Prioritise the bus – for everyone’s sake
Change, as they say, is the only constant in life and so it is with buses. Subsidies are under threat, services are being cut, priority measures are being fought for and lost in equal measure, and while the Bus Services Bill is making progress, devolution is laying the foundations for even greater change, which could make things better or worse for many. And at the heart of all these developments is the passenger – or at least it should be. But according to the latest figures and research, bus use in non-metropolitan areas has fallen, congestion is crippling our towns and cities and pollution is causing the premature deaths of tens of thousands of people across the UK. Yet the much maligned and critically under-funded bus is one of the most effective weapons against congestion and an easy win against pollution, not to mention a boon to local economies and social inclusion. Local and central government, operators and transport planners need to consider the needs of the passenger and the passenger, more than ever, needs a champion. Bus Users UK needs to adapt to this constantly changing environment: as our founder, Dr Caroline Cahm says, that’s progress.

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users
Bus Users News

Social media outpouring for drivers act of kindness
Ken Waterson, a bus driver with Go North East, has become a social media hero after his act of kindness towards a South Tyneside schoolgirl went viral. 11 year old Abigail Lodge had only recently started senior school and was still adjusting to the bus journey when she lost her purse on the way to the bus stop. When she realised, she stepped off the bus, upset, but driver, Ken, told her to get back on again. While many drivers regularly make similar gestures, Ken went a step further, giving the pupil money from his own pocket for her return journey. The story has been shared thousands of times across social media since Abigail’s mum posted a thank you on Facebook: “What a lovely driver you have working for you, who showed my 11-year-old daughter some human kindness, which we are all very grateful for. He has helped enormously in a difficult situation for her. Bless him, what a star.”

World’s first driverless bus
Lyon reportedly became the first city in the world to operate a passenger-carrying driverless bus service this year. The two, 4m long electric vehicles can travel up to 6 miles per hour and carry 15 people each. Despite having a range of detectors to avoid collisions, the buses are not able to manoeuvre around obstacles, and are currently being used on restricted routes near tramways, away from other traffic. According to newspaper New Europe, pilot schemes are also running in Paris, Switzerland, Japan, Singapore and California.

Changes at Bus Users

Bus Users has been consulting with its members and local Bus User groups to look at how they can improve the way they work together in the future. In a recent ballot, members were asked whether they would agree to convert from paid individual membership to free Foundation Supporter status, and an overwhelming majority of 287 people said yes, with just 42 saying no and 7 left blank. The response rate to the ballot was 63.3%, representing a majority of the membership.

Members also gave their support to changing the Board of Bus Users to better reflect the diversity of bus and coach passengers, with 300 saying yes, 27 saying no and 9 ballot papers left blank. Higher still were the number of members who responded yes to the question of whether Bus Users UK should become a registered charity, with just 18 people saying no and 1 paper left blank.

As a result of the consultation work done with local groups, they now have the option to work with Bus Users UK either as an affiliate, where they remain independent but continue to share some of the aims of Bus Users, or as a local branch, working more closely with Bus Users and receiving additional support.

The results of the ballot and consultation were announced and agreed as the way forward at this year’s Bus Users’ AGM. To find out more about the meeting and the impact these changes will have on the organisation, you can read the AGM report on P 12.
Top driving skills rewarded
Craig Lockyer from National Express West Midlands Wolverhampton Garage beat 114 finalists to become this year’s Bus Driver of the Year 2016. Craig received £1,500 from the Road Operators’ Safety Council, £1,000 from Unite the Union and the John Boxall Medallion as national champion. He also scooped £1,000 as FirstGroup’s highest placed finalist and £100 along with the Giles Fearnley Trophy as the best competitor from a depot in England.
Runner up, in what was the 50th Anniversary of the Awards, was former Bus Driver of the Year winner Jonathan Welch from First Aberdeen with Colin Henderson from First Scotland East taking third place. First drivers had particular cause for celebration, securing four of the top 10 places in the competition, including three of the top four. The winners were announced at an Awards ceremony in Blackpool on 3 and 4 September.

Congestion driving down passenger numbers
In a timely new study, The Impact of Congestion on Bus Passengers, Professor David Begg, Chairman of the Greener Journeys Advisory Board, has highlighted the extent to which congestion on Britain’s roads has been ‘corrosive’ to the bus sector.

According to the report, bus journey times are growing by almost 1% per annum on average, with an increase of almost 50% over the last 50 years in more congested urban areas. The report describes a ‘vortex of three vicious downward spirals’ where slower bus speeds are increasing journey times, reducing punctuality and reliability, and pushing up costs and fares. The report points to a direct correlation between operating speeds and patronage, predicting that the current rate of increase in journey times could see passenger numbers fall by between 10% and 14%, with access to around 5,000 jobs lost each year as a consequence.

The report calls for more bus champions at all levels of government, and for bus companies to communicate more effectively with passengers in order to mobilise their support for improved bus priority measures.

Bus Users Chief Executive, Claire Walters said: “The damage being done to bus services by congestion is a bitter irony when buses themselves offer a solution to our congestion problems. But that can only happen if local and central government recognise the need to prioritise services and get more people out of their cars and onto the bus.”

To download a copy of the report in full visit the Greener Journeys website at www.greenerjourneys.com/publications

Buses Bill goes before Transport Select Committee
Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users UK joined James White and Jacqueline Juden from Guide Dogs, and David Williams a Partner with KPMG, on a panel giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee’s Bus Services Bill inquiry. The Committee will produce a short report that will feed into the Buses Bill which is currently before Parliament. You can watch all three panels give evidence to the enquiry at www.parliamentlive.tv
Former editor of Bus User Stephen Morris looks back down the years as the magazine pulls into the terminus

All change please!

All good things, it is said, come to an end: and so it is with Bus User. Its demise may on the one hand be a cause for sadness, but on the other it is an indication of Bus Users moving with the times. We stand still at our peril, and while Bus User served a valuable function for more than 15 years, now a different form of communication will serve our needs better as we continue to develop.

Bus User was very much my ‘baby’. Caroline Cahm had produced a newsletter called Bus Stop Jottings, which she had edited herself for 15 years alongside the mountain of tasks she undertook entirely voluntarily. In the meantime, I was thinking of setting up a freelancing business and approached Caroline with a proposal to take Bus Stop Jottings off her plate and produce a proper magazine. The way Caroline nearly bit my hand off assured me I could make a go of my proposed

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business: I had my first client! I tentatively pointed out I would need paying, and she said, ‘Oh, don’t worry, we’ll find the money from somewhere!’ She was as good as her word and came up trumps with a sponsorship deal from First Eastern Counties.

Lest anyone think Bus User was the working title of the Stephen Morris Benevolent Fund, I like to think it was two-way traffic. With a background in transport publishing, my own interests had developed way beyond the ‘nuts and bolts’ of buses to the politics and policies, and indeed to the passenger experience. How often would I attend posh launch events for new services, where the great and the good of the local town were wheeled out to say encouraging things about the importance of bus services, only to revert to being teenagers as soon as they got aboard the bus: evidence that the last time they had been on a bus was to go to school! For me, going out and seeing the new development actually in service, carrying real people, was far more informative.

So here was the chance to produce a magazine from the passenger’s perspective. It seemed to be well-received by members, we sent it to MPs and Welsh Assembly Members and very quickly the bus companies took a great interest in it. There were plenty of magazines telling them about the merits of the latest brake linings or fancy gizmos, but nothing to tell them what their customers liked or didn’t like. Bus User was highly instrumental in putting Bus Users UK on the map; it was a tangible indication of our purpose and growing professionalism.

It was my aim to put the passenger perspective, to help our members and local groups understand how the industry worked and also show them what was possible in terms of good practice in other parts of the country.
Bus User was highly instrumental in putting Bus Users UK on the map; it was a tangible indication of our purpose and growing professionalism.

It would have been easy to highlight all the bad practices, but actually there were plenty of people already doing that, with shock horror stories in the local press. Those of us who have a half-decent bus service know it is a better way to travel than most non-users would ever believe: and an essential part of our job was to promote bus use, not to pander to the belief that the bus was yesterday’s transport. OK, it’s not good everywhere, but the one thing that will help bus services prosper is getting more people on board.

At first we could only afford to get Bus User printed in black and white, and Portsmouth University used to print it for us. Caroline and our administrator, Dee Parkinson, used to stick them all in envelopes and put them in the post, which was a massive task. Later, however, as printing techniques developed we were able to get the magazine printed in colour at no extra cost and our printers were able to package it up and post it out for us which saved an enormous amount of work.

The very first issue came out towards the end of 2000, when the bus industry was struggling to find enough drivers to keep services going and yellow school buses were being considered. However traffic congestion, then as now, was very much the big issue of the day and Caroline Cahm considered that the Western Traffic Commissioner’s decision to fine First Bristol and place restrictions on its operations as a result of reliability problems caused by traffic congestion meant that passengers were suffering twice over.

We reported on the AGM of what was then still the National Federation of Bus Users, which took place in London in 2000. Caroline Cahm was re-elected as Chair, with Ron Brewer as Vice Chair, Stephen le Bras as Treasurer and Paul Evans, Marianne O’Brien, Phil Tonks and Duncan Ward as committee members. Gavin Booth had produced the first issue of our Good Practice Guide as part of the Welcome Aboard Awards scheme which NFBU ran at the time.

We ran a regular feature on rural buses, contributed by Heather Fogg, and in the fourth issue, Autumn 2001, we began a series exploring what goes on behind

A driver shortage piece from Bus User No.1 with Glenda Jackson
the scenes to provide a bus service. We started off with a day in the life of a traffic commissioner, when we interviewed the then South Eastern & Metropolitan Traffic Commissioner, Chris Heaps, who is now Chair of the Bus Appeals Body.

We also announced Congestion Busters, a campaign Caroline ran to emphasise the problems of traffic congestion and how buses could relieve it. Bus builder Optare provided us with a brand new bus which we took to various centres from Newcastle to Brighton and gave motorists free travel tickets.

The late Leo Markham reported on his first three months as the newly-funded Officer for Wales, the start of a long and very fruitful partnership with Welsh Government and Joe Lynch, whose job title was Areas Officer, reported on his first three months working full time for us on surgeries and complaints handling.
By 2004 NFBU had become stable enough for *Bus User* no longer to be funded by a particular bus company and soon afterwards bus industry design specialist Ray Stenning helped us out with a new image and we became Bus Users UK. That was reflected in a new look for the magazine from the beginning of 2005 when the magazine went colour for the first time. Phil Tonks was campaigning over Birmingham City Council’s decision to remove bus lanes from Tyburn Road, we reported on a new look for the TrawsCambria network in Wales, which continues today as TrawsCymru, and the Government’s all-singing, all-dancing Transport Direct website was launched to make it easier for people to access public transport information as part of its now-forgotten 10-year plan to increase public transport use. Unfortunately, plans to publicise Transport Direct were scaled back with the result that it closed down some years later.

The Summer 2005 issue announced that Caroline Cahm had stepped down as Chair at the AGM in Portsmouth that year; Caroline became our Life President and Gavin Booth took over as Chair.

And so we continued. The whole future of Bus Users UK looked to be threatened when it was announced that Passenger Focus would become the new ‘Bus Passenger’s Champion’ in provisions in the 2008 Transport Act. But we were by no means off the map; our increasing profile meant we had been closely involved with the Government in consultation on that Act, and one of the things that had particularly impressed Passenger Focus’s Chief Executive Anthony Smith about us was *Bus User*. Our role as the complaints appeals body was confirmed by Sadiq Khan, then Transport Minister. I became increasingly involved in the daily work of Bus Users UK and joined the staff in 2007. By the end of 2010 I had become General Manager and found, as Caroline had done 10 years earlier, that there was little time left to produce a magazine. At the same time, as Bus Users UK had developed and grown, we appointed a new high-profile Chair, former Transport Minister Gillian Merron, and Gavin Booth took over the editorship of the magazine from the beginning of 2011.

By now the Internet was established as an ideal means of communication between organisations and their members and the role of *Bus User* came under close scrutiny. From 2012 we reduced the size of the magazine and subtly changed the blend of material in it, in order to contain costs while continuing to keep our members informed.

Changes ratified at the 2016 AGM, however, along with the demand for more timely and interactive communication, means that a printed members’ magazine is no longer appropriate and, after 16 years, *Bus User* has arrived at the terminus. A lot has happened in that time: Bus Users UK has changed out of all recognition and advances and growth in the use of technology gives Bus Users UK the opportunity to communicate more effectively, more quickly and more cheaply with all of its supporters and stakeholders.

It’s been a fun journey and *Bus User* has undoubtedly played a very important part in helping Bus Users UK get where it is today. But like a diesel-powered bus that was state-of-the-art 16 years ago, it’s time to replace it with something better!
To Brazen Bottom and beyond

Stephen Morris takes a journey back in time on board a red London double decker bus to an area of rural England forever suspended in the 1940s

Having a regular bus service is something that many of us (sadly, not all of us) take for granted. However if you want to go by bus to Brazen Bottom or New Zealand (and who wouldn’t?) you can only do so on one day a year, a Saturday in August. The same applies to the village of Imber, with its fine medieval church. But before you feel too sorry for the inhabitants of such places, you don’t need to: there aren’t any.

That doesn’t stop the buses that do run there being packed to overflowing, and what is even more bizarre is that these remote hamlets are served on their one day a year by red London double-deckers buses, with proper London bus stops erected for the purpose.

The service, 23A, runs from Warminster station in Wiltshire. The reason the villages have no inhabitants is that they are on Salisbury Plain and are used by the military for training in urban warfare. Imber was evacuated in 1943 so that American troops could use it to train for the D-Day Landings, with the promise that its residents return once things went back to normal. They’re still waiting, but now there is little left of their village, apart from the rather lovely church, which is surrounded by barbed wire but still gets used a few days a year. Otherwise few buildings remain standing, though there are skeleton houses, with no windows and corrugated iron roofs, built more recently and used for army training.

The reason the bus runs there is that for a couple of weeks a year the roads through Salisbury Plain are open to the public. You mustn’t stray off the roads, as there are all sorts of nasty things that might injure you or blow you sky high, but nonetheless it’s worth a visit. Ignoring the odd burnt out tank, the scenery is rather lovely and is really unspoilt, as for the most part nothing is done with it. As a result it has a number of rare habitats for both flora and fauna.

In 2009 a few bus industry professionals got together to see if they could supply a bus service, so that not just those with their own cars could get there,
and since then they have done just that. The service is technically run by the Bath Bus Company, though the buses are all either elderly London Routemasters or their modern equivalent. Fares are £2 single (despite the Transport for London involvement, you can’t use Oystercards: instead conductors come round with good old-fashioned ticket machines) or £10 for a day ticket, which is worth having if you want a long ride round and go to even more obscure places than Imber: including, I kid you not, New Zealand and Brazen Bottom. The whole service is properly timetabled and there is an interchange at a place called Gore Cross where the various routes converge. It’s pretty well in the middle of a field, and the sight of numerous London double-deckers gathering there to exchange passengers, borders on the surreal.

Armed with my day ticket, I opted to stay on the same bus to ride round the various destinations: it took two hours from Warminster station till I eventually hopped off at Imber, though if that doesn’t appeal you could just ride to Imber from Warminster in about half an hour. Travelling on a double-decker you can of course enjoy the extensive views (and they are very extensive) in a way you couldn’t were you to go there by car.

It needed about a dozen buses to run the service and most were packed for much of the day. Bus enthusiasts turn out in their droves for this most unusual of bus services, but many of the passengers are just locals, curious to see this unusual and generally forbidden landscape on their doorstep. It’s well worth the day out, and the proceeds from the bus fares go to the British Legion and Imber Church fund: in 2015 it raised more than £6,000.

No date’s been announced for Imberbus in 2017, but if you’re interested keep an eye on imberbus.wordpress.com
Norman Baker chaired his first Bus Users AGM on Saturday 10 September at the Priory Rooms Conference Centre in the heart of Birmingham. 58 people joined the event, sponsored by National Express.

Bus Users AGM 2016

Jeff Anderson, Vice Chair, and Board members Harry Barker, Professor Stuart Cole, Hugh Jaeger, and David Redgewell were all present at this year’s AGM, with apologies from Tracy Jessop.

Norman highlighted the list of apologies and attendees which was available to everyone at the meeting, and formally accepted last year’s AGM and Members’ Meeting Minutes before going on to deliver the Chair’s report. Norman discussed the EU Referendum and while the full impact of Brexit on the bus sector is unknown, there is the possibility that it could affect devolution arrangements and investment in buses and Norman stressed the need to ensure bus passengers are not disadvantaged by the outcome. With the impact of Brexit on the economy also unknown, Norman was concerned that passenger numbers and services could be adversely affected.

Cuts to services had been the focus of much work by Norman and Claire Walters over the past year, with the two engaged in meetings with a number of Government Ministers to highlight the impact of cuts on passengers. Norman also mentioned Claire’s involvement with the Transport Select Committee inquiry on the Buses Bill and was, he said, particularly concerned that the Bill recognised the requirement of local authorities to provide socially necessary services as laid out in Section 63 of the 1985 Transport Act.

Devolution was raised as another issue that will have an impact on bus services across England, although it remains unclear as to whether the effect will be positive or negative and is likely to depend on where you are in the country. Norman called on members to bring these issues to the attention of Bus Users, reminding the meeting of the importance of local knowledge in lobbying government and operators.

Norman highlighted the work being done to bring youth discounted fares in England in line with Scotland and Wales. In addition to getting more young people on buses, access to buses for people with mental health issues was another matter of concern for Bus Users, leading the organisation to sign the Time to Change Pledge to help overcome the stigma surrounding mental health.
The process is now underway for Bus Users to become an Alternative Dispute Resolution body, and the outcome of that should be known by the start of 2017. Norman also mentioned the work that Bus Users has been doing in consultation with local groups and members on the status and structure of the organisation. The outcome of this work was top of the Agenda for the day and Norman thanked delegates for their support and input.

Norman moved onto the results of the members’ ballot. Out of a total of 534 Bus User members eligible to vote, 338 actually did so. To the question ‘I agree to convert paid individual membership to free foundation supporter status’, 287 said yes, 42 said no and 7 remained blank. To the question ‘I agree to change the structure of the Board as per the proposal to reflect the diversity of bus and coach passengers’, 300 said yes, 27 said no and 9 remained blank. Finally, to the question ‘I agree to Bus Users UK becoming a registered charity’, 317 said yes, 18 said no and 1 paper was left blank.

With an overwhelmingly positive response to each question of 87.23%, 91.74% and 94.63% respectively, accounting for more than 50% of the membership in each case, Norman felt the organisation had been given a strong mandate by its membership with a result, he joked, far more satisfactory than the close-run 52%-48%, outcome of the EU Referendum. One member asked for clarification as to what charitable status meant. Norman explained that Bus Users reasons for wanting to change status were laid out in the consultation paper but that, essentially, charitable status would allow Bus Users greater access to funding, including Gift Aid on donations, and more security in the years ahead. There are, obviously, different legal requirements that as a charity, Bus Users would have to meet and the organisation would be answerable to the Charity Commission, all of which would require some relatively minor changes to the way Bus Users operates. Following another question from the floor, Norman suggested that any member wanting to continue to pay in their membership money as a donation would be very welcome to do so.

Harry Barker explained that the Omnibus Society had gone through the same process in the past without any difficulty, and had been able to access trust funds that would not give money to non-registered charities. He also made the point that charitable status would enable Bus Users to attract different sources of income and end its dependency on bus companies which some people, quite wrongly, believed caused a conflict of interest.

Claire Walters outlined the next stages of the process which are likely to be lengthy and fairly involved in order to ensure it is fully compliant and transparent. It will involve bringing together an independent group of people with the necessary charitable and legal knowledge to form a nominations committee to ensure that the new Board provides the diversity and independence Bus Users needs. Claire also suggested that it might be an option for Bus Users to set up a separate, commercial operation that could
charge for certain services and channel any profits back into the charitable organisation.

Following recent consultations with local Bus Users Groups, she announced that funding has now been secured for a part-time person to provide support for local groups and interviews have been taking place to find the right candidate. Claire explained that in the future, groups will work with Bus Users either as an affiliate, where they remain independent but continue to share some of the aims of Bus Users, or as a local branch, working more closely with Bus Users and receiving additional support.

In an effort to standardise the approach local groups take to charging and paying membership fees, Claire explained that Branches will pay Bus Users a membership fee of £30 a year, which they can pay by charging their own members an annual membership fee if they choose. Affiliates, who will be more autonomous, will be asked to pay a £10 annual support fee.

Following the discussion on groups, Kerry Donn delivered the financial report having taken over from Bill Wright in September 2015. Harry, who has been working closely with Kerry Donn on the accounts, commended her work and explained how they were now using Smart Cashflow which enables organisations to mitigate against income arriving late. Harry also responded to a member’s letter, suggesting that the AGM be postponed because the accounts had not been circulated 21 days ahead of the event. According to Company’s House, the legal requirement to do this applies only to Public Limited Companies and not, as is the case with Bus Users, a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The Board then responded to questions submitted in advance of the meeting, after which Norman Baker brought the AGM to a close. A full copy of Bus Users’ accounts for 2015/16 is available to download online at www.bususers.org/publications or by contacting the office on 0300 111 0001 email enquiries@bususers.org. A list of questions and answers from members to the Board is also available on request.

The afternoon’s eagerly anticipated Just a Minute session, chaired by Gavin Booth, offered a unique take on Radio 4’s Just a Minute programme. Speakers and subjects included Patricia Wright from Birmingham on Oldies, Kids, language learners, shoppers, rail and coach travellers - Who gets the foremost seat? Ray Wilkes from Shipley covered Rural Transport while Jackie Wilkes discussed False economy, Leonard Lean...
from Milton Keynes talked about Passenger User counts on/off on local Authority subsidised routes, Mervyn Dickson covered Bus changes in the Borders and East Lothian area, and John Carr tackled the question Bus Legislation is a mess and is Brexit an opportunity to clean it up? In a fitting end to the session, John Nicholas discussed My Last Just a Minute at the AGM.

Bus Users’ Country Directors then gave presentations highlighting developments in their work.

Margaret Everson, Director, Bus Users Cymru announced a toolkit that has been produced in partnership with a number of voluntary sector groups and the Community Transport Association. The toolkit aims to encourage greater consultation between local authorities and local communities, particularly people with disabilities, when making changes to bus services. Margaret also discussed the appointment of a full time, dedicated Traffic Commissioner for Wales, Nick Jones, with whom they plan to work closely in the future.

Gavin Booth, Director, Bus Users Scotland, highlighted their success in helping local authorities and operators to engage with passengers to reduce the impact of cuts to services. Their Bus Compliance Officers have also been successful in raising standards in services by dealing directly with operators where compliance problems have been identified and providing excellent evidence at public inquiries. Looking forward, Bus Users Scotland will continue to work with Scottish Government on plans for electronic purses (Oyster-style) to allow travel on all buses, trams, trains and ferries throughout Scotland. This is already trialling in Aberdeen with plans in hand for Dundee, and passengers are still able to pay cash fares. Dawn Badminton-Capps, Director, Bus Users England, spoke of their extensive work across the country on Local Authority Consultations where services and subsidies are under threat. The team is growing, with a new office established in Birmingham, and they have been building strong links with operators, passenger transport groups, local government and the voluntary sector to ensure the voice of the passenger is heard. Complaints handling will remain the priority in the year ahead and Bus Users England will continue its work on the forthcoming Buses Bill.

Keynote speeches for the afternoon included an address from Bus Users’ Youth Ambassador, Ella Beevers, who discussed the future for young people in the transport industry and outlined Fairer Fares, her campaign for affordable fares for young people. Next up was Robin Bennett, Commercial Manager with information design specialists, FWT, discussing the issue of Open Data for Bus Users, followed by Victoria Garcia, Accessibility and Communities Officer at Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus, who outlined their Accessible Travel offer. The final speaker of the day was Hayley Russell, Commercial Officer with National Express, which provided sponsorship towards the cost of the AGM, who spoke on the introduction of smart ticketing to the West Midlands.

Norman Baker invited questions before bringing the meeting to a close. He and Claire Walters thanked the people who organised the event, the Board members, and all those who participated and contributed.
Opening minds

Respected transport geek and Senior Consultant with passenger transport consultancy the TAS Partnership, Meera Rambissoon, talked to Bus Users about two subjects very close to her heart, mental health and public transport and about why she’s having a ‘Sober Tober’ this year.

B eing a passenger has its challenges: throw in mental health issues and it’s more challenging still. We can all experience anxiety and frustration on public transport - not knowing when your bus is going to turn up or how long your journey is going to take, having to deal with crowded buses and ‘other people’, making sure you have the right change or even knowing what payment will be accepted, and the constant fear of being late for work, a meeting or an appointment, can all add to the stress.

For someone with mental health issues these experiences are amplified. “A former boyfriend of mine experienced quite an extreme reaction to travelling on buses and the tube”, says Meera. “He was like the proverbial swan on the water, on the surface he looked calm but I could see in his eyes the absolute panic he was experiencing underneath.”

Watching someone you care about struggling with something most of us take for granted is hard. We can all experience anxiety and frustration on public transport - not knowing when your bus is going to turn up or how long your journey is going to take, having to deal with crowded buses and ‘other people’, making sure you have the right change or even knowing what payment will be accepted, and the constant fear of being late for work, a meeting or an appointment, can all add to the stress.

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Meera is keen to point out that many operators are making real headway in this area, such as Brighton & Hove’s Helping Hand scheme and the Safe Journey and Better Journey Cards relaunched by FirstGroup bus companies. But these cards rely on the cooperation and understanding of drivers who often have their own stress and anxieties to deal with. “Drivers are under a huge amount of pressure,” says Meera, “dealing with sometimes difficult passengers, navigating congested town and city centres, collecting revenue and having to meet strict timetable and punctuality criteria and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).”

Nonetheless, there are some things that drivers and passengers alike can do to make everyone’s journey that little bit more bearable. Meera’s own depression has often left her very tearful in the middle of a crowded bus or sat on a train. “When someone is in obvious distress there can be simple things that people can do to help – and that mainly comes down to understanding, empathy and making a judgement call about what to do or rather how best to behave and respond. Sometimes being left alone is or seems to be what I want. But, being offered a tissue and maybe a smile would have helped enormously, not least for giving me something to wipe my nose with. If anyone had asked if I was okay, be they a fellow passenger or a conductor, I probably would have felt embarrassed and under spotlight but I suspect also very comforted, not least by the human interaction and care of the question – even if fleeting.”

Alastair Campbell, Ambassador for Time for Change, pointed out at this year’s Mental Health Summit (Bus User 62) “I think all of us should be on the lookout for people who are on edge,” he said. “Honestly 9 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.”
According to Laura Whitehurst of Anxiety UK, what people with mental health issues need on public transport is their own ‘ramp’ which could be something tangible like a passenger card or a simple act of human kindness. Meera recalls another speaker at the Summit who talked about being given a glass of water on a train during a particularly bad experience of panic and anxiety. “It was such a small thing and yet it made such a huge difference,” says Meera. “These things can’t be underestimated or undervalued. Operators, drivers, front-line staff, passengers – all of us, at any given time could be experiencing stress or anxiety or having a particularly bad day.”

So what can be done? “Barriers need to be removed and ‘stress points’ mitigated or, better still, eradicated,” says Meera. “Passengers need to have information readily available and easy to digest to help plan and prepare their journey, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence.” Meera also believes that good quality training and greater awareness of mental health issues among operators and their staff, who could themselves be experiencing issues, is another positive step forward, along with feedback from passengers. “Passengers need to let operators know, not just when they have a negative experience but, crucially, when they have a positive one.” There is a huge amount of good practice out there that Meera would like to see celebrated and encouraged, and a great deal of learning still to be done. “Whether you’re a passenger, a driver or both, a little understanding and empathy will go a long way.”

Meera would love to hear from people about their experiences of mental health and the impact it has had on their journeys on public transport. This feedback, collected in complete confidence, will help transport providers identify and remove obstacles that make life difficult for people with mental health issues when travelling on bus, rail or tram. To get in touch, email Meera on meera.rambissoon@taspartnership.co.uk

Meera herself has been abstaining from alcohol during October, in support of Mental Health Action Group Derbyshire (via charity Derbyshire Mind) who played a huge role in organising the Mental Health and Transport Summit. You can support her ‘Sober Tober’ by visiting https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/rambo

The TAS Partnership is a consultancy whose focus and passion is helping the passenger transport sector move forwards for the benefit of providers and passengers alike. TAS’ work includes commercial and supported bus networks, health, social services and education transport and Community Transport.

The TAS Mental Health Pledge
“The TAS Partnership works to make passenger transport accessible for everyone. We will introduce policies and practices that support the needs and protect the rights of customers and staff experiencing a mental health condition.

We will encourage our clients, especially transport operators and local authorities, to adopt policies and practices that help passengers with mental health conditions to better communicate their needs and which enable employees to respond in a courteous and effective manner.

We will provide our own staff with training so that they have a better appreciation of mental health conditions and can support colleagues experiencing mental health conditions.”
With Bus User magazine coming to an end in its current, printed form, Gavin Booth, Director, Bus Users Scotland, looks back at the people and the organisation behind it

Bus Users

Bus Users UK would not exist in its present form if it had not been for a small but tenacious woman living in Southsea. Dr Caroline Cahm identified a need for an organisation to represent bus passengers in the brave new world that the 1985 Transport Act brought to the UK. For more than 50 years, local bus services had been regulated under a licensing system that prevented on-street competition, with bus routes largely run by bus companies in state or local authority ownership. Caroline recognised that, unlike rail passengers who had a body that considered their complaints, there was no equivalent body for bus passengers.

What started in a small way in Portsmouth and Southsea grew into the National Federation of Bus Users (NFBU), with members throughout Britain as Caroline’s crusading zeal encouraged user groups to be formed, and her tenacity when dealing with bus operators and local and national government convinced them to take bus passengers more seriously. After all, as Caroline constantly reminded them, there were many more bus than rail passengers, and she was giving bus passengers their voice.

She badgered bus operators about the way they handled complaints, and the more switched-on operators recognised that swift and sensible handling of complaints not only generated goodwill among passengers, but also provided them with market information that identified potential problem areas.

She started what we now call Your Bus Matters events, formerly ‘surgeries’ (on at least one occasion we had passers-by approach us looking for a cure for a sore throat). These events give bus passengers the opportunity to speak directly to bus companies and local authorities, something that is otherwise difficult, and they can provide us and the bus companies with early warning of passenger dissatisfaction – though it is fair to add that often passengers tell us that they are very happy with their local bus services, thank you very much.

Caroline nipped at the heels of bus and rail companies to provide her with transport to widen her activities and built up a small team of dedicated volunteers who shared her aims and were prepared to give of their time and talents to support the aims of NFBU. These included her good friend Marianne O’Brien as well as Phil Tonks, Joe Lynch, Julian Osborne, Chris Dale and Stephen Le Bras, and the members of
the more active bus user groups around the country.

James Freeman, now Managing Director of First West of England, was managing the People’s Provincial bus company in Hampshire and was one of the earliest industry bosses to support and encourage Caroline as NFBU grew. Throughout his career, James has been a vocal and active supporter of NFBU and Bus Users UK and in conversation recently paid tribute to Caroline’s foresight and sheer doggedness.

When Caroline decided to take a less active part in the running of what had now been renamed Bus Users UK – reflecting the growing influence of the organisation and avoiding confusion with the Fire Brigade Union – she persuaded me to succeed her as Chair, while she became Life President.

With solid support from Stephen Morris, a very knowledgeable transport journalist who had also found himself increasingly drawn into the organisation, we continued to build on the foundations Caroline had laid. Funding was, as it still is, an important consideration. Stephen and I went along cap in hand to the Westminster government and to the bus operators through their trade body the Confederation of Passenger Transport, and gradually built up funds to allow us to operate on a more effective level. The

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Welsh Assembly Government recognised the work that Leo Markham and Barclay Davies were doing in Wales and this led to increased levels of funding and what is today Bus Users Wales, led by Margaret Everson.

I had been working closely with Scottish Government and stepped down as Chair to create Bus Users Scotland, fully funded by Transport Scotland. This was part of a process to make Bus Users UK a more professional organisation, with the appointment of former transport minister Gillian Merron as Chair and Claire Walters as Chief Executive. Gillian moved to pastures new and has been succeeded by Norman Baker, another former transport minister, who has helped the new Board to develop a strategy for the future.

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With the establishment of Bus Users England, under the leadership of Dawn Badminton-Capps, we now have teams in place throughout Britain to look after the interests of bus passengers, which was Caroline Cahm’s dream more than 30 years ago. Today we have excellent staff teams working under our three country directors and much of the success of Bus Users as an organisation is down to their dedication and hard work.

In this last issue of Bus User magazine in print form, it is important to acknowledge the foundations Caroline laid – including a newsletter that was launched as Bus Stop Jottings and grew into Bus User – and recognise how much Bus Users has developed into a national organisation respected by governments, local authorities and bus companies, but most of all appreciated by bus passengers who have very clearly been given a voice. Someone once joked at an AGM about the ‘still, small voice of Cahm’, though Caroline’s voice was never that still or small, and bus passengers are definitely the better for it.

Dr Caroline Cahm MBE PhD

Tireless campaigner for bus and coach passengers, Caroline Cahm was awarded an MBE in 1995 for services to public transport. We asked the founder of Bus Users UK for her thoughts as Bus User magazine prepares to move online.

“The National Federation of Bus Users (now Bus Users UK) was set up to provide a proper system for dealing with passenger complaints and it made a real difference. Our aim was to establish a very positive relationship with bus operators so that when we raised a complaint with them, they would deal with it.

Bus User magazine was one of the ways in which we built that relationship. It began life as a cheaply photocopied newsletter, put together by hand and gradually, over the years, it developed until it became a proper magazine. We wanted Bus User to be positive and to make passengers better informed, bringing them together with operators and helping to develop communications between them. Along with the magazine, our Your Bus Matters (originally Bus User Surgeries), were another way of building that positive relationship.

Setting up Bus Users was a major task but over the years, the whole system has become so much better organised and complaints are now handled in the proper way. At 71, I decided it was time to hand over the reins to other people and for them to move things on. Changing Bus User from a printed format to an electronic magazine is a good idea – it will allow things to move on. That’s progress!”
As this is to be the final printed edition of Bus User, we thought we’d pay homage to tradition and run exclusively letters in this issue. Thank you for your contributions.

Bikes on buses?
Although the picture illustrating Peter Davenport’s article in Bus User 62 is of a bus in New Zealand carrying a cycle on the front, it is noteworthy that all three of the (small) bus operators in Britain which currently have external bike racks on their vehicles - in Bath, Nottingham and Portsmouth - only allow them on the rear.

As Mr Davenport’s own organisation, Bikes on Buses, points out, there are significant disadvantages in this arrangement. The cycle is out of sight of the driver and user during the journey, making it more vulnerable to theft. Loading/unloading takes longer, and is difficult if not impossible for the driver to observe without leaving the vehicle. A bike in this location is vulnerable if the bus reverses, and once it has been taken off the rack, the user is left standing in the road exposed to traffic.

So it is hardly surprising that no mainstream bus operator in Britain has embraced this concept. If Bikes on Buses wishes to make progress with its campaign, it will have to overcome the two principal objections to front racks raised by most operators, ie delays and danger. These were the critical considerations when London TravelWatch - the official consumer body for passengers in and around the capital - explored this issue with Transport for London (TfL) several years ago.

One of the reasons why bus use has soared in London in the past two decades, when it has been in steady decline elsewhere, is that London’s bus operators have managed to reduce journey times. A large part of this improvement has come from cutting dwell times at stops. This has been achieved in part by eliminating cash transactions and in part by having multiple doors so that boarding and alighting can take place simultaneously. Anything that causes delay is unwelcome, and having to wait for bikes to be loaded and unloaded would certainly fall into this category.

But concerns about delays were trumped by those about safety. A rack on the front of a bus poses the same potential threat to pedestrians as bull bars on cars did before they were banned, and for the same reason. Bikes on Buses counters this with the argument that it “needs to be considered in proportion to the very low level of pedestrian/bus collision accidents which occur annually anyway.” But the fact that buses have a generally good safety record is no reason for potentially making it worse.

TfL’s figures show that there were 342 incidents in which pedestrians were injured in collisions with buses in London last year - almost one every day. It is hard to imagine that bike racks on buses could be consistent with that goal. So Peter Davenport will have to come up with some very compelling evidence if he is to convince the managers of Britain’s bus network.

John Cartledge

Merci beaucoup!
When you are sitting in a bus shelter waiting for your bus, spare a thought for the man whose name appears on many shelters throughout Great Britain. Most people would probably not take a second glance except to register the fact that he must be French. Born in Beauvais, the son of a shoe salesman just before the war, his exhibitionist side came to the fore when in 1955 he set up a business erecting billboards at the side of roads. Perhaps, as a result of the fact that these could distract motorists, a law was passed to restrict their use and in 1964 he came up with the idea of the “abribus” ie bus shelter. This became very popular and many towns and cities in France followed Lyons where the first shelter was erected.

Not content with keeping the wind and rain off bus passengers, he turned his attention in 1981 to information boards to communicate information from local town mayors to the inhabitants. He even came up with a super solution to those wishing to (ahem) relieve themselves on the streets of major cities.

When he stepped down, with health problems, his three sons had continued to grow the business such that its existence was truly worldwide and the name JC Decaux will be a living testament to a man whose only aim was that he wanted to make travelling less of a stressful event.

Stephen LB
Enhancing partnerships

Regarding Aidan Turner-Bishop’s points about Concessionary Bus Passes (HYS, Summer 2016), I can’t speak for London (always a special case - itself inherently unfair) but regarding “regional equality”, it should be pointed out that the ENCTS Bus Pass is just that; a pass conceived for free Concessionary travel on local service buses only. The rationale - quite rightly - being that the vast majority of people can access a bus service without needing a car, whereas few over 60s without cars can realistically access rail. Re-imbursement from Central Government is based purely on the estimated shortfall to Bus Operators. Subsidising such passes on other forms of public transport is paid for by local Council tax payers in the areas affected.

As previewed on page 20, the Bus Services Bill has been published. I don’t know the timeline for other areas seeking Devolutionary powers, but I understand that Greater Manchester is due to elect a Mayor next Summer, with him or her taking up the post in late 2017. What to do with Buses will be just one of many subjects in their initial “in tray”, so there should be plenty of scope to lobby Mayoral Candidates both in Greater Manchester and other conurbations, before a final decision is made, even though Transport/Combined Authorities will be working on draft details in the meantime. Should therefore, Bus Users (in conjunction with others) be working on draft principles for Franchising or Enhanced Partnerships? These might need to include the very basics, such as equal Fares regimes across a whole Mayoral area, and non-motorists who NEED buses being considered just as important as motorists who just might be persuaded to use some form of public transport. For instance where I live, Stagecoach charges £1.90 for a 0.8 mile trip to the local GPs, on a captive market route that had a major cut in frequency last year. Meanwhile, over in the western half of Greater Manchester, they are charging just £1.20 for 5+ mile journeys into the “regional centre” on an over-bussed route started in competition with First after the latter bought Finglands from EYMS.

Phil Longdon, Denton, Manchester

We are working on the draft guidelines for the Buses Bill and trying to ensure that local passengers’ views are taken into account as a requirement, as well as trying to ensure any undertakings/standards are independently monitored. Currently the intention is to involve passengers much later in the development of partnerships and franchising than we think makes sense - but we battle on.

In an enhanced partnership scheme, everything will be up for grabs so it’s unlikely to be feasible to stipulate equality of fares across different operators, depending on the commercial viability of the services involved but it’s clearly divisive when there are large differences, and we have banged that drum often. In Greater Manchester, the aim seems to be a franchising plan, at this stage. While there are pros and cons to all options, this is the format where equality of fares is most likely to be part of the scheme. Whether this will mean an increase for many remains to be seen but we will be as involved as we possibly can be to try to get the best deal and the greatest passenger involvement at every stage.

The ENCS is a political hot potato, as I’m sure you are aware and the reimbursement formula has been tweaked and massaged many times, mainly with the aim of reducing the cost to govt. I don’t see any major changes to the ENCS being contemplated at this point so it will continue to be in the gift of the local government whether they sweeten the pot to extend the hours and benefits in their area. The more noise that is made locally, the more likely it is to be prioritised... as ever.

We will keep plugging away, alongside the other non-profits interested in this and hope that all interested parties will make their voices and views heard - we’ve seen some notable victories for passenger power and I’m sure there are more to come!

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users
Counting the cuts

Reading the article as to Northamptonshire County Council bus cuts, I live in Brackley to the South West of Northampton.

Due to Northamptonshire County Councillors decision to cut four routes, those around the Corby and one in the Wellingborough, it also included cutting back the Stagecoach Midlands former 8 now 88 service, south of Silverstone. Luckily, Stagecoach Midlands will run two services, the first a 0650 Brackley depart to Northampton, and a 1720 return to Brackley, Monday to Saturday. In addition, to absorb buses used on school/college services, a 0930 depart to Northampton and a 1403 return will run Monday to Friday at the expense of the bus operator.

The 88 up to July 23rd runs bi-hourly to Bicester via the Lark Rise to Candleford villages, this was affected by cuts by Oxfordshire County Council. The service is being used for access to work at Bicester or towards Northampton, Hospitals at either Northampton or Oxford, plus local surgeries. Section 106 money from housing development in Brackley is being used to fund Stagecoach Oxfordshire’s Brackley - Banbury 500 service.

Northamptonshire County Council has made changes with councillors as to public transport, but this has a negative response as to their job. Brackley also borders with Buckinghamshire - the X5 Oxford -Cambridge goes into Buckingham on the route, Brackley is a mile from that county boundary, and 2.5 miles from Oxfordshire.

There is not a decent bus link to Buckingham to enable a link with the X5 for Bicester or Oxford, so those wishing to have a faster connection have lost out in Brackley. Petitions to both Oxon and Northants County Councillors have been ignored as well.

Mick Furn, Brackley

We are working with Campaign for Better Transport to amend the Transport Act so that the provision of socially necessary services becomes a statutory duty. If that succeeds, this will make it much harder to cut off whole villages, towns and communities in future. Make sure you get your MP to support the amendment when it gets to the Commons!

Claire Walters, Chief Executive, Bus Users

Bus use down, but not out

Claire Walters calls for a radical change in priority over bus use

Bus use across England has fallen, but now that it’s happening in London people are starting to take notice. But does it matter? Government at all levels needs to understand the social, economic and health implications of a diminution in bus use. While funding cuts have had a huge impact, especially in suburban and rural areas, so too has the continued lack of interest in making public transport more appealing than the private car.

A clear legal duty on local authorities to protect bus services locally is urgently needed and we urge people to contact their local MPs to ask them to support the amendment to Section 63 of the 1985 Transport Act which will soon reach the Commons.

Congestion cannot be allowed to continue: priority needs to be given to buses, not just through bus lanes but by the raft of other measures currently available. Cars need to be towed out of bus stops and bus lanes, especially at busy times, and permission for skips, removals and roadworks all need to be carefully considered on busy routes. Tackling congestion will no doubt upset some car drivers but making public transport more reliable, punctual and affordable while disincentivising car use, will put more people on buses and free up vital road space for the vehicles that genuinely need it.

And while we’re on the subject, is it really a coincidence that bus use in the capital has fallen since the introduction of the cashless bus? Every day in London you see confused visitors, tourists and job seekers being turned off buses because they don’t have an Oyster card, a compatible contactless bank card or a suitable phone app. We need to remove this ridiculous barrier to bus travel in London and anywhere else that’s considering it.
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
hugh_jaeger@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
Dengie 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@goolagofar.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
Railfuture
www.railfuture.org.uk
Railfuture Severnside
www.railfuture.org.uk/Severnside+Branch
Rame Peninsula Public Transport Users Group
g.cadwallader@btinternet.com

Bus Users LOCAL GROUPS continued

Rural East Lothian Bus Users
www.relbus.org.uk
The Senior Council for Devon Transport
andrea@scfd.org.uk
Southend Area Bus User Group
stephenknighthley@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
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 groups@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