Accessible, affordable and on time: what passengers want from the bus
The Buses Bill has arrived and, regardless of what you may think of the contents, it has pushed the subject of buses much further up on the UK political agenda, even though its contents only really have an impact on England.

It means that all the related arguments about access, physical and mental health, education, infrastructure, connections between bus and other modes of transport, pollution, congestion, sustainability, social isolation and so on are also being looked at and understood by people who may not have given the role of the bus much thought previously.

This gives us and all the other campaigning organisations in different fields but with a public transport interest an unparalleled opportunity to work together to get the bus passenger’s voice heard.

We are working hard to make those connections and harness the power of the millions of bus and coach passengers to build a new audience and effect change in the ways decision-makers consult and take heed of their views. Your support is both needed and much appreciated.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users
First Scotland East to end services in East Lothian
First Scotland East has confirmed that it will end its operations in East Lothian from the end of May. In its official statement, the company blamed increased competition for the cuts, saying: “Operations in these areas have not been viable for a number of years, despite working hard to turn the business around and attract sufficient customers in what has become an increasingly competitive market.” The announcement comes after the Competition and Markets Authority released First Scotland East from an obligation to maintain part of its network following an investigation by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission 14 years ago. The company will now focus its resources in West Lothian, the Borders and the Central Belt, where it feels customer demand and satisfaction is growing. Managing Director Paul McGowan expressed his disappointment, but said: “I’m confident if we decide to go ahead with these proposals the majority of our customers won’t be left without a service.” Bus Users will be following developments to make sure passengers are kept informed and consulted.

Council plans ‘illogical’
Hugh Jaeger, Director of Bus Users and Bus Users Oxford, has branded Oxfordshire County Council’s £54m plans for a dual carriageway and bus lanes on the A40 as ‘illogical’. In an article in the Oxford Mail, Hugh described the proposals as ‘making no sense whatsoever’ and said: “When you enlarge a road you attract more traffic so the amount of traffic between Witney and Eynsham will increase.” Council Leader Ian Hudspeth said the plans would cut journey times on the A40, which is currently used by around 30,000 vehicles every day, and encourage businesses to create jobs in the area. But according to a poll run in the Oxford Mail, 59% of readers said they did not believe the plans would ease congestion.

Somerset steps up
The Buses of Somerset is stepping in to run additional bus routes after WebberBus ceased operations in May. The company has taken over all routes on an emergency basis where alternative services are not available, with one exception which will be run by its sister company, First West of England. The Managing Director of The Buses of Somerset said the company’s priority is to ensure that passengers in Somerset are provided with a good bus service and that students in schools and colleges in the area are not left stranded: “Of course, we will accept WebberBus tickets up to their expiry dates on all services so that customers are not left out of pocket.”

Taken for a ride
A fleet of buses fitted out with exercise bikes are to be rolled out in London in 2017. The brainchild of 1Rebel founder James Balfour and Giles Dean, the idea is to transform the morning commute, with passengers able to enjoy a workout on their way to work. 1Rebel describes itself as ‘revolutionising London’s fitness industry’, building ‘destinations, not just gyms’. The plans are still waiting approval but if they’re given the go-ahead, 1Rebel hopes to see these new mobile gyms picking up from four points across the capital by next year.

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Born to drive
19 year old Caleb Buxton has become the youngest driver ever to join morebus, operators for Bournemouth, Poole, Wimborne, Purbeck & Christchurch. Caleb, who has wanted to be a bus driver since he was nine years old and amassed a vast collection of model

Notice of Bus Users’ AGM
Bus Users is holding its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 10 September at the Priory Rooms Meeting & Conference Centre, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AF.

Further details will be available nearer the time but to register your interest please email membership@bususers.org
buses, realised his ambition just four weeks after passing his driving test. His family are completely behind Caleb’s choice of career which was inspired by drivers changing their roller signs. Caleb explained: “The driver would lean out of the window and lift up their arm to change the sign for their route. I thought about all the destinations that they got to go to.”

Manchester milestone
Since its launch in April this year, Manchester Busway has seen 150,000 customers use its Vantage V2 service. The controversial £68m Busway project was the result of a partnership with TfGM, Wigan Council, Salford City Council, Manchester City Council and First Manchester. The service carries over 4,000 passengers each day and includes 4.5 miles of guided busway between Leigh, Tyldsley and Ellenbrook, cutting the journey time to the city centre from 1 hour and 20 minutes to just 50 minutes. The seven stops en route have real-time travel information, CCTV, a public address system and covered cycle parking.

Sabden steps up the fight
A group of protesters in Lancashire have taken their fight to the Council’s headquarters in Preston in a bid to restore the only bus operation serving a village of 1,500 people. Sabden’s Save our Service has the support of two local councillors and the local media, and their online petition attracting 600 signatures is still open at www.savesabdenbus.com

Complaints Handler Mashrur Bin Selim (left) joins Kerry Donn, Finance Manager, Jessica Heaven, Complaints Handler, Director for England Dawn Badminton-Capps and Bus Users Chief Executive, Claire Walters at the recent signing of the Time to Change Pledge

Teambuilding at Bus Users England
Bus Users England has appointed two Administrator/Complaints Handers to its new office in Cobalt Square, Birmingham. Jessica Heaven has excellent administrative and complaints handling skills developed across many roles including one with West Midlands Special Needs Transport. Along with expertise in policy writing, she is also fluent in Russian, having lived and worked in the country. Mashrur Bin Selim has a strong customer service background having previously worked for Royal Bank of Scotland as a complaints handler. Mashrur is a graduate of the University of Greenwich and is fluent in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu. Jessica and Mashrur will be based at Cobalt Square, 83 Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 8QG.

You can contact the Bus Users England team on 0300 111 0001 or email enquiries@bususers.org

Northampton braced for bus consultation
Northamptonshire County Council has said it can no longer afford the £1.35m subsidies on passenger journeys in the region and has admitted that a full review of public transport is likely. The Council has already announced cuts to subsidy on the rural service connecting villages between Corby and Market Harborough, leading to operator Centrebus announcing that the service will be withdrawn over the Summer. Campaigns have been set up by passengers in Wilbarston and Gretton, and Corby MP Tom Pursglove is calling on the Council to review the proposal.
No two days are the same for Calum Aikman. His job takes him on bus journeys the length and breadth of Scotland, often from dawn to dusk, investigating passenger complaints, conducting spot checks and working with operators to resolve any issues of poor performance: “I usually have two or three jobs on the go at any one time that can have a direct impact on my work schedule. The number of hours I work, the areas and regions I cover, the nature of the complaints and the operators under investigation all vary”. Naturally, what Calum looks like is a closely guarded secret.

As well as carrying out random monitoring, Compliance Officers respond to complaints received by Bus Users Scotland, the Traffic Commissioner, Transport Scotland, local authorities and passengers themselves. They measure service performance against a ‘window of tolerance’ defined by the Traffic Commissioners as up to one minute early and five minutes late, and use radio-controlled watches to ensure their assessments are fair and accurate. Aside from reliability and punctuality, Calum looks at the information available...
at a stop, the condition of the bus, and the attitude and skills of the driver.

In cases where complaints can’t be resolved with an operator following an investigation, Calum’s reports are submitted to the Traffic Commissioners and Transport Scotland and, in extreme cases, he is called on to submit evidence for use in public inquiries.

Calum started out as a research assistant at Edinburgh University and, as a regular bus and train user, decided to join Bus Users Scotland around three years ago when his contract came to an end. His expertise is already recognised throughout the industry, which is why newly appointed Traffic Officer, Peter Grant (Team Leader for Bus Policy at Transport Scotland) recently spent the day shadowing him. Formerly with HS2, Peter was keen to see, first hand, how bus services operate outside of Edinburgh. The two met on board a bus leaving Edinburgh for Galashiels, and Calum talked Peter through the processes he usually follows when mystery travelling.

The time Peter and Calum spent together was useful for them both, and while Calum admits that understanding the overall objectives of an organisation like Transport Scotland may not have a direct impact on his work: “It’s really useful to understand the general policy initiatives that are taking place, such as biofuels, carbon reduction, guided buses and smart technologies.” Calum hopes the experience gave Peter an insight into how the grants that Bus Users Scotland receives from the Scottish Government are being used: “Bus Users Scotland submits regular reports to the Traffic Commissioners which are shared with Transport Scotland, but that’s no substitute for first-hand experience.”

Calum is brought in to investigate complaints that Bus Users Scotland and the operator concerned aren’t able to remedy between them: “Complaints like refunds are often fairly straightforward, but where the complaint is more complicated, we are asked to step in”. Last year, Bus Users Scotland handled 500 complaints, largely in relation to service reliability and the attitude of drivers and staff, with their two Compliance Officers logging 2,300 hours of monitoring. And while complaints are up slightly on the previous year, Bus Users Scotland believes this is more a reflection of the growing awareness of its work, rather than any upward trend in bus dissatisfaction.

Calum comes into contact with many operators, ranging from Scotland’s largest companies, to small, rural service providers and the attitude towards the work that Calum does is equally varied: “There will always be operators who aren’t particularly receptive to what we have to tell them but that’s usually why they are in the position they’re in. On the whole though, operators do listen and they are willing to work with us because it’s in their best interests.”

One such example was a small operator running four or five different routes in the Lowlands of Scotland. The complaint against them, while fairly non-specific, had not been resolved to the customer’s satisfaction and Calum was sent to investigate. After two or three weeks of monitoring, he was unable to identify any significant issues with service reliability, punctuality or the attitude of the drivers: “There were some minor matters that I reported back to the operator, including one particular timing point where the bus was almost always early and an issue over a bus stop. But other than that, everything seemed fine.” Following his report, Calum spoke to the company owner and they agreed to meet, but by the time the
meeting went ahead, the company had already done everything that had been required of them and more – even to the point of submitting a revised timetable to the Traffic Commissioner bringing forward the arrival time of the always-early bus: “This company was exceptional, they were a small, locally run operator and they were responsive to everything we’d asked of them and totally prepared to accept responsibility and make improvements.”

On the whole, operators do take passenger complaints seriously. Naturally there are some companies who are evasive and could do more to improve their approach to customer services and the overall customer experience and, naturally, these tend to be the operators that Bus Users is called on to investigate. Calum believes the majority of bus companies see passengers as their priority but there are some challenges: “Occasionally, an operator surrenders their PSV licence without warning (often due to financial considerations) and the local authority has to deal with the consequences. This has happened on two occasions that I know of in Scotland over the past two years: fortunately, in both situations other operators were able to step in and continue operating many existing services as normal. But this is by no means a given.”

Calum is also worried about the implications of council budget cuts for those operators who run subsidised services and the passengers that rely on them, many of whom live in rural and deprived areas, a concern that is shared by passengers across the UK. But Calum believes there are also some positive developments on the horizon: “My big hope is that smart and integrated ticketing will be rolled out across the entire Scottish network sometime soon, as Transport Scotland has promised; the benefits of such a scheme could be enormous.” But, he warns, it is important that no-one is left behind: “It is vital that small operators aren’t excluded because of the costs and that passengers are informed of all developments and given every opportunity to understand the implications of any changes.”

Peter and Calum arrive back in Edinburgh at just after 5pm, having spent over seven hours travelling across rural Scotland with several operators including First Scotland East, Buskers Coaches and Perryman’s Buses. But that’s not uncommon for Calum, who can often total 10 or 12 hours at a stretch on the road: “My job is genuinely satisfying. Standing at a bus stop on a wet weekend in Paisley can be pretty miserable, but the variety of each day keeps it interesting.” And what are his ambitions for the future: “I have few ambitions for myself, although I do still harbour the desire to actually drive a bus one of these days.”

Bus Users Scotland’s Annual Report for 2015/16 is available to download from: www.bususers.org/publications
Anyone wishing contact the team can call them on 0131 523 1309 or email: enquiries@bususers.org
Critical to Bus Users’ work as the voice of the passenger, is its close working relationship with bus operators the length and breadth of Britain. But what do operators get out of it? We talked to three leaders in the sector to find out the benefits of working with Bus Users.

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

Bus Users has come a long way since its inception, just as has the deregulated bus industry. Both are now more professional and focussed than in the earlier days of their existence, and Bus Users today offers a unique ability to access, consult and discuss with customers and passengers on how we can improve our offer.

As Chairman of ALBUM, the association representing owners and managers working in the municipal and independent bus sectors, I am well aware that such businesses are much closer to their customers than the ‘big four’ bus companies can ever be. That is because our members’ businesses deploy highly qualified and experienced managers into very tight geographical areas, whereas larger businesses inevitably tend to spread their most talented and experienced managers across a wider remit and geography.

When running my own business in Norfolk, I always found Bus Users to be willing to listen to operators and so understand our issues and concerns, as well as, quite rightly, championing the passenger. I believe that...
that is the right perspective, because no matter how close to our customers we are as business people, we can never be as close to them as an organisation such as Bus Users. Their Your Bus Matters events always brought out things that we had missed, and for that I was forever grateful to them.

Closer though we are to our customers and markets, we can also miss things, and having an independent body that can help channel our efforts and energy into unswervingly providing what passengers want is of great assistance, whether it be to businesses, or perhaps more likely in the future, the local community whose representatives and officers will centrally plan bus routes and timetables.

James Freeman, Managing Director, First West of England

Our best friends are our customers. They communicate with us in different ways – by talking to us directly – speaking to drivers, coming into travel shops, ringing us up – sending us emails, tweets and Facebook messages. A few even write us letters, still. The feedback that all these communications provide is the essential material from which a bus operator can sort out its operation: getting things right by responding to all the nuggets of information that these various messages contain. Not everybody in the industry can see this or accepts it, but I have long held this belief.

I first came across Bus Users back in the mid-1980s when I had recently taken over as Managing Director of People’s Provincial Buses, based in Fareham, Hampshire. I quickly realised that living close by was the redoubtable Dr Caroline Cahm, chairman of NFBU (the National Federation of Bus Users, now Bus Users UK). In those days, today’s Bus Users was in its infancy, with its local Portsmouth off-shoot BusWatch. I knew then that the best and only way to deal with having a customer representative body in my operating area was to make friends with them all and to seek to take advantage of that body’s energy to improve things for local bus passengers.

So it has proved over nearly 30 years! During that time the organisation has grown and matured – got bigger and better and more professional. That said, NFBU always did punch above its weight and Caroline Cahm was able to make things happen – often by sheer force of character! Today the organisation has become nationally organised, with groups across the country.

From a bus operator’s point of view it is hugely helpful to have a well-informed and properly-resourced body of opinion from the passenger side of the business. Both local and national government will listen when the users speak, as long as what they say resonates and makes sense. Often the passengers, speaking through Bus Users, can make their voice heard when operators’ voices are unheeded.

None of which is to say that Bus Users and the bus operators should be in each other’s pockets. Far from it, differing views are important but with respect from both sides. Over the years, that mutual respect has stood us in good stead. Not perhaps that all my colleagues in the industry share my belief in working together like this – but I believe they are the losers as a result.

Finally, the work of the Bus Appeals Body has been very significant in giving the customer somewhere to go with complaints that can’t be resolved. Personally, I feel that every complaint that gets to the Bus Appeals Body is a sign of failure on the operator’s side – with a very few exceptions. We ought to be able to resolve these matters before they have to go to the Bus Appeals Body. But if it weren’t there we’d need something else to take its place.
I think that Bus Users today has a key role as keeper of the bus operators’ conscience. If we operators listen to the messages that Bus Users UK are passing to us, then we can learn a lot and put a great deal right. We’ll do this by working together in an atmosphere of mutual trust where neither party is afraid to tell it how it is. My sense is that in many places that’s just what we have. Here’s to the next 30 years!

I’ve found in my career so far that all encounters with Bus Users have been entirely positive and productive. Sometimes I may have learnt something I may not have liked to hear, and other times it’s confirmed we’ve been doing a good job. The thing that I always find so reassuring about Bus Users is that as an organisation they aren’t there to moan and point fingers –they exist to help get things put right and for our industry to excel, which is great for both the customers as individuals and the industry too. And they recognise that getting to the right answers involves influencing, talking and working together: the kind of thing any decent human being does to get the right result.

Their people are good, well-meaning personalities. They aren’t afraid to be our critical friend, and are no shrinking violets and will give as good as they get to challenge issues affecting bus customers. As a direct line to our customers in an industry where research and listening are critical – that alone should offer huge value to us.

I’ve often found, like many others, that the relationship with Bus Users also works both ways. They are keen to represent their members and the wider bus travelling public, and hold us to account accordingly, but often when we as operators wish for a pure, impartial, third party comment, Bus Users aren’t afraid to speak up. Whether it’s the withdrawal of a bus lane or something equally as unhelpful, Bus Users are there to offer an additional and valued vote of support.

They aren’t afraid of a bit of hard work too. Many a time have my team and I spent a Your Bus Matters event collating views alongside their excellent team. Our customers are critical for our success. Therefore Bus Users are pretty important – and often deeply productive for both customers and operators too.

Alex Hornby cools down passengers on a hot day in York

Alex Hornby, Chief Executive, Transdev Blazefield

Customers are important. Us bus operators really believe that, and rightly so. Therefore it’s logical that working with Bus Users is important too, surely? Of course it is.

The many conscientious managers in our industry recognise this. They are aware that without customers they have no business, and listening to what they have to say is vital to succeed. But why?
Time to Change

16-22 May 2016 was Mental Health Awareness Week in the UK and as part of the week’s activities, Bus Users joined the growing number of organisations and nearly 93,000 individuals who have taken the ‘Time to Change Pledge’.

The Time for Change Pledge is a commitment to end the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health which affects around one in four adults. Public transport, which can be a challenging experience for many people, particularly those experiencing mental health difficulties, was specifically targeted in February this year with a ground-breaking Mental Health & Transport Summit run by Anxiety UK and the Mental Health Action Group.

Bus Users Chief Executive, Claire Walters, a keen advocate for mental health, said: “All organisations have a responsibility to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for their staff, customers and the wider public. As a hidden disability, and one that is often not talked about, it can be a real challenge to ensure that the needs of people experiencing mental health issues are being met.” Claire pointed to a study from Time to Change, a campaign run by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, in which 60% of people said the stigma and discrimination they face is as damaging as the symptoms of their mental health problem itself. “That has to change” she said.

In February, Claire led a workshop at the Mental Health & Transport Summit which brought together leading campaigners for mental health with senior representatives from the transport industry. The event was addressed by Andrew Jones, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with the Department for Transport, and saw writer and broadcaster Alastair Campbell offer a personal insight into the challenges faced by people with mental health problems when using public transport.

Described by Jonathan Bray from the Urban Transport Group as ‘The day we woke up to mental health’, the event marked a new beginning in the relationship between the transport industry and all those experiencing mental health difficulties. One of the Summit’s key aims was to improve understanding...
of mental health, particularly the difficulties experienced when making journeys by public transport, and called on the industry to improve the experience for customers. Laura Whitehurst from Anxiety UK spoke of her own experience as a customer when, having requested support from an airline and an airport, she had been offered a wheelchair: “How can this be remotely appropriate,” she asked, “when only 8% of people who identify themselves as disabled actually use a wheelchair.” Thanks to a few exceptional members of staff, Laura has been able to get back to using some forms of public transport and she called on the transport industry to turn those exceptions into a standard of care: “You can be the ones to make a difference, to break down the barriers of isolation and discontent, to stop people having to put themselves through hell just to get to work.”

Critical to breaking down barriers is the need for greater openness and acceptance. In his opening address to the Summit, Alastair Campbell pointed out that mental health has become a taboo subject, just as cancer once was, and that was something that needed to change: “I think all of us should be on the lookout for people who are on edge,” he said. “Honestly nine times out of 10, if you were to say to somebody ‘Are you OK?’, you’ll find out very quickly if they are or they aren’t. But we’re scared of having that conversation.” As someone with first-hand experience of mental health issues, Alastair offered a compelling insight into the challenges presented by public transport: “I had a breakdown in the ’80s and there were points at which I was having conversations with buses. Now I know that sounds completely crazy, and it is because I was, but I was in the midst of a psychotic meltdown.

“But imagine if you get on the tube, you get on a train, you get on the bus, and you’re in a state of real anxiety. When you are, you feel pressures that nobody

In the end it is skilled and helpful transport staff who make the biggest difference to passengers

LEFT: Claire Walters leads a workshop at the Summit which brought together leading campaigners with senior members of the transport industry

BELOW LEFT: Alastair Campbell sees openness and acceptance as critical to breaking down the barriers on mental health

BELOW: Andrew Jones, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport pledges to make sure mental health keeps rising up the agenda

Anthony Fisher Photography
else can see and feel,” he said, adding: “The world of public transport can be an intensely lonely and anxiety-provoking experience which is made all the worse because of the taboo which still surrounds mental illness.”

Openness and support on mental health is something that also needs to be extended to employees, with Rosie McKearney from Time to Change pointing out that: “A workforce that can’t talk openly about mental health will struggle to identify signs and symptoms in their customers and to have the courage to step in and offer help.” Rosie outlined three tips for reducing stigma in the workplace including promoting mental wellbeing for all staff, equipping line managers to address issues of mental health, and educating all employees so they can support each other and their customers.

Focusing on staff was a sentiment endorsed by Transport Minister, Andrew Jones: “In the end it is skilled and helpful transport staff who make the biggest difference to passengers”. Mental health, he accepted, had not received the same level of attention as physical health and transport in particular had some catching up to do: “I will make a pledge too – I will incorporate all that I can in an Accessibility Action Plan for all disabled people which my Department is writing and will publish later this year. This summit is not a one day wonder. There will be actions coming out of this summit which will make sure that mental health keeps on rising up the agenda.”

Ann Frye, leading consultant on the transport and mobility needs of disabled and older people, agreed. In her foreword to the Summit report she wrote: “The success of the Summit was that it did not stop at simply exposing the issues, it went on to demand commitments to action from all those attending and from the wider transport world.” She added: “We need to ensure that the promises made on the day are translated into new policies and practices and better understanding of mental health across the transport industries.”

The full report on the Mental Health & Transport Summit Report can be downloaded from the Bus Users website at www.bususers.org
To find out more and sign up to the Time to Change Pledge visit www.time-to-change.org.uk
For more information on mental health issues call Anxiety UK on 0844 477 5774 Mind on 020 8519 2122 or the Mental Health Action Group on 01332 345966

### Bus Users’ Pledge

Bus Users UK is committed to reducing stigma around mental health within our areas of work, promoting the mental health and wellbeing of our workforce and people who use our services and ensuring that we provide a safe environment for people to be open about their mental health issues in any of their dealings with the organisation. We do, however, recognise that as an employer there may be some issues which exceed our expertise and understand that we may need to refer to a third party in some circumstances.

**Our aims are to ensure that:**

- All our employees are supported within the workplace to reduce the symptoms of mental health issues and workplace stress.
- All those who contact us, whether Board members, group representatives, supporters, passengers in need of assistance that falls within our remit or general enquirers are treated with courtesy and respect, regardless of any mental health issue or other disability that may make this more challenging.
- We will actively encourage our trustees, employees, service users and volunteers to make personal pledges and be able to talk about personal experience to reduce stigma and encourage conversations.
- We will have a minimum of two Time to Change Champions at all times to offer support to staff and others associated with the organisation to ensure wellness in the workplace.
Operator pledge

Stagecoach is just one bus company committed to breaking down the barriers surrounding mental health

Stagecoach has launched ‘Pledge to help’, an initiative developed with the Mental Health Action Group and Anxiety UK as part of its pledge to end the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health.

The initiative has the backing of Transport Minister Andrew Jones and involves an enhanced training and awareness programme to boost confidence in bus travel among people experiencing mental health issues, along with a new support line for employees as part of a drive to break down barriers.

The UK’s largest bus operator has pledged to support the needs of customers and protect the rights of passengers and staff experiencing mental health issues. Stagecoach plans to improve training to ensure managers are caring in their approach to staff and that a culture of empathy is promoted throughout the company. There will also be specific education on mental health within the training modules for all driving staff, as well as ongoing driver training and staff awareness campaigns.

Travel assistance and support for customers with mental health conditions will be improved and Stagecoach will be working with local support groups and mental health groups to help break down the barriers faced by passengers experiencing mental health issues to encourage them to have confidence in using the bus. Stagecoach will also be running an anonymous support line for staff.

At the launch of the pledge, which was timed to coincide with the start of Mental Health Awareness Week, Stagecoach UK Bus Managing Director, Robert Montgomery said: “Everyone involved in transport has a responsibility to work together to improve the travel experience for people with disabilities, and that includes those with mental health conditions. This involves the training we give our staff, the policies and practices we have in place to deal with our passengers’ needs and the relationships we develop with local support groups. We invest millions of pounds every year in making our services more accessible to all passengers with disabilities and we work hard to deliver the best possible services and information for all of our customers.”

Stagecoach already offers dedicated helplines for people with disabilities and provides Journey Assistance Cards, enabling passengers to make staff aware of their needs easily and discreetly (although Bus Users UK is also hoping to find a software developer to take on the challenge of building a free mobile phone app for that purpose, which could have far wider usage).

Nicky Lidbetter, Chief Executive of Anxiety UK said: “It is really pleasing to see that Stagecoach is not only going to be supporting its passengers who are living with mental health issues such as anxiety disorders, but also its staff. These two measures will go a long way towards tackling the stigma that exists around mental health whilst also helping to break down the barriers that many with anxiety and depression face when making journeys by public transport. It is my hope that other companies will swiftly follow suite and adopt Stagecoach’s good practice”. 
Campaining youth

At just 15, Bus Users’ Youth Ambassador, Ella Beevers is already an established political activist.

Ellas interest in politics was sparked early on by her grandparents, who passed on their passion and commitment to Ella and her brother. Ella herself became actively involved in politics at the age of 11 when she joined the School Council, before going on to represent her school on the Calderdale Youth Council, becoming its Chair that same year. At 13, she was elected member of the Youth Parliament for Calderdale, a role she was succeeded in after two terms by her brother, Jack. Ella’s mandate on the Youth Parliament was to campaign for affordable bus fares for young people and as a result, she launched her Fairer Fares for Youth campaign that same year. The public response has been phenomenal and Ella’s petition has attracted 3,000 signatures.

Ella is passionate about bus travel for young people, and at the heart of her campaign is the call for fare systems on buses to be simplified. Ideally, Ella would like to see anyone wearing a school uniform automatically given half price fare but points out that even half price fares are beyond the reach of many young people. Ella points to a survey conducted by the Youth Parliament in 2008: “According to the study, 1 in 5 children have missed school because they’ve been unable to afford their bus fare”.

Ella knows from personal experience how the lack of access to affordable bus services can trap young people in a cycle of poverty: “Like thousands of other students, I’m in the middle of doing my GCSEs and trying to decide which Sixth Form College I’d like to go to. The best college for the options I’d like to take is a two hour bus ride away because there’s no direct route, and the cost of the journey is far more than I can afford.

“So while there are plenty of suitable colleges, my options are limited by the availability and affordability of the bus service.”

It was as a speaker at last year’s CPT’s Northern Bus Summit held at the Manchester Conference Centre, that Ella met Bus Users Director for England Dawn Badminton-Capps. Ella had been speaking about the need to reduce bus fares for young people and simplify the pricing structures that can vary significantly between operators. Dawn said: “Despite her age, Ella had the confidence and poise to sit on a panel of experts and champion the issues she feels strongly about.

“Her call for affordable bus services for young people to access the educational opportunities of their choosing was inspiring and something we have long supported. It made absolute sense for us to join forces to ensure the voice of young people is heard.”

Bus services allowing, Ella has a very clear idea of what she’d like to do in the future. With languages and politics her main passions, she plans to take Spanish, French, History, and Government & Politics at A Level, before hopefully taking the Oxbridge entrance exam to study Law. Once qualified, Ella plans to become a Barrister before eventually moving over to a career in politics.

In the meantime, however, Ella’s ambitions are a little closer to home with her main objective to make sure that education is accessible to every single young person through the means of transport: “If there was no budget limit, I’d want to see free transport for every single young person to get them to and from education. But with the current pressures on local authorities, I’d settle for ‘affordable’ rather than free for the time being.”
Safe journey

Helen Dolphin MBE worked in medical research until she became disabled in 1997. She then trained as a broadcast journalist and has taken part in the Paralympic trials in London, being one of the fastest swimmers in the country in her S5 category. In 2015, Helen set up a consultancy to help organisations in the field of disability to design and promote their products. Here she describes Quantum, an innovative piece of equipment designed to safely secure wheelchairs on buses.

For wheelchair-using bus passengers, feeling safe and secure on a journey is essential for peace of mind, but being safe and securely anchored is even more important. As Disability Now’s transport writer, I’ve been trying out a new system which aims to deliver that safety and security.

Since 1 January this year it’s been a requirement that all full-size single deck buses over 7.5 tonnes must be fully accessible. This is in order to meet Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) 2000. This means that the bus must have space for a wheelchair and there must be suitable safety provisions depending on whether the wheelchair is carried facing forwards or backwards.

For most buses in the UK, the safety provision is usually an anti-tipping pole for the wheelchair user to hold on to. Considering I have no hands, this is of no use to me whatsoever. Although my wheelchair has brakes, these were not designed to hold me in place on the bus, therefore to stop my wheelchair moving about and tipping over I either get the person I’m travelling with, or a fellow passenger, to put their foot on my footrest to hold me in place.

I hadn’t really considered how dangerous this was (both for me and for other passengers who I might unintentionally bash into and injure when going round a corner) until I had the opportunity to try out a far superior wheelchair restraint system on the bus in Hull. Here, one of the buses belonging to the East Yorkshire Motor Services (EYMS) has a new piece of equipment installed called Quantum. Quantum designed by the company Q’Straint is already being used in the US to safely secure wheelchair users on the bus, but EYMS was the first company in the UK to install it.

As on most buses I had to travel backwards in the wheelchair space but instead of just relying on a pole and another person to hold me steady, here I was, safely secured by Quantum. Quantum is basically two mechanical arms which lock the wheelchair wheels into place preventing the wheelchair user tipping over or moving, should the bus driver brake a bit sharply. What is also good about this system is it is user-controlled so I could lock myself in place by just pushing a button. It also works very quickly and you are completely secured in less than 25 seconds. When
you arrive at your stop you simply press the button again to release the arms and off you go. It’s such a simple system and I really did feel safe.

This system also had a couple of added bonuses as far as I was concerned. I’m sure other wheelchair users will identify with the issue of travel sickness when travelling backwards. However, when I was on the bus in Hull I just didn’t experience it. I think it was because I was held so snugly by the Quantum that the additional motion which usually makes me feel ill was eliminated.

The second added bonus which I believe buses with Quantum benefit from is that it so clearly marks the wheelchair space out as for wheelchair users, making it much more difficult for parents with pushchairs to refuse to move. This would help design out the conflict that can be a real issue for wheelchair users.

The good news is that Quantum is no longer just on the bus in Hull. It has recently been installed on the tourist bus in Edinburgh and I’m sure as more operators realise how much safer this makes travel for disabled people, hopefully they’ll want to install it too.
Bike racks on buses have proven popular in North American cities. It’s about time the UK recognised their potential, believes Peter Davenport

Carrying bikes on buses not only makes cycling more flexible but also demonstrates that a local authority or bus operator is very serious about promoting cycling.

Following a recent meeting in Parliament between Bikesonbuses.com, Ben Howlett MP for Bath, Andrew Jones Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with the Department for Transport and representatives from the DfT, Bath Council and Cycle Bath campaign group, there is now growing interest in this concept in the UK.

Bus racks were developed in the USA during the 1990s, initially used as a way to help cyclists cross the Evergreen Point Floating Bridge in Lake Washington that connects Seattle with Redmond, the home of Microsoft. The local Cascade Bicycle group were heavily involved in the initial pilot schemes and evaluations. Their input resulted in a safe and easy-to-use solution, the Sportworks front-loading bike rack for buses.

The rack is now standard on buses around the world and has been shown to work well, being popular with both users and bus operators. Using the rack is safe, quick and easy, so it doesn’t affect the bus timetable. The racks don’t scratch bikes, as the only contact is on the tyres and when not being used, the rack simply folds up. In addition, the racks are reliable and easy to maintain as they have very few moving parts.

Experience across the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand has shown that the bus rack promotes cycling and is an effective marketing tool. The bus racks enable all types of cyclists – commuters, students, shoppers, leisure cyclists and active sports cyclists – to get out of congested cities to access quieter or more enjoyable routes.

The bus rack is safe, quick and easy to use
Bike racks on buses increase the catchment area and number of people able to use the bus. Many passengers can cycle to a bus stop, use the bus rack and then cycle again at the other end. This overcomes many of the barriers to cycling such as tunnels, bridges, motorways or stretches of fast or unpleasant roads.

Knowing that buses have a bike rack fitted reassures cyclists that there is another option if they encounter problems with bad weather or have a mechanical issue. The racks encourage more bike use by occasional cyclists, who may prefer a multi-modal trip depending on the weather and traffic conditions. This could be a combination of bike, bus, bike, train and bike again. The mix of buses and racks also provides reassurance for less confident users that they can always get home.

The popularity of the bus rack can be seen by visiting any North American city or even watching any recent US movie. Bike racks have been fitted to all the buses in Seattle, Vancouver, Portland, San Diego, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Memphis and many other North American cities. Indeed, bus racks have proven to be so popular that a three-bike model was developed to replace the original two-bike versions.

Racks are an international success story, and have even been fitted to the front of all the buses in Canberra, Australia and Christchurch, New Zealand, which have road situations similar to the UK. But we have yet to see the concept take off in Britain.

The main reason the bus rack has yet to be adopted in the UK is a lack of demand and concerns around safety, despite all the evidence from around the world. Most of the US cities started off in a similar situation, but this has been overcome by active campaigning, pilots or trials on particular routes. This usually involves a local champion led by a Mayor or politician, willing and able to highlight the benefits of bike racks on buses. Many other areas may also be suitable for pilot projects and interested cities or other operators should get in touch if they have suitable routes, ideally with an obstacle or barrier to cycling (such as a tunnel, bridge, busy road or hills) that fitting the bus racks could easily overcome.

Peter Davenport is owner of Bikes on Buses. To contact them visit Bikesonbuses.com or call 02392 815 555

Passengers in other countries are embracing a multi-modal approach to bus travel
The Buses Bill

This year’s Queen’s Speech included the long-awaited Buses Bill along with a Modern Transport Bill, and the pledge from Prime Minister David Cameron to ‘make sure Britain has first-class infrastructure, especially when it comes to the transport of the future.’

Buses represent our most used public transport, making 4.65 billion passenger journeys in 2014/15 and accounting for over 60% of all journeys by public transport. According to the Department for Transport’s overview of the Buses Bill, there has been a wide disparity in the performance of local bus services across England: “Since 2004/05, bus use in England outside London has increased by 2%. But the picture is mixed. In our metropolitan areas bus use has declined by 7% since 2004/05, whereas in non-metropolitan areas it has increased by 9%.” In London, ever the exception, bus use has risen by 31% over the same period.

According to Jonathan Bray, Director of the Urban Transport Group: “For too long (outside regulated London), we have seen an overall trend of service reductions, fares rising above inflation and falling patronage.” At the same time, he believes, “Major cities outside London are unable to plan and develop their services in a way that ensures full integration with other modes (including on fares), as well as with their wider economic, social and environmental plans and priorities.”

The dramatic upward trend in London, however, demonstrates the huge potential for growth which the DfT’s overview explains is what the Buses Bill is hoping to unlock: “Central Government’s role is to provide local authorities and bus operators with the tools they need to improve local bus services and get more people on to buses. So the Bill will expand the range of tools available by introducing new powers and improving the approaches that are currently available.”

Stephen Joseph, Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport, sees the Bill as a step in the right direction: “The Bill will give local authorities which have agreed devolution deals, and maybe others, need above all else is a bus service they can access and afford. The devil will be in the detail, as with all such matters and we will be trying to ensure that the statutory guidance puts passenger needs at its heart.”

Previous attempts to give local transport authorities the tools they need to improve services (the 2000 and 2008 Acts) proved “too convoluted, cautious and cumbersome to work effectively in practice” according to Jonathan Bray. So getting the legislation right this time is vital, which is why the Urban Transport Group has produced a number of helpful briefings including FAQs on the Bill and a paper on the myths and facts of bus franchising. These briefings can be downloaded from their website at www.urbantransportgroup.org by clicking on the ‘Resources’ section at the top of the page.
Have your say

Are there issues about bus travel that you feel strongly about, or have you had an experience as a passenger that you’d like to share? These pages are for our readers’ letters and photos, so we’d love to hear from you.

Helping hand for passenger power

The answer to the headline question in *Bus User 61*, “Can passenger power beat the cuts?”, is probably “yes, if we can get help”. First, it needs to be recognised that mass motoring has become one of the great human disasters. An estimate of 60 million has been given for the number of direct casualties of motor vehicles, which puts it right in the Hitler and Stalin class. And to that we need to add the victims of air pollution, also the health effects of inactivity, isolation and noise. And all this will seem small beer if climate change, to which vehicle emissions are a major contributor, destabilises the world agricultural system. Second, in the society we have built, transport has become so embedded as to be a fundamental human right, as much as, say, education. Before the industrial revolution people could look to their own communities for access to work, food and other essentials of life. For a large slice of population this is no longer possible. To continue the World War II analogy, a group like the Jews could never have beaten Hitler by themselves. We needed a Churchill to rally support for an alliance which could do so. The Government’s war on local authority spending (on buses and everything else) has now been going on about as long as World War II, even though the cost of revenue support is tiny compared with that of, say, the roads programme or HS2. Their unconcern at the bus crisis reminds one of the proverbial Emperor whose name is an anagram of the last four letters of the names of both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. But we haven’t even managed to rally our natural allies -- those who campaign on issues like the environment, climate change, countryside and heritage, strong communities, human rights and so on -- to regard buses as a serious issue, let alone those of our elected representatives who are prepared to discard what should, as I’ve said, be seen as a fundamental human right. Let’s build an alliance to show our rulers that they meddle with our basic needs at their own peril, and hopefully within a few years we’ll not only get our buses back but be on the road to the kind of comprehensive integrated transport network that sensible people like the Swiss view as their birthright.

Simon Norton, Cambridge

Paying for passes

Please may I make four points about the English concessionary bus pass (Peter Colwyn’s letter, *Bus User 61* Paying for passes) and proposals for make a charge for it?

1. Many pass users pay income tax on their pensions. In my case 20% of my pension goes in tax. I already pay for my pass.

2. There’s a regional equity issue. In large cities, such as London and the former metropolitan counties, a bus or Freedom pass also brings other benefits such as free Underground travel in London; Metrolink trams and local rail services in Greater Manchester; local rail and even ferry services in Merseyside; and tram services in Blackpool and Wyre. If a charge is made for our passes then those who receive more benefits for its use should pay more. It would be clearly unfair for London Freedom pass holders to enjoy benefits that taxpayers outside London subsidise from their taxes. Think of the admin costs to run a national fair pass system.

3. Most pensioner pass holders don’t receive public services such as schooling, maternity services and higher education yet we pay for these services because we’re part of a broader social community. What’s wrong with us receiving some benefits after paying taxes for 40 years or more? Many of us provide unpaid work such as child and elder care, community volunteering, and local political activity. Our passes help us to do this socially valuable work.

4. No one has to use a Concessionary Pass: you chose to apply for one. They’re not compulsory. If you don’t like your pass don’t use it.

Aidan Turner-Bishop, Preston
Fitting tribute
As reported in Bus User No. 61 (Spring 2016), Bus Users West Midlands member Richard Lomax sadly passed away in February, and National Express West Midlands have kindly named one of their buses after him with this memorial plaque. We’d like to thank David Bradford and Nick Newcombe of National Express West Midlands for their work in producing this fitting tribute to a much-loved and hard-working Bus Users member.

Phil Parkin, Bus Users West Midlands

Early bird
I am a bus user and a member of Bus Users. In response to Peter Colwyn’s letter, I just wanted to make you aware of what is happening in Devon. I have a bus pass and on Country Bus Services based near Newton Abbot you can show your bus pass and pay £1 before 9.30am. And on certain routes, Devon County Council allows the bus pass to be used anyway, like on the 360 service from Ide onwards to the Teign Valley. So it is happening in Devon on Country Bus Services.

No contact details provided

Campaign Comic Power
I am a member of a self-advocacy organisation for adults with a learning disability called Leeds People First. I have recently completed an art course where I did a project called Comic Power. I have attached a copy of my comic for you to have a look at because adults with a disability can NOT use a bus pass before 9.30am (Monday - Friday) in West Yorkshire. I believe that if I was entitled to use the bus pass before 9.30am, I would be able to attend work on time, attend all appointments at an earlier time such as the doctors and dentists, and attend college. In 2014 I set up a bus pass campaign so we can use the bus before 9.30am and I received 1,000 signatures online and on paper. With this comic, I want to raise awareness about the challenges disabled people face and change the 9.30am restriction.

Alan Hicks, Leeds
Naturally, there was a lot of interest in the announcement of the Buses Bill in this year’s Queen’s speech, with one contributor to Facebook saying:

**Julie Cooper** We don’t want WiFi on buses in Redditch. We just want a service that puts passengers first and buses and drivers that attempt to keep their buses on schedule

There were some excellent responses to news that spin classes might be run on board London buses next year, including:

**Steven Salmon** Very space-hungry. It’s bad enough squeezing in with monster buggies. I like the very small driver, though. If we could find lots like him we could cut down the size of the cabs to make more room for passengers

**Noam Bleicher** Alternatively, cycle to work, or at least as far as the bus stop!

The 19 year old who has just realised his dream as a bus driver received lots of support on social media, including this from our Chief Executive:

**Claire Walters** Well done Caleb, we passengers need all the committed bus drivers we can get, don’t let the banter get you down!

And of course, some bus folk humour:

**Mac Mac** New meaning to the school run!

When a bus company stood by its driver’s decision not to let a pupil travel without her bus pass, it stirred up quite a debate:

**Jason Freeman** Can I play devil’s advocate? Why didn’t she go home get her pass and catch next bus to school? As a driver we’re told that at the end of the school day we need to ensure all children are taken to a destination and not left stranded but in the morning it’s a different story. Is it time to look at relaxing the rules? On the flip side, she wouldn’t go into Asda for petrol and say ‘it’s ok, I can have it free today as I brought the wrong hand bag!’ I can see it from both sides. I bet she won’t forget her pass again!

**Stephen Pickworth** I think they should let pupils under 14 on even if they forgot their pass - come on, safety for pupils. They should put on double decker buses for the run in the morning and between 3pm and 5pm for pupils

**Margo Wicks** Rules are rules end of! I certainly would have to pay if I didn’t have my pass and I use the bus every day. I agree she could have gone home to get it and been late for school. The bus company should stand by the driver, he did the right thing.

**Lynn Roberts** For goodness sake it’s a child going to school who is known to the bus driver. It’s disgraceful. My mother was a conductress and never left anyone stranded!

**Luke Garley** If the driver gives out fares for free with no authorisation from management, he risks losing his job. What was stopping the pupil from quickly going home and grabbing the pass? Surely that’s something she should make sure she has whilst waiting for the bus?

And finally this from a very satisfied customer:

**Margo Wicks** Just got back from South Wales using First Buses to and from Pencoed, Bridgend, Porthcawl and surrounding areas and what a pleasure it was. Friendly helpful drivers and friendly helpful staff. A big pat on the back to you that served us so very well.
Membership Matters

Welcome
To new member groups
Goole Gofar
West Sussex Bus Users

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS continued
Railfuture
www.rallfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Severnside
www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside+Branch
Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group
g.cadwallader@btinternet.com
Rural East Lothian Bus Users
www.relbus.org.uk
The Senior Council for Devon Transport
andrea@scfd.org.uk
Southend Area Bus User Group
stephenknightley@hotmail.com
Swindon Climate Action Network
www.swindonclimate.org.uk
TransWilts CIC
pauljohnson@transwilts.org
TravelWatch NorthWest
admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
TravelWatch SouthWest
www.travelwatchsouthwest.org.uk
West Cumbria Bus Users Group
David Andrews, tel 01946 695373
West Dorset Western Area Transport Action Group
watag@hotmail.co.uk
West Leigh Residents Association
donaldfraser17@btinternet.com
West Sussex Bus Users
info@westsussexbususers.co.uk
Wirral Transport Users Association
www.wirraltua.org.uk

Supporting Bus Users
Individuals can become a Supporter for free by emailing supporters@bususers.org and you’ll receive a news bulletin when we need your support or if we’re holding an event in your area. If you’re under 18, please ensure a parent or guardian is aware of your interest and ask them to confirm it’s ok to email you.

Groups of three or more people who are working to protect their bus services in their local area are welcome to join Bus Users as an affiliated organisation. Contact membership@bususers.org for further details

Bus or Coach operators, including Community Transport Operators, are welcome to become corporate sponsors of Bus Users, work with us to improve your passenger contact and get our insights into bus policy and practice. Contact chiefexecutive@bususers.org

Donors and fundraisers are always welcome - please contact our Head Office for details of how you can support our work on enquiries@bususers.org

Bus Users Working for passengers

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS
Association of Devizes Passengers
www.devizespassengers.org.uk,
www.facebook.com/DevizesPassengers
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
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
arjones@postmaster.co.uk
Bus Users UK Oxford
hughjaeger@hotmail.com
Bus Users West Midlands
philipc.green@yahoo.co.uk
Campaign for Better Transport – Cambs
6 Hertford Street, Cambridge CB4 3AG
Campaign for Better Transport – West Yorkshire
rwilkes@blueyonder.co.uk
Colchester Bus Users Support Group (C-BUS)
peterkay.essex@btinternet.com
Denge Hundred Bus Users Group (DBUG)
contact@dbug.org.uk
Devon Senior Voice Transport Group
Mr John Montgomery, 150 Cleeve Drive, Ivybridge PL21 9DD
East Suffolk Travellers’ Association (ESTA)
The Beehive, Hall Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft NR32 3AW
Friends of DalesBus
www.friendsofdalesbus.org.uk
Goole Gofar
Christine@goolegofar.org.uk
Isle of Wight Bus & Rail Users Group
iwbususers@fsmail.net
Kendal & District Bus Users (KADBUS)
01539 740761
Lancaster District Bus Users’ Group
Jim Davies, lancasterbususers@gmail.com
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 Pembrokeshire Transport Forum
www.nptf.co.uk
North West Surrey Bus Users Group
mjworley@btopenworld.com, www.facebook.com/nwsurreybug