

Independent national passenger watchdog

Passenger Voice

Bus, coach and tram



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In this issue: • North West Traffic Commissioner Event for Local Transport Authorities • Punctuality project

Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses

Passengers in the West Midlands have emphasised anti-social behaviour by rowdy schoolchildren and drunken passengers as their chief safety concern when using buses. They also said that more uniformed police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) would act as a deterrent to bad behaviour and make them feel safer.

Last year passengers in the West Midlands ranked personal security as one of their top five areas for improvements on buses – eight places higher than the rest of the country. Working with Centro, the integrated transport authority for the West Midlands, Passenger Focus has carried out research to understand why some passengers do not feel safe using buses, despite falling crime levels.

Passengers thought anti-social behaviour was more common during school travel times, in the evening and on the top deck of buses. Rowdy behaviour was witnessed more frequently when schoolchildren were using the bus, whilst in the evening participants were more likely to come across drunken passengers or people drinking on the bus. Rowdy behaviour and smoking were more usual on the top deck.

There was a great deal of support for initiatives such as the Safer Travel Team (police and PCSO patrols on buses) and See Something Say Something (anonymous reporting of anti-social behaviour). However, public awareness of these initiatives was questioned and the need for greater advertising highlighted.



Progress for passengers in Cambridge, Bristol and the West Midlands

Passengers arriving at Cambridge railway station used to receive little guidance on which of the two separate sets of bus stands and shelters they needed for their onward journey. Following site visits by Passenger Focus managers in 2010, Cambridgeshire County Council has put up a poster inside the station and signs on the shelters, while Stagecoach has erected signs directly outside the station exit.

In Bristol the usefulness of ticket deals has been enhanced thanks to a meeting chaired by passenger manager Gavin Smith. The First bus customer panel discussed the merits of the 'Two Stop Hop' ticket with First senior management and directors. It was

agreed that its usefulness would be greatly improved by replacing it with a Three Stop Hop ticket; this would be more attractive to passengers and by raising the price from 80p to just £1 – a 25% increase for a 50% increase in benefit – it would improve boarding times by reducing the need to give change.

More informal bus surgeries were held in the West Midlands during 2010, to enable passengers to comment on such issues as traffic congestion, fare levels, driver conduct, service delivery/reliability, cleanliness, information and personal safety. This has been analysed by Passenger Focus and presented to Centro, who are deciding on steps to address the issues raised.

Making a difference for passengers on bus cuts

We've been busy working with local transport authorities (LTAs) and other partners on reducing the impact of impending cuts to bus services. We have now pulled together a detailed picture across the country of what's happening, and how it's happening. This has informed our contributions to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee inquiry into 'Bus Services after the Comprehensive Spending Review'.

So far we have found over £43million cuts. Some LTAs are investing in community transport, but a number of authorities are cutting funding for community transport, including Hartlepool which is ceasing funding for all of its dial-a-ride schemes. We are also aware of 13 authorities that are making cuts to passenger information and advice, creating additional challenges to those faced by all authorities needing to communicate effectively with local passengers about the cuts.

We are aware of 10 authorities which have carried out public consultations setting out the specific bus services they are proposing to stop subsidising. Few have provided the public, or even their members, with the detailed impact assessments and options studies we called for. However, a number of councils, including Worcestershire, Surrey and Central Bedfordshire, have provided good information as part of their consultations. Surrey, Telford and Norfolk have all made significant changes in the light of consultation responses from passengers.



Our next steps in this work includes urging authorities to have a plan for monitoring the impact on passengers of the changes, reviewing alternative ways of meeting the needs of passengers affected by the cuts, and how they are going to provide passengers with clear and timely notification of service changes. We have also highlighted the importance of providing effective feedback on the outcome of any consultations.

David Sidebottom, Passenger Focus bus director



Plymouth launches new Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership

Plymouth City Council (PCC) and local bus operators are working together to improve the reliability and punctuality of bus services throughout the city. The new Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership will bring together representatives from Plymouth Transport and Highways (the partnership between PCC and Amey) and Plymouth Citybus, First Devon and Cornwall, Target Travel and Western Greyhound. Plymouth's partnership will be the first in the country to include a representative from Passenger Focus, whose Bus Passenger Survey last year found that 13% of passengers in Plymouth were unhappy with bus punctuality.

The cuts so far...

- Just under half (42) of England's 88 local transport authorities (LTAs) have announced cuts to bus services
- Cuts amount to more than £43million
- 15 LTAs are making cuts of over £1 million to their subsidised bus services
- Somerset is reducing its subsidy by £3.6 million
- Largest percentage cuts are in Cambridgeshire, Hartlepool and Stoke-on-Trent
- 13 appear not to have immediate plans to cut bus services
- 22 will not be making decisions until after the local elections in May 2011
- Many concessionary fares schemes are being scaled down to the statutory minimum
- There were some reductions in support for children and young people.

North West Traffic Commissioner Event for Local Transport Authorities

A meeting arranged by Passenger Focus brought together the North West transport commissioner, passenger transport executives (PTEs), traffic management officers and school transport officers. The main subjects discussed were punctuality, reliability and compliance. After a presentation on Passenger Focus's work, a lively debate produced an agreement over various ways in which the transport commissioner could receive better punctuality and reliability data from operators. In turn the transport commissioner would inform local transport authorities (LTAs) when an operator licence is refused or revoked, and the LTAs would notify the transport commissioner of any driver conduct concerns. The value of this event prompted requests for a follow-up event.

Punctuality project

More punctual buses were identified as the number one priority for improvement by passengers surveyed in Passenger Focus's March 2010 'Bus passenger priorities for improvement' research. In order to help achieve this improvement it decided to lobby nationally for operators to publish punctuality data, explore the reasons for poor punctuality and measure the effectiveness of bus priority measures in tackling delays.

Passenger Focus decided to carry out a project which would analyse the factors that cause delays and draw up action plans to tackle them. It then successfully sought support for its proposals from the senior traffic commissioner (STC) and the Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG), who suggested that the factors that cause delays for 20 diverse routes were analysed and action plans to tackle them drawn up. This was then presented to the Bus Partnership Forum, which is chaired by Norman Baker MP, under secretary of state for transport.

At the most recent meeting of the forum it was agreed that Passenger Focus will play a key role in facilitating this project. Work is underway now to agree precise terms of reference, responsibilities and identify the resources needed.

Welsh bus passenger survey

The initial results from the Welsh Bus Passenger Survey 2010, produced by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) have been published. The survey found that 88% of bus passengers were satisfied with their bus journey and 76% of bus passengers were satisfied with punctuality. However, only 61% of fare-paying passengers were satisfied with the value for money of their journey. Passenger Focus used comparative, benchmarked research methodology it developed to undertake this survey on behalf of WAG.