PocketBUS in Berkshire

First Berkshire's On-Street Inspectors make thousands of observations every month while they travel around the network, carrying out their surveying and revenue protection tasks. Their paper records took a lot of time to process and only gave a total reliability figure for the whole network. There was a growing desire to understand the punctuality of each route, and this had already started through the use of ticket machine data recorded by drivers. However, this only gives information relating the start of journeys. In addition, On-Street Inspectors record information at many intermediate points. To filter out individual route data from all these data sets was very time consuming and therefore only carried out in very particular circumstances.

What was required was an electronic way of recording information which could then be analysed to produce more informative reports. Matthew Wooll, who manages the On-Street Inspectors as part of his Revenue and Marketing responsibilities, had read about PocketBUS and suggested it to local management. Omnibus set up a short trial; two PDAs were loaded with PocketBUS and the four On-Street Inspectors took it in turns to get used to the software whilst carrying out their duties. They appreciated the simplicity right from day one, and the ability to see all scheduled journeys from any timing point enabled them to answer customer enquiries without referring to the company's timetable books.

THAMES TRAVEL INVEST IN SCHEDULES SOFTWARE

Omnibus, the UK's leading provider of passenger transport software, has just completed implementing its timetable and scheduling modules with Thames Travel, the highly regarded independent bus operator based in Wallingford, Oxfordshire Running in excess of 30 vehicles, Thames Travel has purchased Omni**TIMES** to computerise its timetable design and processing, Omni**BASE** for the production and processing of bus and crew duties, Crew**PLAN** to create efficient crew schedules and Omni**ROTA** for the production of weekly drivers' rotas.

Thames Travel started its operations in 1998 with a fleet of four vehicles and has gone from strength to strength since then, expanding to become the third largest bus operator in Oxfordshire. It now employs about 75 staff and has a fleet of 34 vehicles running from three sites. Thames Travel services operate in South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, currently carrying 1.25 million passengers per year.

With this rapid rate of expansion, the company had reached the point where

investment in a computer package for timetable and schedule compilation was a natural step, as undertaking these tasks manually was becoming an increasingly unwieldy and time consuming task. "The new software will save a considerable number of staff hours preparing revised schedules which are a constant task as services and routes are expanded" commented John Wright, Managing Director of Thames Travel.

"We chose Omnibus because they have a

well developed suite of programs which will allow us to achieve efficient and cost effective schedules."

Omnibus Managing Director Peter Crichton added "I am delighted to welcome Thames Travel to our customer base, and look forward to bringing the benefits of our software to their operations. I am sure that this will prove to be a very productive working relationship for many years to come".

Entering their 25th anniversary year, Henderson Travel operates over 40 buses across southern Scotland, with 80% of this under Strathclyde PT contracts. Whilst not huge, it is reckoned to be as complex as some city networks. "As a commercial operator, we have to make everything work as well as it can to maximise our investment", comments John Henderson, Managing Director of Henderson Travel. "Although we are smaller than other operators, this doesn't mean that we are not keen to see the advantages of technology".

Henderson Travel has rented Omnibus software Omni**TIMES,** Omni**BASE** and Omni**ROTA** since 2006. "What I like about the Omnibus software is that it is very labour saving, especially for asking 'what if' questions and developing services. Having said that, it's not a set of tools that just anyone can use – you need to be precise and know how to schedule to get the best out of Omni**TIMES** for example." As John takes responsibility for the schedules, he uses the software often. "It does exactly what it claims; it helps schedulers and it's very good at doing that. Before Omnibus,

we used spreadsheets to put timetables and bus workings together. Omnibus has made the whole thing more precise and quicker."

"Recently, we have taken Omni**MAP** and the EBSR module. Whilst we haven't used the EBSR module in anger yet, the mapping software is very good. When we first used it, some of the stops were in the wrong location, based on data that was imported. In a short space of time, Omni**MAP** sorted this out and we now use it with a good degree of accuracy." John wants to use Omni**MAP** to help analyse fare structures as well as visually maintain routes; "We have 20,000 fares on the network, and measuring accurately between each stage is useful. This is especially so when over 50% of travellers are concessionary – and, being an election

year, we expect things to change with this scheme at some point."

Commenting about Omnibus support, John said; "As far as Omnibus support is concerned, they are one of our 'top 5' suppliers, without question. There are a lot of major suppliers who fail to return calls or are simply not interested in problems. Omnibus are not like that. The people who support the products are always happy to help whenever we need it."

John concludes, "We love analysing information – we cannot get enough of it. Omnibus helps us do that more accurately and reliably than before, as well as helping us to reduce the time we are working on schedules and the like."

PocketBUS in Berkshire

"It was disappointing to go back to 100% paper records after the trial," explains Matthew, who assisted Omnibus with specifying developments to Pocket**BUS**. "Now Pocket**BUS** is performing just the way we want it, so it was obviously worth the wait."

Matthew now has Pocket**BUS** installed on his personal smart phone, "I use Pocket**BUS** on the way to and from work, when I'm out and about on business or on my days off when I just happen to see buses and coaches in service", says Matthew. "It's important to gain the respect of staff by doing the job yourself and therefore knowing what you are talking about! The extra data also helps build a better picture as I quite often make recordings at times when other employees may not be about. Drivers in Berkshire know that there could always be somebody out watching them

and early running or customer complaints about buses not turning up are now almost unheard of."

Matthew's Revenue and Marketing Administrator, Christine Lee, produces period reports using the data recorded by the On-Street Inspectors. "I was initially worried about the volume of observations that needed collating and sorting," admits Christine "but the software is very easy to get to grips with. Matthew's enthusiasm towards his job is infectious and I feel a great sense of achievement when I can identify timetable changes that will give our customers a much better service." Christine also produces ad-hoc reports which can be filtered down by depot, route, day of week, or even time of day depending on requirements. "The possibilities are almost endless," says Christine, "and once all the relevant data have been imported the

speed of the report generation means we can keep changing the parameters to see all the different results quickly."

Now First Berkshire has this equipment, the On-Street Inspectors will be able to do other things, according to Matthew. Their two newest PDAs are Wi-Fi and Bluetooth enabled, meaning that they can send Pocket**BUS** result files wirelessly. It also allows the On-Street Inspectors to access the Internet, bringing email capability and the ability to view the location of vehicles fitted with GPS tracking. "As technology within the business is developed, handheld electronic devices will assume a much greater role, and we will look to further opportunities in the ticket-checking field," says Matthew.

If you would like to find out more about Pocket**BUS**, contact Omnibus on 0161 683 3100 or via www.omnibus.uk.com.