

# A week in the life of the pteg Support Unit

## Sunday.....

### Jonathan

Week actually kicked off on Sunday (though I try not to make too much of a habit of it) as spent some happy hours doing the first draft of pteg's response to the DfT's Integrated Ticketing Strategy. Overall we are pleased that Ministers are getting right behind smartcards and the benefits they can bring but feel they are still too hands off in their attitude to giving the 'Oyster'-style offer that cities want. Frustrating they won't just sit down with the PTEs and work out how together we can make it happen on the ground - and quick. Then there was a fair amount of logistics planning about which shirt and set of papers needs to be where during my travels in the week to come.

### Everybody else

*Managed to resist working on a Sunday*

## Monday.....

### Jonathan

Have a catch up with Saira to try and untangle a few knots in my diary commitments before firing off a final version of pteg's draft response to the DfT's Integrated Ticketing strategy (this one will need a lot of input from PTE officers who are much closer to the technical issues than I am).

Conference season kicks off this week with the TUC in Liverpool. [We have a fringe meeting tomorrow](#) lunchtime which we have co-sponsored with Unite and Unison. Before catching the train to Liverpool I finish off the last few papers for pteg Planning group which is taking place in Nottingham on Wednesday, have a meeting on our upcoming report on the issues surrounding child fares and sort out the arrangements for pteg's sustainability group meeting in October.

I also fire off copies of [our 'manifesto'](#) for change for the better for transport in the cities to political contacts at the three main political parties. The manifesto will form the centrepiece of our efforts at the party conferences this year and I want them to know what's coming (and hopefully for them to be supportive) before their conferences begin. I get a train around 4pm to Liverpool which allows for a few more hours work on the train. Some of my fellow passengers get to enjoy my end of a long conversation with Steve Davenport who does sterling work in his role as Chair of pteg legal group in providing us with a legal dimension on what we want to do policy-wise. In this case we are making the case for the devolution of 'BSOG' bus subsidies to the ITAs which has all sorts of complicated implications in terms of both EU and domestic law.

In the evening I meet up with some contacts in the Unions. There was a fair amount of liaison with the Unions on the recent [Local Transport Act](#) (which has potential implications for bus workers) so now the Act is passed I want to ensure that we are still communicating as we move from the legislative phase to the implementation phase. Turn in at a respectable hour!

### Matt

*The main event for Monday was spending a few hours grappling with the complexities of joint procurement between PTEs - such a simple goal on paper, but the realities are*

*somewhat harder. Not only have PTEs evolved in different ways, so that they have different ways of working and organising themselves, but the commercial deals that have been undertaken are often on a radically differing basis – a real apples and pears comparison. That's not to say one approach is better than another, but the major conclusion from the session is that this joint procurement takes time – to arrange internally, to align contract dates and processes and to reach an understanding of why x's apples are not the same as y's.*

## Rebecca

A project I've been working on for a while now is what we're calling a 'social inclusion stock-take'. It's been 6 years since the Social Exclusion Unit looked into the links between social exclusion and transport. We felt it was time to take stock of what's happened since then – what's been achieved, what difficulties remain and what the next steps might be. It's such a huge subject area, covering affordability, availability, accessibility and acceptability of public transport and what's been done in each of these areas to ensure everyone can make the most of the opportunities society has to offer – from healthcare to visiting friends, employment to going for a swim.

Having gathered lots of evidence and case studies from around the PTEs the report's really shaping up but needs a bit more policy background running through it. The 'next steps' we're recommending also need to be clearer. Today was mostly taken up with adding these bits to the report.

I also booked my place on the snappily titled conference 'Disability Discrimination Deadlines, Delivery & Duties' due to take place in November. I'll be particularly keen to hear the views from conference about progress made to date – something I'll be able to feed into the stock-take.

## Saila

*It was another busy day in the life of the Support Unit, and I was not short of tasks to keep everything running smoothly. Matt had a collaborative procurement workshop pre meet and I had to put on my catering hat to make sure all were fed and watered. In addition to this, I was busy preparing JB to be sent off to Liverpool for the TUC conference tomorrow. There were also the usual telephone enquiries and various emails to be sent out with various requests for information.*

**Tuesday**.....

## Jonathan

Liverpool is looking its best in the September sunshine as we make our way to the conference centre via the new [Merseytravel](#) ferry terminal on the Liverpool seafront. I do my best to give colleagues the guided tour commentary from what I can remember from the definitive [Neil Scales](#) version! Do a quick tour of the exhibition centre and drop off bundles of leaflets promoting [our lunchtime fringe meeting](#) wherever I can.

The fringe meeting itself is lighter than usual on attendance (we usually get Bob Crowe and he is always a crowd puller) but a very good debate nevertheless. I grab a few words with Jack Dromey (Asst Gen Sec of Unite) and get the promise of a fuller meeting later in the month to discuss our plans for buses following on from the [Local Transport Act](#).

I then have time to go across to the main hall to hear the Prime Minister put the case for the Government's approach to dealing with the aftermath of the credit crunch. Always a bit of a buzz at these kind of occasions and the hall is full and standing. I'm jammed up against a speaker.

Then it's back on the train to Leeds for the [Metro](#) BBQ. Enjoyed the night as it's good to get a chance to talk to people from across Metro and the venue meant you couldn't help bumping into people.

## **Matt**

*As well as catching up on emails and dealing with correspondence in connection with the forthcoming [Light Rail Inquiry](#), Tuesday in part was spent preparing for two of co-ordinating groups in pteg - Planning and Finance. The agendas for both meetings require some detailed preparation, not least the discussion items around PTEs role on local rail (for Planning) and the future arrangements for the national concessionary travel scheme (Finance). Leaping between two quite different sets of debates is challenging, but it's also what makes the job interesting - and both get to the heart of what PTEs and public transport are trying to achieve.*

## **Rebecca**

The morning's emails brought a query from [SYPT](#) on finding LTP2 accessibility indicators for other PTEs. I had a trawl through the LTP websites for each of the PTE areas (some easier to navigate than others!) and sent through links to the

relevant documents as well as contact points. I get quite a lot of ad-hoc queries like this and it's great when you can get the information people need – I like to help!

Then it's back on to the stock-take for more strengthening of the policy and recommendations bits.

There's also a [press release to send out on our new 'manifesto'](#) to all our media and interested PTE contacts. Part of my job is to maintain and edit the *pteg* website – the press release goes straight on there and also makes the front page. Next step is to tweet the news to all our followers on [twitter](#). I keep that up-to-date too – we've nearly 70 followers now!

The evening brings the annual [Metro](#) BBQ where it was a case of too little too late on the food front! Very tasty though and a good chance to meet some other 'Metroids'.

## *Saila*

*As the electronic voice of Jonathan Bray I was back at it sending various emails to people including to no. 10 Downing Street!*

*I also almost lost the will to live reconciling Jonathan's expenses but made it through the other end alive. I had my monthly acupuncture session this afternoon which was very relaxing.*

*I processed a number of invoices, made appointments, printed out meeting papers, and spent my lunch hour tracking down a missing speaker for the [TUC conference fringe meeting](#)!*

*This evening attended the [Metro](#) BBQ and got to mingle with other Metroids. Food was in short supply, but a nice time was had by all.*

## Wednesday.....

### Jonathan

I'm on the train to Nottingham for the quarterly meeting of pteg Planning group. This is one of three 'co-ordinating groups' which now largely run all the pteg issue groups and report back to the DGs. As the Support Unit we find these groups invaluable in ensuring that the work we do is rooted in the reality of what the PTEs want.

This is the first time the meeting has been hosted by Nottingham who only joined us as associate members earlier this year. On the train I'm in a race against time to try and finalise pteg's paper for Friday's meeting of the DfT roundtable on the reform of the BSOG subsidies for the bus industry. I'd been working away on this before leaving for the station but it's a fiddly job trying to incorporate everyone's comments. Meet up with Tobyn Hughes from Nexus who chairs Planning group at Sheffield station - and then I'm half chatting, half trying to finalise the document for rest of the journey. I complete the doc just before the meeting starts and email it off.

Andy Gibbons makes everyone jealous with his presentation on what Nottingham City Council has been able to achieve in recent years. Helps when you own one of your bus operators and the other one is one of the best in the country anyway! But there's much we can learn from Nottingham - including on their smartcards, work place parking levy and smarter choices work. The meeting is relatively modest in duration by Planning group standards (less than four hours I think) but we cover a lot of ground and get the steers we need from the group to move forward across a wide range of policy issues. Time for a rest in the hotel room afterwards before heading out for dinner.

### Matt

*Travel to Nottingham for the pteg Planning group meeting - Nottingham's first as host to a pteg meeting since joining as an associate member back in May. Our hosts kicked off with a tour of life in a unitary authority and the opportunities and challenges that brings - impressive stuff. The meeting itself covers a huge amount of ground - from the current set of CLG-led consultations on new powers for local government and changes to the spatila planning regime to key strands for pteg on bus,*

*bus subsidies and local rail. As well as presenting some of the reports, I have the responsibility of taking the minutes!*

## **Rebecca**

The BBQ leaves me feeling decidedly peaky and so am glad of a nice straightforward task to do. It involves identifying all the possible speeches, receptions and fringe events that may be of interest to PTEs at the Lib Dem and Conservative Party Conferences and inputting these into a big conference planner (Labour's already been done in case you were wondering!). I'm going to be going along to the Conservative conference next month to 'man the stand' and give lucky delegates the chance to win shiny new *pteg* passholders – 4 to collect!

## **Saila**

*A bit tired this morning after BBQ but sadly not due to alcohol consumption! Became that electronic voice again, organised a few more meetings, such as rail strategy. That was a tough one!*

## Thursday.....

### Jonathan

In the morning its back on the train to Leeds where I spend some time on the laptop putting together my case to Network Rail to continue to be a Public Member of the company on behalf of the PTEs (the Public Members are the owners of Network Rail and in effect act as its trustees). There have been lively debates recently about how NR is governed and how it relates to its stakeholders and I want to continue to ensure that we are on the inside and part of its governance structure.

Back in the office and I spend more time on preparing the way for Friday's big meeting on bus subsidy reform - where we will get our opportunity to make the case for it to be devolved to the PTEs so that we can make sure the funding is used to meet local objectives. At 11 I have a catch-up meeting with [Kieran Preston, Director General of Metro](#). We do have ad hoc catch-ups but sometimes when you are on the same corridor you don't make time to have more of a structured meeting - so it was good to have the chance for the catch-up.

In the afternoon I write [our Chair's](#) speech for [our fringe meeting at the Lib Dems](#) (in reality a tweaked version of his speech to the TUC!), fire off the brief and other background info for the PTE staff who will be on our stand at the three party conferences, and then negotiate DfT attendance (via speakerphone) at next month's meeting of the pteg sustainability group. When I'm on the train back home to York I realise that I sent DfT a draft rather than the final version of our paper for the BSOG meeting. Oops - v cross with myself so I then fire off a few more emails to make sure the right version will be available on the day (fortunately there's not too many differences for people to spot!).

### Matt

*From Nottingham yesterday to Newcastle today, where the Finance group is meeting - sessions today on the National Concessionary Travel Scheme and the future budget position for PTEs. PTEs collectively spend over third billion pounds each year on administering and reimbursing operators for concessionary travel - the vast majority of it through the statutory scheme that gives older people free off-peak*

*travel on buses. This is often supplemented locally by extensions into peak time travel on other modes, like local rail or tram. For PTEs its the major item of budgetary expenditure and getting it right, in terms of strong negotiations with bus operators or lobbying government is vital to our stability of funding. I support the Finance Directors on this important area, so being party to these discussions helps me better understand their perspectives and helps inform our work as pteg in lobbying government.*

## Rebecca

Today seems to revolve around IT in one way or another. We use a platform called Communicator to design and send out our [staff and stakeholder e-updates](#). The interface has changed a bit so I go along to a training session to learn how to use it. Managed to get the hang of it and send out our latest couple of email updates without a hitch (apart from accidentally unsubscribing myself to the emails!).

Also, we're looking for someone to design us some templates for Word to make report writing etc a bit more efficient and less prone to formatting nightmares. Saila and I had a meeting online with a lady who might be able to help us. Very impressed with the meeting software she used which allowed her to show us her screen remotely and demonstrate how the templates would work.

Today was also the day to send out the agenda and papers for the next meeting of the *pteg* Social Inclusion group which is happening next week. Papers include the aforementioned stock-take which I'm sending out for feedback. Hope they like it.

## Saila

This morning spent doing training for our Communicator software which we use to send out our [regular pteg Email updates](#). They have created a new platform which has various 'improvements'.

Then came a lot of liaising with the IT department to sort out pteg's external sites transfer to new server.

This afternoon brought a new experience - a net meeting. We are looking at getting some new Word templates and met with a prospective company to discuss the possibilities. Very impressed with the software.

**Friday**.....

## Jonathan

Up bright and early to get the train to London for meeting with DfT at 11 on their plans for how Passenger Focus will represent bus passengers. We are pleased with a lot of the detail (especially since some of it reflects the views we put in at earlier stages of the process) including on ensuring that PF has access to information and that the Traffic Commissioners have to have regard to its views. However we are not at all happy that DfT seem quite content to make bus passengers outside London into second class citizens by refusing to allow them to contact PF to appeal over complaints. In London of course bus passengers do have this right. Plus we also want the PTEs to be the primary complaints body for bus services - not something the DfT appears to have even contemplated. The meeting gets a bit scratchy at times - but in the end everyone knows where everyone stands and it was worth having.

Then I pop out of the DfT to meet up with [David Brown](#) in a proper London caff to get our lines straight for a further DfT meeting on bus subsidy reform. David is lead DG on bus issues and I'm glad I'm not doing this meeting alone! In the meeting itself I think we make a decent fist of putting our case - though we face an uphill struggle given the DfT's caution over devolving funding. And of course the industry has its own views over what should happen to the subsidies. Everyone is concentrating hard on getting their arguments across at the meeting and on reading between the lines of what everyone else is saying, so time flies! A meeting that was supposed to be 1 till 3 goes well past 4. Fortunately I'm staying down in London at weekend with friends - unlike poor David Brown who now has to spend the first half of his Friday night on Virgin Trains back to the North. I accompany him back to Pimlico tube while we pick the bones out of the afternoon's discussions. Although we both know we will need to let it settle in our minds before returning to the BSOG fray on Monday morning.

## Matt

*The morning session for Finance group deals with the remainder of their agenda and by lunchtime, I'm on the train again back to Leeds. The travelling time allows to me to catch-up on my reading - there are a lot of transport journals and magazines - emails (as theres always more) and make a couple of calls to follow-up on the days meeting. Back in Leeds, I finish off the next set of papers for the third co-ordinating group, Operations, which is in Sheffield next week.*

## Rebecca

Today brings another of those ad-hoc queries – this time from TAS Partnership who are working on their Annual Rail Monitor. They're trying to find data from the PTEs on cost per supported heavy rail journey. I'm able to provide only a partial response as some PTEs don't report on this. He seemed happy with it anyway – dealing in rail data he's probably used to gaps in the figures. I've recently been trying to get data to compare growth on PTE rail networks to that in London and the South East and Long distance operators – it seems near impossible! The ORR data just doesn't seem to drill down to the right level.

Later, Saila and I had a good go at tidying up the many copies of [our publications](#) – most satisfying!

Read an interesting [report on transport brokerage schemes](#) which seems to have slipped under the radar a bit – Dept of Health and DfT endorse it but it doesn't seem to be on their website. It is on the Scottish Government site though – v. odd.

Today I also provide feedback to DfT on their draft good practice guide for providing transport to older people. They have let the *pteg* Social Inclusion group have first sight of it and suggest amends and additions. I look forward to seeing the finished guide!

## Saila

*Today was spent preparing Operations group papers in readiness for emailing out to the group. Becky and I also tidied up the vast amount of [pteg publications](#) in the office. This afternoon there was more liaising with IT to sort out privileges on the external site.*

*.... and more meetings were set up for JB and MB.*

*Did the sandwich run for Metro's DG and others at lunch time – Appetite – yummy!*

*Was briefed on looking after DG while his PA on holidays for next two weeks. This is also part of my job, covering for Metro's secretaries / PA.*