



POLICY LEARNING IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES
FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT ENHANCEMENT

GOOD PRACTICES – PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND/OR MULTIMODAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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PREMIER ROUTE BUS CORRIDOT NETWORK

General information

Description

Significant upgrade to bus services in Reading through the implementation of the Premier Route network. This was a holistic approach including a complete route by route rebranding of bus services, the introduction of higher capacity, fully accessible vehicles on the most popular routes, a commitment to only making major changes to the bus network once a year, provision of new and addition bus shelters and accessible kerbing to complement the low floor buses.

In addition, the provision of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) displays at stops and on buses from 2002 and the provision of contactless smartcard ticketing from 2004 combined to form a comprehensive package of improvements.

The Premier Route network includes over 100 buses and 350 bus stops covering the ten major bus corridors in Reading. The core elements of the network were implemented between 2004 and 2008.

Background and Context

Reading is a unitary authority and one of the most significant major population and employment centres in the South East of England. Reading benefits from its close proximity to London and Heathrow Airport and the urban area is at the centre of the largest travel to work area in the Thames Valley. Over 20 million bus trips are made throughout Reading every year and the Borough has one of the highest levels of bus trips per capita in the UK outside of London.

In 2002 Reading Borough Council made a public commitment, in a new document called '*Horizons – A New Vision for Transport in Reading*', to provide a significantly improved public transport system for Reading, following a consultation with residents to understand their main concerns with the existing bus provision in Reading.

This led to the development of the Premier Route network concept, which was implemented throughout the Reading urban area, predominantly between 2004 and 2008. The objectives of the Premier Route network were to improve bus service reliability, increased capacity and frequency, timetable stability, improved passenger facilities and information.

Key elements of the Premier Route network included a complete rebranding of bus services in Reading, the introduction of higher capacity, fully accessible vehicles on the most popular routes, a commitment to only making major changes to the bus network once a year, provision of new and additional bus shelters, accessible kerbing to complement the low floor buses and provision of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) displays at stops and on buses.

In addition, the introduction of smart ticketing for local services in 2004, and its subsequent upgrade to ITSO compatibility in 2010, delivered substantial improvements to passengers alongside the core package of Premier Route improvements.

Development of the Premier Route network has been led by Reading Borough Council, working in partnership with Reading Buses (the operator of over 80% of bus services in the Reading urban area). The network was also implemented in cooperation with neighboring authorities, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council, and other local bus operators to ensure the benefits of the Premier Route network have been delivered throughout the Reading urban area.

The Premier Route network includes over 100 branded buses and over 350 bus stops covering the ten major bus corridors in Reading. The RTPI system includes over 200 display screens at stops throughout the network.

Policy design details

Policy Design Steps and Timing

The main policy design steps for the Premier Route network include:

- The provision of a significantly improved local bus network, including provision of an RTPI system, has been a core part of Reading's transport strategy, as outlined in Local Transport Plans from 2001 to the latest plan covering the period 2012-2026.
- In 2002 Reading Borough Council made a public commitment, in a new document called '*Horizons – A New Vision for Transport in Reading*', to provide a significantly improved public transport system based on the Premier Route principles. This commitment was made following a consultation with residents to understand their main concerns with the existing bus provision in Reading.

Actors Involved

The main parties involved in development of the Premier Route network are:

- Reading Borough Council (lead local authority);
- Reading Buses (main bus operator);
- Best Impressions (marketing company);
- Art Design Direct (marketing company);
- Connexionz (supplier of the RTPI system).

Decision Making Process

The implementation of the Premier Route network was enabled through the decision making process formed by the Reading Urban Area Package (RUAP) agreement between Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West

Berkshire Council, and its ability to secure funding from central government for elements of the system.

Implementation details

Implementation Steps and Timing

Implementation of the Premier Route bus network was phased as set out below:

- Introduction of the original RTPI system in 2002, which enabled RTPI provision to be extended in line with the roll out of the Premier Route network.
- Provision of contactless smartcard ticketing for use on local bus services in 2004.
- Launch of Premier Route 17 (purple), the first Premier Route, serving the east and west of Reading, in October 2004.
- Introduction of Premier Routes 4, 5 and 6 (mint green), serving the south of Reading, in March 2005.
- Completion of Premier Route 9 (red), serving the south of Reading including the Royal Berkshire Hospital, in July 2005.
- In spring 2006, Premier Routes 23 & 24 (pink) serving Caversham to the north of Reading, Premier Routes 25 & 26 (yellow) serving the south west of Reading, and Premier Route 37 (light blue) were all introduced.
- The provision of bus priority at some signal junctions through the RTPI and UTMC systems has been trialed from 2006 onwards.
- In February 2007, Premier Route 37 was replaced with Premier Routes 15 & 16 (light blue) to provide a higher level of service for areas in the west of Reading.
- The network was largely completed in February 2008 with the introduction of Premier Routes 20 & 21 (claret), 31, 33 & 35 (royal blue) and 63 & 64 (orange).
- Premier Route 17 was extended to run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from May 2008, which included the introduction of new more environmentally friendly vehicle, thus allowing the existing buses to be used to increase capacity on the other Premier Routes once rebranded.
- Upgrade to the smartcard ticketing system to ensure ITSO compatibility in 2010.
- Further Premier Routes introduced in April 2011 in association with the complete reorganisation of bus routes in central Reading and changed access to allow Reading Station to be rebuilt in a multi-million pound scheme coordinated by Reading and Network Rail.
- The provision of real-time rail data on on-bus display screens on routes approaching Reading Station, introduced in 2012.

ICT/Infrastructures needed

ICT is fundamental to the operation of the RTPI system, from the GPS based vehicle tracking system to the central server software which calculates arrival time predictions. In addition, ICT is used to provide information from the RTPI system more widely, including the ability for virtual RTPI displays to be used on local travel information websites and to be communicated to mobile phones.

ICT is required to operate the back office systems for the contactless smartcards used on Premier Route services. This includes the product security to enable ITSO compatible ticketing.

In addition to the ICT infrastructure identified above, other infrastructure required for the Premier Route network includes fully accessible vehicles and associated kerbing

at stops, RTPI display screens at stops and on buses, bus shelters and poles, including bus stops being moved and bus lanes introduced.

Human Resources

A substantial level of resource has been allocated to the development of the Premier Route network; principally by Reading Borough Council and Reading Buses and to a lesser extent other local bus operators and neighboring local authorities.

Monitoring Procedures

Monitoring of the success of the Premier Route network is undertaken through the reporting of targets and indicators included within Reading's Local Transport Plan, particularly with regard to bus service punctuality and customer satisfaction.

In addition, real-time monitoring of performance of bus services is undertaken by Reading Buses, other local bus operators and by Reading Borough Council within its UTM Centre.

Supporting Mechanism

Awareness/Information Campaigns

A significant improvement to the level of awareness and information relating to local bus services was a fundamental principle behind the Premier Route network concept. A key element to raising awareness of the Premier Route services is the branding of individual bus routes, creating an impression on passengers and moving away from the dull maroon and beige image associated with the previous vehicles.

The public launch of the first Premier Route included attendance from a Central Government Minister and significant interest from the local press. Launches of subsequent routes and associated press releases have raised awareness of the improved bus services on offer. In addition, a significant level of information regarding the Premier Route network was provided to residents through the Horizons publicity and other local authority and bus company initiatives.

Following the completion of the Premier Route network the provision of up to date passenger information is critical for its ongoing success. This is provided through the RTPI displays, regularly updated network maps and service timetables, and the availability of information at travel information kiosks and on local travel information websites.

Partnerships/Key Supporting Stakeholders

The critical partnership to the success of the Premier Route network was between Reading Borough Council and Reading Buses. In addition, the Reading Urban Area Package (RUAP) agreement between Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council enabled the benefits of the network to be rolled out throughout the Reading urban area.

Results

Expected vs Actual Benefits

Overall the expected benefits from the Premier Route network have been realised, including benefits relating to improvements to bus journey times, punctuality, reliability and passenger satisfaction.

Quantitative Results Achieved

Quantitative results achieved through the implementation of the Premier Route network include:

- An increase in patronage of 10% for local buses services originating in the Reading Borough Council area between 2003/04 and 2007/08;
- An increase in bus service reliability from 75% in 2003/04 to 84% in 2008/09;

- A substantial increase in the level of customer satisfaction with local bus services, from 56% in 2003/04 to 74% in 2007/08;
- The introduction of higher capacity vehicles on the most popular corridors, either to replace or supplement existing vehicles, due to increased demand across the network;
- Significant improvement in emissions regime as each new Premier Route was launched with new buses to meet the latest EU standards.

Qualitative Results Achieved

Qualitative results achieved through the introduction of the Premier Route network include a substantial improvement in the quality of bus service provision, particularly the level and quality of information provided to the passengers.

Key Considerations

Lessons Learned

The main lessons learnt from the project include:

- The importance of building an association between passengers and their local bus service, which has principally been achieved through the branding of individual corridors with vivid colours.
- The importance of presenting bus information from the perspective of the passenger rather than operational requirements. For instance the ability to find the service you require through a list of destinations rather than service numbers.
- The Premier Route concept had to be owned by the partner bus company or else route branding can be diluted by wrong buses being used on each route. Reading Buses as lead partner has been highly disciplined in its use of the branded buses, but other buses running into Reading from outside have been less so.

Primary Obstacles

The primary obstacles to the success of the project include:

- The time and costs associated with producing individual local information display boards for every stop, which resulted in a change of approach to focus on the core bus service information.
- The competing requirements between the need to review and amend service details and timetable with the desire for stability in the network to ensure customer confidence.
- Political limitations to the desire for additional bus priority to avoid ongoing susceptibility to traffic congestion issues.

Critical Success Factors

The key factors which were critical to the success of the project include:

- The branding of bus corridors with vivid colours to create an association between passengers and their local bus service and to update the image of bus services.
- The holistic approach to corridor improvements which ensures a step change in the service provided to passengers after the launch of each Premier Route.
- The importance of effective partnership working between local authorities and bus operators to achieve common objectives.

Transferability Considerations

The knowledge gained from the implementation of the Premier Route network in Reading can be transferred to other areas. The transfer of ICT elements, including the RTPI and UTM systems, is enabled through the use of standard protocols and

the forums established by RTIG and UDG. Smart ticketing compatibility is promoted in the UK through the ITS0 specification.

Up-scaling Considerations

The Premier Route Network has been extended on a corridor by corridor basis, from the launch of the first Premier Route in October 2004 to the completion of the network in February 2008.

Further branding has been applied to other Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council sponsored services such as Community Link, Fasttrack park & ride and Greenwave business park services.

Contact

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