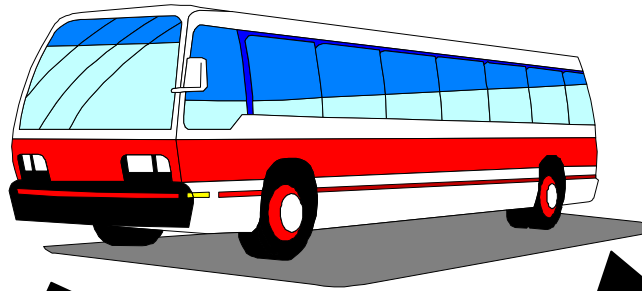




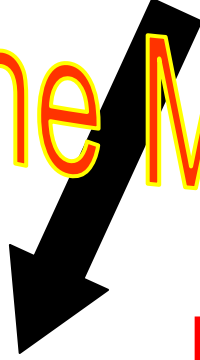
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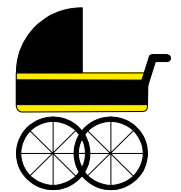
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The Mystery Tours!



A report looking at problems which young people face when using public transport and how solutions may be found - By Emily Card and Helen Swanwick (2000)



Introduction

This report was written during the summer of 2000. The report is a follow up to the 'Fares Fair' report. The two main factors that we considered whilst writing this report were social inclusion and the environment.

The, 'Fares Fair,' report which was the second report written by the, 'Investing In Children,' transport research team considered the issues below.

- Fares
- Timetables
- Driver training
- Making a complaint
- Safe journeys to school
- Lighting
- Cycling

After a great deal of research work (outlined in the, 'Fares Fair,' report) looking at the focal issue of fares the team had created a convincing debate which resulted with the concessionary fare age being moved from fourteen to sixteen years.

This new report demonstrates how we have moved on to look at the other issues in more detail and have carried out research to gain evidence of the problems young people face when using the public transport system.

Searching For Facts

On Tuesday the 8th of August we traveled to the, 'Rural Transport Forum,' at, 'East Durham Community College.' We thought we might gain some useful information that could be taken into account during our research. What we found most useful was the quite large emphasis on mobility problems. We found out the following things, which would be useful when interviewing young people with disabilities;

- Steve Burd (Commercial Director of Arriva North East) stated that out of his 236 buses, 158 are low easy access (approximate figures) and that the frequency of services has increased.

- Chris Graham (Public Transport Officer for Durham County Council) stated that from the rural bus challenge funding a dial-a-ride service is in operation for the elderly and disabled.
- Lydia Speakman (from The Countryside Agency) spoke about mental health buddy schemes.

Another issue raised was young people in education and employment. From this we learnt;

- In Leicestershire there is a, 'Kick-start,' project that loans mopeds to young people in training.
- There are a lot of issues surrounding young people and public transport, which no solutions have been found for. This was evident from workshop discussions.

End of Day Conclusions

There are a lot of efforts being made to solve problems for people with mobility problems in rural areas but there is not a great deal of evidence that solutions are being found for all young people's problems with transport. However, these difficulties have been identified.

Traveling Research

To conduct some of our research we decided it would be important to spend two days using the transport system. By doing this we could then make some true conclusions about the problems and discomforts young people face when attempting to travel around the county using public transport.

The following questions give examples of what we would look out for when travelling and the things we would consider to collaborate evidence.

Before the journey

- How do we gain information about buses?
- When we have received information do we then know everything we need to?
- Was the phone operator for the information line helpful and friendly?

At the bus stop

- Do we feel safe in this bus stop?

- Would we feel safe at this stop if alone or if it was night?
- Is there any useful information at the bus stop, i.e. timetables?
- How far did I have to travel from home to get to this bus stop?

On the bus

- Did the driver treat us with respect?
- What has our journey cost each of us?
- Would we have been able to access this bus in wheelchairs or with pushchairs?
- Do we feel safe in this bus?
- Is the bus clean?
- How long will our journey take?

On arrival

- Now how far are we from our activity?
- Was our journey pleasant?
- How could our journey have been improved?
- How do we know how to get to our activity from this bus stop? Who told us?
- Was the price of our journey reasonable?
- Would a younger young person have found it more difficult to gain information etc, for the journey we have taken?
- How would a young person with fewer reading and / or communication skills have gained information? What difficulties would they face?
- Which groups of young people can be distinguished as groups who would have found the process uneasy?

At activity

- How much has our activity cost?
- Did our form of transport mean we had a long way to walk from the destination bus stop to our activity?

End of day

- What was easy / hard?
- How much has our entire day cost and what percentage of that is due to transport costs?
- Would I rather have used public transport or car? For what reasons?

Further Questions

- Could we have cycled to our activity rather than go by bus?
- If we were to walk from the bus stop to our activity in the dark would our walk be safe and well lit?
- What prevents young people with disabilities other than wheelchair users use public transport?
- Are young people from less well off families forced to use public transport less (due to costs)?

Getting the Information

To carry out our journeys we needed to find out which buses to get, when they arrived and how long the bus journeys would take. We needed to make the following journeys over a number of days;

- From Darlington to Barnard Castle
- From Barnard Castle to Pity Me
- From Newton Aycliffe to Seaham

We decided we could gain this information using the following processes;

- A Phone the travel enquiry line
- B Use the Internet

So, was attaining information easy?

A – This was really helpful. We found the travel enquiry line on a leaflet, which would be available from travel information centres. The phone operator was very friendly, spoke clearly and made no hesitations. She gave us all the information we needed.

B – The Internet has a useful site in which you can type where you want to begin and end your journey and it will produce the best possible journey using buses.

Travelling Around County Durham - Journey 1

- Newton Aycliffe to Darlington
- Darlington to Barnard Castle
- Barnard Castle to Newton Aycliffe
- Newton Aycliffe to Pity Me

Information

We found all the information needed by contacting the travel enquiry line.

The Journey

Part 1:

We began by catching the 16 bus to Darlington at approximately twenty to nine. The bus fare was £1.70 for an adult and £0.85 for a half. The new IIC concessionary pass does really make a difference, but if a young person was to make a number of journeys in one day the half fare prices could prove expensive for someone from a family with financial difficulties. It is important to look at this when considering the issue of social inclusion. The bus did not leave Newton Aycliffe until 8.45am though, due to the fact that the bus driver was sat chatting to a young woman. When we finally did set off the journey was not very comfortable. There was one particular part of the journey where the road was very bumpy and the bus was travelling too fast. This would have been potentially dangerous if there was a person with an injury on the bus or an old age pensioner. The bus eventually arrived in Darlington at 9.10am.

Part 2:

We caught the 75 bus to Barnard Castle at approximately 9.55am. The bus fare was £2.45 for an adult and £1.22 for a half fare. The bus driver did not seem to recognise the IIC card and took a closer look at it, although he did accept it. The journey seemed to take a long time, although it actually only took half an hour. The journey seemed to take ages because it traveled round many small villages and country roads. We eventually arrived in Barnard Castle, where we had arranged a meeting with Paul Branch (manager of leisure centre), at 10.25am. We were unsure of the location of the leisure centre, therefore, we went into a shop and asked a shop assistant. We managed to find the leisure centre because of our prior knowledge of the area.

Potential problems so far on our journey:

- Neither of the buses that we had traveled on so far were wheelchair accessible. If either of us were wheelchair users, we would not have been able to carry out this journey.

- If neither of us had access to a phone or the Internet it would have been very difficult for us to get information about the bus services.

Part 3:

We caught the 75 bus back to Newton Aycliffe at 12.05pm. The fare cost £2.80 for an adult and £1.40 for a half fare. The first thing that we noticed about the bus was the fact that it was wheelchair accessible. The bus traveled to Newton Aycliffe via Darlington. At Darlington we were asked to swap buses, but when we got on the new bus the driver realised that the bus was missing a default card. We then had to go on a slight detour to the bus station, where the bus was checked over for defaults, including a check of the emergency door. It is fortunate that we didn't have an accident on the way to the bus station. We soon resumed our journey to Newton Aycliffe. The bus arrived in Newton Aycliffe at 12.50pm.

Part 4:

We caught the 722 bus to Pity Me at 1.00pm. The fare was £2.40 for an adult and £1.20 for a half fare.

Summary of Journeys

- All the bus stops were Perspex not brick. These are much safer and people feel a lot less vulnerable in them.
- All the bus stops were situated in places where even in the dark there are people nearby, which added to safety.
- Most buses used were not wheelchair or pram accessible.
- Information seeking is much easier for people who have access to the technology required.
- We did not have long to wait for buses.
- There were timetables at all bus stops, however we believe that some people find them difficult to read and understand especially if they are not used to using the twenty-four hour clock. Print on them was small. Vision problems probably exclude some people from using them.
- The buses were reasonably clean inside.

Looking at each issue in the 'Fares Fair' report in more depth

Fares

The research recorded in the fare's fair report resulted in the county council (in agreement with the bus companies) providing

£100,000 to increase the concessionary fare age limit from 14 to 16. As part of this initiative an IIC card was introduced, as evidence for a young person that they are eligible for a concession. The IIC card is beneficial to users in a number of ways, including;

- Young people can access leisure services and other activities more often because they have more money.
- A young person may become involved in, for example a club when they would have previously not been able to afford to.
- The bus companies may secure future customers from it, because there may be people using the bus with the card when they would have never used the bus before.
- Young people who previously could not use the bus because they could not afford to are able to travel places with their friends.
- An increase in customers causes the bus service to make more money.

How the IIC card could be improved;

- At the moment it can not be used before 6 o'clock on a weekday, which makes it almost impossible for a young person to use it after they have stayed back for an extra curricular activity at school.
- The IIC card concessionary age limit could be increased so that anyone in full time education could use it. The card could also act as an education/employment bus pass during the same hours as the present ones do. This would encourage young people to enter into higher education or employment after leaving school.
- At the moment there is still a problem that some young people can not afford to use the buses even with a half fare IIC card. This causes these people to be excluded from activities, which their friends maybe involved in.

Timetables

Problems;

- Timetables are printed in small print, which maybe difficult for people with sight problems to read. Also, how do blind people find out when the bus is coming as they can not read the timetable?

- Timetables are difficult to understand for some young people especially for those who are not using the twenty-four hour clock.
- People have limited access to timetables.
- Timetables do not state whether the bus a person wishes to travel on is wheelchair / pram accessible.

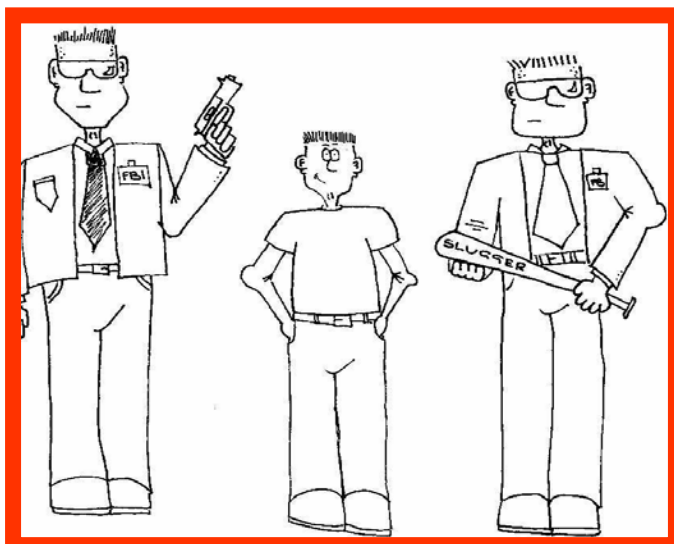
Possible solutions;

- Timetables could be printed in larger letters or people with this difficulty could phone the travel enquiry line and request for a large print timetable to be sent to them. Timetables could be printed in Braille, these could be next to the normal timetables or if this would prove too expensive blind people could contact the travel enquiry line and request timetables to be posted.
- A simpler way of presenting the timetables could be developed. For example the timetable could state a list of the bus numbers and destinations and next to each bus number it could say i.e. ten minutes past every hour except...
- The above solutions help solve this 3rd problem.
- It could. The buses, which usually carry the most passengers, could always be easy access. This way the timetable would not have to change other than when a bus converts and becomes accessible. Although this excludes some people in rural areas it would more than likely increase the number of wheelchair users etc, using buses therefore including people who were once excluded.

Bus Shelters

Problems;

- Some young people feel frightened in brick bus shelters because they can not tell who is around especially in the dark. Also, passers by can only see into one side of the shelter and may not notice if someone was being attacked.



- Some bus shelters - especially the brick shelters are dirty and smell bad. They are not pleasant to be in.

Possible Solution to both problems;

- If all bus shelters were Perspex more people may want to use them. They would not feel as frightened. Also if bins were placed beside every stop people would drop litter less in the bus stops. This would keep the bus shelters tidier and be better for the environment. Although it may be expensive to change all the bus shelters and provide bins, if it cause more people to use the bus, money would be made back by an increase in customers.

Driver Training

Problem;

- Young people feel that the attitudes of bus driver's needs to be improved and we should be treated with the same respect we show to the driver.



Possible Solution;

At the beginning of this research project as part of some other work we went to a public meeting to discuss the police. It was suggested at the meeting that volunteers of any age from organisations could become involved in training the police to deal with the general public. When we thought about this it made us question why the public couldn't be involved in the training of public transport drivers. We realised, this could happen. It would not even have to be members of the public in direct verbal discussion with the drivers.

During our research to write the, 'Fares Fair,' report we discovered that, 'Derbyshire County Council is trying to promote a document

called, 'School Transport; A Good Code of Practice.' This document is issued to all drivers of school buses, to all pupils that use school transport and their parents.' County Durham could create a similar document. The document could present information to all the groups within the community. There could be a section for drivers, which could be written by young people. It could outline young people's expectations of the drivers. In the same way there could be a section written by drivers which outlines their expectations of young people. But the document need not just be those groups. It could also include messages from adults, the elderly, the disabled, and minority groups. Each group could have a brief section, which is set out in a way, which makes it easy to read and understand. I'm sure many people would read the document if it was presented in an appealing way. It could also be printed in different formats i.e. in Braille and foreign languages, so that nobody is excluded from reading it. Maybe if people were given a leaflet about what is expected of drivers and a leaflet of drivers expectations for their group more people wouldn't have much to read. The travel enquiry line and customer complaint line could also be presented in the document.

When we went to the, 'Rural Transport Forum,' in workshops adults displayed their concern for the disrespect for each other some drivers and some young people show for each other. The adults suggested that drivers should go into schools and converse with the young people about issues surrounding respect. This could work in improving communication. However, it would have to happen in a way, which didn't give, the impression drivers were simply going into schools to tell young people how to behave. It would need to be a two way conversation or the young people could end up feeling patronised, and that there is an assumption that young people are going to go out and cause hassle for bus drivers. Bad communication could make the problem worse. A document for people to read would not take nearly as much time out of the driver's work, the young people's education and other people's activities.

Making a Complaint

Problem;

- If I want to make a complaint how to I get the number?
- Some young people will not call the complaint line even if they have the number because they do not feel that their complaint will be taken seriously.

Possible Solutions;

- Make the number widely available; on the inside and outside of buses, on bus passes, on travel information (Leaflets, Internet etc) and in schools.
- Make it every persons right to find out, who dealt with the complaint, what the outcome of their complaint was, and why that was the outcome.

Safe Journeys to School

Problem;

- Some young people who walk to and from school feel unsafe. Some have to walk through unsafe wooded areas with no overlooking houses and no lighting. For the lighting issue it is most important to consider the winter months when it is dark very early. Have a safe route to an from school is most important to children and young people who take part in extra curricular activities and my have to make the journey home on their own.

Possible Solution;

- During our, 'Fares Fair,' research we found, 'A Headteacher of one of the schools in Derbyshire produced a leaflet "Stay Safe, Here and Back." The leaflet unfolded into a map outlining the safe routes to take, bus pick up points and recommended crossings.' Schools in County Durham could make a commitment to do the same thing providing the pupils agreed it would be helpful. Something like this might be most helpful to year 7 students as that is when most young people beginning making their own way to school on foot. A Young person walking instead of using transport is better for their health and for the environment.

Lighting

Problem;

- If the routes young people take when leaving school on an evening are not well lit it causes them to be less safe. If young people do not feel they can get home safely they may not want to stay for extra curricular activities which would be beneficial to them.

Possible Solution;

- Put lighting in places, which are presently unlit and may feature in a young person's journey to or from school.

Cycling

Problem;

- Some young people feel unsafe cycling on roads alongside motor vehicles.
- Some schools do not have secure places to keep bikes, which discourages young people from cycling to school.

Possible solutions;

- There need to be more cycle paths especially on routes to schools so that young people can cycle to school.
- There need to be secure places for people to leave bikes including in schools.

Cycling is better for the environment and health.

Conclusion

There are a number of different issues surrounding transport that young people are concerned about. To increase the number of young people using buses a number of changes need to be made. It is important that public transport ensures that nobody is excluded as the service modernises, for this reason accessibility needs to be looked at as a big issue. It should be remembered that the more young people use buses, the better it is for the environment and the better it is financially for the service.