

Bradley Stoke bus travel survey by the Bradley Stoke Journal (October 2014)

- 1. Main issues reported by readers**
- 2. Questions submitted by readers**
- 3. Additional questions from the editor**

With responses from a First West of England spokesperson

1. Main issues reported by readers

- **The 73/X73 service has deteriorated in recent months (from an already poor level). Some passengers are linking this with the introduction of the X74 service from September.**

Our data shows that the punctuality of Service 73 and X73 has dipped slightly in recent weeks. This is due in part to higher than normal levels of traffic congestion. For instance we have seen higher than normal traffic flows to and from the MOD site in Filton at peak hours, which is increasing congestion on the ring road and Great Stoke Way. The M32 traffic flow has also been increased which has impacted on Services X73 and X74.

There are currently an abundance of road works in and around the city which are having an impact on services.

To put some context on the punctuality figures, the data we have for October shows the following:

77% of Service 73 buses started on time

78% of Service X73s started on time

86% of Service X74s started on time

The biggest single factor affecting the start time punctuality of the bus is whether or not the previous journey – completed by the same bus – was on time or not. If it was affected by severe congestion then it can have a knock on effect on subsequent journeys.

- **There are some reports of driver's short-cutting routes, presumably to make up time (reported for Bowsland Way and Webbs Wood Road loops in Bradley Stoke and the Parkway Station approach road).**

Drivers should not go off the route unless instructed to do so by the radio controllers. If passengers have examples of where this has happened then we'd urge them to tell us, so we can check to see if it's a driver acting on his own, or under instruction.

It is possible that – under instruction from the radio controllers – drivers have been instructed to turn their buses early. This is to try and re-regulate the service where buses have got out of kilter and are not running to the scheduled timetable due to congestion etc etc. We recognise the impact that this has had on passengers though and are reviewing what can be done to better serve the people in Bradley Stoke when the network is suffering from the impact of traffic congestion.

- **Buses returning from centre at peak hours have particularly deteriorated. The 16.25 X73 seems to be a particular problem - said to be always late and sometimes doesn't turn up at all.**

We will look into this as a specific example to see if anything can be done to resolve the issue

- **RTI displays do not show cancelled services (these continue to show up with timetabled arrival time).**

There are a number of issues affecting the electronic display boards at present.

Firstly, there's an issue which means that not all of the buses track properly. Specifically at the moment we – and our colleagues in the Council – are seeking ways to address this but on average two buses in every 10 do not display on the system. The problem is a national one, and the solution can only be found by various organisations, namely Omni, Vix and Almex, working together. We (both us at First, and our colleagues in the council) are pushing hard to find the answers to this, which will permanently resolve the issue. There is no immediate answer though, save to say it remains a

high priority for all of us. We fully understand the benefit the RPTI system brings, and the added frustration it creates when the displays are wrong.

Secondly, there is a problem with the RTPI screen and the associated tracking of the buses near the Willow Brook Centre in Bradley Stoke. This relates to the sensor for the bus stop being effectively located in the wrong place. This means it doesn't accurately know where the buses are in relation to it. The problem has been identified and will be fixed within the next three weeks.

Thirdly, in relation to cancelling buses from the RTPI screens, or adding other messages. We do possess the ability to cancel buses from the screens if for instance something goes wrong during a journey (the bus breaks down or has to be taken out of service). I am not aware of an issue with buses then showing as a timetabled journey.

- **Having no RTI display at some stops (e.g. Christmas Steps, Rupert Street) doesn't help.**

This is an issue best addressed to the local authority. The RTPI screens are their property (as are the bus stops etc) and the decision to locate screens in particular places rests with the LA. As a potential solution, passengers could view the RTPI info via the smartphone app (search First Bus in the App Store) as this provides the same info as fed to the electronic boards, direct to your phone.

- **Several reports of late evening services from Cribbs not turning up (8pm to 10pm).**

This is a concern to us and we will look into it with a view to resolving it.

- **First does not respond to feedback forms submitted by passengers.**

This is not true. We recognise that customers can be frustrated by delays in processing their feedback but we investigate and respond to all the complaints we receive. We aim to do this in 10 working days. There have been instances of it taking longer but it always done.

- **Passengers are sometimes asked to get off the morning city centre bound X73, because "no standing is allowed on the motorway". Passengers ask: (a) Why are passengers allowed on in the first place if there are no seats. (b) Why is this policy not enforced on services heading out of the city centre?**

You can legally carry standing passengers on urban motorways (ie M32) but that would not be allowed on a 'normal' motorway, ie M4, M5.

We will clarify this issue for drivers to prevent issues of this nature occurring in future.

- **Morning X73 services to city centre are constantly late.**

Our data shows that 89% of morning journeys on Service X73 begin their journey on time but then get delayed on the journey. We will look at this and adjust the timetable to make it more reliable for the future. Note such changes cannot be made immediately – they must be planned effectively, with a minimum of 56 days notice given to the traffic commissioner. We are also only permitted to make changes to bus services in / around Bristol on set dates throughout the year. The next planned service change (aside from 2 Nov) will be next spring (March 2015, with the changes registered in January 2015).

- **Report of late evening services (9pm to 10pm) not turning up at Parkway station.**

I have read the specific comments made in relation to this. It is an unusual situation and requires more unpicking to be able to answer better. It could however be linked to the earlier points about buses being turned early to get them back on schedule combined with the fact that drivers stuck in traffic for excessive periods being forced to take breaks (to comply with driving hours rules). It would be helpful to have the person's name to be able to look into it more. The Ref links to a comment posted by 'BS32 Resident'.

- **There is a particular problem with the 7.15 X73 service from Cribbs, regularly arriving 30mins late in Bristol. (28/26/6/22/31 mins late on 15th/16th/17th/20th/21st October - average 23mins late over five days).**

This is a concern to us and we will look into it. NB for your info we've looked at this specific journey and note that while it does start on time from Cribbs Causeway it does seem to lose time between there and Bristol Parkway, which it then fails to recover over the rest of the journey. We will look at this to see if it can be resolved within the next service change.

- **Delays and cancelled services are not limited to peak hours.**

There can be many reasons for delays or cancellations. We seek to minimise the amount of cancellations though.

Delays can be caused by: traffic congestion, road works, adverse weather, Road traffic accidents, passenger incidents (ie someone becomes unwell on the bus and medical assistance is needed, or a passenger dispute erupts and assistance from the police etc is required). Breakdowns, staff illness or failure to turn up for work can also play a part in services operating late or not at all.

Where a delay does occur it can take time to get the schedule back on track – as buses are no longer in the right places at the right times.

One of the biggest factors impacting the punctuality of journeys, is whether the previous journey operated by the same bus / driver, was late or not. We build recovery time into the timetables but exceptional or unexpected delays can have a significant knock on effect.

- **There is a particular problem with the 22.05 service from the city centre. On several occasions, it has turned up 30mins late with driver saying it will only go as far as Bristol Parkway. [Ref, Ref, Ref]**

This is a concern to us and we will look into it with a view to resolving it.

- **Early morning services (6am to 7am) are late setting off from Cribbs, which cannot be blamed on traffic. [Ref]**

This is a concern to us and we will look into it with a view to resolving it.

- **Bus drivers are rude and do not apologise for delays.**

We expect our drivers to be polite and courteous at all times. If there are instances where this is not the case we definitely want to know about it so they can be dealt with.

Notably we have changed our recruitment process for drivers to place a much greater emphasis on customer service skills than driving skills (on the basis that we can teach you to drive a bus if you have the right aptitude). This is leading to a reduction in the number of driver complaints, but if where issues are still identified we will take the appropriate action to resolve them.

2. Questions submitted by readers

- **I would like to ask why I end up waiting up to 25 minutes for a bus from the mall on a morning when they should just [have] come into service? [Ref]**

One of the biggest factors impacting the punctuality of journeys, is whether the previous journey operated by the same bus / driver, was late or not.

To answer this specifically I'd need to know what time she catches the bus and from where, going which way. I can then look at what the bus does before that journey. Note many of our buses start at circa 5am, and many run through the night.

- **Why's is so expensive! Costs £2:50 single from filton to bradley stoke (less than 3 miles) and what's replaced the first 10? I only make occasional journeys and always have to make sure I have change on me! [Ref]**

The cost of the journey is dependent on the distance travelled as defined by the number of sections of route (each approx. one mile long) that the bus travels through. The fares were reduced in Nov 2013, to make them much more transparent and fairer across the board. This web page explains how single fares are calculated. <http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/fairerfaresforall/fares-and-tickets.html#disatnce-basedfares>

There is a Bristol Outer zone 10 Journey ticket: £24 for ten single journeys anywhere in Bristol Inner or Outer Zone. See: http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/bristol_bath/tickets/bristol/bristol_10journey.php

- **Is this the start of the withdrawal of the 73 services from Bradley Stoke? It usually starts with a slippage of times of buses. Along with excuses and a change to the time table. Then its announced some buses on the route aren't profitable, leading to cuts in service, more it's not profitable and more cuts. Then a cancellation of the route altogether. Call me a cynic but here we go again! !**

No, this is not true. We are expanding our network – as you will have seen from the new Service 83 serving Bradley Stoke – but we are experiencing issues with punctuality and reliability linked to traffic congestion amongst other things

- **Why, when your 22.05 bus is late, will it then only go to Bristol Parkway as noted on numerous occasions, than complete its full journey? What additional travel suggestions do you suggest to customers to do when the bus will only go to Parkway, and they need to go a lot further than this? (continued) [Ref]**

We will look at this – and try to resolve the problem – but the answer can be found above (point 2, turning buses early to get them back on track).

- **Would Bradley Stoke be better served by a frequent local bus services for Bradley Stoke, Stoke Lodge and Stoke Gifford, with the X services justing stopping at 3/4 stops only, say: Willow Brook Shopping Centre; Parkway Station; UWE; Centre?**

We can pass this suggestion onto our network team for them to consider.

3. Additional questions from the editor

- **Does First collect reliability data showing delays & cancellations, and is this publicly available?**

Yes we collect the data regarding the punctuality and reliability of services. We use this data to plan our timetables. We can explain more about this when you visit the radio room.

Re whether it's publicly available. We used to publish it on our website but stopped doing so some years ago because very few people wanted to see it and putting it in a format people would understand is time consuming.

- **Your Customer Promise allows passengers to claim free travel if a bus departs from a boarding stops more than 20 minutes late, but there is an exclusion clause for "heavy traffic conditions". What are the criteria that allow "heavy traffic" to be claimed as something outside First's control?**

The elements of operating the buses that are directly within our control are as follows:

- The driver: ensuring they turn up for work, and drive their bus in accordance with the timetable we give them
- The bus: ensuring it is well maintained and able to complete the workload set for it

- The timetable: that it's realistic based on the average time it takes to travel from A to B by bus, accounting for people wanting to get on / off, and ensuring that there is sufficient recovery time at the end of routes to reducing the impact of one service impacting on another.

Factors outside our control

- The road conditions. The highway agency is responsible for ensuring the roads are fit for purpose and that road works are managed effectively. We are facing unprecedented levels of road works at the moment, which often impact on the same route in different places.
- Utility works on the roads which delay services
- The weather – severe adverse weather ie snow / torrential rain can impact on the ability of buses to complete their journeys within the normal timetable. Bad weather also generates more general traffic as those people who occasionally walk or cycle revert to their cars.
- Road traffic accidents or other unusual incidents (in the past three months hardly a week has gone by without a major issue affecting services, be it window cleaners stuck on the side of a building in central Bristol, major RTCs in the city, congestion / problems on the motorways or demolition work in the centre of Bristol closing roads.