



National Express – The Health Bus

Who we are

The National Express UK Bus business is part of the wider National Express Group and has a diverse workforce of over 7,000 employees. The greater proportion of our employees are not office based, as they work in operational roles to either drive our buses or maintain our vehicles. These employees typically work shift patterns which vary to cover the business needs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Overview and objectives

Our National Express Health Bus is a dedicated mobile health facility offered as a benefit to all employees. The Health Bus was created in direct response to feedback from our employee surveys. The surveys indicated that while progress had been made on safety, both for customers and colleagues, more work was needed to support employee health and wellbeing.

Our objective was to create a mobile health check facility for employees to access that would visit all locations at times to reflect their working patterns. This was of particular importance as our surveys indicated a need to engage people working nights.

The purpose of the Health Bus is to provide a mobile health check service where health testing, advice and guidance can be given to enable our employees to enhance their health and wellbeing.



Approach

In November 2013 a project team was set up by the HR Director to build a mobile Health Bus facility. The Health Bus concept involved the refurbishment and re-fitting of a 15-year old single deck Mercedes bus to enable it to be used as a mobile health-testing and medical consultation facility. The design and construction was undertaken within our business using our own skills and expertise from engineering, operations, HR and communications departments.

We also worked in partnership with a medical supplier to provide an Occupational Nurse, to identify specific mobile health tests and to help in the construction of the work spaces on the bus. This resulted in two private consultation rooms and a waiting room suitable to offer confidential mobile health testing.

To engage employees in the Health Bus, concerns regarding confidentiality and how employees may be reluctant to discuss medical issues within the workplace were consistently addressed. To overcome concerns, the project leads frequently met with employees, the union and local management to create a clear and consistent message that total confidentiality would be maintained on the Health Bus. We are delighted that some employees chose to tell us their stories with the objective of encouraging others to benefit from visiting the bus too.

At a very early stage of the Health Bus development the project team regularly met with the union *Unite* to ensure we gained their full endorsement for the project. To ensure that all employees would have access to the Health Bus services, in response to feedback we modified the original planned schedule and increased the frequency of visits to each site from once a week to three times per week. On average the Health Coach sees 50 employees per week.

The overriding benefit to us is the fact that all of our employees are able to gain regular access to important personal medical information that will benefit their personal health and wellbeing.

25-minute appointments provided each attendee with the following:

Physical health checks:

- BMI
- Body fat
- Visceral fat
- Blood pressure
- Total cholesterol
- Blood glucose

Exercise levels Health behaviour questions:

- Smoking

- Alcohol
- Satisfaction with daily energy levels
- Sleep satisfaction
- Work life balance satisfaction
- Satisfaction with daily stress levels



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Results

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Our Health Bus is saving the NHS time, money and resources and makes a long-term impact as an employee engagement programme that is helping our people make healthier lifestyle

choices. It has already been visited by our employees over 11,000 times and is unique within the transport sector since its inception in 2014.

Where we are unable to take the bus physically to the workplace, health coach sessions are set up locally using meeting rooms. As we had not carried these out last year (due to covid) we hosted a quick survey, and it was unanimously agreed that they wanted appointments from the Health Coach. We have four full days of appointments already booked for January and February 2022 in the South East at our Coach Depots. These appointments will enable Coach drivers and office employees to take up the opportunity to take them.

Conclusion

We are delighted with the high level of engagement that our Health Bus has consistently achieved. We can see that it continually delivers positive results for our colleagues, and of course, it is saving lives.

We learnt early on to create appointment sheets, rather than a first come first approach, this gave our colleagues the opportunity to make sure they will be seen, as they could book appointments around their shifts. We also learnt that having three days at a site was better than moving to a different location each day and this provided some regularity to the service.

Over time we knew from the questions our employees had been asking the Health Coach that more signposting was required, we now provide information on mental health, fatigue and healthy eating support. We offer information on our Employee Assistance Program (a 24/7 counselling and signposting portal) as well as leaflets and QR codes on health and wellbeing.

Many employees make repeat visits and update the Health Coach about their progress with weight loss, diabetes and even more serious issues. Visitor comments include 'Amazing, just what I need. Can't always get to a doctor,' and 'Thanks for bringing this to the night team, we are the forgotten workers.'

Most of our employees are male and maybe reluctant to speak to a health professional at their doctor's surgery. The health bus provides accessible and confidential appointments where the health coach can reassure, inform and signpost appropriately.

This year we will be focusing on promoting NHS themes including menopause, mental health and breast cancer awareness to name a few.

The service's biggest success is making people healthier whilst saving lives. Whilst we were initially concerned that employees wouldn't want to reveal medical issues, many are so pleased with their results that they have chosen to share their story - not only with the business but also via newsletters for colleagues. Here are examples of those stories, one for example:

A Birmingham bus driver chose to tell us that, on an unscheduled visit, he was advised that his blood pressure and sugar levels were dangerously high. His GP confirmed the Health Bus was a life-changing experience that will let him live longer. He is receiving treatment and safely back on the road driving again.

We have dozens of such stories which include numerous employees who have gone on to lose one, two and three and more stones in weight.

The Health Bus will be continuing its journey in 2022 with the launch of a new bus to access new areas of our expanding business. The new bus will enable us to travel to sites we are unable to reach at the moment. The bus is currently with our trades and being renovated to meet the needs of its next chapter of our Health and Wellbeing strategy.