The new Chair of Bus Users, the Rt Hon Norman Baker
Thank you to all the members who took the time and trouble to vote in our Election for members of the Board of Bus Users. The turnout was an impressive 63% which is much higher than average for membership organisations such as ours. You can read a little bit more about the people you elected elsewhere in this issue. We also want to thank all those who stood for election, giving members a wide choice of candidates.

As you know, our Articles allow us to co-opt a further two Board members. One of these will be Professor Stuart Cole, emeritus professor of transport at the Wales Transport Research Centre, University of Glamorgan Business School. And I am very pleased to announce that the final place will go to the former Minister of State, the Rt Hon Norman Baker, who has kindly agreed to become our Chair.

This skilled and experienced group of people will help Bus Users to extend its reach and work hard to achieve its aims and objectives.

Another major change is the setting up of an England office for Bus Users, led by Dawn Badminton-Capps whom some of you met at the AGM, along with her newly-appointed Deputy, Natacha Tagholm. We will be keeping everyone informed of progress, as it happens, on our website (www.bususers.org) so please visit regularly for updates.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users
Buses Bill in the Queen’s speech
New legislation on the cards will give local authorities powers to take over their bus services and franchise them as part of the process of giving them devolved powers. The powers will apply where devolved local authorities have elected mayors and by late-September 38 local authorities had applied for devolved authority.

Bus priorities are good value
Independent research by Professor Peter White of the University of Westminster shows that every £1 invested in bus priorities returns benefits worth between £4.67 and £6.94. They can also reduce emissions by up to 75% per passenger/kilometre.

Cooler buses in London
London’s New Routemaster buses have gained a reputation for being hot and stuffy. Now TfL is spending £3million on fitting opening windows to the new buses, and all future vehicles will have them fitted as standard.

Consultation for Scottish bus changes
Bus operators in Scotland are now required to consult with local authorities before being allowed to make changes to bus services. Previously they had to inform local authorities of changes 14 days before registering them; now they have to consult with them 28 days before registering changes, although the registration period has been reduced accordingly.

Roadworks cost bus companies
Go-Ahead Group has announced it won’t meet its target of making £100million profit on its bus services this year due to the effect of roadworks. A major programme of roadworks in Oxford has caused passenger numbers to fall and roadworks in London have caused the worst congestion since the congestion charge was introduced.

South Yorkshire to reduce the price of multi-operator tickets
As part of an improved bus partnership for Sheffield South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive is to reduce the cost of tickets valid on all operators to £4 day, with even larger reductions on weekly and monthly tickets.

Five million passengers expected on Bristol MetroBus
Bristol’s £200million Bus Rapid Transport scheme, due to start at the end of next year, is expected to carry around 5 million passengers a year. It is claimed that it will save up to 20 minutes on some journeys and will improve reliability. Meanwhile a Punctuality Improvement Partnership in Bristol aims to improve reliability of all services in the city, raising the percentage of services arriving on time from 85% to 95% by 2020.

Reduced fares for young people in Wales
Under a new scheme called mytravelpass, all 16-18-year-olds living in Wales are now entitled to one third off bus travel. Young people have to apply for the pass and supply a photo, but there is no charge for it.

Upgrade to Dartford Fastrack
The Fastrack service, which uses separate bus-only roads to link Dartford, Bluewater, Ebbsfleet and Gravesend, has been upgraded with a fleet of new buses and higher frequencies.

Electrifying London
Transport for London is to convert two commuter routes, the 507 and 521 which link Waterloo station with Victoria and the City respectively, to all-electric operations next year. The buses will be battery-powered, following trials with two Chinese-built battery buses on the 521.

First leaves Bracknell
As part of a process which has seen First buses withdrawn from a number of parts of the country, including much of Devon, Herefordshire, Chester and Wigan, Bracknell is the latest town to see First’s buses depart. Most services passed to local bus company Courtney Buses in July. Meanwhile in Braintree, Stephensons of Essex has introduced some new services to replace those ended by First.

Essex consultation
Essex County Council has been consulting on the future of supported bus services in the county. The public consultation ended on 21 October.

Arriva increases frequencies in Darlington
As part of its involvement in the Tees Valley Partnership Arriva North East has improved frequencies on Darlington town services. The services are marketed as Frequenta.
Cardiff bus station closed
Cardiff’s main bus station, ideally placed outside the railway station in the city centre, has now been closed. It will take two and a half years for a replacement to be built. First Cymru, one of the users of the bus station, expects to see a reduction of at least 10% in the use of its services.

Swansea loses FTR
First’s ‘FTR’ bendibuses, designed to look more like trams than buses, have been taken out of service in Swansea as they are too expensive to run. They were introduced in 2009 as part of Swansea’s Metro service which has specially-built stations and segregated roadways.

Former Bus Users man in book launch
Stephen Morris, former deputy chief executive of Bus Users UK, has been compiling a book based on articles which explore Manchester’s bus services to places beyond the city boundary over the last 50 years. The Long Reach is published by the Manchester Museum of Transport on 18 October, price £17, and is a fascinating study tracking development of the region’s public transport.

Night bus home for homeless
A London young people’s charity, New Horizons Youth Centre, has been giving young homeless people tickets to use London’s night buses due to the shortage of suitable accommodation. The young people are given advice on the best routes to use and can have breakfast and a shower back at the youth centre the next morning. The Centre’s director, Shelagh O’Connor told the London Evening Standard that the young people “were safer riding the buses than on the streets”. She said she’d never known the accommodation crisis to be “as bad as this”.

Bus stories for little people

Proposal for timed tickets in London
London mayoral candidate and former bus minister Sadiq Khan is proposing a £1.50 timed ticket, allowing unlimited bus travel in London for an hour. Such tickets are widely available on the continent, though not in the UK. They are especially helpful for passengers who need to change buses on their journey, as they do not need to pay twice.

Uckfield bus users have their say
Wealden Bus Alliance hosted a Your Bus Matters event on a brilliantly sunny and warm 11 September day.

More than 100 visitors attended the event at Uckfield railway station with Brighton & Hove Buses and Sussex Bus both providing double-decker buses on the station forecourt. On hand to receive comments from passengers were representatives from the bus operators, Sussex Community Rail Partnership, Wealden District and East Sussex County Councils, Uckfield Town Council and Wealden Passenger User Group.

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BARCLAY DAVIES offers his personal reflections on the sad death of Bus Users stalwart, John Richards

We are sad to announce the death of John Richards, our former local representative for North Wales Central. John died in hospital on 30 August aged 77.

John was a busman in the late 1950s and 1960s, working for what was then Midland Red. Although he later pursued other lines of employment, John maintained a lifelong interest in the bus industry and had a good general knowledge of bus operations. So much so that, when he retired, John became involved with Bus Users Cymru, representing the interests of passengers in North Wales.

In 2002 when the concessionary scheme was launched in Wales, John accepted a challenge from his local Welsh Assembly Member at the time, Alun Pugh, to travel from Colwyn Bay to Cardiff Bay by local bus services, earning a free lunch in the Assembly in the process. In 2012, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the scheme, John and I recreated the journey from Colwyn Bay to Cardiff Bay and back again by local bus. In an interview with the media John said: “I hope to raise people’s awareness of the scheme and encourage pass holders to make the most of their free pass”. When asked what the concessionary pass meant to him he replied: “Freedom”. This is a sentiment we hear time and again at our Your Bus Matters events across the UK.

Sadly John’s health was deteriorating and he decided in 2013 to hang up his bus pass, but not before his efforts on behalf of bus passengers had been recognised with an invitation to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. Accompanied by his daughter, John had a great day and met various members of the Royal family.

John was quite a character or, in modern day terminology, a legend. He could be stubborn, bordering on obdurate, but you couldn’t help but warm to him: he even managed to get our former Chair Gillian Merron to carry his suitcase to the station in Liverpool after our AGM in 2012. John had a wicked sense of humour and often joked that he would go into a meeting, make a deliberately controversial comment and, having caused a stir, quietly leave.

Above all though, John had an overwhelming desire to help people and to ensure that justice was done. He was always fair and equitable in his dealings with others and he earned much respect along the way.
Bus Users appoints
Director for England

Bus Users already has directors for Scotland and Wales but, until recently, not for England. That has now been addressed by the appointment of Dawn Badminton-Capps as Director for England in July this year. Dawn Badminton-Capps is responsible for leading the England team and developing the work of Bus Users across the UK. She will be working closely with key partners and groups to raise the profile of the organisation and improve standards in bus travel.

Dawn has no previous experience of the bus industry, other than as a passenger, but she has brought with her extensive experience of the public and NGO sectors and has particular strengths in community and stakeholder engagement and project management. We asked Dawn how she is finding her new role.

What were your views of buses before joining Bus Users and has that view changed?
For many years I was a regular bus user to get to and from university, work, appointments and entertainment, just like any other bus user. Bus travel was vital to my independence and getting to where I needed to go and, for the most part, my experience was good. But unfortunately, like many bus users’ experience, from time to time my buses didn’t turn up or run to time, drivers weren’t always pleasant or the bus had simply seen better days.

These were never things which bothered me enough to complain, just annoyances that in those times I joked about with friends ‘the bus doesn’t arrive when you want one then two turn up!’ and accepted as part of the experience. I didn’t understand the complexities of running a bus service to time and that all sorts of things can happen on a journey outside the operator’s control — something operators have taken the time to explain to me.

Since taking up my post I have started using the bus more often and I can see that some operators have done many things to improve the bus user experience: on-board stop announcements, wi-fi, plug sockets, buses with lower floors. So as a regular bus user, feeling that the operator wasn’t interested in what I needed or wanted from my bus journey, I am increasingly aware that for many operators - particularly the ones I have met - that is not the case.
What have been your first impressions of the transport sector?
As someone new to the public transport sector and buses I am surprised at how welcome I have been made to feel and how keen operators and partners are to share their knowledge and expertise with me. I am very grateful to those who have taken time out of their busy days to go ‘back to basics’ with me on how the industry operates and how that particular partner works within it. Many of the operators and partners I have visited have a real family feeling about them, which has been a nice surprise in such a commercial environment.

You’ve spent a lot of your time getting out and about, meeting passengers, operators, transport bodies and campaigning organisations. What has been the general reaction to Bus Users?
Everyone I have met so far has been supportive of Bus Users and understands that the passenger voice is an important one. For many they are doing as much as they can to engage with bus users, but they recognise the value we can add and are happy to work with us. That’s not to say that there isn’t more work for us to do: the industry is changing all the time, as is the political environment around it, and we have to ensure that the bus user’s voice is not lost. There are many opportunities to make further improvements and ensure that services are accessible to all, tickets are easy to buy and use and buses are travelling to places where they are needed. The strength of Bus Users is that we listen to passengers, we know what they are unhappy about or want to improve and we are happy to work with operators and partners to ensure the changes made are beneficial to everyone.

What are the most pressing issues facing these groups?
Passengers want regular and reliable services, taking them to destinations where they can go to work or school or access further public services. They want any problems that they have dealt with, quickly, fairly and effectively. For the rest of us the changing political landscape leaves us with some uncertainty as to what is coming next. What will devolution bring? What will the Buses Bill bring? How will this be funded and implemented? We may all be looking at these issues from slightly different standpoints, but we all agree that bus services are vital and that people depend on them.

“ The strength of Bus Users is that we listen to passengers, we know what they are unhappy about or want to improve and we are happy to work with operators and partners to ensure the changes made are beneficial to everyone. ”

What more could be done to support passengers?
When the basics are right, passengers are happy: can I get to where I need to go, are the buses regular and reliable, is the driver helpful, is the bus clean? This is not always the case and there are ways that we can make those cases less frequent. We also need to ask whether the bus is accessible to all members of the public and are they comfortable using it? Are operators and local authorities truly listening to, and engaging with, passengers and responding to their needs?

How do you see the future for Bus Users?
Change is in the air and with that comes opportunity. I think Bus Users is integral to ensuring the bus user voice is heard and listened to. This, in turn, will create further improvements across the industry and build a foundation for increasing bus passenger numbers.
New directors for Bus Users’ Board

Following this year’s Bus Users AGM at Cardiff, it was decided to ballot members to elect three new members to the Bus Users’ Board of Directors.

Our Articles of Association allow us to have between three and five elected board members; to date we have managed with three, but it was decided that it was time to broaden and strengthen the Board. As Gillian Merron was retiring from the Board, there were three vacancies this year and we have been able to widen the range of expertise and bus-using experience on the Board.

Thank you to all who took part in the ballot; an astonishing 63% of members took the trouble to vote, and the three successful candidates were Harry Barker, Hugh Jaeger and David Redgewell. We have asked them all a few questions, so you can get a better idea of the people who will be representing you on the Board.

Harry Barker

What involvement have you had with Bus Users prior to becoming a Director?
I’ve had an interest in buses since my school days and, over the years, have seen far too many service deficiencies, for whatever reasons, that undermine passenger confidence. I joined the Rural East Lothian Bus Group (RELBUS) and Bus Users some years ago and I’m involved locally in campaigning for better services, including attending East Lothian Council’s Bus Forum. I also became one of three independent members of the Bus Appeals Body (Scotland).

What made you stand for election?
I stood for election because I believe that bus travel is at the cusp of becoming a political football and it’s too important, as the principal means of public transport in this country, not to have a knowledgeable centre of excellence standing up for passengers’ interests.

What do you see as Bus Users’ main strengths?
Its credibility within the bus industry is an essential ingredient which, in turn, depends on understanding both the problems of passengers and those of the industry, coupled with keeping up to date. This is critical to the effectiveness of Bus Users in keeping a close eye on new legislation both from Europe and the current move towards franchising in certain areas.
What skills and expertise do you bring to the organisation?
I have been involved in instigating top-line strategy programmes in a large quoted plc within the financial sector, and then implementing them. The ability to look forward and anticipate issues and deal with them is vital. If your strategy is wrong, someone will have a go at you both within the industry and outside it. I also believe that handling staff (and passengers!) along the lines that you would wish to be treated is important, and taking quality time to deal with and sort out difficult problems pays dividends in the long run, rather than putting off the day when the problem has to be dealt with.

“I can honestly say that I have never driven into a large city in the past 20 years other than my local city of Edinburgh where I sometimes have to visit hospitals”

Why is bus travel so important to you?
I do own a car (for those interested, a Toyota Auris Hybrid estate). However, I can honestly say that I have never driven into a large city in the past 20 years other than my local city of Edinburgh where I sometimes have to visit hospitals: I would never drive into the centre and park. I always use public transport and buses are the natural and, mostly the only, choice. When in London I always prefer to use a bus than the tube, although this may be coloured by being on the Circle Line train immediately before the one that was bombed at Edgware Road when travelling to work in the City in July 2005.

What are your hopes for Bus Users in the future?
I wish Bus Users to become even more relevant in the future, and that legislation changes give us the platform to do that. We need to increase our membership substantially to ensure that nobody can claim we are losing touch with passengers. Then I suppose we must get back to the politics!

Hugh Jaeger

What involvement have you had with Bus Users prior to becoming a Director?
I joined Bus Users Oxford some years ago and am now very fortunate to be Chair of the group. I work with some really wonderful people who are mutually supportive and possess very complementary skills. We play to our strengths and as a team we are greater than the sum of our parts.

What made you stand for election?
I love working at grass roots level and the work I’ve been doing at Bus Users has been really rewarding. I had only intended to find out a little more about the directors’ election but the reception I received was so encouraging that I felt motivated to stand. The whole process has taken shape so naturally and organically that it almost feels like it was meant to happen.

Why is bus travel so important to you?
Buses are uniquely important: they come closer to our front doors than any other form of public transport and

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while not everyone can use private transport, practically everyone can use the bus. Even the word itself — from the Latin omnibus, meaning ‘for all’ — is inclusive.

**What do you hope to achieve?**

My aspiration, and one of the main reasons I’m involved with Bus Users, is that I’d like to see all bus travel brought up to the level of the very best operators. Outside London, standards vary hugely across the UK — access for people with disabilities is inconsistent, as is the quality and design of vehicles, and technologies that already exist and should be fairly easy to adopt are at best patchy. When I visited Germany in 1989 they already had on-board announcements on their buses!

I’d also encourage those bus operators who are doing the right thing to stand by their decisions: if that means some passengers have to make compromises to ensure that everyone has access to a bus, then so be it.

Ultimately, we need more buses travelling to more places with more people on them and that means getting the fundamentals right. Most roads in the UK are in urgent need of repair but while that’s unlikely to happen in the near future, we need buses with first class suspension to provide passengers with a smoother journey. We need to design out the noise pollution on-board from all the rattles and squeaks, we need to offer free wi-fi on every journey and charging points so people can catch up with work, study and social networking. Basically, we need to make bus travel much more attractive if we are going to seduce people out of their cars and onto public transport.

Of course there are cost implications, but if we invest in these things then higher passenger volumes would pay for it anyway.

It’s also hugely important to reduce emissions. There are some really exciting developments being made with hybrid and biomethane buses which, far from polluting the environment, can actually help to improve air quality.

**So what’s the future for Bus Users?**

We’ve been elected for a three-year term which is a good amount of time to try to achieve some of these ideals. We have a real opportunity now to raise the profile of Bus Users beyond the people who already know and respect us. We need to reach out and engage with a broader audience and ensure that the whole of society benefits fully from what the bus has to offer.

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“Buses are uniquely important: they come closer to our front doors than any other form of public transport”

David Redgewell

**What involvement have you had with Bus Users prior to becoming a Director?**

I’ve been a member of Bus Users for over 10 years now. I joined when the coach and bus industry was going through a period of immense change and there was a need for passengers to have a clear voice.

**What made you stand for election?**

I was approached by a number of people with a view to standing as a director for Bus Users. While much has changed in the bus industry, consumers still need greater representation at a national level in the governments of England, Scotland and Wales, as well as locally, across the UK.

I’ve worked in the rail industry for 20 years and in the bus industry for 15, so I understand how the industry works and I also understand it from the perspective of the customer. I’ve had extensive experience in campaigning and dealing with Public Transport Bills, skills that will be useful in my role at Bus Users and will help our work to give passengers a voice at all levels of government and within the industry itself.
Why is bus travel so important to you?
Buses are the most used form of public transport, with around two thirds of all public transport journeys made by bus. They’re the mainstay of our towns and villages and are fundamental to economic growth: without them, the alternative is poor air quality and gridlock.

What do you see as the main threats to services?
The 1985 Transport Act deregulated buses and created the conditions for some of the worst public transport we could have wished for: poorly regulated and with low quality vehicles. At the time, Margaret Thatcher summed up the pervading attitude towards bus travel when she said: ‘A man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure.’

We currently have many high-level bus operators but we cannot see a return to the days of squeezed subsidies that make buses the transport choice of last resort.

What do you hope to achieve with Bus Users?
I want to help raise the profile of Bus Users and improve services for passengers. I’d like to see enhanced information, greater public funding, better relationships between passengers, operators and local authorities, more understanding of ticketing and pricing, and greater investment in new fleets and services. I also want to see a national policy of regeneration of bus and coach stations and bus/rail interchanges and improvements in rural bus services. Above all, I want to see more representation for passengers.

And how do you see the future for buses?
We have an opportunity to shape the forthcoming Buses Bill outlined in the Queen’s speech, to ensure that we have a fully integrated transport system that genuinely benefits the passenger. I want to work with Bus Users to put passengers at the very heart of the policy process. Whether it’s quality contracts, devolution or procurement, passengers should come first and be given the high quality service they deserve. It’s really simple — buses are like any other business, the customer is key and needs to be central to the planning process. After all, no customers means no business.
Tracy Jessop, Chair of Bus Users, welcomed delegates before introducing Traffic Commissioner for Wales and the West Midlands, Nick Jones, who spoke of his passion for quality of service and his pleasure at being able to support the Bus Users Cymru seminars on quality.

The meeting then moved on to the business section, covering Apologies, Minutes of 2014 AGM and Matters arising. In the Chair’s Report, Tracy Jessop looked at the effects of the General Election, the possibilities for devolution, such as Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine for Growth, and opportunities for greater income for Bus Users arising out of devolution.

Tracy outlined the internal reorganisation at Bus Users and the plans that were in place to deal with challenges and shifts in funding. They had, she explained, made really good progress and had a three-year funding deal with operators based on the business plan. Bus Users was now fit for purpose and needed to be fluid as an organisation: very strong director
of service and failure to show or stop. While operators don’t always deal properly with complaints, we achieved refunds, reimbursement and apologies for passengers. Barclay thanked the complaints teams.

European Passenger Rights Regulations (EPRR) came into force March 2013. London TravelWatch covers London and Bus Users covers the rest of England, Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, issues are covered by the Northern Ireland Department for the Environment and exemptions applied in the UK. It should be remembered that EU law trumps UK law, particularly with disability. There were three discrimination cases (one failure to stop which was resolved; one complaint that the concessionary pass was discriminatory because it could only be used in England, Scotland or Wales, depending on where the user lived (this was resolved after going to Brussels) and one was out of scope). The EPRR report is available on the website at www.bususers.org/publications.

Bill Wright, Finance Manager, reminded members that Bus Users’ accounts were for 15 months because the organisation changed its year end from December to March. Income from companies stayed at pretty much the same level but the three-year agreement with the operators will help. Income from Mystery Travelling had dropped off but steps will be taken to try to increase that and income had been derived from project work with a seat coverings manufacturer and a local authority.

Tracy introduced Dawn Badminton-Capps who was about to take up the position of Director for England.

Appointment of directors

Having taken up a permanent role with another organisation, Gillian Merron would be resigning her directorship with Bus Users. Gillian’s role, along with the two other current vacancies, presented an opportunity to broaden the skills on the Bus Users board. Jeff Anderson decided to serve another year with the organisation.

Members had been asked to nominate or self-nominate and it was agreed that a ballot would be held to elect directors. The six members who had put their names forward would all be included in the ballot with a closing date of 3 September. The successful candidates were the Board’s recommended candidates, Harry Barker, Hugh Jaeger and David Redgewell.
Just a Minute

The afternoon led with a session of Just A Minute hosted by Gavin Booth and his ACME Thunderer whistle.

Guests included Hugh Jaeger on the subject of bus suspension on rough roads. He called for a range of buses which have suspension as smooth as a modern motor car and for buses to be comfortable and attractive enough to get people out of their cars.

John Nicholas covered localism. He wants greater democracy to allow citizens to make decisions because customers are usually at the bottom of the list for consultation.

David Redgewell was next on bus, coach and rail integration and accessibility. The Equality Act 2010 puts the duty on operators to make buses accessible but David believes we need to address the conflict between buggy users and wheelchairs.

Gavin Booth then spoke on behalf of Mervyn Dickson on a press cutting about a trial bus service costing £3K to allow pupils in rural areas to take part in extracurricular activities. This scheme could potentially benefit more than school pupils.

Gavin Booth spoke again on behalf of Richard Parker on the benefits of concessionary travel tickets. They help sustain routes and frequency and reduce journeys times in loading. If there was any possibility of losing the concession, the idea was mooted that an annual fee could be charged to go towards providing the service.

Finally John Rose played a soundtrack of a bus ride in Oxfordshire. In 20th century we learned to fly, cracked rocket science, put a man on moon, converted mass, yet bus manufacturers have still not cracked oscillating masses with intolerable noise.

David Redgewell: “We need to address the conflict between buggy users and wheelchairs”
Keynote
The day’s keynote speech was made by Jane Hutt AM, Business & Finance Manager, National Assembly for Wales. She highlighted the importance of the work of Bus Users as the UK’s passenger champion and specifically thanked Margaret and the team of BCOs at Bus Users Cymru for their work in her constituency.

Welsh Government has funded the work of Bus Users Cymru for a number of years, work that has greatly assisted the Traffic Commissioner.

Ms Hutt outlined her commitment to integrated transport in Wales but explained that this could only be done through partnerships. Welsh Government is providing £95m to local authorities and operators to deliver services: improving public transport, she believes, is critical to improving the quality of life for the people of Wales. As well as providing £25m in Bus Services Support Grant for socially necessary and community transport bus services, Welsh Government had also committed £189m to reimburse bus transport for older and disabled passengers and had developed the TrawsCymru network, with state-of-the-art vehicles, coach style interiors and complimentary wifi. 1.5m passengers were carried this year, many of whom now use it every day to travel to work, study and appointments.

Jo Foxall, Marketing Manager Traveline Cymru spoke about devolution, apps for phones and tablets, fares, changing passenger demand, social media and digital exclusion and cost of access. Andrea Gordon, Engagement Manager, Guide Dogs Association, addressed the difficulties encountered by blind and partially sighted people and Alex Clarke, Passenger Transport Information Officer, Caerphilly County Borough Council gave a very comprehensive presentation on bus services and the role of a local authority. Presentations by Jo Foxall and Alex Clarke are available on request from the BUC office.

Barclay Davies brought the meeting to a close with a presentation on service quality. The day ended with delegates offered the choice of a trip around Cardiff to the Central Railway Station in a modern New Adventure Travel vehicle, or the chance to travel to the Cardiff Transport Preservation Group depot in Barry in a Heritage vehicle provided by CTPG.

New Chair for Bus Users

Former Under Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Norman Baker, is to be the new Chair of Bus Users.

Norman Baker said: “I am delighted to joining Bus Users UK. I know from my time as a transport minister just what a valuable role they play on behalf of bus passengers. Bus travel is a crucial and often neglected form of public transport. I am strong supporter both of the bus and the bus passenger, and will be bringing that to my role for Bus Users.”

In welcoming him as Chair, Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users said: “Norman Baker has been a committed campaigner on transport issues and brings with him a wealth of expertise and a deeply held passion for transport. We very much look forward to working with him and ensuring that policy and decision makers give greater priority to the bus and that the voice of bus passengers is heard.”

Norman Baker was elected Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes in 1997 becoming Shadow DEFRA Secretary then Shadow Transport Secretary. In 2010 he was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Transport and from 2013 until 2014 he was Minister of State, Home Office under the Coalition Government. During his time with the Department for Transport, Norman’s achievements included the £600million Local Sustainable Transport Fund which saw £1billion of sustainable transport projects announced across the country.

Norman will take over from Tracy Jessop who is currently acting Chair of Bus Users. Tracy also welcomed the appointment saying: “Bus Users is entering a new and exciting phase in its work as passenger champion. The unique skills and experience that Norman Baker has to offer will add enormous value to that work. I know that Norman is highly regarded for the knowledge he has of transport and he has a strong grasp on key issues. This really is a coup for Bus Users and I couldn’t wish for someone better equipped to take over the Board leadership.”
Devolotion

With devolution currently flavour of the month, Stephen Morris considers what it will mean for bus users.

However much deregulation of bus services 30 years ago aimed to get politics out of bus services, that is one respect in which it was doomed to fail. Buses remain a political animal, and always will be. As we’ve often said before, bus operators and local authorities have to work hand in hand: local authorities need bus companies to provide their areas with local public transport, and bus companies can’t do it without the cooperation of the local authority.

The clamour to restore bus services to public control has never really gone away during those 30 years, and the perception is that local authorities would ensure services weren’t changed and cut so often and fares would be kept down. London of course is the prime example of local authority control of bus services and all of us would love to have the level and convenience of bus service that Londoners enjoy.

By and large London’s buses are cheaper than those elsewhere too, though individual bus fares have risen there, for those that still pay them, by 50% over recent years. So, will devolution bring the same benefits to bus services in other cities?

Like it or not London is a special case. Its population density is higher than other city regions — in fact, it’s about eight times more than the next biggest city in Britain. It’s also far and away Britain’s biggest tourist destination. The level of public funding for its bus service, even if scaled down per head of population, far exceeds that of any other area of Britain.

London has a greater population density and more tourists than other cities, though puts a lot more money per head into supporting bus services too.

Britain is unusual in concentrating quite so much power and resource in its capital city. The fact that it is around eight times the size of Britain’s second city, Birmingham, means it attracts investment like nowhere else. As a result many of our smaller towns and cities are still suffering decline while London thrives and its economy heads rapidly for boiling point, as anyone who has tried to buy somewhere to live there in the last 10 years knows to their cost.

The return of a ‘no’ vote to Scottish independence brought promises of increased devolution for Scotland. This quickly led to demands for similar powers for some of England’s city regions, some of which are as remote from Westminster as parts of Scotland, certainly in terms of the relevance of London to daily lives.
As a result, the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill is currently going through Parliament to enable local areas to bid for greater independence and have a locally-elected mayor. The mayor may have powers for finance, health, police and other services in the area which, incidentally, need not be the same as a single existing local authority. In the 38 areas which are bidding for devolution, several create a more logical local area, such as Derby and Nottingham plus their respective shire counties, while Leeds is bidding with a number of other local authorities stretching as far as Hull. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will have the authority to allocate particular powers to elected mayors. This can include powers to control and franchise the local bus service, rather than leaving the bus service to private-sector bus companies to provide.

Devolution deals have already been reached with Greater Manchester and Cornwall which include powers to take over the running of the bus service. This would be done in a similar style to London, with the local authority specifying the network, fares and timetables and inviting bus companies to bid to run them. Greater Manchester already functions in this way in respect of its Metrolink tram system, but the bus service is still deregulated with bus companies working in conjunction with Transport for Greater Manchester to run non-commercial services and to provide all-operator ticketing.

In Cornwall much of the bus service is dependent already on local authority support and, like many largely rural areas, already depends on a close working relationship between the bus companies and county council.

While the 2000 and 2008 Transport Acts already give powers to local authorities to take control of the local bus services, these are complex and difficult to invoke: so far no local authority has managed to invoke these provisions, though of course Tyne & Wear is currently working through the process in an effort to bring about such an arrangement.

A Buses Bill was announced in the Queen’s Speech at the State Opening of Parliament earlier this year and Bus Users is currently involved in a working party to help the Department for Transport draw up the bill. The DfT says that ‘delivering better bus services for local people is one of the key aims of Government and local authorities when thinking about devolution’. It says that the main aims of the Bill are to:

- enable local authorities in England, outside London, to franchise their bus networks where they have agreement from Government;
- preserve the commercial and innovative strengths of private sector operators; and
- ensure there is a good package of measures to improve local bus services in areas that may not wish or feel able to move to franchising.
Despite some notable exceptions, DfT is particularly concerned that bus ridership overall is in decline. However historically the decline has been greatest in the major city regions, even though there are hints of an upturn and there have been some notable improvements in services in all of them recently. Cynically one could suggest that the threat of losing profitable commercial networks to a franchising system has galvanised operators into action, but whatever the cause there are very positive developments in most of these areas. DfT also expresses concern that bus fares have continuously gone up faster than the rate of inflation since 1995.

There are concerns that a franchised system may not deliver the desired result. After all many services cuts have been the result of local authorities cutting support for local bus services, and indeed some bus companies have responded by trying to keep them going commercially. One of the reasons for decline in bus service in major cities is that traffic congestion has affected reliability and increased journey times. It has also led to bus companies having to put in more resources just to stand still, with a detrimental effect on their costs and therefore our fares. One major urban operator told us recently that the extra cost in maintaining the same level of service, due to the effects of traffic congestion, has been a much greater cause for concern than any cuts in local authority support.

The aim of the bill to ‘ensure... a good package of measures to improve local bus services’ is crucial to the success of any scheme; after all if journey times and reliability continue to be affected adversely by traffic congestion, bus companies franchised to provide a set number of buses to provide the service won’t be in a position to slot in extra ones to overcome delays and reliability, other than by the local authority agreeing an increase in the price it pays. And hopefully such provision will guard against other elected mayors taking the lead set by the Mayor of Liverpool in abolishing bus priority measures.
Naturally Bus Users welcomes anything that improves the lot of passengers and will be watching the development of devolved powers with interest. While it could be a case of needing be careful what we wish for, any opportunity for regions of the country outside London to share more equally in the country’s prosperity has to be worth going for.
As a campaign issue buses probably cut across more basic themes than anything else. They are essential for social inclusion; they help economic development by bringing people to work, shops etc in a way which contributes little to congestion; and as most bus journeys begin or end with a walk they can also help to promote health. But above all they are an environmental issue, as one bus causes far less environmental impact than tens of cars in terms of safety, noise, visual intrusion, air quality and climate change.

Simon Norton from Campaign for Better Transport Cambridgeshire:

In addition to their other environmental credentials, buses can also help people appreciate the value of their environment. One of the milestones in my life came about in 1966 when I found a batch of London Transport publicity left in a locker that had been assigned to me. In the 1960s London Transport ran not only the ‘red’ buses in Greater London, but also the ‘green’ Country buses in the Home Counties and thanks to London Transport’s ‘Country Walks’ books, I learnt to appreciate our countryside. For me, buses represented the means by which I could enjoy the countryside — this is still my main motivation as a campaigner. I also learnt how the countryside was becoming less accessible as buses and trains were displaced by ever-increasing car ownership. For buses this process had a peak in the early 1980s, when the general political situation was very similar to what it is now. Meanwhile new roads were slicing through some of my favourite landscapes.

As for urban areas, one of the first elections I remember voting in was the Greater London Council 1973 election, when the main issue was the choice between a ‘motorway box’ and public transport development — with the electorate decisively on the side of the latter.

Later, land use became an important issue. The car-based developments of the 1980s ate up lots more countryside while creating a sprawl hard to service properly by public transport — especially as nobody seemed to be trying. As a result traffic jams spread from our cities to our smaller towns; building bypasses didn’t help and may indeed have worsened the problem.
In the 1990s climate change became an important issue. If politicians didn’t regard a pleasant environment accessible to all as sufficient motivation to shift people out of cars on to an efficient bus network, maybe the very habitability of our planet might do the trick. Yet despite improvements such as New Labour’s Rural Bus Grant in 1998, little effort was made to solve the underlying problems.

One of the problems is that buses have not been promoted as a core campaign issue. As I said, buses are one of the most cross-cutting issues, with the potential to unite community activists, environmentalists and those who simply want a society that works properly. Unfortunately at present the issue seems to be falling between several stools and left to niche organisations like Bus Users UK and the Campaign for Better Transport. We need to team up with organisations like Friends of the Earth and the Campaign to Protect Rural England, as well as local amenity groups across the country, to get their large membership behind our campaigning. We also need to ensure that climate change campaigners give as much weight to transport as they do to renewable energy and home energy saving — the Campaign against Climate Change’s ‘One Million Climate Jobs’ pamphlet downloadable from www.campaigncc.org/greenjobs is a good start but needs to be supplemented by more grassroots action.

Finally, we need to teach the next generation how to enjoy our countryside and towns by public transport, so they can appreciate the value of buses. Even in financial terms this would be a good investment — I must have spent tens of thousands of pounds in fares during my lifetime, and if more people did the same we could provide a much better service for less public money.

The sooner organisations like Bus Users can meet these challenges the better the prognosis for our future society.

—

Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Journeys, the national campaign for modal switch from car to bus and coach

The view from Claire Haigh, Greener Journeys:

I agree wholeheartedly with Simon Norton that buses are an issue which ought to be able to unite climate change activists, those who want to improve their local environment and those who have concerns about social exclusion.

Tackling the UK’s dependence on car travel will be crucial to achieving an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Cars produce 60% of domestic transport emissions, which as a sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of all emissions in the UK.

We know that technology can only take us part of the way, and an important part of delivering the necessary carbon reductions will need to come from modal shift. Buses have a vital role to play in delivering this. If everyone switched just one car journey a month to bus or coach instead it would mean one billion fewer car journeys on our roads and a saving of two million tonnes of CO2 every year. Buses are also key to reducing congestion which costs the UK economy at least £11 billion every year and is a serious constraint on growth.

Of course there are many for whom car dependency would never apply as they are completely dependent on public transport. A quarter of all
households and half of workless households do not have a car. Greener Journeys has looked at this question in more detail from the point of view of access to employment. 77% of jobseekers have no regular access to a car, van or motorbike—and this rises to 87% of unemployed 16-24 year olds.

If we are to maximise the role the bus can play in reducing carbon emissions, delivering greener growth and providing essential access for many on low incomes, we need to ensure that the right conditions are in place. This includes more investment in local bus infrastructure. Analysis for Greener Journeys by KPMG has shown that investment in bus priority measures can deliver up to £7 of net economic benefit for every £1 invested. And research by Peter White, Professor Emeritus of Public Transport Systems at the University of Westminster has demonstrated that bus infrastructure can deliver up to 75% fewer emissions per passenger per kilometre.

It is also vital that there is sufficient support for bus revenue funding. Simon refers to the damaging effect of bus cuts. We need to make sure that in the forthcoming Spending Review bus revenue funding is kept at least at its current level if we are to avoid triggering a crisis in bus services.

This is surely something around which all can unite.

The view from Meera Rambissoon, Senior Consultant at passenger transport consultancy the TAS Partnership:

The role of the bus environmentally speaking is vast, not least in taking single occupant car drivers off the road while removing the emissions which would have been made by those cars. But it’s not necessarily straightforward.

The sheer quality and level of innovation of the vehicles themselves is worth focusing on. Back in the 1980s when, say, a Bristol VRT with Gardner 6LXB engine — renowned for its particulate output — was chugging around, people didn’t really care about what buses were emitting and about environmental impacts as a whole. That said, fuel consumption (and therefore carbon emissions) was considerably lower in some cases than it is now.

A look at the ‘Environment’ category of the UK Bus Awards provides a good yardstick. The category was introduced in 2010, a year after the Green Bus Fund was introduced by the Government, and what a relief too. The winner of the environment award was BAE Systems, which had worked with bus manufacturer Alexander Dennis Ltd to develop a family of hybrid diesel-electric buses. Double- and single-deck versions in service in cities across the UK were prided on saving 30% fuel costs as well as reducing CO₂, particulates and noise. This was mega and a great example of collaboration, although certainly not the only one. Go-Ahead for example featured as a runner up for its Cutting Back on Carbon initiative.

Finalists in this year’s UK Bus Awards Environment category: First York in partnership with York City Council operate two fully electric park & ride routes helping cut congestion and emission levels into the city centre.
investment in diesel/electric hybrid buses for which the company has become renowned. Lothian Buses was the winner in 2013 with its investment into Scotland’s first hybrids as well as a pioneering initiative to retrofit 44 buses with ultra-low-emission exhaust systems. And last year, FirstGroup topped the decks with a comprehensive fuel economy testing of dozens of buses at Millbrook, triggering significant improvements including looking to improve the diesel fleets which will be in service still for many years.

First’s achievements had implications not just for the group but for the whole industry. Nottingham City Council struck silver that year for its electric bus partnership and Arriva Shires & Essex for its fully electric vehicle trial with wireless charging.

Operators such as Reading and Lothian and local authorities such as Nottingham City Council and Milton Keynes should be commended, not only for their investment but, in many respects, for their pioneering bravery. The big groups, as well as their individual initiatives, have astounded with their sheer scale of achievement and rollout and planning. The not very straightforward bit comes when looking at fuel consumption. Cleaning up diesel emissions has also, ironically, pushed up fuel consumption and adding features to buses like low floor access and more comfortable seating has pushed up weight, another factor in increasing fuel consumption. Back in the days of more fuel-efficient, if much dirtier, buses more people were travelling too, lessening each passenger’s carbon footprint.

This pro-environment spirit and responsibility has been pervasive and collective: it has risen with great gusto and engineers, manufacturers and operators are playing their part admirably. There is, of course, more needed and equally more to come.

Next stop? Get those miles per gallon up!
There are few major towns and cities in the UK which I’ve never visited. By far the biggest, until recently, was Aberdeen: it’s a fair distance from my home in the Home Counties and not exactly on the way to anywhere, apart from Orkney and Shetland.

So a couple of days’ stopover on the way back from Orkney enabled me to fill this significant gap in my knowledge, and has finally put paid to my oft-quoted and highly poetic statement, ‘I’ve never been to Aberdeen’.

That now leaves Hartlepool as my largest unvisited UK town, and gave me the opportunity to approach the local bus service without any prior knowledge.

My first port of call when visiting a town is a suitable emporium from which to acquire an A-Z so I can begin to understand the place, and I headed straight for WH Smith at the airport with that in mind. It could supply me with books about many places such as Bucharest and Banff (which turned out to be the one in Canada, not the one in Aberdeenshire) but my enquiry about an A-Z of Aberdeen was met with the blankest of blank looks. After pondering my question for a moment, the young lady behind the counter suddenly twigged; ‘Is that a map?’ she said. No, they didn’t stock such things, even for dinosaurs like me who still rely on such outdated technology.

This seems to be the way in Aberdeen: they’re very keen that you should go somewhere else. The tourist information centre in the city didn’t have A-Zs either, but it did have what looked to be a good stock of bus timetables. They turned out all to be Stagecoach ones — First runs much of the local network — taking you to places any visitor to Aberdeen really wants to go to: Stonehaven, Fraserburgh, Blairgowrie, Braemar…

But initial impressions were good. Stagecoach ran a jolly good bus service from the airport, the 727, every 10 minutes with nice buses, a good driver and plenty of information, including the fare. That enabled us to give the driver the exact change, for which he was inordinately grateful and which, unexpectedly, would turn out to be something of an irony.
A tale of two cities
One thing we discovered after an evening pottering about the streets, and which I hadn’t previously known, was that while today’s Aberdeen is a bustling port on the River Dee, the original Aberdeen was on the River Don, a few miles away. So having searched in vain for St Machar’s Cathedral and the old city’s cobbled streets we made this discovery and decided that the next day we should go there by bus, do a little coastal walk and then go to the other side of the River Dee and catch a bus back. Simple.

Getting the information was difficult, but we had to see Marischal College, Aberdeen’s most iconic building, and part of it is now the City Council’s offices, with an information centre which had a little leaflet entitled Get about: Day trips on the Bus. Two pages were devoted to getting to places actually in Aberdeen, with a suggestion that you forget about the bus and use the ‘Co-Wheels on street, on demand car rental service’ (no wonder the place is so choked with traffic), two pages were maps and two pages were about places you’d far rather go to that weren’t in Aberdeen at all. We thought it quite a nice city, but clearly the locals don’t have much confidence in it at all. Oddly the greatest ambassador for the city we found was the lady in the left luggage office at the railway station whose accent was at least 500 miles south of the city but had lived there for 27 years, loved the place and wanted everyone else to as well.

The leaflet did tell us helpfully that ‘First services 19 & 20 takes you to the heart of Old Aberdeen’, and the grammar is Aberdeen City Council’s, not mine. As we emerged a First 19, a very glamorous Platinum service double-decker with bells and whistles had rolled up, but as it said ‘via City Centre’ so could have been going in either direction, we let it go. The main street, Union Street, lies roughly east-west so working out which buses go from where to get north or south is not too straightforward.

Walking along Union Street we saw a First logo outside a shop, which turned out to be their
information centre and we assumed now we had it cracked. I walked in and had my mouth open to ask my question of one of two ladies seated behind a desk. With amazing alacrity she got up and vanished into a back room, never to re-emerge, before my mouth actually had chance to move any further. Maybe she thought I was a vampire.

Her colleague was busy with another client who was clearly less threatening than I, but there was a carousel with timetables on it, which confirmed, as I rather suspected, that the 19, with or without bells and whistles, actually went nowhere near Old Aberdeen, let alone to its heart, though the 20 did and it depended on whether or not it was University term time as to whether it did so every half hour or every 20 minutes. It was also possible to work out roughly where the bus went from.

There was also a handy guide to ‘your’ bus fares (strictly speaking, I think they’re yours, Mr First, rather than mine), so I picked that up in the hopes we’d know just how much to pay and we could proudly make yet another bus driver’s day by giving him the exact money.

Savoir fare...?
The 20 bus stop was found and a real time sign told us it would come in 10 minutes, which gave plenty of time to study the guide to bus fares. So a single journey was £1.30 for 1-2 stages, £2.20 for 3-5 stages and so on, and there were similar return journeys, going up to £4, the cost of a day ticket. I needed another leaflet from the City Council to tell me that for another 20p I could by a ticket that would let me use any bus in Aberdeen, not just First’s.

Well, it might be £2.20 return or it might be £3.75 return or then again it might be £4 return: nothing at all indicated what 1-2 stages or 3-5 stages, let along 6+ stages might possibly mean. So the safest bet was to buy two day tickets, £4 each, and surely the driver wouldn’t mind changing a tenner for £8. That was decided upon, and 10 minutes later the sign showed ‘due’ and a 20 hove into sight.

I was slightly perturbed that there seemed to be a solid screen between me and the driver with nowhere to give him the money, but undeterred I asked for two day tickets and waved my tenner vaguely in his direction. ‘No change’, he growled. I then realised that the exact coinage to make up a fare which I had no way of ascertaining before I boarded the bus had to be inserted into a hopper. Nothing on the bus stop indicated any of this (just a not very well-produced list of departure times was there), nothing on the bus indicated it and the guide to ‘my’ bus fares gave me no warning either. As it happened by extracting Herself’s purse from my rucksack and going through all my pockets we just happened to be able to amass £8 in coins, but despite exact fare systems being designed to save time this had taken far longer than being able to give the driver £10 and get £2 back.
Exact fare schemes can work well: they save hours of journey time in the West Midlands where you drop your money in a hopper and carry on walking, picking up your ticket from a separate machine on your way into the bus. Fares are well publicised and very simple. On this bus not only did you have to guess which of the many fares it might be and then have the exact coinage (£3.75 in exact coins? How easy is that?), you also had to wait on the platform for the ticket to be issued from a not very well-placed ticket machine.

We weren’t quite sure where to get off, and missed what would have been the optimum stop, though the next was only a couple of hundred yards further on. No great problem, so I rang the bell and waited for the bus to slow down. It didn’t, so I got up and only then, with an exasperated sigh, did the driver stop the bus, with clear reluctance, in the middle of the road to let us off. Welcome to Old Aberdeen: which was worth the effort of getting there.

Welcome to the 21st century!

The next stage of our journey was going to be less easy. We walked back along the seashore to Footdee, an old fishing village tucked away incongruously between the seafront attractions and today’s busy and business-like docks, and hoped then to carry on to the south side of the River Dee. ‘Haven’t you got an app on your phone?’ suggested Herself. And yes, indeed I have a First app I’d forgotten all about.

I do own a smartphone, and I have had it for several years. It cost a lot of money, I can make phone calls and texts on it, even do emails, I can get my Abellio bus ticket on it (which promptly disappears when I try to show it to the driver as I get on the bus, replaced by a different screen and 10 minutes later was still blank).

Next thing was to try First’s website on my phone. It at last asked me which of the nearest bus companies’ services I would like to use. It gave me the choice of First Bradford, First Leeds, First Calderdale & Huddersfield or First Greater Manchester. I typed in Aberdeen, and it concluded, not unreasonably I suppose, given the choice it had given me, that Leeds was nearest. Finally another journey planning page was found which did know where Aberdeen was and despite having shown me exactly where I was standing, gave me an enormous list of bus stops to choose from, none of which meant anything to me. It then denied my proposed destination, Torry, actually existed, by which time we had lost the will to go anywhere and our £4 bus tickets had been used for just one journey which might have cost us £1.30, £2.20 or £2.60, we shall never know, though would have cost us more because we didn’t have the right change for any of those denominations.

Bus companies often seem to see mobile technology as their saviour. But it’s no good if passengers don’t have the right technology (and we can’t all afford to have the latest iPhone every time one comes out: a nice new one would cost me about £55 a month, thank you very much), the understanding to make it work properly (my grasp of technology is clearly not enough to find out when a bus runs, even if I am sufficiently qualified to drive the thing should the need arise!) or, that most frequently lacking component, a decent signal.

Welcome to Aberdeen: but go to Stonehaven instead!
Claret Spritzers for Reading students

Reading Buses is always ready for a bit of innovation. As students returned to Reading University this year, the company had four double-decker buses refurbished to suit the student clientèle on its Claret 21 service, which serves the University campus.

Branded as Claret Spritzers, the buses are designed, says the company, ‘to provide the ultimate on-board social experience for students’ on its buses. They have a re-designed, carpeted upper deck set out in zones, with a lounge area, games pod with a gaming tablet and desktop games, table seating area and a micro library with an honesty book exchange service. There is also a jukebox to which customers sitting in the rear lounge seats can connect via Bluetooth or a cable.

As well as free 4G wi-fi and USB chargers throughout each bus, what are thought to be the world’s first contactless charging pads on public transport also feature. New buses introduced on the main claret 21 route last November are also being upgraded with at-seat USB phone and tablet charging points and 4G wi-fi.

A conventional layout remains downstairs, with the usual wheelchair space and buggy bays.

Martijn Gilbert, Reading Buses Chief Executive Officer, explained: “Due to recent changes in our fleet, we had an excellent opportunity to trial something a bit different on board the buses operating the University extra journeys on our claret 21a service. We want people to be enthused about buses around the University and encourage even more students, staff and visitors on board.”

The buses are also helping to prove concepts that could be used on buses on other routes in future. Reading Buses has been involved in a research project with the University and with Brunel University into younger people’s travel needs.

The Claret Spritzers run between Reading station and the University’s Whiteknights Campus on weekdays during term time from October.
BUS USERS were involved in helping Surrey County Council earlier in the year with its consultation over the first phase of the next round of cuts in funding for bus services. The first round of cuts some years ago was accompanied by a high-profile consultation exercise. Phase one of the second round, affecting services in the north-west of Surrey, where Bus Users is based, and a few services in the east of the county, seems to have been rather less high-profile, despite our efforts to run a series of Your Bus Matters-style events in key locations to raise awareness.

New services, based on reduced public funding, came into force towards the end of August. One major cut was that a re-arranged service from Heathrow Terminal 5 to Woking would have by-passed the area’s regional hospital in Chertsey, cutting off much of the area from its local hospital on which a wide range of health services have been centralised.

Bus Users and North West Surrey Bus Users’ Group were able to raise awareness in the affected area, and it was notable that few people were aware of the wider consultation or the threat to their services. Following the involvement of local residents’ associations and councillors the service has been re-routed to serve the hospital, restoring the threatened link for most people though, sadly, the last bus back from the hospital is 18.30, so still no use for evening visiting.

Some services have been recast, though few actual connections have been lost. In particular Stanwell Moor, a community increasing isolated as it has become surrounded by motorways and one potentially threatened with demolition to make Heathrow’s new runway, has had its service to Staines restored. Staines is its nearest shopping centre and recent service revisions had lost it that link. Under the consultation proposals Stanwell Moor would have been left without a service to speak of. Again local councillors took up the cause on behalf of residents having been alerted to the threat. Extension of the Woking-Staines service to Terminal 5 via Stanwell Moor has prevented serious exclusion for residents, as well as restoring a link between two hospitals.

The combining of two local hourly services such that one bus can operate both has lost some useful links and resulted in a very odd frequency of every 90min.

Nonetheless, not all is bad news. Some clever rescheduling by the bus company, Abellio Surrey, and not a little commercial risk, has led to some major improvements with services combining over some stretches to give four buses an hour where previously half-hourly services were the most frequent, and half-hourly on some roads that were previously served hourly. Indeed between Shepperton and Hersham there are now four buses an hour where previously there was only one. Abellio has also taken a commercial risk on improving some evening services too, and it is hoped the improvements will generate sufficient additional custom to make them sustainable.
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.

Integration at the point of sale
I was at London Victoria Coach Station waiting in a queue to purchase a ticket. There was a visitor from a foreign country in front of me. Her spoken English was not too good and the sales person was not sure whether she was saying Cheltenham or Chatham. It was finally agreed that she wanted to go to Chatham. He told her that there were no coaches/ buses to Chatham and that she would have to go to London Victoria Railway Station and catch the train.

He was correct, there are no National Express or other coach operators serving Chatham (except maybe the commuter coach services) but there is a very good train service to the Medway Town. However there is a National Express service to Bluewater, Dartford and to Hempstead Valley, Gillingham and from these points there is a local bus service to Chatham.

All the sales points in bus/coach/railway stations could become Transport Information Integration points. Because of the Internet it should be easy to look at the various websites to help the customer plan their journey, especially if there is no direct link by coach or train. It could increase passenger numbers and revenue and make people more aware of links between bus, coach and train. It would be true Customer Service for those who do not know how to find out about getting from A to B.

Paul Clark, London SW7

A sound system
A friend and I, along with our two guide dogs, recently travelled on the shuttle bus between Reading town centre and Thames Valley Business Park.

We wanted to let the operator know how impressed we were with their audio announcements and the courteous help we received from the drivers, especially the lady who drove the 3.12pm bus from TVP back to Reading on Monday 7 September. We were amazed at the clarity and details of the announcements compared to AV systems used by other bus companies in our area which are often too quiet to hear, or not working!

We will now be able to tell other bus companies about these AV systems when they tell us they have no way of improving theirs.

Reading Buses has certainly set a very high standard and we look forward to travelling with them again.

Jenny Pape, Reading

I always knew buses were different in London, but I was rather bewildered by this sign on Waterloo Bridge on a recent visit. Are there so many buses in London because they manage somehow to reproduce? If so does it reach a point where they need to be culled? What are the safety implications? And can anyone tell me when the rutting season is in London, and whether this is a spectacle to be witnessed or is it best avoided?

Frederick Scroby, Ashby-de-la-Zouch
Concessionary solution?
I think I have cracked the problem of concessionary passes and service cuts.

The idea is to charge passholders around 50p per week for their passes. It is difficult to imagine anyone who uses buses at all spending less than £26 per year, so I would not expect much loss of take-up, especially if this were done by automatic deduction from state pensions or disability benefits for those who receive these (with a facility to opt out).

The money would then go to the relevant local authority where it would be ring-fenced for bus revenue support. Figures for counties such as Cambridgeshire and Devon suggest that even if the council chose to spend no more, most of the cuts currently being planned could have been avoided, while if currently planned budgets were maintained significant improvements could be made. In the case of Cambridgeshire this approach could have brought the service back to what it was at the time of Rural Bus Grant.

At the same time buses would remain free at the point of use to passholders, subject to existing conditions. This would ensure that people with access to cars still had every incentive to use the bus.

I also propose that responsibility for reimbursement be transferred from the local authority where the bus is boarded to the one where the passholder lives. This would be fairer on local authorities in tourist areas and remove much of the incentive for them to withdraw the routes required by car-free visitors, or to designate them as services not accepting passes — a designation that is appropriate for City Sightseeing type routes, but not for ones that also function as lifelines for the areas they serve.

Simon Norton, Cambridge

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.

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

Views and opinions expressed in ‘Have your say’ are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of Bus Users UK. The editor reserves the right to shorten or edit letters.
**Welcome**

To new member groups
TransWilts CIC

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### Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adur &amp; Worthing Bus Users Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:worthinganddadurbuswatch@gmail.com">worthinganddadurbuswatch@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age UK Colchester</td>
<td><a href="mailto:peter@ageconcern.org.uk">peter@ageconcern.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>BABUS (Bedford Area Bus User’s Society)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.babus.org.uk">www.babus.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bath Bus Users Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chair@bath-bus-users.org.uk">chair@bath-bus-users.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Berkshire Bus Users Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@bbug.org.uk">info@bbug.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradford &amp; District Older People’s Alliance (BOPA)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bopabradford.org.uk">www.bopabradford.org.uk</a></td>
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<td>Bright Area Buswatch</td>
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<td>BUGS Bus Users Group Stevenage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Users Shropshire</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bususersshropshire@hotmail.co.uk">bususersshropshire@hotmail.co.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Users UK Northampton</td>
<td>13 Dryden Avenue, Daventry NN11 9DJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Users UK Oxford</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hugh_jaeger@hotmail.com">hugh_jaeger@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Bus Users West Midlands</td>
<td><a href="mailto:philipc.green@yahoo.co.uk">philipc.green@yahoo.co.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Watch West Haringey</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chrisbarker46@gmail.com">chrisbarker46@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign for Better Transport – Cambs</td>
<td>6 Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign for Better Transport – West Yorkshire</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk">rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk</a></td>
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<td>Cardiff People First</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.com">cardiffpeople1st@btconnect.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colne Valley Bus Users Group (C-BUS)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:peterkay.essex@btinternet.com">peterkay.essex@btinternet.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dengie Hundred Bus Users Group (DBUG)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:contact@dbug.org.uk">contact@dbug.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon Senior Voice Transport Group</td>
<td>Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Ivybridge PL21 9DD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing Passengers Transport Users Group</td>
<td><a href="http://www.uptug.org">www.uptug.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>East Suffolk Travellers’ Association (ESTA)</td>
<td>The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft NR32 3AW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of DalesBus</td>
<td><a href="http://www.friendsofdalesbus.org.uk">www.friendsofdalesbus.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>I.W. Bus &amp; Rail Users Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:iwbusersusers@fsmail.net">iwbusersusers@fsmail.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendal &amp; District Bus Users (KADBUS)</td>
<td>01539 740761</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lostwithiel Transport Users Group</td>
<td>Prof J Scott CBE, 9 Meadow Breeze, Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0BJ</td>
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<td>Milton Keynes Bus Users Group</td>
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<td>Norfolk Bus Forum</td>
<td><a href="mailto:fedsec@norfolkwi.org.uk">fedsec@norfolkwi.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>North Herts Bus Users Group (NHBUG)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:marilyn.kirkland@north-herts.gov.uk">marilyn.kirkland@north-herts.gov.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nptf.co.uk">www.nptf.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Surrey Bus Users Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mjworley@btopenworld.com">mjworley@btopenworld.com</a>, <a href="http://www.facebook.com/nwsurreybug">www.facebook.com/nwsurreybug</a></td>
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### 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 enquires@bususers.org.