

# NEWSLETTER

## from the Oxford Bus Company

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Welcome to our latest stakeholder update from Oxford Bus Group.

Firstly, may I start by saying what a privilege it is to step up and lead Oxford Bus Group as Interim Managing Director while Phil Southall is on a six-month secondment with our parent company Go-Ahead Group. The support we receive as a Group is fantastic and the number of strategic partnerships we forge is growing all the time as part of our continued strategy to deliver better services for our community.

Our key priorities remain re-building patronage, colleague recruitment and working to decarbonise our business.

We are in an exciting and pivotal stage as we continue to recover from the pandemic. There has been tremendous progress in re-building patronage and ensuring key routes and services are made sustainable for the long-term, in partnership with key partners including the government and local authorities. However, there is of course a long way to go and at present our patronage levels are at just over 80% of what we saw in 2019.

The vision in Oxford is to deliver a low-carbon future by reducing traffic and increasing more sustainable modes of travel including buses, trains, cycling and walking. This requires a holistic approach and an integrated public transport policy that works for all stakeholders and creates the infrastructure to deliver the vision.

Encouragingly there are some strong policy measures proposed that can make a big difference to congestion in Oxfordshire. These include additional traffic filters, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, a Workplace Parking Levy, more cycle and bus lanes and improved rail lines and connections. The challenge is putting all these plans into action in the right order and ensuring that the delivery of one active travel measure doesn't cause unintended consequences for other active travel modes.

We recently held the inaugural Oxfordshire Bus Summit in which the county's ambition to achieve net-zero was explored. Key figures gave speeches and shared best practice and attendees discussed how to improve bus patronage and reduce journey times. It was a positive event and the level of support we received was encouraging.

Earlier this year the County Council, Go-Ahead Group bus companies and Stagecoach successfully secured funding from the government's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas Scheme to deliver 159 electric buses to Oxford, of which 104 would be

operated by us. We've pledged to invest significant finances to deliver the scheme, but it is dependent on improving bus journey times to make it economically viable.

It is a huge opportunity for Oxfordshire and we have one chance to make it work. To make bus travel more attractive, we need to reduce congestion and speed up buses by around 10% of pre-pandemic levels. This will help deliver faster journeys for our customers and make our resources more efficient, meaning we can offer better value services.

Ultimately encouraging behaviour change towards more sustainable modes of transport, where possible, is key. This will require policy that is joined up and workable in the long-term.

We are fully committed to the electric bus bid and have already installed an electricity substation at our Cowley depot in preparation, along with road testing several electric vehicles to learn what the latest technology can deliver.

Please do take a read of all our key updates below, as you will see there are a lot of exciting strategic developments within Oxford Bus Group that bode well for the future.

Thanks for your ongoing support,

Luke Marion

*Interim Managing Director*

## Bus Summit

The opportunity for Oxfordshire to achieve a net-zero transportation system was explored in the county's inaugural Bus Summit on 24th June 2022.

Key figures from business, politics and the bus industry gave speeches on the county's ambitious plans for transport connectivity and how Oxfordshire can move to a net-zero transport system at the Summit at the Said Business School.

Speakers included Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, MPs Anneliese Dodds and Layla Moran, Luke Marion, Interim Managing Director of Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel and Rachel Geliasssi, Managing Director of Stagecoach West. Plus, speakers from Milton Park and Oxford Brookes University were also included. A Wrightbus StreetDeck Electroliner vehicle was on demonstration at the Summit.

The Summit explored issues including how to improve bus patronage, how to introduce bus priority improvements and reduce bus journey times. It followed confirmation that Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet approved its draft enhanced partnership (EP) document for submission to the government. The EP sets out plans by the county council, bus operators and its partners, to help bring passenger levels back to pre-pandemic levels.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways Management, said: "Effective public transport is key to many of our priorities as a council. We want to invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable countywide transport network, fit for the 21st century, and significantly reduce reliance on car journeys. Buses are also central to helping address the climate emergency and tackling inequalities in the county."

He added, "The bus companies have been hit hard by the pandemic, shortages of drivers and uncertainty over financial support from the government. Through our ambitious plans we aim to tackle these problems and look forward to working with the bus companies on improving the situation for the county's existing and future passengers."



## 'Brand the Bus!'

We have launched our annual 'Brand the Bus!' 2022/2023 competition for a local charity or good cause to have its branding on a double-decker.

To make the giving back competition more accessible to good causes we have changed the format to make it easier to enter. It is the fifth year Oxford Bus Company has run the competition as part of its community values. The winner will receive a package worth £30,000 which includes having a double-decker bus branded, and digital screen advertising on board the vehicles.

This year, all entrants need to do to enter is explain their cause and what having a branded bus would mean to their organisation, by completing a simple entry form online. It replaces good causes having to produce videos or create PDF presentations to enter.

The 10 entries for 2022/2023 that are deemed best according to a public vote, will be shortlisted and examined by a judging panel. Girlguiding Oxfordshire won the inaugural 2019 Brand the Bus! competition, Home-Start Oxfordshire scooped first place in 2020 and Blue Skye Thinking won the 2021 contest. Abingdon Riding for the Disabled Association was also awarded the space on a bus rear as runners up in the 2021 competition. Earlier this year, mental health charity Restore won first prize and Be Free Young Carers came second.

Luke Marion, our Interim Managing Director has said: "We have listened to feedback and refreshed our Brand the Bus competition to make it much easier for organisations to enter. This should make it more accessible to more charities and good causes and ensure the opportunity is open to even more deserving groups.

Brand the Bus has become a big part of our community and is a fantastic way for us to give back and support excellent good causes. It is an effective way for good causes to raise their profile in Oxford. There are so many good causes in the county and we're looking forward to seeing all the entries come in."

Prizes will be awarded to the competitors who have, in the panel's opinion, fulfilled the brief to the highest standard. The winning organisation will be invited to work with us to design a bus wrap featuring the brand colours, logo, and messages of the good cause. Runners-up will receive support via digital on-board bus advertising worth £2,000 and £1,000 to the second runner up.

The deadline for Brand the Bus entries is 1st October 2022 and public voting closes on 1st November 2022.

Anyone can enter and vote. To do so, please visit our website: [www.oxfordbus.co.uk/brand-bus](http://www.oxfordbus.co.uk/brand-bus)



## Substation now live!

We have recently achieved a major milestone with our project to roll out a fleet of electric buses for Oxford, with the installation of a substation at our Cowley House depot.

The substation, which will provide eight megawatts of power to support rapid charging of vehicles, is connected to a cable which runs into a large 60MW battery that is sited at the Cowley substation and connected direct to the National Grid. In the future, we are looking to install 104 charging posts and connecting them to the substation to charge the new electric buses. This will represent the next phase in the company's continued journey towards a low carbon future.

The new substation was installed by Pivot Power and makes up part of the Oxford Energy Superhub project, which will be used to help balance grid demand to assist the transition to renewable energy sources. It will also power a high-power private wire charging network that will support a large number of ground source heat pumps in the city, and supply power to the bus depot and an EV charging hub at Redbridge Park&Ride, to support large scale EV charging at the Park&Ride site.

This development came after it was announced 159 electric buses could serve Oxford following a bid for government funding support was approved. Oxford Bus Company, Thames Travel, City Sightseeing Oxford and Stagecoach have pledged £43.7M towards the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme.

Speaking at the time of the installation in his then role as Managing Director, Phil Southall said: "Go-Ahead Group, Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel have always been at the forefront of introducing sustainable low-carbon technology and this installation helps ensure we're ready to facilitate more electric buses in Oxford. We are grateful to the longstanding partnership we have with Pivot Power and the Energy Superhub Oxford project, which has helped us deliver the substation. It is a key step in our exciting electric transformation journey. The next crucial step to make a fleet transition financially viable is to speed up bus journey times by 10 per cent, measures to achieve which will be consulted on in the summer."

In 2020, we introduced the first electric bus to Oxford via the City Sightseeing Oxford fleet. We now have three retrofitted electric vehicles in the fleet, which were delivered in partnership with Oxford City Council. The electric buses are charged at the Cowley depot, via its depot energy circuit, which also includes solar panels.



Luke Marion, Phil Southall, Paul Hennigan in front of the substation.

### Find out more...

#### Social media:

- Oxfordbuscompany
- ThamesTravel
- Citysightseeingoxford
- Oxfordbusco

- @OxfordBusCo
- @Thames\_Travel
- @CarouselBus
- @OxfordOpenTop

#### Websites:

- [oxfordbus.co.uk](http://oxfordbus.co.uk)
- [carouselbuses.co.uk](http://carouselbuses.co.uk)
- [citysightseeingoxford.com](http://citysightseeingoxford.com)



# New city46 service

On Monday 20th June, the city46 service transferred from Thames Travel to Oxford Bus Company and saw its route to include Great Milton, Florence Park and Oxford City Centre, with funding from a new partnership with Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons, a Belmond Hotel. Belmond are keen to provide public transport links to their site to help those living in Oxford who want to take up some of the job opportunities they have available, and through working with the community we identified the optimum route for the service to take in Oxford in order to restore links which were lost following the withdrawal of Stagecoach service 16 earlier in the year.

The route has been well received by local residents. Hugh Jaeger of Bus Users Oxford said “Feedback from both Great Milton and Horspath is already positive. I met a couple from Horspath who had ridden the route to Great Milton on the first day to celebrate the new service. And a Great Milton resident told me that she had accepted an offer of a full-time job in Oxford, which she could not have accepted without the new bus service”.

This partnership with Belmond and Oxfordshire County Council shows what can be achieved through partnership working. More than 400 people are now making use of the service each day and we are hopeful that the 46 can become a permanent part of Oxford’s network.



# PickMeUp is coming to High Wycombe

We were delighted to receive the news that our experience of running PickMeUp in Oxford has resulted in us being awarded a high profile new contract from Buckinghamshire Council to bring PickMeUp to High Wycombe, which will be operated by Carousel. The new service is expected to start in the autumn and we are beginning work to mobilise this new part of our business immediately.



# The airline customer numbers increase

In May, we confirmed patronage of the airline service to Heathrow and Gatwick Airports had grown to 75% of pre-pandemic levels.

Since all UK entry restrictions ended, the luxury airline coach service has experienced a steady increase in demand.

Current patronage is at its highest level since the COVID-19 pandemic started. We expect demand to continue increasing as more people return to international and domestic travel.

We have also improved the digital booking technology in response to customer feedback and now passengers can book tickets at least 11 months in advance, in line with air travel booking arrangements.



# Increasing frequency to Gatwick

On Sunday 17th July, in time for the start of the school holiday period, the airline services were revised to incorporate an hourly frequency to Gatwick via Heathrow. Times have been changed across the day and daily Gatwick journeys increase from 12 to 19 trips. We will continue to monitor and develop this key service as passenger numbers rise.



## Find out more...

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- @OxfordOpenTop

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- [carouselbuses.co.uk](http://carouselbuses.co.uk)
- [citysightseeingoxford.com](http://citysightseeingoxford.com)