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Sheffield Bus Partnership

Dear Sirs,

I am writing in response to your Sheffield Bus Partnership consultation and our meeting on 4 July at which we promised some comments on the proposals.

As the statutory body representing the interests of bus passengers in England (outside of London) our starting point is to focus on the outputs to passengers. The acid test for any proposal will be in terms of the benefits it brings to passengers and how it will improve the delivery of services.

Passenger Focus's research gives us a good understanding of passenger expectations and aspirations. In 2010 we conducted research into passengers' priorities for improvement. Some 3800 passengers across a section of rural, urban and metropolitan areas in England were asked to rank 30 different criteria. The results for the metropolitan area are perhaps the best fit for Sheffield.

| Top 10 areas for Improvement – Metropolitan areas (in order of importance – 1 being highest priority for improvement) | Ranking |
|--|---------|
| More buses are on time or within five minutes of scheduled time | 1 |
| All passengers are able to get a seat on the bus | 2 |
| Buses run more frequently at a time when you want to use the bus | 3 |
| All bus drivers are helpful and have a positive attitude | 4 |
| Buses go to a wider range of destinations | 5 |
| Tickets and passes allow you to travel on all bus services in your local area | 6 |
| Bus fares offer better value for money | 7 |
| Personal security on the bus improved through CCTV on buses | 8 |
| Personal security while waiting for the bus improved through CCTV at bus stops | 9 |
| All bus stops have a well maintained shelter | 10 |



We also carry out the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS). The March 2012 wave included results for the South Yorkshire PTE area and can be split between both the principal bus operators, First and Stagecoach. The table below looks at satisfaction for those criteria that best reflect the priorities listed above.

| Satisfaction (% passenger satisfied) | Total | First | Stage coach |
|---|-------|-------|-------------|
| Overall journey | 86 | 83 | 87 |
| Punctuality | 75 | 70 | 78 |
| Helpfulness / attitude of driver | 72 | 69 | 73 |
| Availability of seating or space to stand | 85 | 85 | 84 |
| Value for money | 65 | 53 | 78 |
| Personal security whilst on bus | 83 | 82 | 83 |
| Personal security at bus stop | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| Overall satisfaction with the bus stop | 75 | 74 | 76 |
| | | | |

As part of the survey we also gather comments from passengers about what they feel could be improved. The results again emphasise punctuality, frequency and driver attitude.

The "Sheffield Bus Partnership" website lists the benefits of the partnership proposals as:

- A single ticket allowing travel anywhere across the city on the new network, even if you have to change buses.
- Greater choice of tickets with tickets being available for a day, a week and 28 days as well as the current city wide day ticket.
- Better connections with "through" ticketing which avoids having to pay twice and offers better value for money when you have to change buses.
- The option of a 60 minutes transfer time before you change buses to complete your journey.
- Better coordinated bus services resulting in more reliable and punctual as services keep to scheduled timetables

We are pleased that these fit well with the passenger priorities outlined above. Improvements to frequency and subsequent improvements to punctuality are clearly important to passengers. However, in any change of such magnitude there will inevitably be winners and losers: we are aware for instance of concerns with services to Ringinglow and Psalter Lane. This makes it all the more important that there is extensive local consultation – the people best able to judge and comment on services being those who use them. To this end we would congratulate you on the efforts made – especially through the route maps – to engage with passengers. Following the consultation it will be important to identify those areas that will receive a worse service and to see what can be provided in mitigation – for example in terms of demand responsive transport.



One area of particular interest is value for money. The table above shows this as one of the lower areas of satisfaction, particular so for First's passengers. Reducing the city wide day fare from £5.00 to £4.30 will help to address this in general. It should also provide an incentive for First to lower its own "First Day" fare from its current £5 level: why, for instance, buy a higher-priced operator specific fare when you can have a multi-operator ticket for less? This move ought to help drive up value for money scores. We are strongly supportive of the move to reduce the city wide day fare and also to introduce weekly, monthly and annual products.

We would also look to the partnership to provide greater stability of service. As part of our Bus Passenger Survey we ask passengers for the main reason they chose the bus – some 30% of passengers in the South Yorkshire PTE area said that it was because they had no other option. Passengers rely on bus services for work and to access local services – for many people it is an essential part of their lives – and so stability of service is important. We understand from our meeting that the partnership would provide more protection and regulate changes to timetables – this is also something that we would welcome.

Finally, we would like to see any partnership agreement include qualitative targets within the contractual framework. It is not clear from the consultation material how this is to be addressed. "Hard" measures of punctuality and service frequency are very important but there is also a need to keep one eye on service quality. Our strong preference is for targets based on what passengers think – the best judge of quality being those who have used the services in question. This could encompass driver attitude (the fourth highest priority of improvement in our research) and also such things as personal security, the condition and upkeep of the bus stop and the provision of information.

As you are aware Passenger Focus conducts the Bus Passenger Survey and we would be pleased to discuss how this might play a role in monitoring performance going forward.

Yours sincerely,

David Sidebottom
Passenger Team Director