Principles of Bus Passenger Information

1. Introduction

It is not worth investing in the provision and development of high quality public transport services if the community that they serve is not stimulated to use them. To persuade more people to use public transport (PT), and indeed to ensure that the experience is positive for all users, then information must be of the highest quality and be aligned with their needs.

Information systems for buses, and other forms of public transport, must match the advanced state of development of the transport systems themselves, and must form part of an integrated marketing strategy. The systems must also cater for all types of user – habitual users, new users and potential users, as well as attracting those who may not even have considered using public transport.

While this note deals principally with the needs of bus passengers, much of it applies to public transport as a whole.

2. Overview

This document covers –

- *Information Needs of Bus Passengers,*
- *Passengers' abilities,*
- *Different types of information, and*
- *Potential communication media.*

3. Bus passenger information needs

Various types of information are needed by bus passengers at various stages in planning and making their journey. Their requirements will depend on a variety of factors, such as –

- Is this a regular journey, or at least one they have made before? Or is it the first time they have wanted to make such a journey?
- Is this a planned journey, or a spur-of-the-moment decision? Or were they not thinking of travelling by bus, but might be encouraged to do so by ready availability of the right information?
- Are they travelling from home, or somewhere else well known such as a workplace or shopping mall? Or have they just arrived at a transport terminal or interchange, such as a regional bus station?
- Do they have special requirements, perhaps because of disability or infirmity, or travelling with a baby or young children?

Depending on the above factors, they may need some or all of the following "*trip planning*" information **before actually making the trip**;

- Is there a bus service from where I am to where I want to be?
- Is there a direct bus, or will I have to change buses?

- How often do the buses run? Can I just turn up and wait, or is it best to get precise bus times first?

- How long will the journey take?

- Where is the best (or nearest) stop to get on the bus? How far will I need to walk, how do I get there, and what shelter is there when I get there?

- Can I Park and Ride?

- How do I identify the right bus when I get to the stop? What number(s) is it? Do all buses with the right numbers go to my destination?

- Does the bus cater for disabled people, particularly those in wheelchairs? Is it easy to get on and off? Is there luggage space?

- I have a baby in a stroller – can I wheel it onto the bus, or do I have to fold it?

- What is the fare? Are there reductions for children or other groups? How should I pay? Does the driver give change? Can I buy a ticket from a machine or at a bus station? Can I buy a return or multi-journey ticket? Can I buy a through (multi-stage) ticket?

- Is the information I have been given up-to-date, and correct for the day I am travelling on (especially if travelling on a Friday or a holiday)?

- Similar information is required in respect of the return journey.

Once they are at the bus stop or station, they may need some or all of the following "*start of trip*" information;

- Am I at the right bus stop?

- Are there also buses to my destination from other stops nearby?

- Has my bus already gone?

- When is the bus going to arrive?

- Which route numbers of bus will get me to my destination?

- Passengers may also need confirmation of some of the "trip planning" information above, particularly in relation to fare payment.

Once *on the bus*, the following information may be needed;

- Can I sit anywhere? Are there special seats for ladies, families or other groups?

- How do I know when I reach the right stop? Do I need to ring the bell?

On *leaving the bus*, the information requirements will be;

- How do I get from the bus stop to my final destination?

- Where is the stop for my return journey?

If **interchange** is required, further information will be needed; firstly, how to get to the appropriate bus stop, and then as at "start of trip".

The above indicates how extensive information requirements may be. The challenge is to provide all the information deemed to be essential, and as much as possible of the non-essential information, in

a clear and concise manner in the right time and place – and most importantly, to ensure that information presented is up-to-date.

Our approach to this task will be to consider all the above information requirements in the appropriate local context, and determine for each whether it will be provided for, and if so how.

4. Abilities of current and potential passengers

The abilities of current, intending and potential passengers vary in respect of how they can acquire and interpret information. Even well-educated people can have difficulty in using a map or a bus timetable, depending on how well these items are designed. Many people may also be unaware of where the points of the compass lie, even in a place they are familiar with.

In some environments, there are issues of language – it is a challenge to produce information that is multi-lingual, or otherwise caters for the requirements of users with various first languages.

Where possible, there is a case to use non-linguistic communication, using icons, symbols and numbers where feasible – though the scope for this is necessarily limited.

5. Types of information which may be provided

To meet the above requirements transport organisations commonly use a variety of types of information including the following;

- Timetables: these may be matrix format, departure lists, or information about arrival times at intermediate points and interchange points;
- Service Guides: containing, for each service, details of its route, an outline of its frequency, and the date on which its timetable was last revised;
- Services to major destinations: "how to get there" information for major local destinations (such as airports, hospitals etc.) showing relevant services, their frequencies and stopping places;
- Fare Information;
- Maps and Guides: geographic, spider, "London Underground-style" or line diagrams can aid understanding by at least some travellers. Maps can help to explain the network of services that are available;
- Multi-modal information: there are obvious advantages in including modes other than bus in information, where appropriate;
- Facilities for disabled people: not only information about services of relevance to those with physical disabilities, but consideration may also be given to how to make information available to those with various disabilities (particularly of hearing, sight and learning);
- Service disruptions: what information is expected when services are disrupted, through pre-planned events or unplanned emergencies;
- Real Time Information (note that where Real Time information is provided, it needs to be made clear to the user whether bus times provided are in fact "Real Time" or "Scheduled" – by no means all systems do this);
- Common information: there may be information, such as the general phone enquiry number, web address and branding, or details of local interchanges that should be included in a range

of media. This also applies to some other items, such as the location of manned enquiry points and the procedure for making a comment, request or complaint.

6. Potential communication media

The above types of information may be provided via a variety of media – some types of information are more appropriate for particular media types.

- Paper-based in a comprehensive booklet;
- Paper-based individual service, route or corridor timetables;
- Paper-based displays at bus stops and other key locations, including matrix timetables and/or departure listings;
- Telephone (and typetalk or minicom) enquiry services, possibly with fax-back and/or e-mail support;
- Screen based displays at principal interchange points such as bus stations, or indeed in other locations such as shopping malls or an airport;
- Screen based displays of scheduled or real time information at principal stops;
- Displays (fixed or variable) on buses (typically showing "next stop" and other route information);
- Interrogatable information through kiosk-based journey planner or timetable (and faretable) display systems;
- Purpose-built web-based journey planning and timetable (and faretable) systems, with maps, and with opportunities to print information easily for personal re-use;
- Inclusion of information in more widely-used web-sites, particularly Google Maps;
- Links to and from other relevant web sites;
- SMS messaging;
- WAP and/or other electronic delivery mechanisms for information to people on the move;
- Face-to-face information at "Travel Shops" or through on-the-ground staff, particularly at major interchanges or boarding points;
- Audible announcement systems on bus, at stops and at interchange points, either automated or manned;
- Bus stop flags and associated displays (typically showing bus route numbers and a stop name)
- Signing within and around bus stations and interchange points;
- Free-issue magazines, newspapers or inserts;
- Signing and information at Taxi Stations, Airports and other interchange points.

There needs to be consideration of which of the above media should be used for what types of information, bearing in mind the nature of public transport provision locally, the requirements and abilities of current and potential bus users, and the feasibility of providing the information which might ideally be required.

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