

## **PE1626/F**

Bus Users Scotland submission of 22 February 2017

Bus Users Scotland (BUS) is a part of Bus Users UK, with a mission to champion the interests of bus and coach users and campaign for better bus services. In April 2013 BUS was contracted by the Scottish Government to help resolve bus and coach passenger complaints within Scotland, to monitor bus and coach services throughout the country, to represent the views of passengers to operators, local authorities and other stakeholders including Transport Scotland and the Traffic Commissioner. BUS interacts with passengers at Your Bus Matters events, through Social Networking/Marketing, relationship-building with the bus companies and networking with key stakeholders connected with bus passenger travel throughout Scotland.

BUS recognises that bus passenger numbers in Scotland are reducing, although bus travel still accounts for 80% of public transport journeys in Scotland. There are many factors contributing to this, including the increase in home-working, supermarket deliveries cutting shopping trips, new faster rail connections, dissatisfaction with delays caused by congestion and the lower cost of car ownership.

Analysis of complaints received by BUS shows that service reliability, driver/staff attitude, frequency of service and buses failing to show or stop are regularly the matters that provoke most complaints, and this tends to be the case in all parts of Scotland. Research by Transport Focus shows that there is a high level of passenger satisfaction with bus services in Scotland – the latest survey showing a 90% satisfaction rating, generally higher than for bus services in England and Wales.

Our team of Bus Compliance Officers are constantly monitoring bus services throughout Scotland and report that service reliability is mainly affected by a range of external factors – principally congestion, planned and emergency roadworks, and poor or non-existent parking controls – and, to a lesser degree, weather conditions and one-off events such as processions and marches. BUS supports any moves to introduce or increase bus priority measures, like bus lanes and bus gates that, properly enforced, would give buses a greater advantage at peak times.

BUS has welcomed the high levels of investment in new easy-access buses and coaches and the general improvement in information provision by traditional means such as printed timetables and leaflets, and better at-stop information, as well as more recent developments like real-time information at bus stops and in public buildings, in-bus audio-visual announcements, apps and social media that provide passengers with up-to-the-minute details of bus times.

BUS supports any moves that will make bus and coach travel easier and more attractive, like integrated ticketing, currently being promoted by Transport Scotland, and voluntary quality partnerships where local authorities work with bus and coach companies to improve the infrastructure to benefit punctuality and reliability, balanced by bus company investment in new state-of-the-art vehicles with features that are attractive to passengers including leather seats, effective heating and ventilation, WiFi, USB points and audio-visual next-stop information.

BUS believes that the Scottish bus-operating industry is delivering all of the positives mentioned above and is committed to a process of continuing improvement. We do not believe that any major change in the ownership or structure of the industry would bring any additional benefits to passengers, who are generally well served by the commercially-provided services that on average account for four out of every five journeys, with a considerably higher figure in urban areas. We are concerned that cuts in local authority budgets have already led to reduced or withdrawn bus services, while acknowledging the importance of local authority support for socially-necessary routes. Against this background of financial constraint we would be concerned that more passengers would suffer in a re-regulated franchised environment.

The factors that will bring improvements for bus passengers – tackling congestion, enforcing parking restrictions, bus priority measures – are not affected by ownership, but can be solved by sensible partnerships between professional bus operators and local authorities and other agencies, working together.