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

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**NEWS****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>.

**FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES**

Bus Surgeries are to be held with the support of Bus Users UK in Dunstable on 1 October and in Bedford on 24 October 2008.

**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 the BABUS Committee. We specifically need a Treasurer and we need help with publicity and the website. Please call the enquiry line on 0870 486 1369 if you would like to help. We welcome to the Committee John Yunnie, who has extensive experience of championing the needs of passengers from within the railway industry; he was co-opted as Vice-Chairman at the BABUS Committee Meeting held on 28 June 2008.

**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.

**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

## IN THE NEWS

### Free smartcard travel arrives

But bus operators do not yet have equipment needed to read cards

Angelica Mari, *Computing*, 20 Mar 2008

The national scheme allows free bus travel for senior citizens

The first nationwide smartcard-based travel scheme launches next month [April], but the majority of passengers outside London will not be able to use the advanced functions.

The Concessionary Bus Travel Act comes into force on 1 April, giving senior and disabled citizens free off-peak travel by bus anywhere in England, building on current free passes available for local services.

The Department for Transport has mandated use of the Integrated Transport Smartcard Organisation (ITSO) standard for all free passes, but bus operators are not yet required to have the necessary onboard card-reading equipment.

Cards will be issued to a single design and used on a show-and-go basis in most of the country until 2010, when the national specification will be enforced.

A few regional bus operators are introducing smartcards, and London's Freedom Pass, which uses the capital's Oyster card technology, has been in place for some time, although it is based on a different standard to ITSO.

Rushed implementation time-scales for ITSO cards did not allow full assessment of the benefits of the new system against existing local smartcard arrangements, such as those used in libraries, said an IT manager at a West Midlands council, who asked to remain anonymous.

"And the passes will not serve one of their main purposes immediately, which is calculating journey reimbursement between local authorities and bus operators," he said.

Transport for London (TfL) will replace 21,000 readers to accept both ITSO and Oyster cards by 2010, but there is still a lot to be done, said TfL's director of fares and ticketing Shashi Verma.

"We are working on the design of the new readers and will then move on to prototype

testing and manufacturing, with a view to start trials by mid-2009," he said.

Marrying the two standards is a simple task compared to that faced by other local authorities, said Verma.

"There are a number of ITSO readers, ticketing structures and back-office systems in the market, so the integration challenges are much tougher," he said.

The standard passes are meant to boost uptake of smart ticketing, but issues such as a lack of interest from train operators is hindering progress. Rail firms are unwilling to invest in card projects that do not allow a payback within their franchise periods.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting took place on 10 May 2008 and was attended by over 40 members and friends. In case you were not able to be present, the major items were a Chairman's report and a talk by Phil Tonks, Operations Officer of Bus Users UK, reproduced and reported on.

## BABUS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Colin Franklin

It has been a busy twelve months since our last AGM in Biggleswade last year and already BABUS has been extremely active on a number of subjects. These have included such topics as diverse as : Changes to Bus Services in North Bedfordshire, Real-Time Information, Changes to the Bedfordshire Town Centre Services, X5 Matters, etc. I would like to thank Zoe Paget (Stagecoach) and Simon Ayres (Bedfordshire County Council) and their respective teams for their willingness to meet with BABUS on a regular basis. Indeed BABUS were saddened by the departure of James Freeman who left Stagecoach East to take up the post of Chief Executive Officer of Reading Buses. Bedford's loss is Reading's gain. In his place we welcome Tony Cox as Managing Director of Stagecoach East, although BABUS is yet to meet him.

At the end of September 2007 BABUS held a Member's Meeting at Bedford Library and continues to be represented at meetings of the Bedfordshire Rural Transport Forum. I also attended the inaugural meeting of the Bedford Railway Station Travel Plan Steering Group recently as well as giving a talk about the role of BABUS to the Rotary Club of Kempston. The railway station scheme is linked inextricably to

the Redevelopment of the Railway Station Quarter to provide better Bus/Rail integration, although I believe that the present scheme falls short in achieving this, with the detrimental effects on existing bus service provision. And to cap it all the developers, Halcrow Group Ltd, have not even done a full transport assessment before lodging their Outline Planning Application with Bedford Borough Council.

Then in April we were informed of the withdrawal of nine out of thirteen rural bus routes that were operated by various operators due to their financial support being withdrawn by the County Council, including the Bedford Dart and the Homehoppa Service. Whilst BABUS are rather disappointed by this decision, I can understand the reasoning behind this announcement, although it makes you wonder how much marketing was done by these bus operators to encourage more people to use these particular services. BABUS will do all that it can to try and minimise the scale of these service withdrawals.

During the course of this year the Committee has had to accept the decision of Frank Hendrix, our Vice-Chairman, to resign as a Committee Member due to other commitments though he will see oversee the BABUS website and bulletin board until such time as we can find a replacement. I'd like to place on record my heartfelt thanks to him for all the work he has done for BABUS. I would like also to encourage members to come forward for election to the committee especially as we are looking to fill the posts of Vice-Chairman [since filled - Ed.], Publicity Officer and Website/Bulletin Board Manager. CAN YOU HELP? If this is for you then please do not hesitate to contact either myself or the secretary or alternatively you can contact me via the BABUS Enquiry Line on 0870 486 1369. Indeed our website, [babus.org.uk](http://babus.org.uk), contains a wealth of information with opportunities for discussion via the Bulletin board.

Finally I would like to thank the Committee for all their hard work on behalf of BABUS over the last twelve months. Special praise must go to Peter G. Williams not only for organising this AGM but also for doing a wonderful job as secretary. To Alan Hopkinson for putting together a splendid newsletter every time. To Simon Norton, for keeping our membership records up-to-date. And finally to Stephen Sleight for keeping me sane. By working together we can strengthen BABUS's voice still further on behalf of bus users, onwards and upwards.

**MR PHIL TONKS, OPERATIONS OFFICER, BUS USERS UK: AGM PRESENTATION**  
**reported by Peter Williams**

Phil started his talk by describing the origins of Bus Users UK (BUUK), formerly known as National Federation of Bus Users, an independent body designed to represent the interests of bus passengers.

BUUK operates by working with the major bus companies and with Government and local authorities. BUUK had been criticised for being too close to operators but it needed to work with, rather than alienate, companies and managers. At the same time BUUK does not shy away from making critical comments where that is justified.

Phil is the only full-time officer at BUUK. He is based in the West Midlands but operates at a national level.

He went on to describe how, before deregulation, bus services were provided by local authorities and by nationalised undertakings. Now commercial bus companies are run for profit and for the benefit of shareholders. Often there is a conflict between the aims of making a profit and of providing a satisfactory bus service. The position is different in London.

Phil compared some bus services to the role played by post offices, especially in rural areas. He acknowledged there was concern about issues of social exclusion where bus services were withdrawn.

He was aware of the situation with HomeHoppa and agreed that the best policy was to lobby for its retention by emphasising its unique advantages. Phil also said that bus operators could not provide taxi services and acknowledged that there were commercial and financial pressures arising from increased fuel bills, staff pay rates and insurance costs.

Phil commented on problems for bus operators caused by traffic congestion and drew attention to Bedford Town Centre where traffic was at a standstill that very afternoon. This would be presenting bus operators with major difficulties in maintaining timekeeping.

BUUK operates by attempting to:

promote the interests of bus users in discussions on public transport issues; influence local and national decisions affecting bus services;

facilitate good communications between bus companies and their passengers

Phil compared bus and rail services and emphasised the local nature of bus services. That implied different strengths and weaknesses in different locations.

In practical terms BUUK works to:  
support local bus users groups like BABUS;  
arrange bus users' surgeries, where passengers can meet with their bus operators and with local authorities, in order to raise local issues;  
help local groups with local issues by meeting with bus companies and with local authorities;  
assist with resolution of complaints;  
and, promote good practice and higher quality standards in the bus industry

BUUK attempts to lobby for measures that help to improve bus services, including traffic management schemes, bus lanes, priority traffic lights, better provision of information, and easier bus access to railway stations and other places where bus passengers need to travel to.

The Government had decreed that there should be a Bus Champion and that this role should be taken over by Passenger Focus. This was a body that was concerned with rail passengers and had no experience of the bus industry. BUUK were engaging in a dialogue with Passenger Focus.

Phil concluding his talk by emphasising the importance of the work of local groups such as BABUS but also the need for innovative leadership of both bus operators and local authorities.

## **BABUS BUS REVIEW by Simon Norton**

Earlier this year BABUS was told that because of its impending abolition Bedfordshire County Council was suspending its "Better Buses for you" review of bus services within the county. It occurred to me that this would afford an ideal opportunity for BABUS to ensure that the two unitary authorities, which are taking over from the County Council got off to a good start.

The new authorities will take control on 1 Apr 2009, but in June there will be local elections (postponed from their usual May date to enable them to be held concurrently with the European elections), and I am therefore proposing that BABUS should target the candidates for these elections with a "manifesto" for buses in Bedfordshire.

Here is a possible scheme for the compilation of such a manifesto:

1. The BABUS committee agrees a first draft. (I would be prepared to accept responsibility for compiling such a draft covering the whole county except for town services in Bedford, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable.)
2. The draft is circulated to those members who have expressed an interest in contributing to the development of our manifesto.
3. A revised version is circulated to all our members, possibly with the next newsletter.
4. A further revised version is circulated to key organisations within the county, such as town and parish councils, community groups, and so on.
5. A final version is circulated to local election candidates and to the general public.

At all stages, starting with the receipt of this newsletter, BABUS members would have an opportunity to make their views known. As I write nothing has been decided.

At some stages, BABUS may wish to ask people receiving the document for contributions towards the cost of circulation. This would have to be decided by the BABUS committee.

I propose the following ground rules:

- (a) Our manifesto should confine itself to more strategic issues and not go into the minutiae of exact routes, stops and times, important though these may be to bus users.
- (b) Also excluded would be consideration of fare levels and bus accessibility. The manifesto will contain a statement that fares need to be kept low enough to be affordable for the less well off and competitive for the better off, and that less able people should be able to use buses, but I don't see any point in going into greater detail.
- (c) Also excluded would be services provided by community buses, except for tendered routes for which they offered the best value. The purpose of community buses is to fill gaps in the mainstream network; we believe it is the job of the local authority to ensure that there are as few gaps as possible.
- (d) The scope of the manifesto would include changes to commercial services, where we believe they are needed, as well as to supported services. It would also include cross boundary services, including those supported by other local authorities.

(e) We should aim to ensure that every village has a bus or train service. If there's nothing else then whatever takes local children to school should be available to adults as well. But all but the remotest villages should have public transport enabling people to travel to work in a nearby town plus shopping services running at least every 2 hours. Larger villages, and all neighbourhoods in towns, should have at least an hourly service plus some evening and Sunday service, the former connecting off a train from London on which off-peak tickets are valid.

Major places of interest should be accessible when they are open, particularly at weekends including Sundays.

To illustrate the above, here are some proposals for daytime and evening buses in East Beds. All existing routes are superseded wherever any of the proposed new routes provide alternatives.

A: Recast Stagecoach M3 to run direct Bedford-Sandy-Potton-Biggleswade-Sandy- Bedford, hourly each way round.

B: Extend Stagecoach M4 to Biggleswade Leisure Centre via Holme Court Avenue, and time it to provide a combined half hourly fast service between Biggleswade and Bedford with M3.

C: Extend Stagecoach 18A and 28 (Cambridge-Gamlingay and St Neots-Gamlingay, interworking with each other) to/from Potton, timed to connect with M3.

D: Provide a frequent shuttle from Sandy Market Place to Sunderland Road and Engayne Avenue, connecting with M3. The bus would run this way round to avoid problems on the A1.

E: New 2 hourly service from Biggleswade to Royston via Dunton roundabout, Sutton, Potton, Wrestlingworth, Guilden Morden then as existing Cambs CC supported 127.

F: Restored 2 hourly service on a modified EB1 route from Biggleswade to Sandy via Dunton, Eyeworth, Wrestlingworth, Tadlow or Cockayne Hatley, Potton, Gamlingay and Everton.

G: New circular route providing 3 journeys from Biggleswade via Broom, Southill, Old Warden, Ickwell and Upper Caldecote Pastures, again this way round only (shoppers return to Upper Caldecote Pastures by M4).

H: No change to 200 except that Southill is omitted by those services used primarily at shoppers from Biggleswade, who can return by the above service. As part of my "package" for

another part of the county, however, I will be proposing to extend the route to Milton Keynes.

I: Recast of services through Langford in connection with Fairfield Park development -- I don't have specific proposals. Also a new route providing 2 journeys in each direction between Biggleswade and Royston via Langford, Edworth, Hinxworth and Ashwell village and station.

J: New 2 hourly service from Sandy to St Neots via Chalton, Blunham, double run to Great Barford, Tempsford, Little Barford and Eynesbury Tesco.

K: Demand responsive evening buses from Biggleswade and Sandy to villages east of A1, including Gamlingay.

L: Demand responsive evening buses from Arlesey station to Stotfold, Henlow, Langford, Clifton and Shefford, in addition to the existing Expresslines journeys on M2, which could be modified to improve train connections at Arlesey.

M: Evening buses to run 6 days a week between Bedford and Sandy in both directions, connecting with trains at the latter. Some journeys would extend to Biggleswade.

### **REGIONAL NETWORK TICKETS by Simon Norton**

For some time Stagecoach have been selling the Explorer ticket, which in recent years has provided unlimited travel for one day on all Stagecoach buses in southern Britain. There also used to be reciprocal agreements allowing travel on some other operators' services, but these have now disappeared except for certain locally advertised agreements allowing travel on local authority supported services, such as those that provide certain Stagecoach in Bedford routes in the evenings and on Sundays.

Recently Stagecoach decided to rename their ticket range to bring more consistency between their different subsidiaries, and also to allow people to buy some tickets online. There were rumours that this would lead to the loss of interavailability between subsidiaries, but Stagecoach appear to have taken a decision to maintain interavailability at least for their day ticket. The new ticket names are as follows.

Dayrider Gold is the new name for the Explorer. At £9 it provides unlimited travel on all Stagecoach buses as far north as the Fens and Birmingham, except for certain long distance and London routes, including the X5 and VT99, and also Stagecoach in Devon services. For £10

one can get an X5 Dayrider Gold, which also allows travel on the X5 and VT99. There are also concessionary and family tickets. Tickets can be bought on the bus.

Megarider Gold is the new name for the Goldrider. As with the Dayrider Gold, it can be bought on the bus, and there are versions with or without X5 and VT99 availability, costing £25 and £22 respectively for an adult. However, it is not clear whether these can be used over the entire Stagecoach network in southern Britain. We have asked Stagecoach in Bedford to produce a leaflet to set out the position clearly.

There are also 4, 13 and 52 week versions of the Megarider Gold and X5 Megarider Gold, but these can only be bought online. For the 4 week ticket the choice is between the Bedfordshire version (also valid in neighbouring counties plus Leicestershire and Oxfordshire), which costs £80 without X5/VT99 and £89 with, and the South of England version, which covers the whole region (including, despite its name, South Wales) for just £1 extra (i.e. £90). There is a UK wide ticket but this costs a lot more (£146).

The above is what we have managed to glean from various websites plus email correspondence and a BABUS liaison meeting with Stagecoach in Bedford, but BABUS does not accept any responsibility for its continuing accuracy. As we said, we hope that Stagecoach in Bedford will produce a leaflet setting out the situation in black and white. If you believe your ticket is valid on a Stagecoach service but its driver refuses to accept it, then complain to the Stagecoach subsidiary that operates the service in question (and let BABUS know about it!).

Incidentally, Stagecoach subsidiaries other than Bedford and Northants may charge different prices for a daily or weekly ticket. Furthermore, except for Oxfordshire, they do not offer a version valid on the X5 and VT99. However, if you have a ticket without such validity and wish to travel on one of these services, the driver will ask for an excess fare, which will allow you to travel on them for the rest of the day.

## **LIAISON MEETING WITH STAGE-COACH EAST, 17 JULY 2008**

Summary Report of the Stagecoach East and BABUS liaison meeting of 17 Jul 2008

### *Validity of Stagecoach Explorer & Gold Rider Tickets across Southern Britain*

Simon Norton raised a number of long-standing concerns over validity of certain Stagecoach

tickets across a number of Divisions within the Group. There appeared to be different interpretations between areas resulting in difficulties for drivers and for passengers. In replying for Stagecoach, Zoë Paget made a number of points: i) There was an ongoing programme across all Stagecoach bus services designed to improve uniformity for daily, weekly and monthly tickets, and to standardise branding of such tickets. ii) There were no changes to 'geographic' boundaries. However, there were still variable restrictions that applied across different areas; policy was not set down nationally. Where there was any uncertainty then the local management should be consulted.

### *Bus Surgeries*

Stephen Sleight reported that he was engaged in discussions with the Operations Officer, BUUK, on proposals to mount surgeries in Bedford and Ampthill. BUUK would be leading and would be looking for support from local operators, interest groups and local authorities.

### *Future for Planets branding*

John Yunnie raised concerns over the 'public' image of the majority of the *Planets* routes, pointing out that only the Mars services routes still embodied the original concepts. Other routes had become seriously degraded over time – both in terms of vehicle identities and supporting publicity and literature. John expressed regret at the negative image that was now being presented and questioned whether the branding had been abandoned.

Zoë Paget confirmed that the *Planets* theme was being maintained but that there were issues over interchangeability of vehicles. There was also an expectation that the composition of the Bedford-based fleet might change and she was awaiting clarification before attempting to reinforce existing brands.

### *X5 issues*

Stephen Sleight asked if the timetable displays at St Neots, especially for the railway station stops, could be amended to show timings that were relevant to intending passengers.

### *Timetable displays at Union Street & Clapham Road stops*

John Yunnie pointed out that the information was unclear, unhelpful and, in some cases, misleading and incorrect. He had particular issues over some Sunday services and some timings after 18.00hrs. Zoë Paget agreed there could be scope for improvements when the timetables were reprinted.

### *M50 route closure timings*

John Yunnie voiced a number of complaints from Sharnbrook residents. There were problems caused by partial closure and diversions on the A6 in Northamptonshire and services were generally unreliable and running up to 20 min late. He felt that there had been insufficient effort put into providing warning notices along the route and, especially, at Bay 10 in the Bus Station. Zoë Paget said that there had been a late change by the local authority (a perennial problem), which meant that plans for local diversions were abandoned at the last minute. She would see if some notices could be posted to cover the last few days of the route closure.

### *Disabled/wheelchairs/pushchairs access*

Colin Franklin reported that he had been made aware of a number of complaints concerning access for people with mobility problems on Route 51 and Venus vehicles. He was also concerned about conflicts between wheelchair users and parents with buggies.

Zoë Paget said that the dedicated space on low-floor buses did not give priority to wheelchairs over others. There were limits as to what drivers could do by way of direct intervention and it was usually a matter of common courtesy and peer pressure from other passengers. She did offer to review the wording of courtesy notices applicable to this space within vehicles.

### *Stagecoach marketing*

Colin Franklin raised concerns, based on his observations at the recent Festival for Older People, over the Stagecoach presence there. He said it was lacklustre and made no attempt to create a positive message. He felt that, even for an 'amateur' group, BABUS put up a much better performance in terms of display panels and available literature. Zoë Paget conceded that she did not really have access to material that was appropriate for an audience comprising the general public.

## **LIAISON MEETING WITH BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, 24 Jul 2008**

Bedfordshire County Council was represented by Simon Ayres, Public Transport Team Leader.

Mr Ayres acknowledged that BABUS was canvassing likely decision-makers on local government reorganisation but said that there was no significant progress to report by the County Council. It had been agreed that school transport would be a shared service; it was likely that public transport provision would be divided between the two new Authorities.

There were vacancies in the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit at County Hall and it was unlikely these would be filled until the reorganisation had been completed.

Mr Ayres said that some low-level activity was being maintained, for example, tenders were being invited for East Beds services. Parish Councils were being consulted on minor adjustments, including the diversion of Wrestlingworth services via Potton

Stephen Sleight (Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership) was concerned that another attempt at a constructive examination of the pattern of supported bus services through *Better Buses for You* had been shelved and hoped that the collected data would not be lost.

Mr Ayres reported that a Quality Partnership was being developed with Stagecoach and Grant Palmer to cover the Wixams development. The developers, Gallagher, had indicated they wished to provide support.

In response to BABUS comments on outstanding issues over the display of timetables for services provided by operators other than Stagecoach within the Bus Station, Zoë Paget (Stagecoach Bedford) confirmed that if this information was provided (by the County Council) it would be displayed in the leaflet racks inside the Travel Shop, and on the windows.

Mr Ayres reported that a new County network map had been designed and should shortly become available.

In response to concerns raised by BABUS, Mr Ayres said he was already aware of issues concerning vehicle displays and ticketing on some services provided under contract to the County Council. A County Council officer had been travelling on the Bedford Town Sunday services over recent weeks and his report was awaited.

BABUS requested that consideration be given to citing additional timing points in the timetables for services 152 and 153. This would be helpful for passengers travelling from/to the stretch of Kimbolton Road from its junction with Putnoe Lane to the roundabout at the junction with Avon Drive and Wentworth Drive.

Mr Ayres noted that County Council officers were in discussion with Sharnbrook Parish Council as a follow-up to public comments made by Cllr Tom Wootton on the withdrawal of HomeHoppa. He doubted that there was much room for manoeuvre. Mr Sleight expressed great

disappointment that the negotiations to continue the service had not reached a successful conclusion. Rural residents had been severely disadvantaged.

BABUS drew attention to the inadequate provision of relevant and appropriate information for intending bus passengers at Bedford Railway Station. Mr Ayres said this was receiving attention.

## **THOUGHTS FROM GREAT BARFORD** by Alma Tebbutt

Congestion on the roads is becoming worse. I ask myself daily what can be done to cure this problem. My reply is "less traffic". This you might think is obvious but how do we get less traffic? The oil companies are doing their best by pricing their products almost out of reach but people have to commute more now than ever before. Consequently people would like to use other methods of transportation, obviously public transport comes to mind.

The next question is how can I get to my destination easily and on time when bus routes are being axed instead of being improved? One answer is, investment in more bus and train services. This would of course cost money and where would it come from?

The County Council holds the purse strings but can only allocate the amount of money granted by the government and taxes. Where will the extra money come from? is the next question. I suggest a good look at what is being done with existing funds. Less sending money abroad to disappear into a bottomless pit would be one way to help resolve this problem. A massive injection of money by the Government is needed to sort out the problem but will it happen? I think not.

Introduction of the countrywide use of concessionary bus passes has changed the face of public transport. April was eagerly awaited and the number of passengers increased dramatically. This led to a number of problems, some of which have been solved but others remain.

One problem still with us is bags on seats. Nothing is more frustrating than to be refused a seat after waiting in a queue in bad weather when going to work or trying to keep an appointment.

Students either asleep or with luggage and using the seat beside them, have been with us for a long time. They are now joined by concessionary pass holders with handbags or

shopping bags on the seat next to them. This has resulted in people being told the bus is full when it isn't. I would ask everyone to think before taking up two seats, one of which could be used by a paying passenger. I think the bus company would be grateful, a bag on a seat doesn't generate a fare but a passenger using a concessionary bus pass holder would contribute something.

## **BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL** **NEWS RELEASE OF 6 JUNE 2008**

Following the threat to rural services in last issue of this *Newsletter* we received this press release from the County Council.

*Bus changes to take effect from Monday 9 June*  
From Monday 9 June the bus service changes, which Bedfordshire County Council announced on 9 April, will take effect.

The council began a bus service consultation last July, which resulted in a decision to withdraw a small number of bus services. Local groups and operators were invited to come forward with solutions to help retain some bus services. However, after negotiations with operators, we regret to say that we cannot save all the services.

- The North Bedfordshire Dart bus will continue, but users will no longer need to book in advance. The bus will now run to a set timetable.
- Stagecoach service 201, from Meppershall, Gravenhurst and Shillington to Bedford, will cease, but residents from Gravenhurst will be able to travel to Shefford, thanks to the diversion of the Grant Palmer service 200.
- Residents of Bletsoe will have a new service to Bedford. Cedar Coaches route 152 will serve the village twice in the morning, and passengers can return on any 152 journey during the day. Also, users of the Bedford Park and Ride will benefit from two new early morning journeys (at 06:20 and 06:40), both of which will run through to Bedford Rail Station.
- Unfortunately from Monday 9 June, the evening bus service between Bedford, Wootton and Cranfield (Barfordian 159) will cease. The last Stagecoach bus will leave Bedford at 6:15pm. Two services operated directly by Bedfordshire County Council will also be discontinued - the Abbeyfields Link and the Potton Circular. Other services



being discontinued from Monday are route 91 to Salford and E8 to Ickwell.

- The council is providing some early morning journeys to Marsh Leys (service 169), which will be operated by Stagecoach. But, the evening Homehoppa service to north-west Bedfordshire villages will come to an end.

Although Government funding for the Bedford Dart has been withdrawn, the council understands that the company operating the service will continue to provide the service. This will include the weekday scheduled Dart journeys from the Poets Area, Tavistock Court, Hillier Court, Hanover Court and Aspley Court. More information is available from the Bedford Dart office on 01234 360380.

Councillor Tom Wootton, Bedfordshire County Council Cabinet Member for Transport, said: "It is with regret that, after negotiations with local operators, we unfortunately cannot find a suitable option to save these services. No one wants to withdraw bus services and we have tried long and hard to find solutions to save the routes, but we cannot continue subsidising buses that are driving around with little or no passengers.

"We need to ensure we get the best value for money for the taxpayer when we subsidise bus routes. The reality is that not enough people are using some buses and the cost of subsidising bus travel is rising, mainly due to increased fuel costs. We have therefore had to make some tough decisions on the worst-performing services and prioritise our support to the most popular routes.

"I know that some people will be disappointed but we will continue to monitor demand for these routes and if there is still a need for these services then maybe in time we can reinstate the facility. Please continue to keep talking to us, we welcome your comments."

Revised timetables for services 152 and 202 will also begin from Monday 9 June.

Details of all these service changes are available in a new booklet issued by Bedfordshire County Council. Copies can be found in Bedfordshire's libraries, tourist information centres and council offices.

## **UNITARY AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN BEDFORDSHIRE**

**by Peter G Williams**

BABUS has made representations to decision makers ahead of the move towards the creation

of unitary authorities.

At the present time transport policy and planning, including responsibility for supported bus services, lies with the County Council. The existing Borough and District Councils have little or no input into this area.

With the creation of unitary authorities for Bedford and Central Bedfordshire BABUS is concerned that the existing centralised responsibilities together with the associated staff and their knowledge and expertise will be split between the two unitary authorities.

When Luton unitary authority was created some ten years ago it was decided that some public services should continue to be managed at Bedfordshire county level. Obvious examples are police and library services where there are benefits to be gained from maintaining economies of scale and avoiding the creation of ineffective groups at sub-optimal critical mass. BABUS is making the case for joint strategic public transport planning across and between unitary authority areas. Outside the Bedford urban area there are few bus services that do not cross local authority boundaries. Buses do not stop running at artificially created political boundaries. Bus or rail passengers do not necessarily terminate their journeys at such boundaries.

BABUS frequently draws unfavourable comparisons between the fragmented and haphazard provision of public transport information in Bedfordshire with the superior system that exists in Hertfordshire. The Hertfordshire Intalink Partnership is an initiative between the County and District Councils and the bus and train operators. Intalink provides Hertfordshire council tax payers with printed publications, an effective telephone helpline and a website designed to inform travellers interested in a wide range of destinations, including many outside their own county.

Bedfordshire claims to lie at the 'heart of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc'. In terms of bus service provision (there is, of course, no rail connection) transport across the region is via the Stagecoach X5 service. BABUS estimates that this one service passes through eight different local authority areas.

The Local Transport Bill now being considered by the House of Commons provides for the establishment of integrated transport areas and authorities. BABUS is asking that, when considering the future of the existing County Council remit and the associated personnel,

account should be taken of the opportunities afforded by this new legislation.

BABUS also believes that future plans across Bedfordshire should take particular note of the status and role of Milton Keynes. The new town is a major economic driver across the region occupied by the two proposed unitary authorities. Its role, in terms of employment, service provision and as a public transport hub only serves to highlight and contrast the status of the proposed Central Bedfordshire authority.

BABUS is asking that early consideration be given to the creation of an integrated transport authority capable of delivering services across Bedfordshire, and beyond. (At the time of going to press, encouraging responses have been received from, Patrick Hall, MP, Alistair Burt, MP, Bedfordshire C.C., Mid Beds District Council and South Beds District Council).

## **TRAVEL FOR PENSIONERS TO AND AROUND LONDON**

**by Peter Hirst**

For years I've envied the kind provision to Londoners of their Freedom Passes, entitling them, after the morning peak, to free and simple use of Transport for London (TfL) buses and railways, trams, and national railways within Greater London. Since 1 April 2008 this privilege has been partly extended to other English citizens over 60 years of age, though you don't get free use of railways, either TfL or national.

If you, a provincial pensioner, go to London and wish to travel more speedily through all those dreary suburbs than by red bus, your options are to go to the West End by Green-line from Stevenage, Hemel or Luton Airport, or to buy a Travelcard to take you further in by rail from where a half-price rail fare on FCC will take you (Elstree or Hadley Wood), or from where a bus might take you, e.g. Enfield, Barnet or Edgware. However, the last Green-line buses out of London on the Stevenage and Hemel routes are quite early in the evening. The buses to Luton Airport run much later as they are designed for Londoners rather than for provincials.

I also envy the Londoners the simplicity of their transport. They needn't take any account of the zone they are in whereas zones are important to a provincial. The best-known London Travelcard is for zones 1 to 6, but there is also one, about £2 cheaper, for zones 2 to 6. Zone 1 is roughly defined by the Circle Line, but also includes London Bridge and Waterloo. Some stations,

such as Vauxhall and Earl's Court, are counted as being in zone 1 or 2, according to the rest of the journey you use them for.

If you use a Travelcard for zones 2 to 6 to speed up the journey, you then need to show your bus pass to the bus drivers in Zone 1. Don't wait for a bus ticket, just move quickly along. Get on a bendy-bus at any door whilst displaying your wrinkles and grey hair. The bus won't be nearly as quick as the tube, but the journey in central London will be more interesting. [Or show your Travelcard instead in Zone 1 as any Travelcard is valid on any bus even in Zone 1: Ed.]

It saves an extra 50p/day to use an Oyster-card for the rail travel, and there is the advantage that it will almost always open the gates whereas a Travelcard quite often doesn't, with consequent delays. The problem is that most of the national rail network in London has yet to join the Oyster-card scheme. The only stations south of the river accessible by Oyster at present are Clapham Junction, Richmond, Wimbledon, Brixton, Morden, and intermediate points on those lines.

The Oyster card is more use north of the river because of the fairly tight network of Underground and Overground lines. Don't use the Oyster card for bus journeys though, stick to your bus pass for these. Of course, as a mere provincial, you won't get any discount when buying your Travelcard or recharging your Oyster card, even though you don't use it for any bus travel in London.

The London Overground is the new name given last November to the old Silverlink network, centred on Willesden Junction and radiating to Stratford and Richmond on the North London line, to Euston and Clapham Junction, and as far as Watford Junction (but only the slow line via Watford High Street). It has all been taken over by TfL and is now included in the Oyster-card scheme.

The North London Line from Richmond to Stratford is all outside zone 1 and has useful rail-interchange points at Willesden, Gospel Oak, West Hampstead, Highbury and Islington, and Hackney Central. Both stations at Watford, and the Underground and Chiltern Line stations at Rickmansworth and Amersham are in additional zones outside zone 6. In 2010 the Overground will be extended to West Croydon, Crystal Palace and New Cross, with an interchange with the rest at Dalston.

## **BUSATHONS AND RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET**

by Peter Hirst

Saturday is the prime day for busathons. You can make an early start and a late end, even for Biggleswade residents with the last bus out of Bedford at 22.45. To go east or west there's the useful X5 route, and from Biggleswade it's possible to save time by using a day return by rail as far as Stevenage or Huntingdon to link up with buses at those points, and to allow for an easier, later return that evening.

From Bedford the other main routes go (a) to Luton (Saturn), whence St Albans and Watford (Arriva 321) and London (GreenLine 757 from the airport); (b) to Northampton (Pluto), whence Market Harborough and Leicester (Stagecoach X7), Rugby (Stagecoach 96), Daventry (D1/D2/D3); (c) to Kettering (Mercury M50), whence Oundle and Peterborough by Stagecoach X4.

From Milton Keynes useful routes 100 and 150 lead via Leighton Buzzard to Aylesbury, whence (a) to High Wycombe on the frequent Arriva 300 service, (b) to Berkhamsted (whence the hourly Arriva 353 via Chesham, the Chalfonts to Slough) and to Hemel Hempstead on the half-hourly Arriva 500, (c) to Hemel via Wendover, Missenden and Chesham by TigerLine's T1, and (d) to Luton on the hourly Arriva 61.

Whilst in Oxford don't miss looking through the covered market; one entrance to it is from the High Street. From Oxford two options from Gloucester Green bus station are to Swindon on Stagecoach 66, or back to Northampton via Brackley on the two-hourly Stagecoach X88. There are also options to Banbury on Stagecoach 59, and to Reading on the hourly service, Thames-Travel X39/X40. The Banbury service leaves from the stop in Magdalen Street near the Randolph Hotel. The Reading service leaves from a stop in St Aldates, near Christ Church College, and often involves an easy change at Wallingford.

Banbury's a nice town, it even has a bus station, the main service from which is to Brackley. It also is in Geoff Amos's Great-Central-Connection territory. He will take you, with just one change of bus in the depths of the countryside, to Daventry, whence you can return via Northampton on the D1/D2/D3 services.

From Reading it's possible to continue a circular route by using the half-hourly Arriva 800/850 service to High Wycombe. One goes via

Caversham and the other via Twyford. Both go through Henley and Marlow.

From Cambridge there are Stagecoach routes 9 to Ely and X9 to Ely and Wisbech, 11 to Bury St Edmunds via Newmarket, 13 and X13 to Haverhill, and an hourly Citi 7 to Saffron Walden. It's possible to link round from Haverhill to Bury on Burton's Coaches services 344/5 and from Saffron Walden it's possible to go on by either of two routes by Stansted Transit (5, the country route via Thaxted and the airport, and 301 via Newport) to Bishops Stortford, whence you can return on the TrustLine 700 to Hitchin, or on the TrustLine 351 rural route to Ware and Hertford. From Hertford you have the choice of 3 routes to Stevenage, the infrequent Centrebus 384 goes back through Ware and follows a very rural way, the other two routes TrustLine 379, and 390, are more direct.

From Peterborough there are the First X1 service to Wisbech and King's Lynn, the Delaine's service 201 and Kime's service 9, both to Stamford. Each is hourly, and the Kime's service goes on to Oakham. Unfortunately, the internet seems to say that to reach Leicester from Oakham by bus, you have to go via Melton, just as the train does but you can go via Rutland Flier to Uppingham and then 747 to Leicester..

Nearer home there are interesting two-hourly cross-country routes from Hitchin to St Albans (Uno 304) and from Stevenage to Luton 44.

Having got as far as points such as Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Wisbech, Peterborough, Stamford, Leicester, Rugby, Daventry, Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Bracknell, Slough, the best bet for a one-day busathon from Bedford is to turn and head back home, probably by a different route. The further you aim to go, the more planning is needed, and also the more you're relying on luck being on your side. Buses don't always turn up when scheduled, maybe because of traffic delays or breakdowns.

Research is best done on the internet using [Traveline.org.uk](http://Traveline.org.uk) or [Intalink.org.uk](http://Intalink.org.uk) or sometimes the bus companies' own sites, e.g. [Thames-travel.co.uk](http://Thames-travel.co.uk), though some of the other companies' sites are rather obtuse. In the case of Traveline, select the appropriate region. If the result on [Traveline.org.uk](http://Traveline.org.uk) is a load of html code, try entering [TravelineSoutheast.org.uk](http://TravelineSoutheast.org.uk), [TravelineEastmidlands.org.uk](http://TravelineEastmidlands.org.uk), [TravelineEastanglia.co.uk](http://TravelineEastanglia.co.uk), [TravelineSW.com](http://TravelineSW.com), or [TravelineMidlands.co.uk](http://TravelineMidlands.co.uk). Remember to put the right day of the week in, and to uncheck the rail, coach and underground options before pressing the Submit button. Be

prepared too to find some services (e.g. Stagecoach X5) classified as “coach”, when you might expect “bus”.

Bedford is in the South-East region, but Northants and Peterborough are in the East Midlands and Cambridge is in East Anglia. Each website has its own format and procedure. If one of the two end points of a journey is in one region and the other end point in another, the journey will probably be described well via either. However, I recall searching for details of a journey between Daventry and Northampton, whilst still working on the South-East site, and being told to expect two changes whereas the East Midlands site gives a direct service. I recently came across another website, internet.xephos.com, which you are invited to subscribe to, though it does give you a free trial week first. Xephos includes the Thames-Travel services, which is more than Traveline does.

Other good sources are sometimes the local authority’s own website e.g. Swindonbus.info.uk, which includes a link to the real-time information system at Swindon.acislive.com. Of course the travel information for London is good at the huge website of TfL.gov. Other good websites, complete with bus-route maps, are at Cambridgeshire.gov, Northamptonshire.gov, Leicester.gov, MiltonKeynes.gov, Reading.gov, Suffolk.gov, Oxfordshire.gov, Westberks.gov. The only map at BucksCC.gov is of the routes from High Wycombe bus station. Sadly, I can’t find any maps of routes on the site of BedsCC.gov. The routes to this information within the sites are via Transport and Streets, then Public Transport. Apart from this there’s not much uniformity, and the details change from time to time. You just have to find your way around the sites.

I’m surprised at how many smaller operators still run interurban services. In Leicestershire there’s Woods’ Coaches, in Peterborough there are two, and others in the Fenland towns nearby. Some towns, e.g. Oxford and Reading (and even Hatfield with Uno), have their own fair-sized local operators.

Two good examples of modern bus-station design are at High Wycombe and at the new St Margaret’s BS at Leicester. The latter also has real-time information displays, denoted by times in minutes to the next bus. Scheduled times on the same displays are denoted by times in hours.minutes format. The bus station at Northampton is showing its age, but, unlike

Bedford’s, it does have good electronic displays, individual ones at the gates and a big general one at the top of the escalator.

## LUTON AIRPORT SHUTTLE BUS SERVICE

In the holiday season, a reminder that since January 2008, the shuttle bus services that operates between the station at Luton Airport Parkway and the airport has been contracted to First Capital Connect. They now charge rail ticket holders £1 and other passengers £1.50. In exchange 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. Please note that if you have a season ticket that covers Luton Airport Parkway railway station, you should not be charged for the shuttle service. Otherwise you should buy a rail ticket for your journey from your starting railway station to the Airport and not to Luton Airport Parkway Station.

## 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.

01-Oct-08	Dunstable Bus Surgery
11-Oct-08	Exec Committee meeting
23-Oct-08	Stagecoach liaison meeting
24-Oct-08	Bedford Bus Surgery
13-Nov-08	Beds C C liaison meeting
Nov-08	Members' Meeting - provisional
22-Jan-09	Stagecoach liaison meeting
12-Feb-09	Beds C C liaison meeting
23-Apr-09	Stagecoach liaison meeting
23-Jul-09	Stagecoach liaison meeting