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# Passenger News

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## TUC March for the Alternative Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2011 Passenger Transport to Mass Mobilise!

Every region and section of Passenger Unite is to do all it can to mobilise our members, their families and friends for the TUC organised march against the cuts on 26th March. This 'March for the Alternative' against the cuts being pushed through by the Conservative-led coalition government is as important to us as to any other section.

The reduction of 20% in bus fuel grants could result in job losses or conditions cuts if we allow it. Similarly, the impact of the Conservative-led Government's revised concessionary fares approach in England cannot be ignored. In some areas entire bus networks could be left in tatters. We have simply have to stop the ConDem cuts! So, mobilise now for a massive turnout from all bus, coach, taxi and tram workers. All Unite regional offices have a large supply of the materials in the form of leaflets, posters and postcards. Contact details can be found on the campaign pages on: [www.unitetheunion.org/marchforalternative](http://www.unitetheunion.org/marchforalternative)

This will be a family day and we want all our members to attend with their loved ones and friends. There'll be transport laid on from all parts and there are no restrictions on who can go on the collective transport provision, so please get everyone to come along. Check with your local or regional Unite office.

Unite has also announced a new free mobile phone text service, 'Unite You' to keep as many members as possible posted in real time about the cuts unfolding in your community. It's easy to use...simply text CUTS to 86888 – it's free to receive and to reply to. It can be accessed from any mobile phone and there is no need to download anything. You can stop getting this service anytime by texting just "STOP". 50,000 Unite members have already opted in to be kept up-to-date with Unite's anti-cuts campaigning. You can make your opinions be heard and find out what other Unite members really think about the cuts. It will also help mobilise to support the March for the Alternative on March 26th. Non-members can opt in too - that way they can find out how Unite is the union at the forefront of stopping cuts killing our communities.



## First Bristol

The branch managed, in the end, to finish its April 2010 pay deal just before Christmas. Following a two year deal in 2009 of 3.7% , two one off payments of £150 were made - one on December 9th and another £100 is to come in April 2011, plus 3% on all rates, plus up to two extra staff passes for grandchildren up to 18 years of age. In the current climate, our members thought that was an acceptable offer, voting to take it in first ballot (something that had never happened before).

*Jim Stevens, First Bristol Branch Chair*

## Stagecoach West Gloucester

126 members are to be balloted on strike action over a pay dispute after the company offered only 1% increase, which is of course well below the rate of inflation - and at a time when the company is making healthy profits. The ballot will be for strike action and action short of a strike. The form of action will be decided by our members at site meetings after the result of the Industrial Action Ballot.

**268 Unite members are being postal balloted at First West Yorkshire's York depot on strike action over a pay offer.**

## OUR HISTORY: 100-year old badge



The badge illustrated was issued by the Portsmouth branch of the Amalgamated Association of Tram & Vehicle Workers Union, probably somewhere between 1911 and 1914.

It was found at a military fair in Surrey a few years ago, and the union found out about it when the buyer contacted us for any information we had. This begs the possibility that many such old and important pieces of union memorabilia could be out there. Have you anything to tell us? Have you got something in the attic?

The badge was a particularly significant find since the AAT&VW was a tram and bus union usually associated with the northern half of the UK. To have produced its own badge, the Portsmouth branch must have been quite sizable and yet to be so far south is rare for an AAT&VW lodge. PN would guess that Southampton's passenger workers would have been in the London & Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Workers (a bus, tram, taxi, and charabanc union) and Pompey just wanted to be different!

But it ended happy, since the LPUVLVW (bit of a mouthful, so everyone called it the red button, or badge, union) and the AAT&VW (another string of letters rendered at the time as 'the blue button union', hence the blue background on the badge) merged in 1919. The new union that emerged from that, the United Vehicle Workers, was short-lived, since - with the port and dockers' unions - they were the main groups to form the T&G in 1922. Who says mergers are rare?



## Xmas woes

Passenger News hopes you all enjoyed your Xmas turkey without too much trouble. But we know that bus branches are by no means unfamiliar with the seasonal rows that beset the industry in some parts when a new-ish or ambitious manager comes along with some bright idea.

Before the big freeze came, 'Passenger News' heard of ructions in Southampton. About five weeks before, the company let it out that they had changes to Christmas working patterns in mind. With members' rosters being changed over the Christmas two-week period, this would have also

modified members' days off on close down days with a loss of pay. It seems no thought had ever been given to those employees who had made arrangements for their lost days off.

The branch arranged what it called "the quickest postal ballot ever" and told the company it intended to strike on the week leading up to Christmas. After meetings in due course the company totally backed down and our members Christmas was back on. As many have remarked 'all power to busworkers' - united they can never be defeated.

Let us know of any other little local difficulties over Xmas and New Year allocations and payments, or anything else. We like to know these things!

## The tale of the ventriloquist lawyer.....by a Unite learning rep

Once upon a time, a ventriloquist lawyer bought a ticket for his dummy on a London bus and refused to remove his 'assistant' from its seat when challenged because he knew the law!

This is just one of the stories that feature in a new book by Unite learning rep and London bus driver, Kenny Mackay called 'The Road Ahead – Observations of a London bus driver'. Kenny drives a No. 27 bus between Chiswick and Chalk Farm and decided to collate all the stories and anecdotes because he thought that bus drivers get a bad press and he wanted to show that there was a brighter and funnier side to the world of the London bus driver.

Kenny said: 'There is a quirkier and more amusing side to the life of a London bus driver. Celebrities, such as Jeremy Clarkson, think it is open season on bus drivers and I wanted to portray my profession in a better light. I love London and its fascinating character and I hope this comes across in the book.'

Kenny, who lives in Kensal Green, took up bus driving five years after completing a business law degree as a mature student. He thought of training as a barrister, but the money during the pupillage period was so poor that he turned to bus driving as it was more financially rewarding.

'I have loads more unused material that I could write a second book on London life – but let's see how this one goes.'

And the lawyer ventriloquist? – one of Kenny's colleagues experienced this episode when the lawyer paid for a ticket for himself and the dummy in The Strand, sticking the ticket on the label. A woman, however, demanded that the dummy be removed, so she could sit down.

However, the lawyer pointed out that as long as the ticket had been purchased for the dummy he was in the right, as the regulations stipulated that the bought ticket did not have to be for a human being! And the dummy broke into speech to indignantly defend itself.

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## *View from the top deck*



*A quick report for Passenger News of the most recent National Passenger Committee (NISC) meeting from your elected Executive member Martin Mayer. (pictured right)*

Our NISC has now confirmed that we will be firmly pursuing our national campaign to reduce the working week and therefore call on all UNITE Branches in the bus industry to:

**STOP FOR ONE MINUTE  
at 1100hrs on 1st March 2011.**

A large quantity of materials - badges, pamphlets and leaflets - have been produced for distribution and, if you have not seen any of these please ask your branch secretary or Regional Office.

Graham Stevenson will be handling press and publicity on behalf of UNITE to ensure we maximise the effect of our action.

However much depends on ALL OF US to ensure this national protest action is observed. I look forward to being able to report a massive response.

The NISC heard a report from Sharon Powell UNITE Finance Officer and Mike Rutherford from Driver Care about their final proposal to extend the scheme to over 60s - one of our longstanding demand of the union. In summary, all members of the main scheme under 60 years of age would see their subs increase from 80p to 95p, for which the Loss of Licence benefit would increase from £7000 to £7250. Current rates for over-60s would remain in the main scheme and no loss of licence benefit would be payable to over 60s as now. However all members including those over 60 would be free to join the Top-up scheme (current rates £2.95p per month but this might even increase to £1 per week!). In this way, members paying into the main scheme and the Top-up scheme would be eligible for a Loss of Licence benefit of £2200 if over 60 years of age.

Whilst we have been discussing this for a long time and I had thought we had arrived at some sort of settlement, unfortunately I was unable to endorse the proposition put to us by the Unite finance team. Nor was the NISC at all impressed with the proposal, which involved a substantial increase in contributions for very little benefit, and we have therefore overwhelmingly rejected it in a show of hands. The Unite EC must now deal with this and I will put our case there.

The Sector is pursuing a major organisation drive aimed at building union strength in the currently less well organised parts of the sector, which I will strongly speak for at the EC. This to include the coaching sector both

private hire and National Express contracts, as well as the unorganised bus operators. Taxi organising to be devolved to our specialised taxi section. Graham Stevenson needs local knowledge and information about unorganised areas of our industry and suggestions for strategic target priorities. Obviously RISCs will play a key part in delivering this and a link up with the Organising Department and with regional organising teams is to be encouraged.

I reported to the NISC that Tony Woodley has understood the expectation that Len McCluskey becomes the sole General Secretary as soon as possible, and has therefore made the extremely generous decision to step aside, allowing Len to become the sole GS of UNITE from 1st February. Tony Woodley will remain as an Executive Officer (on a reduced salary of course!) with Organising as his special responsibility. Now we can begin the business!

## ***Martin Mayer - Executive Council member for Passenger Transport***



## **Calling stress policies?**

Ernie Luney, Health & Safety rep for Northern Ireland's Translink, is looking for contact with any passenger transport members with any experience in negotiating Stress Policy with bus companies.

Of course, all employers have a positive duty to manage health and safety to prevent workplace ill health and injury, including stress at work.

But do bus employers have such policies and agreements? Unite has produced our own leaflet on stress at work which is on the website.

[http://www.unitetheunion.org/member\\_services/health\\_and\\_safety/health\\_and\\_safety\\_resources/stress.aspx](http://www.unitetheunion.org/member_services/health_and_safety/health_and_safety_resources/stress.aspx)

The HSE's Management Standards is guidance approach that might help and there is even a draft stress policy to be found on the HSE's website:

[www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

Although this has not been favoured by Translink's managers. Although it has to be said that there is an excellent company stress counselling service. Translink also provides significant employee assistance schemes that cover such issues as general well-being, anxiety, relationship and equality issues alongside a medical service supplier.

The normal risk assessment process also allows for work pressure issues to be looked at if applicable and there is a wide range of existing issues covered.

There's a well-being project, an Absence Management and Rehabilitation Policy, a Dignity at Work policy, Family Friendly policies, flexible working, bereavement, special leave, alcohol and drugs policies, policy on violence to staff, Harassment Advisors, and a Welfare Officer.

But is there a good example of a Stress Agreement out there that PN readers can supply to Ernie Luney by email so he can progress things?

[Ernie.Luney@Translink.co.uk](mailto:Ernie.Luney@Translink.co.uk)



## Plenty of room on top, now!! But only in China

China's new "3D fast bus" carries passengers *above* street level by straddling the lanes below to allow traffic to pass freely underneath. This futuristic vehicle has just passed all safety assessments and is now slated to be put into pilot use in Beijing's Mentougou District by the end of

2011. The 22<sup>nd</sup> century design for a 4.4 metre by 4.5 metre vehicle operates on two levels. Passengers travel on the upper level, while other vehicles lower than 2 meters can freely go through underneath.

The bus uses two lanes at a time but traffic passes underneath both when it is stops to let passengers off at tram-like stations and when it is in motion. In fact, it is more like a massive double-wide tram than a bus, with a fixed route and physical connection to the city's municipal power grid, except that it uses wheels and shares space with all other road vehicles. Powered by solar energy and using electricity, the zero-emission 3D bus operates on an average speed of 60 to 80 kilometres an hour. The infrastructure cost of the 3D system is roughly one-tenth the cost of building a metro/tube of the same length, whilst construction takes a third of the time it normally does in China.

The 3D fast bus is more flexible than underground metro and light railways, owing to its modular carriages and normal bus-like features without adding to congestion, or being slowed down by it. Either one or two carriages can be run, so that peak hours, or off-peak needs can be catered for. Passenger News refuses to provide a prize for its non-competition requiring the first correct answer as to when such technology might be expected from Britain's public transport operators, since the answer is probably `never'!!!

## CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

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Cuts spell fewer services, higher fares and the withdrawal of concessionary schemes for children and for bus pass holders outside of the statutory minimum hours. Bus services face cut after cut, which could tip services into a spiral of decline from which they will struggle to recover. Already North Yorkshire council is cutting all its Sunday services, in Somerset a 50% cut to subsidised services is on the cards, and concessionary schemes are under threat everywhere. Northamptonshire County Council claims to be on course to completely scrap all "socially-necessary" bus subsidies as part of a plan to save £1.4m out of the overall £68m cuts being sought in the next financial year. It is virtually certain that a vast number of bus miles and services will be withdrawn there, whilst the County Council claim that a new and massively reduced budget of £700,000 will be used to "explore new public transport solutions", which seemingly fixates on car-sharing schemes.

But a campaign is underway by the Campaign for Better Transport, which has been launched by a range of campaign groups and unions, including Unite, to build broad support against bus funding cuts. We are preparing a high profile project to track the effects of funding cuts on services up and down the country and to illustrate the knock on effects for bus users and whole communities. To start with we are focusing on local authority cuts but later we will expand to commercial service cuts. A CBT website will use a clickable web map to show clearly that the cuts have a national effect and so that people with local interest can also pick out the information about their area easily.

A letter from a massive range of organisations - NGO's, community organisations and trade unions - is being prepared which will go to the Prime Minister and a large number of ministers. This will spell out that the impact of buses goes far beyond the remit of the Department for Transport, affecting government objectives and provision in a broad range of areas. Signatories thus far are: Action with Communities in Rural England, Age UK, Campaign for National Parks, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, Children's Society, Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Transport Association, CTC, Friends of the Earth, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Living Streets, Mencap, National Children's Bureau, National Council for Voluntary Youth services, National Council of Women, National Pensioners Convention, National Youth Agency, NUS, RADAR, Ramblers Association, RMT, RNIB, SCOPE, TSSA, UK Youth Parliament, Unison, and our very own Unite!