



## **Working with Community Groups for insight and feedback**

### **Who we are**

A local, award-winning bus and tram operator serving the Fylde Coast with a high frequency bus network linking Lytham, St Annes, Blackpool, Bispham, Fleetwood, Cleveleys and Poulton. The network is a cost-effective way of travelling around the Fylde Coast area, with high visibility, accessible, environmentally friendly buses and easy to follow timetables to make your journey easy and pleasurable. The Blackpool tramway runs for 11 miles along the coast using modern, light rail trams.

### **Overview and objectives**

Our bus and tram services are some of the most accessible in the UK. To achieve this, we wanted to engage with a range of community groups who all work to improve the experiences of those with a disability.

Surveys over the last few years have identified that up to one in four people with a disability will not use public transport due to perceived problems they may face onboard. We wanted to work with organisations to help change the perception of using our services and ensure we were as accessible as possible.

When a local guide injured his nose on one of our buses, we took it upon ourselves not only to make sure it would never happen again but also to improve sight loss awareness on transport all around Blackpool.

### **Approach**

Working with organisations such as Guide Dogs for the Blind and N-Vision Northwest we worked to identify and understand the potential barriers that people specifically with visual impairments faced when travelling with us. Armed with that information we then pledged to take action to ensure our services were accessible for our communities.

### **Results**

All of our drivers and conductors are given detailed training to not only raise awareness of the issues a guide dog and their owner face whilst travelling around the town, but also what they can do to make the journey experience that little but easier and more pleasant for both the dog and the owner.

Onboard the services themselves, both bus and tram, we added audio 'next stop' announcements to assist those travelling with a visual impairment. The announcements play onboard in advance of the next stop, assisting customers and advising that they are at a destination. We also improved our communication offering by adding important updates to play onboard the bus along journeys including diversions, any service changes and other important information.

We also worked with local charity N-Vision Northwest who provide a weekly audio 'news update' for their community members. We utilised this update to provide customers with information that could affect the planning of their journeys in advance.

Our mobile app, receives great praise from customers with visual impairments. The app, coupled with Android and iPhone standard text to speech and accessibility options provides an 'exceptionally good experience'. The BTS website is also fully accessible and works with computer based text to speech programs. Both of these options provide live updates, information and vehicle tracking which are accessible via these means.

## **Conclusion**

Working with community groups such as these provides us with valuable insight from the customer who we are striving to assist. Armed with this insight, we have been able to adapt and improve our services to make them accessible and pleasant for customers with visual impairments.