

EARLY JANUARY, 2010..... AND NOTHING CHANGES!

Breaking News....Breaking News... Breaking News... Breaking News

Peace on the West Yorks buses regarding the senior citizens bus pass has been even shorter lived than Chamberlain's promise of peace in our time on his return from Munich in 1939 and exactly what we feared in the recent report above on the buss pass centre web, noting we had been here before!

On Wednesday the 6th of January 2010 I attempted to board a First bus at 14.45, the 617 (no 60904) going from Bradford Interchange to Allerton. In fear and trepidation I had journeyed back to the West Yorks cauldron because I had no choice. My destination was the royal infirmary where a severely arthritic friend was recovering from an operation. As a result of what happened I am terminating my mercy mission because it is clear that nothing has changed and that as a heart patient, I have my own health to consider. I cannot continue putting myself in extremely dangerous situations which could so easily spiral out of control and risk bringing on a heart attack.

I boarded a First bus, presented my pass, said the usual "senior citizens bus pass" and asked if it stopped at the infirmary. Instead the driver asked for my bus pass, examined it and declared it wasn't valid and would I dismount. (Rather the driver did not examine pass as he hadn't a clue as to what logo he should look for). This I refused to do, asking him to get an inspector and went to sit down. The first thing he did was to contact the Interchange security staff and in a couple of minutes three bully boys duly arrived and asked me to leave the bus. I told them that I absolutely refused to do any such thing, and that I was legally entitled to free travel and that if they called the police and had me arrested, they would be in serious trouble.

The driver had by now switched off the engine and the passengers were beginning to become irate as some of them were on their way to visit patients in the infirmary as I was. Meanwhile First bus 'control' located in Bowling Back Lane had got back to the driver, with a top inspector a Mr. Tony Smith, assuring the driver my pass was invalid. This just increased my resolve to stay put. The passengers were now justifiably angry and I had to endure the indignity of a girl telling me "the police are on their way. You've had it". I took out past copies of 'apologetic' letters from First Bus and Metro management and waved them at security and the driver, telling them I was 66 years old and that it was my right to travel on local authority buses. "Then stop acting like a 16 year old" was the response! I even said, "This horrendous situation has been presented in detail on a notable bus users' website", to which the driver sneered, "We don't read webs!" The sheer arrogance of such comment I found unbelievable. I was exasperated, but did not lose my cool, and it seemed clear to me the staff have been groomed, when in the wrong, to provoke members of the public so they can hide behind the shabby excuse "we don't tolerate abuse from members of the public"- a very elastic notion, which obviously, after countless similar incidents over a time span of nearly two years, now includes becoming even mildly exasperated.

After we had handed out our leaflet briefly explaining these nasty goings-on in West Yorks at the Pensioners' Convention in Euston on the 5th of November 2009; a meeting specifically around the future of the senior citizens' bus pass, the External Affairs Officer of the Bus Users Group contacted us by email saying it can only be the drivers who are at fault over this. We responded immediately by saying something like, "No, it comes from higher up". Obviously thinking we were somewhat paranoid in our conclusion our email was not replied to. Surely however, this last incidence proves we are right as for *the first time* an inspector has named himself. What we do know with reasonable certainty is that nothing will happen and nobody, like in the past, will be called to account.

After all the trouble, and even after it has been given pride of place on the bus pass centre website, it is simply astonishing that nothing, absolutely nothing, has changed regarding recognition and acceptance of the national bus pass since it was first introduced on April 1st 2008. In fact I was even

blamed on January 5th for the bus being taken out of service and for costing First bus money! Meantime another inspector, Mr. Singh from the Bradford interchange, cleared my pass and said it was valid. But I was obliged to continue on my way on another bus, though not before being told I might have to walk back from the infirmary in the deep snow and freezing temperatures, if a driver refused my pass. But this baby was not going to be another captain Oates for nobody and I thought to myself “just let a driver try and black ice will be the least of his troubles”.

Can you believe it? We can't! The entire West Yorks Metro authority is caught up in a rictus lockstep they can't stop and won't stop, even though blatantly illegal. Why is management so scared to do anything about this blatant and brutal flouting of the rules? Or are they so weak they have no authority over a lawless situation to deal with the inspectorate beneath them? In this insane post Copenhagen, autodestruct world it seems everything, great and small, is now, zombie-like, marching to preventable disaster.

Stuart Wise. January 7th 2010