

## FIRST PERSON

**There's a long way to go if drivers are to be coaxed out of their cars on to public transport, says John Florance**



# Bus firms have much to learn about service

**C**harging or Choice? was the slightly forbidding title of a conference organised by Travel Watch East Midlands last week. Thankfully, the topics addressed went well beyond this and I was pleased to hear from campaigners, representatives from transport companies, local politicians and others.

As a bus user, I was particularly interested to hear Kevin Belfield, MD of First Bus in the Midlands. Not unnaturally, he painted a positive picture of local bus use. It seems the most recent survey carried out among passengers revealed that 83 per cent of bus users were satisfied with the service they experienced.

I must say I find that figure quite extraordinary. In my experience, the bus companies have no room for complacency.

The real point bus companies need to take on board is that people should be given a genuine choice so car users are tempted out of their vehicles and on to public transport. If we want this to happen, they need to feel that this option presents an economic advantage, punctuality and provides a reasonably pleasant experience.

Admittedly, achieving punctuality in a town during busy times is not easy. But I am not convinced that the companies are serious about improving the things over which they do have control.

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### **I caught a bus into the city driven by a man who appeared to think the A6 was Brands Hatch**

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On the very day of the conference, I caught a bus into the city driven by a man who appeared to think the A6 was Brands Hatch and simply drove past one bus stop at which people were waiting because he couldn't be bothered to stop.

Until the companies begin to check up on their reluctant staff and train them to do something about anti-social behaviour among passengers, then I can quite understand why people are unwilling to be coaxed out of their cars.

■ Life isn't a bowl of roses for pedestrians, either:

The other day, I was strolling through Gallowtree Gate at lunchtime when I was accosted by strangers four times in two or three minutes.

A Mormon attempted to convert me, a children's charity attempted to sign me up, as did a shopping catalogue. Then a Big Issue seller. I must confess I gave in to the last gentleman.

I am not against people attempting to convert passers by to good causes, but Gallowtree Gate that day was like an obstacle course.

There are protocols about approaching pedestrians and collectors are required to have a licence. How many of the people who were operating in Gallowtree Gate were aware of the protocols and had a licence, I wonder. Eager collectors provide just one more reason for people not to use the city as a shopping centre.

■ *John broadcasts on BBC Radio Leicester, 104.9FM on Sundays from 6am to 9am.*

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### **Tomorrow: Food allergies and problems shopping**

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The views expressed above are the views of the author and not necessarily the views of the Leicester Mercury