

On Board



Farewell from Me

Well, this is my last newsletter. Back in December, I had the chance to talk about my retirement announcement. At the time April still seemed some way off in the distance, but it has certainly come round quickly. I am now in my final few days at First West of England, busy handing over the steering wheel to my successor, Doug Claringbold, to whom I am sure you will join me in extending a very warm welcome. He introduces himself and his ambitions further on in this communication.

It has certainly been a challenging final year. During a successful 47-year career on the buses, I could never have imagined having to deal with a pandemic and its fallout for the sector. The experience has included the sad loss of two of our drivers to this dreadful virus. The memory of Martin Egan and Hussen Mudei will stay with us all.

I am immensely proud of our team in the way they have helped keep the West of England moving during the past difficult twelve months: staff across all our depots have worked tirelessly to serve key workers and now those returning to work, school, and further and higher education.

With Doug now at the helm supported by a talented and committed team of people, First West of England will continue to work in partnership to ensure our transport

services best meet the needs of our customers, our communities, and of the environment moving forward.

So, it is a heartfelt Goodbye from me. Whilst stepping into retirement will be strange, as I've made so many wonderful friends amongst colleagues and customers over the years, I am glad that I am leaving the Company in good hands with my successor.



Clean Air Zones in Bath and Bristol

Back in April 2020 the upgraded fleet of Euro VI standard *Aquae* X39 Bath to Bristol buses took to the road. They represented an investment of £3m and just one element of our preparations for the Bath Clean Air Zone (CAZ).

Today, we are almost a year on from that launch and the first CAZ outside London has already been operating for almost two weeks. Since the 15th March launch of the Bath CAZ we have continued to provide our customers with a reliable service across the city while complying with the new legislation. Alongside the introduction of the *Aquae* fleet, this has meant the additional conversion of 109 buses across Bath and Wells depots to Euro VI standard as well as the introduction of newer vehicles to the fleet over the most recent years. The conversions were made possible thanks to £2.1m grant aid through the Energy Savings Trust.

The Bath CAZ is a big step forward in addressing the Climate Emergency, and First West of England's preparations have been hugely successful. Now our focus is turning to Bristol, where a CAZ that *does* include cars is

due to be introduced in October. With a fleet of 99 bio-gas buses already on the road in Bristol and an extensive retrofitting programme to ensure our older vehicles are Euro VI-compliant, we are already almost set for the October introduction. Read more about my views on the pandemic, how it has helped shape a different attitude to public transport, and the role it can play in a cleaner lifestyle in our towns and cities.

[Read more](#)



National Bus Strategy

Last week saw the launch of the Government's long-awaited [National Bus Strategy](#), "[Bus Back Better](#)".

The Prime Minister is offering £3bn to support the bus industry while also tackling congestion. The money will be funnelled through the local Transport Authorities, in our case WECA and North Somerset, who will gain new powers to be involved in how our services develop through newly-formed Enhanced Partnerships, which need to be in place, in double quick time, by April 2022.

As ever, the devil is in the detail, but we very much welcome the Strategy, which presents a significant opportunity to achieve our shared objectives of restoring passenger confidence in travelling by public transport, transforming customer experiences, and accelerating the de-carbonisation of the bus sector.

Picture this

We recently ran a photography competition amongst our staff to capture one of our buses in a picturesque location or take a photograph along one of the bus routes. We're delighted to share these winning efforts with you.

Callum Reed from Bath depot captured the D1 service to Bath at Bradford-on-Avon Town Bridge, Cynthia Miller from Weston depot gave us the Glassblower statue at the end of Nailsea High Street with one of our Excel services in the backdrop, and Isti Hanson from Lawrence Hill depot captured the beauty of Clifton Suspension Bridge from Sion Hill.

Recognition was also given to Claire Stephens and Alex Moy for their submissions which you can also see via the link below.

[View photos](#)



Hello from Doug

I am privileged to be joining the First Bus West of England team at this crucial time. As I have been introduced to many of our stakeholders and employees by James it is impossible not to be impressed by what has been achieved so far. Prior to Covid, passenger numbers had grown rapidly, and we had invested significantly in new technology, including our biomethane-powered fleet. However, what is perhaps most impressive is how this has been achieved – with a commitment to both the customer and employee and an honest and constructive dialogue with all our stakeholders. It is this approach which I intend to continue.



Clearly, we will have challenges in a post-Covid world. Despite clear evidence that bus travel is safe, we will need to overcome the concerns of existing and potential customers. We will also have to work through with all stakeholders this unprecedented change in travel patterns and what this means for our services – with increased numbers likely to work from home for some of the time and the rise in online shopping - we will need to adapt to ensure we remain attractive and efficient in meeting people's travel needs. The National Bus Strategy commits to a significant role for bus in the future and this commitment is hugely positive for our sector as we seek to play our part in addressing the Climate Emergency and keeping our communities connected.

I am passionate about the need to deliver high-quality services to all our customers and this is key to our future success. Taking the bus should be a positive choice for all and I will endeavour to work with customers, other stakeholders, and the First West of England team to make this the reality.

Email and website changes

Please note that from 10th March we have changed our web address and all our email addresses.

Our website can now be found at www.firstbus.co.uk/bristol-bath-and-west

Any email addresses you may have for our staff will also be changing; they will now end in @firstbus.co.uk rather than @firstgroup.com.

We currently have your contact details on our database because you have received information from us in the past or have attended one of our events. We believe you have a legitimate interest in these updates, however if you don't wish to receive the next On Board update, please unsubscribe below.

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