

COACH & BUS WEEK



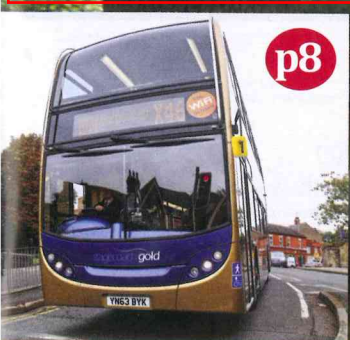
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New passenger focus reports call for improved communication

Reports claim passengers are not made properly aware of fare structure and feel they are not consulted or listened to on service changes

Passenger Focus has released two reports entitled 'Bus passenger views on value for money' and 'Giving passengers a voice in bus services'.

A summary of the key findings of the value for money report is:

- The 'core' product is all important. Focusing on performance will also improve perceptions of value for money;
- Better access to information is essential. Passengers relied on word of mouth and the bus driver for information on times, routes and fares. The research found a very strong desire for more centralised sources of information. For example websites, apps and notices on the bus. It also emphasised the importance of live updates on bus running;

- Bus drivers are the face of the company and responsible for far more than driving the bus. They are the main source of information on fares, the provider of information on delays and disruption, and a reassuring presence when it comes to personal security.

- Younger passengers have very distinct needs. They rely on buses, need more flexibility (to balance work, education and seeing friends) and often take journeys spontaneously. They also resent paying adult fares when they are still at school/college or on low (or no) incomes.

Passenger focus recommended that bus companies, transport authorities and the Government consider how communication with passengers already on board a bus can be dramatically improved.

Colin Foxall CBE, Chairman of Passenger Focus, said: "We wanted a better understanding of what passengers actually thought about value for money, what had the biggest influence on their perception and, importantly, what might help to improve things.

"In particular we wanted to find out more about what 16-19 year olds thought, as they had lower satisfaction with value for money on buses. This is a big market for the bus industry so there is real



The ticket machines on the Cambridge Busway are anything but daunting

benefit in knowing what makes them 'tick'.

"We will now work with the bus industry, transport authorities and the Government to ensure that the issues highlighted in this research are addressed."

James White, Campaign Manager at Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, told *CBW*: "Guide Dogs wholeheartedly agrees with Passenger Focus that the Government needs to consider how communication with passengers on board can be dramatically improved. Interestingly, a recent Transport Select Committee report called for the phased implementation of audio visual on board announcements, and Guide Dogs urges the Department for Transport to accept this recommendation. Talking buses would benefit all bus passengers."

The 'Giving passengers a voice in bus services' report, released on October 31, found:

Passengers currently know very little about the way that bus services are determined. It is often assumed local authorities or PTEs have some control over the provision of bus services. User groups agree that local authorities and PTEs have passengers' interests at heart, but that sometimes their intentions and influence can be undermined by budget constraints. Operators are less trusted to consider passengers' needs, but user groups argue that if operators run commercially viable businesses, this is ultimately beneficial to passengers;

- There is a clear desire for passengers' views and needs to be given more weight in the appointment of operators and other decisions.

- Passengers feel it is crucial their views are considered. They generally view bus services as a public service, and, as such, feel a sense of entitlement to these services and also to some opportunity to influence how they are determined;

- Passengers currently perceive no involvement for themselves in influencing the provision of bus services. The industry is seen to be lacking in communication in either direction and there is great cynicism as to whether the passenger viewpoint is listened to when it is received;

There are some key opportunities for consulting with bus passengers. Passengers feel they would benefit from both periodic consultation when a change in service provision is imminent, and from ongoing monitoring of service levels.

Passengers generally feel there is a need for a regulator, authority, or some other body to whom bus operators are held accountable on passengers' behalf.

The Quality Partnership model of bus service provision was generally popular with passengers, as long as it included contractual obligations with penalties for failing to meet minimum standards.

i Both reports can be found at <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications>