



## **IRU Bus Excellence Award 2013 Application form – BUSFORUS**

### **Introduction**

BUSFORUS.co.uk is a new website, aimed at 16-25 year olds, providing quick and easy access to information on local bus services in the UK. Launched by Transport Minister, Norman Baker in January 2013, the site, which is also accessible by Smartphone and tablet devices, uses Bing Maps and GPS technologies to match users to their nearest bus stops and services. BUSFORUS is a true one-stop-shop of information and is set to revolutionise the way young people plan bus journeys.

### **The project**

In the Spring of 2012, Norman Baker discussed with the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT UK) and also stated in the Green Paper (Green Light for Better Buses, March 2012) that, "The government believes more effort is needed to get young people onto buses and keep them there". At the same time Passenger Focus, the independent Passenger Watchdog, revealed that 16-25 year olds rate buses and bus services lower than any other age group. Subsequently, the UK Youth Parliament and the British Youth Council put forward public transport and making it 'cheaper, better and accessible for all' as its number one issue for debate.

CPT's Legislation Committee, made up of representatives from the UK's major bus groups, collectively agreed to address this subject. A decision was made by the Committee to fund an exciting project on behalf of the industry, delivering an online platform for bus service information specifically aimed at younger travellers. This would bring together for the very first time, in one single site, everything young people need to know about planning a local bus trip. Reducing the need for lengthy and unproductive web browsing and site hopping sessions, BUSFORUS, as the slogan says, 'has it all covered'.

Following a survey of the British Youth Council (below) and extensive research into the types and levels of information currently available, the direction the BUSFORUS site would take became clear very early on. It needed to provide the following four key elements:

- Icon driven summary of various ticket types (emphasis on young people and students), services and facilities offered by local bus operators
- Electronic map detailing nearest bus stops and services to a given location (postcode, place and road search)
- Key contact details, including customer service, ticket office and journey planning, for operators serving 'matched' bus stops
- Quick and easy to use look-up and comparison of operators

In order for the site to be recognised and respected as a comprehensive source of local bus and service information, the full support and participation of the UK bus industry was requested. CPT placed advertisements in the trades' press, online (using social media) and also in their own members-only publications, urging operators to join in this industry-first initiative. Norman Baker himself called on operators to take part, and addressing those gathered at the UK BUS Awards (2012) dinner he said, "I'd like to see all operators on board in the near future. My message to the remaining 15% is 'don't miss the bus'."

As a result, by the end of 2012 approximately 95% of the industry had registered to take part (100+ individual bus operating companies).

### **Working in partnership**

It was clear from the outset that the overall success of BUSFORUS would rely heavily on the support of a large and disparate project team bringing together a wide range of information within a short timescale. Initially, all participating operators were asked to complete and return a questionnaire (attached) providing an overview of their operations, areas/postcodes served and a brief synopsis of the various services, facilities and ticket types available to passengers.

Having reviewed their responses, it was agreed that BUSFORUS would not attempt to duplicate or store data already available to the industry, but draw on trusted National Open Data sources using the TraveLine and Next Buses' APIs. The challenge was to identify data that was publicly available and accessible to the web platform, from data that would require harvesting and storing within the projects' own database.

Close working partnerships were then established and a steering group formed between CPT, key industry stakeholders (TraveLine, NextBuses, DfT and Rise Digital Media) and the bus operators themselves. These relationships were not only crucial in establishing an overall approach for the website proposition, but also to foster a greater understanding of the datasets held both regionally and nationally for bus stops, scheduling and operator codes and services.

After a significant research phase, the project team identified that the main feature of the site - providing visitors with information and quick links to their local bus stops, operators and services - would require the use of four technologies:

1. **Bing Maps API** - A users' location is converted into a geo-location (latitude/longitude) based on either a postcode or location search
2. **NaPTAN** - A list of bus stops is retrieved from the NaPTAN bus stop data sheet where the bus stops selected have a geo-location that fits within the identified range
3. **NextBuses API** - The list of bus stops is queried against the NextBuses API to retrieve the codes for each operator that services the selected bus stops
4. **BUSFORUS** operator dataset - The operator codes are matched to the B4U database to return the operator specific data for services, facilities and general information

Throughout the 4-month build process, CPT kept Norman Baker and his team fully up to date with all developments and also sought advice on certain characteristics and design aspects.

### **Researching and understanding the project**

On agreeing the nature and level of information proposed for the site and the preferred platform for doing so, an online survey of the British Youth Council was undertaken in order to

gain a better understanding of exactly what young people think about and want from their local bus services. In particular, we were keen to establish (i) how young people currently access information on bus services, (ii) the types of information a new bus website should offer and (iii) how information should be displayed and the functionality required to support it.

The survey of the British Youth Council revealed:

- Site must be available to Smartphone and tablet users as well as PC
- Provide quick look-up comparison of operators
- Detail when and where student and young person's tickets are available
- Show where late night services run and operators who offer onboard Wi-Fi
- 95% purchase tickets on bus for same day travel (5% newsagents)
- 90% would like their first port of call for bus info to be online
- 50% rely on bus stop boards for service information

These responses, very much in line with the Committee's thoughts on how the site should function, were shared with RISE DM and work on the site commenced.

### **Benefits to the environment**

The environmental benefits of travelling by bus rather than car are well documented. Research shows that easy to access and reliable information on bus services helps to encourage people out of cars and on to buses. And this is exactly what BUSFORUS does.

The inclusion of real and scheduled time information (phase 2) will make planning and, making bus journeys, even simpler. Following the launch of this phase in August, we will work closely with operators to review the amount of traffic (hits) arriving to their own sites due to BUSFORUS. In turn we will be able to measure whether an increase in site hits is directly attributable to an increase in passenger numbers. We are confident that this will be the case.

## Outcomes and achievements

A beta (test) version of the website was launched to the industry by Norman Baker at last November's Euro Bus Expo show. Then, following a further two-month testing and data cleansing period, the site was launched to the general public on 2 January 2013, supported by a modest and cost-effective social media campaign.

To date the site has achieved:

- In excess of 30,000 unique hits
- 5000 repeat visits
- Average of 500 hits per day during January
- High of 1000 hits on 3 January
- Average visitor spending 2+ minutes on site (web average <20 secs)
- twitter: 200 followers, facebook: 100 'likes'
- +100 participating operators – in excess 90% of industry
- 8 mentions in Parliament

Speaking at last year's UK Bus Awards, commending the site Norman Baker said:

"Let's make bus travel easy and attractive for young people by building on initiatives like CPT's excellent BUSFORUS interactive website.

"I'd like to see all operators on board in the near future. There's room on top for the rest. My message to the remaining 15% is 'don't miss the bus'."

The site continues to be a hot topic at the Department for Transport and is regularly referred to during speeches and Parliamentary Questions. Norman Baker has recently declared that, "making buses more accessible for young people" is his bus policy priority in the lead up to the next General Election in 2015.

CPT looks forward to working closely with him during the construction and implementation of phase 2 of the project and all subsequent work.

### **Moving forward**

Due to its initial success and the site being well received by Government, industry, press and stakeholders, further enhancements to BUSFORUS are already well underway. With an ever increasing demand being placed on web products and services to offer something new, whilst continuing to remain fresh and current, CPT's Legislation Committee has regularly reviewed the success (statistics), perceived image and usefulness of the site.

Phase 2 of the project, due to be launched in late August, will see the addition of real and scheduled bus timetable information (based on a visitor postcode/town search) and additional links to relevant Passenger Transport Executive websites. CPT is currently working closely with PTEG to finalise this new area which will bring further benefits to visitors along with some simple journey planning tools.

To retain a high level of interest and in order to continue providing a useful and worthwhile service, BUSFORUS has been structured so it is easily adaptable to market demand and changes in technology.

### **In summary**

The BUSFORUS site is a result of the UK bus industry listening, responding and giving young people - tomorrow's bus passengers - what they want. The site showcases an industry which has joined together for the benefit of its greatest shared asset - bus passengers.

BUSFORUS is simple to use, easy to access and, unlike any other site of this nature, freely accessible on all internet enabled platforms. It removes the need for lengthy, tedious and often unrewarding internet research and planning of bus trips, providing for the very first time a whole host of local bus information under one roof. A true one-stop-shop.

Mindful of not letting perfection get in the way of the possible, a value shared by the Minister, the development and implementation of this site demonstrates a brave first step from an industry eager to move with the times.

The site has also proved to be the ideal platform to promote and highlight further industry initiatives, hosting the recent Bus for Jobs campaign which saw free bus travel given to job seekers during the month of January.

With work on the further development of the site well underway, BUSFORUS looks set to revolutionise the way that young people view buses and plan journeys using them.

#### **Additional material, artwork and images**



1 **BUSFORUS** is launched by Transport Minister Norman Baker (L-R) Christopher Nice, CPT; Giles Fearnley, FirstGroup; Simon Posner, CPT; Norman Baker; Mark Yexley, Arriva plc.



2 Norman Baker takes a look at the mobile version of the site on iPad



3 The main BUSFORUS logo, branding and search facility



4 BUSFORJOBS was launched using the BUSFORUS platform in January 2013