



# Stakeholder Board

Annual Report 2008

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# Introduction

## from Oxford Bus Company

This is the seventh annual report from Oxford Bus Company's pioneering Stakeholder Board (SHB). The board is a forum for debate and decision making which is unique in the UK bus industry, and we believe that it represents an excellent platform for improving what we do and how we do it.

Members of the SHB helped the company focus on the services it provides. We are pleased to report that in 2008 we saw improvements in the quality of services provided, with a record performance for reliability and punctuality, despite the usual disruptions for roadworks etc. We continued to invest heavily in new, low emission vehicles with eleven buses and nine coaches joining our fleet. We are pleased (and proud) that an independent survey has revealed that we maintained our place as the lowest emission bus company in the UK.

It was also a "red letter" year for the company in other ways – we were honoured by a visit from the Prime Minister, and we were shortlisted for five industry awards, winning two.

It is sad to record the passing of two of our founder members during 2008. Stan Taylor was for many years a councillor in Oxford and a very informed advocate of bus services. David Edwards was Transport Strategy Manager for the Oxford Radcliffe NHS Trust and a very passionate supporter of public transport. Both will be missed in the community, and the Stakeholder Board is much stronger going forward for their help and guidance in our formative years.

If this is the first time that you have encountered a Stakeholder Board, I hope you read our report with interest. As ever, we are keen to hear from you if you would like to take part, or if you just have something to say – our contact details are at the back of this report.



Philip Kirk  
Managing Director

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# Introduction from a Customer Representative

I can honestly say that I am proud to have been part of the Oxford Bus Company's Stakeholder Board. Frequently companies talk about being customer focussed and socially responsible, rarely do they demonstrate so clearly and unequivocally that they actually are. It is a credit to the Company that this external input continues to be welcomed and embraced.

The Stakeholder Board membership is balanced and well considered. Ideas, suggestions and inputs are listened to and considered with good will and always implemented when reasonably practical to do so. The Company provides the stakeholder board with regular detailed performance and reliability reports for all key areas of its operation, and are prepared to highlight both the positive and the negative indicators and discuss corrective action.

The Oxford Bus Company also encourages employee representatives to sit on the Stakeholder board and is clearly committed to listening and learning from their experiences. Between 2006 and 2008 the company implemented improvements in driver recruitment, training and development which were positively reflected both in the customer comments received and staff retention rates.

The board meetings were always well attended, our agendas included lengthy discussions on the transport issues facing Oxford City and how they impact on the people who live and work in there. These included increased restrictions on vehicle access to the High Street and with major road works both planned and unexpected. In 2006 the introduction of on street parking restrictions and the expansion on the hospital sites in Headington put pressure on existing bus services for employers, staff, patients and other bus users and featured regularly at meetings.

New buses, new livery, new payment methods and timetable layouts were all reviewed and discussed with the Stakeholder Board in detail and the different perspectives and experiences of the members were embraced and reflected in the solutions implemented. More every day issues with onboard safety announcements and the storage of wheeled luggage received equal attention.

The stakeholder board meetings were conducted with unfailing good humour and were always a pleasure to attend. The personal time given on a voluntary basis very well worth it. I am sure that similar challenges and celebrations await the new Stakeholder Board members in the coming years, I wish them well.

Liz Simpson-Wells  
Employers representative

# 3 Stakeholder Board in Principle

## Mission Statement:

“To ensure that the views and concerns of passengers, large employers and company representatives are taken into account in decisions about the provision of bus and coach services.”

## Aims and Aspirations:

- to provide an understanding of the main requirements of customers, employees and managers;
- to monitor performance, make comments and recommendations;
- to explore with appropriate authorities ways in which improvements can be made for both customers and staff;
- to ensure that due regard is given to staff and customers' health and safety;
- to ensure that customer views are heard and appropriate action taken;
- to investigate customer complaints brought to the attention of the Stakeholder Board which have not been resolved satisfactorily within standard procedures and to seek resolution;
- to ensure that policies towards disabled passengers are followed and to bring attention to potential improvements;
- to compile an annual report detailing the work of the Stakeholder Board.

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# Membership

With the exception of the permanent ex-officio members, membership of the Stakeholder Board is unpaid, voluntary and for a fixed term (2 or 3 years).

## Permanent ex-officio Members:

Philip Kirk, Managing Director

Louisa Weeks, Operations Director

Ray Woodhouse, Engineering Director

Helen Le Fèvre, Finance and Commercial Director

Alan Tyson, Branch Secretary, Transport and General Workers Union

## Customer Representatives:

Rhona Mead\*;

Barbara Naylor;

Judith Penrose Brown;

Andrew Adegbile;

Steve Czajewski\*.

## Representative of Large Employers in Oxford:

Liz Simpson-Wells, The Manor Hospital.

## Representative of Local Pressure Group:

Noam Bleicher\*, Bus Users UK

## Oxford Bus Company Employee Representatives:

Mike Holms-Sharp, Customer Services Assistant

Steve Woodjetts\*, Driver.

\* - these members stood down from the board at the end of 2008 as part of the normal rotation cycle.

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# Activities

## Regular Activities

The Stakeholder Board meets six times each year: the exact dates and times are agreed between members so that all circumstances can be taken into account.

At each meeting, the Board receives a report from OBC's Managing Director, which details any major events since the last meeting and progress on any action points. A full range of Key Performance Indicators is reported. These include:

- Service punctuality and reliability;
- Driver turnover rate;
- Health and Safety issues;
- Customer comments and complaints;
- Rate of annual VOSA test success;
- Adherence to planned vehicle maintenance schedules;
- Results of VOSA vehicle 'spot checks'
- Number of road traffic accidents involving company vehicles;
- Number of accidents involving employees.

Other items for discussion are tabled by the company or by members as required.

In addition to the main board meetings, specialist working parties can be tasked by the main board to investigate detailed issues and report back, with recommendations.

Away from meetings, board members are kept informed of issues via email and receipt of the OBC staff newsletter. Board members are invited to OBC functions, such as the launch of new services etc. There are also occasions where board members may represent OBC at external meetings.

## **Specific Issues**

Seatbelt announcements: The board expressed its concern that some drivers were not following company guidelines in announcing to passengers on express services that they are required to wear seat belts. The company responded by communicating the instruction through staff newsletters and meetings, and the board was pleased to note that compliance is now complete by the end of the year.

Luggage policy: The board member representing express service passengers drew attention to the inconsistency of drivers in allowing certain items of luggage onto coaches. This provoked a debate on the level of discretion drivers should be given in such matters. This problem was exacerbated by the different provision of luggage holds on different batches of coaches. By the end of 2008, a new luggage policy had been devised and this is due to be rolled out in early 2009.

Online booking: A employee board member was concerned both that the online booking system for express services was unreliable and that the procedure was insufficiently flexible to provide drivers and customers with a secure way of verifying tickets. Following close discussions, a revised booking facility was introduced and the issues were resolved.

Parking capacity at Thornhill Park & Ride: A number of complaints were received from customers who were unable to park at Thornhill, which is full for much of the time. The board expressed its view that the car park should be extended or otherwise expanded to increase the attractiveness of this valuable facility.

Bus Stops: There were specific queries on bus stopping arrangements in Risinghurst, Cumnor and Oxford Queen Street and High Street. The former two were resolved whilst those in central Oxford were subsumed into the debate on "Transform Oxford" (q.v.)

Concessionary fares: A board member queried the need to issue tickets to those travelling on concessionary passes. The company responded that proof of travel was required but that hopefully the

introduction of more sophisticated ticketing arrangements may make this unnecessary.

Spitting: the board discussed the rise of spitting as an assault, and challenged the company to support the staff in combating this. As a result, the company has purchased “spit kits” for all drivers, so that a sample can be taken and presented to the Police for prosecution.

Oxontime: the board queried a number of cases where roadside “real time” timetable displays had been inaccurate. The company responded that the reliability of the units is at 90%, which is the highest for such a scheme in the UK. However, further discussions would be held with the supplier and the county council to try to improve on this.

Noise and Music: it was reported (and agreed by passenger representatives) that there is an increasing number of cases where people use their mobile phones on buses to play music. The board discussed the issue, and concluded that warning signs are displayed on all vehicles but that these had to be self-enforcing.

Constitution Review: in response to passenger representatives, a review of the SHB constitution was completed in 2008.

Roadside displays: the board debated the correct content of roadside display cases, and particularly whether these should include fares information. The matter will be resolved during 2009.

Coach stop requests: a board member highlighted that passengers are requested to remain seated on coach services until the bus has reached the stop, but there is no instruction on how to signal that the coach needs to stop. This will be resolved in 2009.

Spaces for wheelchairs and buggies: there is an on-going conflict over the use of space on buses. The “wheelchair area” is primarily intended to be just that, and that buggies, pushchairs etc can use this space if it is not being used for wheelchairs. The conflict arises where a wheelchair user wishes to use the space but it is already taken up by a buggy. In some cases, the buggy pusher has been unwilling to collapse the buggy. The company view is that in such cases the

driver can request the buggy pusher to give way but that the driver cannot then force this. The board understood the company's position, but believed that better worded signage could help the matter. This will be resolved in 2009.

Buses leaving stops: in a number of passenger complaints, the issue has arisen of whether drivers should open bus doors to allow more passengers to board, once the doors have been closed. The company believe that this is a health and safety issue and that once the doors have been closed then they should only be reopened in an emergency. The board agreed with this position, but believed that this needs to be communicated clearly to passengers. This will be resolved in 2009.

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# Major Events

in 2008

## Services

Despite the onset on difficult economic conditions, we were again able to make a number of improvements to our services. We were able to provide a direct, frequent link to Heathrow's Terminal 5 from its opening by enhancing **airline service X70**. This service now serves Heathrow's Central Bus Station as well as Terminal 5 and runs every 20 minutes at summer peak times, every 30 minutes in winter. Nine brand new coaches were added to the airline fleet in 2008, to work alongside the ten bought in 2007.



An airline coach awaits departure at Heathrow Terminal 5.

Working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and The Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust, we were able to offer a direct link between Redbridge Park & Ride and the Headington hospitals for the first time with **service X13**. This development centred around a new turning circle and traffic controlled exit being introduced at Redbridge, using developer contribution funds from the new John Radcliffe Hospital development. It also gave a new direct link between Redbridge and Oxford Rail Station. Eleven new buses were purchased in 2008 for this service.



Oxford Radcliffe NHS Trust officials cement the partnership with OBC

Minor changes were also made to services **2, X3, 8, 15, 35** and **X90** to reflect worsening traffic conditions and passenger demand.

Service 35A/B was withdrawn south of Abingdon on Sundays from 1 June, after the loss of the contracted service subsidised by Oxfordshire County Council.

We provided free travel for children to attend the **Winterlight** festival in central Oxford.

There were prolonged periods of roadworks affecting St Aldate's, New Road, Summertown, Headington and Iffley Road. For those in St Aldate's, close liaison with the local authority and utilities meant that we could run special timetables during the roadworks and so operate reliably. In other cases, this liaison still requires a lot of work and we strive to do more.

### **Park & Ride Development**

Oxfordshire County Council took over operation of three car parks which had previously been run by Oxford City Council. At the same time, the county withdrew parking charges at the sites. To match this initiative, we maintained Park & Ride bus fares at their 2007 levels throughout 2008.

In addition, we boosted the daytime frequency of P&R 500 (Water Eaton) to every 15 minutes from 1 June.

In the lead up to Christmas, we operated additional Park & Ride buses on Sundays, and Oxfordshire County Council teamed up with us to offer free Park & Ride services on eight evenings in December.

### **New Investment**

During 2008, we made two significant investments in new vehicles. For the new airline link to Heathrow Terminal 5 we bought nine new Volvo coaches, following on from ten similar vehicles in 2007. These coaches now offer wheelchair accessible transport across all airline services.

For local bus services, we again invested in eleven top-of-the-range Mercedes Citaro single decks, which are used on the highly successful X3/X13 group of services. This enabled a 'cascade' of slightly older Citaros to the popular city4 service, serving Rose Hill and Botley.

The Euro emission standards are discussed below.

## Emissions

Air Quality is an important issue in Oxford, particularly in the central area. We have been working with the city council and county council to reduce the impact of bus emissions in the area. Since 1997, we have specified particulate traps on all new buses, and in 2005 we achieved full fitment on all buses in our fleet. We were the first company in the UK to achieve this.



The lowest emission bus fleet in the UK

Our emissions profile has been compared with other companies throughout the UK, outside London, which has a different regulatory and funding regime for bus services. This report revealed that we have the lowest emission bus fleet in the UK, and that for the four measured pollutants we have the lowest emissions.

In 2005, Oxford City Council issued a draft Air Quality Action Plan for consultation, to which we responded. A summary of this response can be found at [www.oxfordbus.co.uk/air](http://www.oxfordbus.co.uk/air) . It is notable that for three of the four measured pollutants (particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and carbon monoxide), central Oxford meets the government's targets. For the remaining pollutant, Oxides of Nitrogen, the "Euro 5" engines on our new vehicles reduce this by some 75%.

## **Fares**

High fuel costs were a concern throughout the year, although prices were reducing by the end of the year. In spring, 2008 we "hedged" or fixed our fuel price for the next 18 months; this gave us certainty going forward and we were able to keep our fares increase to one per year, and at a lower rate than would otherwise have been the case without hedging.

## **Cost Reductions**

To keep our fares increase at the lowest possible we are constantly reviewing our cost base. During 2008, we introduced two major schemes.

We changed the way in which we do routine servicing to our vehicles so that this is now done overnight when buses are in the garage. This means that we were able to reduce our fleet by seven buses.

During the year, we trialled and then introduced across all our fleet a new system of fuel saving. All drivers have been given an advanced driving course, with special emphasis on techniques for using less fuel. This is backed up by a device in the drivers' cab which gives alerts when pre-set parameters are exceeded. This programme has saved around 5% of fuel consumption.

## **Industry Awards**

We were delighted to be shortlisted for five industry awards during 2008, and to win two of these: Operator Training Award at the Operator Excellence Awards, and for the second year running Express Coach Operator of the Year at the UK Bus Awards.

## **Expansion**

The company was delighted to be awarded the contract to operate the Brookes Bus network of services, which will run for five years from 1 July 2009. This will take OBC to a number of new areas, and introduce nearly 30 new jobs.

## **Transform Oxford**

Oxfordshire County Council unveiled a major new initiative in October, 2008, with the aim of enhancing the pedestrian experience in central Oxford. This initiative – Transform Oxford – is highly controversial as its ultimate aim is effectively to ban buses from a large part of the city centre and instead run a system of shuttle buses.

The initiative has met with a good deal of criticism from the Oxford community and OBC in association with Stagecoach have promoted a scheme which achieves the majority of the aims of Transform Oxford whilst not alienating bus passengers.

This proposal uses powers conferred upon local authorities by the Local Transport Act 2008. This enables local authorities and bus companies to agree a “Quality Partnership”, and to agree on joint timetables and joint ticketing. This would reduce the number of buses in central Oxford whilst providing a more attractive service for the general public

## **Prime Minister visits OBC**

The event of all events happened at Oxford Bus on 7 April, when Gordon Brown made a visit to the company. The Prime Minister paid tribute to the good work being carried out and met a variety of staff members.



The Prime Minister visits Oxford Bus and inspects the Training Department.

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## Oxford Bus Company in 2008

- We employ 549 people.
- 12.7% of staff is from an ethnic minority group. This mirrors the local community.
- In 2008, we bought twenty new vehicles, representing 14% of our fleet.
- 17.7m passenger journeys were made in 2008 and a total of 9.9m miles were operated.
- 99.73% of scheduled miles were operated, and 94.34% of journeys operated within five minutes of timetable. 0.22% of services were lost due to traffic congestion.
- The 'Euro' standard dictates the maximum levels across a wide range of vehicle emissions. All our vehicles use ultra-low sulphur diesel and 100% of our fleet have engines to Euro 2 standard or better. In addition, all of our bus fleet is fitted with a catalyst and regenerative trap or similar device.
- The average age of our fleet is 6.1 years, compared with a government target of 8.0 years and a national average of 8.2 years.

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## Corporate and Social Responsibility

We participate in an annual environmental and social responsibility audit as do our sister companies within the Go-Ahead Group.

The results of this audit are published in an on-line interactive report. The pages for OBC can be accessed from the homepage, which is at:

[www.corporateresponsibility.go-ahead.com/default.asp](http://www.corporateresponsibility.go-ahead.com/default.asp)

## Contacting the Stakeholder Board

If there is a particular issue you would like to have the Stakeholder Board discuss, or if you are interested in becoming a member of the board, please contact us at any time.

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