

## The Bus Services Bill: 10 actions to benefit passengers

The Bus Services Bill has the potential to improve the bus journey experience - through new arrangements between authorities and operators - and hence satisfaction for bus passengers. Transport Focus has researched bus passenger satisfaction on a range of factors every year (Bus Passenger Survey [BPS]<sup>i</sup>) for the last five years as well as passengers' priorities for improving services<sup>ii</sup>. Our research can help realise that potential.

Here we set out what could be included in **franchise** conditions (specifications and targets) and as points to consider in other arrangements such as **partnerships** and **alliances**.

### 1. Improving punctuality and reliability

Bus passengers rank punctuality and running on time highly as priorities for improvement. Lateness of a bus arriving at a stop to start the journey causes more anxiety than a bus arriving late at the destination<sup>iii</sup>. Passengers can tolerate the arrival at the bus stop of departure up to five minutes late. After that satisfaction with punctuality decreases markedly, and again after 10 minutes. The new arrangements should:

- Have clear punctuality targets
- Targets for improving average bus journey speeds
- Include a statement on monitoring performance and publishing data

### 2. Ensuring frequency and stability of bus times

Alongside punctuality, passengers want to know that the timetable doesn't change too frequently. Our research<sup>iv</sup> found that passengers did not think it was acceptable to make changes to services more than twice a year and more than six out of ten wanted to be given at least four weeks' notice of a major change. The new arrangements should ensure that:

- There are minimal changes to timetables
- There is a clear process for consulting and informing passengers of changes.

### 3. Building trust: engagement and consultation

Buses need to run on time, be reliable, deal well with disruption and offer value for money. Our research<sup>ii</sup> shows that building a relationship with passengers helps build loyalty and repeated use of services. Passengers should feel that the company really cares about what happens to them, especially during disruption, and is not remote and aloof. Drivers have an important role in showing empathy and care (see 7 below). The new arrangements should require operators to produce a passenger engagement strategy.

### 4. Monitoring passenger satisfaction to make improvements

It is important for operators and authorities to research (quantitatively and qualitatively) how satisfied passengers are with services both on the bus and at the stop. Transport Focus's BPS<sup>i</sup> provides such an independent assessment which could be used providing vital feedback on vital factors such as punctuality and cleanliness. A similar measure is used in rail to assess the passenger experience during a franchise. Each arrangement should establish targets for service quality, how they will be measured and results published.

### 5. Passenger information in real-time

Real-time information displays are valuable in indicating to passengers when their bus will arrive, so reducing stress and anxiety and enabling them to make alternative plans when things go wrong<sup>v</sup>.

The Bill will make more data available for public use, so new arrangements should set out, through an action plan, how they can provide real-time customer information – especially at bus stops and through developing apps.

## **6. Improving fares and ticketing**

Better value for money is passengers' highest priority for improvement. It is also linked to getting a punctual, reliable serve and a seat in return for payment. Our research<sup>vi</sup> has found that passengers often have poor information on fares and ticketing and types of tickets, often relying on word or mouth or the bus driver. Younger passengers have distinct needs relying heavily on bus travel. They require service flexibility but also resent paying adult fares. Smart ticketing can help with some of these issues and the new arrangements should

- Provide a central source of pre-journey information on fares, ticket types (including smart ticket availability) and bus routes
- Identify specific policies for 16-18 year olds, such as the range of tickets and price

## **7. Boosting the role of bus drivers**

They are the 'face of the company' providing the main contact with passengers. For a good passenger experience, they should provide a pleasant and professional service whether by providing information on disruption, delays, or ticket types, or settling disputes. Their role is essential. The new arrangements should therefore:

- Set standards of behaviour for drivers
- Provide training courses programmes that include customer service

## **8. Customer care and satisfaction**

Despite the best intentions, things will go wrong from time to time. An effective complaints system makes it easy for passengers to know who to contact and a range of ways to do so; has efficient handling systems; and uses the resulting data to make improvements<sup>vii</sup>. The new arrangements should set out

- Clear complaint handling processes and lines of responsibility
- How contact details will be publicised
- What response times will be and how they will be reported upon
- Clear guidance on where, when and how compensation will be offered.

## **9. Improving personal security**

This features in our research both on the bus and at the stop, particularly for those with disabilities<sup>viii</sup>. The new arrangements should ensure that partners work together to deal with anti-social behaviour and that security is included in design guidelines for buses and stops.

## **10. Encouraging non and infrequent users**

A key aim of the Bill is to increase bus use. Our research<sup>ii</sup> shows why current non users don't use the bus: poor punctuality, failure to provide services when people want to travel (such as for work or a night out), length of journey and not knowing 'the system'. We found that 28 per cent of non users would support a bus service. Therefore, operators should produce a strategy for boosting bus use.

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<sup>i</sup> Transport Focus, *Bus Passenger Survey: Autumn 2015* (latest version)

<sup>ii</sup> Transport Focus (2016), *Bus passengers have their say – trust, what to improve and using buses more*

<sup>iii</sup> Transport Focus (2014), *Bus punctuality and timetables*

<sup>iv</sup> Passenger Focus (2010), *Bus service changes*

<sup>v</sup> Passenger Focus (April 2013), *Bus passengers' experience of delays and disruption*

<sup>vi</sup> Passenger Focus (2013), *Bus passenger views on value for money*

<sup>vii</sup> Passenger Focus (2009), *Handling complaints and appeals from bus passengers*

<sup>viii</sup> Transport Focus (2016), *Analysis of bus passenger satisfaction for those who have a disability*