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13 June 2012

Mr Patrick Harvie MSP
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Dear Mr Harvie

Thank you for your letters dated 10 and 21 May in which you raise a number of issues in relation to the fare changes that we implemented recently and the provision of information on bus passenger satisfaction.

First of all, I can confirm that we have reduced the fare chargeable on our Night Services to £2.00 or £3.00 depending on the length of the journey to be undertaken. I can also confirm that, as from 29 April, multi-journey tickets have not been valid on Night Services. You might note that in the publicity material that was issued prior to our fare changes coming into force on 1 April, it was stated that only the flat fares referred to above would be available on Night Services from 29 April and I can also advise you that our website was updated to reflect the current position. Whilst I very much regret any inconvenience caused to FirstWeek or FirstCard users by this aspect of our fares' revision, I would ask you to accept that this was a business decision taken in light of the current economic climate and that we have no plans at present to reinstate the previous ticketing arrangement on our Night Services.

In regard to your comments about our FirstCard range, I can confirm that a facility exists - and has done for some time - on the homepage of our website for customers to purchase the 4 and 10 week variants of this product. Since the introduction and expansion of our FirstWeek tickets, which are transferable, do not require photographic ID and are more easily acquired either on-bus or from almost 1000 PayPoint stores throughout our network area, we have not given the same prominence to the promotion of FirstCards. However, existing FirstCard customers can continue to buy their cards online or from any of our appointed agents and there is no restriction whatsoever on any new customers purchasing a FirstCard should they wish to do so.

With reference to your comments about our Flexi 10 ticket, I would ask you to note that this ticket was not designed for use by regular travellers but rather by, for example, a customer who has cause to travel once or twice a week. The ticket is valid for 6 months from the date of purchase, hence the 'flexible' aspect of the ticket and this makes it unique in our product range.

I note from the example you quote that there is not much of a saving to be made but if, for instance, a customer travelled between Lennoxton and the city occasionally over a period of time the Flexi 10 network ticket would allow the customer to make 10 such journeys for £23 whereas the cost of purchasing 10 single tickets would be £31.50. As with any of the tickets we offer, it is open to customers to choose the product that most suits their individual needs.

Turning now to the point that you make about student travel, I can advise you that, contrary to the information you have received, our Under 20s/Student FirstWeek tickets can be used by young persons between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not students. They are also available for students of any age providing they have an appropriate matriculation card to confirm their status. I can also confirm that we have discontinued our Student FirstCard ticket and, in consequence, students who wish to continue using the FirstCard option now must purchase the 'Adult' version. Both the 4 week Adult FirstCard and the Under 20s/Student First4Week ticket, which are valid network-wide, cost £48.50. There is at present a small difference in the relative prices of the 1 week and 10 week versions and this matter is currently under consideration.

With reference to the representations that have been made to you about the cost of travelling with us since our fare changes were introduced, I can confirm that whilst there was no increase in our Child single fare (which still costs 75p), or our Child all-day ticket which remains at £2, we did raise the cost of the Accompanied Child all-day ticket from £1 to £1.50 in April, the first increase in the price of this particular ticket since it was introduced in May 2007. I note in the example you quote that the cost of travel for a family of four would be £10.40 at peak time Monday to Friday. However, I would point out that we still offer a Family FirstDay ticket which allows 2 adults and 2 children to travel from 9am Monday - Friday and all day on a Saturday or Sunday for only £8. In brief, we consider that notwithstanding the rise in the cost of the Accompanied Child all-day ticket, the price of travel for families on our network represents good value for money.

In regard to your comment about the Child Fare in Brighton, I think you will concede that a much deeper analysis of regional variations in the cost of travel would have to be undertaken before any meaningful comparisons could be drawn.

With reference to your comments on the involvement of passengers in the decisions we take, I can advise you that we have well-developed customer feedback arrangements in place which allow customers to comment on any aspect of our service provision. As you would expect, the views of our customers are, and will continue to be, taken into account when we are planning future service provision. However, as a commercial operator there are business decisions that need to be taken to ensure the viability of our company that will not always prove to be popular. For example, across Scotland this year bus operators have had to increase fares and revise services due to challenging economic conditions, cuts in external funding and the high price of fuel. We fully understand and recognise that such actions are not welcomed by our customers but the fact of the matter is that a failure to take some of the hard decisions to counter the challenges with which bus operators have been faced in recent times would have serious consequences for the operation of the bus services that we wish to provide.

I hope that the above responses cover to your satisfaction the points raised in your letter dated 10 May. I will turn now to your letter of 21 May regarding customer satisfaction.

As indicated in my recent letter in the Evening Times to which you make reference, First Glasgow has data relating to the performance of our services and I can confirm that the latest reports show that we are achieving very high levels of punctuality and reliability despite congestion problems, roadworks and the lack of bus priority measures in Glasgow city centre.

I can also confirm that First Glasgow contracts an independent organisation that surveys thousands of our passengers annually. The way in which our punctuality, reliability and customer service satisfaction data is collected and aggregated means that we do not make this information available in the public domain. However, First UK Bus, of which First Glasgow is part, is looking closely at how we can better engage with our customers and produce performance information that is more customer friendly. Discussions will be taking place in the coming months in regard to publishing this type of information on our own website and I will, of course, let you know the outcome of those discussions.

Finally, I agree that having a body such as Passenger Focus conducting ongoing research and providing feedback on bus services across Scotland would be a positive development and I can confirm that First Glasgow would support the introduction of such an initiative.

I hope the above information is helpful and whilst I acknowledge that this reply will appear on the 'betterbuses.org' website I would urge your contributors to make contact with us direct via our website <http://www.firstgroup.com/www.firstgroup.com/glasgow> or call Tel: 0141 423 6600 to discuss any issues relating to our service provision that they wish to raise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronnie Park', written in a cursive style.

Ronnie Park
Managing Director