

promoting quality public transport.....

28th February 2013

News Release – Immediate

Bus passengers need more information.

Buses are vital in providing a viable public transport option to millions of people in the UK. As the cost of motoring continues to increase, alternative transport modes are now being considered by many people as an affordable and efficient alternative.

During the Autumn of 2012 TravelWatch NorthWest carried out a survey to examine the quality of the bus industry's offer to passengers in the North West. Travellers' experiences were recorded in pre-planning journeys using a range of information sources, the environments at bus stops and bus stations, vehicle presentation, driving standards and information provision. Surveyors undertook over 100 journeys in different parts of the region and recorded their findings which have now been published in a report titled -

Bus Passengers' Experience in North West England.

Chris Dale, Chairman of TravelWatch NorthWest said, "Whilst the standards of vehicle presentation and driving were mostly good, we found the industry lags behind other transport modes in the provision of information. There is no industry "house style" in the presentation of websites and timetables and it is impossible to find out the cost of walk up fares in advance of journeys. When these can vary between £2 and £7 for journeys of the same distance there is little wonder that new travellers are not attracted. Equally the application of modern technology is slow in an age where other industries are moving quickly. Other countries have embraced GPS to help passengers with locations during their journeys and electronic displays with "real time" information at bus stops and stations, but the UK is a long way off the pace of these developments."

It is acknowledged that developments to meet future passenger needs will require serious investment, but a start and a commitment has to be made and we call upon the Dept. for Transport and the Bus Industry leaders to address these shortcomings with strategies to make the bus an attractive transport option to new markets and to provide better care for its present passenger markets.

Chris Dale added, "The expertise and the technology to deliver the infrastructure we call for is in existence and everyday use in other transport sectors, so all that is required is the commitment and application, and with the right attitude, it can be achieved in a very short timescale."

Ends.

Notes to Editors:

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See summary of recommendations below:

Summary of recommendations to the Bus Industry from the TravelWatch NorthWest Report on Bus Passenger's Experience in North West Engand, February 2013.

Websites: Some consistency of website presentation and navigation by the bus industry would be helpful for users, particularly for those passengers who are unfamiliar with an area they may be visiting.

Printed Timetables: Again, a consistent standardised style and size of printed timetables, throughout the industry, would be helpful to users.

Text Enquiries: The practice of charging a premium rate (often 25p above normal costs) for text enquiries about bus times, at bus stops where no other information is displayed, is deplored. Provision of free text information should be considered and perhaps the provision and promotion of a free "App" could be helpful to travellers.

Bus Stops and Stations: Information at bus stops and bus stations requires serious overhaul. All stops should display at least a printed timetable or departure list. Where this is not possible consideration should be given to providing a free call/text contact service. The provision of electronic/real time information at bus stops and stations needs to be re-visited. Financial constraints are understood but it does make the North West look like a poor relation when compared with other areas of the UK and overseas countries where this is standard provision. Consideration should also be given to displaying route maps and information.

Fares Information: Attention needs to be paid to the consistency of fare pricing on a regional, if not national, framework in order to make the bus an attractive alternative transport option to the car. Information provision about “walk up” bus fares and the ability to buy tickets remotely with incentives for advance bookings needs to be addressed with some urgency and with a corporate approach.

On Board Information: provision requires updating to consistent standards throughout the industry and GPS equipment should be rolled out throughout fleets. In the meantime consideration should be given to audible location announcements during journeys.

Driving Standards: In the main, drivers are to be commended for their consideration to passenger comfort. Whilst it is recognised that it is necessary for them to judge and apply responses to situations as they occur during journeys, they should, where practical, be encouraged to always wait for passengers to be seated when moving off. They should also be encouraged to communicate with passengers about service interruptions and delays/late running.