

Scotland slump leads bus patronage fall

GB bus patronage falls 2.2% with Scotland by a substantial 6.7%

STATISTICS

▶ New Department for Transport statistics have revealed that the decline in London's bus patronage could be slowing.

The latest *Quarterly Bus Statistics* for January to March, 2017, published this week, reveal that while patronage declined in the capital once again, it was by just 0.9% when compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

However, the situation was not replicated elsewhere in England; in fact it was far worse. In the 'Shires' it was down by 3.0% and in the metropolitan counties 2.2%. Overall, patronage in England was down 1.8%, or 2.7% if London is excluded.

While Wales reported a fall of 1.9% for this quarter, the situation in Scotland was particularly

acute. Patronage fell there by a substantial 6.7%.

Looking at the rolling year figures, the provisional number of local bus passenger journeys in England was 4.45 billion in the year to end March 31, 2017, a 1.7% decrease when compared with a year earlier.

Once again London, for so long immune to declines in bus patronage, saw the largest

reduction. There passenger numbers fell 2.3% over the year to reach 2.24 billion passenger journeys. However, in context this remains 12.4% higher than a decade ago.

After the capital, the biggest slump in patronage was in England's metropolitan counties (-1.1%), followed by England's 'Shires' (-1.2%).

In Scotland this figure was higher with a decline of 3.8%. Wales bucked this trend with an annualised increase of 1.3%, despite the losses reported in the most recent quarter.

Meanwhile, in the year to March 31, 2017, local bus fares increased by 1.6%, slower than the all items Retail Prices Index rate for inflation of 3.1%. By means of a comparison, the DfT reports the price of purchasing a motor vehicle has decreased by 0.2%. However, the price of petrol and oil has increased by 18.3%. ■

QUARTERLY BUS TRIPS: MARCH 2017 (VERSUS MARCH 2016)

Source: Quarterly Bus Statistics, DfT

	+/-
London	-0.9%
English Mets	-2.2%
English Shires	-3.0%
England	-1.8%
England outside London	-2.7%
Scotland	-6.7%
Wales	-1.9%
Great Britain	-2.2%

change, combined with wider social change is transforming urban transport in four key ways, namely:

- ▶ New and emerging data can help travellers make better informed choices and transport planners to make better decisions;
- ▶ A proliferation of new vehicle technologies means cleaner, smarter and more connected vehicles;
- ▶ Allowing for smarter and more integrated ways of paying for access to different modes of transport; and
- ▶ Enabling new players in the transport market to offer new services including those that relate to the wider shift to a sharing economy.

UTG claims that its members have

a unique perspective, and key role to play, in capitalising on the benefits for both transport users and the future of cities whilst at the same time seeking to mitigate or avoid the potential downsides.

The document then summarises nine key principles which Urban Transport Group members will adopt on 'smart futures'. These include seeking to ensure technological change makes travel simpler and easier; recognising the role transport can play in facilitating and supporting change, such as open data or Mobility as a Service; and seeking to ensure that change does not result in sectors of society being left behind. ■

MAAS TRIAL: PAGE 14

IN BRIEF

NEW BUS FLEET VANDALISED

▶ Council-owned bus operator Blackpool Transport has made the decision to remove all USB charging facilities from the table spaces installed in its latest 25 high specification double deck vehicles. It follows the operator replacing almost 30 of the charging ports in recent weeks as a result of persistent vandalism. "Having replaced the USB ports numerous times in the space of just six weeks, we can no longer sustain the cost of doing so and all USB charging ports will unfortunately be removed," said managing director Jane Cole.

FIRST SECURES CONTRACT

▶ City of York Council and First York are set to extend their partnership delivering York's park and ride service after the bus operator successfully bid for the seven-year contract commencing in early 2018. The new partnership agreement will see fully electric buses operating on three of the six routes, with brand new diesel-powered buses completing the fleet. First has also committed to introducing contactless payments alongside its existing cash, smartcard and m-ticket options.

CONTACTLESS EXPANDS

▶ A number of operators have introduced contactless payment by debit and credit cards in recent weeks. Go-Ahead subsidiary Oxford Bus Company has introduced the facility across its operations after upgrading to Ticketer electronic ticket machines. Meanwhile, Stagecoach South Coast and Stagecoach Yorkshire are also now accepting contactless payment as well as the Newbury-based operations of Reading Buses.

UTG EXAMINES TRANSPORT'S ROLE

New report finds sector well placed for change

REPORTS

▶ A report setting out the implications of rapid and transformative technological change for urban transport has been launched by the Urban Transport Group.

Smart Futures – Our vision for urban transport also highlights the key role public sector transport authorities will need to play if the benefits are to be maximised for both individual travellers and cities as a whole.

The report says that technological