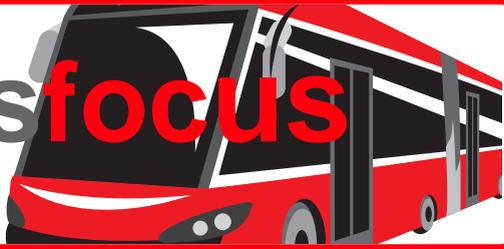


# Busfocus



Conference special

April 2009



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## Understanding passenger needs research

**In February 2009 we began research looking at the passenger perspective of the National Concessionary Fares Scheme.**



The views of operators and local authorities are well known on this subject but there has been little focus on the views of passengers. Focus groups with a mix of concessionary and non-concessionary passengers took place in Manchester, Norwich, Hartlepool and Bournemouth in January and one to one interviews with passengers also happened in Birmingham, Bath, Scarborough and Newark-on-Trent. The full report will be published in May 2009, but for the key findings see page five.

The research looking at bus passenger complaint handling across the industry also started in February. The Department for Transport (DfT) have requested that Passenger Focus carry out a review of the current arrangements for complaints handling in order to recommend areas for improvement. Focus groups with bus passengers have been held in Nottingham, Blackpool and Ipswich, and further one-to-one 'in-depth' interviews with passengers, operators and councils have been held in these three areas plus in Hereford, North Yorkshire, Epsom and the South Yorkshire and West Midlands PTE areas.

Fieldwork for the DfT Bus Mystery Traveller Survey took place throughout February in Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Bristol, Nottingham and Leicester. We are working with the research agency currently undertaking this work for DfT before we take over the contract from April 2009. The results will be published annually.

We will also be taking over DfT's existing Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey from April 2010. We are working with the DfT and others to ensure that the passage of this work takes place smoothly next year. Both this piece of work and the Bus Mystery Traveller survey will provide useful information for us.

Prior to this we have developed our own Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey which started in late April. We have appointed Continental (who already do the National Passenger Survey - or NPS) and the TAS Partnership to jointly work on this research together. We feel confident that this is the right blend to carry out this research as together they have the perfect combination of passenger research experience and bus industry knowledge. We are testing our plans in Southampton, Bristol, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Tyne and Wear and the West Midlands, shortly before rolling out further studies later this year.

In order to build relationships and to share knowledge we have been meeting the Heads of Research at Arriva, Stagecoach, Go Ahead, First and National Express to discuss our plans and to see if we can share their existing and future research. We are about to create a 'Bus and Coach Research Stakeholder Board' of key industry personnel to help us set the highest standards in our specification, management and publication of our research programme. This replicates an arrangement we have with the rail industry for our NPS.



## Making a difference Passenger link pilots

Our Passenger Link Managers for the three pilot areas have now been appointed. Jocelyn Pearson will be covering the South East, Mike Greedy will be covering the South West and Paul Fullwood will be covering the West Midlands.

Through the selection of these areas we are confident that we can cover the majority of the key journey types used by bus and coach passengers in:

- large cities/metropolitan areas
- suburban/city boundary areas
- rural networks.



The pilots should also provide a sufficient base to establish how we best engage with passengers, other passenger representatives, local and regional media and a range of stakeholders that are new to us in the bus, coach and tram industry.

We will also be looking at testing the following key areas:

- how we undertake and use passenger research
- how we access and use existing bus and coach industry research
- aspects of the passenger complaints handling role
- integration of our new bus, coach and existing rail functions.

## Building capacity - recruitment

Following the appointment of the three Passenger Link Managers for the pilot areas, the recruitment process is now beginning again to find five Passenger Link Executives to assist in the bus and rail work in the pilot areas.

Because we are aiming for the pilots to give us a clearer idea of what may be the best structure for bus and coach work in future, we are trialling different arrangements in the three different areas.

Some of these Passenger Link Executives will be office-based and some will be based in the pilot areas working on a remote basis.

## Representing bus and coach passengers - passenger advice

The passenger advice team is now prepared to receive any bus or coach complaints or enquiries that may come through. A handbook has been produced to assist them in signposting passengers to the right place.

This is an important area for us as existing bus complaints will still be dealt with by Bus Users UK and the Bus Appeals Body. We however want to make sure that any passenger contacting Passenger Focus with a potential complaint or enquiry is given the most appropriate level of advice and directed to the right point of contact within the industry.

The database which the team uses to capture details of passenger complaints will shortly be modified so it can also capture passenger details and the data on bus and coach complaints we capture. We are working closely with Bus Users UK to shape the various categories of complaints we are likely to see from passengers.

## Building knowledge - training

Our first session of bus industry training took place at the end of March. Ten members of staff from all departments took part and the aim of the training was to give background knowledge on the regulations and workings of the bus industry.

This was achieved through the first and third days being classroom-based and the second day being a visit to the headquarters of Go North East for a presentation by their Managing Director, Peter Huntley, and a trip to the Go North East bus depot in Chester-le-Street.

As well as looking at local buses, National Express coaches are also in operation from here so those in attendance got to go onboard one of the latest vehicles and see their latest disabled passenger lift in operation (see right).



We used Go North East buses to get around while we were in Newcastle and we were really impressed by the high quality of the vehicles.

The other external speakers (Tony Depledge - Director of Transport Policy Development at Arriva, Nicola Tidy - Marketing Communications Director at Nottingham City Transport and Chris Anslow - Group Manager for Transport Policy at Lancashire County Council) also gave us a fascinating insight into their experiences of working in the bus industry.

The feedback from this initial training course will now be used to help inform the content and delivery of bus industry training for all staff and board members. It will help us to put together a schedule to run anything from half-day sessions through to three day courses depending on what levels of knowledge are required in future.



## Policy work

We responded to the Department for Transport's consultation on the proposed European Commission Regulation on bus and coach passenger rights.



Our response supports the aim of achieving a level playing field for bus and coach passengers in such areas as liability for personal injury and loss of/damage to luggage; compensation in the event of delays and cancellations; complaints handling; and assistance to disabled people. It emphasises the importance of value for money as well as the right to redress, but warns against imposing disproportionate burdens on the bus industry which may result in higher fares or cuts to services which would not be in the interest of passengers; however, we would want to see persuasive evidence that such action is justified. While drawing attention to the differences between the bus and coach industries, it insists that bus passengers should not be treated as second class citizens, but concedes that an alternative route to guaranteeing bus passengers' rights would be acceptable if applying the Regulation to buses proves too challenging.

We welcomed the publication of the Traffic Commissioners' draft Strategy. We look forward to working closely with them to ensure that bus and coach services operate safely, fairly and reliably, and that passengers are protected.

We have also welcomed the Office of Fair Trading investigation into the effectiveness of the market for tendered bus services. We met with the officers carrying out the study and offered them our full co-operation.



## News in brief



### Trams

Following the possible addition of trams to our bus and coach passenger representation role, we will shortly be starting to meet the heads of the trams companies in England to build relationships and to grow our knowledge of the tram industry and tram passengers' needs. This will be included in the consultation on our role which will be coming out from the Department for Transport (DfT) at the beginning of May.

### Legislative timetable

The DfT are planning to consult with industry and stakeholders on our proposed bus, coach and potential tram duties in May 2009. This will be a major piece of work that will start to shape some of the detail on the scope of bus, coach and tram operations and passenger interests we will be asked to represent.



Throughout this process we will continue to keep you informed of developments.

### Engagement of Industry and stakeholder discussions

Over the last few months the bus passenger project team along with support from colleagues have met many people from a variety of organisations with an interest in our plans and how we will work with them on important passenger issues. This has included key figures in the bus industry such as Richard Bowker of National Express, Brian Souter of Stagecoach, Keith Ludeman of Go Ahead and Sir Moir Lockhead and Nicola Shaw of First Group.



This important exercise is continuing throughout 2009 as we continue to learn about the bus, coach and tram industries and how we can do an effective job of representing millions of passengers across England.

## The bus and coach team



**David Sidebottom**  
Bus passenger project manager



**Jocelyn Pearson**  
Passenger link manager



**Paul Fullwood**  
Passenger link manager



**Michelle Brooke**  
Development co-ordinator



**Mike Greedy**  
Passenger link manager



## Concessionary bus research - findings

There is strong evidence that concessionary bus travel has encouraged greater bus use by pass-holders, particularly in their local area. In the survey over a third (39%) said they travel more by bus within their local area since they obtained a concessionary pass.



In comparison, about one in eight (13%) of pass holders reported making more journeys by bus outside of their local area following the introduction of the free national bus travel entitlement.

In the focus groups, pass holders reported a number of barriers to travelling by bus outside their area, despite this now being free under the new concession. These included:

- a general anxiety about travelling on unfamiliar bus services
- a perceived lack of information on bus timetables, service frequencies and stops
- longer journey times by bus in comparison to car.

It should also be noted that the survey was undertaken in February, and less than a year after the introduction of the new concession. Subsequent research, carried out in summer, may indicate greater use of buses by pass holders outside their local area.

Amongst pass holders who were using their pass to travel outside their local area, 35% were undertaking journeys by bus that they had previously made by car. 12% were making journeys by bus that they had not previously made by any means, prior to the new concession.



The most common reasons pass holders travelled by bus outside their local area were to visit family and friends (46%), make shopping journeys (46%) and to access sport, recreation and leisure facilities (18%). 10% of pass holders travelling outside their local area by bus had done so for holiday purposes or while away on holiday.

Around one in five of all passengers (21%) perceive buses services to have become more crowded since the introduction of the new concession. However, 94% said they were usually or always able to get a seat on the bus services they regularly use, while 3% said they usually had to stand due to levels of crowding.

In three of the four survey areas this overcrowding was generally seen by passengers as a year-round issue, while in Scarborough there was more evidence of overcrowding being a specific issue during the summer months of May to August.

There was limited evidence that overcrowding linked to the introduction of free national bus travel has impacted on the perceived quality of bus services. 76% of passengers felt the quality of bus services had stayed about the same since the introduction of the new concession, while 12% felt it had improved and 8% thought it had got worse.

There was strong support for the concessionary scheme, amongst both pass holders and non-pass holders. Overall, 95% of passengers in the survey (96% of pass holders and 94% of non pass holders) thought it was right that older and disabled people were entitled to free national off-peak bus travel through the current concessionary scheme.

Views were more mixed on the idea of extending the scheme to free bus travel at all times of the day, including the morning peak. 58% agreed with this potential change while 33% disagreed.