Highlights 2016/17

* Nearly 700 bus passenger complaints handled in 2016/2017 (35% increase)
* Service Reliability continues to attract the greatest number of complaints
* Greatly increased number of complaints about buses failing to stop or show and frequency of service
* Complaints about driver/staff attitude still very high
* Geographical spread of complaints similar to 2015/16
* Eleven Your Bus Matters events held and BUS attended several passenger engagement events across Scotland
* BUS co-operated with Transport Scotland, bus operators and local authorities to minimise the impact of bus service cuts and wholesale withdrawals from parts of Scotland
* Over 2,300 hours of roadside and on-bus monitoring by Bus Compliance Officers
* Continued close working with Transport Scotland, Traffic Commissioner’s office, Confederation of Passenger Transport, bus operators and other stakeholders

The Your Bus Matters events organised by Bus Users Scotland give bus passengers the opportunity to meet representatives from local bus companies and the local authority to discuss bus services that they use. This event was in Stirling.
Chart 1 (see next page) shows the breakdown by category of all complaints BUS dealt with in 2016/17. It is clear to see that passengers expect a reliable bus service with courteous and efficient staff. The level of service relates to the frequency of service that passengers have access to.

Bus Users UK has a standard format for categorising complaints that has been used since April 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Service reliability</td>
<td>buses running early or late, occasionally or frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Driver/Staff attitude</td>
<td>drivers and other bus company staff who provide poor level of customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Frequency of service</td>
<td>passengers looking for changes in frequency (e.g. evenings and Sundays)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Vehicle condition/type</td>
<td>dirty, noisy or dangerous aspects of the bus, inside and out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a Bus failed to stop</td>
<td>buses failing to stop at proper bus stops when hailed by a passenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b Bus failed to show</td>
<td>buses not turning up at or around the scheduled time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Infrastructure</td>
<td>issues with bus stops, shelters, Apps, Real Time Information etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Compliments</td>
<td>passengers praising the bus company or its staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Capacity</td>
<td>overcrowding, passengers unable to find a seat or space to stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a Disability issues</td>
<td>problems experienced by passengers with registered disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b Accessibility issues</td>
<td>problems experienced by all passengers at bus stations and stops, boarding or alighting from buses etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10a Ticket prices</td>
<td>complaints about bus company fares/ fare structures/ fare zones etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10b Ticket acceptance</td>
<td>problems with drivers and other bus company staff accepting tickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10c Other ticket matter</td>
<td>drivers withholding tickets, problems with season tickets etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10d Concession pass matter</td>
<td>any problems with concession passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Personal injury and accident</td>
<td>claim against bus company on bus, in bus station etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Incorrect information provided</td>
<td>verbal, online, printed material, Traveline Scotland etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Smoking</td>
<td>drivers, bus company staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Other</td>
<td>not covered by other categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Luggage</td>
<td>loss of or damage to luggage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 EPRR</td>
<td>Bus Users UK is the representative body for European Passenger Rights Regulations in the UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Various Your Bus Matters events were held in Scottish Borders in partnership with Scottish Borders Council and the principal bus operators, which included one at the new Transport Interchange in Galashiels.
Complaints received by BUS are analysed and a monthly report is sent out to stakeholders. In 2016/17 BUS dealt with 694 complaints compared to 513 in 2015/16 (2014/15 - 508); this significant increase is partly due to the increased awareness of BUS among passengers in Scotland, partly to the Your Bus Matters events held across Scotland, where BUS facilitates direct dialogue between bus passengers and bus operators and local authorities, and partly due to greater engagement with passengers throughout Scotland. As in 2015/16, service reliability and driver/staff attitude continue to attract the greatest number of complaints handled by BUS during 2016/17. There were more complaints in 2016/17 about buses that failed to stop or show, and about the condition of the vehicle/type of vehicle than in 2015/16.

As in previous years, these categories tend to attract the greatest number of complaints, while other categories barely register. The charts above and on the next page show the categories that these complaints fall under (Chart 1) and the geographical spread (Chart 2).
The figures in Chart 2 (see above) are shown by Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) area, calculated on a population per capita basis to give a more balanced picture. The RTP areas are Zetland (Shetland Islands), Hitrans (Highland, Argyll & Bute except Helensburgh and Lomond, Moray, Orkney Islands, Western Isles), Nestrans (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire), Tactran (Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross, Stirling), SEStran (Edinburgh City, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, West Lothian), SPT - Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (Glasgow City, Argyll & Bute - Helensburgh and Lomond area only, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire), Swestrans (Dumfries & Galloway).

Recording the complaints by RTP area on a per capita basis shows a fairly even spread between Nestrans, Hitrans, Tactran, SPT and SEStran, with considerably fewer for Zetrans and Swestrans.
Comparing 2016/17 figures with 2015/16, there have been increases in the Nestrans, Hitrans, SEStran and Swestrans areas, and decreases in SPT, Tactran and Zetrans.

Transport Scotland is committed to introducing integrated ticketing for road, rail and ferry transport across Scotland, and Bus Users Scotland attended the launch of the new ABC card in Dundee in September 2016 promoting smart ticketing in Dundee and Tayside.
Following First Scotland East’s decision to withdraw its remaining East Lothian services, BUS worked with East Lothian Council and bus operators to ensure that passengers had continuity of service. Lothian Buses set up East Coast Buses to serve the key corridors between Edinburgh and Dunbar and North Berwick.

Bus Users Scotland Deputy Director, Greig Mackay launches the new JET service provided by Stagecoach North Scotland linking Aberdeen and Aberdeen Airport, using high quality double-deckers. Greig is pictured with Steve Walker, then managing director of Stagecoach North Scotland.
BUS USERS SCOTLAND

Under the terms of our grant from Transport Scotland, Bus Users Scotland (BUS) is required to receive and investigate complaints from passengers about bus and express coach services in Scotland, provide advocacy on matters relating to bus passengers to Transport Scotland, and carry out effective monitoring of bus services throughout the country.

The year 2016/17 was notable for the uncertainty caused for passengers by bus companies requiring to make cuts for financial reasons. BUS worked with Transport Scotland, bus operators and local authorities to minimise the effect these proposed cuts had on passengers. In two significant areas, East Lothian and The Scottish Borders, the major bus company indicated that it was closing down its entire operation, leading to concern among passengers, particularly those in more remote areas. It was fortunate that existing operators were able to step in very quickly with suitable replacement services, including a commitment to invest in new vehicles. Bus passengers are naturally anxious about potential changes of this magnitude and look for stability and certainty. BUS encourages all bus operators and local authorities to consult with passengers over any service changes or withdrawals that could cause inconvenience or even social isolation and BUS is happy to facilitate consultation between the different parties to achieve this end.

Bus Complaints

Handling of complaints from bus passengers about bus and express coach services in Scotland is a fundamental part of the work of BUS. There are two distinct types of complaint and these will be identified in future monthly reports from BUS. Stage One complaints take the form of phone calls, letters, emails, text messages and other electronic methods that are received by BUS. These are logged and redirected by BUS to the bus operator or local authority concerned, with a request that BUS should be copied into all subsequent correspondence through to the successful resolution of the complaint. Stage Two complaints are received from bus passengers by the same methods, but involve situations where the passenger has been dissatisfied with the response from the bus company or local authority and requests further action. BUS will then pursue the complaint on behalf of the passenger with a view to reaching a satisfactory outcome for both parties. Both Stage One and Stage Two complaints provide invaluable information for BUS and will often lead to bus compliance monitoring as well as informing the Traffic Commissioner about unsatisfactory performance by bus operators. Stage One complaints often reach BUS because passengers are uncertain who they should address their complaints to. Bus company websites are required to carry information about BUS, and often passengers are confused and approach BUS directly. Identifying the correct address for complaints is often difficult on smartphones and other hand-held devices.

Your Bus Matters events

Your Bus Matters events give bus passengers the opportunity to meet face-to-face with bus operator and local authority staff in order to discuss matters of concern. In 2016/17 BUS facilitated events at Alloa, Ayton, Clackmannan, Dundee, Galashiels, Hawick, Livingston, Peebles, Stirling and Tillicoultry.

These events are held in conjunction with bus operators and the relevant local authority and may be held in a bus station or in a prominent central location. Bus companies are encouraged to provide buses and staff and the events are advertised locally in the weeks leading up to the event. The choice of venue may be the result of concerns about bus services in that area, or follow major route changes, or may be requested by one of the bus operators as a means of gathering useful market research from passengers.

All of the major operators in Scotland have been involved and many local independent operators have also attended.
The events are very informal and allow passengers to feel relaxed and not nervous about discussing their issues or concerns about the buses they use. It must be noted however that much positive feedback is also received by operators, including praise for helpful drivers, good standard of buses, good time-keeping, etc.

The main themes concerning complaints at the Your Bus Matters events centred on cutbacks of subsidised and commercial services, punctuality, fares and the frequency of services provided. As part of the planning and organisation of these events, transport representatives from the local authority are also invited to the event although not all attend. It is important that local authority staff attend these events as there are often questions and comments about aspects of bus travel that are under their control, including bus stations, information, stops and shelters, as well as supported services. BUS feels that it is beneficial to have the widest range of local transport representatives on hand to give passengers access to staff who can deal with all the issues they raise. This type of networking also benefits BUS’s relationship with local authorities as part of our mission to improve bus services throughout Scotland.

All comments are logged and BUS maintains contact with the passengers and the bus companies/local authorities to ensure that comments and complaints are properly followed up.

A full programme of Your Bus Matters events is in hand for 2017/18. Confirmed areas include Fort William, Scottish Borders and West Lothian.

Bus Compliance Monitoring

Bus Users Scotland performs a bus compliance monitoring role for Transport Scotland and the Traffic Commissioner’s office. Three Bus Compliance Officers (BCOs) monitor the reliability and punctuality of bus services throughout Scotland, working to the times originally registered by bus operators with the Traffic Commissioner. They measure performance against the window of tolerance laid down by the Traffic Commissioners throughout the UK (currently up to one minute early and five minutes late) at prescribed timing-points, using radio-controlled watches for accuracy. Bus Compliance Monitoring is carried out at all times buses run, including early mornings, evenings and weekends to obtain an accurate picture of how bus services perform for all passengers.

The BCOs work in response to calls from the Traffic Commissioner’s office, Transport Scotland, complaints received by BUS, and concerns expressed by passengers or local authorities, as well as carrying out random monitoring throughout Scotland. They work incognito and report back to the Traffic Commissioner and to the bus operators or local authorities providing these services. They also monitor at-stop information, vehicle condition, driver attitude and driving skills as part of a range of matters that concern bus passengers.

BCOs operating in this way can report back on how services operate on a normal day. Bus drivers have no idea who the BCOs are and this provides much more meaningful feedback to the operators as the BCOs provide a useful passenger-related insight into the bus companies’ services. The feedback received from operators regarding the BCOs’ activities has been so positive that they are increasingly requesting that the BCOs carry out some monitoring on their routes to provide them with an overview of their service to passengers.

Bus Compliance reports are routinely sent to the Traffic Commissioner’s office and where concerns have been expressed about aspects of a company’s operations, BUS staff will contact the operator to discuss how matters can be improved.
During 2016/17 the BCOs covered much of Scotland, from the Borders and Dumfries & Galloway up to the north-east and Highlands. Much of the BCOs’ work is inevitably concentrated in Scotland’s Central Belt and north east corridor, where the majority of bus services operate, and where standards can vary widely. The BCOs were not involved with any Public Inquiries held by the Traffic Commissioner during 2016/17.

**Partnership working**

BUS has developed excellent working relationships with bus companies throughout Scotland and we have been aware of a general improvement in the way bus companies handle complaints. There are fewer standard letters and companies seem more prepared to accept responsibility for complaints and avoid the often drawn-out (and expensive) situations where both parties might refuse to budge and which, in the past, could lead to a referral to the Bus Appeals Body Scotland and its predecessors.

BUS works closely with the Traffic Commissioner and her staff, Transport Scotland, CPT Scotland, and Regional Transport Partnerships, and sits on the Transport Scotland Bus Stakeholder Group and specific working groups, in addition to local groups throughout Scotland. BUS is keen to encourage the formation of local Bus User Groups that give bus passengers a voice and better access to the bus company and local authority staff.

These are often formed where passengers are unhappy about the level or quality of bus service they receive, and the most active group, the Rural East Lothian Group RELBUS, concerned about the bus services in that area, is a good example of an effective lobby group. BUS has also been actively involved in the creation of a new bus users group in Ayrshire which attracted support from the local MP. It is hoped that the group will progress and develop further in 2016/17. BUS also made contact with the Lochaber Transport Forum with a view to their Bus Users Group possibly becoming affiliated with BUS.

Throughout 2016/17 BUS engaged with various community councils and community forums to not only raise the profile of BUS but also to gather views of local community bus services. Much of this information is shared with the BCO team and indeed Transport Scotland.

**Bus Appeals Body Scotland**

Where BUS has been unable to negotiate a satisfactory outcome with a complainant, there is a right of appeal to the Bus Appeals Body Scotland (BABScot), which consists of three independent arbitrators representing passengers. BUS works hard to resolve complaints before they need to be referred to BABScot, and there were no referrals during 2016/17.
Key Stakeholders
Ayrshire Bus Users Group
Bus Users Scotland works in partnership with these organisations:
Citizens Advice Scotland
Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland
Dundee Voluntary Action
Learning Disability Alliance Scotland
Lochaber Transport Forum
North Lanarkshire Partnership
RELBUS (Rural East Lothian Bus Users)
Rural South West Area Forum - Stirling
Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance
SEStran (south East Scotland Transport Partnership) bus forum
Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Traffic Commissioner for Scotland
Transport Scotland Bus Stakeholder Group
UK Bus Awards
Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire
Various Community Councils throughout Scotland

BUS believes that bus users have a right to expect:
- Good-quality information at every stop
- A clear indication of buses serving each stop
- Advance notice of service changes
- Friendly, helpful drivers
- Clean and well-presented buses
- Clean and comfortable seats
- Adequate heating and ventilation
- Safe and smooth driving standards
- In-bus information – ideally audio/visual next stop information
- Prompt and appropriate complaint handling by bus and coach companies
- Bus priority measures and strict parking controls to allow buses to run punctually

BUS staff
Bus Users Scotland employed five staff at the end of 2016/17 – Gavin Booth, Director; Greig Mackay, Deputy Director; and three Bus Compliance Officers, Hazel Calltainn, Deborah Biscoe and Roy Cairns. The position of Complaints Handler/Administrator became vacant during the year and recruitment for a replacement is currently under way. At a later stage BUS expects to recruit part-time local representatives, regular bus passengers who will be our eyes and ears in areas throughout Scotland.

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