

**Local bus service annual reliability and performance  
April 2009 - March 2010**

Report by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development

**Summary**

There were more than 29 million journeys made on buses in Norfolk during 2009/10, which represents a decrease of around 2.5% on 2008/9. This is most likely to be as a direct result of the economic downturn. There has been growth in Norfolk in recent years, due to the joint investments of the County Council and bus operators in services and associated infrastructure as well as the introduction of free concessionary travel. This is the first year Norfolk has reflected the national trend for bus use outside London, which has been falling over the past few years.

First's "Norwich" network performance in the last year has shown improvement over 2009 and has exceeded the targets set in the Joint Investment Plan. All five major operators' punctuality at start of route has shown an improvement over 2008 with no company falling below 80%, while performance at intermediate stops remains similar to 2008.

As usual, there was a dip in punctuality in the run up to Christmas. This is mainly due to increased traffic congestion in the city. The predominantly County Council funded traffic marshals to prevent queues from blocking car park entrances and junctions. This worked well ensuring punctuality and reliability were not too adversely affected. Over this period, there was congestion in King's Lynn made worse by the adverse weather-related conditions.

The County Council works closely with bus operators to drive up performance of their services. The use of voluntary agreements (e.g. Punctuality Improvement Partnerships and the Joint Investment Plan) is a valuable mechanism to maintain improving performance.

The County Council is expecting to spend around £5.3M subsidising bus services in 2010/11 (including around £2m for Norwich park and ride). A realistic choice of travel options is important for the communities of Norfolk, in particular where social exclusion and deprivation is a key factor. Any reduction in performance and reliability of public transport could have a negative effect on passenger numbers and ultimately may lead to service withdrawals and a smaller bus network. This could lead to pressure on the County Council to support bus services that are currently provided on a commercial basis.

The County Council's investment is part of our ongoing commitment to improve travel and transport to support residents, visitors and business across Norfolk. On an area-wide level, the County Council is working with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement transport measures to meet local needs through strategies such as the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy (NATS) and the King's Lynn Area Transport Strategy (KLATS).

**Action Required**

The Committee is invited to comment on the annual report.

## 1. **Background**

- 1.1. The local bus network in Norfolk is a mixture of commercial and subsidised services. Commercial services receive no financial support from the County Council. There are over 40 operators providing local bus services across the county. These range from small operators running one or two services or community buses, up to large national bus operators. This report contains information about the performance of the major five operators: Anglian Bus & Coach, First Eastern Counties, Konectbus, Norfolk Green and Sanders Coaches.
- 1.2. Bus operator performance is reviewed and discussed regularly with Members. There is a significant data set providing robust information within Norfolk, and in particular Norwich, that can be used to identify performance trends and measure progress. There have been improvements but we recognise that there is room for more progress towards better quality buses, increased punctuality and reliability in service delivery.
- 1.3. The reported national trend for bus use outside London has been falling over the past few years. However, there has been growth in Norfolk in recent years, most likely due to the County Council's investment in public transport and associated infrastructure and the introduction of free concessionary travel. There were more than 29 million journeys made on buses in Norfolk during 2009/10, which represents a decrease of around 2.5% on 2008/9. Given the inclement weather during December and February and the economic downturn, this figure is still a good achievement. Some routes continue to return year-on-year passenger growth on like-for-like services through a combination of fleet investment, attention to operational performance and marketing.
- 1.4. The County Council's investment is part of our ongoing commitment to improve travel and transport to support residents, visitors and business across Norfolk. On an area-wide level, the County Council is working with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement transport measures to meet local needs.

## 2. **County Council Monitoring and the BusNet system**

- 2.1. The County Council has invested over £1m since 2003/4, fitting over 350 buses with the BusNet satellite tracking system. The system enables the County Council to monitor bus movements across the network and identify improvement areas. Bus operators have direct links to the system so they can monitor their operations in real time, making proactive changes to help keep services "on time".

With active and efficient management control of vehicles, problems on route are identified and avoided by drivers taking remedial action via communications from bus companies' offices. Data gathered from the system is also used to review timetables and make changes that help to improve punctuality. Continued use of BusNet has delivered a sustained improvement in time keeping and this report shows generally improved punctuality in 2009/10.
- 2.2. The latest performance report from BusNet for the period up to March 2010 shows continued improvement and full details are given in Appendix A.

### 3. **Vehicles**

- 3.1. All buses must be low floor easy access compliant by 2017. The County Council is monitoring progress towards this target and specifies the requirement when tendering.
- 3.2. In February 2010, 82% of buses owned by the major companies met the low floor easy access requirement compared to 69% in 2009, 64% in 2008 and 54% in 2007.
- 3.3. The County Council is encouraging operators to reduce emissions from buses. In Castle Meadow, the low emission zone (LEZ) requires that buses should at least meet Euro 3 emissions standards. This is the first LEZ outside of London. The Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in the Castle Meadow area appears to have improved overall as a result of the LEZ and investment by operators in cleaner buses, which has brought the added benefit of newer, low-floor vehicles.
- 3.4. In February 2010, 51% of buses owned by the major companies met the LEZ standard compared to 40% in 2009.

### 4. **Joint Investment Plan (JIP)**

- 4.1. The County Council, Norwich City Council and First signed a ground breaking investment plan in December 2007. This plan commits each party to certain actions which help with the continued improvement of bus services in the Norwich area. Norfolk is the only shire county to have such an agreement with a bus company. This demonstrates the excellent working relationship between the County Council and the bus company and the importance of passenger transport to the economic prosperity of Norfolk.
- 4.2. A working group involving representatives from each party meets on a regular basis to monitor progress against commitments and targets.
- 4.3. Since signing the JIP achievements include
  - Improvements in punctuality on the Norwich city services (as shown by the graphs in A.2 and A.3)
  - Improvements to bus priority at the junction of Grapes Hill and Dereham Road, Norwich
  - Replacement of older vehicles with newer vehicles on Norwich area service X2 and newer low floor vehicles on service 10.
- 4.4. During 2009/10 the following improvements have been made:
  - Newmarket Road bus lane extension
  - More vehicle replacements to reduce the average age of the fleet and increase the number of low floor easy access vehicles in operation
  - Changes to vehicle fleet to comply with air quality standards for the Castle Meadow Low Emission Zone
  - A total of £1.092M has been spent on bus related capital projects.

## 5. **Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs)**

5.1. The County Council has successfully introduced Punctuality Improvement Partnerships with major bus companies and a number of smaller companies. PIPs are a key tool for working with operators to improve and maintain punctuality and reliability of bus services. Norfolk is a leading authority in the development of PIP's. We have earned national recognition as being very proactive in this area and hold regular forums with operators which the Senior Traffic Commissioner has attended.

5.2. The PIP is a voluntary agreement and represents a "joint commitment to achieve continuous improvement in punctuality and overall reliability of bus services".

Under the terms of the agreement both parties agree to:

- monitor and collate information using BusNet to measure reliability against targets
- to jointly validate the data with on-road surveys where necessary
- to meet quarterly to identify trends and mutually agree actions to improve punctuality

Planned actions will result from the information gathered and include:

- identifying areas for bus priority measures
- revision of or recasting of timetables to improve punctuality and reliability, First are currently working with us to review running times of services in the Norwich area
- better communication of planned road works and closures across the network
- improved planning of engineering and staff resources

## 6. **Resource Implications**

6.1. **Finance** : Funding of over £1m has been provided through the capital programme for the BusNet system. The ongoing revenue costs for the system of £257K and are met by a 50:50 split between the County Council and bus operators. Staff resource has been met from the existing staff budgets in ETD. Any expansion of the system would usually be funded from the Integrated Transport Block funding through the Local Transport Plan. However with the current budget pressures opportunities for expansion may be limited in the future unless a good business case exists or alternative funding is provided.

The County Council is expecting to spend around £5.3M subsidising bus services in 2010/11 (including around £2m for Norwich Park and Ride). A realistic choice of travel options is important for the communities of Norfolk, in particular where social exclusion and deprivation is a key factor. Any reduction in performance and reliability of public transport could have a negative effect on passenger numbers and ultimately may lead to service withdrawals and a smaller network. This could lead to pressure on the County Council to support bus services that are currently provided on a commercial basis.

6.2. **Staff :**

a) The roll out of the BusNet project has reduced the need for intensive on-street surveys, although a limited amount still takes place. Resources were redirected to manage the BusNet system, monitor the development and management of the system and maximise the use of this asset. Staff use the system data on a daily basis to support their work in network planning and management, as well as responding to customer queries. This has enabled us to deliver a much broader transportation service as the data collected supports a range of other transport activities.

6.3. **Property :** There are no implications.

6.4. **IT :** Bus service registrations are managed by the County Council as the Local Transport Authority. The data that staff input from the registrations supports several activities including BusNet, the Traveline database and real time information screens. This data will be increasingly received by the authority in electronic format as Electronic Bus Service Registration (EBSR) is implemented to meet Department of Transport guidance.

7. **Other Implications**

7.1. **Legal Implications :** There are no implications.

7.2. **Human Rights :** There are no implications.

7.3. **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) :** Local bus services are exempt as under current legislation vehicles do not have to be fully accessible until 2017. However, we are working with operators to ensure low floor vehicles are provided before the 2017 deadline.

7.4. **Communications :** There are no implications.

7.5. **Health and safety implications :** There are no implications.

7.6. **Any other implications :** Officers have considered all the implications which members should be aware of. Apart from those listed in the report (above), there are no other implications to take into account.

8. **Section 17 – Crime and Disorder Act**

8.1. The local bus network helps to tackle social exclusion, and access to services enhances opportunities for people in employment and education.

9. **Risk Implications/Assessment**

9.1. The provision and performance of local bus services is very important for the Norfolk economy and our citizens. Supporting and enhancing public transport is therefore essential in meeting our targets set within the Local Transport Plan, new National Indicator targets and delivering on area transport strategies.

## 10. **Conclusion**

- 10.1. The performance data suggests that reliability and punctuality continues to improve and service standards have got better.
- 10.2. The BusNet system is providing robust data and provides a good platform for improvement of bus services in Norfolk and in particular our major urban areas.
- 10.3. The County Council is working collaboratively with bus operators to drive up performance and the use of voluntary agreements (e.g. Punctuality Improvement Partnerships and the Joint Investment plan). These are valuable mechanisms to maintain the momentum and consistent with the Coalition governments stance on making use of voluntary arrangements.
- 10.4. The County Council and bus operators recognise there is room for continued improvement and will keep working to improve timekeeping performance. We will also promote best practice amongst operators for the benefit of the travelling public.

## **Action Required**

- (i) The Committee is invited to comment on the annual report.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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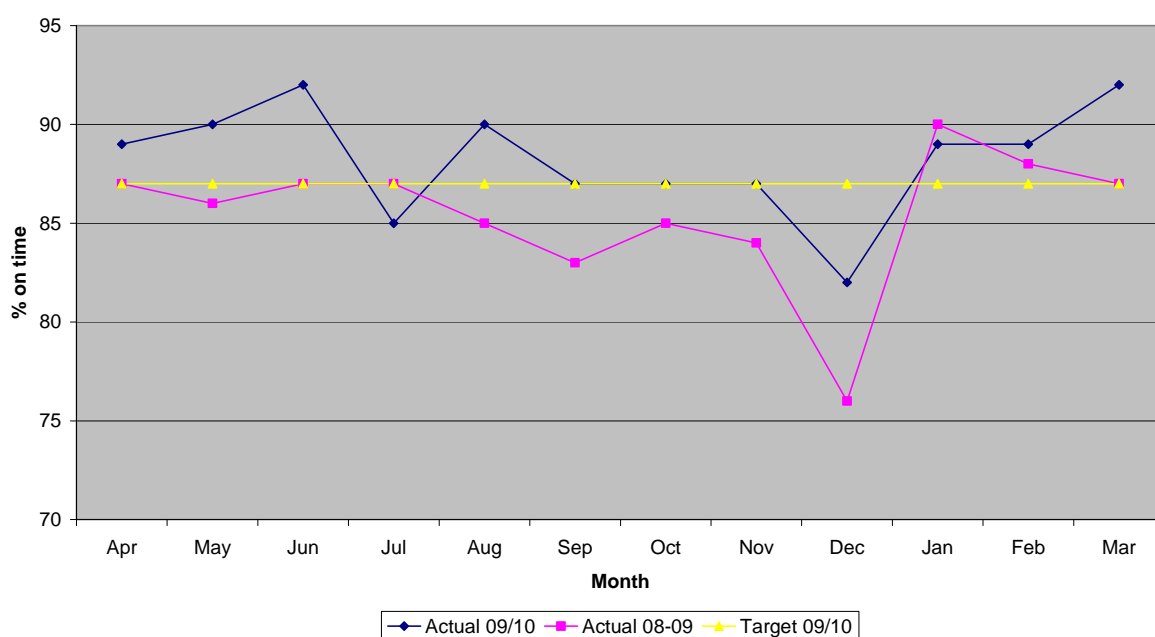
## Appendix A

### Bus service performance analysis and graphs

- A.1 The performance of First city bus services in the Norwich area over the last year shows improvement over 2008 and has exceeded the targets set in the Joint Investment Plan. Both graphs show a dip in performance in July due to unplanned roadworks (collapsed sewer causing delays in Unthank Road and Chapelfield areas) and a dip in performance between December and February which was due to a combination of pre-Christmas traffic congestion and poor weather.

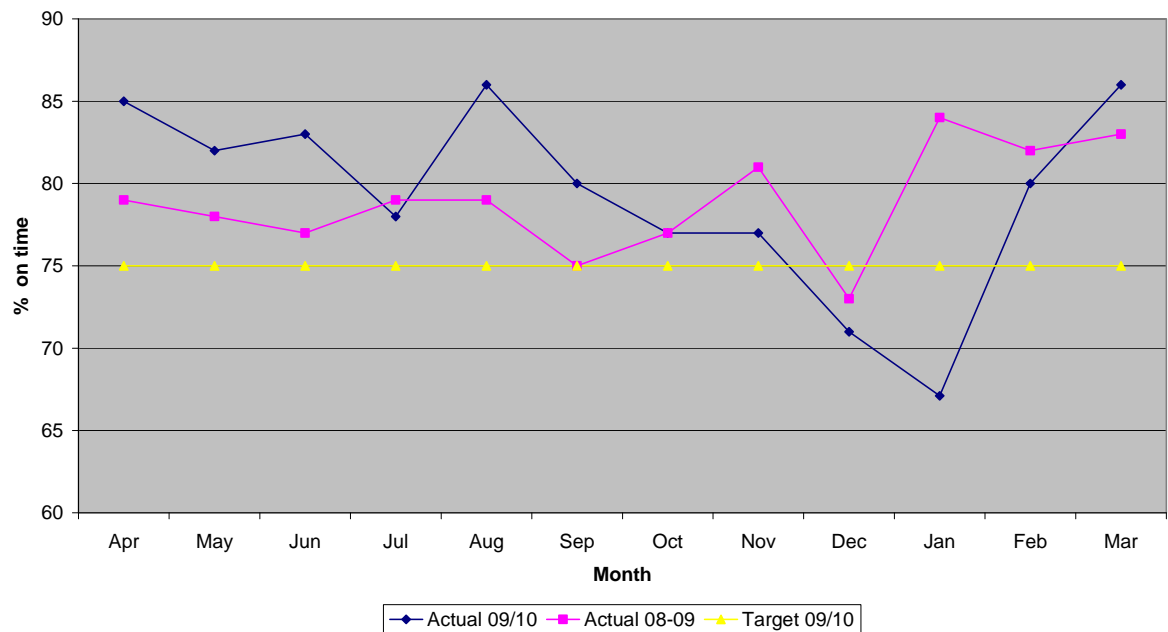
#### A.2

**First city centre journeys starting on time**



A.3

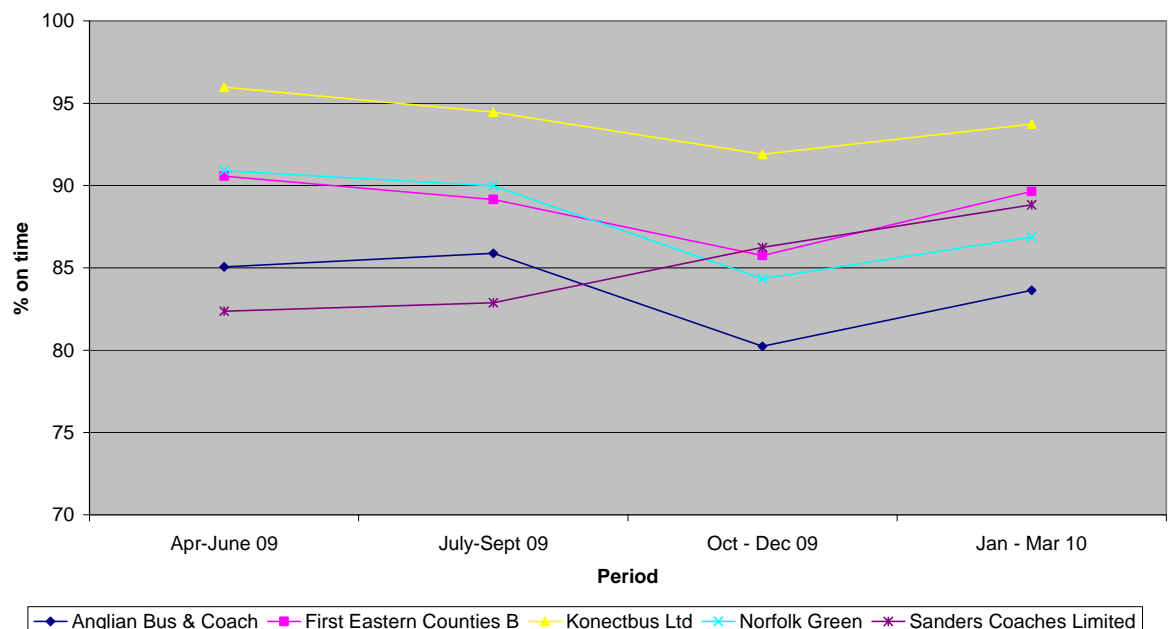
**First city centre journeys on time at intermediate stops**



A.4 The majority of journeys undertaken by the five major operators were monitored to assess punctuality of the Norfolk network between April 09 and March 10 inclusive. This enables us to confidently assess performance using hard evidence and identify trends.

A.5

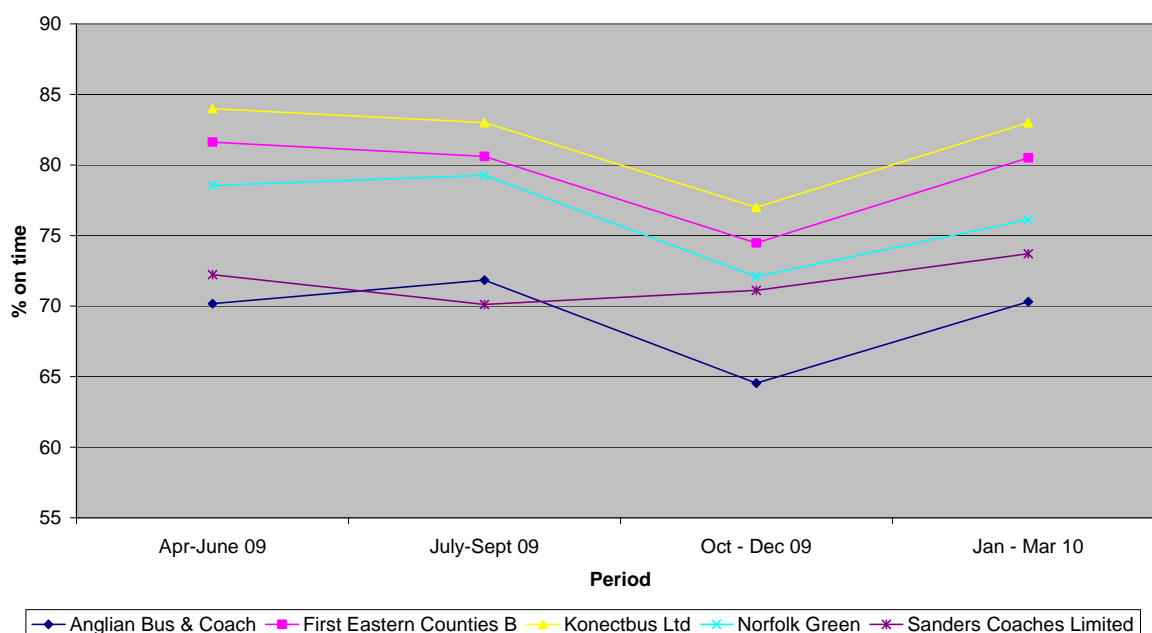
**Bus services on time at start of route**





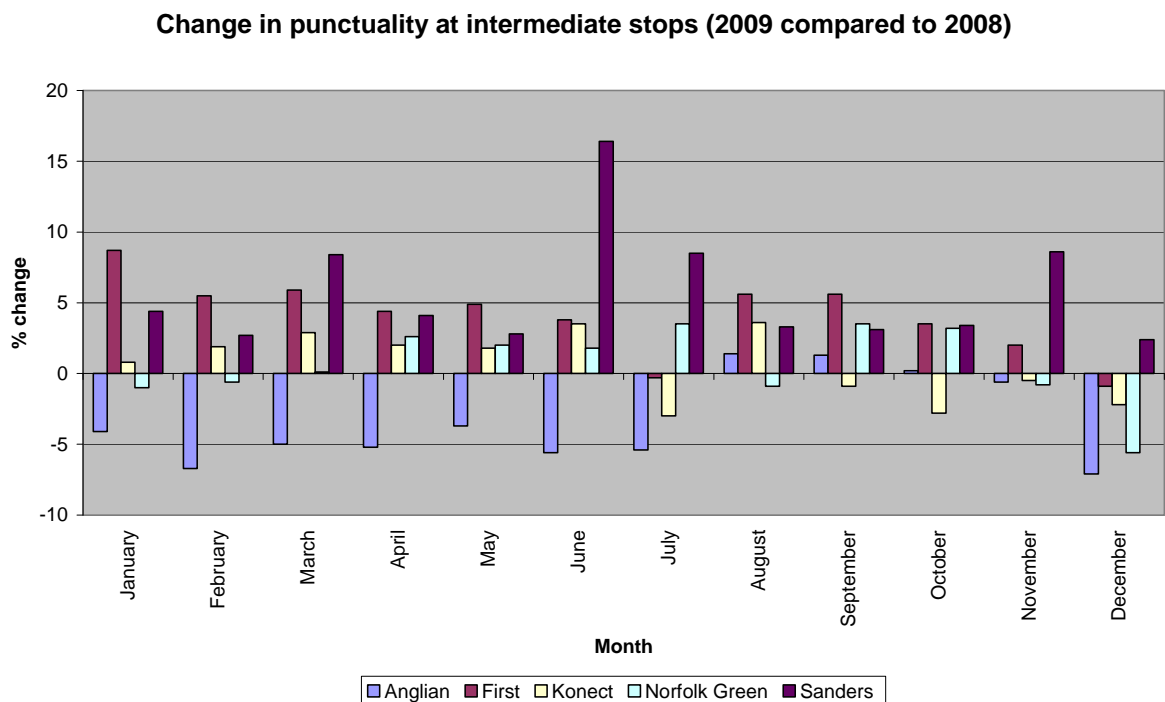
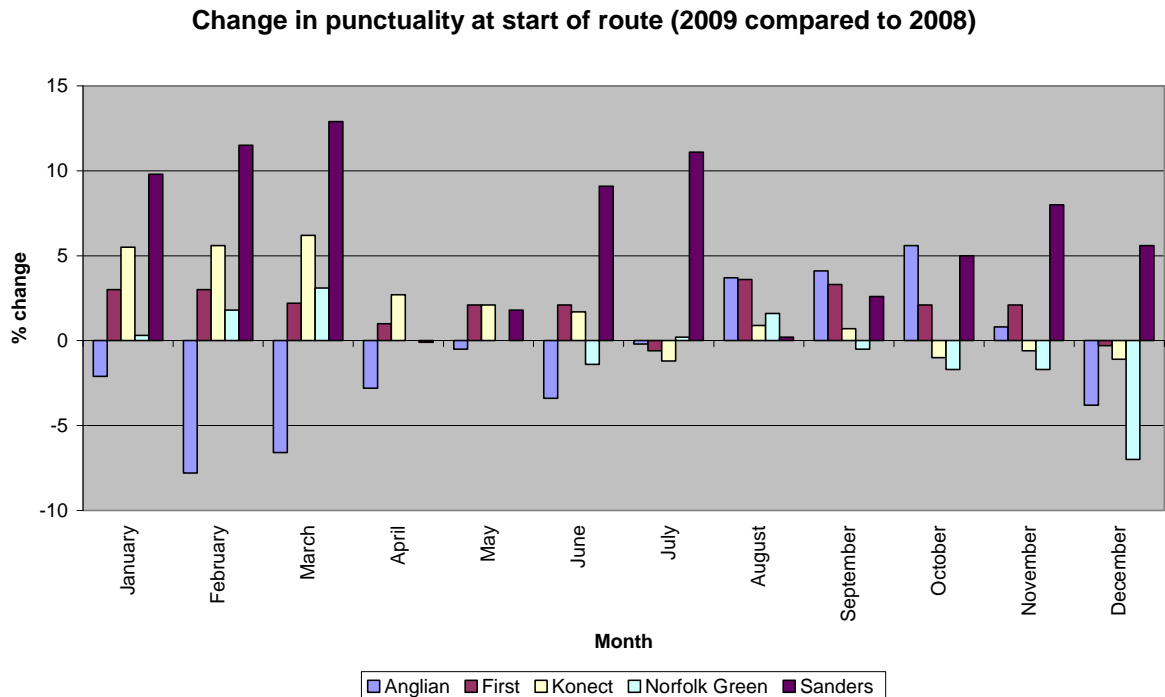
## A.6

**Bus services on time at intermediate stops**



- A.7 Across all 5 operators, punctuality at start of route has shown an improvement over 2008 with no company falling below 80% while at intermediate stops performance remains similar to 2008.
- A.8 As usual there was a dip in punctuality in the run up to Christmas. This is mainly due to increased traffic congestion in the city and principal towns. For the run up to Christmas 2009, the County Council funded queue marshals in Norwich but not elsewhere to prevent traffic from blocking junctions and queuing back from car park entrance. This again worked well ensuring punctuality and reliability were not adversely affected.
- A.9 The performance during 2009 shows that overall punctuality was better than in 2008 although Anglian Bus & Coach in particular struggled at the start of the period to maintain the levels they had reached during 2007. When reviewing the graphs below it important to look at them in conjunction with the punctuality figures for 2009 as a dip in punctuality, whilst disappointing does not necessarily mean that the overall punctuality is poor.
- A.10 Major roadworks are being undertaken in King's Lynn as part of the growth funding package and the impacts are evidenced in Norfolk Green's performance. Although routes in King's Lynn are shared with First, the performance of Norfolk Green are more representative of traffic in King's Lynn as First have routes elsewhere in the county. The roadworks are continuing in the town throughout 2010 and further short-term falls in performance in King's Lynn can be expected as a result.

A.11



- A.12 The information captured by BusNet forms a reliable tool for operators to recast schedules (where appropriate) to improve punctuality and reliability.
- A.13 Recent monitoring of bus services in Gloucestershire shows that overall the number of First buses is 88% on time at start of route and 78% at intermediate stops. In Thurrock 91% of buses were on time at the start of route and 83% at intermediate points. Performance from Nexus (Newcastle upon Tyne) indicated performance of 83% at the start of route and 82% at intermediate stops. These results indicate that although performance at the start of route is comparable, and in most cases better

than other areas, more work is needed on performance at intermediate stops.

- A.14 The County Council works closely with operators to drive up performance of their services. This has included regular reviews of punctuality, workshop sessions with operators to identify issues and possible ways these can be mitigated. Operators are taking a much stronger stance against drivers who run early and such behaviour is now recognised as unacceptable.