
Newsletter of BABUS - Bedford Area Bus Users' Society, Summer 2012

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OUR PICTURE THIS ISSUE

This is the same bus stop that in an earlier issue showed the display 8 ft above the pavement. Thanks to member Alan Sprod of Flitwick who tells us that as far as he could tell all stops through Flitwick, Ampthill and Houghton Conquest now have new timetable cases with composite bespoke timetables. These name the stop, have a location map, list all services and then list all times from the stop. The display at Flitwick railway station, northbound, is shown here. BABUS has been campaigning for better bus stop information through Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.



Display at Flitwick railway station, northbound

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership year runs from 1 April until the following 31 March. **To continue to receive all the benefits of membership**, renew your membership by sending a cheque for £3 (£12 for group membership) payable to **BABUS**, to the Membership Secretary, Simon Norton, 6 Hertford Street, Cambridge, CB4 3AG.

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope if you would like a receipt by post; alternatively ask for a receipt by email.

For enquiries, contact BABUS through the website at <http://babus.org.uk> or on the BABUS Enquiry Line 0871 218 2287 or 0871 218 BBUS (24 hour answering and fax service).

NOTE THIS IS A NEW NUMBER. If you leave a message and would like us to call you back, please leave a phone number. You may send a fax to 0871 218 3293

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

At the recent Annual General Meeting I was appointed Chairman of BABUS for 2012-2013. I have been Secretary in recent years but, as committee members know, was unable to continue in that role due to the ever-present Mr Parkinson! I am humbled at being asked to take the Chair and with our good committee around me I am sure BABUS will continue successfully.

With the current Olympic atmosphere, successes are the "in" story – BABUS will never be awarded a Gold Medal or even a Bronze but it can recognise that 2011/12 was a successful year – buses returned to the outer part of the Bus Station in Bedford (see page 6), we supported the successful bid by Bedford Borough Council for funding out of the Better Buses Fund, we pestered C.B.C about bus stop information which has resulted in new data being progressively supplied – Ampthill and Flitwick being the first areas, we have been consulted on North Beds Rural changes and have held regular liaison meetings with Grant Palmer Passenger Services – the new boys on the block. We have made firm contact with friends next door – Northampton, Stevenage, North Herts, Milton Keynes and St Neots user groups and, to compare issues, have met with Brighton Area Bus Watch.

BABUS has also responded to the Department of Transport stakeholder consultation on the proposed, combined, Thameslink and Great Northern rail franchise. Our submission concentrated, naturally, on perceived current weaknesses in providing access to railway stations by bus. In Bedfordshire bus-rail connectivity at some stations is poor; at some stations non-existent. Hence, any progress from the present low standard of provision would be welcome.

Membership numbers are stable with one new member from Bedford but, through the increasing number of website enquiries, I hope we continue to grow in 2012.

Godfrey Willis (Chairman)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2012

The Annual General Meeting took place in Bedford Central Library on 16th June and was one of our most successful AGMs of recent times. Both Bedford Borough Council and Grant Palmer Passenger Services were represented (by Chis

Pettifer, Head of Transport, for the former and Grant himself for the latter).

In his Report, the outgoing Chairman had, amongst other things, highlighted the need to strengthen the committee and he again asked for volunteers. The full details of that Report were included in the last newsletter.

The Treasurer proposed that from 2013/14 the committee be authorised to increase subscription for ordinary members by up to £2. This was carried. The original BABUS constitution has been updated and the revised constitution was accepted by those present.

The Committee were returned unopposed but Godfrey Willis was nominated for Chairman and Peter Williams as Secretary – both were elected. Martin Brookes, who has been undertaking the publicity work for the Society was appointed Publicity Officer. Alma Tebbutt who, regrettably, has been indisposed for much of the past year will remain on the Committee and it is hoped that she will be back with us in the near future.

Following the official business, the gathering was addressed by Stephen Morris of Bus Users U.K who spoke in some detail on many aspects of their work.

SUMMARY REPORT OF LIAISON MEETING BETWEEN BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL AND BABUS HELD ON 13 AUG 2012 from Peter Williams

Highlights of the meeting: there was brief discussion on a number of points carried forward from previous meetings, including:

- Delay in commissioning rising bollards on the bus lane at Shortstown/New Cardington;
- Supply of bus stop defect reporting cards to BABUS;
- Issues over North Beds rural services including stopping arrangements at Harrold Institute;
- Impact of the scheduled closure of Bromham Road for gas main replacement

North Beds rural services (including Wilden, Riseley and Souldrop issues)

There was an exchange of views on a wide number of concerns, including: impact of minor

changes of 23 July 2012; passenger loadings on route 29 to St Neots following reduction to a Thursdays only service; availability of disabled-friendly vehicles; reduction in 152 service to Riseley resulting in a three hour gap for passengers who had travelled to Bedford.; possibility of improving services for passengers at Souldrop.

Returning buses to the Bus Station

Proposals for publicising this 'good news' story were considered. BABUS members aired concerns over apparent abuse of the revamped area of the Bus Station, mostly by private car drivers.

Bus Shelters in Bedford

The programme for installing some 79 new bus shelters has been almost completed.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL – REPORT OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT STRATEGY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOPS – OBJECTIVES AND BARRIERS, PRIORY HOUSE, CHICK- SANDS, 14 JUNE 2012, 2 JULY 2012

Report by Peter Williams

The CBC Passenger Transport Strategy forms part of the Local Transport Plan 3 which the authority is required to establish. LTP3 has to create a framework for transport planning to 2026.

The Passenger Transport Strategy has to examine a range of transport needs:

- Travel to Work;
- Travel to school and FE colleges;
- Access to Healthcare;
- Access to Services;
- Access to Retail;
- Access to Leisure;

The Strategy has to take account of all modes of public transport including buses, rail, taxis, and council-operated vehicles.

The Workshops were required to identify current barriers and opportunities affecting access and travel. There included: a lack of joined-up action between public transport, structural planning and economic development; the perception that bus services were inherently unreliable, difficult to access in terms of route information and

timings, and did not fit with journey requirements in terms of times and destinations.

It was thought that the core bus network across most of the authority area was satisfactory but required improvement especially in terms of connectivity between bus-bus and bus-rail. It was acknowledged that the authority area was deficient in that it contained no secondary healthcare facility, limited FE provision, no significant retail or administrative centre and no significant transport interchange. There was heavy reliance on private cars and limited work opportunities within Central Bedfordshire.

The Workshops were then invited to identify objectives for a 15 year planning framework. Priorities were thought to be access to information about available services, interavailability of ticketing and effective interconnectivity between modes.

Stakeholder Workshop 2 was concerned with clarifying policies and identifying potential actions.

Key criteria were considered and agreed. Given existing and future resource constraints prioritisation of issues was not only desirable but essential. There was scope for improved integration and coordination dependent on the extent to which the local authority could engage with and influence public transport providers.

Rural transport issues were a major challenge.

It was thought that only the local authority could attempt to change the perception of public transport as an alternative to the private car, by marketing and promotion but that this demanded an appropriate product quality in terms of user convenience and education.

Further workshops will deal with policy and strategy leading to the establishment of a confirmed policy by early 2013.

NOTE ON BUS INFORMATION PROVISION AND OTHER STATISTICS

contributed by Peter Williams

Under LTP3 each local authority must determine what local bus information should be provided and the means of communication.

The Transport Act 2000 Section 140 lays a duty on the local authority to make information available on bus services and provides that they may recover any costs incurred from operators.

National Audit Office identified, in 2005, steps to be taken to improve bus services and attract more bus passengers, citing marketing, promotion and passenger information provision as key.

Local authority spend on public transport per head of population in 2010-11 (figures from Audit Commission) was: Milton Keynes Council £39; Herts County Council £30; Bedford Borough Council £29; Central Bedfordshire Council £25.

Spend on supporting bus services per head of population was: Milton Keynes Council £18; Herts County Council £14; Bedford Borough Council £12; Central Bedfordshire Council £1. Milton Keynes is perceived to be a city dominated by the private car.

Annual bus patronage in terms of journeys per head of population per year is estimated to be (using DfT reports for 2010-11 and ONS population projections): Bedford Borough 44; Milton Keynes 37; Hertfordshire 23; Central Bedfordshire 5. Brighton Borough which has a reputation for providing good bus services has 147 journeys per head of population per year.

For 2012-13 council tax rates on a Band D property are (DCLG data): Milton Keynes £1392; North Herts District £1482; Bedford Borough £1564; Central Bedfordshire £1647.

RESPONSE TO THAMESLINK, SOUTHERN & GREAT NORTHERN FRANCHISE

The combined Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise will bring together all of the services currently operated by two franchisees: First Capital Connect (FCC), in 2013 and from July 2015 Southern (including Gatwick Express). In addition, some services will transfer from Southeastern in 2014 and 2018. The franchise will be responsible for delivering rail services across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Greater London, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Surrey and Sussex. There will be a wide and diverse range of destinations served such as Ashford, Bedford, Brighton, Cambridge, Chichester, Eastbourne, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport, Hastings, Horsham, King's Lynn, Lewes, Littlehampton, Luton, Luton Airport, Peterborough, Portsmouth, St Albans, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City.

BABUS was encouraged to make a submission by Stephen Morris, the speaker at our AGM

Here are a summary of the main points in our submission:

Railway stations within the franchise proposals that are of interest to BABUS are Bedford Midland, Flitwick and Harlington on the Midland Main Line, and Sandy, Biggleswade and Arlesey on the Great Northern (East Coast Main Line) route. The proposed station at Wixams is of interest to BABUS.

BABUS currently has limited contact with First Capital Connect, the present franchise holder, through the Bedford Station Travel Plan Steering Group and the Flitwick Station Travel Plan Steering Group. These are facilitated by Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council, respectively. BABUS works closely with Bedford Commuters' Association (BCA) the rail user group for Midland Main Line. BABUS recognises that BCA are best placed to liaise with First Capital Connect over matters concerning rail passengers.

Questions to be considered in the consultation document

Q.27 What are the priorities that respondents consider should be taken into account to improve the passenger experience of using these services?

The Department is asking for the views of stakeholders on improvements in quality of service. BABUS considers that this should embrace the wider journey experience.

Q.29 What is important to stakeholders in the future use and improvements in stations?

BABUS welcomes the recognition given to 'whole end-to-end journey made by rail passengers including transit to the station'. That concept, widely accepted as the norm in continental Europe is totally absent in Bedfordshire at the present time.

Q.30 What priorities would respondents give to car parking and cycling facilities at locations where these are fully used?

BABUS maintains that there would be less pressure on car parking at stations and in adjacent residential areas if there were sensible and adequate bus services designed to meet the needs of passengers.

Q.31 What sort of ticketing products and services would you expect to see delivered

BABUS suggests that smart tickets should cover rail and connecting bus services. And vice-

versa. When people want to make affordable weekday trips to London they are likely to find that by the time evening peak restrictions have been lifted there are no buses to get home from the station. This is surely one area where cooperation between the train and bus operators could open up new opportunities for travel.

GOOD NEWS!

Good news stories, like rural bus journeys, seem to be few and far between these days but, as Stephen Morris saw for himself when he addressed our AGM, we think we have one!

Returning buses to their rightful place

Bedford like many other county towns and market centres has hosted bus services since the early years of the twentieth century. As they developed over time they tended to be separated into “town” and “country” routes – the former serving bus stops on streets adjacent to the town centre whilst the latter acquiring a purpose built bus station.

By the late 1950s Bedford’s Bus Station at St. Peter’s was grossly overcrowded: it had been built for the Eastern National Omnibus Company and had passed through reorganisation to United Counties and their partners. In December 1960, as part of the revamping of a section of the town centre a new greatly enlarged facility was provided at Allhallows, the inner area being for United Counties with the outer section for other operators and coach routes.

As the years progressed, services were reduced or withdrawn altogether, many of the smaller operators ceased to run and the bus station had plenty of vacant space. In due course pedestrianisation of much of the town centre saw the transfer of the town routes to the bus station, adjacent to, or using, bays no longer occupied by country services. Furthermore the reappearance of a growing number of small operators covering tendered services replacing the commercial routes no longer produced a clear cut “town” and “country” split. One final piece to the jigsaw was the introduction of taxi ranks and car parking for blue badge holders on the outer area.

Bedfordshire as a county had begun to disappear with the formation of Luton Unitary Authority and by this time (2010) the remainder had been further split with Bedford Borough Council under the leadership of a directly elected Mayor becoming the Local Authority covering the town and surrounding villages.

Both the initial Mayor (who sadly died in office) and his successor have been pro public transport and BABUS has grown a strong relationship with council officers.

Given the situation where further tendered rural services run by new operators were using on-street termini in the town whilst the purpose-built bus station housed taxis and parked cars, BABUS decided that it was time for action.

During the summer of 2010, Colin Franklin, BABUS Vice-Chairman addressed the issue by undertaking research into alternative areas for cars and taxis to release the space in the bus station back to its former use. Questions that he addressed were:

- Are there alternative car parks nearby?
- What facilities are provided there for disabled drivers?
- Can additional spaces be made, if so, how many?
- What other taxi rank facilities are there or could there be made available?

Having identified spaces far in excess of the current number in use within the bus station and following meetings with current bus operators a comprehensive report was forwarded to the Local Authority in August and a joint meeting held in October. Further meetings with the Borough Parking Manager and the Head of Transport began to produce positive results and it is rewarding to note the collaborative way in which things moved forward.

Consultation by the Borough with other interested parties – taxi drivers, disabled groups, bus operators, etc. ensured the plan moved forward, albeit slowly. The awarding of several rural tendered routes to Grant Palmer Passenger Services from August 2011 with on-street termini finally brought the issue to a head and in due course road layout plans were produced, legal notices published, works carried out and from the beginning of June 2012 the taxis generally moved out (a small rank remains for coach service connections), the blue badge spaces were reduced in number with alternative parking being commissioned, new shelters had been erected and buses were back in their rightful place!

In Bedford, all bus services now use the bus station and as this item was being written, the Local Authority announced that money had been found to further enhance the facilities in the area.

ROUTE CHANGES

There have been very few changes recently in the area covered by BABUS.

Route 29 between St Neots and Pavenham was introduced only last year as a result of a review of bus services in Bedford Borough, and was running 3 times a day and replacing a former weekly market bus. Now it is back to a weekly service. If you want to use it, be at St Neots market square for 12.15 on a Thursday – there are plenty of connections with other services in the Bedfordshire villages. (Thanks to Cambridgeshire Campaign for Better Transport for this item about route 29)

VITAL ROLE OF THE BUS TO THE BRITISH ECONOMY

Published by CILT: 4 July 2012

Bus companies announced proposals for a discounted travel scheme for young unemployed people, as a new report revealed the crucial link between buses, jobs and economic growth.

The *Buses & Economic Growth Report* found that there are 2½ million regular bus commuters with a further 1 million who use the bus as 'back-up'. This combined total, around 12% of the working population, accounts for around £64 billion of economic output every year, in addition to the significant direct employment created by the bus industry itself. The study, undertaken by the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds, brings together for the first time an assessment of the economic contribution of the bus in growing the economy, connecting people with jobs, helping businesses and supporting the vitality of our city centres.

Its publication coincides with an announcement by Greener Journeys, an alliance of leading bus companies encouraging people to make more sustainable travel choices, to develop a discounted travel scheme to help the one million unemployed young people to access jobs, further education and training more easily. Details of the scheme being developed by the leading bus operators will be announced in the autumn.

Sir Brian Souter, at the time Chief Executive of Stagecoach Group, said: "For many young people, the bus is the only form of affordable transport available to them and they depend on it to get to their education or training. The discounted travel scheme being developed by

the leading bus operators could make the vital difference between a life of worklessness and getting a job, helping more young people to make a better start in life. This shows just how important the bus is to the future of our country."

This new report highlights the vital role the bus plays in the wider economy, including:

- More than five billion bus journeys are made each year - a billion of those bus journeys are made to work.
- More people commute by bus than all other forms of public transport combined.
- Bus commuters generate £64 billion of economic output.
- People use the bus to make shopping and leisure trips to a value of £27.2 billion, of which £21.5 billion is spent in our towns or cities centres.
- 1 in 10 bus commuters would be forced to look for another job if they could no longer commute by bus.
- More than 50% of students are frequent bus users and depend on the bus to get to their education or training.
- An estimated 400,000 people are in work or in a better job because of the availability of a bus service, equating to £400 million additional gross value added (GVA) per annum.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

BABUS officers will be representing the Society at the following meetings. If you have any comments please get in touch.

6 Sep Bedford Station Travel Plan Steering Group

18 Sep Grant Palmer liaison

26 Sep Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership Forum

6 Oct BABUS Exec Committee Meeting

18 Oct Central Beds Council liaison

Dates to be confirmed:

Flitwick & Harlington Station Travel Plan Steering Group
Stagecoach liaison
Bedford Better Buses
Central Beds – Passenger Transport Strategy consultation