

IN BRIEF

12-day rule: wait continues The wait continues for the final text of the dispensation for the 12-day rule. The Confederation of Passenger Transport says: "We are still awaiting the final text to appear in the Official Journal in the European Union (OJEU), but it appears that the dispensation will be available to operators six months and 20 days after the package's appearance in the OJEU."

BSOG talks continue Discussions on longer-term plans for Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), as part of the government's review, are continuing, says the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT). Initial ideas on smartcard readers and GPS appear to have given way to detailed work on moving towards a per-passenger payment. Any change will involve a challenge – for both the Government and the industry – to make payments compatible with European legislation. The Local Government Association and the PTEs have renewed their calls for all funding to be channelled through them, rather than being paid directly to operators by the Government.

Beer by bus and tram Drinkers looking for a good pint of real ale in Nottingham have been given a helping hand, thanks to the launch of a new Beer by Bus and Tram Guide. The Guide, officially launched last Friday (9 October) at the Nottingham Beer Festival, features 45 local pubs that serve real ale, as recommended by Nottingham CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) in partnership with Nottingham City Transport and NET.

Silver award for TTC Group Shropshire's TTC Group, one of the UK's leading driver training organisations, has been awarded the coveted 'silver status' by Investors In People in recognition of its exceptional management practices and dedication to employee development. The TTC Group, which runs corporate driver education courses including courses for professional drivers, has 150 trainers across the UK and 35 administrative staff at their Hadley Park head office.

First helps hospital Young heart surgery patients at a Leeds General Infirmary will benefit after First's Charities and Sponsorship Committee, provided £4,000 for an exciting new children's activity room. The new, modern £36,000 children's play area was opened at a special ceremony last Friday (9 October).

Nat Ex deal – yet more time please The consortium bidding for National Express is expected to seek a third extension to the formal offer deadline, sources suggest. The Spanish-led Cosmen consortium is expected to ask for more time to formalise the £765m deal to buy the bus, coach, rail and tram operator, which the Takeover Panel had already delayed by three weeks until 16 October after a request from both parties. A source says the consortium expected due diligence to take four to five weeks and "it's taking a little bit longer than anticipated. It shouldn't be taken to indicate that there's any problem or hiccup or difficulty, it's just taking a little bit longer than they thought."

Charity draw Many thanks to all who contributed to the charity draw at last week's routeone Operator Excellence Awards. Held in support of the Teenage Cancer Trust, the draw raised the magnificent sum of £4,930, which Expo Management added to – in addition to donating the prize – to make £5,000. Each year thousands of young people and families are affected by this disease. The draw aimed to try and make a slight difference to those people by raising some money which can go towards helping improve their lives.

Upbeat mood at Coach & Bus Live show

Overwhelming vote of confidence as event welcomes a late arrival

By Mel Holley

Last week's autumn show for the coach and bus industry received an overwhelming vote of confidence during its two days at the NEC. With a waiting list for stands and reports of busy exhibitors receiving plenty of enquiries for business, the organisers were really positive about the show's impact on opportunities for next year. The show posted a pre-audited attendance figure of almost 6,000, a creditable 3% increase compared with 2007.

A delighted Show Director

Mark Griffin told routeone: "This year's show has all been about working together and helping our industry through these challenging times. Given the buzz from all around the show floor I believe we have really lifted the mood of manufacturers, suppliers and operators alike and provided assurance that there are better times to look forward to in the year ahead.

"There to create new business opportunities, Coach & Bus Live 2009 has played its part in that and I am pleased to say that nearly all those exhibitors we have spoken to have come away with new sales leads enquiries and, in some cases, even genuine orders. You only had to be at one of VOSA's Workshop Live sessions to see the fantastic interaction with operators who came along."

The quality of visitors throughout the two days was extremely high with many companies represented at senior

level. These included Sir Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive and Deputy Chairman FirstGroup Plc, who made an unexpected appearance at the show during the closing stages on Thursday 8 October.

Remarking on the show's most prominent late arrival Mr Griffin says: "It just goes to prove that even after 15 years of having organised exhibitions there's always something to learn. Leave early and you don't know who or what you're going to miss. Whoever would have thought that just half an hour before the end when the halls were starting to empty I would have bumped into Sir Moir Lockhead making his way around the show?"

Clearly Sir Moir was pleased by what he saw during his visit. He told Mr Griffin: "I've spent a brief time here and had a good look round. From what I've seen it's a really good show. One thing is for certain; the recession will end

and when it does business will get back to normal. It's encouraging that there are a lot of exhibitors here, so well done."

Despite tough trading conditions the general consensus amongst the industry was that the show organisers pulled off their most successful Coach & Bus Live event yet.

It more than exceeded expectations with the vast majority of exhibitors enjoying a strong show and for those who, in the early days, were unsure whether to back the show their decision will have been more than vindicated.

Not only did the show sell all available stand space with 205 top-name exhibitors but a busy Technology Zone, an interesting series of seminars, a fiercely contested Skills Test and a well attended outdoor vehicle display all went towards making a valuable day out for those who made it.



Sir Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive and Deputy Chairman, FirstGroup plc with Coach & Bus Live Show Director Mark Griffin

Buoyed by the overall level of optimism generated through the show, organisers believe they created the perfect platform from which to attract further support across the industry for next year's international event – Euro Bus Expo 2010. More details about

the attendance and demographics from Coach & Bus Live 2009, as well as an announcement about show dates for 2011 will be available later in the year.

● Full review of the show – see pages 26-51

Greyhound postpones Canadian closure plan

FirstGroup-owned Greyhound Canada has halted plans to stop all coach services in the western province of Manitoba and parts of Ontario (routeone, News, 10 September), after a meeting with the Manitoba government.

It says it needs a C\$15m (£8.7m) government subsidy to continue running money-losing routes between small communities. Greyhound is the only public transportation link among hundreds of rural and northern communities in

Manitoba and north-western Ontario.

"The outcome of the meeting is that we're going to work toward finding a solution" a Greyhound spokesman says. The Manitoba government has not offered a financial commitment.

Greyhound will postpone its closure decision until after a meeting of provincial and federal transport ministers on 22 October. And, pending the meeting, it will not lay off 200 Manitoba workers as planned.

Unite slams Boris' plans

Trade union Unite has welcomed the findings of a report by the RAC, which says that London Mayor Boris Johnson is "pre-occupied with minority-focused transport schemes and high-cost initiatives."

Unite Regional Industrial Organiser Peter Kavanagh says: "Unite warned the Mayor that the withdrawal of the bendy bus would mean more buses, more

operating costs and more congestion on the already congested roads of London. This report from an organisation that can hardly be accused of having a political axe to grind, vindicates everything we argued against.

"The Mayor's policies are adding to passenger grief with extra waiting times, even more congested roads and the likelihood of increased fares."

Double win for Boons Calibre

Suzanne Evans, proprietor of Hatfield Peverel-based coach tour and excursion operator, Boons Calibre Travel, scooped the top prize for its Outstanding Customer Service at the recent Essex Tourism Awards.

The award comes hard on the heels of winning the Coach Tourism Manager of the Year and the COACH MONTHLY awards – routeone's sister title, earlier this summer.

Suzanne says: "Winning this award is a great honour,

everyone in business strives to provide their customers with the highest level of customer care and service possible, none more so than in the tourism industry.

"Boon's Calibre Travel is blessed with a wonderful clientele, who deserve the best, and I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart for their kindness and continuing support."

She added: "It's difficult to convey in black and white what we offer our customers, however,

this award, based largely on client testimonials and other positive feedback, along with our high percentage of repeat business is a good indication that we must be getting it right.

"Nevertheless, in any business there is always room for improvement, however, with our comprehensive Customer Care & Service Policy in place, along with our customer feedback system providing us with valuable data, our quest for perfection continues."

Glenton's boom sparks recruitment

Coach tour operator Glenton Holidays has seen bookings over the summer peak soar by 100%, thanks to booming demand for tours in the UK.

It expects to see bookings for the whole of 2009 rise by at least 35% as holidaymakers defy the recession.

The rapid growth means Glenton is opening a new call centre at its head office in Glasgow and is recruiting 20 new members of staff.

The new call centre will be run

by reservations manager Rita Murray, who has been at Glenton for over a year. She used to have a similar role at Zoom Airlines which went into administration in September 2008.

Commercial Director Turbill says: "Despite a slow start to 2009, sales have just got better and better as the year rolled on.

"We've been seeing people booking holidays closer to departure, perhaps because they're careful with their budgets, but they've been

determined to take a holiday despite the gloomy news.

"Glenton has benefited from the 'staycation' trend, as more folk want holidays in the UK. Another factor in our success is the ease of budgeting with our coach tours – most costs are included such as excursions, accommodation and meals, so people know they can afford a Glenton tour.

Glenton is launching a programme of tours from the North East of England.

Nicola Shaw backs cross-city plan

The head of Britain's biggest bus company is backing plans to create new cross-city routes in Manchester.

First carries 80m passengers a year in the area where Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) has started consulting residents on a major set of infrastructure improvements which will help to improve bus services from one side of the city to the other.

Nicola Shaw, First's Managing Director for UK Bus says: "We are working very closely with the ITA and we are very pleased with the work they are doing on cross city services and priority.

"It's a great partnership between the public and private sector to provide something the customers want. We can't do it without the investment the ITA is going to make because we can't provide the services which anyone would use. It would take forever to do it."

The ITA is working in partnership with Manchester City Council, Salford City Council and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council to finalise the package of improvements along three major routes.