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## **Newsletter of BABUS - Bedford Area Bus Users' Society. Winter 2008**

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### **WEBSITE AND BULLETIN BOARD**

Our main preferred way of communicating with you, the Membership, at least those of you who have access to the internet, is through our website and bulletin board. Please register by going to <http://babus.org.uk>.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Annual General Meeting will be held in **Bedford Central Library, Harpur Street, Bedford**, on **Saturday 10 May from 2 pm to 4pm**. We are fortunate to get as our speaker Phil Tonks who is the Operations Officer at Bus Users UK. Previously known as National Federation of Bus Users, Bus Users UK is an independent group which was formed to give bus passengers a voice. As it says on their website at <http://www.bususers.org>, they have the ear of all the major bus companies and a lot of the smaller ones too, of their trade organisation and of the Government and local authorities. Light refreshments will be available.

### **COMMITTEE**

Due to family and business matters, a number of our members have had to leave the Committee. In consequence there are a number of vacancies on BABUS Committee. We specifically need help with publicity and the website. Please call the enquiry line on 0870 486 1369 if you would like to help.

### **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 **or come to the AGM and renew there**.

**Contact BABUS through the website at <http://babus.org.uk> or on the BABUS Enquiry Line on 0870 486 1369 (24 hour answering and fax service)**. If you leave a message and would like us to call you back, please leave a landline telephone number. We regret we may not be able to respond to mobile numbers. You may also send a fax to 0870 486 1369

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## **IN THE NEWS: STOP PRESS**

### **Extension of free travel for bus pass holders from 1 April 2008**

Thanks to John Smith of Sharnbrook for this news item. If you are over 60 or unable to drive due to a disability, you will be entitled to travel on ordinary buses anywhere in England free of charge after 09.30 Monday to Friday and all day on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. However, for journeys entirely within the Borough of Bedford (which includes for example Sharnbrook to Bedford), these timing restrictions will not apply and the pass will be valid all day, every day. (This is already available in Mid and South Bedfordshire in their own areas)

Existing pass holders should receive their new passes by post during March provided they supplied a new photo last autumn. Other people who qualify but do not currently have a pass and those who did not send in a new photo should call at Bedford Town Hall as soon as possible with proof of residence (e.g. Council tax bill) or their existing bus pass and a recent passport size photo.

The current ban on pass holders using the frequent X5 bus from Bedford to Milton Keynes and beyond will no longer apply. So day trips even to Oxford on the X5 will become a possibility. Then when you are away on holiday, use your pass to ride round the Lake District, the Cornish Riviera or anywhere in England!

## **IN THE NEWS: ON THE RADIO**

In the last issue of *BABUS Newsletter*, we had an article 'Bus Crisis in East Bedfordshire' by Frank Hendrix. He reported that in the middle of December 2006 an announcement had been made by Stagecoach announcing that a number of local bus routes were to be cancelled. The area affected was mainly in East Bedfordshire around Biggleswade, Sandy and Potton, although there were a few effects in other parts of the county.

No sooner had we gone to press than the news got out that Stagecoach planned from November to cut its hourly J1 route between Bedford and Flitwick. The rural route from Bedford to Harrold and Wymington was also under threat unless the County Council offered financial support.

Stagecoach said no decision had been finalised. In a statement to the BBC, the company said: "Stagecoach East is not pulling out of the Bedford area, but changes are being made as a

result of low passenger numbers. Bedfordshire County Council has the ability to support these services but has chosen not to do so at the present time. As such Stagecoach East has had to assess the network it provides." A debate ensued in which the County Council got involved and Frank Hendrix our own Vice-Chairman. The BBC quoted Frank: "The implications are that previously if you used to have a direct service, now you have to change buses," said the group's spokesman Frank Hendrix. Frank also was reported as saying that fares would go up as direct services were split between two operators.

Frank was also a guest of the editor of Biggleswade Chronicle at BigglesFM, an East Bedfordshire local radio station, on 17 December, for about two hours. He writes: "We covered the particular problems of the area. Being primarily rural, the issues are different from towns like Bedford. We discussed the situation following on from the drastic bus cuts earlier in the year. With a multiplicity of bus companies there's a total lack of integration with many journeys requiring two or more buses. In practice the consequence can be waiting times for connections of an hour or more. Bus fares have rocketed for such journeys too. Integration with rail services is effectively non-existent. I believe the wrong priority is being given to the introduction of real-time information. The priority should be in rural areas rather than urban areas. The new national bus pass scheme from April may make the situation worse for many people in our area as they will be restricted to travelling after 09:30 unless our councils will put in extra funding.

"The outlook for rural services is bleak unless the government changes the system and puts more money and regulation in place. Right now there is no real incentive for people who are liable to pay fares to use buses. I certainly wouldn't pay the high ticket prices for the poor and unreliable service."

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BEDFORDSHIRE**

Last summer, the government published its preferred option for unitaries in Bedfordshire. Following representations made by some of the authorities affected, a further consultation is taking place. Until we hear the outcome of the consultation, we cannot be certain as to what the outcome may be for Bedfordshire local authorities. We feel it's important that this uncertainty be resolved quickly. As soon as we have further information we will let you have our

thoughts. In the meantime the situation remains that the County Council has certain statutory duties relating to ensuring provision of public transport, and the districts (Bedford Borough and Mid-Bedfordshire) are able but not obliged to offer subsidies. BABUS will be talking to all authorities as necessary.

## **BEDFORDSHIRE TRANSPORT TOKENS SCHEME FOR YOUTH**

Thanks to the Members of Youth Parliament, the Youth Opportunities Fund and Mid Beds District Council, Mid Beds Transport Token Scheme is now available across the whole of Bedfordshire.

Members of the Bedfordshire South Constituency with the support of Katy Henman (Mid Beds Youth Participation Officer) completed round 3 of the Youth Opportunities Funding and were granted £50,000 to extend the Mid Beds Transport Token Scheme across Bedfordshire.

Mid Beds District Council manages the scheme, which aims to tackle rural isolation and improve access to activities for young people and youth engagement projects by providing transport tokens for young people to use for various forms of transport, including Stagecoach buses, First Capital Connect trains and a range of taxi operators. Fares are paid in transport tokens, which can then be redeemed by the bus company (via National Transport Tokens).

Thanks to the success of the Mid Beds Transport Token Scheme and the Youth Opportunities Fund the Mid Beds Transport Token Scheme has now been extended to be the Bedfordshire Transport Token Scheme.

The scheme is open to youth projects and organisations to join, providing they are offering youth engagement activities for 8 - 19 year olds who live, or go to school, in Bedfordshire.

Projects that are eligible to join are those which provide youth engagement activities. The scheme does not cover transport of unsupervised leisure activities, formal training, one to one support services or formal education. Examples of eligible projects are:

- After school activities
- Youth action projects
- Sports activities and events
- Volunteering
- Music/drama projects
- Youth Service events and activities
- Supervised youth clubs/meetings
- Young people accessing services

Environmental projects  
Scouts/Guides

Young people are not individually eligible to join. Projects and organisations join the scheme on behalf of the young people.

Projects that join the scheme are required to complete log sheets, detailing how many tokens they have used. For more information, the contact person is Katy Henman at [katy.henman@midbeds.gov.uk](mailto:katy.henman@midbeds.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01462 611008.

## **MEETINGS WITH STAGECOACH**

Your Bedford Area Bus Users' Society continues to hold quarterly liaison meetings with Stagecoach East. Stagecoach is very keen to hear BABUS's views and makes every effort to act on suggestions made. BABUS members are welcome to submit items for the agenda.

Two meetings have been held since the last issue of this newsletter, hosted by Zöe Paget, Operations Manager, Stagecoach East and Mark Hind, X5 Route Manager. They have been attended by Stephen Sleight, Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership Officer and around five BABUS officers and committee members.

Matters from earlier meetings revisited included:

**Cameras on buses:** they were standard on new vehicles but the cost meant that they could not be retro-fitted on older buses;

**Revisions to the Bedford cross-town services.** Services 1 to 5 were showing improvements and had been well-received. There was a problem with Service 6 timings at Shortstown related to school peaks. An issue had been identified around Thomas More School and an extra, dedicated, bus was to be provided.

**BABUS Posters:** Stagecoach agreed to accept a supply of posters for display on buses and at the Bus Station.

### **Changes to Services in North Bedfordshire**

Zöe Paget, Operations Manager, Stagecoach reported, again, that routes 124/125/126 would continue to be operated by Stagecoach until Easter, at least. She indicated that the continuing uncertainties around local government restructuring in Bedfordshire were impacting on Stagecoach operations and planning.

**X5 Matters.** It was reported that there were in early autumn problems with X5 reliability

resulting from a combination of bad weather, accidents and road closures; BABUS asked if it was possible to improve on-board toilet provision on X5. Stagecoach advised that the cost of replacement and repairs was an absolute barrier to re-instatement across the X5 fleet. There was some discussion on provision of toilet stops at strategic locations and times. 'Black boxes' had been fitted to the X5 fleet and that data had been collected over a two-week period. The results were being analysed and was expected that much valuable information would result.

Simon Norton had raised a large number of detailed points relating to the X5 Cambridge-Bedford-Oxford service, directly with Stagecoach. Zöe Paget had provided a detailed response to Simon Norton but it was appropriate that she should summarise her responses for the benefit of the wider BABUS membership: Suggested connections at the Oxfordshire end – these had been referred to the Stagecoach Scheduling Manager;

New Parkside Cambridge stop – there was a benefit for passengers connecting to/from National Express services;

Renaming the former Cambridge McDonalds stop since McDonalds closed some time ago; MK Coachways – resiting to a temporary facility at Campbell Park whilst the existing interchange is rebuilt and upgraded;

Stops in Woodstock Road, Oxford;

Time of last service from Bedford to Cambridge and back – consideration may be given to running the last journey from Cambridge to Bedford later;

Cambridgeshire Real Time Information – lessons were being learned from the partnership with Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It was envisaged that information would be provided via panel displays at key bus stops and via mobile phone texting at the majority of stops;

In response to a query from Stephen Sleight, Zöe Paget confirmed that, where appropriate, rail tickets were valid on X5.

**Planets Services Update:** Zöe reported that Pluto, Mercury, Saturn services were running smoothly and that this period of stability was welcome. Passenger loadings were fairly steady. Venus services would be affected by road closures in Cranfield in February. An early morning inbound Pluto service was calling at Bedford railway station.

Some upgrading of Mars stops would be undertaken shortly.

**Kingsway Bus Lane:** Peter Williams had observed that this bus lane was not being used, as intended. Frank Hendrix had suggested that there were inherent safety-related problems with the design. Zöe Paget confirmed that it would be in order for BABUS to raise the matter of phased traffic lights with the County Council.

## **MEETING WITH BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, 11 OCTOBER 2007**

Your Bedford Area Bus Users' Society holds four meetings a year with the County Council. At the meeting held at County Hall, Bedford, on 11 Oct 2007, the meeting was chaired by Simon Ayres Transport Officer, Bedfordshire County Council. BABUS fielded five members and there was also present Stephen Sleight, Transport Officer of Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership.

One of the important items on the agenda as far as BABUS and its members are concerned was the changes to Bus Services in North Bedfordshire and between Bedford and Ampthill. Simon spoke at length about proposed changes, describing work being undertaken by the County to ameliorate the impact, especially on passengers living in outlying villages. He said this work embraced two different geographical areas.

Stagecoach had announced a consolidation of Routes J1 and J2, leaving Houghton Conquest and Maulden without direct services to Bedford. These changes would take effect on 5 Nov 07. The County Council had undertaken surveys to establish passenger movements and evaluate the impact of J1 withdrawal. Stagecoach changes would result in a reduction from 4 vehicles to 1 for the J service. He confirmed that the County Council would provide alternative services. Discussions were under way with Grant Palmer and agreement was close to being secured. The County was working with Grant Palmer because the company had produced plans to introduce a commercial Clophill to Bedford service that was being developed to additionally serve Maulden and Ampthill, and also existing Grant Palmer Route 200 would need to be amended to enhance the service between Clophill and Flitwick. Simon said that it was intended to publish an area timetable, with maps, in the longer term. The outcome should be a combination of Grant Palmer and Stagecoach services which would provide two services per hour between Clophill and Bedford and two buses per hour between Ampthill / Flitwick and Bedford, with Grant Palmer's X42 additionally serving Houghton Conquest.

There was some discussion around the Wixams development, A6 realignment, provision of Stagecoach and Grant Palmer bus services, rail-bus interconnection, and related matters. Simon suggested that consideration was being given to extending the Elstow Park and Ride service to the Wixams in the long term, thus providing more balanced passenger loadings. It was agreed that the Wixams development should be a long-term agenda item.

Simon went on to describe major changes to Stagecoach services north of Bedford. The routes affected were 51 with 125/126 and M50. The County would have welcomed the opportunity to comment on Stagecoach's two proposals for the area at an earlier stage.

The matter had been referred to consultants who have been working on a scheme to provide a supported network for the villages around a commercial Stagecoach service.

It was also clear that there was no alternative commercial operator with a base that could provide access to North of Bedford. Furthermore, with the likely increase in tender costs, it was possible that some very small communities north-west of Bedford were at risk of losing a regular daily bus service.

It was revealed that Bedfordshire were talking to Northamptonshire about the possibility of community bus provision being arranged in conjunction with Rushden / Northamptonshire-based services.

Bedford DARTs were discussed and it appeared that there were diverging views within the County Council with some members for and some against continuation of DART. It was thought that it would be continued in some form but this would ultimately be a decision made by the politicians.

Other items: The County could not provide a capital grant for minor items such as bus shelters: maintenance of existing shelters was down to the parish council. The County Council recognized there was a need to improve shelters and their maintenance. Alma Tebbutt of BABUS said there was much concern in Great Barford over the state of the bus shelter which was being vandalized and was in a disgusting condition. Stephen Sleight said there could be money from RTP (Rural Transport Partnership) but the parish council would have to provide 25-30% of the funding.

East Beds Bus Services Update: Simon said the County were providing a free bus service between Wrestlingworth, Cockayne Hatley and

Potton using their own vehicle and driver. This ran twice daily.

One of the perennial problems with public transport is information and there is usually an item on the agenda on Transport Information Matters. Simon said the County Council planned to publish a new guide, with maps, in due course. Colin, BABUS Chairman had been reminded by John Smith, a BABUS member from Sharnbrook that there were still no non-Stagecoach notices at Bedford Bus Station; this would be raised with the appropriate authorities.

Other minor matters concerned the siting of certain bus stops. The next meeting will be on 24 January 2008.

## **MEETING WITH BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, 24 JAN 2008**

Present were four BABUS Committee members and Stephen Sleight. Simon Ayres, Bedfordshire County Council, reported on progress with Real-Time Information Systems. There were trials being undertaken in Cambridgeshire, supported by Bedfordshire. These showed that more work was necessary before the lessons could be applied in Bedfordshire. In due course it was likely that installations would first be considered for Bedford and the X5 Route.

A number of Stagecoach vehicles had been equipped for RTI (Real Time Information). RTI displays were probably only justified where the service frequency was greater than 15 minutes and only at carefully selected sites.

Simon reported on possible developments with the Arriva Route 97 service between Fairfield Park and Stotfold. Service improvements were being hampered by lack of progress in opening up the new road to Arlesey.

Matters such as North Beds DART & 152 route review, 124/125/126 Update, and, to some extent, Better Buses for You were now being overshadowed by a deficit of £1.1m that the County Council had to manage. Reduction of this deficit, which resulted from support for non-commercial services, could require withdrawal of evenings and Sunday services, curtailment of cross-boundary services and abandonment of worst performing routes.

The County Council was undertaking a systematic review across its territory which involved collecting and analysing data, then consulting parish councils and other stakeholders (and this included BABUS). The entire process could take 6-8 months.

## THREAT TO RURAL SERVICES (1)

Currently there is a serious threat to the efficient running of certain rural bus services caused by the inappropriate application of EU drivers' hours and tachograph legislation on some local bus services, due to take effect in December.

The new rules apply to services more than 50km (31.6miles) long and are intended to prevent long-distance coach and lorry drivers spending too long at the wheel on long motorway journeys. However local bus services do not involve spending hours on end driving along motorways, and it has always been accepted that bus drivers have an irregular pattern of shorter breaks to fit in around schedules.

Insisting on longer breaks at set times will make it impractical to schedule bus services efficiently, while tachographs, which are not needed on shorter regular services, will add significantly to the costs of running services over the limit.

Some bus companies are already splitting services to bring them within the limit. The government service that supervises this needs to be satisfied that any split is a real split. The numbers must be different and the drivers and buses must be different. There are many very convenient services longer than 31.6 miles though none in our area other than X5, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, St Neots and Cambridge. Brighton to Portsmouth is one such which takes people along the south coast road at a very slow speed, nothing like motorway traffic. But this will have to be split in such a way that it won't be identifiable to the bus users as one service. Our own X5 has been fitted with tachographs and treated according to the new regulations.

## THREAT TO RURAL SERVICES (2)

### **Buses, Shoes and Hitch-hikers by Simon Norton**

Recently I was talking to my friend Tom about how the implementation of the new European driving hours regulations were accelerating the disintegration of this country's rural bus network when he told me that he had encountered a similar situation elsewhere and, yes, the effects had been worse than I could imagine.

Tom said he had recently returned from a hitch-hiking trip in Douglas Adams's galaxy which had

included a visit to Frogstar World B at around the time of the Shoe Event Horizon. According to the description in Chapter 10 of "The Restaurant at the End of the Universe" given by Pizpot Gargravarr, shoe shops crowded out all other retail activity, leading to famine and a resolution that feet would never walk the planet again. In Chapter 8 the planet is described as "the most totally evil world in the Galaxy". However, according to Tom, Pizpot Gargravarr gave an oversimplified version of the events leading up to the Shoe Event Horizon, and Tom proceeded to tell me his version of what really happened.

[Notes explaining the various analogies are shown at the end.]

Following pressure from local authorities who were fed up of getting sued by pedestrians who had tripped up on their pavements, the Frogstar Union of Planetary Systems prepared a Directive on Pedestrian Safety which they hoped would deal with the problem.

Campaign groups representing walkers suggested that tripping up on pavements was a negligible problem compared with being run over by motor vehicles (1), and furthermore that to the extent that tripping up on pavements was a problem it would help if vehicles were stopped from parking there so that they weren't continually subjected to weights for which they were not designed. These suggestions were met with the total disdain that greets all ideas involving restrictions on motor vehicles for the benefit of those who don't use them (2).

A manufacturer came up with a high tech shoe which was guaranteed not to slip on even broken pavements, provided the shoe wasn't overused. To guard against the latter a chip was inserted into the shoe which, after a period of use, would activate a device that would make further walking so uncomfortable that the wearer would have to rest until the shoe could recover its non-slip feature.

FUPS came up with a draft directive that it should be illegal to sell pairs of shoes of other types. This led to immediate outrage from many sections of the public.

The poverty lobby said that many inhabitants couldn't afford these high tech shoes (3). The reply was that public safety was more important than money.

The countryside lobby said that country walking would become impossible because of the weight of the several pairs of shoes that inhabitants would have to take with them to cover a long

walk (4). The reply was that country walking was an elitist activity because few footpaths were usable by disabled inhabitants, and, indeed, local authorities were afraid of a lawsuit which, if lost, would require them to upgrade the footpath network so that it could be negotiated by wheelchair users. This issue encouraged developers to push all the harder for the draft directive because if the public were prevented from enjoying the countryside it would become easier for them to get permission to build on it.

The health lobby said that if inhabitants were prevented from going on long walks obesity would rise. The reply was that they could always go to gyms or playing fields.

In due course the directive was enacted. The opposition had become muted when a loophole was pointed out -- that the directive would only prohibit the sale of pairs of shoes, and that non-compliant single shoes could still be sold (5).

This loophole was officially justified as a reasonable compromise on the grounds that selling shoes in pairs was anti-competitive (as it effectively prevented inhabitants from buying a left shoe from one manufacturer and a right shoe from another) and discriminatory (against amputees or inhabitants with feet of different sizes) (6).

On all the other worlds of the Frogstar system, things were left at that. On Frogstar B, however, the relevant regulatory body ruled that the loophole could only be used if steps were taken to ensure that shoes were really being bought singly. For example retailers would not be allowed to sell both shoes of a pair in a single shop, nor to offer any kind of reservation facility whereby someone buying one shoe could ensure that its twin was available in another shop (7).

Many people reacted to this by wearing unpaired shoes. However, following a spate of shoe bomb attacks, originally on other issues but exacerbated by protestors against the way the new directive was being implemented, such people immediately became terrorist suspects liable to detention without trial for ever lengthening periods.

This led to increasing panic and a proliferation of shoe shops, as people desperately tried to find a pair of shoes they could walk in as long as they liked at a price they could afford (8). Many people tried to make their own shoes, with some of them falling victim to toxic adhesives (9). According to Tom, that was the real story behind the Shoe Event Horizon.

## Notes

(1) Travelling by bus is about 10 times safer than travelling by car, and in terms of the likelihood of killing or injuring someone else the discrepancy between the modes is even greater. Despite this, there are no proposals for driving hours regulation for motorists.

(2) Frogstar B resembles the UK here!

(3) The regulations require that all buses which are ever used on longer distance services should be fitted with tachographs to log running time. The cost of this has to be borne by the bus industry, even though the economics of many bus services are marginal and, in the case of supported services, local authorities are strapped for cash.

(4) Access to the countryside by public transport users may be greatly hindered by the legislation. In the Yorkshire Dales there is a service where the operator withdrew from a contract as a direct result of the legislation. A substitute operator was found, but the higher cost means it runs less often, and when it does run it's limited to a less scenic route because none of their tachograph-fitted coaches can go under an arch on the former route. For information about this see <http://www.dalesbus.org> and go to "Winter Dalesbus services".

(5) Buses on routes of less than 50km are not covered by the EU directive, so operators have been encouraged to split services up into sections of less than this distance.

(6) Several years ago the Office of Fair Trading announced that it would investigate issues of anti-competitive behaviour when routes, usually longer distance routes through the "territory" of more than one operator, were jointly operated. This led to the splitting up or even withdrawal of many such routes.

(7) The (UK) Vehicle & Operators Services Agency – or should it be called the Vehicle & Operators Government Oversight Network (VOGON) for reasons that will be obvious to any Douglas Adams fan – has ruled that to escape the EU directive buses must not only change drivers but all the passengers have to get off too, and no point to point through fares can be offered (even though many operators offer them for journeys that have never been covered by through buses). Whether the issue of area-wide tickets provides a way out of the last requirement is unclear.

(8) It may seem that the analogy breaks down here because we aren't getting a proliferation of buses as a result of the implementation of the EU directive. Rather, people are getting out of buses and into cars (see next note). But, with

the implications of climate change for the need to move to a low carbon economy, the effects of increasing car dependence can be quite as harmful as the effects of the Shoe Event Horizon on Frogstar B. See the new book *Oil Apocalypse* by Vernon Coleman for an (admittedly highly alarmist) prediction of the effects of over-dependence on fossil fuels.

(9) However, here the analogy is very much to the point. In recent decades people have indeed shifted from buses to “drive yourself”, and this has indeed had harmful effects on the air we breathe. Indeed, the reference to “poisoning by shoe manufacturers” is taken from the recent case of the writer Joan Brady who has received an out-of-court settlement from a shoe manufacturer as a result of damage to her health attributed to the solvents used.

## **CONCESSIONARY FARES: NEW SCHEME FROM APRIL**

The Act of Parliament to introduce free bus fares for over 60s and people with disabilities throughout England was passed during July.

From 1 April 2008 all people aged over 60 who are resident in England will be entitled to free bus travel on local bus services anywhere in England between 09.30 and 23.00 Monday to Friday and at any time at weekends or Bank Holidays. Local authorities may extend the hours of operation for their residents and extend the concession to other modes of transport if they wish. (As stated on page 2 of this Newsletter, Bedford has done so.) The cost of a cardholder’s travel will be financed by the district or unitary council covering the stop where the passenger boards. Long-distance coaches are excluded, though the half fare concession on National Express will continue. Trains and trams are not included though a local authority may include them if it wishes, but will not receive Government funding for any additional concession.

The rate of reimbursement to bus companies will be as at present based on the operator being no better and no worse off for the scheme. The Department for Transport will issue guidance as to who qualifies for a disabled card and how to define a local bus service. Such definition can preclude sightseeing services and park-&-ride as well as express services.

The passes are going to be smartcards which will be to a common design, featuring a rose logo and a red ribbon in a cross formation, which is supposed to represent the cross of St

George. Over 60s cards will feature a blue strip to the right-hand end and disabled cards will have this in orange. Above the ‘cross’ to the right-hand end will be space for the issuing authority’s identity. There will also be a unique identity number, a security hologram and an expiry date; card validity is a maximum of five years, though authorities can choose to set shorter expiry dates. The rear of the card will include terms and conditions and a phone number to call in the case of finding the card, but otherwise local authorities can use the back of the card as they like.

London Freedom cards which are currently available to all London residents will be designed similarly to be recognisable to bus drivers throughout England. However they will not be compatible with the rest of the country as they are based on London’s separate Oystercard which is an older system. London will become compatible by 2010. The Government is not funding the fitting of Smartcard readers on buses, and if they are not fitted Smartcards will just be shown to the driver which will mean that bus companies and local authorities will not get good quality information on the usage by users from outside the local area. Existing cards will be valid until 30 September 2008 but probably will not be valid outside the area where they have been issued. So if you want to go beyond the buses in your current scheme you will need to get a new card.

English cards will not be valid in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, but the Act does make provision for cards to become valid UK-wide at a later date.

The government is undertaking a campaign to widen awareness of the scheme. User groups like BABUS are being encouraged to ensure their members are aware of the scheme. To this end they have produced the following guide to answering the key questions.

### **1. What is the new national bus concession?**

Since 1st April 2006, eligible bus users have been guaranteed a minimum of free off-peak local bus travel within the local authority area in which they live. But from 1st April 2008, the new national bus concession will enable eligible users to get free off-peak travel on local buses anywhere in England.

### **2. Who’s eligible for the new concession?**

If you’re aged 60 or over or eligible disabled, you’re eligible.



### **3. When exactly is off-peak travel?**

Off peak hours are 9.30am until 11pm Monday - Friday, and all day weekends and bank holidays. For more information about eligibility, visit [www.direct.gov.uk/buspass](http://www.direct.gov.uk/buspass)

### **4. Why will time restrictions apply?**

Time restrictions apply in order to ensure that the scheme can be realistically funded and to manage capacity on services in some areas.

### **5. Will I be able to enjoy free travel everywhere within the UK?**

No, the concession will only apply within England.

### **6. Is it only applicable to buses?**

Yes. As a rule the concession applies just to bus travel, rather than ferries, trains or trams, scheduled coach services or community transport services not registered as local bus services and other special services. Check with your local authority to find out exactly what services are covered in your area.

### **7. If I visit an area that offers additional services, will I be entitled to them?**

Probably not. As a general rule, local authorities will only provide additional services for their own residents. Some authorities, however, *may* provide them –check with the relevant authority in the area you intend to travel.

### **8. I don't live in London, but I visit relatives there occasionally. Will I be able to enjoy the same benefits as a Freedom Pass Holder if I travel there?**

No. Because those benefits are paid for by the London authorities, only London Freedom Pass holders will be able to enjoy additional local travel on the tube, trains and trams. You will, however, be able to enjoy the statutory national concession of free off-peak bus travel when visiting the capital.

### **9. How do I get a concessionary travel pass?**

#### ***If you live outside Greater London***

It depends on your local authority. Some will be upgrading passes automatically, for example so if they've already contacted you to advise you that you fall into that category, you won't need to do anything. Other local authorities have already written to their residents asking them to return application forms. If you've received one, make sure you return it promptly to ensure you receive your new pass in good time. As part of the application you'll also need to prove your eligibility, that you're a permanent resident of your area and supply two recent passport-style photographs for your new pass. For full details

about how your local authority plans to issue passes, contact them for more information or look on their website.

#### ***If you live inside Greater London***

If you live inside Greater London and already have a Freedom Pass, you don't need a new pass until 2010, but you will need to get your existing Freedom Pass 're-stickered' before 1st April 2008. This re-stickered pass will allow access to free off-peak bus travel throughout England from 1st April 2008. Again, for full details about how your local authority plans to issue passes, contact them for more information or look on their website.

### **10. Do I need to get a new pass if I'm not planning to travel outside my local area?**

If you live outside Greater London, you must get a new pass to ensure that you're able to access free services across England from the 1st April. Without a new style pass, you won't be entitled to any free travel outside your local area. Your existing pass will still entitle you to free travel in your local area, but only for a limited time after which you will need a new national pass.

### **11. What will my pass look like?**

#### ***If you live outside Greater London***

You can see the two new types of passes on the website. The pass on the left, with the blue strip down the right-hand side, is for those aged 60 and over. The pass on the right, with the orange strip, is for eligible disabled people.

#### ***If you live inside Greater London***

Freedom Passes will have a new sticker applied to them, featuring the national concession logo and a hologram for additional security for when it is used as a "flash card" outside of London. There are a small number of Freedom Passes that have been issued by London Boroughs to people who don't meet the criteria for the national concession. These Freedom passes will have a sticker applied that clearly shows they are valid in London only.

### **12. When will people receive their new passes?**

Again, it depends on your local authority - but as a rule, the new passes will be issued shortly before 1st April 2008.

### **13. I'm finding all the differences in the different schemes confusing, what do I really need to know?**

The new national pass entitles you to free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England. This is the only service that is guaranteed. There may be additional services but you should check with the local travel authority that issued your pass for more details.

## **PROPOSALS FOR BUS USERS COMMITTEES**

The Government is proposing a statutory body to represent bus users.

Until now bus passengers outside London have had no official representation, even though rail users do. Passengers in London are already represented by London Travelwatch which represents national train, Underground tram and bus users not to mention taxis. We will bring you news as developments unfold.

### **LETTER FROM GREAT BARFORD**

**Alma Tebutt** who lives in Great Barford and is a member of BABUS's Committee writes her thoughts on various matters that concern Great Barford. Would anyone else like to put forward the issues in their own village or area? If so contact *BABUS Newsletter* editor Alan Hopkinson at [alanhop@another.com](mailto:alanhop@another.com)

#### ***Buses for Barford***

We like the X5 coach services through Great Barford. The half hourly timetable is acceptable at the moment. What I would like to propose should not affect the X5 service as it will be for the part of the community which is not at the moment being catered for.

#### ***Parents with pre-school children***

After parents have taken their children to school they might wish to take their younger children into town. It isn't happening at present because there is very poor access onto the X5 coaches. This is the only public transport available at present. Sometimes the coaches are very crowded with students and baggage taking up several seats. No room for a baby buggy or shopping trolley. Although I use this coach frequently, in the last 6 months I have seen only three mums with young children waiting for the bus. There are several pre-school groups in the village and the numbers are growing.

#### ***Elderly or Disabled***

Another section of the community is the elderly or disabled who might like to travel a little later. A shopping trolley is difficult to take on a coach when empty let alone when full. The access into the coach has several steep steps and the aisles are not wide enough to accommodate several bags of shopping.

There have been many changes to Bedford town bus services recently, 10 minute services around town, park and ride and the Planet buses but because Gt. Barford has the X5 it has been deemed we have enough. This is a

growing village. We have two schools and groups for pre school children. Houses are planned for several sites in the village with affordable housing included. Future building will include 26 houses in Green End Road with possibly 6 more and 54 in New Road, this is just the beginning. With the opening of the Great Barford bypass recently the building of more houses will start very soon 15 have already been erected in the last few months with more imminent.

An extra bus service would be useful to cover the local villages between St. Neots, Biggleswade, Sandy and Bedford all of which have a railway station. This bus service would ideally be cross country to include Shortstown, Cardington, Cople, Willington, Moggerhanger, Blunham, Roxton, Wilden and Renhold and of course Great Barford. Some children from these villages attend Alban Middle School. The only doctor's surgery is in Great Barford and a direct bus route might be very useful for patients in the other villages. A route through the village along the High Street where some bus stops still exist would be helpful. The one bus stop in use in Great Barford is on Bedford Road near the cross roads. This is approximately 1 mile from Barford Bridge. A long way to walk for some people.

These are my hopes for the future. I seem to be asking for a lot but I think it could work and if we cannot have it all at once something would be better than nothing.

#### ***Bus Shelter***

The Parish Council is now in possession of a copy of the plans for the bus shelter. Owing to the time taken to find them the Parish Council had to use existing money for other projects before the end of the financial year. It will take time to obtain estimates for the work involved but hopefully this project will be completed next year.

#### ***Ivel Sprinter***

The service to Tesco is about to commence its third year proving there is a need for more transport through Great Barford. By popular demand a second journey was started which is very well supported. These continue to run on the first and third Monday in the month. A regular timetable is printed in the monthly edition of *The Bridge* (Great Barford Parish Magazine).

Unfortunately the shortage of volunteer drivers is proving frustrating; extra services such as a journey into St. Neots are proving difficult to organise. If you have enquiries about the Ivel Sprinter please ring **Lesley 01234 870957**.

## LONDON TRAVELWATCH

London TravelWatch is officially called the London Transport Users Committee (LTUC). Its website at <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/> is worth a look. They have recently done a survey of passenger charters around the country which is particularly interesting. This can be found at <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/454/3016> Looking at what they do only gives a feeling of envy that there is no such body to represent bus users outside London. Let's see what comes of the government's proposal to create one! It is worth noting that London TravelWatch actually supports railways outside London and reaches as far as Bedford. One of the members of BABUS, John Smith, used to be a member of LTUC until he resigned a few years ago.

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

Also of interest is the organization called Campaign for Better Transport of 12-18 Hoxton Street, London N1 6NG which has a website at <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk>. On this website we saw that their director was just finalising their briefing for the report stage of the Local Transport Bill, which started on 16 January. He goes on to say that the Bill aims to empower local authorities to sort out local transport problems. From talking to people around the country, he says he is clear that one of the biggest of these problems is the increasing traffic on our roads, which is making life hard for cyclists, pedestrians, bus passengers and drivers alike. You may be interested in the section specifically on buses giving examples of how people have been severely inconvenienced by bus cuts. This is at [http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/public\\_transport/buses](http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/public_transport/buses)

## PLUSBUS

by Alan Hopkinson

This article was prepared for the previous newsletter but was held over because we heard just before going to press that PLUSBUS had been introduced to Bedford.

### What is PLUSBUS?

Many railway stations have a leaflet advertising PLUSBUS; "add bus travel around town to your train ticket" it says. In short, for an add-on fare of

between £2 and £3 you can have what usually amounts to a local day-rover ticket on the buses in the town to which you are buying your rail ticket (see [www.plusbus.info/](http://www.plusbus.info/)) The facility wasn't available for people travelling by train to Bedford because they were not valid in the town. So I wrote a general article about PLUSBUS. Just before we went to press all this changed, Bedford became a PLUSBUS town from September 2007. Of course PLUSBUS can be used by people travelling from Bedford to other places but you would need to go to the station first to buy your ticket to allow travel in Bedford on your way to the station. Residents of Bedford are more likely to hold season tickets with PLUSBUS so that they can use it to go to the station by bus each day. If you have a railway ticket to Bedford you can buy a PLUSBUS for £2.70. A Stagecoach megarider is £2.80 so PLUSBUS is less and also allows travel on other operators. A weekly could be purchased for travel to the bus station each day before taking the train journey and would cost £10.50 the same as a Stagecoach megarider but with access to other companies for the week.

A quick look on the PLUSBUS website for Bedford shows us:

<b>Bedford PlusBus</b>
<b>Interchange Station(s):</b>
Bedford (Midland) & Bedford St Johns
<b>Fares:</b>
Adult Day £2.70 (£1.35 child). Season tickets: 7-day £10.50, month £36, 3-months £100, year £375
<b>Unlimited travel on these participating bus operators:</b>
Stagecoach, Barfordian, Cedar Coaches, Expresslines, Grant Palmer & Park and Ride and County Council Supported services.

### BUSPLUS to Leicester

I investigated the scheme in Leicester a year or two ago when I wanted to go to an exhibition

about two miles from the centre. My wife would only let me go if she could come to Leicester with me. She was brought up near there and likes the famous market. On my own, I would have gone by bus for £8 using an Explorer ticket. I was pleasantly surprised that she didn't want to go by car, and suggested taking the train, though I knew the price wouldn't be pleasant. It was the opportunity to try PLUSBUS and we went to the station to get the tickets. It's always interesting to see what happens when you want something a little out of the ordinary (and I assume people in Bedford aren't buying PLUSBUS to Leicester every day). My wife wasn't planning to use a bus, so she needed just a day return, which cost £21.30 for a Saver. When the lady at the counter tried to get the machine to print the tickets for PLUSBUS, the problems began. She found and consulted a manual, asked someone behind the scenes, and two minutes later she issued me with the same Saver (two tickets) and the PLUSBUS tickets, one outward and one return (stating Leicester to Leicester Plus Bus, though I assume that it's valid for as many journeys as you want all day) for an extra £2. The time taken for the actual purchase could have been worse.

My idea was at Leicester to take the first bus that came to the bus station (which is run by First) and then ask how to get to my destination on Narborough Road. My wife said I might as well walk to the bus station, so I did that and discovered there that only Arriva buses went all the way to my destination. First said they weren't sure whether my ticket was valid on Arriva, so recommended that I take First's route 70, which went every 20 minutes to a point about half a mile away, and walk from there. I didn't realise, until I checked on the Internet to write this article, that PLUSBUS is also available on Stagecoach and Arriva in Leicester, so I could have gone on Arriva, which passed right by my destination.

The First driver didn't bat an eyelid when I showed him the ticket. It was 15 minutes before the bus left, and I arrived at the exhibition just before one. I left at 3.30 and spent about 15 minutes at the stop with other people waiting for the number 70 bus, (letting five Arriva buses go past because I didn't know whether they would accept my tickets). The driver looked very

carefully at the ticket. I assumed that he doesn't get shown many railway tickets, so I started to explain the PLUSBUS system to him, but he said that it was OK and we set off to the city centre.

I made only the two bus journeys because I walked back to the railway station via the market. The ticket stages go from 70p to £1.10, so chances are I broke even with my £2 ticket, and would certainly have done so if I'd taken the bus to the bus station first.

Since Bedford now is a PLUSBUS destination I assume there would not have been the same problems in issuing the tickets as I had had.

## LUTON AIRPORT SHUTTLE BUS SERVICE

A shuttle bus services operates between the station at Luton Airport parkway and the airport. Since 20 January 2008 this service has been contracted to First Capital Connect. They now charge rail ticket holders £1 and other passengers £1.50. In exchange for being able to charge, FirstGroup (the parent company of First Capital Connect) have invested £1.3 million in four new articulated Wright StreetCar buses, which have double the capacity of the previous fleet of buses. They now go at 10 minute intervals instead of every 15 minutes and have guaranteed connections during the overnight period when there is a less frequent train service

## BABUS MEETINGS

BABUS Committee members and advisers will be involved in the following meetings over the next few months. If you have any issues you would like raising, please contact a member of the Committee.

Chairman Colin Franklin addresses Kempston  
Rotary Club 9 April  
Stagecoach 17 April  
Bedfordshire C C 24 April

<b>AGM Meeting for all members 10 May</b>
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Stagecoach	17 July
Bedfordshire C C	24 July