Our work on behalf of coach passengers
Following the departure of Gillian Merron, we are grateful to Tracy Jessop who is standing in as interim Chair while we seek to appoint new Board members.

Members may be interested to know that we’ve taken note of the feedback received that we need to support the development of local groups and events in England, so we’re in the process of recruiting a Director for England to do some of this work. Those of you involved in local groups will be able to meet this person at the next Local Group training event planned for later this year.

We are also recruiting a UK Complaints Manager to help to analyse the overall impact of this work and report on trends and successes. We hope to be able to give you more information about these new team members in our next issue.
Cashless buses will improve speed and efficiency, apparently. I beg to differ!

Despite intense opposition by a large majority of those who responded to the ‘consultation’, Transport for London went ahead with the abolition of cash fares in July, just in time for the huge influx of tourists to the centre.

Fares for cash-paying passengers have been creeping up relentlessly in an effort to get passengers to move to using Oyster cards, and those of us who live and travel regularly in a TfL area will probably have one already. However, for those of us who are trying to encourage more people to try using buses, this is a new and completely unnecessary barrier to bus travel.

Oyster cards are not free and not readily available outside business hours or main town centres. Having to have an Oyster card with enough money on it or a debit card that has sufficient resources will put off many potential travellers and those who need to use the bus in an emergency. If there were to be Oyster card vending machines at most main stops which cost perhaps £3 and came out of the machine with £3 credit on it, I would be less incensed but this still wouldn’t help the many people who don’t live near a main hub and aren’t always able to pre-plan their travel.

To get one of the cards, you first have to be able to fork out £5, which is called a ‘refundable deposit’ although it seems that there is an administration charge to get a refund which would wipe out that amount if you tried to get it back after the fact. This means that, even if you could stump up the money, find a shop open to sell you a card and then have enough cash to put another £5 on it, which is the minimum it’ll accept, you’re essentially asking people to faff about for a while and pay £10 for the privilege of taking a single bus trip!

Of course it’ll put people off, it’s a ridiculous idea and we need to keep pointing this out. Buses should be accessible to everyone at any time and refusing to accept cash is a major obstacle for many people.

Claire Walters
Chief Executive
Your Bus Matters

Bus Users continues to make the link between passengers and bus companies through its Your Bus Matters events.

Traditionally these events have been focused around a bus parked in an area of high footfall within town and city centres, but recently we have taken Your Bus Matters into street markets, libraries and shopping malls.

The success of these events has encouraged us to develop links with landlords and stores in further retail malls around the country. We are also investigating how we can gather the views of groups including mothers and toddlers, young people looking for employment, and people with physical or sensory impairments.

Bus Users is also working in partnership with a major operator to look at ways in which we can engage with primary school children, as part of the PSHE (Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education) programme under the National Curriculum. We are particularly keen to talk to Year Six/Primary 7 students (10-11 year olds), to advise and encourage these young people to use the bus safely.

We are always open to ideas on how we can better represent every type of passenger, and through Your Bus Matters events and our local group network we will continue to work to ensure that the voices of local bus users are heard.

Bus Users Cymru at ATCO training event

Bus Users Cymru were pleased to be asked to participate in the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers’ Summer Training Event in Cardiff in June. The event, hosted by ATCO Wales, brought together senior transport personnel from local authorities across the UK.

Margaret Everson, Director of Bus Users Cymru, spoke about changes taking place in Cardiff and the transport world more widely, including the establishment of the Cardiff and Swansea City Regions, and the Silk Report’s recommendation that bus regulation, including the relevant functions of the Traffic Commissioner, should be devolved. She also highlighted continuing losses to subsidised services across Wales and concerns over the level of reimbursement that bus companies receive for offering concessionary fares.

Deputy Director Barclay Davies facilitated a workshop on reducing complaints, using an imaginative analogy between buses and tins of beans. Some tins on the supermarket shelf are in perfect condition, some may be a bit battered, while others may have torn labels and incomplete information about their contents.

‘It’s a different way of getting across the message,’ said Barclay. ‘Companies like M&S and Waitrose look to get it right first time, and wouldn’t expect their customers to put up with a poor choice. There are some operators and local authorities who could learn from their example.’

The word’s on the street...

First West of England has found a novel way of attracting extra bus drivers. Around 70 adverts have appeared on pavements across Bristol in a move to encourage people to consider bus driving as a career.

The ‘clean graffiti’ adverts began appearing in Bristol late in August, and remained visible for up to four weeks.
Games success
Traveline Scotland delivered a successful passenger information project to support the recent Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.
Reliable and helpful travel information was provided throughout the Games, due largely to a careful planning process that saw additional hardware and human resources deployed to accommodate the increased demand.
During the Games, more than 2.2 million customer contacts took place across all Traveline Scotland channels. This included 950,000 journey plans created from the website and a further 420,000 from Traveline Scotland’s mobile Apps.
Despite significantly increased traffic and demands on the infrastructure, Traveline Scotland reported uptime during the games of 100% for its call centre and 99.97% for the website.
Chief Executive John Elliot commented: ‘We played a small part in what has been a fantastic success for Glasgow and Scotland.’ He paid tribute to the organisations that worked together on the project including the IT group Trapeze and the transport operators, especially First Glasgow, Transport Scotland and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport.

Bus Users supports pteg report
Bus Users fully supports the recent report from pteg (Passenger Transport Executive Group) which shows that the bus is key to achieving 46 cross-sector policy goals across 12 of the 24 Whitehall departments including the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, Department of Health, Department for Education, and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
The report, ‘Making the connections: The cross-sector benefits of supporting bus services’, points out that buses represent a huge bargain to transport policy-makers in achieving a very broad range of transport, economic, environmental and social objectives.
The report points out that public funding for bus services reduces congestion for all road users. Buses connect people with jobs, social networks, education and leisure, regardless of their social or economic background. They give students more choice about where to study, connect otherwise isolated communities to employment, and have a role to play in minimising hospital admissions by helping people to stay independent and healthy.
However, the report shows that all the main forms of funding for bus services are under severe pressure. The way buses are funded is complex, and does not reflect the cross-sector benefits.
Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users said: ‘pteg’s report is powerful in the way it joins up the dots between different policy areas and makes the case for supporting buses to so many different Government departments – not just the usual suspects.
‘It is invaluable in showing that the bus helps to ensure that everybody, regardless of their background, can access the opportunities they need to move forward, and we hope that the various departments will listen to the arguments and help make passengers’ lives easier and more enriched as a result.’

Moors Explorer
We are happy to report that East Yorkshire, one of the country’s largest privately-owned bus companies, has launched the Moors Explorer, a commercial service to replace the withdrawn Moorsbus from Hull/Beverley to the North York Moors.
The Moors Explorer ran every Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday this year from 25 May until 28 September with one journey up to the Moors, a shuttle journey from Danby to Pickering and back, and then a journey from the Moors back to Hull. We hope to see the service return in 2015.
East Yorkshire have also recently introduced a new Go Card, which gives 16-18 year olds 20% off single and return fares on all their standard services.
As Liverpool City Council considers whether to make permanent its current temporary suspension of bus lanes in the city, a new brochure from the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and other groups sets out the case for bus priority schemes in a non-technical and compelling way.

The brochure shows that well thought-out and properly enforced bus priority measures such as bus lanes, bus gateways and rights of way at junctions, lead to more reliable and punctual bus services and, in some cases, quicker journey times. The combined effects can help to provide a realistic and attractive alternative to the car, which in turn helps ease congestion and improve local air quality.

The brochure addresses some of the myths about bus priority schemes, and through a series of case studies shows just how effective such schemes can be in reinvigorating struggling high streets. There is also a recognition that local transport authorities and bus operators need to do better in gathering the evidence for bus priority measures and articulating this to local decision-makers.

Meanwhile, Liverpool’s controversial bus lane suspension trial has been extended. The 26 bus lanes in the city were suspended in October 2013 by Liverpool mayor Joe Anderson in the hope of improving traffic flows. The suspension was due to end in July this year but because of the number of roadworks taking place in the city centre, the Council decided to continue the suspension until November to allow them to collect more data.

Mayor Anderson told the Liverpool Echo: ‘We wanted to get a better and clearer picture of what effect the suspension is having, so we have decided to extend the project. There have been lots of roadworks taking place in traffic-filled areas, and we don’t want it to be unclear if it is the roadworks or the bus lane suspension making the difference. We need more evidence before we make any big decisions.’

Gavin Booth of Bus Users attended a meeting at Liverpool City Council in September, organised to enable representations to be made about the proposed removal of the bus lanes. The comments received will be considered by the Council’s Cabinet at a meeting in October that will determine whether the suspension should be made permanent.

Gavin warned members of the Cabinet that passengers would be seriously affected if the suspension becomes permanent, with buses stuck in peak-hour traffic and unable to make progress. He suggested that if the bus lanes are not reinstated, the city could experience gridlock and bus passengers would be tempted to desert city centre shops in favour of out-of-town malls.

We will report on Liverpool’s decision on its bus lanes in Bus User 57.
Coach Users UK!

Although it’s not immediately apparent from our name, Bus Users also represents the interests of coach passengers across the UK.

Our main activity on behalf of coach passengers is the handling of complaints. Unlike buses, coaches do not generally provide everyday access to local destinations and services, although some commuter coaches and many services in Scotland do fall into this category. Coaches tend to be used for longer and more infrequent journeys, but as these often involve holidays or other one-off events, if something does go wrong the impact can seem more significant. Fortunately, coach services are relatively reliable and serious problems don’t occur very often, but when they do and the problem can’t be resolved with the company direct, Bus Users plays a mediation role just as we do with bus complaints.

National Express is of course the largest coach company in the UK, but other significant operators include Scottish Citylink, which operates a network of express coaches north of the border, and Stagecoach-owned Megabus, which runs budget inter-city services across the UK and mainland Europe. Other Stagecoach services include the express Oxford Tube and the XS from Oxford to Cambridge. Arriva’s Green Line service links central London with Luton airport, while First’s Greyhound coaches operate between Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol. The Oxford Bus Company also runs coach services, including the X90 to London and the ‘Airline’ service to Heathrow and Gatwick, while Italian operator Terravision specialises in low-cost airport transfers across Europe.

Coach complaints are handled for Bus Users by Julian Osborne (Senior Complaints Negotiator), Barclay Davies (Deputy Director, Bus Users Cymru), and Greig Mackay (Deputy Director, Bus Users Scotland). All are coach users themselves, which gives them first-hand experience of the issues that sometimes confront coach passengers. Typical issues on which Bus Users helps passengers achieve a resolution with coach operators include problems with service delays, missed connections, ticket issues and vehicle condition, for instance toilets being out of use.

Bus Users can also help passengers in disputes with excursion coaches and private hire companies, although we have fewer possible sanctions at our disposal than we do with scheduled operators. Some bookings in this sector are made through coach brokers who don’t themselves have an operator licence, which can complicate matters further.

Bus Users’ complaints-handling role in relation to buses is complemented by our Your Bus Matters events, where passengers can put concerns about services direct to their local bus companies. We held a similar event for coach passengers at Digbeth Coach Station, Birmingham, last year. Coach companies have also accepted invitations to join local bus operators at some of our other YBM events, but with coach journeys generally being longer and taken less frequently, these local YBM events do not seem to be the most effective means of gathering feedback on coach travel. We are looking at the possibility of doing so through a feedback card which would be on the back of each coach seat, and will update you on this in a future issue. BU
European Passenger Rights Regulation: What’s in it for us?

Over the last few years the European Union has been bringing in standardised rights for public transport users. The aims are primarily to eliminate discrimination, ensure that passengers have adequate information, and provide help for people who get stranded miles from home when there are serious problems.

Separate legislation has been brought in progressively for airline passengers, train passengers, ferry passengers, and most recently for coach and bus passengers.

‘Regulation (EU) No 181/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 concerning the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport’, to give it its full title, came into force on 1 March 2013. Application of the Regulation is taking a little time, and throughout Europe there have so far been very few cases brought under the new legislation.

Coverage and exemptions
Most of the Regulation’s provisions only apply to coach services in excess of 250km in length (about 155 miles) and the UK Government has taken advantage of the option to exempt domestic (non-international) services for at least four years, with the possibility of a further four-year extension. This means that as far as UK services are concerned, for the most part the Regulation currently applies only to international journeys within the EU; it probably won’t apply to express services within the UK until 1 March 2021.

There are also exemptions for services to non-EU territories. The UK Government has exempted services from London to Geneva and Zurich, on the basis that Switzerland is not in the EU, even though some passengers may use these services to get from London to Paris or Brussels.

National Enforcement Bodies
However there are parts of the Regulation that do apply to all bus and coach services, regardless of whether they are more than 250km or cross an international boundary.

Member states are required to nominate enforcement bodies, which can impose penalties on operators and handle complaints. In the UK the enforcement and complaints roles have been split.

Outside London, Bus Users is the nominated body to handle complaints, while London TravelWatch handles complaints on London bus services and facilities.

Responsibility for enforcement lies with the Traffic Commissioners, who can impose fines on operators that do not comply.

In the UK, passengers will have to give the bus or coach company the opportunity to sort the matter out first, which is the approach Bus Users has always taken in our complaint handling. If the matter isn’t resolved to the passenger’s satisfaction, then Bus Users (or London TravelWatch) will review the case. Any operator not complying with the resolution of the case has to be referred to the Traffic Commissioner, who can fine them.

Nominated terminals
Member States also have to nominate terminals where there has to be specific help and information available for disabled people. In the UK the nominated terminals are the National Express station in Birmingham and London’s Victoria Coach Station.

Passengers with disabilities will be able to arrive at the coach station and be helped through everything to get to their seat on the coach, including getting their luggage and mobility aids loaded (with of course the reverse required on arrival at the other end). All staff they encounter will have to be trained in assisting
them, though there is currently an exemption for drivers, which the Government is reviewing; most drivers are trained in helping passengers with disabilities anyway.

Passengers will have to give 36 hours’ notice of their need for assistance and will need to turn up at least half an hour before departure time, though operators have the right to ask people to arrive up to an hour before departure.

Bus and coach companies will have to replace or repair any mobility or other disability aids that get damaged during a journey. This applies on any bus or coach service, not just long-distance coaches; there are no exemptions to this requirement.

Regardless of the length of journey, bus and coach operators cannot refuse to carry someone on the basis of disability, so long as it’s physically possible to get the person on board and doing so doesn’t conflict with health and safety legislation. They can’t be charged extra for travelling either. Nor can operators charge different fares according to where passengers come from. Malta, for example, had different fares for its own residents, with overseas nationals being charged a higher fare; such schemes are no longer legal. Nonetheless the UK’s present arrangements regarding free travel for older or disabled passengers remain legal, for example where only English residents get free travel in England.

Adequate information
The other right the Regulation confers on all of us is the right to adequate information. Quite what this means in practice is not yet entirely clear. The Regulation requires coach and bus companies and terminal managing bodies to provide passengers with ‘adequate information throughout their travel’. Where feasible this should be provided in accessible formats, though there doesn’t seem to be a definition of what ‘adequate’ or ‘feasible’ means in this context. The Department for Transport is yet to issue guidelines for the implementation of the Regulation, and Bus Users is in discussion with them.

Compensation
The full provisions of the Regulation, applicable only on cross-border services of more than 250km as far as UK nationals are currently concerned, require a minimum compensation of €220,000 in cases of death or serious injury and €1,200 per item of luggage lost or damaged. In the event of an accident, passengers are entitled to first aid and other help and up to two nights’ accommodation, not exceeding €80 per night.

When a coach is cancelled or its departure is delayed by two hours or more passengers will have the choice of a full refund and being returned free of charge to where their journey began, or to get to their destination, if necessary by a different route, as soon as possible and at no extra cost. Passengers at terminals should be informed of delays and likely departure times no more than 30 minutes after the scheduled departure time. If the delay is more than 90 minutes on journeys scheduled to take three hours or more, refreshments should be provided. If the delay is overnight, then accommodation has to be provided, unless the delay is caused by extreme weather or natural disaster. However these provisions don’t apply to passengers with an ‘open’ ticket, only to those restricted to a particular departure.

So far, then, the Regulation is rather limited in its scope for the UK, but as the exemptions expire then it will have more ‘teeth’. If you’d like to know more, go to ec.europa.eu/transport/passenger-rights/en.
A tale of two cities

GAVIN BOOTH is impressed by improvements to bus services in two British cities

My travels this summer took me to two cities where it was impressive to see the level of bus use and the improvements that have helped make bus journeys easier and more attractive. They are cities with a broadly similar population – Aberdeen with 227,130 residents and Derby with 248,700 – and yet they are very different.

Oil capital

Aberdeen, the third largest city in Scotland, is regarded as Europe’s oil capital, and its wealth is reflected in the number of expensive cars that can be seen. The city’s unemployment rate of 1.8% is one of the lowest in the UK; in Derby, on the other hand, unemployment stands at over 7%. Yet both cities appear to be well served by their local bus companies.

In Aberdeen, First is the main operator, and with First Group’s headquarters in the city you would expect the bus services to be exemplary – and, to be fair, they are certainly going that way after years of under-investment and rising fares. Today First Aberdeen seems to be on an upward trend, with lots of new and refurbished buses, fares freezes and reductions, and rising passenger numbers.

In the past two years the company has invested £7.8m in 49 brand-new vehicles, replacing around a third of its fleet, and around one-third of its buses are fitted with free wifi. Last November its 19 route between Culter and Tillydrone was upgraded to the customer-focused Platinum Service, which was voted Scotland’s Best Bus Service at the 2014 Scottish Transport Awards. With the service attracting an extra 1,500 passengers a week since the upgrade, First Aberdeen introduced another Platinum route in July, the 11 linking Heathryfold and Torry.

Fares too have been reviewed. In October 2013 First Aberdeen permanently reduced its Family Weekend Day ticket by 25%, and in March this year the company froze or reduced the majority of its fares for the second year running. First also now has a network-wide Customer Promise under which passengers can claim...
a free travel voucher if they are unhappy with any aspect of the service that is within First’s control.

As a result of all of these initiatives First Aberdeen is carrying an extra 1,000 passengers every day compared with 2013, showing that customer-focused thinking really does work.

**Colourful contrasts**

Derby is served by two main operators: Arriva Midlands, which mainly provides city services, and Trentbarton, with city services and routes into other parts of Derbyshire and neighbouring Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire. A more recent arrival is Yourbus, which runs competitive local services, while National Express offers coach services from Derby to many UK destinations.

The hub of services is the new Derby Bus Station, adjacent to the substantial Westfield shopping centre. The new facility opened in 2010, replacing the much-admired 1933 art deco bus station. What the new building may lack in period charm, it makes up for with the facilities it provides – a totally covered and enclosed concourse with good-quality information, a travel centre and a convenience store.

The travel centre is well-stocked with leaflets, the multi-coloured Trentbarton range contrasting with the corporate Arriva examples. This contrast is reflected in the buses too. Trentbarton has abandoned many route numbers in favour of names and distinctive liveries, like The Allestree, Indigo, Mickleover, Red Arrow and Spondon Flyer. These use the bus itself to sell the service, with fare information by the entrance door and promotional adverts on the back of the vehicles. And this year Trentbarton is celebrating 20 years of its groundbreaking money back guarantee, offering an on-the-spot no-quibble refund to passengers who are unhappy about any aspect of their journey.

Derby City Council provides a useful Bus Network Guide, with a map of all services and timetable information in the bus station and at stops. Sadly, some of the bus stop information is placed so high that I found it difficult to read – and I am 6ft tall. Smaller people, children and passengers in wheelchairs would have no chance to see the bus times. Aberdeen, on the other hand, after years of truly dreadful bus stop information – essentially the bus operators were left to post their own information, often over their rival’s – has come up with a neat standard style that is easier to follow, although the type could be bigger and easier to read.

There are similar good news stories all over the UK, where bus operators and local authorities have recognised the importance of finding out what passengers want and then providing it. Pressure from passengers, local groups, and Bus Users has acted as a wake-up call for many bus companies. But we know from the complaints that pass through our hands and the comments at Your Bus Matters events that, sadly, there are still some that seem to have missed the call.
By bus with partial sight

What’s it like for an older person with limited sight trying to get around by bus in a rural area? Stephen Morris spent a day with veteran Bus Users member MARIANNE O’BRIEN

Marianne O’Brien is a long-standing active member of Bus Users, recently honoured by her local council for services to community transport (BUS5, p5). A former art teacher at Farnham Art College in Surrey she has led an eventful life, and her love of travel has inspired her to overcome difficulties that would make lesser mortals give up any aspirations to travel.

Now into her eighties, Marianne suffered a stroke a while ago which robbed her of most of her eyesight. Yet despite living in a rural corner of Surrey she still fiercely maintains her independence by using local bus services.

Not being able to see well, Marianne had tripped recently on some steps in her garden and damaged her foot. Only a few days before we met she had managed to get as far as her village on the outskirts of Haslemere for the first time since, but she was undeterred.

Our first hurdle was to negotiate our way to the village bus stop, with the hazards of hedges and parked cars encroaching on the pavement. It took us just over 20 minutes, though it used to take Marianne eight.

To catch a bus towards Farnham and Aldershot involves crossing a major road; it has a 40mph speed limit, which to many Surrey drivers means about 50mph, and there is no crossing. ‘When I first lost my sight three years ago’, Marianne told me, ‘two different drivers took me across roads in Farnham and Haslemere, which cheered me.’ We didn’t attempt the road crossing today, preferring to head to Guildford, a journey of about an hour and 10 minutes on the hourly Stagecoach bus.

The bus stop is poorly sited, just after a bend in the road, and a side turning near the stop was rendered difficult by a van parked partly on the pavement and blocking the dropped kerb. There is a seat, but it’s several yards from the stop. Fortunately there were two other people waiting, which was just as well as the bus appeared with only seconds for us to see it and flag it down. As it was, the bus stopped with the platform some yards beyond the stop, and as we made our slow way to it I was concerned that the driver hadn’t seen us and would drive off without us. I needn’t have worried; he waited and obligingly lowered the step for us to board.

Marianne has a pass that enables a carer to travel with her. The driver placed this on the smartcard reader and issued me a nil value ticket.

Long, slow walk

Low-floor access is a boon to people who aren’t so easy on their feet, but it’s a long, slow walk to the first suitable seats. Those immediately behind the wheelchair area don’t have very good handholds, so Marianne prefers the ones behind them. The driver waited patiently for us to be seated and off we went. Marianne has no vision to the left side and limited forward vision and to the right. Forward visibility on the bus was non-existent due to the ‘ironing board’ backrest for the wheelchair area, but fortunately this route is very familiar to Marianne and for the most part she knew exactly where we were. This was more of an issue on less familiar routes, and some of the buses we used had yet more limited forward visibility with glass panels covered in black dots beyond the wheelchair area.

Our second journey was on the 20 Guildford to Aldershot, leaving from Guildford bus station, which is at least an easy place to board. Marianne’s eyesight is adequate to see the stand numbers, though she pointed out that none of the displays actually shows
what services leave from that stand. The exception was the stand for services to the hospital, on which she had cajoled Surrey County Council into putting appropriate information.

The driver didn’t bother to lower the step for us, and part of the windows was obscured by vinyl marketing material, further reducing Marianne’s chances of knowing where she was. Indeed soon after the bus set off she asked me if I’d checked this was a 20. The number 20 appeared on the stops we passed, but Marianne wouldn’t have been able to see these.

The bus had tall handrails curving inwards into the gangway. Marianne was very wary of these; she had hit her head quite badly on one when this type of bus was first introduced, and was surprised that such a hazardous feature was allowed. Although painted in the ‘contrasting’ colour required by the regulations, this isn’t the same as the bright colours that partially-sighted people need.

Cross-boundary problem
The 20 terminated at Aldershot bus station which is not easy to negotiate, with narrow pavements and narrow entrances to the shelters that line the kerb where the buses stop end-on. Marianne pointed out again that each bay was clearly labelled with a bay number that she could see, but not the service number.

We boarded a no.3 bus towards Camberley, with the intention of alighting in Frimley, but we encountered an unexpected problem: the driver refused to let me travel on Marianne’s pass. This was a mystery; it was another Stagecoach bus and others had accepted it so far. He was adamant and pulled out a piece of paper to back up his argument. The print was too small for me to read, let alone Marianne, but eventually it dawned on me that we had crossed the county boundary! We were no longer in Surrey but in Hampshire, so while Marianne could travel for free, I couldn’t.

This bus was fitted with a ‘next stop’ display, which Marianne could just make out. It wasn’t very clear and she hadn’t noticed it until I pointed it out. Unfortunately, the information shown wasn’t always reliable and we completely missed our stop in Frimley, so we stayed on to Frimley Park Hospital instead.

Several services serve the hospital, and there is a large timetable display, but the timetables were in smallish print, and it was several yards from the bus stop, as was the seat for the stop. For a visitor it was not clear which bus stopped where, until you

“Part of the windows was obscured by vinyl marketing material, further reducing Marianne’s chances of knowing where she was.
Obstacles remain

Overall, most things had worked well. Drivers could have been friendlier but most were helpful, though it wouldn’t have been a great effort for the no.20 driver to lower the step for us. Fellow passengers were without exception courteous and when necessary helpful.

I wondered however how Marianne gets on unaided; she is indomitable, but for many in her position the effort would probably be just too much. And there is still some way to go to remove all the obstacles. Stricter parking controls, preventing vehicles parking on pavements or across dropped kerbs, would make it easier to get to the bus stop. Trendy handrails look nice until you bang your head on them, and they only look nice if you can actually see them.

The one thing Marianne would like is better visibility from buses. We often comment on marketing material obscuring the windows; it’s just a nuisance or unpleasant for most people, but a real obstacle if you’re partially sighted. A new visibility annoyance, she tells me, is placing disabled stickers on the window which she claims are frequently ignored by other passengers anyway.

There’s a lot to do to make bus stops and stations fully accessible, and how much easier our trips would have been with good audio-visual information on all the buses.

realise there is only one stop and all buses stop there regardless of direction. Marianne headed for the seat, unable to see that the bus we needed was already approaching the stop.

The driver lowered the platform for us and let me travel on Marianne’s pass, and within a couple of minutes we were back where we needed to be to catch Stagecoach’s flagship no.1 service back to Aldershot. The front seats on these do boast a proper handrail behind the wheelchair area, albeit painted a dull gold and therefore not very visible if you’re partially sighted. Our bus was very busy and there was no chance of seeing out if you didn’t have visibility to the left. It whisked us quickly and comfortably back to Aldershot, where we waited in vain for the ‘hourly’ service back to our start point.

This service usually runs at 50 minutes past the hour, but there is an exception during school terms. You can find this out by working out what the little blue blob on the timetable means, again particularly difficult with partial sight. You also need to know the dates of local school terms. The exception, of course, was the bus we needed, the 15.50. We had to admit defeat and succumb to a taxi for the 12-mile jaunt back to Marianne’s home. This would have been a major issue had it been winter, as Marianne tries not be out any later than dusk, because what sight she has is then non-existent.

WHAT WAS GOOD:

- Accessible buses
- Patient drivers
- Helpful passengers
- Free travel for passenger and carer
- Buses used were reliable

WHAT WAS NOT GOOD:

- Poor visibility from buses
- Cluttered pavements
- Difficulty of road crossings to bus stops
- Information was not easy to read
- Poor handrail design on some buses
- Lack of ‘next-stop’ announcements
- Entitlement for carer travel ending at county boundary
The case for the bus pass

New research highlights the social and economic benefits of concessionary bus travel

Bus Users members will not need reminding of the value of concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people. As well as the freedom it can provide for individuals, concessionary bus travel brings significant economic and social benefits.

New research carried out by the lobbying group Greener Journeys, working with consultants KPMG, shows that every £1 spent on free bus travel for older and disabled people generates over £2.87 of benefits for society and the wider economy. The free passes deliver at least £1.7 billion in annual net benefits by enabling older people to lead more active lives that support families, communities and local services.

The research warns that there is a substantial risk to communities and the quality of life of people across the UK if Government funding for bus passes is not sustained.

Older readers will know that their bus passes enable them to have fuller and more efficient access to the services they need, and allow them to take part in activities that would be unaffordable without the free pass. They can contribute more actively as volunteers, and are more physically active as they make fewer journeys by car. Local bus services can benefit too. Bus companies are reimbursed for a percentage of the ‘normal’ fare, and even though local and national governments are constantly squeezing this rate, the reduced income bus operators receive can still underpin and improve the rest of their networks – though inevitably many would wish for more money for carrying ‘free’ concession passengers.

The Greener Journeys report puts figures on these benefits totalling over £1.3 billion. It also suggests that pass-holders can feel less lonely and isolated and are more able to look after children and care for others. They are more likely to shop in their local high streets, thereby supporting the local economy, and can continue to travel independently rather than having to rely on others for lifts.

The message from the research is clear. Although removing the travel concession for older and disabled people might appear superficially to offer a cost saving to government, the overall effect would be an increased cost to the economy.

Bus pass holders represent a significant part of the British population. In 2012/13 more than 1.2 billion trips were made by 12 million pass-holders, representing up to a third or more of all bus journeys (31% in England outside London, 35% in Scotland and 44% in Wales). And the number of older people in the UK is growing; by 2020 it is estimated that one-quarter of the British population will be over 60.

We know that four out of five of those who are eligible for bus passes take them up, and we recognise the frustration of older people living in more isolated communities who do not have a bus service that they can use their passes on. We also know from Bus Users members and the passengers we meet at Your Bus Matters events that many older people would be prepared to pay a token fare every time they use their passes, rather than lose this invaluable concession.

At a time when public sector cost savings are constantly being sought, this new research makes a valuable contribution in highlighting and quantifying the wider benefits of concessionary bus travel. But we suspect that it would take a brave government of any colour to drop the bus pass scheme, which is a lifeline to so many people in this country.

The Greener Journeys report ‘Bus 2020: The case for the Bus Pass’ can be downloaded in full from: www.greenerjourneys.com/bus-pass

The case for the bus pass
Making life easier for bus passengers

Here we highlight some recent initiatives by bus companies and transport authorities to improve services and facilities for bus passengers.

Talking buses in Bristol
First West of England became the latest company to introduce audio-visual announcements on some of its buses, following a successful trial in Bristol.

The technology provides audio announcements about the next bus stop on the route, with a visual prompt via matrix displays or television screens. Initially the service will only be available on selected buses in Bristol, but it heralds a significant step forward for people travelling in the city, particularly blind and partially-sighted passengers.

‘Augmented reality’ on the Glasgow Shuttle
In time for the recent Commonwealth Games, First introduced what it calls ‘augmented reality technology’ in the 500 Glasgow Shuttle service linking the airport with the city centre.

During the Games, passengers could download the First Scotland AR app and point their mobile phone or tablet at a vinyl fitted to the seat backs. The app launched an interactive screen showing short films about Glasgow 2014, with links to the latest news and traffic/travel reports.

Electric Park & Ride in York
Two new Park & Ride initiatives have recently opened in the city of York.

Parking capacity at the Askham Bar Park & Ride has been increased to 1,100 vehicles, and a new 600-vehicle facility has been introduced at Poppleton Bar, served by a new fleet of fully electric buses. Parking is free and journeys into the city centre take around 15 minutes.

Smartcard advances
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive has launched more smartcards and set up 13 kiosks in its interchanges to sell them. TravelMaster 7 and 28-day tickets, offering unlimited travel on bus, tram and train in Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield and South Yorkshire zones, are now available on an electronic credit-card sized pass, as an alternative to paper tickets or scratch cards.

Days out with Stagecoach
Stagecoach in Yorkshire was one of many operators that introduced family tickets over the summer months. The £8.50 Stagecoach South and West Yorkshire Family Dayrider allowed two adults and up to three children to enjoy discounted travel on Stagecoach buses and trams throughout the school holidays to destinations across South and West Yorkshire.

£1.2m Lanarkshire giveaway
First in Lanarkshire gave away £1.2m worth of discounted bus travel vouchers to over 100,000 households this summer.

Around 400,000 vouchers were delivered for use on First services, giving a £2 saving off adult daily or weekly tickets and half-price family day tickets. The vouchers were accompanied by information about local services and ideas for family days out.

X marks the spot
Stagecoach Yorkshire took to the streets in Dearne Valley to encourage motorists to leave the car at home and try public transport.

Wearing company branding and armed with colourful placards, the team went out and about meeting the public and highlighting the benefits of bus travel in the area, particularly the express 22X route between Rotherham and Barnsley. Households along the route were leafleted, and Stagecoach staff chatted to people in shopping areas and car parks, encouraging motorists to give the bus a try.
Barclay Davies of Bus Users attended the launch of National Express’s Youth Promise in July. Developed in partnership with the British Youth Council, the promise is built around five core pledges:

- An ongoing commitment to deliver value travel for young people
- Working at a grassroots level with young people in communities across the UK
- Supporting young people into work and education
- Delivering the most accessible public transport network possible for young people
- Providing platforms on which to showcase youth talent

Young people from the UK Youth Parliament worked with National Express to develop the package, which aims to focus on young people aged 15-26 alongside the company’s traditional student market.

The Youth Promise will see the national coach operator create apprenticeships, roll out a structured work experience scheme, and invest thousands of hours in young people’s causes. All National Express staff will be given a day’s paid annual leave every year to carry out voluntary youth work. The company is also committed to offering equal pay for the same role for all frontline staff, regardless of their age.

To ensure National Express stays on track, a Youth Panel is being created to continually engage with young people and help maintain regular dialogue around the issues affecting young people’s travel.

Marc Kidson, Chair of the British Youth Council, said: ‘Time and time again we hear that transport is one of the areas which matters the most to young people, so it is absolutely fantastic to see National Express take its commitment to young people even further with its groundbreaking Youth Promise.’

Tom Stables, Managing Director, National Express UK Coach, highlighted the importance of transport to young people, enabling them to connect with family and friends and explore the wider world. ‘It was absolutely crucial to us to engage with young people on our plans from the outset,’ he said. ‘Thanks to the input of the young people involved, we’ve been able to pull together a package of benefits which we really hope will benefit young people in all parts of the UK.’

The Youth Select Committee, which was launched by the British Youth Council and is supported by the House of Commons, produced a report on public transport and young people in 2012. National Express have developed their Youth Promise as a response to this report. Bus Users welcomes the company’s active engagement with young people on this subject, and encourages other companies to act upon the YSC’s recommendations.

Further information:
www.nationalexpressgroup.com/our-way/community/case-study-youth-promise
Youth Select Committee report ‘Transport and Young People’, published 5 November 2012: byc.org.uk/uk-work/youth-select-committee.aspx
HOW TO COMPLAIN

Online

Have you experienced problems with a bus service and been unable to resolve the matter with the bus company? You can now submit a complaint online via our website, www.bususers.org. GREIG MACKAY of Bus Users Scotland takes us through the process.

1

On our Home page you will see the Complaints tab near the top middle of the screen. Click on that icon and it will take you to the Complaints page. Or you can click on the red ‘Making a Complaint’ tab on the right-hand page edge.

2

This page gives you all the relevant information relating to complaints. Each of the grey lozenge tabs on the left can be clicked on for further information. There is also a ‘How to make a complaint’ link in the text below the picture.
If after reading the information provided you want to submit a complaint, then please click on the grey ‘Make a complaint’ icon on the left.

You will then be asked for details about where the complaint took place, i.e., country or region.

Have you contacted the bus company directly? Yes or No?
If ‘No’ then you will see this page with advice on the next steps to take.

If ‘Yes’ you will see this online form. Please complete all the relevant boxes, providing as much detail as possible, and click on the green ‘Submit complaint’ button.

Your complaint will then be registered, and a member of our Complaints team will contact you to follow it up.
Another Bus Users group, Devizes Passengers, meets at least three times a year supported by Devizes Community Area Partnership, which brings a wider reach.

Devizes Passengers raised strong objections to proposals from Wiltshire County Council for changes to the local Connect2 bus service, which links the busy market town with nearby Pewsey and surrounding villages. Following constructive discussions, Devizes and Pewsey Community Area Partnerships were funded to work on an alternative timetable that could include direct services between Devizes and Pewsey station at peak times.

Devizes Passengers has also helped provide improved bus information in the town, after Wiltshire Council ceased producing all paper-based timetables. The town centre has no real-time bus information and there is no tourist information centre, so other than Traveline South West, visitors and local residents had no means of accessing bus timetable information in the town centre. Devizes Passengers were runners-up for the Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Working award in 2012 for their spider map project that is displayed in all the Market Place bus shelters.

Devizes Passengers is also pressing for a quicker bus route between Salisbury and Devizes. ‘Passengers want a shorter direct service from Salisbury to Devizes without diverting to numerous villages’, says chairman Jasper Selwyn. The recently-introduced ‘shopper’ bus is a step in the right direction, but the group believes that there is further scope for a service capitalising on the potential market arising from the new Stonehenge Visitor Centre.

Our planned training day for local groups in August unfortunately had to be postponed because of potential disruption to rail services on the date concerned. It proved difficult to find a workable substitute date in September or October so we have decided to wait until the new Director for England has been recruited, which is under way. The new Director will take over the organisation of this training and will be in touch with you all as soon as possible.
Welcome improvements
Mention has been made in the past of insufficient seat availability on departures from Scarborough on the X93 service to Whitby and Middlesbrough.

During a holiday in Scarborough in July, I was very pleased to see and use double-deck vehicles on this service, making for a much more pleasant trip. No more standing as far as Whitby, or passengers being left standing on the way as the bus passed! The larger buses seemed to find the climb out of Robin Hood’s Bay a challenge – but no matter, our bus made it.

I am also pleased to report that I enjoyed a journey from Pickering to Castleton on the first day of the new Moorsbus service, 13 July (see p5). The very enthusiastic promoters of this new venture were present on board the bus, which was provided by Arriva.

Martin Willson, Slough

Punctuality in Milton Keynes
BU 55 noted that there is only 65% satisfaction with bus punctuality in Milton Keynes (‘Passenger satisfaction rising’, p18). As a user of local buses for some 13 years, I would agree. That said, the buses do run, even if occasionally 10 to 15 minutes late.

All local buses, as well as the majority of inter-urban buses, traverse the full length of Midsummer Boulevard, 1.5 miles between Central train station and ‘Food Centre’: four sets of traffic signals eastbound (five westbound) together with two roundabouts. In addition, all routes going west or south have an additional two sets of traffic lights.

Consider the time difference between passing every traffic signal at green, and getting stopped at amber or red and having to wait a full cycle and restart. I estimate the difference to be between 10 and 12 minutes overall, and furthermore, the schedule allows almost no extra time for peak hour congestion.

Leonard Lean, Milton Keynes

Pipe down!
Whenever I travel on my local Green Line coach into London I am subject to the whim of the driver as regards the type and volume of piped music I shall be listening to, be that hip-hop, reggae or (rarely) classical. Alternatively, should my driver be an ardent football supporter, I may then instead be obliged to listen to a running commentary of the game for the duration of my journey.

I have no knowledge of what guidelines, if any, exist as regards the use by drivers of radio for their own entertainment, but surely the needs of passengers should come first? Of course, passengers these days listen to music on their phones and other devices, but there are notices displayed in many buses reminding them not to disturb others and to keep the volume down.

Have not passengers an equal right not to be disturbed by inconsiderate use of radios by the driver?

Chris Kennett, Dunstable

There are no national regulations on the use of radios by drivers but we suggest you contact the company concerned, which may have its own guidelines.

Bus Users UK
The Department for Transport has announced that Transport Direct, their absolutely brilliant multimodal journey planner, is to close on 30 September. We’ll be lost without it – literally!

Gloria Lindh
The suggested alternatives don’t allow for planning public transport nationally eg across regions, which I can’t believe is such an unusual thing to want to do!

Bus Users UK
A new-look bus interchange is planned for Exhibition Square in the heart of York’s city centre.

www.itravelyork.info

Ann Jones
Great news - York needs something like this.
Progress in York

I must take issue with Brian Nye’s account of the situation in York (Have your say, BU55). I am in my final year as Independent Chair of the York Quality Bus Partnership.

Like other Councils, CYC has suffered cuts in staffing, but has managed to do a good job in working with operators to ensure reasonable levels of service and performance. It has also helped to attract new funds through York’s status as a Better Bus Area, local sustainable transport projects, and Green Bus Funding. This has involved a great deal of work, including a consultant-led review of the Quality Bus Partnership that recommended more formal structures to give the operators a role in administering the Better Bus Area.

CYC also wanted to ensure that consultation on bus matters, including service changes, was more representative and became a real dialogue. To do this, it advertised for representatives to serve on a new city-wide Bus Users Group that better represented the wide range of users in York. In parallel, the major operators and the Council have also improved their own consultation procedures with public sessions when there are major issues to discuss. Several proposals have been rethought or refined as a result of these sessions.

It’s still not perfect and probably never will be, but the Quality Bus Partnership too is about learning as a family. It would be ideal if there were sufficient Bus Users UK members to form a York Group that could have a formal place on the Bus Users Group, which must however be as representative as possible of all bus users in York.

Sadly, our Roman and Mediaeval ancestors did not lay York out for 21st century traffic levels, and unfortunately public opinion is not yet convinced that there is only so much traffic the city can take without destroying its character and livelihood. Buses, walking and cycling are the future for city centre access and a strong Quality Bus Partnership, with the support of both bus users and the wider community, needs to continue pressing that case.

John Carr

Windsor defence

I was sorry to read Paul Kirby’s letter in BU55 about the 702 service from Windsor to London. I have used this service for many years and have watched it grow into the double-deck coach operation it is today. The commercial manager at First Berkshire has worked very hard to attract custom by the use of wifi, comfortable seating and pleasant drivers.

The fare structure depends on the time of day travelled: morning visitors from London pay £16.50 return, which is then reduced in the afternoon. A lower fare is charged on the service from Windsor. The fare compares reasonably with that on tour coaches, which on one Windsor-only afternoon service currently costs £42.

Comparison with the services from London to Oxford is unreasonable as there are two separate operators and many more coaches per hour. Besides, Oxford has a large university population as well as visitors and residents.

Now if you were to compare Oxford with Cambridge and bring in the coach/train mix, that would be a different matter altogether. It is a case of ‘Horses for courses’!

Stephen Le Bras, Windsor

Dialogue is improving in York with the formation of a new city-wide Bus Users Group.
Welcome
To new members
Michael Bloom, Abingdon, Oxon; Colin Brown, Lincoln; Mark Cornelius, Plymouth; Mary Dickie, Glasgow; Donald Fraser, Saline, Fife; Mike Galloway, Wolverton, Milton Keynes; L H Green, East Grinstead, Sussex; Evelyn Hughes, Gillingham, Dorset; Derek Plimmer, Telford, Shropshire; D L Seymour, London; Alan Waddington, Metheringham, Lincolnshire.

To new local group
East Suffolk Travellers’ Association (contact details below)

Local Groups

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

Age UK Colchester peter@ageconcern.org.uk
Association of Devizes Passengers
www.facebook.com/Devizes Passengers
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
rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk
Cardiff People First cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.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 (DHBUG)
contact@dbug.org.uk
Devon Senior Voice Transport Group
Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Ivybridge PL21 9DD
Ealing Passenger Transport Users Group www.eptug.org
East Suffolk Travellers’ Association (ESTA)
The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft NR32 3AW
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@norfolkw.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
The Pensioners & Fifty Plus Action Group
tomag42@hotmail.co.uk

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.