked considerable extra hours in highly stressful conditions the UK’s coach and bus services ‘understand the unprecedented situation we face and are working hard to do whatever is needed to keep the country moving.’ He said he was ‘delighted to hear’ that the national coach network was operating normally with no significant disruption. ‘National Express is prominent among the coach operators laying on thousands of extra seats to ease the pressure in the worst affected areas’, he concluded.

At the time, Tom Stables, Managing Director National Express UK Coach pledged to add as many seats as were needed for everyone to travel. He also promised to keep fares at their standard levels. He said: ‘We understand the impact the current weather is having on the lives of many people who are simply trying to get on with the day-to-day and would like to assure people National Express is ‘open for business’. He said that the company was committed to playing its part in alleviating the transport issues faced by tens of thousands across the UK.
Lonely bus stops

BBC’s online News Magazine asked if an isolated, slate-roofed shelter in rural Cumbria was the UK’s loneliest bus stop. Readers responded with their own alternatives and we reproduce a few here – hopefully encouraging Bus User readers to produce a few more that we could include in our next issue.

1.
On the northern edge of the North York Moors National Park sits a decaying brick shelter set ‘in splendid isolation at a road junction in the middle of nowhere’. The only houses visible from the stop are miles away, on the other side of the Dale, and anyone hoping for a ride is likely to face a long wait.

2.
Shaun the Sheep has been waiting at a desolate North York Moors stop for a year or so. Currently the stop is served by one bus service, the 26 – one bus, every other Thursday – to get to the nearest town, Guisborough, on market day. Exactly who uses the stop – at Commondale Road End – is difficult to discern. Fortunately, anyone finding themselves waiting there has options for passing the time; on a fine day, particularly when the heather is in bloom, the view is ‘stunning’, but should the rain settle in, there’s always the Shaun the Sheep graffiti to admire as the hours and days pass by.

3.
Sheep find themselves untroubled by would-be bus passengers at a bus stop on the Scottish island of Islay. The stop is outside Glenegedale Airport which has several flights a week to Glasgow, Oban and Colonsay and the sheep were able to make it their own, even though the stop is served by several buses a day – but it is apparently unusual to see a bus or passenger there.

4.
Bus stop 3300BA0497 is in the middle of beautiful woodland and parkland on a 3,800 acre National Trust property at Clumber Park, but has not seen a regular service ‘for many years’. But while there may be an absence of buses, there could be some hope of company on a rainy day as it can provide shelter to visitors who have been caught out by a passing shower whilst exploring the grounds.
Brighton Area Buswatch

Brighton Area Buswatch is pressing Brighton & Hove City Council to make progress on a new smartcard as a priority for 2014. Similar to the Oystercard in London the card would allow bus users to use one ticket on all local buses. The technology to do this is now available, and ideally the group would like to see the ticket being available on local rail services too. ‘We understand there is currently a funding issue with extending smartcard technology’, says the group. ‘While this is sorted it ought to be possible to launch it as a paper ticket.’ There are now six bus operators in the Brighton & Hove area and Brighton Area Buswatch says it should be possible to use any bus without paying separately for each journey.

Multi-operator tickets are already in use elsewhere around the country. The West Midlands Swift card is currently being rolled out across the region on buses, trains and trams, while the Oxford SmartZone card is already valid on most local bus services. The Nottingham Kangaroo ticket is a paper ticket covering travel on all buses, trams, local rail and allows free cycle hire within the city. ‘Our area used to lead the way on new tickets but now we seem to be falling behind other parts of the country’, says the group.

North West Surrey Bus Users Group

North West Surrey Bus Users Group has been actively involved in consultation with the local bus operator, Abellio Surrey. Abellio has worked closely with Surrey County Council to retain as much of the local network as possible in the light of reduced budgets, but is now having to look at making changes to the network to improve reliability and reduce costs.

The consultation period was only a week, but Abellio held meetings both with Bus Users, whose office is in the heart of their patch, and with NWSBUG, which managed to achieve some improvements. These will improve services to the area’s main hospital, St Peters at Chertsey, especially on Sundays. There will also be new late-evening journeys out of Kingston and Woking; traditionally Surrey bus users have had to go to bed very early!

‘Whatever the good and bad points of the review’, says NWSBUG’s Mark Worley, ‘it is vital that users support the new services. With ever increasing traffic hold ups and high car ownership, this is a difficult area in which to operate a viable bus service’.

Developments for Bus Users’ Groups

To reflect our plans to become more influential and better known, Bus Users UK is hoping to expand the number of local groups and support them more actively. All existing groups have recently been approached as to whether they wish to become an official Bus User Group, which will include limited financial support, a dedicated area on our new website and access to support, or they can remain an independent affiliate. With this latter status, groups can focus on their own priorities although being kept informed of our activities.

Unfortunately, many members currently do not have access to a local group. Jeff Anderson, our Vice Chair (jeff.anderson@bususers.org), would like to hear from anyone who would like to assist in the setting up of a new group. Full support will be given including kick-start funding for the likes of meeting room and promotional costs etc.
Now that holy grail really is beginning to look achievable. Government is sold on the idea, and is very keen to see electric cars beginning to flood our streets, saving the world by emitting nothing. That’s all very well, but they will do nothing to reduce congestion and there are emissions: they just occur somewhere else.

It goes without saying (doesn’t it?) that getting more people on to buses will do a lot more to alleviate congestion and pollution than lots of electric cars, but electric buses, if they can be made to work, will at least bring silent and clean transport to city streets, making public transport an even more attractive option.

Leeds is very keen on bringing back the electric trolleybus, at considerable expense, and First has countered the proposals, suggesting that London style ‘Boris buses’ could bring stylish and clean buses to the whole of the city rather than benefitting one corridor.

But Milton Keynes is claiming a first, in that the cross-city route 7, an Arriva service that runs between the older local centres of Wolverton and Bletchley, right through the heart of Milton Keynes itself, is now run by battery-electric buses.

Where battery-electric buses have been used in the past it has been on short, town centre services. Arriva’s route 7 is more interurban in nature, and the trip length is hardly short, at 15 miles. The clever bit is that at each end of the route is a large metal plate – in the road at Wolverton and in the bus station at Bletchley (see photo). The driver makes sure the bus is correctly positioned over the plate and lowers a platform under the bus that contains magnetic coils. Through them, the bus can recharge its batteries. A 10-minute charge is enough to keep the bus running for an hour; and it takes the bus slightly over the hour to complete the 15-mile journey. Energy is also captured during braking.

The buses are 37-seater single-deckers built by Wrightbus in Northern Ireland and they perform at least as well as any motorbus, although the top speed is a bit less. They can still keep up to a 30mph limit with no problem: they’re certainly nothing like a milk float! And the recharging pads mean the buses can stay out all day without having to go back to the depot before the power runs out. The first bus from Wolverton is 06.10 and the last service finishes in Milton Keynes city centre at 23.29.

Milton Keynes Bus Users Group was able to help out in the testing phase. Needing to see how the buses...
worked carrying real, live passengers before they entrusted the new buses to the great Milton Keynes public, MKBUG turned out in force to enable Arriva to test them with genuine passenger loads before they went into service on 19 January.

Leonard Lean, a member of MKBUG, wasn’t impressed by the legroom, though the writer, who’s usually pretty critical of buses that don’t accommodate his bulk adequately, wasn’t aware of a problem when he had a ride. Leonard did however find the seats very comfortable and found the bus very quiet. That could be a problem in itself; ‘the silence of an electric vehicle (bus or car) is a problem that will require urgent attention as blind, partially-sighted and partially-deaf travellers cannot hear its approach’, he warns. However he comments that acceleration was so smooth that it was a few seconds after it set off that he realised the bus was actually moving.

Milton Keynes isn’t the only place trying electric buses; two Chinese-built battery electric buses are in trial service in London, on the 507 and 521 routes from Waterloo to Victoria and London Bridge respectively. However Milton Keynes route 7 is of particular interest in that the whole route has been turned over to electric buses, and is much longer than any route that might have been considered for battery-powered buses before. And the fact that the local papers don’t seem to have mentioned them since the blaze of publicity that surrounded their launch suggests they’re working out all right. Perhaps the breakthrough has come at last and we can all look forward to silent and pollution-free buses in our towns and cities.
**More rural losses**

Further to your article ‘The end of Moorsbus?’ in BUS3, the Beacons Bus network covering the Brecon Beacons National Park is not to reappear in 2014 barring a last-minute reprieve.

This was a very successful network bringing people from South Wales, Carmarthen and Hereford to Brecon where they changed buses to go out walking, cycling (one of the buses had a bike rack) or visiting tourist attractions in the Brecon Beacons National Park. It also enabled local people to get about in an area not noted for its public transport provision.

The scheme relied on refunds for concessionary passes from local government. Welsh Government is reducing the amount it pays for concessionary passes, therefore the operators no longer found it viable to run the network. The same problem is affecting Worcestershire, where 144 services are scheduled to disappear this year, and Herefordshire, where 85 services will go over the next two years.

There is no point in having a concessionary pass when there is no bus on which to use it. We have to lobby national government so that the concessionary pass entitles the holder to a 50% fare reduction, in order to retain these services.

It may be too late to save Moorsbus and Beacons Bus, but if we do not demonstrate that we are all in the economic mess together and must all take a share of the pain, then there will be no buses for us to use our passes on outside the cities.

Andrew Pearson, Herefordshire

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**Cuts upon cuts**

I do not recall that the reduction in the Bus Service Operators Grant led to an instant increase in fares. What it did mean was that routes on the border of being commercially viable became subjects for local authority subsidy and, as this sum was more and more constrained by a different Government cut, rural services quietly vanished, sometimes replaced by a demand-responsive service or taxibus.

Leonard Lean, Milton Keynes

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**Dogs on buses**

I would like bus companies to provide better information in advance for passengers proposing to travel with a (non-assistance) dog. There is often nothing obvious on this matter on operators’ websites.

Except in London, where dogs are allowed on all buses, this seems to be at the driver’s discretion. A consequence is that passengers on multi-modal journeys can have the whole journey ruined by a ‘dog-allergic’ driver on any one sector. This has happened to me three times in the last few years, with three different drivers on Arriva Milton Keynes. My journey is from Milton Keynes to Birmingham twice a week, involving two buses and one train each way. As the train journeys involve advance purchase tickets, a capricious rejection of my well-behaved dog can also cost me money.

John Rose, Birmingham

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**A victory for ‘passengers’?**

BU53 confirms that a great leap forward has been made. The word ‘passenger’ is used 123 times, while ‘customer’ makes only seven appearances. In five of these cases it is used by a bus company, neatly confirming the reputation of the operator in question for lacking respect for the users of its services. But the other two appearances are in quotations from a report by Passenger Focus, an organisation which should know better. Perhaps it should check its own title?

John Cartledge, Boreham Wood

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**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 with other readers? These pages are for our members’ letters and photos, so we’d love to hear from you.
Bus lanes
The attitude of Liverpool’s Mayor as reported in BU53 beggars belief. He is reported to have received ‘countless complaints’ – one wonders just how many. He refers to his own observations: has he really spent enough time on the streets to have recorded statistically-reliable information? How has he concluded from this that removal of the lanes will speed movement in his city? At least he is looking to independent evaluation of the trial, but have those doing the assessment sufficiently recorded flows before the trial started, for a proper comparison? And one hopes that they will be looking at movement of people, rather than movement of vehicles alone.

Vehicle flow depends on what happens at pinch points such as traffic lights and roundabouts; all that bus lanes do is to enable buses to overtake others between these points. They do not alter the total number of vehicles which can move forward during, say, a green light phase. One hopes that Arriva and other operators (or Bus Users) will present data on the effectiveness in general of bus lanes, based on past studies. It must surely be well established by now that slower journeys will increase costs, and thus fares, and thus reduce bus use, which will increase car use, which will increase congestion. Why can the Mayor not follow this simple logic?

David Dixon, Lichfield

Wheelchair policy
Regarding the wheelchair/buggy priority question in BU53, the major operators in South Yorkshire (First and Stagecoach) both have very clear notices in their buses, for example ‘This space is reserved for a wheelchair, which has priority in this area’ or ‘You may be asked to fold your pushchair and move to another part of the bus’.

I have always found local people to be friendly and cooperative in these matters anyway, so we don’t appear to have a problem to deal with. It does seem sad that the courts should ever be involved in what should just be a matter of appropriate courtesy in a public place.

Peter Green, Rotherham

The happy bus driver
I was delighted to read the article about Raul Campos Folgado, Top National Bus Driver, in BU53. What a treat it was to read of Raul’s attitude to his work and more importantly, to the general public who travel on his service.

All too often today, passengers boarding buses are met with surly drivers who give an impression that they are not enjoying their work, sometimes never responding to a passenger’s ‘good morning’ or ‘thank you’. It is true that driving conditions can be very challenging, and this can affect a bus driver’s attitude; and of course there are many drivers out there that follow Raul’s example and are extremely pleasant and friendly. However, I wonder if bus companies can start to look at changing the whole ethos of bus driver training by not just looking at a driver as a means of getting passengers from A to B safely, but again to quote Raul: ‘A bus is a special environment and we need to give every passenger attention.’

Paul Davies, Swansea

Email your letters and photos to nicola.parkins@bususers.org or post to: Bus User magazine, Hopetoun Gate, 8b McDonald Road, Edinburgh EH7 4LZ. Deadline for Bus User 55: 30 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.
Welcome

To new members
Christopher Brindley, Cannock; Hazel Dunn, Seafield, West Lothian; Derek Fearnside, Worcester; Terry Figgis, Stevenage; Gary Forbes-Burns, London; James Hartman Porthyrthyd, Carmarthenshire; John Hassall, Taunton; Mark Jones, Oxford; David Kenlock, Richmond, Surrey; Timothy Murgatroyd, Wokingham; Alexandra Williams, Tunbridge Wells; Jennifer Williams, Stoke on Trent; Matt Wright, Norwich.

To a new group
Railfuture Severnside – contact details to follow

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

Age UK Colchester  peter@ageconcern.org.uk
Association of Devizes Passengers
www.facebook.com/DevizesPassengers
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  hugh_jaeger@hotmail.com
Bus Watch West Haringey  chrisbarker46@gmail.com
Campaign for Better Transport – Cambs
6 Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG
Campaign for Better Transport – West Yorkshire
rwikes@blueyonder.co.uk
Cardiff People First  cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.com
Christian Peoples Alliance Party (Northampton Branch)
colin.bricher@ntlworld.com
City of Hull & Humber Environment Forum info@hullenvironmentforum.org.uk
Colchester Bus Users Support Group
peterkay.essex@btinternet.com
Dengie Hundred Bus Users’ Group (DBUG)
sarah@burnhamtowncouncil.org.uk
Devon Senior Voice Transport Group
Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Iverbridge PL21 9DD
Ealing Passenger Transport Users Group
www.eptug.org
Footprint Trust  www.footprint-trust.co.uk
Friends of DalesBus  www.friendsofdalesbus.org.uk
I.W. Bus & Rail Users Group
iwbususers@fsmail.net
Kendal & District Bus Users (KADBUS) 01539 740761
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
Oxfordshire Unlimited  daveholmes.home@btinternet.com
Pattishall Parish Council ann.atkin51@btinternet.com
Penllwyn Community Partnership Sian Woosnam,
c/o 12 Highmead, Penllwyn, Blackwood, Gwent NP12 2PE

LOCAL GROUPS continued

The Pensioners & Fifty Plus Action Group
tomag42@hotmail.co.uk
Radstock Public Transport Group
gorge@whitecsl.demon.co.uk
Railfuture www.railfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Severnside contact details to follow
Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group
g.cadwallader@btinternet.com
Rural East Lothian Bus Users  www.rebus.org.uk
The Senior Council for Devon Transport
andrea@scfd.org.uk
Southend Area Bus User Group
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
St Neots Area Bus Users Society info@snabus.org.uk
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
Tyne and Wear Public Transport Users Group
e11eef@fsmail.net
West Cumbria Bus Users Group
David Andrews, tel 01946 695373
West Leigh Residents Association
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
Wirral Transport Users Association
17 Poulton Road, Bebington, Wirral CH63 9LA

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.