

**Bedford Area Bus Users' Society. BABUS Newsletter No 1. March 2006**

**The first Annual General Meeting of BABUS will be held on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2006, starting at 10.00, at the Bunyan Meeting House in Mill Street, Bedford.**

**Mr James Freeman, the Managing Director of Stagecoach East,**  
has kindly agreed to speak at the meeting on

**“A Vision for Stagecoach in Bedfordshire”.**

**We hope that all members who can, will come along so that we can meet each other and welcome our speaker. Refreshments will be available.**

**Open letter, with two themes, to members from the vice-chairman of BABUS.**

**Why am I with BABUS?**

I have for many years been interested in public transport. Like many of us, I see that the private motorcar has, in many places, dominated the travel to the extent of virtually wiping out public transport, particularly in rural communities. I have lived in a number of large cities in this country that have fairly comprehensive public transport services, yet use of the motorcar has led to traffic congestion and gridlock. I now live in a rural area where public transport is fairly primitive, and many of the communities around me have little or no public transport. What little public transport exists is totally uncoordinated. If you have no access to private transport it's like having no legs. The main bus route through my village starts at a town with a railway station, passes through three other towns with railway stations, and finishes in another town with a railway station. Yet for some crazy reason at no point on its journey does it provide any kind of interchange with the railway system.

In order to earn a living, by working in a town, I have found it necessary to use a private car as the only practical way to get around. Having been an enthusiastic cyclist in my youth, I found latterly that my work location was generally too far away to be within easy reach. In any case, as a cyclist these days you are very vulnerable on roads where some motorists seem to barely know what a bicycle looks like. This was starkly brought home to me a few years ago when a car driver, who did not even stop, knocked a friend of mine off his bicycle locally. The victim, having lost a leg, is now in a wheelchair. This is why, as a parish councilor, I also campaign for improving safety of cyclists.

I have travelled around different parts of the world, and through Eastern Europe and South America in particular. There I saw it was possible not only for public transport to exist, but actually prosper as a method of travel. Being an enforced car owner and a fugitive from pedal cycling, I thought there must be a better way of organising transport in this country. This is why I joined BABUS. My only regret was, and still is, that BABUS restricts itself to transport by bus. In truth I am not particularly interested in traveling only by bus: to me, bus is just one mode of public transport. There are others like rail, trolleybus, tram and so on, even canal. Depending on my journey I will happily use whatever mode of transport is appropriate. I suspect many of the public feel the same way: I imagine they just want to travel from A to B and, like me, will use whatever mode of transport is appropriate and available.

With this in mind I have looked to join forces with other organisations locally that are also engaged in public transport. There are a number of such organisations, eg BRTA. I wonder if we each individually have sufficient membership for us to be campaigning independently? It might cause confusion in the minds of the public that there are several monkeys trying to unzip the same banana.

**Is that piece of paper really necessary?**

When I joined BABUS, as secretary in the first instance, I said I would be happy to serve subject to one proviso; that I would like to use electronic communication as the primary method of exchanging written information. There were a number of reasons for this and I would like to share them with you.

1. We now have some 80% or so of homes locally with a connection to Internet (figure provided by Mid Beds District Council). For those people not yet so connected there are numerous places, such as the library, which provide access. Many offer training too, often for little or no cost to the user. Contrary to popular belief, it is not even essential to own a computer to use the Internet.
2. I serve on a number of different committees, and in other organisations. If they all send me paper I simply do not have the resources, or the storage, to manage the resulting mountain of paper that would clog up my home.
3. One of the reasons I believe we should promote public transport for travel is the environmental one. I share the concerns of many people about the medium to long-term effects on our planet caused by over-use of resources. Whenever I receive an e-mail from Beds County Council, there is a message at the end proclaiming: “Save energy, money and the environment - is it necessary to print this message?” I support this notion and invite BABUS members to think about it.

The paper tsunami obliged me to relinquish the post of BABUS secretary. I am now focusing on deputising for the chairman as appropriate, maintaining the website and bulletin board and managing development projects. I have spent a significant amount of time setting up our website and its associated bulletin board. I hope that those of you who have used these resources will agree with me that they provide a worthwhile way to communicate. I will be the first to admit that neither are they perfect nor do they totally replace every other form of communication. However, I hope that those of you who have not used them will take the time to find out about them, and maybe dip your toe in the water. The Newsletter is sent out only a few times a year: the website can be updated daily if necessary. I would especially like

feedback and items for the "News" section. The BABUS website at [babus.org.uk](http://babus.org.uk) is the window through which the rest of the world views us.

I welcome all members to this, the first edition of our newsletter. If you are reading it electronically then I especially thank you. I invite members to join me and limit the number of trees being cut down, as part of our mutual interest in preserving the environment for future generations. If you need help on reducing the amount of paper in your communication, feel free to contact me to explore other options. If together we succeed, one of my reasons for joining BABUS will have been met.

**Obligatory Disclaimer by BABUS.** The articles by named persons in this newsletter are the views of those individuals, and do not necessarily coincide with the views of BABUS as a corporate entity.

#### **From the Editor.**

Hello everyone, my name's Peter Hirst; I've been 'volunteered' into putting the BABUS newsletter together, and since I wrote that, the committee has kept on looking at me, with the result that yours truly now finds himself scribbling notes at its meetings, writing the minutes or notes afterwards whilst climbing a steep learning slope on the use of tables in 'Word', maintaining the membership list for use in e-mail distribution of all the documents

The two main people on the BABUS team are Colin Franklin, chairman and very keen on bus operations, and Frank Hendrix, vice-chairman and website wizard for our website at [babus.org.uk](http://babus.org.uk) (no w's with that one!). He gets us all to think in terms of electronic data transmission, a very worthwhile practice. We are encouraged and helped in our efforts by the people at Stagecoach, and by Stephen Sleight of the Beds Rural Communities Charity. One of the projects that the Rural Communities Charity runs is the Rural Transport Partnership, who got BABUS founded.

BABUS, in turn, is associated with Bus Users UK, who publish their own very good quarterly magazine. They can be contacted at [www.bususers.org.uk](http://www.bususers.org.uk). Hyperlinks exist between all three websites, Stagecoach, Bus Users and BABUS.

I've always been keen on transport, first coming across Biggleswade as a handy stop on the Yorkshire Services route up the A1, long before the M1 was built. It's been my home on and off since 1961, at which time it was still on the coach routes to the West Riding and even Scotland. Since then it has lost many of its routes; most recently the daily ones to Milton Keynes, Stevenage and Cambridge. These routes were taken off quite soon after the opening of Biggleswade's bus station.

**Timetables.** The Stagecoach timetables are always well displayed at this station but other timetables, for Herberts Travel, J & D Travel, Ivel Sprinter and Tesco's are not. Some are available from the library, whose policy is to rely on the blue timetable booklets, supplemented as necessary by leaflets for newer services. However, surely they should also be displayed at least at the most important bus stops. After all, the Ivel Sprinter timetable is displayed at Cambridge's Drummer Street bus station.

The Tesco bus services to Baldock were included in Hertfordshire's Region 5 booklet and they're still on [www.intalink.org.uk](http://www.intalink.org.uk) (though its page is dated in year 2000). Up to now Bedfordshire have declined to put the useful T1 service in the blue booklet, but that may be about to change. Ivel Sprinter and the T1 are obviously run for Bedfordshire folk, so the T1 timetable is included later in this newsletter. I'm glad to say that Beds CC now intend to include some more services in the next printing.

The County, along with Luton, publish a useful transport map, on paper, and the timetable booklets. They are all available from libraries, etc. The County's 'Bus and Coach Operators' webpage looks as if it has survived from last century, but it's not quite so old, having been constructed in July 2004 by a spelling-challenged author. Timetables are accessed from it by hyperlinks to **some** of the various bus companies, who use a variety of formats for their information. The site doesn't have links to J and D Travel, or directly to the Ivel Sprinter, and doesn't include any maps. We hope that Beds CC will soon produce a more professional version of its Operators' website.

For about 18 months I've been trying, by correspondence with BedsCC, to achieve timetable displays for other companies at Biggleswade. In April 2005 I received an e-mail with several good intentions, all of which have come to nought. This March we were told that timetable display is a matter for the Biggleswade Town Council. Don't hold your breath though, the Town Council are unlikely to hurry. Their two maps of the shopping facilities still show Budgens rather than Rainbow, and ASDA isn't even built yet according to those maps. We have three layers of local government, sometimes at odds with each other and, at other times, devolving duties from one to another so that it is hard for the citizen to find out who is responsible and, having discovered that, to get anything moving. Relations with neighbouring counties also are not as friendly as they could be, for instance between Beds and Cambs.

**Bus stops.** The County Council are reported to be planning to install more than 200 new bus stops, some equipped with 'real-time' bus information. 'Real time' implied to my mind a system similar to that used at major bus stops in London, but it transpires that much of the information may be given out by webpage and SMS texting, so not everyone will be any wiser. Each bus in the system will have to be continually locatable by one of two systems; GPS plus radio link, or the less precise option of cell-phone location. Either will enable better control of the bus fleet. Information will be fed out from the inevitable computer to the SMS, (with a possibility of a synthetic speech version at some locations), to the web, and to displays at major points where suitable protective locations exist.

**Concessions.** The website [www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk) reports that Bedford Borough plans not to honour the general concession on the X5 route to Milton Keynes, apparently not even the present 40p concession. BABUS is already facing this problem. There's more on this topic later in the newsletter.

The latest booklet, available from 23<sup>rd</sup> March (Concessionary Bus and Train Fares 2006, from Beds CC on behalf of Mid Beds and South Beds Councils) adds that free travel will be available on Arriva services 100/101 between Hitchin and Lister Hospital. The recent Stevenage Express service 900 is not listed in the book. If there are any problems on

the buses, note all the details and ring 08452 304040. Current passes/permits will be updated as normal (2 years after being issued, i.e. in April 2007). People who wish to apply for a concessionary bus pass/permit should do so by using the forms available in the libraries. It will be interesting to see whether people suddenly start to travel a lot more, with the consequence that buses will become quite a lot busier.

**Rail discounts.** What's this, in a newsletter on buses? The 50% discounts enjoyed for the last several years with Thameslink are being carried over for the time being with the new franchise, First Capital Connect, **but only on the Bedford-Luton-Elstree stretch. They will not be available on the GN line**, which is part of the same franchise. Even though I tried to get County to negotiate an equivalent concession with First on their GN line, County say they were not able to get it for us. However, I am taking this matter up with First to discover why NE Beds should be treated in such a different way. In order to get a 33% discount from FCC on the GN line, seniors must spend £20 on a Senior Card. North-East Beds really does have to start pushing, otherwise it will continue to lose out to those who do.

The booklet referred to above has 6 pages about the rail concessions. A lot of it is clear, but twice we have “- the last station stop before Elstree and Borehamwood –”. To me that means Radlett, in the case of an all-stations train. Eventually it dawned on me that it does mean Elstree and Borehamwood, but with the **important proviso that the train you are on at Elstree, must be timetabled to stop there.** The reason for using this station as the limit of the concession is that it is at the outer limit of validity of London's all-zone Travelcards. Therefore, to use a separate London-only all-zone Travelcard, (on which I hope there might be a Senior Card discount available) as an add-on to your half-fare ticket from Bedford to Elstree; you would have to change at Luton and/or St Albans on to a train scheduled to stop at Elstree. In the case of a return ticket, the same proviso applies in reverse on the way back, if you're going to remain within the law. It's a complicated topic but the booking clerks will be able to help if you're able to tell them clearly what you aim to do.

**Other areas.** London, with its 'regulated' superior public transport, is in the lucky position of being able to offer Freedom Cards for seniors, valid on buses, underground, trams and even National Rail, and in many of the London Boroughs this is all done with lower Council Taxes than ours. From April 1<sup>st</sup> there is free travel for accompanied juniors too, and that could have serious consequences. One can imagine crowds of juniors waiting to be taken through barriers, and, once through, occupying seats so that paying passengers are forced to stand, or not travel at all. Has Uncle Ken thought that one through? To add insult to injury for the mere paying provincials, Ken has introduced, in the last two years, large rises in the price of Travelcards that many visitors buy in order to travel around London.

The rest of the country, relying for public transport largely on de-regulated buses, is more constrained in its ability to grant concessions. In England, only the West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester are able even to approach the capital's concessions. Up to now, the Bedfordshire schemes of 40p and 50p concessions, have compared well with other schemes nearby, e.g. some of Hertfordshire's and Cambridgeshire's. It would be tragic if, after Gordon Brown's throwing all the cards into the air, they came down to make a worse hand than before. In this year's budget he announced that he will be throwing them in the air again, to fall to earth in 2008 with another set of unknowns.

**Services.** Two years ago when Biggleswade had its Whippet bus to Cambridge, the useful bus used to leave at about 09.30 for Cambridge, 20 miles away, to arrive by 10.30. In those days the road signs used to tell us that Bedfordshire was a progressive county. Now that **was** news! Progress led to cancellation of the bus route. Recently the signs have all been changed (how much did that cost?) to tell us that we live on the Oxford-Cambridge arc, which we already **did** know. Cambridge is a city of rapidly growing importance as a regional capital. It has an impressive array of bus services, despite its narrow streets and its inadequate draughty bus station. Sadly there is only the one Ivel Sprinter bus per week to Biggleswade or Sandy. The only way (apart from the Sprinter on Wednesdays) to get by bus from Biggleswade to Cambridge before 10.30, is to leave at 07.54 and travel upwards of 40 miles via Bedford. With services as infrequent and round-about as ours, we need to make an early start. Its nice to know that we can still do that with the new scheme.

**National Express.** Elsewhere in the Newsletter there's a summary of National Express services that pass through, or nearby, our county. Frank has put the summary on our website too. Until 31 March 2006 National Express had an offer of £9 to anywhere in the country (£4.50 for over-60s). From 1<sup>st</sup> April it has cost £3 odd for seniors of Bedford Borough to get to Milton Keynes Coachway to access the many National Express Services serving that point.

National Express handed over the GN part of their WAGN franchise to the First Group on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006. First will rebrand it as part of First Capital Connect – new logos and vinyl transfers I guess. There won't be any through running to the other part of FCC, the old Thameslink, to get to Croydon, Wimbledon, Gatwick or Brighton, even though the tunnelled link between Finsbury Park and St Pancras is so nearly complete that it could easily be finished now.

OK, rather than Gatwick, try getting to Luton for an early flight. You'll find that the first train in the morning from Peterborough misses a connection (by 45 minutes) at Hitchin station with the first 787 National Express bus to Luton Airport and Heathrow. I wonder whether two different companies can do any better than when both WAGN and the coaches came under the National Express Group. Doubtful! I believe that BABUS should take note of relevant railway matters, so as to move towards a better-integrated transport system. Apparently the attempt to form a commuter group in NE Beds failed - surprise, surprise, but there is a group at Bedford and we should be talking with them.

**Finally,** I'd like to thank members who have contributed items for the newsletter, and to remind everyone that I rely on news items contributed by members, preferably electronically to phirst5@yahoo.co.uk. There's a lot about Biggleswade in this issue, for obvious reasons, but I've tried to balance things by compiling the table of National Express services. We did try to get articles from a wider range of the members, but if we don't get them, we can't put

them in. BABUS does want to include the Biggleswade and Sandy area in its remit, but for obvious reasons we didn't want to form an acronym from Bedford and District, preferring just Bedford Area instead.

Newsletters on paper are necessarily infrequent, but the various parts of the BABUS website are kept up-to-date by Frank and other contributors. It holds a growing set of discussions between members, so, in order to keep abreast of news and other developments, **do** register and learn how to negotiate the site. You'll need a username and password, and to be a member of BABUS, to find your way to all the parts of the site. I have to admit that I had some problems finding my way around parts of the site, and the way to join in the discussions, but I'm gradually getting there.

**Bedford Area Bus Users' Society.** by Alma Tebbutt, Great Barford.

BABUS was launched on Wednesday 2nd November 2005. The aim of the Society is to represent the interests of bus users in the Bedfordshire area. This will include liaison by BABUS between the bus companies and County and Borough Councils. Already, the Society has had two meetings with Stagecoach. One result has been the introduction of an extra stopping point at St. Peter's in Bedford. A few more are hoped for. I was also assured in the meeting with Stagecoach that there are NO plans to cut any of the X5 services when the Great Barford bypass opens.

I have agreed to be a Contact Point for the village of Great Barford, and would like to see a more user-friendly service than at present. The half-hour service is good, especially for anyone going to Milton Keynes; however, access on to the coaches leaves much to be desired. This aspect was also discussed in the meeting with Stagecoach. They were sympathetic, and promised to look into the problem.

My plans for the future include re-instating a cross-country service, which would run through Great Barford, using existing stops and connecting other villages, such as Cople, Willington, Blunham and Roxton, none of which has a doctors' surgery. Taking this further, Alban Middle School serves Sandy Upper, and there is no direct bus link there.

At a recent meeting held at the Methodist Church, a discussion was held about the Ivel Sprinter. This is a registered charity, and runs some bus services in the Biggleswade-Sandy area. A service could be started for Great Barford if sufficient people are interested, and we have already had the first run. Initially, it will be run on one Monday a month, and could be routed to suit local needs. I feel a service to Tesco might be appreciated. The drivers are all volunteers, and are very helpful. More volunteer drivers are needed, so if anyone has some time to spare would they please contact Ian Cobban of Ivel Sprinter, on 01767 699199. If you have any comments or suggestions, or would like more information about the new Ivel Sprinter service for Great Barford, please contact me, Alma Tebbutt on 01234 871210.

**The Tesco T1 bus service from Biggleswade, via the villages, to Tesco's at Baldock. Tuesdays and Fridays.**

Biggleswade Bus Station. 09.45. via Langford, The Boot. 09.55. Henlow, Crown. 10.01. Arlesey, Old Oak. 10.03. Hitchin Road, Fairfield Estate Entrance. 10.11. A tour around Stotfold including the Green. 10.17. Tesco. 10.30. The service returns from Tesco at 12.30 for the same route back again to Biggleswade, arriving around 13.15. The service seems to stop at any official bus stop on the route where it is hailed. The bus itself is a Uno (Hatfield University) one so give it a hail and see what shopping should be like.

**The National Express Guide** contains many timetables. Some are complex, with several services included, some are operated on special days only, and others are straight-forward daily services. The accompanying table was compiled from the 2005/6 Guide that was valid only until 5 March 2006 (the new edition was not available until 20th March). The table attempts to present the choices that were available from our district on a daily basis. The reason for this late news is that this part of the newsletter was 'ready to go', way back in February – but you know what committees are like! In some timetables the service numbers resemble the timetable number, in others they don't. Some service numbers are listed under more than one timetable number, hopefully without conflict! For further information related to the timetable, service numbers and fares, please consult a **current** National Express Guide in the reference section of your public library.

Useful, and accessible, destinations for changing on to other services are Milton Keynes Coachway (MKC), Cambridge (Drummer Street), Oxford (Gloucester Green), Peterborough (Bus Station, between Rail Station and Queensgate Centre), Heathrow (Central Coach Station), Birmingham (Digbeth) and Nottingham (Broad Marsh Bus Station). There is easy access from the Green Line termini at Victoria to London's Victoria Coach Station, **or**, catch the 91 bus from opposite St Pancras as far as Aldwych or the Strand, and change there on to the 11 that takes you all the way to the Coach station.

The route for accessing coaches at MKC, Cambridge, Bedford and Oxford is the Stagecoach X5. Good routes for accessing Heathrow are the 787 National Express route via Hitchin and Luton and the 724 Green Line through Welwyn GC, Hatfield Station, St Albans (Station and Centre).

The National Express website (see below) approaches the timetables from a different direction, mentioning neither timetable nor service numbers. It asks you "where from?", "where to?", "when?", and "what type of ticket?", but this approach hides, to some extent, the large choice of routes available; a choice that **is** presented in the Guide. The fares information in the Guide is pretty complex too. It all has to be approached with great care. The Guide also shows special services at holiday times and for some special events. They are not included in the table above. The information will eventually be updated on our website when I get the 2006/7 Guide, and we hope to include a map of the National Express routes in our next issue of the newsletter.

Timetable information for Stagecoach (for the X5) is available from [www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com). National Express information is at [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com). National Express bookings can be made, and tickets obtained, on line. There is even a scheme for 'ticketing' by SMS texting. (Show the bus driver your phone instead of getting a ticket!). They had a special offer until 31 March of 'as far as you like' for £9 a trip (single) or £18 (return). For the over 60s all fares are halved, but take proof of age with you! Maybe there'll be a similar scheme next winter.

**National Express Routes passing through, or near to, Bedfordshire; listed by timetable number.**

Time table	Service Number	<b>Abbreviations</b> , A = Airport, B = Bus Station, Bfd = Bedford, B'ham = Birmingham, BRd = Baldock Road, L'pool = Liverpool, M/c = Manchester, MKC = Milton K Coachway (on the X5 route), N'castle = Newcastle-on-Tyne, Nott'm = Nottingham, N'ton = Northampton, SM = St Mary's Square, SP = St Peter's Street, U = University Bus Station,
010	010.	London, Cambridge (12/day), to King's Lynn (1/day)
105	230, 707.	Luton A, Heathrow, Gatwick (27/day)
108	717, 797.	Cambridge, Stansted, Hatfield U, Heathrow, Gatwick (21/day), Brighton (1/day)
109	787.	Cambridge, Letchworth BRd, Hitchin Stn, Hitchin SM, Luton B, Luton A, Heathrow. A similar service is the hourly 724 Green-line from Harlow, via Hertford, Welwyn GC, Hatfield Stn, St Albans Stn and SP, Watford J to Heathrow. It starts, and ends, quite early.
110	707, 787.	Northampton (9 from N'ton, 707), MKC, Luton B (+10, 787), Luton A, Heathrow, Gatwick
111	757.	(from Hemel H), Hatfield U, Stansted (8/day, night and day)
111	707, 787	Luton B, Luton A, Hemel H (change on to service 757 to High Wycombe, Oxford.
112	717, 787,	& 797. Cambridge, Heathrow (22/day).
215	777.	Birmingham, B'ham A, Coventry, MKC, Luton B, Luton A, Hitchin SM, Stevenage, Stansted (8/day).
230	230	Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton A, Luton B, Leicester, Nottingham (9/day).
303	304, 310, & 539.	Oxford, Reading, Southampton, Portsmouth or Bournemouth, Weymouth. This is a complicated group of timetables and services. You need to consult the Guide or website.
305	& 314.	Southend (1/day), Chelmsford, Cambridge (+3/day), St Neots, Bedford, N'ton, Coventry, B'ham A, B'ham (3/day), Stoke, Warrington, L'pool (1/day).
308	308.	Peterborough, King's Lynn, Norwich, Great Yarmouth.
326	&350.	Cambridge, (Bedford 1/day), Leicester, Nott'm, Sheffield, Leeds, then Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Sunderland, N'castle, or Durham, N'castle.
335	350	Cambridge, Bury SE, Ipswich, Colchester, Clacton.
348	348	Oxford, Bristol, then change for S Wales or Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall.
350/1	326, 350.	Cambridge, Leicester, Nott'm, Chesterfield, Sheffield, M/c, L'pool.
421	422	London, Luton A, Luton B, MKC, Coventry, B'ham A, B'ham, M/c A, M/c, Bolton, Blackburn, Burnley.
425	425, 426.	London, MKC, then Middlesbrough, Sunderland, or Durham, Newcastle (total of 10/day)
440	440.	London, MKC, Leicester (10/day), Derby (7/day), Manchester (1/day).
448	427/8/9.	London, Peterborough, then Boston, Skegness, Mablethorpe; or Louth, Cleethorpes, Grimsby; or Stamford, Grantham, Lincoln.
450	450	London, MKC, Nottingham, Mansfield (6/day).
455	455	London, MKC, Northampton (6/day).
540	422, 540.	London MKC, Manchester A (4/day), Manchester (6/day), Burnley (2/day).
545	545, 871.	London, MKC, Birmingham, Rhyl, Llandudno, Bangor. Also Eurolines service 871 calls at MKC, to Holyhead for Dublin ferry.
550	550.	London, MKC, Liverpool (5/day), Chester (2/day), most buses via Stoke.
560	560, 564.	London, MKC, Chesterfield, Sheffield (8/day), Barnsley (6/day).
561	425, 561.	London, MKC, Leeds (8/day), going on variously to Bradford, Skipton, Harrogate and Ripon.
562	426, 562.	London, MKC, Doncaster, Scunthorpe, Hull (2/day).
563	426, 563.	London, MKC, York (4/day), Bridlington, Filey, Scarborough, Whitby (1/day).
564	564	London, MKC, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Brighouse, Halifax (3/day).
570.	570, 571.	London, MKC, Birmingham, Preston, Blackpool (3/day), some services call at Wigan.
588.	588, 590.	London, MKC, Carlisle, Glasgow, Perth, Inverness (2/day). From Glasgow there are connections to Dundee, Aberdeen (2/day) or to Oban (1/day) or Fort William (1/day).
591.	591.	London, Luton B (1/day), MKC (2/day), Ferrybridge Services (W Yorks, refreshment stop), Morpeth, Berwick, Edinburgh (night bus).
700	920	Stena service. London, MKC, Birmingham, Manchester, Carlisle, Stranraer for Larne ferry.

**Bedford Borough's Bus-travel Concessions.** We hope that Bedford Borough Council will rescind their decision not to allow concessionary fares for their Seniors and Handicapped on the X5 to Milton Keynes, even if only to the extent of continuing the 40p or 50p fare. If they do not, it will cost almost as much to go from Bedford to MKC as it does to travel to the North by National Express from MKC, on one of their special winter fares. Surely it can't persist until 2008, otherwise every other English permit holder will be using the X5 for free whilst those from Bedford pay. The MK Metro service 24 will continue to observe the concessionary fares, but it runs only 6 or 7 times a day to and from Bedford, and doesn't call at MKC. The other service to Milton Keynes (via Cranfield and Newport Pagnell) have been removed since the improved X5 service began.

**The new Mars services.** Stagecoach is carrying out a fundamental review of the major inter-urban bus service corridors linking Bedford with the surrounding towns.

Over the years, although basic half-hourly and hourly frequencies have been maintained, these have increasingly been disrupted in the morning and afternoon peak times by the need to divert buses to pick up school children. In the new timetables, those needs will be met in other ways.

The new buses on the Mars (M1, M2 and M3) services on the Bedford-Hitchin corridors, are low-floor single-deckers, fully accessible and with the latest environmentally-friendly engines. Fully accessible means that the buses include a ramp enabling access by small scooters used by handicapped people, but such users do need to be able to steer the scooters round the fairly sharp corner to get to the parking areas, and of course, to manoeuvre to get out again.

The other main routes in the county will receive similar treatment (though not new buses) during the course of 2006. Stagecoach believe that this will significantly improve the attractiveness and reliability of their services, and that new users will be attracted to the buses.

The changes have the consequence that there is a change from Stagecoach to Herberts Travel for most of the services between Holme Court Avenue and Biggleswade Market Square. Timetables for the service (number 185) effective from 20<sup>th</sup> March, have just appeared in the library. The possibility of through ticketing to Bedford is being investigated, but looks unlikely.

The Stagecoach timetables for the new route M3 show five early-morning services travelling to Bedford in the 'old' sense via Drove Road, but no corresponding ones coming back in the evening. The new 'short' service serves the Drove Road area in the middle of the day by an hourly service running on a Bedford-Sandy-Biggleswade route, that carries on to serve Drove Road **after** calling at the Bus Station. Conversely, on the short route away from the rush hour, buses start from Drove Road (at the triangle roundabout?) and go, via the bus station, to Bedford.

The hourly longer M3 services go through to Langford, Henlow and Hitchin. They are timetabled to provide connections with the M1 service to Bedford at Henlow Newtown. The corresponding connection also exists for the return journey from the M1 on to the M3 to get back to Langford. There will be through ticketing to Bedford.

The last Herberts services of the day are at 17.10 from the bus station to Drove Road, etc. (186) and at 16.50 from the bus station to Holme Court Avenue, etc. (185). There are two slightly later M3 services too to Holme Court Road.

**Useful Websites for Travel information.** Each (except one) of the following web sites needs the www prefix: bedfordshire.gov.uk (and also bedsc.gov.uk) is the source for most, but not all, of the local services. It has no maps, no link to J and D Travel (who run service 190 from Sandy and Biggleswade to Letchworth and Baldock) and no direct link to the Ivel Sprinter. It does include Herberts, but their site doesn't give any timetables.

Herberts' phone number is no longer 01462 813240, as given on the webpage, but 08450 090369 (after 9am).

Limited information about Ivel Sprinter is available on the carberry hyperlink which is included on the webpage.

The 'phone number for Ivel Sprinter is 01767 699199, and that for J and D Travel is 01462 629469, though I must admit that I haven't checked all those, as I did the one for Herberts.

We look forward to seeing a more professional webpage from Beds CC in the near future.

stagecoachbus.com takes you to all the timetables and facilities for Stagecoach.

bucksc.gov.uk is quite good, with maps, but I couldn't see service 24 to Bedford on their map.

cambridgeshire.gov.uk is also a good site – it includes maps with service numbers.

Hertfordshire is covered by intalink.org.uk which gives information on transport there, but it's as well to know what route number you need.

northamptonshire.gov.uk doesn't volunteer any maps. You'll need to know operators and service numbers. The 'need more information?' link leads to an offer to post leaflets.

traveline.org.uk is the source of general information for the whole country.

barrydoe.co.uk has a big overview of transport generally. Buses are dealt with county by county, both shire and metropolitan counties with all the necessary hyperlinks. It is a good starting point for making comparisons of how customer-friendly the various web-sites can be. Many of the links lead into sites needing pdf, but travelwm.co.uk (for the West midlands) is approachable without that complication, and looks like an excellent site, worth visiting to see how good a site can be. There might be less useful sites than bedfordshire's, but I haven't bothered to look for them.

tfl.gov.uk/buses/spiders takes you to detail maps for London, for which you need to know your boroughs.

busmap.co.uk gives excellent big maps for both Central London Buses and Greater London Buses.

firstcapitalconnect.co.uk for the new rail franchise, though it doesn't say anything very concrete yet.

babus.org.uk (which doesn't need all those w's) takes you to BABUS and Bus Users UK has its site at bususers.org.uk, which does need them.