

Who we are

We're proud to have been transporting customers in and around Reading for over 120 years. Yes, there's a lot of history but we're committed to providing a quality bus service with a strong focus on customer service and innovation. Along with our owners, Reading Borough Council, we're successfully reducing car dependency for access to the area, both for visitors and residents.

It is this approach which has made us a success story. Our fleet of 159 buses is very environmentally-friendly and includes 1 battery electric and 60 gas buses, and all of our diesel fleet meets or has been upgraded to meet Euro VI standards, so we're dramatically improving the air quality for all Reading's people too.

Diversity – it's integral to what we do

Reading Buses operates in a diverse community on every single factor possible: income, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and much more. 10 year's ago, we already had a reputation for cultural diversity, however, there were gaps – female bus drivers, accessibility, inclusion and we wanted to track and measure our diversity.

We've taken a seemingly simple strategy which has changed perceptions and generated pride in our workforce. It's galvanised our employees to live and breathe diversity and inclusion in everything we do, making them more engaged than industry benchmarks. For customers, we've enabled everyone to participate equally, confidently and independently every day, removing barriers so people can travel no matter their background or ability.

In simple terms, diversity is the mix, and inclusion is getting the mix to work together. We've achieved both with extra flair and sparkle. We've completed the project in an engaging and inspiring way for employees and customers, while proactively engaging with and energising the wider community to grow and promote bus use.

By putting people at the heart of the business we have 5% more customers and 7% more revenue, helping secure our future as the transport of choice in Reading and beyond.

The situation

10 years' ago, Reading Buses were heavily focused on the logistics of bus operations. For the business to have a long-term sustainable future we needed to consider what people, our customers and our employees, wanted from their bus service and their employer. We needed to make Reading Buses a desirable and inclusive place to work and way of a travelling.

The project

In 2007, we set out to achieve our aim “to improve diversity and become more all inclusive to all employees, customers and the community to make the bus best”.

The project was designed to make Reading Buses an intrinsic part of the local community and to change perceptions.

To make Reading Buses the clear transport, and employer, of choice, we had a strategy to leave no stone unturned. Diversity and inclusion have been at the forefront of thinking and the following initiatives were delivered across the past 10 years

Diversity

Diversity is about empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different. We recognise diversity by:

- a. **Celebrating women** including actively recruiting women bus drivers, our first female engineering apprentice, entering women’s awards, making our new uniform female-friendly, celebrating 100 years of Women in Transport/International Women’s day and filming a TUC video encouraging women into the bus industry.
- b. **Celebrating age** including attending CILT Young people in Transport event, showing our industry-leading amount of young employees and celebrating long service through weekly bulletin/annual awards night plus retro bus livery celebrating 25 years of Newbury buses.
- c. **Celebrating ethnicity, religion & national origin** including regular board reports showing we mirror Reading Borough Council ethnicity data, free bus passes for retired ex-Ghurkhas, integrating into the Sikh community for Nagar Kirtin, Vaisakhi, celebrating Black History Month, introducing “quiet contemplation/prayer” room including WuDu-friendly wash facility and 70-years Independence of Pakistan community celebration.
- d. **Celebrating sexual orientation.** Participation at Reading Pride with a bus and employees joining the event march, advertising on our buses for supportU, a leading Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) help/support service, supporting Reading Renegades Rugby Club who allow men of any sexual orientation, age or experience the opportunity to play rugby without fear of prejudice.
- e. **Training to support disability & vulnerable bus customers**
 - CPC course on ‘Customer Needs Awareness’ including visit from someone with a disability.
 - LIFT Training helping drivers understand the needs of customers with learning difficulties.
 - Dementia awareness: part of new driver training so they become Dementia Friends.
 - 2016 CPC course: section on mental health awareness for ourselves and customers.
 - 2017/2018 CPC: section on helping vulnerable children/road users.

1. Inclusion

“Being caring” is one of our company values. We define this as “being caring to our customers, each other, the communities we serve and the environment”. This encompasses how Reading Buses embrace inclusion.

We’ve made sure different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated including:

- a. **Talking about Mental health** including supporting “The Campaign Against Living Miserably” (CALM), an award-winning charity dedicated to preventing male suicide, raising over £14,375. Three managers trained in mental health first aid.
- b. **Supporting our employees including** help with affordable housing through Key Worker scheme homing over 130 employees, working with Shaw Trust helping two employees with disabilities return to work and launching Employee Assistance Programme, providing employees a 24/7 free confidential advice/counselling service.
- c. **Supporting local charities including** Charity Open Day to open our depot yearly, integrating and welcoming the community. Local Charity of the Year: raising money/awareness with selected charity normally celebrating diversity and inclusion including Alzheimer’s Society, CALM, Autism Berkshire and LaunchPad (Homeless Support Charity).
- d. **Supporting our customers** including cheaper fares for lower income groups, a month’s reduced-rate travel for Job Seekers and child prices extended to age 18, or 21 if in full-time education.
- e. **Our buses:** Since 2008, we’ve made changes to our buses, helping people move, see, hear and communicate including:
 - Talking buses inside and out’: over 80% have ‘next stop’ audio/display screens. 80 buses have external destination repeaters.
 - Double wheelchair bays, on two routes.
 - 100% low-floor DDA fleet.
 - Larger buggy zones, reducing conflict between buggies and older people.
 - Supporting RNIB’s ‘Talking Buses’ and CPT’s mobility scooter code.

The key challenge in this project was overcoming prejudice and unconscious bias. We worked hard to try and change perceptions and to challenge the norm. Talking about things that many other companies would be afraid to tackle including recruiting women, learning how it feels to travel with a disability and talking about mental health issues.

The results

Diversity and inclusion is not just a fad or a phase. It’s integral to Reading Buses and has driven tangible business results:

- Continuing to reflect local demographic allowing customers to identify with the diversity of our employees.
- Frequent requests to attend local events and be a part of Reading’s diverse community.

- Generation of numerous news articles for internal newsletters/external media including television.
- Winning awards that celebrate diversity: National Venus Women's awards: Company of the Year and Everywoman Women in Transport Awards: Driver of the Year/Woman of the Year.
- Recognised/awarded with 'RNIB exemplar' status.
- Raised over £75,000 for local charities since 2008.
- Almost one-in-five of drivers recruited in 2018 are female.
- 80% more female drivers over past six years, bucking transport industry trend.
- Gender pay gap. 0% mean, 2% median, against 18% national average.
- Talent pipeline. Four female drivers promoted into office positions in 2017.
- Excellent retention rate: 7% of employees leaving voluntarily in 2017.
- Changed perceptions: Our Annual Employee Engagement survey question "I think Reading Buses respects individual differences (e.g. cultures/working styles/backgrounds/ideas)" has improved by 16% to 75%, outstripping transport industry benchmark by 27%.

We've put our people at the heart of the business and shown true dedication to diversity and inclusion. It not just been about our employees – we've gone further by including customers and the communities we serve too. The main result is the best one: 5% more customers and 7% more revenue.