



BURNLEY AND PENDLE, UNITED KINGDOM

High Quality Bus Corridor – Starship

Background/context

Burnley & Pendle is the main public transport operator in the Boroughs of Burnley and Pendle. It is part of the Blaze-field Group, the UK division of the French-owned Transdev Group holding company. In order to improve the quality and image of certain services, Burnley & Pendle reorganised part of its service under the brandname "Starship."

Case description

The Starship brand delivers high-quality bus services in Burnley, Nelson, Conley, Accrington and Keighley. The re-branded services 101/102 and 111/112 provide a 15 minute and 10 minute service. In addition, Burnley & Pendle invested £2.75 million in 19 new Versa buses, which are modern, fashionable, 40-seat single-deckers. Because the new buses are shorter than standard, they have a lower unladen weight for fuel efficiency, and have space for 40 seats and exceptional standing-passenger capacity.

The Starship brand doesn't use Burnley & Pendle's regular cream and red colour scheme but a new design using orange and yellow. Their slogan, "We're light years ahead!" is supported by the futuristic designs of the buses.

Although the Verso is a midi-bus, it looks like a full-sized bus because of the positioning of its entrance. The buses also offer a very good ride quality and are exceptionally quiet, partly due to their special non-vibrating windows. The bus's arched styling and big, curved windows are striking.

By using light-coloured surfaces and large windows the interior offers a bright and airy atmosphere and gives the impression of lots of space. The positioning of the rear wheel at the extreme rear of the bus allows for ample seating on a low-floor level. This makes for easy access to every seat. The buses also have low-emission, fuel-efficient engines.

Legislation and policy issues

Local bus services in Great Britain (except for Northern Ireland and London) have been deregulated since 1986. Two types of standard bus services have developed since then: commercial and subsidised. Generally, around 80% of the UK's bus services are provided on a commercial "for profit" basis. The operator determines the routes, timetables and fares for these services and has to register them with the Traffic Commissioner at least 56 days in advance of implementation. The remaining services, those that are not commercially viable but deemed "socially necessary," are also provided by private operators, although they are publicly subsidised through tendered contracts by public authorities.

In the early days of deregulation this brought some fierce competition on some profitable routes, with several operators running buses on the same route. Although the UK bus network has settled down and matured in recent years, there are still many examples where there is on-street competition between operators on the same route.

In London there is a European-style tendering system,

whereby private operators bid for exclusive rights to run on a particular route. The fares, timetables and routes are set by the authority, Transport for London, and the private operators merely operate the service to the required standard.

Elsewhere in the UK the deregulated environment brings much discussion amongst the travelling public and politicians. Some argue that bringing bus services back under public control would bring some stability and remove much of the confusion. However, the London-style system is expensive to replicate across the rest of the UK. Private operation brings private investment in new vehicles and infrastructure. It also encourages innovation in terms of increasing flexibility to change and create new routes to meet shifting public demand. Also, there is little political interference in private bus operation! There is also a concern that, should the control of bus services return to the public sector, public funding may backslide in the longer-term, posing a risk to the viability of some services. That said, currently bus services are subject to commercial decisions by the private operators, and sometimes result in withdrawal of the service with just 56 days notice. In this case, the local authority may be able to step in with a publicly-funded tender package, but that is not always the case, especially if patronage is low on that particular route.

The UK Government's recent Transport Act adds some new ideas, in the form of "quality contracts," which are akin to the London model, but none of these have been put in place yet. They are only supposed to be used where an area is alleged to be "failing" with regard to bus provision. "Quality partnerships" also bring together operators and local authorities in partnerships for improvement, such as new infrastructure, new vehicles and new bus priority schemes.

Excellent examples of good quality bus networks in the UK include: Brighton, Newcastle (Go North East), Nottingham (Nottingham City Transport / Trent Barton), Warrington and Edinburgh.

Costs and financing

Revenue in 2006 of all divisions of the Transdev Blazefield Group in the United Kingdom rose by €28 million. High quality bus routes significantly contributed to this development.

Results

Backed by its reputation as an operator of high-quality public transit systems, Starship is deploying a quality management standard. They want to offer all types of customers, transport authorities, companies and passengers a guaranteed, high-quality service.

Starship's aim is to ensure that passengers can enjoy travelling and employees are able to work in a safe working environment. Starship implemented a committed security enhancement policy for several years. Furthermore in 2008 Burnley & Pendle bought 19 new low-floor buses, in order to improve the bus quality services of Starship.



Problems

Starship has faced some general problems such as assaults, vandalism and fare-dodging. These problems do not go unpenalised, but rather result in contractually agreed compensation, legal action for criminal damages and sentences for more serious offences.

Transferability and success factors

A good example of transferability would be the Blackburn Borough Transport network, which was upgraded shortly after its acquisition. A new fleet of "superbuses" was launched, which led to an immediate increase in patronage.

Conclusions

Starship has led to an increase of passengers due to improved service quality and new design. The Starship brand is constantly improving the quality of its services to provide a genuine alternative to the car.

References and contacts

Contact: Phil Tonks, Operations Officer for England
 Organisation: Bus Users UK
 Tel: 01384 273267
 Fax: 01384 273267
 Email: phil@bususers.org
 Web: www.bususers.org

Sputnic contact: Franz Barta
 Email: franz.barta@socialdata.de