

# BUGS Secretary Report 2024

David Martin

At our last proper AGM in July 2023, I reported that we were looking forward to Bus Users UK's CatchTheBusMonth, introduction of new Hertfordshire routes (following the earlier successful launch of the Herts Connect brand with the 907 service to Brookfield Centre in Cheshunt) and participation in Stevenage Borough Council's Economy and Environment Select Committee bus service review.

A few days prior to that, Baroness Taylor spoke (then as Shadow Minister for Transport) on her amendment, to give franchising powers to all local authorities, not just Mayoral and Combined Authorities. Although the amendment was defeated, a HCC commissioned report into franchising of local services, foreshadowing the power now available to it, was produced. From reading that report, it is unlikely that HCC would want to commit to operation of a franchising model. Given Intalink's performance, I would have very little confidence in allowing it the responsibility to operate local services anyway. In the coming months, it will be important to ensure we look closely at any new legislation coming forward, particularly the Bus Services Bill, to ensure that even without franchising, better regulation of services is achieved.

It was not expected that an early General Election would take place, but we had planned to hold a hustings for parliamentary candidates this month to coincide with this year's CatchTheBusMonth. Like trying to get from A to B with our local bus services, things did work out exactly as I had hoped, but we did manage to hold a hustings event during the election period, with contributions from all parties and chaired by Bus Users UK, Chief Exec, Claire Walters. This was to a fully packed room at Friends Meeting House, and recorded and published online by Daryl and myself.

Returning to CatchTheBusMonth 2023. We saw the launch of Centrebus's new 391 service to Weston Village, got our Hands Up for the Farmers Market service, Hugh Daryl and I attended Showbus 2023 (where we met Neighbour's Dr Karl) and Chris and I had a visit to Arriva's depot in Babbage Road, which at long last had brought their buses all onto one site.

In October, I went into hospital for a major operation following which I had a lengthy recovery period, but in my trips to Lister and QEII, discovered that faults with data on real-time information exist across the Hertfordshire network and not simply limited to Stevenage. Continuing issues led me to put to HCC that they should review the contract with their provider as it has not delivered any significant improvements. That said, HCC have fixed some of the problems reported, such as the very outdated timetables at one of the QEII bus stops, and I complained that the square screen had been replaced with a three-line screen at Stevenage Rail Station, which I notice is now again a square display able to show <sup>6</sup> services at a time.

My hospitalisation did mean I missed the launch of the rest of the Herts Connect network, but Daryl went out and rode these, making some videos which were posted on our Facebook page – this has now grown to have 750 followers. That takes part in UK Bus Campaigners group, and along with our X account, is becoming more useful to see what is happening nationwide.

Many passenger queries are answered through Facebook. Support is given when passing through the Interchange, and contributions have been made on multiple planning matters, including as a consultee on the Lister Hospital bus stop and High Street 'improvements' which are expected to be delivered within the coming year.