Derby Bus Station

Most bus travellers do not like change. When they have mastered how to use 'their' bus, moving bus stops around in a city centre is disorientating – even when such actions are in their long-term interest. As a new bus and coach station was about to be built on the site of the old one, a comprehensive 'temporary bus station' had to be created completely in the busy streets outside. Derby City Council recognized the problem from the start. Travellers and operators were kept on side over a four-year period. This was achieved by attention to detail and investing in a well thought through information strategy, with changeover processes that were completed successfully.

Chris Hegarty, Passenger Transport Co-ordination & Strategy Team Leader, Derby City Council: *"Working with FWT and having full confidence in them to implement the static information provision allowed me to utilise my time more efficiently to ensure that the construction of the new bus station went as smoothly as possible".*

DERBY – SEPTEMBER 2005

Derby City Council handed over the site of its 1930s bus station to developers in October 2005. A scheduled 18-month construction period meant there would be no bus station at all, as no central temporary site was available elsewhere. The replacement facility was to be 31 clustered bus shelters (about half of which were existing ones enveloped with the runs of temporary ones) and the sheer quantity of these meant that some were a quarter of a mile from the bus station, and some on streets perpendicular to the main central core.

An agreement had been made with the developers (two years earlier) that they would provide, at their own expense, the necessary street-based shelters and these would include information cases.

FWT specializes in logistical information design and was called in five weeks before the closure of the old bus station, by which time most of the new shelters were in place. Our first job was to understand the services we would have to communicate – bus stop locations, stopping patterns, local geography, bus route nomenclature (Derby's are particularly unusual with many having names) street signage, bus blind displays.

ASSUME NOTHING

A 1954 report into complaints and difficulties passengers were having with signage on the New York Subway, levelled criticism (among lots more) at: "the insider's inability to understand the outsider's view".

We have believed this for a long time ourselves and start all such jobs by 'seeing' what the user sees, and not what the transport professional sees. As such we could reasonably suppose that passengers knew the name of where they were trying to get to. With few exceptions, bus passengers fall into one of three categories:

1 Those who know their destination and also which bus to catch and its nearest boarding point;
2 Those who know the bus route they need to catch but not where to board it;
3 Those who know their destination but not which bus to catch, nor where to catch it.

Passengers in the first category usually need no help at all. Those in the second category need wayfinding assistance to get them to the most convenient boarding point. Those in the third category will need a lot of help. Different products are therefore required to help different people. It is also fundamentally important that information is in the right location. Placing a well-designed product in the wrong place is a waste of money, as it will not be seen by those for whom it is intended. Believe it or not, this is quite common.

Without a clear picture and understanding of what is happening it would be impossible to devise a meaningful range of products that would address the needs of the full spectrum of passengers' circumstances. It also should be recognised that habitual travellers (our category ones) would become category twos on the day the bus station would close.

In the distance is one of the existing city centre bus stops, soon to become part of the 'temporary bus station'.

In the foreground is one of the new shelters provided by the developers, seen here with two information cases too small for the job in a busy city centre environment. One of our first jobs was to replace them.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The crucial first step was to assess the practicalities of what could be provided at the stops that were to form the 'Temporary Bus Station'. Unfortunately the new cases were far too small for the intended purpose and would have to be replaced with appropriate ones.

The next problem was that there was no suitable site for a central information point to which people could be directed for help. Normally, such a facility would only be necessary for those in categories two and three, however, for the reason stated above, for the first few weeks at least, those in category one would need it too. So everyone then.

THE OBVIOUS SOLUTION – OR IS IT?

All bus professionals will be familiar with lettered bus stop schemes, the cruder origins of which can be traced to the 1950s in central London.

It is widely assumed (actually we rather fear that most professionals have not thought about it at all, as noted in the New York Subway report) that passengers seeking boarding information know how they are supposed to use these 'Where to Board Your Bus' (WTB) destination-led schemes. A letter, or number, or both, is displayed on or near the bus stop flag (up in the sky to the bus user). A map showing all the stops within the scheme is displayed with an index of places served (at eye level). Look for your destination, find out which route(s) go there, see which stop letter is appended to that place, check the map, use the stop letters as signposts along the way and walk to the appropriate stop in the street. Simple. However, this doesn't work at all if the link is not made between the stop letter (up in the sky) and the lettered symbols on the map (not up in the sky). Compounding the short-coming of this leap of faith of a feeble visual link, is the fact that the identifying letters on the flag are commonly buried among all manner of other mysterious symbols, and furthermore they are usually too small.

A typical lettered bus stop (in London). The flag is well designed and contains the information passengers need, and with balanced hierarchy that allows the route numbers to be clearly seen in their own space. However, the green and yellow 'No Stopping' plate is clearly NOT for the bus passenger and can be ignored. Should they therefore also ignore TQ05? And what about FL? What is FL?

Somewhat detached is the shelter containing a map. The map does not have a 'You Are Here' pointer and the association with the disk on top of the flag is flimsy. Outside the capital, it is common to see stop letters far more weakly displayed and without the benefit of a well-designed flag.

Left: one of the replacement flags in Derby. The stand identifier is prominent at the top and has its own space and strong colour. Crucially, 'Bus Stand' is appended, making it clear that 'J2' is the identity of this place on the map.

Right: a section of the Where to Board Your Bus map used at all stops at Derby's 'Temporary Bus Station'. The association between flag and map is strong.
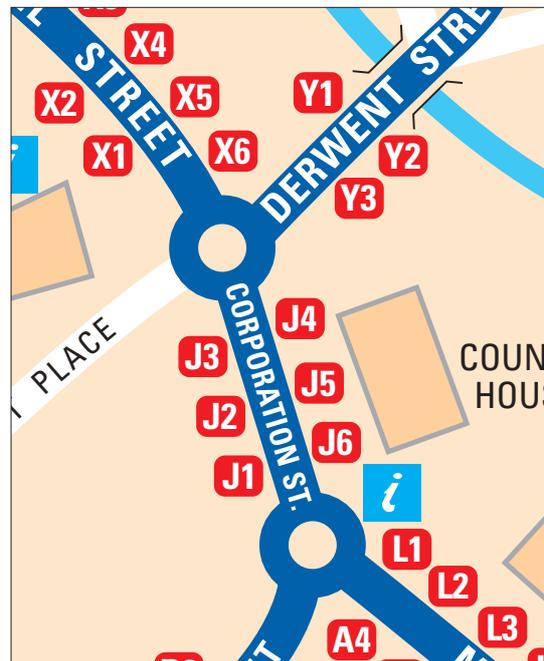
Should the passenger realize that they have to look upward and horizontally to join up the facts, they then see other information on the flag – parking restrictions, logos, site references etc and rightly think 'these are not for me' – and probably see the stop letter, and think 'it too is not for me'. They might think it is some sort of code for the use of the local authority, or the bus operator, or perhaps the driver? Or more likely, they don't think about it at all. After all, why should a passenger ponder one letter on a flag, among all manner of others. Why would we expect them to look up at it in the first place? At this point, the whole concept of a Where to Board scheme collapses.

However, the people in category three do need a WTB scheme, but they need one they can penetrate, interpret and understand.

The great majority of people at a city centre bus station are habitual users – they know which stand to go to, because they have done it over and over again. They don't need to find out anything. By turning them out into the street the day the bus station would close, on that first occasion they need their usual bus they would have no idea which stop to go to.

IDENTIFYING THE RANGE OF SOLUTIONS REQUIRED
In these circumstances, a destination-led alphabetical index of places served (WTB), directing people to the correct bus stop, would do the job, but it would be making life overly complicated for the regular user – this would now be the vast majority of users. Count the processes they would face: look up the destination; establish which route goes there; establish which stop to go to. Three stages.

However, they already know their bus number – so some of these decision-making processes would be using up cognitive reasoning, and time, for no gain at all, as crucially, they already know which bus number they want to use. It is that latter fact

that is essential to them finding out which stop to go to, with the least effort, for the first time. This is why a route-led listing is much more beneficial in this situation. Statistically, this approach reduces the interpretation time by one third. It may not sound much, but multiply that by the number of people in the street, all at the same time, and imagine the street scene now. Derby was very unusual in this respect.

Although there was also a publicity campaign timed one week beforehand, to warn as many people as possible, on the first few days of no bus station a very large number of bus users would not know where to go for their bus, or at best would know, but would not have done it before. It did not matter whether each individual person was very familiar with the area, or had never been there in their entire life. On that day, they would all become the same. Had we got this one wrong, Derby city centre would have been genuinely chaotic.

OVERCOMING THE LACK OF
A CENTRAL INFORMATION POINT
We installed two industry standard 'Double Royal' cases in each shelter, replacing the inappropriate specification ones originally provided by the developer. The Council was able to re-use these small ones elsewhere.

We had to devise a method of making each of the 31 shelters a self-contained information centre in its own right. This was not difficult, but it would need maintaining for two years and that could become expensive. We needed therefore to separate the items that applied to all stops, from those that were stop-specific. We also needed to retain a visual balance and not have one poster looking action packed and the other not – that would be distracting and burden some users unnecessarily.

Stop-specific timetables were created for each stop and this in itself was a major upgrade from what was available at the bus station; it was welcomed by the operators too. All timetables

The bus station had now closed and one of the 31 replacement shelters is seen here in service. There are two Double Royal poster cases. The one on the left has the familiar WTB map and is accompanied by a set of individual route diagrams with frequencies, arranged in route number order, showing main places served for every route serving the area. These are for our category two people.

The right-hand poster has a destination-led index for category threes, and to the right of it a full stop-specific chronology of departures broken down into Mondays to Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.
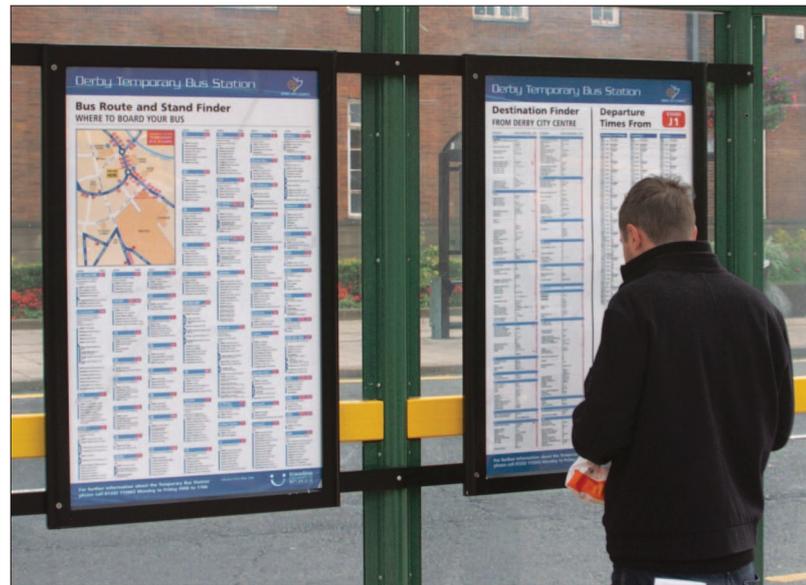
Critically importantly, above the timetable section is a prominent red rectangle stating the stand letter/number. The map and the stand identifier are both at eye level and, even if the flag is not consulted, the scheme still works. Even the colour blind are not disadvantaged as the red label spells out 'Bus Stand J1'.

needed re-compiling as the transfer from bus station to street affected running times and thus departure times too.

Obviously the timetable chronologies had to be stop specific. The WTB map needed to be at every stop and so did the destination-led places index. However, the conventional approach of map with alphabetical index would not fit on one poster with the timetables.

As such we opted to pair the route diagrams with the WTB map in one poster. Future revisions would be caused by timetable changes, though these would not always affect the routeings and so the linears with map poster might not need revising each time. There was therefore a cost-saving too by taking this line of action.

TIMING

All cases received their new poster pairs a few days before implementation, thus avoiding a last-minute panic, and were covered over so as not to mislead people while the bus station was still functioning. On the night before 'opening' all that was required was to remove the covers.

The feedback from the Council a few days later was that it had all gone well and we entered a period of time during which the old bus station would be demolished and the new development proceed.

To the credit of the Council the information posters were kept up-to-date during the coming years and believe me this is not always the case elsewhere (but that is another story on how to waste a lot of money).

Unfortunately site work did not get very far and came to a halt owing to the failure of the developers. In due course a new developer took over and, four-and-a-half years later, the new bus station opened on 28th March 2010.

For this, the same range of products would be required and could be enhanced with others now that a central information point could be created inside. The changeover back from street to bus station also needed planning as about half of the Temporary Bus Station stops would be removed and the others return to being conventional street-based bus stops.
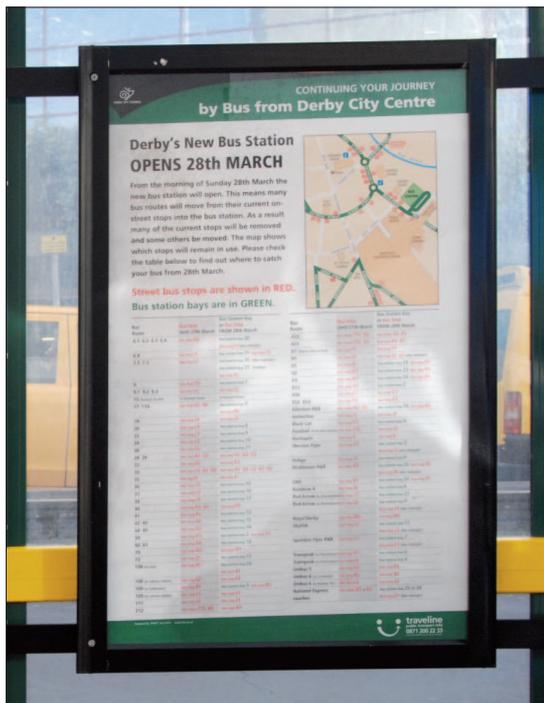
All shelters in the street received a poster giving sufficient notice of the final move.

THE NEW BUS STATION

As stated earlier, local geography and traffic patterns always have an impact on information design. Some local buses would not serve the bus station but only the street stops; the bus station would not be open at night and some 24-hour routes would serve the bus station during the day and street stops at night. We also wanted to cater for all modes of onward travel from the bus station – people arriving there by bus may need to continue by bus, express coach, train or locally on foot.

Planning, designing, producing and implementing what was required, was made easy by working with an enlightened client and there was almost no debate about the way forward. At a couple of strategic points during the construction phase, we visited the site with Chris Hegarty of the City Council and quickly agreed what should go where.

Seven core information posters were created. These were: a conventional WTB with alphabetical index including bus station departure bay layout and also street map for routes not serving the bus station; a pair of posters of individual route linear diagrams in numerical order; a detailed local street map for pedestrians; a UK railway network diagram showing direct trains from Derby railway station (the street map showed users how to get there); a radial diagram showing all express coach routes; a geographical bus map of the whole of the city centre, with diagrammatic arms to all long distance destinations. The head of each departure bay would receive the WTB poster and a stop-specific timetable chronology. We also colour-coded the bus station and the street stops differently for ease of identification. The street-based stops were similarly equipped with a WTB poster and timetable chronology.

The ceremonial opening of the new bus station was performed by the mayor on 27th March 2010 at 11am and the public were invited in to see their new bus station in the afternoon. It opened for business the following day, when many of the street-based Temporary Bus Station shelters were taken out of service.

Inside the two entrances, passengers are greeted by a multi-modal information point. A run of posters caters for: walking, train, bus and coach. (One passenger has thought of a good way of taking a poster with her for later reference.)

THE CHANGEOVER

Work on the new information started as soon as the bus registrations were in place within the usual 56-day rule.

Firstly, a 'news' poster was produced for every Temporary Bus Station shelter and this gave a straightforward conversion table of where to board your bus – pre bus station in one column, new bus station and street in the other (see page 4). These would replace the linear diagrams a short while before the changeover, so that habitual passengers would be prepared and know where to go from 28th March. The timetables of course would remain in place.

On the night of 27th/28th the street timetables were replaced with their equivalents and the new WTB poster was installed in the neighbouring case at all 31 shelters. The stops that were to come out of use of course did not get a timetable but did get a very large message saying the stop was no longer in use. The adjacent WTB removed any pain and told people which stop to go to instead. The stops only in use over night also received a warning message poster but again retained the WTB.

What all this demonstrates is that the set of answers (products) is almost always the same, but the starting point of the users' knowledge base and importantly local environment too can vary enormously, the application of these 'answers' is NOT always the same. In truth, one size fits no-one.

Our working relationship with Derby City Council is excellent and is seen as an important partnership. FWT's evolution and development of the product range and increasing use of data manipulating systems ensure that we are always endeavouring to provide the most cost-effective solutions and ensure long term sustainability.

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In the bus station, every stand was provided with onward travel information for passengers having arrived by bus. Every stand received a stop-specific timetable for those departing. Both needs are covered in one place.

The posters in the bus station have green headers and all departure points on the Where to Board index are colour-coded green or red, to denote bus station or street boarding points. For consistency, the same system is used in the street posters.

After the move, in the street, every shelter was provided with onward travel information for our category two and three people. The posters have red headers.