



NEWSLETTER No 1, October 2011

Dear Member

Welcome to the first Bath Bus Users Group newsletter. In future we hope to produce these on a regular basis to keep you updated with our activities and any events you may wish to attend.

The last year since our inaugural meeting on October 7th 2010 has been a busy time of consolidation, networking and getting ourselves up and running.

We formed an acting Executive Committee from the conveners of the inaugural meeting and attendees who offered help. Some members of the original committee have stood down due to other commitments. We would like to thank them for all their work and we value their ongoing support.

The current acting committee is:-

Pat Lunt - Chair and acting Secretary
Anne Hardy - acting Treasurer
Jenny Speller - Press Officer
Frank Thynne - Membership Secretary and Webmaster

We have drafted a Constitution to be reviewed and, we hope, adopted at our first formal General Meeting. This will be on **Wednesday 9 November 2011 at 7.00pm in the Crypt at St. Michael's Church, Broad Street.**

We currently have 57 members, both private and corporate and we really appreciate your support.

We have set up a bank account with the Co-operative Bank. Our apologies to some members who experienced a delay in processing their cheques.

Update on the climate of Bus Travel

The provision and quality of bus services in Bath remains unsatisfactory. No single organisation can be blamed. In many cases responsibility is shared between the bus operating companies, local authorities and central government. Traffic congestion contributes to poor services but sometimes bus operations contribute to congestion.

We don't feel progress will be made by "bashing" either the operators or the council. Our aim is to persuade bus operators that developing a good

service can be good for business. We want to encourage improved communication between all parties to make bus operations easier and bus travel cheaper and more attractive to the public.

Local authority funding cuts following the Government Comprehensive Spending Review led to reductions in some subsidised bus services. However, some losses to routes into Somerset have been mitigated by contributions from B&NES. The high profile campaigning by those affected by cuts on the 6/7 route have now resulted in B&NES agreeing to provide an additional bus on the route. We are keeping an eye on the problems affecting the No. 12 route.

The Bath Transportation Package (BTP) produced under the previous administration included the Rapid Transit Route (BRT) planned to link the Newbridge Park and Ride with a new eastern Park & Ride on Bathampton Meadows. The total package was placed in a development pool of schemes to compete for Department for Transport Funding. B&NES was invited to submit an Expression of Interest for government funding under transport infrastructure.

The Rapid Transit element within the package had long been controversial with concerns that it would not achieve the anticipated benefits and would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding environment. B&NES's new administration have withdrawn the BRT element and are now submitting a revised transport package agreed in July. Details are on the Council website www.bathnes.gov.uk/transportandstreets/transportpolicy/plansandstrategies/bathpackage

Concerns have been expressed that significant changes to the package could lead to a reduction in overall central government funding and a subsequent loss of proposed improvements to bus services. It seems, however, that many bus improvements are still in the Council's plans.

We're pleased to see bus information displays appearing at some of Bath's bus stops. At present these are only on routes that pass through Bristol's new "bus corridor" and do not show local bus departures, but we hope they will eventually be extended to cover the whole of Bath.

What We Have Been Doing

The good news is that at www.bath-bus-users.org.uk we now have our own website. We thank our membership secretary for offering to be our webmaster.

It has travel news, bus timetables, links to travel organisations and B&NES. There are forms for bus passengers to log comments about their bus travel, good and bad, so we can take issues up with whoever is responsible.

We have joined:

TravelWatch SouthWest - www.travelwatchesouthwest.org - which promotes the interests of public transport users in the South West region.

Bus Users UK - www.bususers.org - a national independent organisation which aims to give bus passengers a voice.

The Federation of Bath Residents Associations (FoBRA) as an affiliate member to give us another platform to express our views and be informed of wider issues affecting residents. www.bathresidents.org.uk

Meetings/Events

In addition to our regular committee meetings, other meetings we've attended have included FoBRA; Travelwatch in Taunton; West of England Partnership; Great Pulteney Street Residents public meeting over the closure of the bridge to buses; a panel discussion with Peter Hendy, Transport Commissioner for London during the Treasure & Transform Exhibition at the Octagon; Cllr. Charles Gerrish, then Cabinet Minister for Transport, B&NES and First Group.

In **January** we held a public meeting with Stephen Morris, General Manager of Bus Users UK as guest speaker. He explained how bus services are managed and the limitations of the regulatory framework in effectively representing bus users.

In **April** we attended Bus Users UK AGM in Hove. The guest speaker was Caroline Lucas MP, leader of the Green Party. She talked about the role public transport has in sustaining a fairer society and its contribution to a healthy environment. She expressed a wish to see more integrated transport networks and more investment in bus services. Roger French of Brighton and Hove Bus Company proposed five principles for success: high frequency 'turn up and go' services, value for money, vehicle investment, customer services and marketing.

In **July** we were invited to meet a team from the Competition Commission during their visit to Bath. They are investigating the state of competition in the bus market and asked for our response to their suggested remedies. On their website www.competitioncommission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2010/localbus you can see our responses.

In **September** we met Tony McNiff First MD Bristol, Bath and the West and Simon Newport Regional Network Manager who is involved in marketing. We had a constructive exchange of views and they are writing to us with a summary of a number of issues we raised which they said they would look at which they hoped they might be able to take forward. They stressed the

importance of reporting complaints promptly as it was difficult to follow them up if they were received too long after the incident. Our website has a form for recording these and it also provides a body of evidence of problems.

In **October** we are attending B&NES Public Transport Liaison Group at the Guildhall.

We are meeting Cllr. Roger Symonds the new Cabinet Minister for Transport and hope to meet all the bus operators over the next few months.

Bus Users UK are planning a Bus Surgery in Bath and we will let you know when that date is confirmed.

We have been gradually building up our profile. The Bath Chronicle continues to give coverage to the issues we raise. We are frequently contacted by the TV companies for responses to transport issues.

Finally: We need your help! Bus passengers clearly have plenty to say about their services but it's no good having a moan at the bus stop. We need the problems to be logged on our website.

We are printing comment cards to hand out at bus stops and to passengers and we need volunteers to carry a small supply of the cards to hand out to passengers and promote the website. If any of you can help with this in your area please speak to us at the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you on November 9th.