



NEWSLETTER No 3, Autumn/Winter 2012

Dear Member,

Welcome to our Autumn/Winter Newsletter.

A couple walking through Southgate recently was overheard saying "I can't imagine why anyone needs to use their car here when the buses are so good!"

Needless to say, they were visitors.

Sadly the same sentiment still doesn't apply to residents forced to pay high fares. Using the family car is still a much cheaper option. The message from the operators is that they want increased usage. BBUG raises the issue of fares at every opportunity but, to date, we haven't managed yet to convince the bus operators that lower fares will not only increase usage but also profitability, strengthen their green credentials, reduce congestion etc.

We will continue to press home the argument which seems really to be a no-brainer especially as, according to Bus Users UK, where First have reduced fares in other parts of the country there has been a consequent rise in usage.

It's been a half-year of mixed progress.

There are clear signs that there is beginning to be a change in the mindset of central and local government about the importance of buses as part of an effective, integrated transport strategy. This is encouraging.

BBUG attended the **Bath Transport Strategy Conference in September**. Cllr Roger Symonds, B&NES Cabinet Member for Transport in his opening address underlined the overriding transport hierarchy that guides council policy – pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, distribution and finally, the private car.

Peter Hendy, Bath resident and MD of Transport for London, gave the keynote speech. He outlined how experiences in London might be applied to Bath. The challenge of the Olympics had shown that a 'modal shift' – getting people out of their cars onto other forms of transport is possible. Obviously Bath's circumstances are different but the principle applies that if the right elements are in place – affordability, reliability, attractiveness, then such a shift could be achieved here.

BBUG attended the **West of England Bus Conference** in October. The keynote address was given by Norman Baker MP Parliamentary Under-

Secretary of State at the Dept. for Transport who hoped to see people's perception of bus travel change. Modern vehicles with modern technology such as smart tickets and information provision was crucial.

There also appears to be a greater emphasis on marketing and customer relations. BBUG is represented on First's new **Customer Panel** for Bath. Head of Customer Services Natacha Tagholm said these will be regular strategic level meetings where First hope to explain changes and innovations in the pipeline but also to obtain feedback from bus users and local interest groups. A customer promise has been introduced which allows for a claim for compensation if a bus service fails to meet specified parameters. A form is available at the bus station and will be posted on BBUG's website.

The next **Customer Panel** meeting is **January 9th 2013** so please contact BBUG if there is any issue you would like us to raise. (secretary@bath-bus-users.org.uk) or c/o Elm Place Ltd., 21 Stall Street, Bath BA1 1QF.

BBUG had a useful discussion with Cllr Roger Symonds about ways in which bus travel could be promoted to achieve a positive image. We hope to have more on this later.

All the operators need to advertise the range of ticketing options.

We also stressed the shortcomings of the information centre in the Bus Station. This should be a much more high profile centre as the main portal to bus services in Bath in line with the adjacent improvements to the railway station. It should be open on Sunday and later in the evening.

Information must be readily available. The service is currently inadequate with staff uninformed and frequently unhelpful.

Passengers recently had problems getting timetables for First changes on November 4th. These came into effect again without consultation creating a mix of benefits but difficulties for commuters, children trying to get home from school, delays and gaps connecting to other transport services. It is intended that future proposals will be available at Customer Panel meetings giving interest groups the chance to have input.

The Real Time Information displays are useful but do not display information on buses outside the station.

Please check our website for updates on news and events. Please also try and get the word out that we need more members as we are all working hard on behalf of bus passengers but we need support and funds!

We hope you all had a very Happy Christmas and send you our Best Wishes for the New Year.