

# TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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***Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport***

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## **English National Concessionary Pass Survey 2014**



***(photo Chris Dale)***

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## **1. Introduction and Background**

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) dates back to October 2003 when the Rail Passengers Committee for North Western England (RPC), using its powers under section 228 of the Transport Act 2000, set up the North West Public Transport Users Forum (NWPTUF). This legislation required, inter alia, the RPC to co-operate with other bodies representing the interests of users of all public transport services. The RPC, alongside the North West Regional Assembly, identified a gap in the representation of public transport users across the region and across modes. Similar forums, now also under the TravelWatch banner, have been established in South West England, the West Midlands, the East Midlands and Southern England. With the demise of the regional RPCs TWNW has become an independent Community Interest Company limited by guarantee.

1.2 Free Bus travel for Seniors is indisputably popular, as might be expected, but there have been long standing issues over funding allocations to reimburse the bus operator for revenue foregone. This short paper concentrates on the operation of the scheme in practice. There have been reports of confusion about the need to scan passes on ticket machines and the method used by different companies to accomplish this.

## **2. Methodology**

2.1 Surveyors were asked to note the issuing authority of the pass used, as this could have some bearing on how the ticket machines react. (In practice this did not appear to be the case)

2.2 We asked that journey details be recorded in case there was a trend on certain routes for problems.

2.3 On boarding the bus, we set out to monitor how the presentation of a pass is handled by the driver and if the method of dealing with it is easily understood by the passenger. Some ticket machines use different coloured lights to show if the pass has been accepted, whilst others show instructions on the screen facing the passenger, so please note which system is used.

2.4 We also sought to ascertain how drivers dealt with a pass that was rejected by the ticket machine.

2.5 If a ticket was issued we wanted to check the accuracy of the information printed on the ticket, especially boarding and alighting information.

2.6 During the summer of 2014 TWNW members who held concessionary passes travelled on 65 bus services in NW England and completed a questionnaire to record

their experiences (Appendix). The bus companies and geographical locations were as follows –

- Blackpool (Blackpool Transport) – three journeys
- Cheshire (Arriva) – one journey
- Cheshire (D & G Bus) – one journey
- Cheshire (First Potteries) – one journey
- Cheshire (GHA coaches) – two journeys
- Cheshire (High Peak) – one journey
- Cheshire (Stagecoach) – one journey
- Cheshire (Vale of Llangollen Travel) – one journey
- Cumbria (Reays) – two journeys
- Cumbria (Stagecoach) – one journey
- Greater Manchester (Stagecoach) – two journeys
- Lancashire (Boomerang Travel) – one journey
- Lancashire (Preston Bus) – 4 journeys
- Lancashire (Rossendale Transport) – two journeys
- Lancashire (Stagecoach) – 22 journeys
- Lancashire (TransDev) – 10 journeys
- Lancashire/Cumbria (Stagecoach) – 6 journeys
- Merseyside (Arriva) – three journeys
- Merseyside (HTL buses) – one journey
- West Yorkshire (TLC) – one journey

The results were analysed.

### 3. Analysis

3.1 The surveyors stated their destination on 52 occasions (80%). This is necessary in Lancashire where the reimbursement for concessionary travel is based on actual journeys made.

3.2 Inspection by the driver of the photo on the pass was observed on only 11 occasions (17%). We are concerned that this could be subject to fraud by anyone who had found a pass and was tempted to use it.

3.3 On 9 occasions (14%) a successful scan did not take place -

- A journey from Buxton to Macclesfield on a High Peak service – the driver observed the pass and issued a ticket without scanning.
- On 6 journeys with Stagecoach Lancashire a technical error with the system (which had also affected other pass holders) led to tickets being issued manually.
- On two occasions the pass was presented outside the validity period (i.e. before 09.30).

3.4 On 32 occasions (49%) no instructions on the ticket machine regarding the presentation of the pass were discernible. However Stagecoach in Lancashire &

Cumbria came out well in this regard with the instructions being held to be clear on 24 out of 29 journeys with the operator.

3.5 On 56 occasions (86%) a ticket was issued. The other 9 occasions where a ticket was not issued were as follows –

- Two journeys on Stagecoach Manchester
- One journey on Stagecoach in Cheshire
- One journey with Arriva in Cheshire. The comment was made by the surveyor that it appears to be Arriva policy not to issue tickets.
- One journey with HTL buses on Merseyside. (“I have not known any driver on Merseyside to ask for a destination or to inspect the photo”).
- Three journeys with Arriva Merseyside.
- One journey with TLC in West Yorkshire.

3.6 Where tickets were issued there were 8 occasions (17%) where it appeared that the destination was shown incorrectly. For example on Blackpool Transport a ticket was issued from Pleasant Street in Blackpool to Fleetwood Freeport when the destination asked for had been Bispham. In some other cases the discrepancy was related to the location of correct fare stages and there was at least one example where fixed fares operated.

3.7 It is gratifying to record that on 62 occasions (95%) the bus driver was pleasant and helpful.

3.8 On only on occasion was an inspector observed checking tickets.

3.9 On just two journeys the surveyor noted information displayed regarding the concessionary pass scheme – TLC in West Yorkshire and Stagecoach in Preston. In the latter case there was a notice on the drivers cab door reminding holders of the times of use of the passes.

## 4. Conclusions

4.1 In general terms this small survey shows that the ENCTS scheme appears to be working reasonably well. Minor criticism could be made in some areas -

- LTAs and operators should increase measures to ensure drivers are more rigorous in inspecting photo card passes in order to prevent fraudulent use.
- Clearer instructions/ guidance on whether and how to present the pass to the ticket machine would be useful.
- Travelling bus inspectors seem to be much thinner on the ground than they used to be.
- More information generally about the scheme on the bus would be useful.

4.2 Because of cuts to local authority spending imposed by government we are going through a period of severe pressure on the continued operation of locally supported buses especially in rural areas. We would make three points –

- Travel concessions are of no use if services do not exist.
- There is a concern that in some areas additional costs generated by ENCTS are not properly reimbursed both to the LTA and the operator and that this is a factor contributing to the erosion of bus services.
- The withdrawal of local bus services is leading to increased deprivation and isolation for many who do not have access to private transport, especially in rural areas.

4.3 For more information about TravelWatch NorthWest contact John Moorhouse, Company Secretary, at the registered office address, or email - [admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk](mailto:admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk) or visit the website – [www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk](http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk) .

***TravelWatch NorthWest 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014***

**Appendix****TravelWatch NORTHWEST – E.N.C.T.S. Survey 2014**

Surveyor: ..... Date of journey: .....

Issuing Authority: ..... Operator: .....

Service Number: ..... Route: .....

Joining Point/Time:..... @ .....

**On boarding the bus:**Did you state your destination? **Yes/No**Or, if not, did the driver ask for a destination **Yes/No**Did driver inspect photo on pass? **Yes/No**Was the pass scanned by the ticket machine? **Yes / No**Were the instructions on the ticket machine screen easily read? **Yes / No**Were these instructions clear? **Yes / No**If pass scanned, was the scan successful? **Yes / No**

If not successful or not scanned, what action did the driver take?

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Was a ticket issued? **Yes / No**Was the information on the ticket correct? **Yes / No**Was the driver pleasant / helpful? **Yes / No****On the bus:**Was your ticket checked by an Inspector? **Yes/No**

Any information displayed regarding the concessionary ticket scheme?

**Yes / No**

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Please write any other comments or observations in the space below or on the reverse of this form.