



# Park & Ride: pleasant bus travel?

Steven Taylor looks at some of the fundamental factors that dominate the facilitation of a well-used and operated passenger service.





**P**opulations are growing, geographically expanding, urbanising and becoming more reliant on faster travel solutions. There is a significant need for innovative ideas within the public transport sector to cater for this trend. Park & Ride systems are a transparent, systematic way of operating, and synchronise the connection between the bus operators and the local authority to alter the way we see and use public transport to and from inner city districts and areas.

Technological and innovative advancement is widespread, from farming to manufacturing and medical sciences, transforming the way we live, and transport is a fundamental part of this. Congestion is increasing due to the imbalance between supply and demand for private vehicle usage, but there are other factors at play that are contributing to a society that is unproductive and economically inefficient. New, enhanced and modernised ideas are required, particularly in industries such as passenger transport, which is continually changing to satisfy the needs and requirements of customers.

Systems such as Park & Ride, guided busways and bus/rail interchanges can have such a positive effect on the local community if they are not only maintained to their highest standards, but also positively promoted. People from all socioeconomic backgrounds, geographical locations, regions and ages should have access to adequate public transport. In the commercial world, stakeholder groups must realise the importance of factors such as customer service and reliability. Innovative systems such as Park & Ride at least give bus organisations and councils a way to offer potential passengers a way to try public transport. Encouraging public transport through means such as intermodal transportation benefits the system as a whole, especially in relation to ticketing.

A road passenger transport service, whether it is commercial or subsidised, has to satisfy generalised and specific internal and external expectations to be able to maintain a modern service for its passengers. Not only do these factors help an organisation provide a satisfactory standard of service to its passengers, but they also enhance the sustainability of operational success.

Credible and successful operations are delivered by some fundamental factors affecting service usage and reputation. First, when passengers are using a product or service – which does not have to be a

**Innovative, contemporary systems and networks encourage modernisation and enhancement not only of local transport, but also the region as a whole. Congestion and emissions are reduced, especially at busy peak-times, enabling faster travel solutions to and from work, thereby increasing productivity and efficiency for the benefit of the local economy.**

- The first Park & Ride service was in the 1960s, run for a year as an experiment
- Oxford was the first place to operate such a scheme, part time from the A34 Motor Lodge; it became a permanent service when the Redbridge car park was built in December 1973
- Nottingham has nine Park & Ride sites (plus two pocket sites), including interchange facilities with the tram system, and currently has the most prominent urban network in the UK

bus service – they expect the same level of standard or better each time. This results in repeat business, which develops the brand loyalty that is important in competitive markets. Second, in passenger transport, where customers are in direct contact with staff, customer service level and availability are important. Other factors include the onboard and off-board facilities, such as comfortable seating and adequate waiting areas. One of the most significant individual aspects that directly affects a customer is the feasible and variation in ticketing options and cost. A well-used service will offer not only affordable pricing for all socioeconomic groups, but also a wide-range or connected ticketing for a variety of transport services. Finally, support from the local authority of regional transport

operations, such as bus lanes, assisted policies and procedures, and constant review of enhancing local products, services and infrastructure, such as housing estates and tourist attractions, helps the capability of the service. This is particularly so in urban areas where there is much congestion. Park & Ride systems not only enable co-operation between parties, but also contribute to the paradigm shift away from the use of private vehicles and towards public transport, especially in urban districts.

If successfully operated, Park & Ride can incorporate a lot of positivity and commercial advantage for the operator and the local authority. Systems are strategically located on main and busy trunk routes into city centres and towns, with the primary aim of reducing congestion and emissions. Prosperous operations entail separated road space such as bus lanes and busways, intelligent transport systems – for example, integrated traffic management, such as traffic lights and barriers – designated Park & Ride infrastructure, including direct access to major link roads and motorways, ergonomically designed waiting, toilets, real-time information and staffing facilities. Integrated ticketing options and high standards of customer service also reinforce the customer experience.

Overall, passengers want an adequate service that is reasonably priced and in which they can be confident of reliability and comfort. Park & Ride systems are growing, and the realisation of their importance is apparent on both sides, bus operator and the local authority. Do they, though, offer more than an interchange between the car and the bus? ☹

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Park & Ride schemes help reduce congestion