

**Passenger Survey  
of  
Bus Services  
in  
North West England**

**Summer 2008**

**TravelWatch  
NORTHWEST**

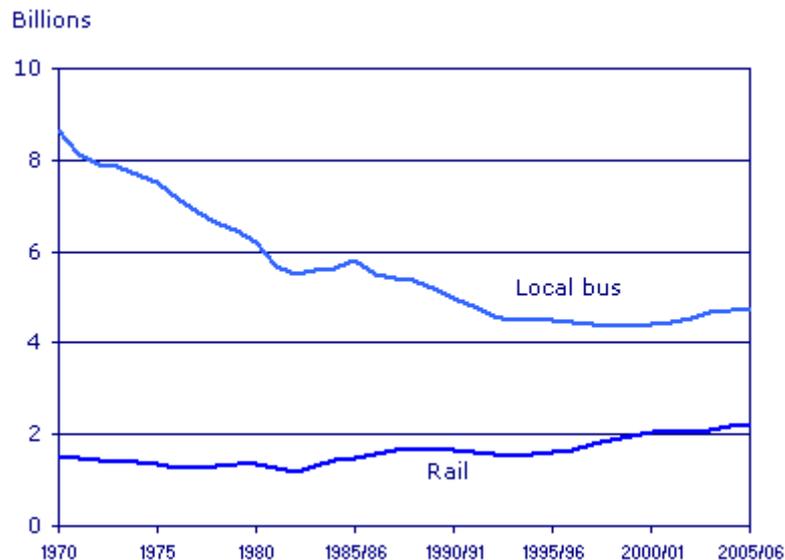
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Over 4.7 billion journeys were made by local bus in Great Britain in 2005/06. Over one third of these journeys were undertaken within London. There has been an overall growth in bus passenger journeys since 1998/99 but this has taken place mainly within London and in Scotland. The number of journeys made in Scotland and Wales since 2003/04 has remained constant whilst those made within England, outside London, has fallen steadily. In contrast, during the period 2005/06 some 2.2 billion journeys were made by rail, again with a large proportion being made in the London conurbation.
- 1.2. Since the turn of the century the use of both trains and local buses has increased across Great Britain, with bus journeys being just over twice as 'popular' than train journeys.



- 1.3. In the period January to March 2008 there was a 0.2% reduction in the number of bus and light rail journeys in England, with patronage falling in both Metropolitan and non-Metropolitan areas but increasing in London.

- 1.4. Concern has been expressed by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee that, apart from in London, the 40-year downward trend in bus usage continues. In contrast to London, regional bus services operate in a de-regulated market where there are differing controls on service provision. Only where local authorities provide support for marginal services is there any degree of direct control.
- 1.5. Despite the government's wish to see more people transfer from their cars to public transport, it is clear that local bus provision does not prove attractive enough to secure an increasing market share. As reported below, only 8 out of 10 passengers were satisfied with their overall journeys by bus and only 7 out of 10 were satisfied with their reliability (the certainty that the bus would turn up on time).
- 1.6. The Department for Transport reports that for Winter 2008 the average score for overall satisfaction given by passengers for bus journeys in England was 81%, a 1% reduction on the previous period. Metropolitan and non-Metropolitan areas each recorded scores of 84%, whilst in London the satisfaction rating was 79%.
- 1.7. Bus passengers' satisfaction with reliability remained at 70%, whilst their opinion of information provided at bus stops gave a satisfaction rating of 73%.
- 1.8. The figures quoted above refer to opinions of passengers across the whole of Great Britain. The role of TravelWatch NorthWest is to champion the interests of public transport users within that area. It was decided therefore to carry out a survey of bus provision to determine whether the buses of the North West achieved the aims of being:
  - accessible to everyone;
  - affordable and socially inclusive;
  - available where and when needed;
  - acceptable to all;
  - attractive to users.
- 1.9. The independent group, Bus Users UK, has produced a comprehensive Good Practice Guide which sets out standards which the organisation believes should apply to all bus related operations for the good of the passengers who use them.
- 1.10. The guide is subdivided into six sections, as follows:
  - Before a bus journey
  - Bus stops and bus stations
  - The bus
  - Fares and tickets
  - Punctuality and reliability
  - Complaints and suggestions

- 1.11. The TravelWatch survey looked in detail at bus journeys and at bus stops / bus stations. Other aspects, including pre-journey planning and matters relating to fares and punctuality may be dealt with in the future.

## **2. Project description**

- 2.1. The 13 assessors who were enlisted to carry out the survey selected bus journeys across a broad area easily accessible from their homes. The actual journeys were self-selected with emphasis on achieving variety in type of route (urban, inter-urban or rural), type of bus (double decker, saloon, minibus) and time of day.
- 2.2. During the course of their journeys assessments were also made of facilities at bus stops and at bus stations
- 2.3. 292 individual journeys were assessed, involving 37 separate operators. These ranged from the major players, such as Stagecoach, First and Arriva, to very small scale operations in both urban and rural areas.
- 2.4. A set of criteria was determined so that the assessors could report their findings in a consistent manner. 'Yes' or 'No' answers were required in the majority of cases but there were some instances for each journey where a subjective assessment on a 1 – 5 scale was required.
- 2.5. The journeys were assessed on three distinct aspects of provision:
  - joining the bus;
  - the bus itself;
  - alighting from the bus.
- 2.6. Bus stops were assessed on the following facilities:
  - access / location;
  - information;
  - shelter;
  - facilities within 200 yards.
- 2.7. Bus stations were assessed with reference to:
  - access
  - information
  - passenger environment
  - passenger facilities
  - comfort rating

- 2.8. Additionally assessors were encouraged to add narrative comments whenever there was a particular feature of the journey or bus stop/station provision which was worthy of comment, either positively or negatively.
- 2.9. As there were no pre-determined 'diagrams' or journeys to be completed, assessors were free to re-plan their journeys in the case of late running or other adverse circumstances.
- 2.10. The surveys did not attempt to identify causes of delay, accepting that these could be beyond the control of operators.
- 2.11. The completed survey forms were sent to a central point for collation and analysis.

### 3. Analysis of the bus journey results

#### a) JOINING THE BUS – results tabulated by operator

	Journeys	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	46	91%	76%	98%	0%	64%	3.2
<b>First</b>	55	93%	93%	98%	6%	38%	3.9
<b>Stagecoach</b>	69	94%	97%	97%	0%	56%	3.5
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	24	83%	61%	100%	0%	13%	2.9
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	10	90%	100%	100%	0%	50%	4.6
<b>Lancashire United</b>	8	100%	88%	100%	25%	86%	3.5
<b>Preston Bus</b>	12	100%	83%	92%	8%	17%	3.5
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	11	100%	100%	100%	0%	64%	4.8
<b>Other operators</b>	57	93%	74%	59%	4%	81%	3.7

- Criterion key:
- A The bus pulled into the kerb
  - B There was an easy step onto the bus
  - C The driver wore an identifiable company uniform
  - D The driver wore a name badge or other personal identification
  - E The driver waited for passengers to be seated before setting off
  - F Assessment of the welcome by driver (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)

The shaded regions denote results which are lower than the average for the overall results.

A list of operators whose journeys were assessed can be found on Page 19

**b) THE BUS ITSELF (Part 1) – results tabulated by operator**

	Journeys	G	H	I	J	K	L
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>98%</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	46	89%	93%	60%	58%	70%	100%
<b>First</b>	55	100%	100%	43%	87%	50%	100%
<b>Stagecoach</b>	69	96%	100%	32%	68%	87%	97%
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	24	88%	100%	54%	54%	54%	83%
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	10	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Lancashire United</b>	8	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Preston Bus</b>	12	100%	100%	83%	83%	100%	100%
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	11	91%	100%	100%	100%	91%	100%
<b>Other operators</b>	57	91%	90%	52%	64%	76%	98%

- Criterion key:
- G The exterior of the bus was clean
  - H The route and destination were clearly displayed
  - I There was a ramp for wheelchair access
  - J The floor was step-free (at least for a significant length)
  - K The interior was clean and tidy
  - L There were easy to use hand holds

The shaded regions denote results which are lower than the average for the overall results.

## THE BUS ITSELF (Part 2) – results tabulated by operator

	Journeys	M	N	O	P	Q
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	46	71%	86%	88%	48%	3.6
<b>First</b>	55	89%	95%	96%	43%	4.3
<b>Stagecoach</b>	69	70%	83%	82%	37%	3.7
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	24	54%	85%	67%	42%	3.7
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	10	100%	100%	100%	43%	4.8
<b>Lancashire United</b>	8	100%	100%	88%	46%	4.5
<b>Preston Bus</b>	12	83%	88%	100%	33%	4.2
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	11	100%	100%	100%	39%	4.9
<b>Other operators</b>	57	64%	82%	86%	38%	3.9

- Criterion key:
- M There was space for a wheelchair or buggy
  - N Clear instructions were provided for securing the wheelchair/buggy [the percentage score relates only to those instances where a space for a wheelchair/buggy was provided (see G)]
  - O The bus was appropriately heated and/or ventilated
  - P The average maximum load (estimated for each journey)
  - Q The bus was deemed safe and comfortable  
(1 = not safe or comfortable, 5 = very safe and comfortable)

The shaded regions denote results which are lower than the average for the overall results.

### THE BUS ITSELF (Part 3) – results tabulated by operator

	Journeys	R	S	T	U	V
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	46	56%	2%	16%	43%	3.3
<b>First</b>	55	69%	33%	37%	69%	4.0
<b>Stagecoach</b>	69	30%	17%	13%	35%	3.3
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	24	50%	54%	0%	17%	2.9
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	10	50%	80%	0%	90%	4.3
<b>Lancashire United</b>	8	75%	63%	88%	75%	3.9
<b>Preston Bus</b>	12	33%	17%	25%	25%	3.3
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	11	91%	64%	70%	82%	4.6
<b>Other operators</b>	57	26%	14%	23%	34%	3.7

Criterion key:

- R Information was provided on fares and services
- S Route information was provided
- T Information was available on how to make a complaint
- U Other general information was displayed
- V The bus was driven with consideration for the passengers and other road users (1 = very badly, 5 = very well)

The shaded regions denote results which are lower than the average for the overall results.

### c) ALIGHTING FROM THE BUS – results tabulated by operator

	Journeys	W	X	Y	Z	AA	BB
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	46	0%	75%	100%	10%	91%	87%
<b>First</b>	55	0%	73%	100%	0%	98%	92%
<b>Stagecoach</b>	69	0%	0%	99%	6%	95%	94%
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	24	0%	0%	100%	0%	88%	58%
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	9	0%	90%	100%	0%	100%	100%
<b>Lancashire United</b>	8	0%	100%	100%	N/A	100%	100%
<b>Preston Bus</b>	12	0%	9%	100%	N/A	100%	80%
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	11	0%	64%	100%	0%	91%	100%
<b>Other operators</b>	57	0%	24%	96%	21%	98%	84%

- Criterion key:
- W Calling points were announced or displayed
  - X Passengers were instructed to remain seated until the bus had stopped
  - Y The 'bus stopping' bell worked when pressed
  - Z An apology was given when the bus had been delayed.
  - N/A applies if no delays were experienced.
  - AA The bus drew right up to the kerb
  - BB It was an easy step onto the kerb

The shaded regions denote results which are lower than the average for the overall results.

**d) TYPES OF BUSES USED by the various operators**

	Double decker	Saloon	Minibus	Bendy bus
<b>Overall results</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Arriva</b>	7%	93%	0%	0%
<b>First</b>	9%	81%	4%	6%
<b>Stagecoach</b>	39%	54%	6%	0%
<b>Blackpool Transport</b>	58%	21%	21%	0%
<b>Burnley &amp; Pendle</b>	10%	90%	0%	0%
<b>Lancashire United</b>	0%	100%	0%	0%
<b>Preston Bus</b>	58%	33%	8%	0%
<b>Rosendale Transport</b>	0%	82%	18%	0%
<b>Other operators</b>	3%	63%	34%	0%

## e) Results tabulated by type of bus

	Journeys	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Double Decker</b>	59	93%	98%	40%	68%	69%	93%
<b>Saloon</b>	192	98%	98%	44%	61%	74%	100%
<b>Minibus</b>	35	86%	89%	46%	51%	83%	97%

	Journeys	G	H	I	J	K
<b>Double Decker</b>	59	73%	92%	69%	33%	3.7
<b>Saloon</b>	192	76%	83%	98%	45%	4.1
<b>Minibus</b>	35	54%	100%	83%	41%	3.9

	Journeys	L	M	N	O	P
<b>Double Decker</b>	59	31%	19%	15%	34%	3.5
<b>Saloon</b>	192	58%	20%	34%	63%	3.6
<b>Minibus</b>	35	49%	34%	18%	31%	3.5

- Criterion key:
- A The outside of the bus was clean
  - B The destination and route were displayed
  - C The bus was wheelchair accessible via a ramp
  - D The floor was step-free (at least in part)
  - E The inside of the bus was clean and tidy
  - F Easy to use hand holds were provided
  - G There was space for a wheelchair or buggy
  - H Clear instructions were provided for securing the wheelchair/buggy
  - I The bus was appropriately heated and/or ventilated
  - J The average maximum load (estimated for each journey)
  - K The bus was deemed safe and comfortable  
(1 = not safe or comfortable, 5 = very safe and comfortable)
  - L Information was provided on fares and services
  - M Route information was provided
  - N Information was available on how to make a complaint
  - O Other general information was displayed
  - P The bus was driven with consideration for the passengers and other road users (1 = very badly, 5 = very well)

Three further journeys were provided by 'Bendy Bus', one by express-type coach and two not recorded.

## 4. Comments on the bus journey survey results

4.1. The following comments refer to the criteria set out in the Good Practice Guide, which relate to aspects of the bus which particularly affect passengers:

- clean and fresh
- easy to identify
- easy to board
- easy to move about in
- properly heated and ventilated
- driven thoughtfully
- comfortable

4.2. **CLEAN AND FRESH:** 94% of a buses surveyed were deemed to be clean externally, with First, Burnley & Pendle, Lancashire United and Preston Bus having all their surveyed buses externally clean (Criterion G in the results tables). The internal condition of buses was deemed to be good in 74% of all the buses surveyed, again with Burnley & Pendle, Lancashire United and Preston Bus having a very high standard (Criterion K).

4.3. **EASY TO IDENTIFY:** (Criterion H) 97% of all buses displayed the destination and route. There were however significant differences in readability, ranging from clear, large electronic destination panels to the destination hand written onto a piece of card and placed in the windscreen (this tended to apply only to small operator, minibus services). Only the surveyed services operated by Arriva and those of Other Operators failed to achieve a 100% rating in this category.

4.4. **EASY TO BOARD:** The majority of buses were able to pull right up to the kerb (Criterion A) to provide easy access to the bus but this is not always possible when traffic is heavy. Inconsiderate parking at bus stops also prevents ease of access. Overall only 51% of buses were fully wheelchair accessible (Criterion I). Rossendale Transport drivers were found to be particularly welcoming, with those of Blackpool Transport at the other end of the scale (Criterion F). Approximately half of the drivers waited for their passengers to be seated before they set off (Criterion E).

4.5. **EASY TO MOVE ABOUT IN:** 72% were step free along sufficient length to allow the easy passage of wheelchairs, buggies and the passengers themselves (Criterion J). In contrast to the previous comment, Rossendale Transport buses provided universal ease of movement, along with Burnley & Pendle and Lancashire United. Most buses (98%) provided easy to use hand holds (Criterion L). Three quarters of all buses surveyed had an area for holding wheelchairs or buggies (Criterion M), with only Blackpool Transport falling well below this figure. When such a space was provided

88% of buses displayed instructions on how the wheelchair or buggy should be stowed and secured (Criterion N). It is important that reserved spaces for wheelchairs do not impede the free passage of other bus users.

- 4.6. **PROPERLY HEATED AND VENTILATED:** Passengers opinions of correct heating and ventilation can vary widely, according to personal preference. 87% of the buses surveyed were deemed by the assessor to be appropriately heated and ventilated (Criterion O). Stagecoach, Blackpool Transport and Other Operators' buses fell below the average score. It was noted that the action of one passenger, in opening a hopper window immediately above his/her seat, can create an annoying draught throughout the rest of the bus without directly affecting the passenger who wanted better ventilation in the first instance.
- 4.7. **DRIVEN THOUGHTFULLY:** (Criterion V) Using the 1 – 5 scale the overall rating for the bus being driven with consideration for the passengers and other road users was 3.6. Rossendale Transport drivers would appear to be particularly considerate. The majority of drivers working for the major operators wore a recognisable uniform (Criterion C) but this was not the case with the minor operators where the smart appearance of the drivers does not seem to be a major requirement. Very few drivers wore personal identification (Criterion D).
- 4.8. **COMFORTABLE:** (Criterion Q) An overall score of 4.0 shows that most journeys were deemed to be safe and comfortable. Burnley & Pendle journeys were judged to be especially so.
- 4.9. **ON-BOARD INFORMATION:** The Good Practice Guide does not specifically refer to the provision of information within the bus but many passengers, especially those new to the area, will consider it to be necessary. Criteria R, S, T and U referring to this aspect gave significantly lower results than in other areas of provision. Nearly half of all buses displayed some information on fares and services (that on fares often being adverts for day and weekly 'rider' tickets) whilst only a quarter of all buses had internal information relating to the route(s) served and on how to make a complaint about the standard of service, etc. However, some buses incorporated a clear route description as part of their external livery, especially when certain buses were dedicated to a specific route.
- 4.10. **AVERAGE MAXIMUM LOAD:** Criterion P provides an assessment of the greatest loading the assessor witnessed during the part of the journey being assessed. This may or may not have been the absolute maximum for the complete journey and it will have been closely related to the time of day. However, allowing for the possibility of

wide variation, the average maximum load for all the buses was 41%, with average maximum loadings for individual operators being very close to this figure.

4.11. **ALIGHTING:** There were no instances when calling points were announced or displayed (Criterion W). New passengers are clearly left to their own devices in establishing where their destination stop will be. To avoid accidents it is desirable that passengers remain seated until the bus has stopped but only Lancashire United buses seemed to take this matter seriously. It was noticeable that the minor operators were more considerate in offering apologies if their bus was late (Criterion Z). Other drivers tended to remain silent when late.

4.12. **TYPE OF BUS USED:** Two thirds of all journeys were provided by single deck saloons. Only Preston Bus and Blackpool Transport used a significant proportion of double deck vehicles (58%) whilst Lancashire United used none. The 36 'Other Operators' used the greatest percentage of minibuses compared with the major operators. Only half of minibuses offered step-free access, despite being used in urban areas with frequent stops where many passengers are elderly or mobility impaired and only half (54%) provided a space for a wheelchair or buggy.

## 5. Comments made by the assessors

Assessors were invited to comment on particularly positive or negative aspects of their journeys, with special attention being paid to service quality and safety. The following comments are particularly significant:

- **Macclesfield to Crewe (Arriva):** Ayrton Senna is alive and well and driving for Arriva. Late departure from timing points followed by fast driving to give an early arrival at the next (10 minutes early at Sandbach). Finally wasted time outside Crewe bus station to give the impression of a delayed journey.
- **Macclesfield to Bollington (Bostocks):** Route number only displayed in roof box. Several sheets of A4 paper in windows showing “Macclesfield to Kerridge” but nothing to show direction of travel.
- **Leighton Hospital to Crewe (Arriva):** Bus route-branded for a service which no longer exists.
- **Crewe to Nantwich (Bakerbus):** Temporary paper destination indicator in windscreen due to operator having taken over after previous operator went into liquidation a few days earlier.
- **Audlem to Nantwich (First):** Bus departed Audlem 10 minutes early with no passengers. Complaint made to operator who denied that the service existed. Complaint progressing.
- **St Annes Square (Blackpool) to Talbot Road (Blackpool Transport):** All buses colour coded to indicate the route.
- **Blackpool North Station to Skippool Avenue (Blackpool Transport):** An appalling experience. Poor quality vehicle with high floor, driven roughly by a driver who seemed to lack all practical and interpersonal skills. Bus driven in an over-aggressive manner – with uncomfortable consequences for the passengers.
- **Royal Preston Hospital to Preston Bus Station (Preston Bus):** Driver tried to move into offside lane to make a right turn into the bus station. He misjudged or failed to notice a lorry protruding into the offside lane, resulting in a collision. Nearside windscreen smashed and front corner panelling damaged.
- **Blackpool to Kirkham (Stagecoach):** An old bus driven with vigour on the M55.
- **Carlisle to Penrith (Stagecoach):** 39 minutes allowed for the journey. Due to congestion in Carlisle the bus must travel fast once it leaves the city. For most of the journey along the A6 road it was doing maximum speed, lurching around corners, even so doing the journey in 40 minutes. The problem is not with the driver but the schedule.
- **Penrith to Keswick (Stagecoach):** The bus was a coach with steep steps and limited luggage space. There was no bell so passengers wishing to get off at intermediate stops had to walk to the front and speak to the driver. This is a RailLink service and many passengers had come off the train with heavy luggage and had difficulty stowing these.

Many elderly passengers had great difficulty boarding the coach. Due to boarding problems the bus was 10 minutes late leaving Penrith and was driven at speed along the A66 and recklessly through the villages of Stainton and Penruddock.

- **Keswick to Carlisle (Stagecoach):** The driver assisted passengers by unloading their luggage himself and helping the elderly. He was cheerful and friendly – well done!
- **Blackpool to Cleveleys (Blackpool Transport):** Rowdy passengers on board inconvenienced the other passengers. The driver made no effort to subdue or to advise culprits. All the printed information on the bus was out of date.
- **Bacup to Burnley (Northern Blue):** Although officially Route 8 the bus showed 'Burnley 92'. A fairly tatty H-registered double deck bus with only one other passenger from Bacup.
- **Colne to Burnley (Pennine Motor Services):** A K-registered bus, not up to present day accessibility standards but well turned out.
- **Burnley to Stoopes Estate (Burnley & Pendle):** One of the brand new 'Starship' branded buses. Driver obviously in a hurry because of late departure.
- **Padiham to Accrington (M & M):** A low quality operator competing with Burnley & Pendle with an L-registered 'breadvan'. Destination card in windscreen.
- **Accrington to Huncoat (Accrington Transport):** The driver said the service was 'coming off' in June. He spent all the time talking to some teenage girls who were sitting at the back of the bus.
- **Carnforth to Kendal (Stagecoach):** The bus arrived very late but there was no apology. It was driven very fast but still lost a further minute.
- **Yealand Conyers to Carnforth Station (Battersby Silver Grey):** The bus was supposed to connect with one train and two buses at Carnforth. All were missed as the bus arrived 10 minutes late.
- **Lancaster to Yealand Conyers (Stagecoach):** Driver told off two teenage boys for fighting.
- **Grange over Sands to Ulverston (Stagecoach):** Quite a rough ride despite the bus being quite new.
- **Lancaster to Kendal (Stagecoach):** Two thirds of the passengers had free travel passes. It took 12 seconds on average to issue each ticket, resulting in a full six minute delay at Lancaster.
- **Rochdale to Manchester (First):** The excellent driver went through the bus picking up all the Metros (free newspapers), cans, food containers, etc prior to opening the doors at Rochdale. Highly commendable.
- **Ellesmere Port to Frodsham (GHA):** A poor quality, very noisy bus giving a poor ride. No information of any sort.
- **Warrington to Runcorn (Arriva):** The bus showed the wrong display initially resulting in the wrong passengers boarding. During the journey a man with two sticks had to make

his way down the bus which did not wait for him to be seated. Untidy patchy tinting applied to some windows – a mess.

- **Shopping City to Runcorn (Anthony's Travel):** A Sherpa vehicle with coach seats. Very friendly 'village bus' atmosphere where the driver seemed to know all his passengers. No wheelchair access and far too small for buggies.
- **Shopping City to Stockton Heath (Halton Borough Transport):** This bus was not listed on the real-time system at Shopping City. Many passengers commented on the smell of urine at the back of the bus.
- **Warrington to Grappenhall (Warrington Coachways):** Hand written destination on piece of cardboard. Scrappy – straight out of the worst of de-regulation.
- **Hilltop Road to Warrington Bus Station (Warrington Borough Transport):** A good smart operation.
- **Astley Miners Arms to Leigh (First):** Very courteous driving. Excellent service standard with an obvious pride in the job.
- **Manchester to East Didsbury (Haytons Travel):** The driver did not issue tickets.
- **Clitheroe to Nelson, via Barley (Tyrer Bus):** A basic service over a difficult route resulting in a less than pleasurable journey.
- **Bolton to Manchester (First):** 'Bendy Bus' with huge capacity but noisy and less refined than modern lowering suspension saloons. Speedy progress.
- **Clitheroe to Chatburn (Tyrer Bus):** The 'free' ticket was requested to Chatburn but was issued to Downham (beyond Chatburn).
- **Preston Circular (Blue Bus):** Passengers are expected to know where to alight as the driver seemed unwilling to give advice when the stop was approaching. Therefore easy to miss it.
- **Preston to Chorley (Stagecoach):** Traffic calming islands with bumps are a hazard for long buses. Rear wheel hit bollard and all passengers jumped in the air! Otherwise a good driver.
- **Various journeys:** Many assessors commented on the accumulation of Metro free newspapers on the seats and floors of many buses in the Greater Manchester area. On some occasions they were cleared by the driver or bus station based cleaners but in many cases they were just left to accumulate.

## 6. Bus operators involved in the survey

	<b>JOURNEYS ASSESSED</b>
<b>MAJOR OPERATORS</b>	
Stagecoach	69
First	55
Arriva	46
Blackpool Transport	24
Preston Bus	12
Rossendale	11
Burnley & Pendle (Transdev)	10
Lancashire United (Transdev)	8
<b>MINOR OPERATORS</b>	
Accrington Transport	1
Anthony's Travel	1
Avon	2
Baker Bus	3
Battersby Silver Grey	3
Blue Bus	1
Bostocks	1
Bowers' Coaches	4
Bu-Val	1
Click Services	1
Clowes Coaches	2
D & G	3
D Jones & Son	1
Elite Minibus Service	1
Fishwicks	6
GHA Coaches	2
Halton Borough Transport	2
Hayton's Coaches	1
Jim Stones	1
M & M Coaches	1
Northern Blue	1
Pennine Motor Services	1
Princess Coaches	1
Red Bus (Darwen)	1
South Lancs Travel	1
Tyrer Bus	5
Warrington Borough Transport	7
Warrington Coachways	1

## **7. The bus stop survey**

- 7.1. The BUUK Good Practice Guide recognises that bus stops and bus stations are an integral part of every journey. They should be sensibly situated, in well-lit, safe locations and be properly maintained by their owners (usually PTEs or local authorities). They should carry appropriate information, such as service numbers, contact phone numbers, bus times and fares. Additionally the bus stop sign should indicate its whereabouts, e.g. a street name.
- 7.2. It is important that all information should be up to date and easily understandable, given that a user may be new to the area and unfamiliar with the route.
- 7.3. The minimum timetable information should be a list of departure points for each route served but ideally the intending passenger should also be able to determine how long a journey will take.
- 7.4. Ideally there should be a real-time information display so that the passenger can determine that the bus is actually running. Such displays are rare in rural areas but are becoming more common in urban environments. The real-time display should not replace printed timetable information.
- 7.5. It is unusual for adequate fare information to be displayed, even though this information is obviously important for non-regular passengers.
- 7.6. Whilst the assessors were primarily looking at bus journeys they additionally assessed the 'quality' of bus stops whenever possible. The results printed below give an overview of the facilities provided at around 124 bus stops situated over a wide area of the North West.

## **8. Bus stop survey results**

### **8.1. ACCESS / LOCATION**

- 85 % of stops were situated on a pedestrian walkway without separate waiting facilities.
- 15% of stops were situated in a reserved area off the pedestrian walkway.
- 39% of stops were situated in a reserved lay-by of the main carriageway.
- Parking restrictions applied to 78% of calling areas but it was observed that many of these are ignored by motorists, leading to congestion when a number of buses are loading.
- 55% of bus stops had raised kerbs to allow ease of access to low floor vehicles.

### **8.2. INFORMATION**

- Only 88% of calling points had a 'Bus Stop' sign on a post.
- 1% had notices to indicate which side passengers should queue.
- In 77% of cases was the location of the bus stop displayed, e.g. High Street.
- 14% of bus stops displayed no information about which services called.
- 9% of bus stops displayed no timetable information.
- 58 % of the bus stops did not display route information.
- Only 9% of bus stops had real-time information displays, present in parts of Preston, Carlisle and Chester. A real-time information system was installed as part of the Carnforth Connect project but it is no longer operational (and the installer has gone out of business). Other non-operational systems were found in the Stockport/Trafford area.
- 24% of bus stops had some form of information help point. These were mainly present in the Blackpool and Preston areas.

### **8.3. SHELTER**

- 28% of bus stops had no shelter, whilst 38% had a shelter which was enclosed by at least three sides. 31% of stops had a cover and one side.
- In the case of bus stops with some form of covered shelter, 44% had seats under cover, whilst 24% had just perches within the shelter.
- 14% of bus stops had some form of seating away from the cover of a shelter (if provided).
- 31% of bus stops areas were judged to have some litter and/or not be free from graffiti.
- Although the survey took place during daylight hours, 69% of bus stop areas were judged likely to be well lit after dark. This is of course a subjective assessment.

#### **8.4. FACILITIES WITHIN 200 METRES**

- 40% of bus stops had public toilets within the stated distance. These may not be open throughout the full period of the daily timetable.
- 51% of stops were reasonably close to a café or other refreshment outlet.
- 48% were within 200 metres of a public telephone. The current BT programme of closing non-remunerative call boxes may quickly reduce this figure.
- 43% of stops had seats available, not necessarily in the immediate proximity of the stop itself.

#### **8.5. RATING**

- The assessor was asked to determine how happy he/she would be to wait for 15 minutes at the bus stop in question (using the scale where 1 = extremely unhappy and 5 = very happy). This again was necessarily a subjective assessment but it gives at least an indication of how content a person might be whilst waiting for the bus.
- Waiting during daylight hours gave an average 'happiness' rating of 3.9, with 2 being the minimum score and 5 being the maximum. A low rating, even for a bus stop in a built up area, may well be due to the lack of information to allow the passenger to determine if the bus was on time or even running.
- Waiting during a dark evening gave an average 'happiness' rating of 2.6, with 1 being the minimum score and 5 being the maximum. There were bus stops in both urban and rural areas which gave the full range of scores for waiting during the hours of darkness. Many urban stops are situated in areas where there is a high level of 'night life' whilst rural bus stops are often totally unlit and remote from dwellings, etc.

#### **8.6. NARRATIVE COMMENTS**

Assessors were invited to make additional comments to augment the objective responses on the questionnaire. The following is a selection of those received:

- "There are no shelters or seats. During the day, with many cafes open, this is not a problem but I would not like to catch a bus here on a wet, dark evening." (Cockermouth)
- "There are seven bus stops and nearly all local bus routes stop here. There is no proper directory of services or which stand they go from." (Carlisle)
- "Timetables are not easily seen as they are on the inner side of the shelter. It is necessary to intrude on other people's personal space if the bus stop is busy." (Chester)
- "Potential passengers may avoid using this bus stop because it is too difficult/dangerous to cross the busy A56 road." (Near Chester)
- "All bus stops in the Kendal area show bus times in the 12-hour clock, whereas timetable show 24-hour times."
- "When the service did not appear at the time specified the real time information simply moved on automatically to the next service." (Preston)

## **9. The bus station survey**

- 9.1. The BUUK Good Practice Guide's comments about bus stops apply likewise to bus stations. However, as bus stations will experience a much higher number of passengers per day, at all times of the day including late into the evenings, their facilities should be more extensive than those one would expect to find at a normal bus stop.
- 9.2. The Guide expects all bus stations to provide well-lit accommodation which is protected from the elements. The accommodation should be safe and unthreatening at all times of the day, with staff available to answer passengers' queries and deal with their problems.
- 9.3. Clear up-to-date information on services available should be provided.
- 9.4. Ideally a bus station should incorporate an enquiry / ticket office, open for as long as possible of the period of bus operation, together with toilet facilities.
- 9.5. It should be possible to obtain fares information, both for point to point journeys and for daily / weekly tickets.
- 9.6. Bus stations were surveyed as an adjunct to the assessment of bus journeys. Altogether 49 bus stations were assessed across a wide area of the North West. The term 'bus station' refers to locations where a significant number of buses call; these can range from purpose built centres with a wide range of facilities, to a loose grouping of bus shelters along the roadside.

## 10. The bus station survey results

### 10.1. ACCESS

- Bus stations vary widely in their proximity to their town centres and to the ease of access along and across town roads.
- The maximum walking time to a bus station from the town centre was judged to be five minutes, although this can be lengthened if busy roads have to be negotiated or the passenger has heavy bags or is pushing a buggy. Although it is reasonably close to the city centre, Preston bus station is accessed via the Guild Hall shopping centre and then by a maze of underground passages and ramps. Kendal bus station is reached from the shopping centre by means of 35 steps. A lift is however available.
- 46% of bus stations can only be reached after crossing at least a single carriageway road. A dual carriageway road had to be negotiated in Morecambe and Ulverston, whilst at Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, the threat was from passing trams.
- 56% of bus stations were signposted from within their town centre but in only 47% of those surveyed was the town centre signposted from the bus station.
- Only 19% of bus stations reasonably close to a railway station were signposted from the railway station, with 21% being signposted for the reverse journey.

### 10.2. INFORMATION

- Regular users will be fully conversant with their bus station and will not normally require information, except to check if their bus is running, whereas casual visitors will definitely require a wealth of information to assist them in their onward journey planning. Purpose built bus stations, serving a multitude of routes, normally have a staffed information centre. Of those within the survey, 47% of bus stations incorporated such a facility, with opening hours averaging nine hours but up to 18 hours per day (Leigh). Even when there is such a facility it is not always possible to obtain vital information; Preston bus station has an information office staffed by Preston Bus who cannot give any information as to whether the Lancashire United service to Skipton is running to time, or even running at all.
- Rather surprisingly only 69% of bus stations displayed timetable information in a readily accessible form. When a bus station is used by a number of operators there can be a wide variety of styles of presentation of bus times, each using its own 'house style', including the occasional use of the 12-hour clock.
- Real time information is provided in 12% of the surveyed bus stations but, as noted above, this does not always extend to advice about late running buses. The information about them just disappears off the screen! 63% of bus stations had departure time displays, not necessarily linked to a 'real time' system.
- At only four out of the 49 bus stations surveyed were rail timetables displayed.

- It is a common complaint that information on fares is hard to discover. The survey showed that only 8% of the bus stations displayed fare information and then mostly related to daily and weekly 'rover' tickets.
- 45% of bus stations had a location map display, showing routes to, for example, the town centre and railway station. Again, this type of information is vital for the newcomer to the area.
- 86% of bus stations had clearly defined bus stands, with their routes shown, but only 65 % included a master plan of the bus stands and the routes they serve.
- Despite the obvious need for an awareness of the time, only 39% of bus stations had a clock on prominent display. Despite there being a timetable, some buses were observed departing two or even three minutes before their correct departure time.

### **10.3. PASSENGER ENVIRONMENT**

- 18 of the bus stations surveyed fully enclosed spaces for shelter and comfort, whilst a further eight offered cover only. Five provided fully enclosed waiting rooms (as opposed to shelters) but 20 bus stations could only offer bus shelters for their customers.
- 65% of bus stations had bus stands with their own individual waiting areas. Others tended to provide shared waiting areas for adjacent stands.
- 76% of bus stations were observed to be free from litter and graffiti, with 61% of them being judged as welcoming and safe. This means therefore that 39% were deemed to be unwelcoming and potentially unsafe, particularly after dark.

### **10.4. PASSENGER FACILITIES**

- 57% of bus stations provided toilets, which may only be available during the opening hours of the information centre. When such facilities were provided around two thirds of them were judged to be clean and correctly equipped. When toilet facilities were not available there were very few signposted toilet facilities off-site.
- Only Burnley, Clitheroe (both Lancs CC) and Leigh advertised secure cycle facilities as part of the bus station provision. Other bus stations may provide cycle storage but evidence was not obvious.
- One third of the bus stations offered a refreshment facility on-site and 39% provided a public telephone.
- At Barrow, Fleetwood, Rawtenstall and Ulverston bus stations passengers were expected to stand whilst waiting for their service. In other locations the number of seats or perches varied widely.
- The 'happiness scores' were more or less identical to those given for the bus stop survey (see above).

## **11. Narrative comments about individual bus stations**

The following comments were provided by assessors as a result of their visit to the bus stations concerned. The comments are not exhaustive but merely provide an on-the-spot opinion at the time.

### **Accrington**

- One disused stand not signed.
- Cycle storage not signed and no information as to location of keys to unlock.
- Some “perches” missing.

### **Birkenhead**

- New facility. Needs time to “bed in”. Real time information poorly located and difficult to read.

### **Blackburn**

- Hazardous bus station for pedestrians, with no facilities.

### **Burnley**

- Public telephone out of order.

### **Carlisle**

- Poor bus service distribution in the city with major gaps in links with railway station.
- Timetable information displays poorly located .
- No seats in the bus station.
- A very poor facility for a major city!

### **Chester**

- Very run down with minimal facilities. On the site of redevelopment area.

### **Clitheroe**

- Adjacent train station booking office has timetable and access to cycle lockers located at the station car park 80 metres away. Staffed 11 hours.

### **Colne**

- Confusing arrangement of bus positioning.

### **Crewe**

- Toilets closed – out of order.

### **Darwen**

- Two shelters had leaking roofs dripping on to seating areas.

### **Halton Lea - North and South**

- Isolated from main shopping area.
- Hot and poorly ventilated on a warm day.
- Having two bus stations at different locations is very confusing. Some service changes from one station to the other necessitates long walk through shopping centre, particularly for passengers who are strangers to the place.

**Kendal**

- Lift available from shopping centre car park to avoid steps down.
- Southbound buses only have a shelter on opposite side of busy road.
- Direct access to the town centre is not available when the shopping mall is closed.

**Keswick**

- Bus interchange relies upon facilities and amenities at adjacent supermarket.
- Information display in supermarket not obvious to passengers. Departure information was inaccurate.

**Lancaster**

- Electronic information indicators are timed to erase at departure time. Consequently some buses departing late may be on stands but are not featured.

**Nelson**

- Current facility to be replaced by new multi modal interchange offering modern facilities.

**Penrith**

- Displayed information is out of date, e.g. the old Traveline telephone number is still displayed.

**Rawtenstall**

- Very “down at heel.” One long shelter with stands on each side.
- Not all buses pass the bus station.
- Information office located in adjacent bus depot.

**Runcorn**

- Signposting to/from rail station exists but is poor and strangers would have difficulty.
- Information difficult to interpret.

**Ulverston**

- Very poorly maintained shelters – bad state of repairs and dirty.
- Bus stop flags lack information and are in a poor rusty state.
- Wooden seats are rotting and unpleasant.
- In short a disgrace to the town.

**Wigan**

- Island waiting areas remote particularly after dark.
- Information office closes for lunch!

**Workington**

- Information office locked out of use.
- Electronic departure information switched off.

## 12. Conclusions

- 12.1. The findings from the report exhibit a 'mixed bag' of experiences depending on location and the familiarity of the passenger with the location. Looking at the 'global' picture exposed by the survey the bus transport service in the North West presents a confusing profile to consumers, particularly those who may be unfamiliar with locations, (such as tourists and visitors), those who may be considering using buses for the first time (notably in the current economic climate), and those trying to understand routes, fares and timetables.
- 12.2. The quality of journey results were quite favourable. It was pleasing to record that virtually all vehicles were clean and tidy both outside and inside and scored highly with interior amenities such as hand holds, step free floors, buggy/wheelchair space, bell pushes, and heating ventilation resulting in an overall satisfaction and comfort score well above average. Driving standards were also good, on the whole, save for some isolated incidents recorded, mainly due to late running. Entry and alighting to/from the vehicle was also deemed to be good in the positioning of vehicles at stops. However an 'average' score in respect of drivers moving off before passengers are seated is a disappointment and needs attention as it is reasonable to expect this to be a safety requirement.
- 12.3. Bus stops were variable but this is to be expected given the many different locations featured. The majority were well located and consequently obvious to the bus user but information provision at locations was patchy with a surprising number not displaying any route information at all. Some were in a poor state of repair and had obviously not seen any maintenance for some time.
- 12.4. Bus stations also varied from a set of shelters at the roadside to enclosed facilities with excellent accommodation for passengers. In many of the latter cases results of good investment could be seen, although some 'snagging' issues such as poor positioning of information displays and zealous electronic displays could do with some attention. It was also surprising that only 39% of bus stations displayed a prominent clock.
- 12.5. It would appear that the main failing exposed is in the provision of information. On buses this tends to be patchy and there is little consistency between the various companies. The most elusive piece of information appears to concern fares, both on buses and at bus stops and stations. When fares are displayed they tend to major on promotional tickets. Equally there is a dearth of information at bus stops, other than the location and timetable. Installation of 'real time' information displays at both bus stops and stations is a rarity when it could be expected to be developing quickly. At bus stations the experience in information provision was variable with no consistency in opening hours of staffed information points (one

closing for lunch!). In many cases a variety of presentation styles in one location was confusing and it was also disappointing that less than half of bus stations displayed a local location map.

### **13. Recommendations to the Bus Industry**

- 13.1. **Information provision** - This appeared to be the greatest deficiency that emerged from the observations taken during the survey. There is little consistency in the style, content and extent of information provided leaving both active and potential customers bewildered. The bus industry needs to look very carefully into how it presents itself as a homogeneous utility if it is going to attract new customers and retain those that currently use it. No age segmentation was undertaken in the survey but anecdotal evidence suggests that profiles do appear to be dominated by those aged 50+ and those under 21. The bus industry has a major challenge in how it retains these and also addresses the 21 – 50 market. If the industry is to successfully tackle this challenge, overhauling its image and style of information provision will be crucial and learning the art of communication with customers, both 'on site' and in the armchair will need to become a cornerstone of the industry's profession.
- 13.2. **Fares** – Pricing is perhaps the greatest challenge. In many areas fares do appear to be expensive to the occasional user and those not benefiting from concessions. Due to the differing transport authority provisions they are also very inconsistent throughout the region and leave the uninitiated passenger and potential future passengers extremely confused as to what to expect. We do not offer a solution to what is acknowledged as being a complex issue but draw attention to the need for the industry to address the confusion that currently reigns.
- 13.3. **Passenger Provision** – Consistency of provision was an issue that emerged. Some areas had excellent bus stations and stops whilst some were poorly maintained and exhibited a tired look. It became clear that investment could be tracked by county area with Cumbria recording the poorest results. Maintenance of bus stops ought to be a fairly easy exercise as should replenishment of facilities at them such as rotting seats and missing perches. Lack of attention in some areas was apparent and again needs to be addressed if the industry is to take its strides into the future. Basic provisions such as clocks (a surprising omission at many obvious locations for an industry operating to an advertised timetable) and the lack of progress of real time information displays, were further evidence of stagnancy.

13.4. **Vehicles and Driving Standards** – The evidence gathered in this sector was the most positive with the majority of results recording well presented buses and good driving practices.

## 14. Survey personnel

TWNW Administration	John Moorhouse
Coordinator	John Owen
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## 15. Acknowledgements

To Bus Users UK for the use of their Good Practice Guide.

## 16. TravelWatch NorthWest

TWNW is an independent organisation representing all users of public transport in the North West. Membership is open to any not for profit organisation representing the interests of users or potential users of public transport. TravelWatch holds conferences in public at various locations in the North West, where issues of concern to public transport users are debated. TWNW's chief purpose is to influence, by research and campaigning, public transport policy in the NW always with the passengers' interests foremost.

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## APPENDIX A

### TravelWatch North West – Bus Travel Experience Record

Surveyor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/2008 Service operator: \_\_\_\_\_

Route No./description: \_\_\_\_\_ from: \_\_\_\_\_ to: \_\_\_\_\_ Urban/Interurban/rural

Joining point: \_\_\_\_\_ Scheduled time: \_\_\_:\_\_\_ Actual time: \_\_\_:\_\_\_

Alighting point: \_\_\_\_\_ Scheduled time: \_\_\_:\_\_\_ Actual time: \_\_\_:\_\_\_

**Joining the bus:** Bus pulled into kerb Y / N Easy step onto bus Y / N

Driver welcome – (1 v poor to 5 v good) 1 2 3 4 5

Driver wearing uniform Y / N Driver wearing name-tag Y / N

Driver waits for passengers to be seated before starting Y / N

**The bus:** Decker / saloon / mini Exterior clean and smart Y / N

Shows route and destination Y / N Ramp for wheelchair Y / N

Step-free floor Y / N Interior clean and fresh Y / N

Easy hand-holds to assist boarding/alighting Y / N

Wheelchair/buggy space Y / N . . . with clear instructions for use Y / N / NA

Properly heated/ventilated Y/N Max Load factor (estimate) \_\_\_ %

Interior safe and comfortable 1 2 3 4 5

Info re fares and services Y / N Route information Y / N

Info on making complaints Y / N Other info for passengers Y / N

Driven with consideration for passengers 1 2 3 4 5

**Alighting from the bus:** Calling points announced or displayed Y / N

Passenger instruction to remain seated until bus stops Y / N

Bell works when pressed Y / N Apology for delay Y / N / NA

Bus draws into kerb Y / N Easy step to kerb Y / N

**Please write your comments and impressions on any points, on reverse if necessary.**



## APPENDIX C

### TravelWatch North West – Bus Station Record Form

Location/name of bus station: \_\_\_\_\_ Owner/operator: \_\_\_\_\_

Surveyor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/2008 Time started/completed: \_\_\_:\_\_\_ | \_\_\_:\_\_\_

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#### ACCESS

Walking time from edge of main shopping street/centre \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Hazards/difficulties en route: (please circle or complete as appropriate)

Steps \_\_\_\_ (number) Major highways: single/double carriageway Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Signposting:	from town centre	Y / N	to town centre	Y / N
	from railway station	Y / N	to railway station	Y / N

#### INFORMATION

Staffed information office Y / N Hours open Mon-Fri: \_\_:\_\_ to \_\_:\_\_

Bus timetables displayed Y / N Real time running info Y / N

Departure times display Y / N Rail timetables displayed Y / N

Fares information display Y / N Location map Y / N

Bus stands with routes shown Y / N Clock Y / N

Plan of bus stands and routes Y / N

#### PASSENGER ENVIRONMENT

(Please circle one or more in line 1 as appropriate)

Fully enclosed Cover only Enclosed waiting rooms Bus shelters only

Defined queuing/waiting areas for each stand Y / N Well lit after dark Y / N

Litter and graffiti free Y / N Welcoming, safe feel Y / N

#### PASSENGER FACILITIES

Toilets Y / N Clean and equipped Y / N Off-site toilets signposted Y / N / NA

Secure cycle storage Y / N Café or refreshment bar Y / N

Public telephone Y / N Seats/perches (how many?): \_\_\_\_\_

Other : \_\_\_\_\_ Raised kerb for bus access Y / N

#### RATING

Happy to wait 30 minutes for your bus . . (1 = extremely unhappy, 5 = very happy)

during day time 1 2 3 4 5

on a dark evening 1 2 3 4 5

Please write your comments and impressions on any of these points, on reverse if necessary.