



# Bus Users England Annual Report 2017/18



## Highlights

- Close to 2,000 individuals complained to Bus Users England during 2017/18, raising 4,127 issues – up a third on the number of complaints handled in the previous year. The biggest areas of complaint were service reliability and driver/staff attitude respectively
- We held 19 Your Bus Matters events across the country. On-bus route discussions proved particularly fruitful in Newcastle upon Tyne where we spoke to passengers about a specific issue, giving us very specific feedback for the Local Authority
- More than 1,500 individuals had their say about local bus issues at meetings and events organised by Bus Users England
- We have 3 Branches in England – Brighton, Oxford and Shropshire, with a new group established in Cambridge currently working towards becoming a fully-fledged Branch
- On 21 separate occasions, Bus Users England took the opportunity to reflect passenger views back to government and Local Authorities through consultations, correspondence and meetings, ensuring local voices and opinions were heard. In the case of Norfolk, this resulted in funding being saved
- 7 media campaigns were run highlighting passenger concerns including loss of service: this proved particularly helpful in Newcastle with the proposed Blakett Street closure, and in Queen Street, Oxford
- Contact was made with all 6 newly elected Combined Authority members informing them about the role of Bus Users and the importance of listening to passengers. That contact was followed up with meetings to discuss how we could support positive change in those areas
- A Bus Users UK Supporter Event, to be held in place of our previous AGMs, was organised for Spring 2018
- The profile of Bus Users England continues to rise, with invitations to make presentations at events such as the ALBUM Conference, and to participate in radio and TV interviews
- Changes to the team in Bus Users England mean we are now well positioned to look at our strategic plan in line with our newly formed charitable objectives.

## Complaints

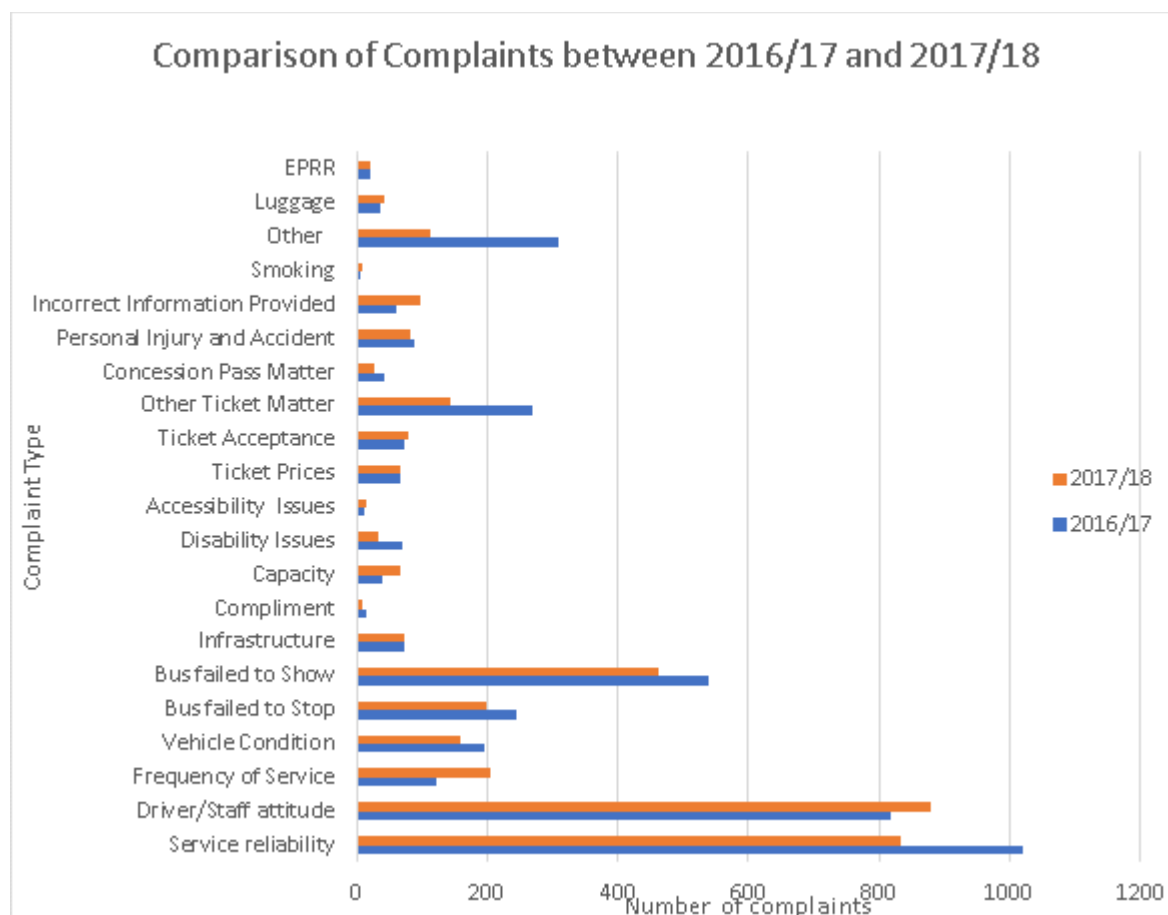
In 2017/18, 1,978 complainants were handled by the Bus Users England team, raising a total of 4,127 issues. The number of complainants contacting Bus Users England has increased year on year with the team handling a third more cases this year than the previous year.

In 2017/18 we saw a switch at the top with complaints relating to service reliability replacing driver/staff attitude as the single most complained about issue. Congestion and roadworks, which continue to blight our cities and towns, is likely to be the reason for this change. As many congestion problems do not look like being resolved in the short-term, this could well become a trend for future years.

The number of cases relating to the European Passenger Rights Regulation remained the same as the previous year, as did the number of passengers complaining about disability issues.

Bus Users England keeps operators updated with monthly reports of the summary data collected through our complaints handling system. This allows the team to flag trends to the operators, as well as highlighting locations where it may be useful to host a Your Bus Matters event, such as Hanley where a number of subsidised services were facing cuts.

The table below shows a breakdown of complaints received in 2017/2018 compared to 2016/2017



### Your Bus Matters

Our Your Bus Matters events give passengers an opportunity to talk to us, bus operators and Local Authority representatives about their concerns regarding bus services in their communities.

During 2017/18, Bus Users England hosted 19 events, covering the breadth of England from Ipswich to Bath and from Hanley to Middlesbrough.

Your Bus Matters events are arranged in partnership with local stakeholders – the various bus operators and relevant Local Authorities - at a place that can easily be accessed by members of the public. They provide an effective way to assess the impact of proposed changes in service provision, and to monitor changes that have already taken place.

The locations are selected in response to a specific complaint or a sudden increase in complaints, either identified through our own data or via an operator or partner alerting us. We also visit areas where the Local Authority is carrying out a consultation on changes or cuts to services or funding.

Holding these events in the local community makes it easier to engage with local people, both passengers and non-passengers, and encourage them to share their views on local services. Events in Norfolk at Norwich and Kings Lynn allowed us to demonstrate public feeling about cuts to subsidised bus services, which resulted in the Council making fewer cuts than originally proposed.

The response we get from our partners for hosting Your Bus Matters events is extremely positive, with many telling us how well received the event was and what a great opportunity it has been for people to have their views heard.

The concerns that are raised generally reflect the type of complaints we receive at Bus Users England, and relate predominantly to service reliability and driver/staff attitude. As we are often in areas where a change or decline in service is being experienced or about to be implemented, this is invariably the issue of greatest concern for the customers and communities there.

Speaking to people locally enables us to challenge both local and national policy on issues such as the funding of bus services and whether it is time to consider a standard national policy of young people's ticketing. We were able to use the data collected at our Newcastle Your Bus Matters event to prevent the closure of Blakett Street through collecting local feedback and sharing people's feelings with the local council.

## **Branches**

Our network of local branches is fundamental to everything we do at Bus Users England. With a unique understanding of the issues facing the communities they represent, these groups act as a regional voice for Bus Users UK and work with us to champion the interests of passengers.

We have three Branches in England: Brighton, Oxford and Shropshire which have been working alongside our staff to ensure issues in their communities are addressed. Our Branches work hard in their local areas to ensure good bus services are retained. Our Oxford Branch has done a lot of work this year to try to prevent the full and permanent closure of Queen Street in the City Centre.

We have also been working with a newly formed Cambridge Bus User Group which is well on the way to establishing a voice in the Cambridge area for passengers. We look forward to their continued growth and development, as they work towards becoming a Branch of Bus Users UK in the coming year.

If you would like to know more about developing a Branch in your area, or find out how your group could become a Branch, please get in touch.

## **Partnership Working**

Partnership working remains a key focus for Bus Users England and we continue to identify ways to grow new partnerships and build on existing ones.

We maintain regular contact with the Department for Transport particularly around our EPRR work, and this year we have also discussed the Bus Services Act Guidance and Accessibility issues. Throughout the design and consultation of the supporting guidance for the Bill we worked hard to ensure that the legislation will, in fact, bring about the positive changes it promised for passengers, which we believe can only be achieved with the involvement of both bus users and non-bus users.

The possibility of change with the introduction of the Bus Services Act has meant that many Local Authorities and Combined Authorities are reviewing their transport and bus strategies and we have ensured that our voice and therefore that of passengers is being heard during this process. We continue to work with Transport for West Midlands and Derbyshire County Council and this has been extended to working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority as well.

Working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority we were able to produce information about the effect of disjointed ticket pricing for young people and provide examples of more positive approaches across the country. This led the Combined Authority to introduce a standard young person fare which didn't require a proof of age card.

As well as working with partners in the industry, we have been working extensively with the voluntary sector including Anxiety UK, Disability North and DEEP, on ways to support bus users with hidden disability issues.

Throughout 2017/18 we have built upon the good working relationships we have with operators at all levels to ensure that complaints are handled correctly and that the rights and interests of passengers are upheld. The big five operators in England receive monthly reports from Bus Users England outlining the complaints we have handled in partnership with them. These reports have formed the basis of meetings with Operators to discuss the concerns being raised by passengers and to look for solutions. With one Operator, the concerns we raised led to improvements being implemented within a month.

Bus Users England recognises the importance of partnership working and the value it brings and will continue to explore further partnerships in the coming year.

### **The Year Ahead**

The Bus Users England team continues to work tirelessly to respond to passengers needs and deliver an excellent service in everything they do.

Complaints handling will, as ever, be a priority as we move into our second year as the industry's only dedicated Alternative Dispute Resolution Body. We will maintain dialogue with bus and coach operators to share best practice and improve standards in bus travel for everyone.

We will continue our work to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard in all arenas, and at all levels, particularly in the areas of the newly elected Combined Authority mayors, and we will seek to ensure that the rights of the passenger are recognised and upheld.

### **England Team**

Dawn Badminton-Capps	England Director
Susan Dawson	Events Manager
Victoria Walker	Programme Manager
Dave Fairey	Complaints Administrator
David Gray	Complaints Administrator

I would like to thank all the staff at Bus Users UK who have provided support to the England team. Thank you also to the staff at Bus Users England who remain dedicated and committed to their roles and who continue to work hard to deliver on our promises and our mission.

### **Dawn Badminton-Capps**