
Newsletter of BABUS - Bedford Area Bus Users' Society. Autumn 2007

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NEWS**BABUS AGM**

BABUS held its AGM on Saturday 12 May 2007, at St Andrew's Church Hall Biggleswade. The formal meeting included thanks to retiring committee members Ted Bowen and Peter Hirst for their hard work over the years: Stephen Sleight, Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership Transport Officer thanked the committee as a whole for their hard work and congratulated them on their efforts as the first bus user group of its kind in the County and the great strides they were making. He then presented Chairman Colin Franklin with a cheque for £1,000 from the BRTP Delegated Fund. After refreshments and a raffle, the guest speaker, Mr Chris Pettifer, Head of the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit at Bedfordshire County Council gave a presentation on the County's 'Better Buses for You' consultation. Comments were made and questions asked by members. Concern was expressed that drivers were not issuing tickets with the correct destinations on [for concessionary tickets]. The hope was expressed that Bedfordshire County Council would join the Intalink scheme which is of such benefit to residents in Hertfordshire.



Stephen presents Colin with a cheque for £1,000

FORTHCOMING MEMBERS' MEETING

A member's meeting will be held in Bedford Central Library, Harpur Street, Bedford, on Saturday 29 September from 2-4pm. Please tell us what topics you would like discussed at this meeting. So far we have the new development in Bedford town centre and the future of Bedford DART. Light refreshments will be available.

Apologies for the delayed publication of this newsletter. We hope to publish 3 times a year.

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership year runs from 1 April until the following 31 March. These dates are a month earlier than last year. **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 Membership Secretary, Simon Norton, 6 Hertford Street, Cambridge, CB4 3AG **or come and renew at the Members' Meeting.**

Contact BABUS through the website at <http://babus.org.uk>

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New Bus Station for Bedford takes a Step Closer

by Colin Franklin

The planning application for the redevelopment of the western part of Bedford Town Centre was submitted to the planning department at Bedford Borough Council in January this year by St Modwen Development Ltd. This £180m scheme has been submitted with construction expected from 2009 to 2013 following site assembly. It proposes a department store, a food store, 40 retail units, 5/6 restaurants, a cinema complex, a hotel with up to 130 rooms, up to 330 residential units, a car park with up to 1,100 spaces and a new bus station.

There are three areas of this scheme, entitled the "Bedford Town Centre (West) Redevelopment" that I have reservations about. These encompass (a) The location of the new bus station (b) Improved accessibility for existing bus services and (c) Additional traffic movements within the town centre. I will expound about each one separately.

As I see it the location of the new bus station is in the wrong place as it seems to be divorced from the rest of the Bedford Town Centre precinct, especially the High Street shops. My alternatives would be to either relocate it to where the new department store would be built, or bulldoze the River Street car park and build it there. There are three main advantages to this. (a) It would allow better connections to be made between the bus and railway stations for passengers (b) It would help the economic fortunes of businesses in Midland Road (West) and (c) A greater spread of footfall would be generated to other parts of the town for e.g. the High Street. Indeed it also allows greater use to be made of the Howard Centre for shopping, as it has never had the same appeal for shoppers that other parts of the town for example Church Square, Silver Street or Midland Road (East) have.

I'm surprised that no thought has been given to improving accessibility to existing bus services. The problem with this redevelopment scheme is that it assumes that the present one-way system in the town centre, from St Mary's to River Street is adequate for Bedford's economic needs. It isn't!!! So why haven't St. Modwens included an extra river crossing from Kingsway to River Street in their plans, not only to help alleviate the chronic traffic congestion that has such an adverse effect on the reliability of bus

services, especially in the peak periods, but also from an environmental view as well? A few years ago this project was mooted but nothing has ever come of it but an added benefit of having an extra river crossing is that it helps to speed up journey times, with the consequences that it'll help to encourage people to use buses more. Unfortunately the planners seem to think that the Western Bypass will be the saviour to help take traffic out of the town centre. It won't!!! Remember, the bypass will take X number of years to build, and it will be X number of years before we see any decline in traffic in the town centre.

Lastly what effect will the new multi-storey car park, associated residents parking and the new hotel have on existing bus service reliability? If you look at the numbers the new car park will have over twice the number of car parking spaces than the present multi-storey car park at the bus station. Then if you factor in the number of residential units (330), as well as the number of rooms the new hotel will have (130), potentially you could end up with up to 1,560 vehicle movements in and around the town centre during the course of the day. I have grave doubts that the road system on the periphery of this development will be able to cope with the consequent increase in traffic levels for example Bromham Road, Union Street and Beckett Street, especially in the peak periods.

I would therefore urge all BABUS members to send in any comments they may have to Graham Mason in the Planning Department at Bedford Borough Council, Town Hall, Bedford who is the officer in charge of making sure this development proceeds through the planning process. Alternatively they may wish to lobby members of the Planning Committee; their details can be found by accessing the Borough Council's website at: www.bedford.gov.uk. As I understand it, St Modwens are still waiting for the application to go before the Planning Committee. The Council have said that they are aiming to submit the planning committee report on the application in September 2007.

Bus Crisis in East Bedfordshire by Frank Hendrix

In the middle of December 2006 an announcement was 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. This was promptly followed by a County Council announcement condemning the Stagecoach cuts and adding to the passengers' misery by announcing closure of East Beds Dart (EBD). County Council confused the issue by apparently putting the blame for EBD closure on Stagecoach, although it was not even Stagecoach's service. The only good news from Stagecoach was the announcement of a new bus service M4 between Biggleswade and Bedford. All this came within about a week after BABUS had a liaison meeting with Stagecoach at which none of the forthcoming closures was mentioned.

The bus cuts were due to take effect in the middle of February 2007 and it soon became clear that this was the largest cutback in bus services on the county for around 10 years or more. Most, if not all, of the villages to the East of the A1 were to be left with no bus service at all. To the west of the A1 Blunham, Old Warden, Broom, Southill and Stanford were similarly affected. Langford, which with its population of around 3000 makes it one of the largest villages in the county, was to have its bus service cut to almost nothing. As the only BABUS member in the affected area with an interest in saving passengers from the forthcoming catastrophe, I urgently asked for help in mounting a campaign of protest. Most BABUS members are located in and around Bedford and they were slow to respond. As days went by, with BABUS not able to itself mount a campaign, the Biggleswade & District Pensioners Association (BDPA) rapidly stepped in with a high profile campaign supported by the local newspaper. For the next few weeks the bus cuts dominated conversation in this part of the county and the newspapers were full of the "Save our Buses" campaign highlighting the BDPA. Two public meetings were held at Langford and Potton respectively. The Langford meeting had the largest and most vocal audience who loudly condemned the proposed loss of bus service. Stagecoach explained that it was now up to County Council to come up with a solution to save the bus network. Despite prior promises, County Council had no answers whatever to offer the crowd assembled at Langford. They could only say they were thinking out it and the meeting finished with no useful result!

The Potton meeting a week later was significantly smaller and lower key. However, this time there were answers given by County Council for villages around Potton and Sandy.

There was some attempt to shore up the bus network although it was clear that many people would lose out. Further details are given by Alison Gibson in her article. The situation for bus users around Langford was barely mentioned at the Potton meeting and those of us there had to wait a further couple of weeks to get the news of the dismantling of Langford's bus service.

The situation left for Langford residents was limited to an hourly bus service between Biggleswade and Hitchin. Services previously available to Bedford and Shefford have been cancelled and passengers have been left by County Council to search through 7 pages of complicated timetables to try to negotiate a route to these towns. Further there are no buses at all after 18:00 Monday to Saturday badly affecting people who go to work as well as evening travellers. Of course, there is nothing at all on Sundays. Langford, like many local villages, is largely a commuter village, with many people making train journeys to work. Despite the popularity of journeys to work by train, neither County Council nor Stagecoach have shown the slightest interest in helping rail passengers by providing a bus service that calls at a railway station. Consequently rail passengers are forced to use private transport (predominantly cars) to enable them to reach their destination. Despite being the largest village affected, the County Council has singled out Langford for the earliest shutdown of its bus service. All other villages around (and even tiny hamlets like Eyeworth) have a later bus service in early evening. County Council has similarly arranged timetables such that it is very difficult to reach Bedford from Langford efficiently: passengers can be left stranded at connection stops for up to an hour. Langford now probably has the worst bus service in the county based on population size. The County Council's response was that this poor level of service actually "exceeds the guidelines" (whatever they may be). I fear the result of this will prove to be a further significant drop in passengers and I will not be surprised if in the near future further bus cuts will be proposed. By wrecking people's bus service, the spiral of decline in our bus network can only accelerate.

The experience of these bus cuts in East Beds in my view highlights a weakness in BABUS. It was not found possible to marshal the Society to run a campaign and we failed to do it. The bulk of our members residing in and around Bedford had a misguided belief that these cuts were not relevant to Bedford and North Bedfordshire. For

the most part I found myself working single-handedly in flying the BABUS flag. Our failure to mount an effective campaign lost an unrivalled opportunity to recruit new members.

There is to be a review of all bus services in the County Council area. Given the savage scale of the cuts imposed in and around East Beds, together with County Council claiming they have no money, I suspect passengers in villages in other parts of the county may now find themselves faced with service cuts. For example, all the villages in North Beds (outside of Bedford and Kempston towns) are significantly smaller than Langford yet attract far higher bus subsidies per head of population from County Council. I believe there will be significant pressure to spread the subsidy more evenly across the county and certainly I will not accept the current situation of disproportionately large bus subsidies offered to North Bedfordshire. Those members in North Bedfordshire who felt that the recent events in East Beds were of no relevance to them may be in for a wake-up call.

On 25 July 2007 the government announced that as a result of an extensive consultation it is likely the county council will be scrapped in its present form. The government's preferred option is for it to be replaced by two unitary authorities comprising Bedford as one and the combination of Mid and South Beds as another. If this proposal comes into effect it will mean that the area of East Beds will be governed by a different authority from Bedford. Whatever arrangements Bedfordshire County Council will have put in place will be reviewed by the new authorities who may have different priorities. BABUS will have to consider carefully how this affects our future.

East Bedfordshire Bus Service – Potton, Sandy, Biggleswade, Gamlingay, Everton, Dunton, Wrestlingworth, Eyeworth, Sutton by Alison Gibson

Monday 18 February saw the introduction of a reduced and more expensive bus service across rural areas of the east part of the county where people have no choice other than to travel to gain access to all essential services including further education. The change of services meant that several people lost their jobs and are still now looking for work. In addition commuters used the bus as part of the integrated service

with trains. The revised service means that the last train out of London, which connects with the last bus of the day, is just after 6:30 pm. Most commuters do not arrive back in Sandy until 7:30 pm and beyond. Again if a passenger is travelling "off peak" (£10 cheaper) the first train they can get from London is the 19:20 arriving in Biggleswade just before 20:00. The last bus now leaves at 18:45!!

There is no way that passengers can now get home from either Sandy or Biggleswade rail station in the evening.

Chiltern Buses were given the task of running new routes to include Gamlingay some of the Bedford runs as well as run a service, which affectively had been cut in two. – one between Wrestling worth and Biggleswade and another service for Sandy and Biggleswade running through Potton, Everton and Sutton. They have done their best to accommodate these changes and I know have received a great deal of flack, which should be aimed at the government and councillors instead.

These new bus services now mean that the villages are no longer connected to each other. For example if a passenger wishes to go to the Medical Centre in Potton, they now have to catch two buses going via Biggleswade – the whole journey taking 40 minutes and costing £3:20 when previously the journey would take about 10 minutes and cost £1:30!

From the above you can see how much these changes have disrupted passenger's lives and increased their cost of travel overnight. As important is the effect changes have on encouraging people to travel by public transport especially in rural areas. The lack of integration with the trains, no evening or Sunday service, means that people are seriously restricted in travelling and I know it has affected the number of travellers on the buses. Every time there are changes passengers are lost because they lose faith and become demoralised that the service cannot be trusted. Research shows that people will use public transport if it is regular, integrated, runs day and evening and is affordable.

One of the other things which happened was that without any prior notice the County Council increased fares considerably on the same day the bus service changed. They did not take into account that some journeys would now mean

two buses –so more than doubling the original fare. Granted passengers recognise that fares may need increasing but to do this without notice, having already disrupted passengers, made us feel as though the County Council had little regard or consideration for those using the service. I would urge County Councillors and those making decisions to travel by bus and leave their cars at home for a week. The experience of this would I suggest bring a new perspective to decision making. My hope is that the review will see as a priority the need for an integrated bus service which offers access to services and facilities to those living in rural areas in the same way as it does to those living in urban areas – to ensure that there is equal access.

I also hope that when decisions are being made public transport is seen as an essential social service for those who otherwise may become isolated and so need other services provided by the County Council and also as a crucial resource for young people who are so poorly served in rural areas.

They now cannot travel direct to the largest leisure centre in the area or access the trains to use leisure facilities at night.

Boundary Blues by Simon Norton

One of the most striking achievements in terms of social engineering has been the development of the idea that only the least sustainable means of travel -- cars and planes -- are suited to people's increasingly complicated travel requirements. It's difficult to say to what extent this has been intentional; the roads lobby is known to be very powerful, and there is the well known example in America of General Motors buying up and destroying municipal tramway systems en masse. (Though of course even car industry chiefs will lose out in the longer term if climate change collapses the world economy as suggested in the Stern Report.)

In this country we still have enough rural buses and trains to make up a reasonable national network, if only they were properly coordinated. Unfortunately our regulatory system makes coordination difficult, allowing commercial operators to "cherry pick" sections of corridors and leave hard pressed local authorities to fill in the gaps.

Unfortunately, when planning their supported networks, many local authorities do little to try to develop new sources of patronage which might help to keep services going. For example, all too often tendered services stop at or near county boundaries making it unnecessarily difficult for people to make cross-country journeys. Sometimes there are short gaps (e.g. between Wrestlingworth and the Mordens) between the services tendered by the two counties; in other areas the services do meet (e.g. at Gamlingay) but the timetables are not correlated to provide suitable services for passengers going through.

Here are some examples of how new opportunities could be created for journeys between Bedfordshire villages and the regional centres at Milton Keynes and Cambridge, which are not only important in themselves but have onward train and coach connections to many other parts of the country. It should be emphasised that all the main elements of the proposed routes already exist except for some short gaps -- all that's needed is to put them together.

18A (Cambridge-Gamlingay, 2 hourly): Extend to Biggleswade via Potton and Sutton, This service could also attract passengers from Cambridgeshire villages seeking to use Biggleswade as a railhead for London, and should continue late enough to allow them to return after the evening peak.

28 (St Neots-Gamlingay, 2 hourly): Ditto, providing joint hourly service between Gamlingay and Biggleswade.

18 (Cambridge-St Neots via villages, 2 hourly): Extend to Bedford via Eynesbury, Little Barford, Tempsford, Blunham and Moggerhanger and/or Willington village loops.

127 (Royston-Guilden Morden, 2 hourly): Extend to Biggleswade via Wrestlingworth. Note that this service would offer opportunities to connect at Royston with trains to/from Cambridge.

75 (Cambridge-Arrington, irregular): Run on a 2 hourly regular interval and extend to Sandy via East Hatley, Gamlingay and Everton. This route could serve visitors to Wimpole Hall, including Londoners using Sandy as a railhead.

200 (Biggleswade-Flitwick, about 2 hourly): extend to Milton Keynes via Woburn village and Woburn Sands. This could serve visitors to Woburn Abbey, including Londoners using Flitwick as a railhead.

V1 (Bedford-Cranfield, ½ hourly to Wootton then hourly): split into separate sections for Cranfield and Marston Moretaine, each running

hourly. Extend former to Milton Keynes replacing existing routes 1A, 17 and 17A; and extend latter to Lidlington and/or Leighton Buzzard replacing existing routes 160, 165 and 168, as well as the southern section of 10 (the northern section of which would be replaced by the extension of the 200 referred to above). Stewartby could be served by diverting the X42 between Ampthill and Bedford.

P1 (Bedford-Northampton, hourly): Establish an interchange at Warrington Toll Bar with buses to Milton Keynes (via Olney and Newport Pagnell) and Wellingborough (via Bozeat). Note that I envisage that separate services would continue to run from Bedford to Olney and Newport Pagnell as routes 1 and 24 do now.

Sustainable Highways by Simon Norton

The above title is intended as an oxymoron -- how can highways, designed for cars and lorries above all else, possibly be sustainable? It is the author's contention that we need to design both existing and -- if we must have them -- new or upgraded highways to better meet the needs of walkers, cyclists, horseriders, and, last but not least, bus users.

Let's take the A1 to start with. At the junction at Upper Caldecote vehicles are unable to turn right. This means that the direct M4 bus service from Bedford to Biggleswade has to turn right at Upper Caldecote crossroads and therefore misses out the Pastures area of Upper Caldecote -- and Bedfordshire County Council has to spend public money supporting a replacement service (the E6) which is far less frequent than the M4 (or the former combination of the 180 and EB5).

To the north and south there are junctions (at Edworth/Langford and Tempsford) where the Highways Agency has put in grade separated junctions which would have solved any similar problems there -- except that neither has had any more than a sporadic bus service for some time. The road upgrades could have been used as a catalyst to reintroduce such a service if only we'd had some degree of cooperation between the various offices involved.

The road network at Sandy could scarcely have been better designed if the object was to make it difficult for buses to operate. At Wyboston one bus driver was heard to remark that he considered the stop unsafe and there was a

move to discontinue it, thus isolating the village. At Lower Caldecote the road severs an important walking route. Further to the north, in Cambridgeshire, problems similar to those described above are evident in Southoe, Buckden, Brampton, Stilton and Water Newton.

Similar problems affect less important roads. When the Bedford to Bletchley line was closed recently, there were reports that replacement buses going north were heavily delayed by problems in leaving and rejoining the A421. Questions as to the safety of a pair of bus stops on the A507 have affected bus/rail interchange at Arlesey. Some buses have ceased to serve Maulden Hall End because of problems on the A6 junction.

Recently in Cambridgeshire a teenager was killed as she tried to cross the A1307 after leaving a bus. This has fuelled calls to close the relevant bus stop -- though, notably, not from the family of the victim, who recognise that bus stops on main roads can be important lifelines to nearby rural communities. How much longer will it be before we realise that if we want both road safety and social equity we need to refocus the design of our roads to give greater weight to the needs of sustainable travellers?

Information from websites by Peter Hirst

The **websites** for the local authorities neighbouring Bedfordshire are: buckscc.gov.uk, cambridgeshire.gov.uk, essexcc.gov.uk, northamptonshire.gov.uk, intalink.org.uk (for Herts), and two for the unitary authorities, luton.gov.uk and mkweb.co.uk. Essex has a lovely map at essexpublictransport.info. Each website needs the **www.** in front. A typical way to get to bus maps, routes, operators, timetables, etc. is to go to the Transport and Streets item at the end of the main menu on the home-page, and progress to something like "buses" or "bus-operators". There's no standard formula.

A new version of the Bedfordshire County Council website appeared on the web in February. The new set of timetables for the changes introduced from 18/19th February were available in booklet form at the road-shows held by the County Council at a series of venues on 13/14/15th February. They are now available in Bedford bus station, libraries and in some buses. They are also available via the county's website, bedscc.gov.uk in PDF form. An

improvement, and it needs to be if Beds CC is to be regarded as a serious contender to take over as a unitary authority.

To use the main part of the website at present you have to know which operator you'll be using. The best way to do that is to look at the excellent public-transport map that Bedfordshire County Council publishes, but it has to be an up-to-date one and that's been the problem. An updated one is being prepared and will be available in printed form, as well as on the web. Having decided which operator is the right one, click its hyperlink and hope for the best. If it's Herberts, it'll tell you that their detailed webpages are still under construction. I still can't find a link on the **bedscc** site to Ivel Sprinter, or to the Tesco buses, which still run on Tuesdays and Fridays from Biggleswade to Baldock.

The operators hyperlinked on the Beds site are: Stagecoach East (includes the X5 route), Megabus (not very useful locally), Arriva The Shires (a big improvement here), Bedfordshire Darts, AGS Taxibus, Cedar Coaches, Herberts (leads nowhere), Centrebus (the new 171 route accessible via Hitchin), MK Metro, First Group (the site includes the 'ftr' systems in Leeds and York, but it would be quicker to go straight to **firstcapitalconnect.co.uk**), Red Rose, Flitabus (spelt wrongly, and it got me nowhere), Whitbread Wanderbus (it's there, but not much use on timetables), National Express and National Rail Enquiries (neither of those are as useful as they could be).

The new timetables that came in on 19th February are all available in PDF form by going to the bottom of the page and clicking "**Bus timetable revisions**", but you'll have to lean your head to the left to read the long list which this leads to. Is this because the County Council was lying down on the job? Operators with timetables in the list include AGS, Centrebus, Chiltern Travel, Grant Palmer, Herberts, J & D Travel, Red Rose and Stagecoach. There's still more for the County's webmaster to do on this site, so that when you click on a route number on a list, or on a map, just the timetable that you require (without all the others to scroll through) will appear – and then, preferably the right way up. When such a system is complete, the present hyperlink method could be largely dispensed with.

You can also get links from www.carlberry.co.uk/co/Bedfordshire_County.htm for Buffalo Travel, Barfordian, Chiltern Travel, Flittabus (spelt correctly by Carl), Herberts, Ivel Sprinter and J & D Travel. **However**, the link to

Chiltern led nowhere when I tried it, and the Herberts site didn't include any of their Biggleswade services. Whilst some of Carl's information is bang up to date (e.g. National Express from Cambridge), much of the information was dated way back in 2005 and even 2004, but at least it does all have dates on.

A good website for hyperlinks to many of the other transport websites in the country is **www.barrydoe.co.uk**. There's also the **traveline.org.uk** site, but I don't find that easy to navigate. For a start, Bedford is near the meeting point of three regions and Traveline does not tell you where the boundaries of these regions lie. Where railways are concerned, Bedford lies in both East Midlands (for Rail Rovers) and the South East (for First Capital Connect), and in East Anglia for television. After some experimenting I found that Traveline puts Cambridgeshire in East Anglia, Northants in the East Midlands, with Beds, Bucks, Essex and Herts all in the South-East.

When I tried Traveline, I gave it a good test by asking for a journey in the early morning from Biggleswade to Letchworth, to see if it had heard of service 190 (now called E7) by J & D Travel. It hadn't, and even worse it told me (with a Google map as back-up) to go by the M4 service and change on to Arriva's route 97 on the top road past Fairfield. However, M4 didn't go along the top road past Fairfield, it went along the lower road through Arlesey, so that shook my faith yet again in Traveline. I gave it another test by asking for travel from Biggleswade to Milton Keynes on a Tuesday, to see if it had heard of the Grant Palmer service 197. It didn't know about that service. A long time previous to these internet searches I'd tried ringing them, but that didn't yield any sensible advice either.

News from Great Barford by Alma Tebbutt

A meeting was held with Bedfordshire County Council recently at which a request for a cross-country service for this area was made. We were told it is not likely to come about in the near future because the County Council is going through a period of great change. A recent MORI Poll was held suggesting that Public Transport is very high on the list of priorities and I will continue to press for a service with easy-access buses to link local villages. The Ivel Sprinter trips to Tesco are proving very successful. This service was initiated by

BABUS. The Society works to help local commuters have better services. If you have any ideas or would like to join BABUS I have application forms, please ring Alma on 01234 871210. The website address is babus.org.uk (without the www) for more information. At a recent meeting with Stagecoach, BABUS was informed that a double-deck bus is being refurbished to replace one of the coaches on the X5 route. This would be on a trial basis and, depending on the wishes of the passengers, could be a permanent arrangement. Access on to the bus will be much easier, and there will be plenty of luggage space. If it proves popular a double-deck bus and a coach will alternate throughout the day. The half-hourly service will continue as normal. Voting slips will be on the bus for you to inform Stagecoach if you would like this service to continue. **Please use them to prove we really need this service.** If all has gone well the first double-deck bus would have gone into service at the end of January. If you have any queries please ring Alma on 01234 871210.

Ivel Sprinter by Alma Tebbutt

In January the Ivel Sprinter completed its first year transporting shoppers to the Goldington Tesco. Following many requests, the Ivel Sprinter started, in February, making fortnightly trips to Tesco, on the first and third Mondays of the month.

On the first Monday of each month, since Monday 5th February, the time of pick-up is slightly earlier at 09.57 and the return journey from Tesco is 11.30. There will not be journeys to Bedford on those days. The third Monday of the month will remain the same as it has been, with pickup for Tesco at 10.30 and the return journey at 12.00 noon. There are timetables on the bus.

On the **third Monday of each month** the Sprinter will first make a journey from the village into Bedford (re-routed along New Road). The Sprinter will come along the High Street at 09.40 picking up on request. Then, it will leave Great Barford church at **09.57**, unless other arrangements have been made. It will return from Bedford at 13.00 to Great Barford, after its Tesco trips. If you have any queries on Ivel Sprinter, please call Lesley on 01234 870957. Alma is also working on the problem of improvements to the bus shelter, and presented the case to the Parish Council on the 15 March.

Ideas for a day out on the buses in the Intalink area by Peter Hirst

Hertfordshire County Council have made an agreement with local bus operators for the use of an Intalink Explorer ticket in most bus services throughout the county. This ticket is issued and accepted by Arriva Luton and the Shires which covers an area from Oxford in the west to Chelmsford in the east.

If you want to make the most of this ticket and a long day of it I recommend that you do this route anti-clockwise. A clockwise version would not be able to leave Hitchin until 10.10. By taking the 07.30 Centrebus 171 from Biggleswade to Hitchin, or the 07.35 Mars M1 from Bedford you should be in Hitchin by 08.05 or 08.37 respectively. On either of these routes to Hitchin you can buy your Intalink Explorer ticket for £7, entitling up to 2 adults and up to 2 accompanied children, travelling as a group, to travel on the whole of the Intalink network (including all routes mentioned in this article). Unfortunately there's no individual Explorer ticket probably because the policy is to encourage the family NOT to use the car. From Hitchin there are three sensible options.

The first is to catch the 08.45 Centrebus 304 to St Albans via the villages of Whitwell, Kimpton and Wheathampstead; though the destination blind should state Welham Green. The bus leaves from St Mary's Square, and has a request stop in Bancroft just opposite the stop for the M1 and 171. Be careful to spot it as it comes round the corner from Hermitage Road, and hail it clearly. The 304 should land you in St Peter's Street at St Albans at 09.40, right in the middle of the excellent market if you go on a Wednesday or Saturday. Of course, if you're a holder of a Bedfordshire bus permit, you'll be able to travel for free to St Albans via the Saturn S1 service to Luton at 07.30, then change buses by walking through the Arndale Centre to the far end to catch the Arriva 321 in Park Street by the parish church.

The second option from Hitchin is to catch the Arriva 102 at 08.22 from Hermitage Road (just round the corner leading east) to Stevenage to change there on to the express Uno 634 from stand H at the bus station (the 634 doesn't run Saturdays) as far as Hatfield Galleria. The Galleria is a shopping centre, and also a useful bus interchange point on to buses for Hatfield

rail station, opposite which is the entrance to Hatfield House. Buses for Hatfield House include the frequent 300 and 301 services.

The third option from Hitchin is the Centrebus 314 (also from St Mary's Square and then the stop in Bancroft) direct to Welwyn GC to visit the shops there (including John Lewis), but the first 314 doesn't go until 10.00. It goes via Codicote and Old Welwyn and reaches Welwyn GC at 10.40. If you want to get to Welwyn GC earlier than this the best bet is to catch the 09.00 Arriva 300/301 from Stevenage bus station (also from stand H), via Knebworth and Old Welwyn.

Here's the timetable for the hourly Green Line 724 eastwards from any of the four points: St Albans XX.40, Hatfield Galleria XX.59, Hatfield station XXI.03, Welwyn GC XXI.21, getting to Hertford bus station at XXI.46. (XXI is the hour after XX). The Explorer ticket is valid on this Green Line service.

Another way to get to the attractive little town of Hertford is to use one of three Arriva routes from Stevenage (bus station stop A). These are 384 at 08.55 via Walkern, Benington and Ware (this service is being diverted to avoid bridge works during 2007), 390 at 09.25 direct, and 379 at 10.00 via Datchworth. These get to Hertford at 10.10, 09.55 and 10.40 respectively. There is also a 383 service, but not at a convenient time.

From Hertford I propose that you catch a TrustLine 351 to Bishops Stortford. They leave the bus station at 10.15, 12.15, 14.15 and 16.05 (M-F) 16.15 (Sats), arriving in Bridge Street, Bishops Stortford at 11.08, 13.08, 15.08 and 17.01 (M-F) 17.08 (Sats). This route is a real country route through narrow lanes and unspoilt villages. If you want to use the 384 at 08.55 from Stevenage to catch the 351, you could get off the 384 at Ware College, and cross the road to change on to the 10.15 ex-Hertford.

The TrustLine 700 to Stevenage, via Hitchin, leaves Bishops Stortford (from stop N in The Causeway, just round the corner from Bridge Street) and retraces the route of the 351 (except for the 351's diversion via Tesco) as far as Little Hadham. The one at 15.55 gets to Hitchin at 17.00, in time to get the last Centrebus 171 back to Biggleswade. There is a later one at 18.05 (17.55 on Saturdays) which gets to Hitchin at 19.10 (19.00 Sats), in time for you to catch the 19.15 M2 or 19.45 M1 Mars buses back to Bedford (arriving there 20.15 or 20.45

respectively). Biggleswade folk (especially those with permits) might like to buy a longer day by using the M2, and then travelling back to Biggleswade on the 20.45 M3 (Friday and Saturday only).

The alternative for folk from East Bedfordshire is to buy a longer Saturday by using a railway day return to Hitchin or Stevenage. Hitchin station is a mile out of town. If you need a bus for that mile there's a fairly frequent service on routes 92, 94 and 97 from just outside the station to Hermitage Road.

Bus notes by Peter Hirst

Bus Stations. In the autumn newsletter I mentioned that I would be going to see St Modwen's new bus station at Edmonton Green, and asked readers to suggest to me others in London worth seeing. No response again. I looked at the ones at Aldgate, London Bridge and Golders Green, and found them rather tired looking.

At the presentation of their scheme for the redevelopment of Bedford's west end I had talked about bus station design with one of St Modwen's representatives. Of course I'd mentioned the new one Paul and I had seen in Warrington, and the ones in Yorkshire. He recommended me to look at the one at Edmonton, which he reckoned was "state of the art". Well, my sight of it had to be through holes in the security fence because construction was running a few months late. It looked like a glorified bus shelter, not in the same league as the proper bus stations at Stratford, Walthamstow, Canning Town, Harrow or Hammersmith.

If we want a good bus station in Bedford I'd say to everyone, "do your homework and keep your eyes open". It would be sad if, by hitching its wagon to consultants who don't even realise what a modern bus station should be like, Bedford ends up with a bus station less good than the present one. An easy way to have a quick look at what I mean is to go to page 33 of Luton's Local transport Plan 2001-2006. Prominent in the picture of Luton's ideal bus station is the information board, with a Wymetro white M sign on a red circle. West Yorkshire is a good place to go to compare designs of different ages, sizes and types, within a fairly compact geographical area. Form an opinion on guided buses too, whilst you're there.

Prams and trolleys on buses. I've seen a statement purporting to come from Stagecoach that they will endeavour to make room on their buses for prams, wheelchairs and trolleys, and presumably reasonable means of access for them. However, I guess we've all noticed how successive generations of all these vehicles are increasing in size. McLarens' version collapses almost to walking-stick dimensions but fashions go round in circles, and now prams are growing again. They are often built for twins, and look as if they would take a fair amount of shopping too. Trolleys for folk with mobility handicaps now come with attachments for supermarket shopping, and their use is growing rapidly. Can we look forward to powered prams too? Stagecoach issue a leaflet that says they'll endeavour to take wheelchairs (powered or not) up to 1.2m long by 0.7m wide, and 'mobility scooters' up to 1m long by 0.6m wide.

Cash tickets. One of the consequences of pensioners' permits for free travel on buses is that the driver no longer collects a lot of 20p and 50p pieces as fares from them. It follows that the drivers have difficulty in giving change to passengers who still have to pay fares. Centrebus are solving this problem by issuing "change tickets" as IOUs when they're running short of change. The tickets can be used as credit for paying fares in the future, and one can foresee that, if the first change ticket is for a large amount, yet another smaller change ticket would have to be issued after another fare has been subtracted from the first. Stagecoach hasn't introduced this IOU system yet but, on a recent trip I made, the driver had to call out for help from passengers in splitting a tenner.

Road junctions. Bus routes often deviate from the main road to go along a village street (which was the main road at one time, e.g. at Elstow, Wilstead, Silsoe and Barton). Sometimes there's a delay in pulling off the main road to the right, but in that instance there will probably be a waiting bay in the centre of the main road. A big problem is in rejoining the main road. If this means a right turn, the joining traffic is meant to wait until an opportunity presents itself in the form of gaps in traffic in **three directions**. Three? Traffic from the right going straight ahead, traffic from the left going straight ahead and traffic from the left entering the road that you are waiting to get out of. That means a long wait in the rush hour! In practice, the bus driver relies on the kindness of a driver coming from the right, so that he can draw out to the centre, at which point the traffic from the left will usually

take the hint and let the bus in. In the UK the road authority's answers to this problem (if it wants to address the problem at all) are to build a roundabout (mini or maxi) or to equip the junction with traffic lights, but neither of these is a complete solution.

In Spain, and maybe elsewhere, there is another possibility of extending the waiting bay in the centre of the main road so that traffic can move across the traffic flows in two moves, rather than having to make the whole move in one go. It's the complementary idea to that of the waiting bay for turning off the main road, but for some reason we don't use it much. Why not? There are the obvious complications of conflicts with the traffic turning from the main road into the side road, but problems are there to be overcome.

There's a fairly cheap solution if there's room to provide four traffic lanes at the mouth of the side road. Two on the left, for traffic turning to and from that direction, and two on the right, for traffic turning to and from that direction. This implies that the four flows of traffic at the mouth of the side road have to arrange themselves (making crossing manoeuvres) whilst they are in the low-traffic of the side road, helped by road markings at the turning and signs on both main and side roads. If there is space to do this somewhere, surely it would be worth a trial.

Another problem is that many private car drivers (and some of the people who plan our road layouts) seem not to realise that the front wheels of a long rigid vehicle have an ambition in life to travel a lot further than do the rear wheels, and have to take a much bigger swing on corners to do this. When continuous opposing traffic doesn't allow a long vehicle to make a turn, then the long vehicle has to stop and block the traffic on the road it's coming from. A solution in this case is for an adequate area of yellow cross-hatching to be painted where the long vehicles need space to turn. Motorists often pretend that they haven't seen these areas – but there are solutions to that one.

Such problems, and that of the proliferation of parked vehicles on the roads, imply the need to extend the timetable to ensure reliability. Some services on Centrebus's Dunstable to St Albans route have had to be adjusted to set off up to 20 minutes earlier so as to be reasonably certain of getting to their destination in time. Does anyone know of any other similar cases?

Costs involved in the travel permits issued by local-authorities. Local Authority officials have been heard to say that, if permit holders travel more, it doesn't cost the authority any more because the payment from the LA to the operators for accepting the permits are fixed amounts, presumably negotiated with each of the several operators before the scheme starts. Renegotiation must be either for each financial year, or possibly for the validity of the travel permit, which in the case of Mid and South Beds is two years. Efficient operators will have records of the use made of permits, from the old days of 20p, 30p, 40p and 50p per journey as well as for the present free travel. I'm also sure that they are quite capable of using the trends in this data in renegotiations with the Local Authorities. It's true to say that more use of permits won't cost the LA any more in the short term – but it obviously will cost more in the longer term.

A similar situation exists with the electricity supply for street lighting. I remember calling Beds CC in the past to inform them that the lighting on the A1 had been on all day, and having been told that it doesn't cost the CC any more because they operate under a fixed contract price. Clearly the electricity supplier meters the supply, and will use the past results in their renegotiation of the "fixed price". Small wonder that Council Taxes are so high.

Explorers, Weekly Tickets and Oystercards. Explorer or Rover tickets can be bought from the drivers, and this takes time at the bus-stop as the driver explains the range available, puts the ticket together, and completes the money side of the sale. On Monday mornings, extra time is taken in selling the weekly tickets. All these operations mean that the drivers carry larger amounts of cash, not a wise way to operate. There are alternatives.

Other areas provide different systems of prepaid Rover tickets for their bus and/or rail transport. A Wymetro version takes the form of a scratch card from which you scrape the four correct panels to display DAY and 3 elements of DATE in a contrasting colour, then stick a self-adhesive cover over the card. Thus equipped you can have a day's travel on a selection of the hundreds of bus routes and the eleven rail lines of Wymetro. Versions are available for individuals at £5 for bus plus train, or for couples/families at £7.50. Prepaid tickets are valid for a few years, so you can keep a stock of them and protect yourself against price rises.

The operator gets his money in advance, and in a more secure way. The South Yorks equivalent is called Daytripper (as in the West Midlands) and costs £4.50 for the individual version. I don't know whether they have a prepaid version, but it does include all Sheffield's Supertram routes (run by Stagecoach). A day on the TfL buses cost £3 using my Oystercard in 2006 and it is the same in 2007. Compare that with £8 for an Explorer with Stagecoach (not including the X5 service), or £3 for travel just within North Herts.

According to its Transport Plan, Luton is looking at the use of prepaid tickets. They would be bought from machines in relatively secure locations such as the Arndale Centre and the new bus station (whenever that comes). However, there are snags in prepaid tickets as the rail company 'one' found out when it discovered the use of computer-copied tickets being used on its system.

London has a very efficient way with its Oyster cards, which can be used to replace season tickets, travelcards and single tickets; all with price advantages over the equivalents paid with cash – where that is still possible. The Oyster cards are bought, and recharged with value as necessary, at the many shops and TfL stations in the London area. The initial purchase (e.g. £13, including the deposit of £3 per card) and also viewing your account, can be done on-line, but I find it best to recharge the card by paying to do so at a shop whilst in London. Recharging your account this way just involves touching it on to the yellow pad at the shop, whereas paying for the recharge on-line means that you have to do the actual recharge by touching the card on to a yellow pad at a nominated TfL station within a limited period after TfL takes your money on-line. I can't see why my account on uncle Ken's computer can't be updated by entering my card number whilst on-line. Perhaps that will come eventually, but it's easy enough to recharge at a shop. Oystercards are very convenient if you're happy to do all your travelling in the TfL area by bus. An "Oystercard day" on the buses begins and ends at 04.00, not midnight. Travelcards also run until 04.00 the next morning. If you want to use the trains (national and TfL) in London, it is possible to save 50p by using Oystercard, but it would be an awful hassle. The situation might improve as the rail operators sign up with uncle Ken for his cards. That time hasn't arrived yet so stick to your Travelcards. In any case you have to be careful to touch your Oystercard both in and out on the TfL railways and tramways, otherwise the

charge goes up hugely. You have to be extremely careful at Wimbledon station where trams, SWT, FIRST CAPITAL CONNECT and the District Line all meet, and produce complications in use of Oyster. London's residents aged over 60 have their Freedom cards, a free version of Oystercards. They're not usable between 04.00 and 09.00 on the railways, or, friends tell me, on buses either.

Bus links into London. The TfL area reaches out as far as the rail stations at Watford Junction (for routes 142 to Brent Cross and 258 to Harrow), Elstree and Borehamwood (for route 292 to Apex Corner and Colindale), Potters Bar (for routes 84 to Barnet, 298 to Southgate and Arnos Grove, and 313 to Enfield and Chingford), and also to Waltham Cross which has a very good bus service on route 310 from Hertford.

Guided buses. The latest on this topic is that the Cambridgeshire scheme from St Ives to the outskirts of Cambridge, is starting construction from the main contractor's newly constructed base at Longstanton. The busway will be of the usual kerb-guided design. The complete route will be from Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, via Huntingdon centre to St Ives centre, then on to the guided section via Swavesey, Longstanton, Oakington, Cambridge Regional College at Impington, Arbury, Science Park and then via the city centre, the rail station and Addenbrooke's to the Park and Ride at Trumpington. The Cambridgeshire website includes quite a good section on the scheme, and even has a picture of one of the two rollers on a bus. The scheme aims to be running by the end of 2008.

The Luton-Dunstable scheme, called Translink is not yet off the ground, even though the Luton Local Transport Plan 2001 – 2006 states that it will begin construction by 2006. It's probably still looking around for finance, but it already has its own website at translinkexpress.org.uk, which will grow as time goes on. The guided section will again be of the kerb-guided variety, along the old railway trackbed alongside Hatters' Way in Luton. Buses will come off the guided way to go on to a variety of final destinations (Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, Houghton Regis and Leagrave) from the western side of town. At the eastern end they will go via the town centre from Bedford Road to Church Street, then back to a guided section to a point near Luton Parkway station. Then I guess it will go up the new road, just being built, up to the airport.

In the autumn newsletter, I wondered whether First Group's articulated bus (ftr, streetcar, or whatever they call it now) ran with guidance on some sections of its route (Acomb to the university) in York. I asked readers whether anyone knew anything about it from the technical viewpoint. No response, so I wrote to the editor of Wheels, the West Yorkshire newsletter, for his guidance (sorry about that). He thinks that no guidance is involved for ftr. The wymetro.com website reports that ftr is already running in Leeds too, and will be having a big roll-out there this summer. The [wymetro](http://wymetro.com) website has all sorts of goodies about the many projects planned, underway and completed. They include many bus stations, a new rail station next to the biggest indoor ski-slope in England (a good way to reuse an old colliery spoil heap). You can also tap into the real-time information system (called "yournextbus") from the website, and see the minute-by-minute operations at each bus stand in the various bus stations.

Problems in getting buses to stop. This problem is a more frequent one than in getting them to go. That's only happened once to me on the local network. However, twice in the last month I've wanted an Arriva bus to stop at a bus-stop that's been already occupied by another bus.

On the first occasion I was at a stop used by five routes, and luckily was alert to the problem about to arise. Sure enough, the driver just kept going, luckily, slowly enough for me to rush out and shout. The other passengers heard and saw this, so he decided he would stop, contenting himself in criticising me for not having my ticket ready in my hand. The same sort of problem often arises at the stop for eastbound buses in Hermitage Road, Hitchin. Many services use this stop, so you have to be alert to buses joining at the back of the queue, further up the road. They are quite likely to take passengers on there, and not to draw up to the stop before moving off.

The second occasion was when a number of passengers wanted to alight at the St Mary's Square stop in Hitchin. It was Tuesday, market day, so the square was busy with cars and buses, with one bus already at the bay where the bus is supposed to stop. Maybe people were there waiting to get on. Hard luck for them! We all went round to Hermitage Road, not far away but further from the market. I can walk easily enough but some others can't.

As you travel by bus you sometimes wonder whether people at bus stops do intend to catch the bus you're on, or whether they're just hanging around, or waiting for another bus. It's quite usual that they don't bother to hold their hand out to make a definite sign.

Sometimes the puzzle for the intending passenger is that of being uncertain about which bus is approaching. Not all buses have the correct destination showing (particularly important in a place like Sandy where buses in both directions go past the same stop), not all buses have a sensible destination showing (would you guess, without seeing the timetable, that a bus from Hitchin showing Welham Green, would go through St Albans?). Not all buses are able to show a prominent route number. Why ever not? Well, it's by no means rare for a bus, hired in from another operator, not to have the required route number and destination on its blind. In this case the route number will probably be written on a piece of card propped up behind the windscreen. As well as the bus looking unfamiliar it's difficult for the intending passenger to locate its number in time to hail it.

Readability of timetables. Some operators seem not to realise that their timetables are displayed in frames where the lighting, at night, is only by street light or the occasional car headlights. They also seem not to realise that a lot of the people who use their buses don't have 20/20 eyesight, but need a couple of pairs of spectacles – one pair for general use and the other for close-up and small print with poor contrast. A great help to passengers would be to avoid using colours that fade in sunlight, and to concentrate in printing black on white in a print size big enough to see without having to change from normal specs to short focus ones. Shaded panels, as used in timetables and magazine articles, certainly make the panels stand out, but they don't help to make them readable. To mark out the section of the timetable where the midday hourly pattern takes over, why not just fence it off with a couple of straight black lines?

Planet timetables displayed at bus stations say when the buses leave, but often don't say how long the journey will take, or details of the route. Their leaflets, available from Bedford bus station or libraries, make a better job, but when they're displayed in a frame they are hard to read. To read the top timetables at my stop in St Paul's Square I need to add to my height of 6ft by standing on the seat.

Welcome to Bedford. The traveller arriving at Bedford by bus and wanting to find his way to some other point locally must be more than somewhat puzzled by the lack of a map of the local bus routes. Whilst he is looking for information he will be dismayed by the infestation of pigeons and might even collect a souvenir from one. He'll be struck too by the uncared-for appearance of the bus station, which is, nevertheless, of a sensible design. If he arrives by train, he'll find quite a smart station, but be even more puzzled as to how to continue his journey by bus. The information on local bus routes from the bus stop there is just pathetic. Is it a case of too many authorities dodging the responsibility of welcoming visitors to the town? Whose job is it – the Borough, Stagecoach (as the main bus operator), or Beds CC? The County Council do publish a map of the local routes (as an inset on their map of routes in the county). Surely in this digital age, the inset could be enlarged somewhat and copies displayed in a few frames at the rail- and bus-stations, along with the appropriate timetables. And how about some displays of falconry to persuade the pigeons to move to another county? There is a similar lack of information elsewhere too. Luton's bus station is still waiting to be replaced, Leighton Buzzard doesn't have a bus station, and Biggleswade's rail and bus stations don't provide sufficient information on the modest bus services there.

A personal recollection of transport in post-war Liverpool by Paul Owen.

My earliest recollection of using the bus was when my younger brother was born in early 1947, and I was taken to one of my grandmothers. We used a cross-city route and I remember being frightened as we went up the stairs, which were outside and had no backs to them. I learnt much later that they were ex London-Transport buses that had been purchased by the corporation to cover the increased demands for transport early in the war. How strange they looked compared to the rest of the normal-looking buses operated by Liverpool Corporation and the independents. Journeys to my other grandmother were much more fun because they involved both buses and trams, with an interchange right outside a large depot with examples of both. At this time the Corporation did not operate direct services to the city centre from where we lived, just inside the city boundary, and we had to use buses operated by the Crosville company. Its buses all

had low-bridge bodies, with a sunken side gangway upstairs to give the necessary headroom, and bench seats for four. When a person next to the nearside window wanted to get off, up to three other people on the seat had to step down into the trough and stand towards the front of the bus to allow this.

When I went to secondary school, my journey involved two bus trips in each direction. It provided me with the opportunity to take more interest in the vehicles themselves. When Liverpool decided on tramway replacement in the 1930s, it had opted for AECs, perhaps influenced by the choice of the newly-formed London Transport. By the time war broke out they had about 150 Weymann-bodied AEC Regent 1s in service. Further deliveries of Regent 2s, 3s and 5s followed after the war until the purchase of the first rear-engined buses in the early 1960s.

Unfortunately the Corporation's hopes of standardising on one manufacturer, to simplify maintenance and stores, and to economise in purchasing, did not happen because of the government's post-war restrictions on bus purchases and the inability of AEC to supply the number of buses needed to keep up with tramway replacement. Crossleys, Daimlers and Leylands followed in quick succession in the late forties and early fifties. Each make was confined to specific garages and groups of routes. The routes that I used were all operated by AEC Regent 3s, but at various interchange points we would cross other routes operated by some of the other makes. The long route to Gilmoor was always operated by Leylands and the many city-centre routes by Crossleys.

Liverpool buses were always painted green with 2 cream bands, very similar to the buses of the other local operator Crosville, so some variety was provided when a jointly-operated route with St Helens Corporation introduced some of their buses from time to time. These were all of the London RT type, and were even painted red. St Helens was the only provincial operator to order RTs. Nearer the city centre there were other operators' vehicles in their own colour schemes. Lancashire United vehicles were red, and Ribblesdale likewise, whilst Wigan Corporation's were painted a deep crimson. Two colour schemes we never saw in Liverpool were the yellow of Wallasey Corporation and the blue of Birkenhead Corporation, although both towns were less than a mile away across the Mersey.

The first Mersey road tunnel had been built in the 1930's, but no scheduled services used it until the advent of Merseyside PTE in the late 1960s. One instance of forward thinking that occurred at the time was the introduction of a lighter, aluminium-bodied, bus to save money on fuel and painting. The body was built by Saunders-Roe, whose main business was building flying boats. However, the experiment was not repeated, and the bus ran unpainted for the rest of its career, a constant reminder of an experiment that failed. Widnes was another nearby municipal operator whose buses never regularly ran into Liverpool, so it was a novelty when a Widnes double decker turned up to take us to our confirmation service at a nearby church; the only time I ever saw one of their buses in Liverpool.

Paying for your journey was simple; only single fares were available, none of the travel cards, season tickets and area travel that we enjoy today. All buses had conductors; in fact on some busy routes at peak times two conductors were employed, one upstairs and one down. Ticket inspections were quite frequent on the corporation buses, but I can't remember inspectors on the company buses. A friend of mine who left school at 15 became a corporation bus conductor on reaching the minimum age of 18. My parents were mortified whenever they met him as the conductor because he refused to take their fares. They would spend the rest of the journey petrified in case an inspector got on and asked to see their tickets.

How fortunate we were in those post-war years when bus services were probably at their peak and most routes, certainly in Liverpool, ran at ten-minute intervals or better throughout the day. Municipal operators answered to local councils and fares were kept low, often subsidised by the local ratepayer. A golden age indeed for public transport in this country!

Note. Liverpool is having its 800th birthday, and will be the European City of Culture in 2008. There will probably be special offers in the field of transport. The website available at present for Merseyside is: <http://www.merseytravel.gov.uk> for travel by Merseyrail, the ferries and buses.

STOP PRESS! PLUS BUS

We have heard that Plus Bus, a scheme whereby a train ticket can be bought with an add on for bus travel, is to be introduced in Bedford on 9 September.