

# Passenger Voice

## BUS, COACH & TRAM

Independent national passenger watchdog



## New bus, coach and tram watchdog

Passenger Focus has formally started to represent bus, coach and tram passengers in England outside London

This follows Sadiq Khan, Transport Minister, making the legislation to extend the statutory remit of Passenger Focus to bus, coach and tram issues.

The Government took powers in the Local Transport Act 2008 to enable Passenger Focus's remit to be extended, through secondary legislation, to bus, coach and tram passengers in England outside London. The necessary secondary legislation came into force on 25 February 2010.

Sadiq Khan, Transport Minister, said: "Given that bus, coach and tram passengers make over 5 billion journeys each year, it is important that these are provided to a high standard and many of them are. But as I have seen and heard on my bus tour, there are still too many examples of services that don't reach the standards that passengers have a right to expect.

"Passenger Focus already has a strong reputation for securing benefits for rail passengers through evidence-based campaigning and advocacy.

"I am confident that they will be

able to transfer this capability to deliver improvements for bus, coach and tram passengers."

Colin Foxall, Passenger Focus chairman, added: "It is great news that we have been given statutory responsibility for representing bus, coach and tram passengers. We're absolutely committed to using our established consumer focus to get the best deal for passengers."

Passenger Focus has carried out extensive research across the country to gather evidence of passengers' experiences of bus and coach services.

Reports on research which has looked at the passenger perspective of the National Concessionary fares scheme and bus passenger priorities for improvement have already been published. In the coming months, comparative, benchmarked research into bus passenger satisfaction in 20 areas of England will be published. In addition to that, Passenger Focus has taken over the Bus Mystery Traveller Survey from the Department for Transport and will also be looking at measures to improve the handling of bus passenger complaints



Left to right: Anthony Smith, Passenger Focus Chief Executive; Sadiq Khan, Transport Minister; and David Sidebottom, Passenger Focus Bus Director

across the bus industry.

Passenger Focus is now building a dedicated team who will use this research as the basis of their work at a local and regional level to help get a better deal for bus, coach and tram passengers.

## Passengers have their say on improvements

Passenger Focus has published research on the expectations of bus users and what they would most like to see improved. Over 3,800 passengers across England, outside of London, were asked to rate how well their expectations are currently being met for a number of different attributes of the bus stops and services they use, and what their priorities are for improvement.

The research found that passengers' expectations are being met or exceeded for seven out of the nine bus stop attributes passengers were asked to rate, the exceptions being the provision of real-time information and information on fares provided at the stop. Expectations are also being met for the majority of bus journey attributes, although expectations are not currently being met for two key attributes:

punctuality and value for money.

Improved punctuality was ranked by passengers as the number one priority for improvement. This was followed by increased service frequency (2nd) and all passengers being able to get a seat for the duration of their journey (3rd). A summary of this work can be downloaded from the Passenger Focus website.



## Looking to the future

It's great to finally say that Passenger Focus is now the independent passenger watchdog representing the interests of rail, bus, coach and tram passengers. I want to recognise the hard work that colleagues have put into developing our new role over the last year. We have learned a lot and this hard work will stand us in good stead for the work ahead.

So how will we set ourselves up for this challenge? As we launch our new role we publish the results of our bus passenger priorities for improvement research. This work tells us how passengers' expectations are being met and what they would most like to see improved. We see this work playing an important part for passengers in the planning and delivery of bus services at a time when funds are limited.

In addition, we will carry out a programme of comparable, benchmarked bus passenger satisfaction research. We will shortly publish the results of our initial six "pilot" areas. We have recently completed fieldwork in 14 other

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areas of the country. These results will be given to our new Passenger Link team to provide the evidence they need to start a dialogue with local and regional stakeholders to identify and action journey improvements for passengers. We aim to publish the results of this work in July 2010.

Our bus passenger satisfaction machine will then roll on as we embark on work in another 20 areas of England this autumn. We aim to publish the results of this work in March 2011.

The significant programme of comparable benchmarked passenger satisfaction work will start to build a compelling picture of the experiences of bus passengers across England. We will understand more about the things that

passengers like and dislike through the factors that drive levels of passenger satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

From this we will want operators and authorities to do more of the former and less of the latter! There will be opportunities for Passenger Focus to work in partnership with operators and authorities as we contribute and share in our programme to help deliver even more results across the country.

We have been tasked by ministers to review and report on the existing arrangements within the industry for bus and coach passenger complaints and appeals. We have started to work with the bus and coach industry to develop a plan and programme of work to fulfil this commitment. In 2010 we will also start an identical process across the tram industry.

Our focus was on the local bus industry during our preparatory work. Now we will look to develop a meaningful programme of work with coach and tram operators and other industry stakeholders. With our Passenger Link team now in place we can start to develop working relationships with coach and tram operators to better understand how and where we can make a significant difference for passengers.

There is a lot of work and many miles to cover as we embark on this exciting new area of Passenger Focus responsibility. However, I am confident that we will continue to build upon the good start we have made. We now have a job to do, so let's crack on with getting the best deal for bus, coach and tram passengers!



# Your Bus Matters in Birmingham and Coventry

Bus Users UK (BUUK) organised a number of *Your Bus Matters* (YBM) events, two of which were attended by Paul Fullwood, Passenger Focus manager for the West Midlands

These events have three parts: a 'meet the manager' session at the bus station; a bus surgery in a prominent location; and a Transport Users Forum with local councillors in the evening.

The Birmingham event was attended by National Express West Midlands (NXWM), Diamond Bus (both with vehicles) and the Safer Travel Team, while the one in Coventry was attended by Travel Coventry (TC), Stagecoach, Diamond Bus and Travel de Courcey. Senior staff including the managing director of TC and directors of Stagecoach and Travel de Courcey represented the operators at the Coventry YBM event.

They were able to respond to comments, complaints and suggestions



from passengers. More than 189 written comments were left by members of the public. Over 22 per cent of comments were about service reliability, while more than 23 per cent were about driver and staff attitude.

## Customer Panels

Customer panels which are common in the rail industry are relatively hard to find in the bus sector.

However, Transdev Yellow Buses in Bournemouth (named Shire Operator of the Year in the UK Bus Awards 2009) and First Bristol run their own customer panels.

Joe Lynch, passenger executive, represented Passenger Focus at the most recent panels of each company. He was impressed by what he observed and will be exploring opportunities to encourage other bus operators in the South West to use panels to engage with their passengers.

## Bus and coach policy update

We responded to the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on the extension of the remit of Passenger Focus to bus, coach and tram issues and the requirement to display information.

Central to our submission was a report on the results of research we commissioned into the handling of complaints by bus operators and local

authorities, showing high levels of dissatisfaction from passengers.

We also expressed concerns about the narrow remit of the Bus Appeals Body. The government has now asked us to work with the bus industry and Bus Users UK to address these issues. If things do not improve, they may ask Passenger Focus to take over the appeals handling role.

We have already made a start by accepting an invitation by the Bus Appeals Body to attend its meetings and comment on its terms of reference.

We also contributed to the Passenger Focus response to the DfT's consultation on *Developing a strategy for smart and integrated ticketing*, drawing on some of the emerging conclusions from the Office of Fair Trading's market study into the bus industry.

## Overcoming the barriers to bus use

Passenger Focus is working in partnership with Milton Keynes Council (MKC) on an extensive research project to find out the reasons why some local people don't use buses.

The research, entitled 'Barriers to bus use in Milton

Keynes', will use focus groups of non-users and people who used to use buses but no longer do, to find out what needs to be changed to get more people on the buses.

This work follows a period of Passenger Focus

closely working with MKC and MK Metro, the local bus operator, where passenger satisfaction and needs have been surveyed and identified.

Jocelyn Pearson, Passenger Focus manager, said: "We're delighted to

be working with Milton Keynes Council to find out what passengers want from their bus services. This will help them to deliver improvements, giving local people more choice in how they get around the town."

# West of England Partnership establishes new Transport Commission

The West of England Partnership, which brings together Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council, has recently established a Transport Commission to assist them in addressing part three of the Local Transport Planning process.



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Transport Planning process. This part focuses on five priority outcomes: congestion, accessibility, safer roads, air quality and general improvements to quality of life. Passenger Focus has been invited to sit on the Commission with other stakeholders to provide advice in

respect of local transport plans and major projects which are planned between 2011 and 2026.

Other stakeholders include First Great Western, First Bus, Network Rail, The Highways Agency, the health authority and local authority officers. Passenger Focus will be represented on the Commission by Mike Greedy, Passenger Focus manager, who will be raising both rail and bus issues in the Partnership area.

Commenting on this, Mike Greedy, said: "It is important that the views of passengers are taken into account in these types of forums and we welcome the opportunity to be involved at this key level."

## Plymouth bus sell-off

Plymouth CityBus (PCB) which was one of 13 bus companies still owned by a local authority, has been sold to the Go-Ahead group for £20 million

The decision to privatise PCB which carries 13.5 million passengers each year in and around the City was made at a meeting of the Plymouth City Council (PCC) in November 2009.

The new owners have committed to not changing the service for at least six months, but many passengers have been alarmed by this sell-off.

A meeting between Passenger Focus and Go-Ahead has been scheduled for the spring and the results of the Bus Passenger Satisfaction Surveys carried out in Plymouth and PCB are

at the top of the agenda.

Passenger Focus will be closely monitoring developments, especially

in the light of First Devon and Cornwall's launch of an extended competitive network in the city.



## Passenger surveys

Southampton, Bristol, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Tyne and Wear and the West Midlands have been taking part in trial bus passenger satisfaction research projects. Passenger Focus teams have been using these important findings to provide constructive feedback to local authorities and bus operators on passenger experience and expectations. The findings will be published soon.