

South West Public Transport Information



Information Sheet One: General Information

What is **traveline** ?

Everyone is familiar with the long established National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES), which answers over 50 million telephone enquiries each year about train times and fares using one national telephone number, and is paid for by all of the train operators in the UK.

Bus services carry many more times customers than train services, but traditionally there has been no equivalent of NRES for bus customers. Instead there were several thousand individual bus operators, most of whom only answered telephone calls about their own services.

In 1999 HM Government set up an initiative to remedy this problem, but also to go much further in seeking to establish a multi-modal public transport telephone and internet information service covering not just buses, but trains, long distance coach services and local ferries, all under the branding of traveline and using one national telephone number 0871 200 22 33.

How is **traveline** organised nationally?

The UK was divided into 11 Regions for the delivery of traveline, of which the South West is one.

It was envisaged that traveline would be delivered by local authorities and bus operators working together in partnership within each of the traveline Regions. A database of all bus, rail, coach and ferry timetables, bus stops, rail and coach stations, and maps of all routes and stops would be established.

Call centres would be set up in each Region to answer calls from customers.

Generally, local authorities would take responsibility for the database, with the transport operators meeting the costs of the call centre.

How is **traveline** organised in the South West?

The 18 local authorities with responsibility for public transport in the South West are all partners in South West Public Transport Information (SWPTI), the organisation established to deliver traveline in the South West.

11 of the largest bus operators in the South West are also partners in SWPTI. These operators provided some of the initial funding, and all of them are committed to paying the cost of all calls to the call centre relating to their own bus services.

National Express and the regional train operators also pay call costs relating to coach and train services.

In addition there are about 200 smaller bus operators in the South West.

SWPTI has an office in Plymouth, and the call centre is based in Exeter.

Who supplies the database?

The task of compiling and maintaining all of the bus, coach and rail timetables was the first stage of building the database. All 45,000 bus stops in the South West were visited and satellite technology was used to establish the exact location of each stop to within one metre.

Electronic route maps of every journey on every bus timetable showing all the bus stops were produced.

The local authorities are responsible for keeping this database up-to-date. An outside contractor, MDV, is responsible for integrating all the timetable and bus stop information sent from all parts of the South West Region, and for supplying that information and journey planning software to the call centre.

What service does the call centre offer?

traveline opened for business in the South West in July 2000, and now handles about 300,000 calls per year from the call centre in Exeter. This number of calls is higher than for any other traveline Region in the UK.

The call centre is open from 0700 to 2200, seven days a week and can answer any bus, rail or coach travel timetable or journey planning enquiry (or a combination of all three) for the South West, as well as long distance journeys to and from the South West Region.

So what's in it for me as a Smaller Bus Operator?

The call centre service is completely impartial and is manned by agents employed by the call centre contractor. The service gives out information about all operators' services regardless of size of operator.

It can be very difficult for visitors not familiar with the area to find out information about smaller operators' services. traveline enables potential customers to find out about your services and help to fill empty seats.

What sort of calls do customers make to **traveline?**

A huge variety of calls. Some customers already know what bus service they need to use, and just want to know the time of the next bus.

At the other extreme is a customer who knows nothing about public transport but wants to travel from, say, a village in Cornwall to an address in Newcastle. Some enquirers want information about both forward and return journeys.

Some customers are interested in travel today, while others want to know about journeys some days ahead. Some people want the quickest journey, while some want the most convenient journey with as few changes as possible.

Some customers know exactly where their nearest bus stop is, but others have no idea about public transport.

The database has to be able to plan for all of these types of journey as quickly as possible. In order to help the call centre agents answer calls, a wide variety of different databases is used.

We have electronic directories of streets, addresses and post codes, including places of interest to customers such as Tourist Attractions and Hospitals, to help call centre agents find answers quickly.

We have electronic maps ranging in scale from whole region level down to bus stop and individual house level. Using these maps we can “walk” the customer from their house to the nearest bus stop, and tell them all the service numbers and times for buses, trains and coaches which they will need for their journey, and we can offer alternative solutions if the customer wants them.

How are Bus Operators charged for information about their services?

The software used at the call centre is complex because of the huge variety of calls they have to handle.

The fundamental principle of charging is that all transport operators are only charged for information about their own public transport services used by the call centre agent in answering the customer’s call.

Bus operators do not pay for calls about trains or coaches; National Express do not pay for calls about buses or trains, and train operators do not pay for calls about buses or coaches. Large bus operators do not pay the costs of small bus operators.

In other words every operator is required to meet its own costs, and this is judged to be the fairest way.

At the end of each four-weekly period the costs of all enquiries for each transport operator in the South West are totalled, and invoices are sent to operators.

Larger call volume operators receive an invoice for each four-weekly period. Medium call volume operators receive an invoice on a quarterly or six-monthly basis. Smaller call volume operators are only invoiced annually.

Transport Information Finance Limited is the company established for the purpose of invoicing for traveline call costs, and acts as the authorised agent of SWPTI for invoicing operators and receiving payments.

A 2% administration charge is added to call costs, and VAT at standard rate is also applicable.

So are Bus Operators obliged to pay **traveline costs?**

The 11 larger bus operators who are partners in SWPTI are contractually obliged to pay call costs relating to their own services.

Many of the other bus operators in the South West operate tendered local bus services under contract to local authorities in the South West. Local authorities have now altered their Conditions of Contract for Tendered Local Bus Services to include a requirement for holders of contracts to pay the costs of traveline calls about their services.

The Transport Act 2000 came into effect on 30 November 2000. Sections 139 - 141 of that Act place a statutory duty on all local authorities with public transport responsibilities to implement a Bus Information Strategy. Part of the purpose of this legislation is to enable local authorities to be able to require all bus operators to pay traveline call costs.

We hope you will see that the advantages to you of the traveline service are such that you are content to pay the charges without action having to be taken by local authorities to achieve this.

How does **traveline charge Operators for calls about their services?**

To help operators understand how this is done, we have prepared a traveline Information Sheet Two that explains charging of operators in more detail.

So what else is **traveline** doing?

In addition to the call centre, a regional public transport internet site is available on www.traveline.info or from www.travelinesw.com . We have also launched a mobile telephone text messaging SMS service , which allows customers to find out about the times of the next buses from any particular bus stop. This is free to users across the region until March 2014. There is also a “Next Buses” mobile phone app which provides scheduled and real time information on request by users.

Traveline data also helps drive real time information across the region, and publicity for major operators. For internet site users, there is also bespoke departure information for their chosen bus stop, and downloadable timetables. We are looking at how to integrate demand responsive services, restore fares information to the database and add mobile journey planners for android and i-phones.

Where do I get more information?

If you would like to know more about traveline in the South West you can e-mail us at info@travelinesw.com

We hope you will want to support traveline in delivering an impartial public transport information service to your customers in the South West.