What next for buses under the new Government?
So more English cities may be given powers over their own transport and budgets, according to the Cities Devolution Bill which will form part of the Queen’s Speech, but will this be a good thing for bus passengers?

Local people have a clearer idea of what’s needed in their area and it should make sense to have transport budgets handled locally so that appropriate services can be commissioned and public transport designed to serve the needs of the people who use it. Residents would know who to speak to about their needs and could hold them accountable if they got it wrong.

However, recent decisions by Local Authorities have led to further cuts to bus budgets and some cynics feel this move is a good way to lay the blame for any future cuts at the door of the Local Authorities rather than central government.

Another issue with devolution is the need to have an elected Mayor, which adds either another level of local bureaucracy or accountability, depending on your point of view. It will certainly add more cost to the devolved local government’s running costs.

One issue that isn’t attracting headlines though is where this leaves the suburban and rural areas in between the big cities? With bus cuts hitting those outside major towns hardest of all, will this emphasis on cities not make their problems worse?

Tell us what you think and we’ll keep an eye on what happens as the picture unfolds.
Ministerial team appointed

Following the election of the Conservative party with an overall majority in the May General Election, the Department for Transport has announced its new ministerial team. The Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales, retains his post as Secretary of State for Transport, an office he has held since September 2012, when he succeeded Justine Greening.

Andrew Jones MP, Conservative MP for Harrogate & Knaresborough, is the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport. He succeeds Liberal Democrat Baroness Susan Kramer in the role which encompasses bus policy. His other responsibilities include the Northern Powerhouse, environment, the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV), Highways England, local roads and smart ticketing. From May 2003 to May 2011 Mr Jones was a local councillor in Harrogate and worked in sales and marketing for Bettys and Taylors of Harrogate.

Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrat MP who held the role for nearly three years after the 2010 election, lost his Lewes seat in the election to Conservative Maria Caulfield, having won it with a majority of more than 7,500 in 2010.

Robert Goodwill and Claire Perry retain their posts as Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State for Transport whilst Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon joins the team as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport and Home Office. His brief includes aviation security and transport in London.

Meanwhile Michael Dugher MP, who was re-elected as Labour MP for Barnsley East with an increased majority, has been reappointed Shadow Secretary of State for Transport by Harriet Harman, acting leader of the Labour Party. Mr Dugher is well-known for his strong views on bus service regulation and his animosity towards commercial bus companies.

Travelsafe in Greater Manchester

A new pilot scheme to tackle and prevent crime and antisocial behaviour on Greater Manchester’s bus and tram network was launched recently. Under the Travelsafe Partnership, a dedicated team of 16 police constables, police community support officers, special constables and security personnel will provide regular patrols on the region’s networks for the next three years.

Led by Transport for Greater Manchester ( TfGM ) and Greater Manchester Police (GMP), the scheme will use crime and antisocial behaviour data from Metrolink, First Bus and Stagecoach, to target patrols in hotspot areas at key times and support front-line staff.

The team will wear cameras which can be used in conjunction with existing CCTV to help gather evidence for prosecutions and assist in the identification of repeat offenders. Where appropriate, the partnership will seek to use legal powers to ban offenders from public transport. The pilot will also focus on preventative measures and youth education.

Fare deals in Essex

Network Colchester has introduced a new family day ticket costing just £5. It allows up to two adults and up to two children travelling together to have the freedom of Network Colchester’s buses for a whole day. The ticket is available from bus drivers and also via mobile phones, as is a new four-weekly child ticket costing £36.

In Harlow, Arriva has cut the price of its day ticket from £4 to £3.50 for a trial period of two months to see whether it generates additional use of its services. Arriva has also introduced a new range of day, weekly and four-weekly tickets covering its services in the Harlow, Bishop’s Stortford and Stansted area. They are also available on the SX Connect express services from Harlow to Chelmsford and linking Colchester and Harlow to Stansted Airport.

Correction

In the Manifesto section of Bus User 58 we mistakenly said that bus ridership in the major urban conurbations had halved since 2000. This should have read ‘since 1985’. We apologise for the error, which has been corrected in printed copies of the full manifesto and in the online version available on our website.

The most recent DfT statistics show an encouraging upturn in ridership in those areas.
Manchester’s Quality Partnership Scheme

Transport for Greater Manchester is delivering a £122 million bus priority package to improve bus service quality on key corridors linking Leigh, Atherton, Salford, Middleton and East Didsbury with Manchester. A special partnership is proposed, committing bus operators to a minimum level of service standard and quality, and TfGM and local authority partners to maintaining the quality of the infrastructure on which those services will run. The Quality Partnership Scheme is one of the largest ever undertaken in the UK, spanning four local authorities and covering approximately 50 bus routes.

TfGM is consulting passengers and other stakeholders, giving them the opportunity to comment on the proposals; see www.tfgm.com/buspriority.

The new priority measures will facilitate cross-city services and First introduced two new cross-city services linking Altrincham and East Didsbury with Eccles and Middleton in April.

Land speed record attempt for biomethane bus

Reading Buses is attempting to have the fastest gas-fuelled bus in the world! The bid was due to take place on a banked circular track at Millbrook, just outside Bedford, in May, to help champion its low-emission Scania buses that run on Biomethane Compressed Natural Gas (CNG).

It is also planned to issue the fastest ever on-board ticket at the same time. The aim is to achieve a speed of at least 80mph, some 50% faster than the normal 55mph that the bus is limited to, and the driver will also issue the fastest bus ticket ever whilst going round the track. The bus has no major body or engine modifications other than slight tweaks and some high-speed tyres.

Bus Users respectfully suggests that drivers don’t try to issue tickets at 80mph in service; we do prefer our tickets to be issued while the bus is stationary!

New city service in Cardiff

Cardiff-based New Adventure Travel (NAT Group) has started a new cross-city service in Cardiff, the X1. It links Culverhouse Cross on the south-west side of the city to Pentwyn and Pontprennau in the north-east via the City Centre every 15min, using 10 brand new single-deck buses which were publicly launched at Cardiff City Hall.

Cross-city journeys have become more difficult in Cardiff since services have had to terminate in different parts of the city centre. The new service ran into a controversy on its first day when rear advertising posters inviting people to ‘ride me all day for £3’ were considered too risqué for Cardiff and following complaints on social media and to the Advertising Standards Authority they were quickly removed by the company.

Art on the move

What is believed to be the country’s first ‘Gallery Bus’ has entered service in Bournemouth, bringing art to the masses. Yellow Buses had ‘artists in residence’ across its fleet last year and now their work has been displayed inside a state-of-the-art double-decker on routes through the Bournemouth conurbation from Christchurch to Poole.

Advertising space has given way to the colourful pictures and early reaction from the public has been very positive.

Yellow Buses has recently taken delivery of eight new high specification Volvo double-deckers which meet the latest Euro6 emissions regulations.

Upper deck seat indicator trial

An indicator which tells passengers how many seats are available on the top deck of the bus is being tested by Transport for London. The technology encourages passengers to go upstairs rather than standing on the lower deck, which at the busiest times can prevent other passengers from boarding.

The trial began on route 141 (London Bridge-Wood Green), and has been extended to route 59 which runs between Kings Cross and Streatham Hill. The new equipment, developed by UK mobile digital recording technology company Timespace, analyses information from the on-board CCTV system and displays upstairs seat availability on a screen at the bottom of the stairs.
So, the election is over. There were various manifesto commitments from all parties but the ones that ultimately matter are those from our new Government, which has promised to devolve powers to regulate buses in cities which choose to have elected mayors. It will start in a deal for Greater Manchester and we will have to wait and see what happens from there. You can be certain that Bus Users will waste no time in calling on the Government to address the issues set out clearly in our 10 point manifesto (read more about this on page 8) about what is important and what we expect.

The danger in times of austerity is that people take the simple option – cut things and stop services to save money. But that isn’t very smart. The smart move is to look for different ways to offer services; working with people from across sectors to develop new ways and approaches to meet passengers’ needs. In the same way, the level of investment can be reduced but in a more planned and sustainable way. A co-ordinated approach that might encompass conventional bus operators, community based transport providers, local people, manufacturers and, of course, bus users – what a powerful cocktail.

Bus Users has taken on responsibility for European Passenger Rights Regulations. All bus operators need to have a complaints process clearly publicised and must promote Bus Users as an avenue for complaints. We are anticipating a greater number of complaints in the year ahead – not because bus services will get worse – but because it will be easier for people to complain. I have not met a bus operator who doesn’t want to hear about how they are performing so they can improve their business.

Internally, Bus Users is restructuring so we are better placed to deliver the objectives of the organisation and meet our business plans. To that end, we are also bolstering the Board to ensure we have the right skills and experience to deliver the strategic plan. I agreed to hold the reins as interim Chair whilst we went through the period of change and one of my tasks was to grow the Board. If things go according to plan, some new faces will be up for our own election at the AGM to take Bus Users into a new era.

We still have much work to do to grow the membership and to be reflective of the ridership of the UK’s buses. We need younger members, more women and representation from the thousands of people who use buses to commute every day. This will help us to have a stronger voice with agencies and partners, so we will work on a programme of recruitment and additional support for BU groups. This is a key task for the leadership team and will be a priority in the coming year. We would be very happy to hear from existing members about any ideas you might have to grow our support, so please do tell us by contacting us at membership@bususers.org.

In the meantime, please remember the AGM is in Cardiff on 11 July and it would be great to see as many of you there as possible.

Thank you for your continued support for Bus Users and I wish you all a very long, happy and healthy summer!
Over the coming weeks, bus fever will once again grip the nation with the return of Catch the Bus Week. Following the success of last year’s campaign, we at Greener Journeys can’t wait for another fantastic campaign — this time during a glorious summer (we’re sure!). The event will run from 29 June to 5 July, giving the Great British public even more of an incentive to get out of the car and walk to the bus stop.

Greener Journeys is a campaign dedicated to encouraging people to make more sustainable travel choices; specifically, demonstrating the numerous benefits of making the shift from car to bus. During Catch the Bus Week (CTBW), our campaign goes into overdrive as we coordinate activity from the whole bus world to get people out of cars and onto the bus!

Last year, CTBW was a great success. The campaign had impact and was innovative, surpassing the
previous year in terms of reach and engagement. We witnessed support from almost 100 bus companies, passenger organisations and local authorities, all of whom came together to run events, ticket giveaways and community engagement campaigns across the country.

The beauty of CTBW is that each participant has the flexibility to design their own campaign, event or promotion to support the week and celebrate getting on the bus. Last year, across the country, bus companies’ plans varied from ticket offers to initiatives with local charities to community events. For example, Chalkwell, a Kentish independent bus company, demonstrated their support for CTBW by offering two lucky travellers the chance to win a year’s worth of free travel around Kent. Devon County Council, in association with Stagecoach South West, launched a hunt for the county’s best bus driver, and gave primary school children the chance to design a poster on why it’s better to ‘catch the bus’ that week.

Greener Journeys hosted an event with the then Transport Minister Baroness Kramer and key CTBW supporters outside the Houses of Parliament to launch the week last year. We also encouraged MPs to lend their support to the campaign by hosting their constituency surgeries on a bus. Twenty-five parliamentarians met with local constituents to talk about local issues while at the same time celebrating the role of the bus in the community. The concept was a great success and there were many more MPs and MSPs supporting the campaign on-line and through social media.

With the average bus commuter walking an astounding 11 marathons a year, our focus last year was on the health benefits of taking the bus. This year we’ll be highlighting its social value, talking about all of the ways in which buses promote social cohesion by connecting communities and bringing friends and families together. We want to demonstrate that the bus is a social enabler, allowing people to visit their loved ones, get to football training or even freeing people’s heads and hands on their way to work. Did you know the average bus commuter could finish about 52 books per year whilst on the bus? Or nine books if you’re re-reading War and Peace...

With all of this good news to shout about, we are poised for an even bigger and better CTBW this year. Greener Journeys will once again be coordinating an exciting launch to kick off the campaign and is already liaising with operators, passenger groups like Bus Users and local authorities on their exciting plans. Last year, more than 100 media outlets, from national broadcasters to trade magazines, covered the week, with their articles shared on social media hundreds of times. This year we are hoping to build on that result to reach an even wider audience and to encourage even more people to make the shift from car to bus.

Social media will play a big role in helping us promote the campaign as far and as wide as possible. Anyone can get involved by tweeting @GreenerJourneys or using the hashtag #CTBW2015 and sharing their experience of the week: the more people tweet, the more people can find out about the fantastic things going on aboard buses around the country that week!

But above all, the real success of last year’s CTBW was that it galvanised more than 100 organisations to work together and put the bus on the map nationally — something difficult to do as individuals. A collaborative effort allowed us to change perceptions and drive real behavioural change. For this year’s event to be as successful, Greener Journeys relies on the support and enthusiasm of everyone involved in bus travel. So get involved, get in touch, and let us know how you are planning to get people on the bus from 29 June to 5 July!

www.catchthebusweek.co.uk
Will this new Government be just the ticket?
Nobody who watched the Election closely could say that transport loomed large in any of the coverage or debates even though it is one of the few issues that affects almost everybody’s lives almost every day in one way or another. Sure, Mr Dugher’s constant bashing of the “gangster bus barons” and the Chancellor’s apparent intention to roll out London style bus franchising in Manchester and who knows where else got everyone in the industry excited, but was it the main topic of discussion on Newsnight or the bar at the Dog and Duck? I think not.

But before we jump up and down indignantly about this, let us take a step back and ask whether it is a bad thing. There is, in fact, a great deal to be said for taking the politics out of transport policy.

I think it fair to say that bus operators and some areas of local government have not always seen eye-to-eye on policy issues! Which is actually strange — because we all want the same thing: to produce a network of bus services that serves everybody’s needs and that more people will want to use.

This is where Bus Users comes in. If we are to provide passengers with the services they want, it is vital that we listen to what they have to say. Bus Users does a great job of getting the passenger voice heard up and down the Country. The operator’s job is to continue to work with Bus Users to make sure that they take notice.

Then I suppose we must get back to the politics!

Simon Posner, Chief Executive, CPT

With transport failing to register in the pre-election hubbub, we’re putting the bus back on the political agenda.
We’ve asked leading figures representing bus and passenger bodies to tell us what they want to see from the new Government

**Andy Dean, Assistant Director, Rural Services Network**

In our Rural Services Manifesto, RSN made a number of specific asks of the new Government including amendments to the formula used to distribute government grant to make it fairer and take full account of the rural cost premium; and to incentivise local authorities and other public bodies to work together in making the best use of the transport fleets that already exist.

At a recent partnership meeting convened by RSN between local authorities and bus operators, the clear message to Government was the need to raise the profile and priority attached to rural transport at all levels of Government. The rural bus services, so vital to all rural communities, must be properly supported as a critical element of economic growth and sustainability.

**Mark Yexley, Operations and Commercial Director, Arriva UK Bus**

So the election is over and we have a new Government which will pick up all the challenges facing transport afresh. The best starting point would be to look through all the research material produced by Greener Journeys, PTEG and the like to remind politicians about the enormous benefits which buses deliver to the economy — £64 billion — the 4.7 billion passenger journeys a year and the big potential if we can combat congestion.

Then it would be great if the lesson could be learned about how everyone benefitted from having transport ministers who were left in place and who then had time to understand the subject and build up the working relationships with everyone in the industry so we could achieve more than having to brief a non-stop stream of replacement ministers.

The challenges of reducing the deficit will be huge but please don’t look for quick savings at the expense of bus services when this will only drag back further economic recovery if people and employment, schools, shops and hospitals are not easily linked.

And finally — let’s not waste more time with a never-ending debate about who controls the bus networks when we all need to work together to deliver attractive and easy to use bus services.

“**The challenges of reducing the deficit will be huge but please don’t look for quick savings at the expense of bus services.**”

**Paul Fulwood, bus passenger**

I would hope that the new Government will understand the vital importance of bus travel as part of an integrated public transport offer, and will ensure that bus users see deeds as well as hear words to make their journey experience better. My three priorities would be:

1. To use the emerging consensus about the devolving of powers for transport to the regions in order to strengthen the toolkit available to those specifying service provision. Localism should not mean that one approach suits all regions, rather that regions should be free to choose, adapt and experiment with options that work locally.

2. Customer service matters — some operators get it but some don’t. Drive standards up through incentive, encouragement and innovation, not race to the bottom of cost and only think of the bottom line in the short term.

3. Remove some of the barriers to passenger growth; smart ticketing, real time information and bus priority measures will all increase ridership but conflicting messages (bus priority), conflicting legal frameworks (multi-modal, multi-operator smartcards) and conflicting funding streams (RTI) can all inhibit the benefits to passengers.

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“**The challenges of reducing the deficit will be huge but please don’t look for quick savings at the expense of bus services**”
It is people that use buses, not local authority growth policies or development plans.

Ben Colson, Chairman, Album (the Association of Local Bus Company Managers)

The incoming Government needs to recognise three basic principles in improving bus services in the UK. The first is that it is people that use buses, not local authority growth policies or development plans, but people going about their everyday business, and it is they we have to appeal to.

Secondly, that whether they like it or not, the starting point is the here and now — it is a deregulated industry in which the free market predominates. Indeed, local government spending on bus services has diminished in recent years, making it ever more commercialised. It is ‘how we get from here to there’ — the promised land of milk, honey and wall to wall, probably unaffordable, bus services, all nicely integrated and smart-ticketed, is the key missing link which has yet to be seriously addressed.

Thirdly, Government must recognise that there are consequences of changing policy, especially if it is left to local authorities with an open-ended timescale to decide what regulatory control they want and when they want it. There have to be clear criteria against which their plans can be measured, and there has to be an exit strategy for smaller operators not wanting, or failing, through no fault of their own, to be part of the new game plan.

Barry Turner, Chairman, RELBUS

RELBUS campaigns for better bus services in rural East Lothian. We have identified these four key elements as our priorities for change and improvement.

1. Integration, between services, timetables, ticketing etc in a manner that will facilitate convenient and seamless public transport journeys, improving arrangements for those who rely on public transport and encouraging drivers out of their cars.

2. Involvement of users in the planning of the routes and networks which make up an essential public service, and making sure that there are effective mechanisms for complaints and feedback.

3. Innovation in terms of introducing new routes which relate to demand. Also finding novel and cost-effective ways in which rural services can be provided, thus reducing social exclusion.

4. Information about services and fares which is up to date and comprehensive and provided in a variety of ways to existing and potential users.

RELBUS will support in principle any action from Government which will achieve or work towards these improvements and change the image of the bus as being the transport option of last resort.
Janet Cooke, Chief Executive, London TravelWatch

London’s bus services carry 6.5 million passengers a day, much more than either Underground or National Rail services. London already accounts for over 50% of the bus journeys made across the country, serving eight million residents and more than a million visitors to the city each day.

London is very congested and is growing rapidly so many Londoners have no choice but to use the bus to get around. Without London’s bus services operating as efficiently as they do London would not be able to function as a world city. Yet in many ways bus services can often be taken for granted.

In London, buses are procured and regulated by Transport for London (TfL), and supported through government grant. This grant has been and is being reduced, but is vital to enable London’s buses to operate efficiently, with affordable fares.

We urge the new Government to continue to recognise the vital role that buses play in the capital, ensuring that London has the resources to ensure bus capacity keeps up with the capital’s growing population. As bus journeys are already getting slower due to congestion, it is essential that TfL also invests in measures to improve reliability and maintain and improve bus priority to keep bus travel more attractive and deter people from using less efficient modes of transport.

Buses in London have been a success story of the last 10-15 years but given the importance of bus users to the economy it is more important than ever today that the network doesn’t stand still.

Philip Ayers, Managing Director, Cuckmere Buses

There has been quite a lot of uncertainty about bus services in East Sussex with major changes resulting from the withdrawal of funding by the County Council. The revised service pattern has now been introduced with many operators, ourselves included, taking on services commercially where we feel there is an opportunity to improve our business. That new pattern needs the chance to stabilise and settle down so that passengers’ confidence in their services can grow.

The same applies to our businesses as well. We have reduced our fleet to save costs and need to see our revenues increase to ensure we are covering our costs fully. We are a Company run entirely by volunteers who give their time freely to keep services going where commercial operators cannot afford to do so. For that reason, we do not compete with commercial operators, but try to complement what they do in order to provide the travelling public with a realistic alternative to the private car.

We need consistency and stability from Government in order to provide that and the fact that we are retaining the same Secretary of State in Patrick McLoughlin suggests a steady course which is good news.
Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users

Ahead of this year’s General Election, Bus Users put together a 10-point Manifesto calling on the new Government to make bus services a priority. Buses offer a solution to the congestion and air pollution problems facing many of our towns and city centres and they can (and indeed already do) a huge amount to support local economies and improve social inclusion.

Among the things we’ve called for is enhanced bus priority measures, fully funded and more widely available concessions, improved integration with other transport, simplified fares and services and timetables that better suit the changing needs of passengers.

With the new Government now decided, we will be working hard to ensure that buses are given the resources, the investment and the opportunity needed to realise their potential. And, of course, we’ll continue to make sure that passengers get the services they deserve.

Joe Oldman, Policy Adviser, Age UK

The importance of a free bus pass and regular, reliable bus services to older people’s lives should not be underestimated. Buses connect many older people to family, friends and the community, and enable access to health, social care and other key services.

However funding cuts in recent years have led to many bus services being cut or withdrawn. According to the Campaign for Better Transport, half of local authorities cut funding for bus services in 2014, affecting 500 routes. These kinds of cuts inevitably have a detrimental impact on older people, particularly those with no alternative private transport. That is why we firmly believe that local authorities should provide flexible alternatives, such as financial support towards community transport services and volunteer schemes, if their transport system does not fully serve the needs of local people.

At Age UK, we want national and local government to recognise the wider value of the bus service in preventing social isolation. Bus services should also be more accessible to disabled older people including those with impaired vision or hearing loss. New technology has allowed improvements in this area but there are still significant variations in the age friendliness of services depending on where you live.

Ursula Benjafield, Althorne Parish Transport Representative and Founder Member of the Dengie Hundred Bus Users Group (DHBUG)

What I would like for bus users from the new Government:

Many bus users are bus pass holders. It is vital that the free bus pass should continue, ideally valid 24 hours a day, because this encourages many elderly people (some of whom are no longer confident drivers) to give up their car and reduce congestion and pollution.

Many bus pass holders who provide child care for their grandchildren sometimes take them out on the bus and this encourages a younger generation to become familiar with bus travel.

The bus pass should not be means tested. It would be better if people who felt they were able could be encouraged to make a voluntary donation towards their journey. Even £1 per trip would help to finance better bus services.

The Government should take on board the huge contribution bus users, especially bus pass holders, make to the economy. The benefits such as reduction in social isolation amongst the elderly spill over into other areas such as social care and help keep people healthy, mobile and independent in their own homes.

Ideally, bus operators would not pay fuel duty, with the proviso that this money could be used to expand bus services or reduce fares.
Stephen Morris bows out

Stephen Morris has decided to stand down as Deputy Chief Executive of Bus Users after 15 years with the organisation. We talk to the founding editor of Bus User magazine about his passion for bus travel past, present and future.

While Stephen Morris officially left Bus Users on 30 March this year, the organisation will continue to seek out Stephen’s immense expertise and experience, honed over 35 years in the bus world.

When Stephen began working for what was then the National Federation of Bus Users in 2000, the organisation was a largely volunteer led operation set up by Caroline Cahm around the time plans were being formulated to privatise and deregulate bus services. A major turning point for the organisation came in the run-up to the 2008 Local Transport Act which saw Stephen take a pivotal role in securing official Government recognition for Bus Users as the designated body for complaints handling.

Since then, the organisation has gone from strength to strength, building relationships with other leading bodies in the bus industry, working closely with operators and local authorities and, of course, becoming an ever-more effective champion of bus passengers.

But it’s not the past that interests Stephen so much as the present and future. Stephen is a passionate advocate of bus travel, and while he does admit to owning a car, it spends most of its life sitting in the garage and only gets used for journeys which would be impossible by bus or rail.

Stephen Morris, bus passenger champion.
Left: A young Morris, still in his 20s, driving a Tillingbourne bus in rural Surrey for a roadtest for Buses magazine.

Stephen was a leading force behind the recently published Bus User Manifesto, which laid out a 10-point plan to the incoming Government to make bus travel a priority in the UK. Buses, Stephen believes, are the future: “There’s far too little recognition given to the role that buses have to play in transport planning. We urgently need an environmentally friendly alternative to the car, a strategy to reduce congestion in our town and city centres, and a way to improve social cohesion.

“Buses offer a genuine solution to all of these problems but until policy-makers and government recognise that, buses will continue to be treated as the ‘poor relations’ of transport planning.”

At the moment bus services are in deadlock: passengers need services that are efficient and reliable; services can only become efficient and reliable with investment and the political will and that only happens when services are used. Services that aren’t fully
utilised or commercially viable are poorly funded and unreliable, resulting, of course, in fewer people using them. It’s a far-from-virtuous circle and one that Stephen believes needs to change.

And on the ground at least things have been changing. Bus Users has had a genuine influence in improving the way passenger complaints are handled, something that Stephen is proud of and something that is due, in no small part, to the growing willingness of operators to recognise the needs of their passengers.

“Bus passengers have historically been under-represented and as a consequence, their voice hasn’t been heard. But organisations like Bus Users have worked hard to educate local authorities and bus companies that listening to customers and responding to their needs makes sound business sense. Passengers who feel valued and are confident in the service they receive are more likely to use it.”

As a journalist, Stephen has always felt that the press was there to record the news, not make it. This is a philosophy he has applied to much of the work of Bus Users which, rightly according to Stephen, has gone under the radar: “I remember getting a call from a woman whose family had moved miles out of town. They had two cars but discovered a door-to-door bus service that could take her husband to and from work each day.

“A combination of poor communication and roadworks meant that on his very first day of using the service, her husband was unable to get home by bus, and the bus company had been less then helpful about it. I managed to get hold of the local manager of the bus company and suggested he offer them a week’s free travel and direct them to the website in future to check running times. A short while later the woman called me back and told me not to worry, the bus company had resolved her complaint. They’d offered her husband a month’s free travel and suggested he check the website regularly for news of disruptions.

“That was the perfect outcome for everyone: the bus company had trusted our judgement and the customer could now trust the bus company and the couple weren’t even aware of what had brought about the radical change of heart.”

While Bus Users continues to honour its commitment to passengers, government has so far failed to realise the potential of the bus as a way to improve the environment, build local economies and enhance social inclusion.

“Cars waste the economy £13billion each year in congestion. They ruin town centres, lowering air quality and causing congestion and taking up increasing quantities of space for parking. Rail travel is costly and inaccessible to the many people who aren’t near a station. And yet government and planners continue to invest in road networks, pumping in millions of pounds each year and consistently ignoring the one thing that offers a genuine solution: the bus.

“Rail has seen passenger numbers rise massively over the past few years and the same can be said of bus travel in London which has attracted significant investment and opportunity for development. Why are we not seeing the same for the bus? Why is there so little recognition of its potential to meet the changing needs of an increasingly diverse public?”
As Stephen said recently in his blog ‘Bus Users are the future’: “It’s a no-brainer; buses are good for us, they’re not just for ‘poor people whose vote doesn’t count for much’. The very word ‘bus’ is short for the Latin word omnibus meaning ‘for all’. Buses once again need to be ‘for all’, benefitting the entire country and every community in it.”

So what now for Stephen? “I have no firm plans although I do have capacity yet for another challenge which may or may not involve buses. My wife is quite keen to get her husband back and we plan to do a lot more travelling across the UK and Europe”, (the day after he finished he was off on Eurostar!) “I’m also close to achieving my personal target of visiting 60 British islands by the time I reach 60. I’m currently 59 ½ and have another 10 to go!”

And what are Stephen’s hopes for Bus Users? “I want to see Bus Users at the heart of a positive change in attitude to bus services right across the country. I want to see politicians and councillors sitting up and taking notice as the message is put across that fairly small savings in funding are having huge negative effects on individuals’ lives and are actually hampering economic growth and positive modal shift. And I look forward to Bus Users being a household name, regularly quoted in national media in the quest to get passenger issues recognised. Close a railway station or put the fares up and it’s front-page news: cut an entire community off from the bus network and nobody bats an eyelid. That has got to change and Bus Users are the people to do it.”

“I also look forward to the day when there’s a proper national network of local bus user groups, espousing Bus Users’ values of respect and working collaboratively, to achieve a proper dialogue and get bus users’ views across on the local stage, where they really count.”
Thus it was that in 2001, Welsh Government decided to award what was then the National Federation of Bus Users an annual funding package to carry out bus passenger representation work in Wales. To ensure the Welsh Assembly was getting value for money (and great value for money is exactly what they do get), a clear set of outcomes was put in place and the work of what is now Bus Users Cymru began.

Today, the organisation is headed up by Director Margaret Everson MBE, with Barclay Davies as Deputy Director, Angela Guarno and Ann Matthews handling the administration and complaints, and ten local representatives working in the field across Wales.

Its primary role is to improve bus services across the country by monitoring and reporting on bus operations. It works to educate transport providers and enforce compliance; to gather the views of users and represent them to the industry and legislators; to improve the attitude of transport providers towards their passengers; to offer support and guidance to bus users, resolve their complaints and make sure they have their say; to provide advice on proposed transport policy; and to input passengers’ views before policy is written.

The organisation also runs seminars for transport providers, produces mystery traveller reports on the services of commercial operators, and carries out surveys on up to 500 services across Wales as well as a comparative survey of bus operations.

Complaints handling
A cornerstone of the work of Bus Users Cymru is complaints handling. While passengers are always encouraged to talk to the bus operator first, if they’re not satisfied with the outcome then Bus Users Cymru will step in. In the majority of cases the issues are successfully resolved but on the rare occasions when both parties are in deadlock, complaints are referred to the Bus Appeals Body. Bus Users Cymru worked on 261 complaint appeals in 2014.
Outreach
In addition to its annual funding package, the Welsh Government was persuaded to fund three Bus Compliance Officers (BCOs) so that Bus Users Cymru could help deliver Ministers’ priorities for bus services and passengers in Wales.

The BCOs support the work of Bus Users Cymru in raising standards of bus travel for all passengers. Their activities have a direct bearing on the punctuality and reliability of bus services across the country: they meet with bus operators to look at ways to improve services and they monitor areas where there are clusters of complaints.

Bus service reliability is a factor in awarding Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG), and the BCOs keep records of when operators fail to run services and report their findings to the local authority which leads in providing grants in each region.

Your Bus Matters
One of the key roles for Bus Users Cymru is to make sure the views of passengers are heard. The ‘Your Bus Matters’ events bring passengers together with the people responsible for running their services and in the past year alone, Bus Users Cymru has run more than 20 events across all parts of Wales. Each comment, complaint and compliment is logged and passed on to the relevant operator and local authority for a response.

Locations vary and include rural towns to ensure a good, representative spread of coverage. While local authorities and bus operators often contact Bus Users Cymru to request an event, areas are also targeted where there’s a significant change in a local bus network or a sudden rise in complaints.

Mystery Travelling
‘Mystery Traveller’ operations give Bus Users Cymru an unparalleled insight into what’s really happening on bus services. Ratings are given for the overall journey, the bus, the driver and for on-street infrastructure on a range of randomly selected routes across Wales.

Mystery travellers measure the arrival time of the bus at the beginning and end of a journey against the timetable. They assess the bus stop and shelter and they look at the exterior of the bus, front, side and rear destination and route numbers, as well as checking whether the bus has stopped at the kerb and how easy it is to board.

Once on board, they look at the appearance, attitude and helpfulness of the driver, the standard and cleanliness of the interior of the bus, how full it is and whether there are wheelchairs or buggies on board. They also check that the bell, stopping sign and audio-visuals work. Finally they rate the overall journey.

Assessments are carried out year-on-year for comparison purposes. The results provide an impartial barometer of the quality of bus service in Wales. In the year 2013-14, 456 separate mystery traveller surveys were undertaken by Bus Users Cymru and as the current financial year comes to an end, they’re on schedule to reach their target of 500.

Insight
To gain a greater understanding of the causes of problems with bus services, representatives from Bus Users Cymru regularly attend the Public Inquiries run by Traffic Commissioner for Wales and the West Midlands, Nick Jones. In a number of cases, BCOs have even provided evidence to the Traffic Commissioner where an operator has been brought to Public Inquiry on grounds highlighted by them, by Bus Users Cymru and by the public. Through this process, Bus Users Cymru is even better placed to support the interests of the travelling public.
Partnerships
Since its work began, Bus Users Cymru has established close relationships with organisations throughout Wales including all local authorities, railway companies and bus companies from the largest to the very smallest. They work with bodies such as ATCO Wales, the CPT, the CTA and Transport Focus, the National Assembly for Wales, the Traffic Commissioner for Wales and the West Midlands, and a number of leading non-profit organisations including Action for Hearing Loss, Guide Dogs Association, RNIB Cymru and Disability Wales.

Get in touch
In 2015 Bus Users Cymru moved into new offices in the centre of Cardiff. The offices are more accessible and have the space to bring together all the Bus Users Cymru staff and BCOs as well as providing an office for the Traffic Commissioner for Wales and the West Midlands.

To find out more about its work or to get in touch with an issue or complaint, you can still reach Bus Users Cymru at PO Box 1045, Cardiff CF11 1JE, on their new telephone number 029 2034 4300 or email them on wales@bususers.org. For the time being, calls to the old telephone number are being redirected.
Chatterbus

Poverty in Cobham. Not a phrase you often hear of this prosperous small town in one of the more affluent parts of one of the most affluent counties in the country, Surrey. Extend the phrase to read ‘Transport poverty in Cobham’, however, and you have something completely different.

Cobham is a pleasant small town with a population of around 11,000 on the banks of the River Mole, and is now perhaps better known as a motorway service area on the M25, which bounds it on one side, with the main A3 dual carriageway bounding it on another. It’s never been well-served by bus, though like many towns in the Home Counties the main local public transport is rail, in this case serving commuter flows in both directions, one way to London, the other to Guildford. But Cobham station is Cobham in name only; its full moniker is Cobham & Stoke d’Abernnon, not least because it’s in the latter, a couple of miles out of the former: and poorly served by bus. If you live in Cobham and have neither a car nor a good pair of pins, you know all about transport poverty.

To try to combat transport poverty in the area a Community Interest Company, Cobham Community Bus CIC, has been set up by local residents, led by Sir Gerald and Lady Joyce Acher. Sir Gerald is also vice chairman of Motability as well as President of Young Epilepsy and has recently become chairman of the local Brooklands Museum. ‘Lack of appropriate local transport is limiting opportunities for employment, training and even access to state benefits’, says the organisation, and the result has been the establishment of a new bus service called Chatterbus.

Chatterbus runs a regular timetabled service six days a week. It provides a useful link to the station throughout the day, with specific journeys targeted at the most popular commuter trains in and out of Cobham & Stoke d’Abernnon. A new bus stop has been erected at the station, which is served not only by Chatterbus but by the 408 bus service which provides a rather infrequent timetable to Epsom and used to pass by the station on the main road. Ironically, three weeks after Chatterbus started in April, major roadworks began on the road to the station and are expected to continue into August. Chatterbus also connects the nearby village of Oxshott to the station and Cobham town centre.

Cobham has existing bus services on roughly a north-south axis (Abellio’s 515 from Kingston to Guildford) and to the east towards Epsom. Chatterbus aims to give people new links into those services rather than compete with them, with the overall aim of enhancing public transport in the area all round.
However Cobham had no service at all on a westerly axis towards Weybridge and Brooklands, now a significant retail and business development on the site of the famous old motor racing circuit. It’s not far from Cobham, but not hitherto linked by bus and an uninviting walk or cycle journey along a very busy, twisty and largely unlit main road.

On Saturdays Chatterbus extends to Mercedes-Benz World and Brooklands Museum in one direction and in the other to Leatherhead, for its shops and leisure centre. A flat fare of £2 is charged for each journey, half fare for children, and further reductions for school journeys, while season tickets are available and concessionary passes valid for free travel.

Chatterbus is set up rather differently from other community bus services. Rather than run by the CIC using a rota of volunteer drivers, the whole operation is contracted to East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership, a not-for-profit but commercial operator, which won the tender for running the service and uses a couple of small minibuses with wheelchair lifts and with two regular drivers. It is supported both by Surrey County Council and Elmbridge Borough Council, but as Chelsea Football Club has its training ground in Cobham, it receives funding from the Chelsea Foundation, which as well as funding football in the community and anti-discrimination projects, also gives funding to community and environmental projects. Chatterbus also received funding from Anchor Homes, which provides housing for the elderly in the area, and Cargill, which currently has its regional headquarters in the town.

‘Chatterbus’ suggests a sociable sort of atmosphere. We tried the bus for a short trip from Cobham to the station (where the train service promptly collapsed in a heap, but that’s another story!) and certainly the driver was very chatty, as was the only other passenger on the bus, and it was all very convivial. According to the driver patronage is building, but slowly, which probably isn’t surprising in an area not used to bus services, though the service certainly seems to fill a good many needs. It has gained a reputation for reliability, and our bus turned up right on cue at 09.05, not the easiest time of day to run to time: as it was the bus had to battle its way to the stop through shoppers and delivery vans intent on parking as close as possible to their destination.

And you can always find out where the bus is; a tracker system on its public website (chatterbus.org.uk) not only shows you exactly where the bus is on a route map but even tells you how fast it’s travelling. So don’t expect it to break any speed limits, even if it’s running late!
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? These pages are for our readers’ letters and photos, so we’d love to hear from you.

First things first...

Following the interview with First’s UK Bus managing director Giles Fearnley in *Bus User* 58, you asked for comments on their local services.

Here in Swansea, First Cymru’s delivery has vastly improved over the last three years or so with, as stated, new investment in new single-deck vehicles and a mid-life refurbishment plan for those vehicles of ten years and under. This expenditure is very welcome, as up until 2012, a large number of services within the city were operated by ex-London buses that were in a dreadful, worn out state and genuinely put people off from travelling on them unless absolutely necessary. Thankfully, they are now headed for the scrapyard.

However, First Cymru will still not adopt a double-deck policy here and I am curious as to why? I live on the Mumbles corridor and services to this seaside resort are very overcrowded during the summer and last year’s very warm summer proved this point, with many daytime services operated by small single-deckers unable to cope with demand. I raised this with First Cymru and was told that ‘they had no record of this’!

Perhaps Mr Fearnley would like to travel to Swansea this summer and witness for himself the large numbers of passengers queuing at either end of the service and his own eyes would then record the situation.

**Paul Davies**, Newton, Swansea

Why buses are late

I enjoy reading *Bus User* and I also enjoy using my bus pass. I travel everywhere by bus and enjoy the experience. About three times a year I go to Eastbourne by bus; it takes me five hours, changing at Horsham and Brighton, a fantastic journey through the countryside, over the Downs and by the sea.

There are at least three reasons why our buses in Guildford run late. The first is the volume of traffic between 7.00 and 10.00am. Our road is a main road and every morning in school terms there are at least three buses waiting in a traffic jam. During school holidays there is less traffic.

Secondly, passengers hold the bus up while they look for change to pay the driver. People could cause less hassle by getting their fare ready while they’re waiting for the bus.

Thirdly older people take longer to get on and off the buses. They don’t have to look for change, but most drivers wait a few minutes while older people get on and off. Roadworks also cause delays and sometimes lead to buses being diverted round longer routes.

**Barbara Horlock**, Guildford

I wish to point out a slight inaccuracy in the interview with Giles Fearnley. First did not sell to Stagecoach in Devon. They wanted to leave and Stagecoach were prepared to pay for the operation, but were prevented from doing so by the competition authorities.

First eventually shut up shop in Barnstaple, but not before Stagecoach had registered services to take over immediately. The result was that Stagecoach got what they wanted for free.

As far as I can make out, the premises which First operated from in Barnstaple are used by another operator with Stagecoach based elsewhere in the town.

**Krystina L. M. Baker**, Guildford

A Firstgroup bus leaves Barnstaple for Appledore in the days before First pulled out of the town and left it to Stagecoach.
Driver changeovers
I read with interest the various practices regarding bus driver changeover, mentioned in the comments on Barclay Davies’s blog recorded in the last issue of Bus User. I have experienced quite a few in my time. In London these changeovers can take place mid-way through a route and not necessarily at a garage or bus station. Passengers remain on the vehicle during the change. This was the practice even before cash free buses (Jonathan Morse) and there was no regard for Health & Safety (Darren Brown).

Paul Clark, London, SW7

No fun in Eastbourne
Living in Eastbourne when there is a Bank Holiday results in total isolation for the resident non-car owner.

On Good Friday and Easter Monday there is a Sunday bus service, which for some means an hourly service into the town, for others no service at all. Taxis double their normal fares, all of the shops are open and there are attractions at the sea front, but the Stagecoach buses just do not offer a decent service so that all and sundry can reach them.

Boxing Day is one of the busiest days of the year for retail outlets, but there are no buses whatsoever. I have been told that bus drivers are entitled to the same time off as the general public, hence there is no service. Surely a bus driver would expect to work anti-social hours as part of his or her contract? Brighton manages to run bus services over Bank Holidays, so why doesn’t Stagecoach fulfil its obligation to the travelling public?

Many of us who are sentenced to isolation over Bank Holidays are pensioners, but would gladly pay a nominal fare in order to be mobile on these occasions. Some of us have friends who are inaccessible to us because it is a Bank Holiday, and so are some of the town’s special attractions. It’s no fun living in a seaside resort like Eastbourne when it is a Bank Holiday.

Mrs J. I. Hoban, Eastbourne

The Bus Users’ Manifesto was incredibly well received with a huge number of tweets and retweets including the TAS Partnership:
Powerful @BusUsersUK BUS MANIFESTO calls on next Govt to make bus travel a priority via 10-point plan

And groups like Bus Users Oxford:
Proud to back @BusUsersUK 10 point plan. “Onboard facilities” must include “talking buses” & next stop displays!

Bus Users on social media
Here’s a selection of some of the online posts and comments we’ve received over the past few weeks. If you don’t already follow us on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn then pay us a visit and tell us what you think about buses and passenger service.

Our favourite tweet came from @MOBOB in response to an article revealing that at the age of seven, Ed Miliband had wanted to be a bus conductor.

@MOBOB tweeted:
I wanted to be a Labour MP when I was 7, but I had more sense & became a bus driver instead.

Louise Ann Powell posted on Facebook:
I would like to thank Bus Users UK in their help and assistance in a complaint even though I didn’t get the answer I wanted they were really helpful.

And along with a number of people wishing Stephen Morris good luck for the future following the announcement that he was stepping down as Deputy Chief Executive of Bus Users was this from Paul Harley: I can’t “like” this post!

And a brilliant find from Stephen Morris posted on Facebook came from the Manchester Corporation Transport Department Guide from November 1938. It concerned an ancient byelaw on queuing and prompted Kate Pangbourne to wonder whether the byelaw still exists in Manchester....

Email your letters and photos to editor@bususers.org or post to:
Bus User magazine, Terminal House, Shepperton TW17 8AS.
Deadline for Bus User 59: 27 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.
Membership Matters

Welcome
To new members
Pauline Jones, Abergavenny, Ian Thomas, Cardiff
To new member groups
Adur & Worthing Bus Users Group. Contact Gavin Muggeridge, 07549 434250, worthinganddadurbuswatch@gmail.com
Berkshire Bus Users Group (BBUG). Contact James Denny, info@bbug.org.uk

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

Adur & Worthing Bus Users Group
worthinganddadurbuswatch@gmail.com
Age UK Colchester
peter@ageconcern.org.uk
Association of Devizes Passengers
www.devizespassengers.org.uk,
www.facebook.com/Devizes Passengers
BABUS (Bedford Area Bus User’s Society)
www.babus.org.uk
Bath Bus Users Group chair=bath-bus-users.org.uk
Berkshire Bus Users Group info@bbug.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
hughjaeger@hotmail.com
Bus Users West Midlands
philipc.green@yahoo.co.uk
Bus Watch West Haringey
chrisj Barker@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
Colchester Bus Users Support Group (C-BUS)
peterkay.essex@btinternet.com
Dengie Hundred Bus Users Group (DHBUG)
contact@dhubug.org.uk
Devon Senior Voice Transport Group
Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Ivybridge PL21 9DD
Ealing Passenger Transport Users Group
www.egtug.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
Lostwithiel Transport Users Group
Prof J Scott CBE, 9 Meadow Breeze, Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0BJ
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
Railfuture www.railfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Severnside
www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside+Branch
Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group
g.cadwallader@btinternet.com
Rural East Lothan Bus Users
www.relbus.org.uk
The Senior Council for Devon Transport
andrea@scfd.org.uk
Southend Area Bus User Group
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
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
Tynedale Bus Users Group
Mrs N Wallace, Viewlands, Oakwood, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 4LJ
West Cumbria Bus Users Group
David Andrews, tel 01946 695373
West Leigh Residents Association
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
Wirral Transport Users Association
www.wirral tua.org.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.