



Bus Travel for Older People A Good Practice Guide

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SECTION 1

Introduction

Pensioners are not a uniform group. Their ranks are as diverse as the rest of society. Just as with the rest of the population there are pensioners who have a range of interests, abilities and ambitions, and that range is much wider than many other population groups, ranging from 60 to the over 90s. Age is the obvious common factor, but with age often comes health issues, mobility problems and the potential for social exclusion.

Often age can bring many and varied health problems, which can cause difficulty when using buses. Many pensioners also suffer a large reduction in income when they retire, but still maintain a commitment to their families and communities. Hence numbers assist their families in various ways or serve as volunteers in local activities. Pensioner groups as a whole are more likely to include non-drivers than other adult groups and so the Concessionary Bus Travel scheme is extremely important in enabling them to remain active in their communities and helping to maintain their own health. In fact, recent research for Greener Journeys conducted by KPMG LLP has shown that for every £1 spent on providing concessionary travel for pensioners the UK economy benefits by £2.87; an astonishingly high rate of return.

There are several documents relating to good practice in providing for people using buses as a means of transport, but the majority focus on issues which are relevant to all bus users. Going the extra mile to cater for pensioners rarely has a negative impact on other bus users, but can make a huge difference for older people at little cost. This document is intended to focus on those aspects of bus travel which are of greatest concern to pensioners. The NPC's surveys of its members show that frequent, reliable services rate highly whereas surly drivers, dirty buses and poor driving are the greatest source of dissatisfaction. This guide therefore aims to show how good practice should look.

SECTION 2

Legal and Regulatory requirements

The bus industry and those responsible for operating buses and maintaining highways and bus infrastructure are of course subject to laws and regulations governing their actions and responsibilities. Some of these apply general duties of care, such as the Equality Act and Health and Safety legislation. Others, such as Highways Acts and Traffic Regulation legislation, aim to create a safe infrastructure for buses and their customers. There are also regulations covering the construction of bus bodies, notably European Directive 2001/85/EC, which has now been superseded by UNECE (Economic Commission for Europe) Regulation 107. These largely cover such aspects as access for wheelchairs and mobility impaired people, and the design of seats and steps.

In the UK, other aspects of bus equipment such as tyres and lighting are dealt with by various UK Construction and Use Regulations. In Great Britain, the Traffic Commissioners, who are a Government organization, are responsible for licensing and regulation of buses and coaches, and for registration of local bus services. In

Northern Ireland the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) carries out this function.

Regulations covering accessibility are covered by The Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 Guidance.

http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3260/ss_topublicservicevehicle5990.pdf

Regulation (EU) No 181/2011 of the European Parliament and Council covers the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport and aims to prevent discrimination by bus and coach operators.

<http://www.bususers.org/complaints/european-passenger-rights-regulation/>

SECTION 3

Bus stops, routing and security

Some older people use buses out of choice, but for many others the bus is their only available means of local travel. It is thus very important that bus services are available to major destinations such as hospitals, local retail parks, railway stations and City /Town centres, and that bus stops feel safe and welcoming. Some important considerations are:

- **Route planning:** The continuing reduction in finance available to support socially desirable bus services suggests that Local Transport Authorities and bus companies should work together with older people's organisations within their area to develop an integrated strategy linking locally important facilities and encompassing rural and semi-rural communities wherever possible. Such an approach would minimise social exclusion for older people by providing a greater opportunity to access major destinations either directly or indirectly.
- **Subsidising services:** Critics often look on the Concessionary Travel Card (the bus pass) as a drain on the public purse. On the contrary several studies have shown that the contribution to society made by pensioners using their bus pass far exceeds the cost of its provision. Overall, older people contribute around £40bn more to the economy through taxes, voluntary work and unpaid caring than they receive in state pensions and benefits such as the bus pass. Criteria used for assessing the net cost of subsidised services should therefore recognise that where pensioners are concerned a journey starting after 9.30 am is not necessarily for leisure purposes.
- **User friendly bus stops:** Bus stops must cater for all types of user so raised kerbs for mobility impaired people should be installed wherever possible, without compromising the ability of mobility impaired people to walk along the footway. However there is no point in installing raised kerbs if bus drivers are unable to position their vehicles correctly, so any bus stop design must necessarily address this issue.
- **Bus shelters:** For older people bus shelters are a welcome provision but need to include adequate seating, a good degree of weather protection and good, clear

and easy to understand timetable information. They also need to be cleaned and maintained regularly. Far too often bus shelters appear to be ignored in maintenance regimes. Real time running displays at bus stops are a step forward for everyone and serious consideration should be given to their provision especially where services are half hourly or less frequent.

- **Reassurance:** For older people there can be a concern about personal safety when using buses especially when it is dark. Good lighting (both on the highway and in any shelter), readable timetables and running time information are important elements in giving confidence. A well maintained bus stop environment is also important. Untackled litter, graffiti and vandalism do not inspire confidence.
- **Getting to the bus stop:** On busy roads, bus stops should be located within a reasonable distance of pedestrian crossing facilities. This is especially important for older people who may be less confident in crossing roads.

Examples of good practice

- Centro (the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive) have a system of Passenger Champions who when taking a bus journey complete a short “At stop audit” form which are then regularly reviewed by the authority.
- National Express and Arriva Midlands in partnership with Centro have both instituted a Customer Charter which addresses many of the issues covered in this and subsequent sections of this document, in particular the safety and security of its passengers. Such joint working encourages operators to be more customer friendly and so produces real passenger benefits.

SECTION 4

Passenger information

For older people, passenger information is critical. Regular bus users on a route will generally know the times buses are due and the various alighting options. However, people using routes with which they are not familiar are easily confused, so information is critical. Information takes many forms some of which are detailed below:

- **Route display on vehicles:** Those on the front of a bus should be of a size and colour to be clearly visible to those waiting at a stop when the bus is at least 80 metres away. Supplementary displays by the entry door are particularly useful to those with poorer vision.
- **Timetables at stops** should use clear fonts of an appropriate size for the location. Timetables displayed at stops serving more than one route should clearly separate the information for individual routes. It is always helpful for passengers if the timetable heading includes a list of the key stops on the route as well as the route number. Ideally fare information should also be shown.
- **The flag sign on the bus stop pole** should display the route numbers and /or destinations served by the stop, in a size and colour easily seen by prospective

passengers. Real time displays are incredibly useful especially where buses are delayed or cancelled.

- At bus stations and key transport interchanges directional signing is required to direct passengers to the bus stop they require. Ideally this should be in a central location and use electronic displays.
- Many buses do not have “next stop” information on board. This is incredibly useful to passengers; especially elderly people as it give them an opportunity to prepare to alight. Serious consideration should be given to installing such displays as bus fleets are modernized. Given modern technology, the extra cost should not be great. Similarly on-bus audio announcements are essential for people who are visually impaired.
- Printed timetable information should be readily available locally, for example in libraries, Health Centres and major superstores.

SECTION 5

On the bus

First impressions count. A bus that is clean inside and outside; with a driver who is smartly dressed, immediately gives a professional impression to passengers. The bus itself should be wheelchair friendly and have seats with adequate leg room. Important points for older people are:

- Seats with adequate leg room are a must for older people who often have mobility problems. Wherever possible double deck vehicles should not be deployed on routes where there are significant numbers of older people as the lower saloon usually has restricted numbers of seats. Steep stairs can be very difficult for people to climb or (particularly) descend.
- Wheelchair spaces: Wheelchair and pushchair space on buses is usually interchangeable and so problems can arise should there be insufficient space to meet demand, especially where services are infrequent. Drivers must therefore be given authority by the bus operator to deal with such issues on the basis of clear guidance. In 2014, a court of appeal judgement decided that transport firms are not required to force one traveller to make way for the other, so there is no legal priority of one group of passengers over another.
- Ticketing: Although the Government intention was that bus companies should adopt a common standard for card readers this has not happened. When concessionary passes are not recognised by the reader on the bus this can easily lead to disputes between the driver and passenger. Bus companies need to do more to implement the common standard.
- Hand rails and bell pushes: There should be a generous number of hand rails and bell pushes. Both should use a conspicuous colour to assist people with impaired vision.

- Heating and ventilation: All too often buses are either freezing cold or muggy with streaming windows. Operators should ensure that systems are regularly maintained and that drivers have control over heating systems.

Example of good practice

- Both the Confederation of Passenger Transport and Transport for London have developed a Code of Practice for the use and acceptance of certain types of mobility scooter and other powered wheelchairs on low floor buses. These schemes introduce a permit system for the scooter/wheelchair user which operators can adopt so that drivers can recognize users who have the appropriate type of machine and have received appropriate training.

SECTION 6

Courtesy

Courtesy is a two way process. Drivers should respect passengers and vice versa and in the majority of journeys that is so. However problems do occur, some of which from a passenger perspective may not be readily apparent to bus operators. Communication is the key. Some examples are:

- Operators must encourage politeness from drivers. Older people often have hearing or sight difficulties and can be slow to respond. Employers should thus ensure that all customer facing staff are given training in disability awareness and customer care.
- For passengers courtesy also extends to the way the bus is driven. A driver who takes chances or speeds does not inspire confidence.
- Older people often take longer to get from their seat to the exit, especially if a bus is crowded. Allowance should be made for this.
- On many buses there are prominent notices stating what will happen if staff are abused. However in reverse it is difficult for a passenger to know how to complain about any aspect of their journey. Good practice would suggest that a notice should be displayed both on the bus and at the bus station/bus stop giving a contact number and address to which any issues can be referred.
- Inevitably buses are sometimes delayed or even cancelled. Where possible operators should communicate with drivers to ensure buses maintain reasonable headways. This in turn will allow drivers to communicate with passengers.
- From a passenger viewpoint there is little more aggravating than a bus that leaves a few minutes ahead of schedule. Don't run early!!

Examples of good practice

- Centro have a system of Assistance Cards with messages such as "Please speak slowly I am hard of hearing" and "Please wait for me to sit down" which passengers can hand to the driver when boarding.

- National Express operates a system of Advanced and Master Driver assessments through which their drivers can become recognized by the Company for their skills and performance. There is also a cash reward for those achieving Master Driver status.

SECTION 7

Summary

Most bus operators and Travel Concession Authorities in the UK produce a good standard of service for all their customers. The purpose of this document is to provide a benchmark against which that service can be assessed in relation to older people. For example, going just that little bit further in meeting the various legal requirements outlined in Section 2 may incur very little additional expenditure, but can transform the journey experience for a traveller.

The NPC seeks to encourage higher standards and would like to know of particular examples of good practice in bus operation which it could then share with other interested organizations.

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