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## Newsletter of BABUS - Bedford Area Bus Users' Society, Winter 2012-3

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### In Memoriam

It is with regret we have to record the passing of another founder member of BABUS and stalwart Committee Member, Alma Tebbutt.

Alma, a resident of Great Barford, regularly submitted items to this newsletter regarding the Ivel Sprinter services and campaigned for several years regarding the provision of a regular bus service across the river to villages such as Willington (to connect with Sandy and Biggleswade) and Cople.

How ironic that with the August 2011 local route changes her labours came to fruition but it was

at that very same time she became ill and although over the past year she had seemed to be making progress she never travelled on the service.

As Publicity Officer of BABUS, she enjoyed the contact with local libraries, Tourist Information Offices etc. when taking supplies of leaflets and posters.

She passed away in Bedford Hospital on 20 November. BABUS was represented at the funeral.

R.I.P

BABUS has sent a donation to MacMillan Nurses, but individual members who wish to be associated with Alma through their own personal donations are urged to do so by sending to Clarabut and Plumbe, Funeral Directors, 11 Kingsway, Bedford MK42 9BJ indicating that the amount is in memory of Alma Tebbutt of Great Barford.

### MEMBERSHIP

Our membership year runs from 1 April until the following 31 March. **To continue to receive all the benefits of membership**, renew your membership by sending a cheque for £5 (£12 for group membership) payable to **BABUS**, to the Membership Secretary, Simon Norton, 6 Hertford Street, Cambridge, CB4 3AG. For 2013/14 there will be a new class of 'family' membership where multiple members at a single address will be asked to pay £5 only. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope if you would like a receipt by post; alternatively ask for a receipt by email.

For enquiries, contact BABUS through the website at <http://babus.org.uk> or on the BABUS Enquiry Line 0871 218 2287 or 0871 218 BBUS (24 hour answering and fax service). If you leave a message and would like us to call you back, please leave a phone number. You may send a fax to 0871 218 3293

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## **CHAIRMAN'S PAGE**

As another deadline approaches for a BABUS Newsletter, I feel we should think of the positives and negatives since the last issue.

On the positive side BABUS has been involved in the many affairs concerning the lot of the bus user in Bedford Borough and much of Central Bedfordshire. As you can read in many other articles in this edition these can range from local village meetings dealing with small, but important, matters which are concerning local travellers through to consultation documents issued by government at a national level which, although they may seem remote from today's local bus, will surely have an effect on that within a short space of time.

Positive outcomes have emerged from our ongoing contact with the Local Authorities and the bus operators in the area – examples being the return of buses between the smaller North Beds villages and Bedford on Saturdays, additional services via the Wixams Estate on weekdays and a continuing look at how buses can better interface with trains at Flitwick.

Comparisons with adjacent areas such as Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire suggest that we are still fairly well supplied with bus services but that we must not be complacent as no doubt a further round of budget examination within Local Authorities or simple cost cutting by operators will need our sharp eyes and continuing input.

On the negative side – attending meetings, producing responses etc. our level of involvement produces many hours of work for a small number of committee members and we are almost approaching a “rationing” of items that can be dealt with particularly when deadlines are tight.

It is difficult to believe that two editions of the newsletter in one year contain an obituary to a long standing committee member but on this occasion we have to sadly record the passing of our recent Publicity Officer and founder member Alma Tebbutt.

Another vacancy on the Committee means that the workload is spread even more thinly – any volunteers from amongst our membership to join us?

## **IMPROVEMENTS TO BUS SERVICES IN NORTH BEDS**

BABUS have been involved in recent meetings chaired by Bedford Borough Council relating to complaints by villagers over shortfalls in bus services.

Firstly residents of Melchbourne and Knotting wished to have a regular timetabled service to and from Rushden restored together with a service to Bedford. Following discussions as to which days passengers preferred and how long they wished at each destination Grant Palmer Passenger Services came up with a proposal to divert one Service 26 journey between Sharnbrook and Rushden in each direction on Mondays to Fridays. This also enabled the Local Authority operated service to Sharnbrook to be withdrawn.

A new service 22 was likewise introduced on Saturdays between Yelden, Melchbourne, Knotting and Bedford giving over four hours in the market town.

More recently a similar series of meetings was held in Riseley where villagers were concerned with the large afternoon gap in service from Bedford following withdrawal of some commercial journeys operated on Service 152. They also regretted not being able to reach St Neots market following the earlier service changes in the area.

Grant Palmer Passenger Services serve the Middle School in Riseley and the 1425 from Bedford on Service 27 will be extended to Riseley on Schooldays to bridge the otherwise three hour gap. This is planned to commence from the new school term after Christmas. Following the study of passenger numbers on the Thursdays only Route 29 to St Neots it has been suggested by BABUS that this route divert via Riseley rather run via Thurleigh and this is planned for January also.

The proviso “Use it or lose it” is always emphasised!

## **EARLY WARNING ADVICE**

Due to health issues it is unlikely that I shall seek re-election as BABUS Chairman at the June 2013 A.G.M. Members are asked to commence consideration as to a replacement.

**Godfrey Willis**  
**Chairman**

## **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL LOCAL AREA TRANSPORT PLANS: BABUS RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

Four draft Local Area Transport Plans (LATPs) within the BABUS area of influence have been out for consultation. These are for Haynes and Old Warden, Potton, Arlesey and Stotfold, and Biggleswade and Sandy. The BABUS response argued that the defined local areas had no logic in terms of population movement, transport provision and natural economic and geographical structures and relationships. Other local authorities have taken a different approach.

The CBC approach has consequential implications for future planning of transport needs. The local Plan areas, being based on groupings of electoral ward boundaries, are arbitrary and so the analyses and discussions of projected needs are flawed.

All draft LATPs conform to the same format or template which makes it difficult to identify and highlight the future transport needs within the different communities. Many of the transport issues cited are, in fact, traffic issues, for example, HGVs, speeding, school parking, etc.

The BABUS submission focussed on issues that have been raised with local authorities in the past, such as adequate roadside bus timetable provision, the need for direct routes to major service centres and bus-rail connectivity. Given the future outlook for Council-funded bus services it would have been helpful to see how the defects with existing service arrangements are to be addressed.

The full BABUS submission can be seen on the Member's bulletin board.

## **CONSULTATION ON BUS SUBSIDY REFORM: BACKGROUND**

by Peter Williams

Bedford Area Bus Users' Society (BABUS) participated in the consultation on Bus Subsidy Reform.

In the context of the provision of easier access to buses, reducing reliance on the private car, and maintaining access to services BABUS made comments as follows on the proposals to reform the Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG).

Para 2.3 *"The Government has several overarching aims for transport, including supporting economic growth – both enabling growth and helping to spread prosperity - and creating a greener transport system by reducing the environmental impacts of travel."* BABUS is not convinced that the proposed reforms relate to these stated objectives.

Para 2.8 sets out five policy objectives for the proposed changes to bus subsidy, including *"iv.to minimise regulatory burdens and administrative costs;"*. BABUS believes the proposed changes will increase and not reduce bureaucracy.

Para 3.4 states *" . . .local authorities have the powers to procure socially necessary bus services where commercial services are not viable, for example services in some rural areas or late night services with low patronage."* BABUS believes that rural areas will be disadvantaged by the BSOG reform proposals

Para 4.1 states *"The reforms which the Government proposes to make to the BSOG system are: i. devolving BSOG for tendered services outside London to local authorities;"* BABUS believes there are obvious dangers in this policy unless future funding for bus services is both ring-fenced *and* protected against increases in operating costs. In local authority areas where supported bus services are seen as a low political priority there is a danger than future funds could be diverted away from bus services. Bus operators working on low margins will be concerned that funding levels are to be frozen. There are implications, especially, for the financial viability of some small, independent operators commonly found in rural areas providing services under contract.

Para 4.5 states *"We intend the amount of funding which is devolved to each local council to reflect broadly the amount of BSOG which is currently paid to bus operators for running tendered services within that council's geographical boundaries."* It is not clear why a distinction is being drawn between supported and commercial services?

Para 4.6 states *" . . .once we have identified the initial amount to be devolved to each council we propose that this figure should remain fixed for future years."* This cut in the real value of support runs counter to the stated aims of Government in seeking to *" . . . to reverse this [long-term decline in bus use] decline and get more people onto buses."* (Foreword, page 4).

Para 4.22 states “ . . . money paid direct to local authorities should not be ring-fenced, consistent with the Government’s policy of maximising the funding flexibility available to local government.” BABUS sees this as an openly cynical attempt to shift the blame towards local authorities confronted with further reductions in financial support. BABUS will see Government guarantees on future funding as a demonstration of their commitments to increasing bus use, reducing environmental impact from private car use, and protecting disadvantaged communities and individuals.

Paras 4.29 and 4.30 state “The Government intends to designate a limited number of geographical areas as new Better Bus Areas via a competitive process.” and “The Department will provide a grant for the leading local transport authority in each of the new Better Bus Areas.” BABUS wishes to register concern over this apparent discrimination against local authority areas where the authority is unable or unwilling to compete for funds. Residents in failing authority areas will be penalised.

Para 4.34 states “ . . . where a single bus operator does not have any effective competition, there is less pressure to pass bus subsidy on to passengers in the form of reduced fares or additional services.” BABUS sees no connection between the BSOG reform proposals and increased competition between operators.

Para 4.52 states “It is for the local transport authority to work closely with local bus operators to develop plans that meet the objectives within their area. . . , it is essential that the fund represents good value for money.” BABUS supports these sentiments but feels that actions will speak louder than words.

Para 4.77 refers to “ . . . many disabled passengers are disproportionately reliant on community transport,” BABUS welcomes this recognition.

## **BUS SERVICE REVIEWS: CONSULTING ON CHANGES TO LOCAL SERVICES. A BEST PRACTICE TOOLKIT**

**Passenger Focus Press Release, Oct 2012**

Following a recommendation from the House of Commons Transport Committee, Passenger Focus, the statutory body charged with protecting the interests of bus users, has produced a toolkit or protocol aimed at

identifying best practice for local authorities faced with cuts in funding.

The guidance is presented in four parts: *Collate* – formulate proposals ensuring that evidence and information are robust; *Consult* – when, what, who and how. Consultation should take place when the authority can put sufficient information to the public to ensure effective dialogue. Consultation should influence the decision of elected members, consultation is not the same as notification. 12 weeks, minimum should be allowed for consultation; *Consider* – by allowing adequate time to consider responses and avoid the impression of a box-ticking exercise; *Communicate* - provide feedback on what was said and what has been decided. Then notify passengers of specific changes to services, bearing in mind that operators are required to give Traffic Commissioners 56 days’ notice of any changes. Passengers, who may rely on these services to get to work or to access important services, need as much notice as possible.

Passenger Focus suggests that good engagement and consultation can result in a better outcome for the local authority and the bus passenger. It can help to ensure that the data on which decisions are made are accurate. It may be possible to identify alternatives or ways of saving money, or even improvements to the bus network, not just from passengers but also from bus operators. Most importantly good consultation should identify ways in which the adverse impact of changes can be mitigated.

The document highlights the approach taken by Central Bedfordshire Council in carefully designing its consultation questionnaire as an example of best practice. This sought views on what people saw as priority areas for spending on buses in order to find the relative priorities of a range of different options. This approach enabled the authority to establish a sense of overall priorities.

## **REPORTS OF MEETINGS OF FLITWICK AND HARLINGTON STATION TRAVEL PLAN STEERING GROUP**

**by Peter Williams**

**Second Meeting, 4 Sept, 2012**

Groups represented included Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) who were hosting the meeting, First Capital Connect (FCC), Grant

Palmer Travel Services (GP), Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP), Harlington Parish Council (HPC), Bedford Commuters' Association (BCA) and BABUS.

It was noted that Stagecoach and both Flitwick and Ampthill Town Councils had not sent representatives. It was suggested that Centre Parcs be invited to send a representative to meetings of the Steering Group.

Possible terms of reference for the Steering Group were considered. It was thought that the approach applied to the Leighton Buzzard Station Travel Plan should be adjusted and used as a template for the new Plan.

It was decided to undertake a simple survey of passengers using the two stations. It might be possible to adapt the simple format used at Bedford Midland Station. The objective would be to undertake a survey later in 2012.

FCC had provided post code data for season ticket holders and CBC had used this to map the locations of station users. It was thought that a survey could provide further valuable information, for example, by seeking to identify the times of day when passengers were passing through the stations. The importance attached to the gathering of evidence was agreed by all.

On Flitwick Town Centre redevelopment it was noted that this would embrace improvements to the Station forecourt but the timescale was likely to be of the order of years.

There were no plans to improve walking and cycle access to Harlington Station due to lack of funds. However there was more encouraging news for users of Flitwick Station where cycle access from Ampthill to the A507 roundabout, improved crossing at the A507 roundabout and a shared cycle path on Ampthill Road, Flitwick were being planned. A new walking and cycling map for Ampthill and Flitwick would shortly be produced with a print run of 5 000 copies. Funding had been secured for a major upgrade of cycle storage provision at Flitwick Station. An additional 100 spaces was due to be provided by Mar 2013.

### **Third Meeting 30 Oct 2012**

Groups represented included Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) who were hosting the meeting, First Capital Connect (FCC), Harlington Parish Council, Flitwick Town

Council, Bedford Commuters' Association, and BABUS.

Larry Heyman, First Capital Connect, (LH) spoke at some length on the Great Northern/Thameslink/ Southern re-franchising consultation. All previous target dates have been set aside following the collapse of the WCML franchise process. For First Capital Connect services the future is rendered more uncertain through delays in ordering new Siemens trains. Thameslink infrastructure work, including London Bridge closure and platform extensions, Sandy to Arlesey, is not affected though there are significant implications for passengers travelling between Bedford, Flitwick and London

It is possible that the present FCC franchise would be extended beyond the existing date of March 2014. The uncertainty affecting operators would impact on any major investments though small schemes involving Flitwick and Harlington will proceed as planned.

Sam Caldbeck, Central Beds Council, reported on his involvement in an interim scheme to redevelop Flitwick Town Centre including access to the Station. A major scheme had originally been envisaged that included redevelopment of the existing Tesco store. That would almost certainly not now take place. Alternative schemes involving other retail partners were under discussion but any interim scheme would have to take account of future possible requirements. There should be some scope to undertake limited improvements in the Station area.

FCC is improving cycle storage facilities at Flitwick.

James Gleave, Central Beds Council (JG) tabled a protocol to create an evidence-base to underpin the work of the Steering Group. Some data had already been acquired and analysed with other existing sources to be interrogated. New locality-specific evidence would be acquired through passenger survey forms and on/off counts at stations. Acquisition and analysis of research data is due to be completed by Apr 2013.

Nick Ross, Central Beds Council, reported on current bus issues. There were increasing pressures likely to lead in cuts for supported services both from Council budget reductions and changes to BSOG. Some routes had unrealistically low loadings levels mainly comprised of concessionary pass holders. Following BABUS action in highlighting errors in

the new Houghton Regis roadside GP Route 42 timetable displays they had all been withdrawn and replaced.

The Flitwick Town Council representative reported that the recent introduction of automatic number-plate recognition vans had reduced illegal parking in the town .

The FCC representative briefly commented on the possibility of Harlington station being redeveloped as a 'parkway' station linked to the M1 motorway. He would provide the Harlington Parish Council representative with details together with the 'Sundon loop'. This would, of course, have major implications for station access and parking at Harlington.

There would be a major blockade of WCML through the Christmas/New Year period which should have positive implications for Marston Vale trains running through from Bedford to Milton Keynes from Dec 2014

### **SUMMARY REPORT ON GRANT PALMER PASSENGER SERVICES AND BABUS LIAISON MEETING HELD TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**by Peter Williams**

The BABUS Newsletter for Summer 2012 had featured an example of new roadside timetable displays installed in the Flitwick-Amphill-Houghton Conquest area by Central Bedfordshire Council. BABUS representatives reported that a superficial inspection of displays at bus stops on Route 42 had revealed some serious shortcomings. The new displays appeared to provide incorrect information and none carried an enquiry telephone number for Grant Palmer services.

After some early problems with displays and signage, the new arrangements at Bedford Bus Station appeared to be working well. Grant Palmer operations staff had not reported significant issues resulting from illegal parking of private and 'for hire' cars.

Central Bedfordshire Council had analysed the season ticket-holder post code data provided by First Capital Connect. This information was relevant to a feasibility study for a commuter bus link to Flitwick railway station. It was agreed that Flitwick and Harlington Stations Travel Plan was

the most appropriate mechanism for developing this study.

Mr Palmer reported that, generally, there were positive responses to the changes on North Bedford rural routes which were perceived as service improvements. On some routes passenger loadings remained low but Route 22 (Shopper service) was reported to be 'busy'.

It was agreed, in discussion, that problems with bus stop location remained an issue at Harrold. There were also problems at Pavenham and at Souldrop. Godfrey Willis (BABUS Chairman) raised the about the possibility of providing a connection into Stagecoach Services at Sharnbrook.

### **SUMMARY REPORT OF LIAISON MEETING BETWEEN STAGECOACH EAST AND BABUS HELD 21 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**by Peter Williams**

Stagecoach management reported that major timetable changes made in August 2011 were based on commercial judgements but in aiming for increased reliability and simplification they had resulted in measurable benefits.

There would be some relatively minor changes effective from 4 November 2012 affecting Route 6 to Woodlands. Route 5 would serve the new Waitrose store.

It was agreed that the anticipated problems with Bromham Road roadworks had not materialised and had not adversely affected Route X5 services. BABUS representatives asked if consideration might be given to improve direction signs to X5 stops outside Milton Keynes railway station; the new signage was not helpful to rail passengers unfamiliar with the layout.

BABUS representatives voiced concerns that Stagecoach, as the major commercial bus operator, were not attending the two Travel Plan Steering Groups covering Bedford railway stations and Flitwick and Harlington railway stations.

Stagecoach management reported that, following the BABUS-initiated programme for returning buses to Bedford Bus Station, their experiences were generally positive.

Other topics discussed included: the continuing delay in restoring through bus services at Shortstown; possible adjustments to operating systems that might, temporarily, have a minor impact on Central Bedfordshire concessionary bus pass holders; clarification of Stagecoach policy on charging full adult fares on some school journeys; and the missing flag at the Cutcliffe Grove stop on Bromham Road.

## **BEDFORDSHIRE RURAL TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP FORUM MEETING - 1ST NOVEMBER 2012**

**by Colin Franklin**

BABUS was represented at this meeting by the Vice-Chairman and the Secretary and the following topics of interest to us were noted.

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) are currently consulting on a number of new Local Area Transport Plans (LATPs) and some "refreshed" ones. The new LATPs cover the Chilterns, Haynes and Old Warden and Potton, and the refreshed LATPs cover Arlesey and Stotfold, Biggleswade and Sandy, and Dunstable and Houghton Regis. These refreshed LATPs have come about due to changes in local ward boundaries, and confirmation of additional LTP funding for 2014/15 that CBC were made aware of after they were produced.

CBC are also developing a Passenger Transport Strategy for Central Bedfordshire which has been influenced by the workshops that they held. Unfortunately, it has been delayed due to internal restructuring and issues with passenger transport within CBC.

BABUS also highlighted other issues that it had been involved in since the last meeting. These included:

commenting on the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) consultation, the Bedford Borough Council bus passenger surveys, the deferral of the CBC bus stop audit to next year, the completion of returning buses to the "central" section of Bedford Bus Station, our draft comments on CBCs LTP 3, the possible installation of Real Time Information screens at Bedford Railway Station to show bus departures at the front of the station and the BUUK "Mystery Traveller" article in their latest magazine.

## **SUMMARY REPORT OF LIAISON MEETING BETWEEN BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL AND BABUS HELD ON 5 NOV 2012**

**by Peter Williams**

There was brief discussion on a number of points carried forward from previous meetings, including:

Delay in commissioning rising bollards on (former) A600 at Shortstown/New Cardington.

Anomalous siting of bus stops at Harrold Institute.

There was a detailed discussion on rural bus services in the Riseley and Wilden areas. At the former location the situation was complicated because there were two operators. At Wilden there had been an issue over peak demand for wheelchair access on a Wednesday when there had been occasions that the vehicle could not carry all those wishing to travel.

Some benefits arising from Better Buses Funding were reported, including preparations for the introduction of smart cards, including procurement of hardware and 'back-office' support for the three operators with a presence in the Borough. The first phase would be introduced in Apr 2013 with incentives for take-up. The Borough Council hoped to provide a travel kiosk in the Harpur Centre in 2013.

An account was given of changes to the former Route 6 to Woodlands Park. It was agreed by all that this is an unsatisfactory situation. The local authority planners had been overruled and that the developer had been able, in effect, to restrict access for buses.

Other issues covered included: the working of the forum established to bring together highways and bus operators in order to discuss road closure plans; the new Souls service from Goldington Green to Cranfield University.

## **BUS SERVICE REDUCTIONS – THE IMPACT ON PASSENGERS. A REPORT FROM PASSENGER FOCUS, JULY 2012**

**contributed by Peter Williams**

The report describes research undertaken by Passenger Focus. It concluded that the majority of negative impacts experienced when passengers suffered a loss of service were of a background nature rather than headline making.

Taken cumulatively service reductions became substantive. The impacts were subtle, diffuse in nature, and often not directly financial; most commonly there was a reduction in quality of life.

Negative impacts could be mitigated when changes in local authority-supported bus service provision were considered within the wider context of local transport options. For example: encouraging/incentivising the community transport sector; using the authority's central role/leverage to bring private services to passengers more cheaply e.g. discounted taxi services; or, supporting the infrastructure for car share schemes, etc.

The research found that although disrupted, most people were still able to go about their daily and personal business. However, there was a sense that people were having to make greater efforts in order to travel or abandon certain activities altogether.

Alterations to a bus service impacted on people's time and limited social and leisure activities when suitable transport was not available when and where needed. This affected all ages from teenagers to the elderly. A loss of personal independence implied reliance on assistance from other people to assist them. Some individuals felt they were stranded at home but for the compassion of others willing to help and provide transport.

There were financial implications resulting from reduced access to bus services. Most obviously increased car dependence impacted on people's budgets especially with increased fuel prices. Some might feel under pressure to buy a car to enable them to get to and from work. Taxis, and occasionally trains, when suggested as alternatives to bus were seen as being out of reach of people on low incomes.

Increased limitations on the use of free bus magnified the sense of deprivation. There is a suspicion that free bus passes have been contributed to the removal of some services.

Reduced bus services forced individuals into more advanced planning of activities. A reservation request a day or two in advance still might not provide a guarantee of a place on a dial-a-ride service.

There is increased stress due to a fear of missing the one bus home, with reduced frequency of services means that a seemingly sporadic bus is a heightened factor when trying

to return home or make a pre-arranged engagement. Appointments (e.g. with a doctor or dentist) had to take due account of bus schedules.

## **WARNING OVER CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL 'TIMEBOMB'**

### **Press release from Passenger Transport Executive Group**

#### **Funding for concessionary travel could lead to 75% cut in spending on other transport services in ten years' time**

The leaders of the six largest urban transport authorities outside London today warned the national free bus travel scheme for older and disabled people is a financial 'timebomb' as the costs of the scheme rise and Government funding for it falls. A report (that has been sent to the Secretary of State for Transport today) shows that although the costs of the scheme are on an upward trend, Government funding will have been reduced by 27% between 2010/11 and 2014/15.

Already, funding the scheme takes up around half of all PTE spending. PTEs have very little influence over the cost of the scheme and have no choice but to fund what is a legal requirement. With wider PTE funding also being cut this means that the rising cost of funding the concessionary pass rapidly eats into spending on other frontline transport services. So by 2022, spending on these frontline services could be reduced by three quarters.

Frontline services in the firing line would include:

Lifeline bus services that PTEs support at the weekends, in the evenings and those serving isolated communities

Services specifically for older and disabled people like dial-a-ride

Concessions for children and young people

Maintenance and staffing of bus stations

Public transport information services (including call centres and printed information)

Support for Active Travel measures like walking and cycling

The capacity to plan for the impact on local rail networks of major national schemes like HS2



Chair of the group of six authorities, Cllr David Wood, said: *"The national concessionary fares scheme allows older and disabled people to retain their independence, to access shops and services, and visit friends and family. It is of great value, it has been a huge success and we want to see the scheme continue and flourish. However, it cannot be right that the cost of providing what is a national statutory scheme, determined by national government, should create such a heavy funding burden for transport authorities in a way that threatens the future of the services that we provide for all members of our communities, including older and disabled people. There will be little point in a free pass if the bus services that older people are using have to be withdrawn to pay for it. Nobody wants to see that - least of all older and disabled people - which is why we need a sustainable long-term funding solution for concessionary fares which will both guarantee the future of the scheme whilst protecting other essential transport services."*

## **TRANSPORT MINISTER LAUNCHES NEW YOUNG PERSON'S TRAVEL SITE**

Transport Minister Norman Baker has launched BUSFORUS [www.busforus.co.uk](http://www.busforus.co.uk), a new and interactive website designed to help 16-25 year olds get the very best from buses.

BUSFORUS, produced by the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT UK) on behalf of the UK bus industry, details a whole host of information on the various services, facilities and tickets types available from bus operators across the country.

The site – available on PC, smartphone and tablet – also uses sophisticated mapping tools to locate and direct visitors to their nearest bus stops.

## **BUS SUPPORT 'CUT FOR SECOND YEAR'**

More than 40% of local authorities in England have cut spending on supported bus services this financial year, figures obtained by campaigners show.

The Campaign for Better Transport said it used Freedom of Information requests to find funding was being reduced by £18.3m - 16% - for such services.

In 2011/12 one in five, or 9%, of services which are supported by councils were cut or reduced.

The government said some councils were finding ways "to meet passenger needs".

## **RURAL AREAS**

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide appropriate transport services. Where such services do not make money - typically in the evenings, at weekends and in rural areas - they rely on financial support through the local government transport grant and the bus service operators grant.

Figures from the Campaign for Better Transport show that in 2011 central government cut the transport grant by 28%, while this financial year the operators' grant has been cut by 20%.

The group says more than 100 supported services in south-west England were lost this year, while the east of England saw cuts of £4m.

Stephen Joseph, chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport said buses were vital to both communities and the economy.

"Without them many people are isolated, unable to access jobs or reliant on the car.

"By making year on year cuts like these, we run a very real risk of tipping services into a spiral of decline."

But transport minister Norman Baker said his department "strongly supported" bus travel.

"We accept that the overall funding settlement for local authorities is challenging but some councils are responding positively to this and finding more flexible and cost-effective ways to meet passenger needs," he said.

"Bus patronage levels in rural areas are almost exactly the same as they were last year and the predicted collapse in passenger numbers has not happened. In addition, around 80% of bus services outside London are commercially run, so do not rely on direct funding from councils."

## **WILL FREE BUS TRAVEL HELP TO BOOST UK EMPLOYMENT?**

Individuals on certain benefits will be offered free bus travel under new plans to increase employment in the UK.

The proposals have been launched by a number of the nation's leading transport companies, with the firms planning to supply free journeys to unemployed people to help them find work.

Covering an estimated 70 per cent of the bus routes in England, Scotland and Wales, the scheme could benefit as many as 800,000 people looking for jobs.

It follows calls from politicians for bus travel to be made more affordable and businesses signing up to the initiative include First, National Express, Stagecoach, Arriva and Go-Ahead.

A three-month trial will take place from January, with passengers using existing Jobcentre Plus travel cards to access free transport.

"This move will benefit the industry as well as jobseekers, as young people are not only a key section of the market - they are the future of the local bus industry," commented transport minister Norman Baker.

Go-Ahead group chief executive David Brown said his firm was "pleased to be backing this initiative", adding that more people use buses to get to and from work than other forms of public transport.

## **DFT STATISTICS REVEAL SLUMP IN BUS SUPPORT**

The impact of local authority budget cuts on the bus industry in England has been highlighted by the publication of new figures by the Department for Transport that show a slump in supported bus service mileage and concessionary fares reimbursement.

Latest annual bus statistics reveals that bus mileage on services financially supported by local travel authorities outside London fell 9.3% over the course of the last year with the greatest reduction seen in non-metropolitan counties where mileage fell by 9.9%. Metropolitan counties also saw a fall of 7.2%.

Highlighting greater financial pressures across the industry, fares in England increased by 33% in the five-year period between March 2007 and June 2012 with some of the highest increases seen in the metropolitan counties (40%). London fares also increased by 31%, with non-metropolitan areas registering an increase of 28%. This figures compare with an 18% increase in the all items Retail Price Index.

Concessionary fares reimbursement paid to operators in England also fell by 2% in real terms, according to the statistics. This is despite concessionary journeys outside London increasing by 10% since 2007/08.

The average reimbursement paid per journey to operators in 2011/12 was £0.84, a fall of £0.03 per journey in real terms. The biggest reduction in reimbursement was in the non-metropolitan counties, with a smaller reduction elsewhere. However, reimbursement payments in London actually increased during the year.

A total of 82% of England's reimbursement was spent on supporting the statutory scheme for pensioners and the disabled, with the remainder spent on discretionary add-ons. This includes concessions for young people and the use of rail or light rail networks.

Meanwhile, passenger journeys increased by 0.6% in 2011/12 to 5.2 billion. Bus use in London increased by 2.4% and by 1.6% in Scotland. In Wales bus use was steady but England, not including London, saw a dip in patronage.

## **FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

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

20 Dec – Grant Palmer liaison, Flitwick

### 2013

14 Jan - BBC liaison (provisional)

24 Jan - Stagecoach liaison (provisional)

29 Jan - Flitwick & Harlington Stations Travel Plan Steering Group (provisional)

7 Feb - CBC liaison

9 Feb - BABUS Exec Committee

### No date fixed

Bedford Better Buses

Central Beds – Passenger Transport Strategy consultation

All articles express the views of their authors and do not necessarily express the views of BABUS.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR  
TO ALL OUR MEMBERS**