

TECH **i**nspector



How the numbers add up...

CARDIFF BUS started their digital journey 15 years ago with the introduction of Freeway's fleet management software. During that time Cardiff buses have travelled more than 170 million miles and consumed over 67 million litres of fuel; the thirstiest bus consuming 450,587 litres and the busiest bus travelling a total of 1,110,595 miles.

A few more clicks of the mouse and some interesting figures emerge about the workshop such as the fact that 251,779 Job Cards have been opened, managed and closed, 99,070 scheduled events have been planned and completed, and 215,451 defects have been recorded and sorted! In the last 15 years over 101,843 separate Purchase Orders have been created, and 12,252 unique parts have been recorded and 447,559 separate part lines have been issued out of stock.

Freeway is used to schedule maintenance work, manage defects, parts and fuel spend and Cardiff Bus has introduced tablets as part of a real-time mobile working solution to eliminate paper job cards and inspection sheets.

"It was 15 Years ago that Freeway was installed at Cardiff Bus. Back in the day Freeway ran on a Linux server and Purchase Orders generated from the system were faxed to suppliers! The software is now upgraded and hosted on a Windows server by Cardiff ICT," says Patrick Tandy, Managing Direct of Freeway.



The Omnibus Connection

Freeway has completed integration with Omnibus passenger transport software. This means bus operations can now have complete visibility of vehicles in terms of availability, outstanding defects, recently completed work and compliance status. Operations can now plan routes and assign buses with full visibility of the status of every vehicle, making it easier to plan operations with fewer last minute changes to schedules.

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STOP PRESS

OCR technology at ALBUM 2019. Visit Freeway's stand to see how Optical Character Recognition can read Supplier Invoices and automatically match them to Purchase Orders – and be used to automate third party safety inspection document registration.



Be Smart About Retaining Staff

Unemployment in the UK is at its lowest levels since the 1970's. Although there is a shake up in the automotive industry due to declining diesel vehicle sales, with job losses at Jaguar Land Rover and Honda, it will not be long before alternative fuel vehicles fill the void and will need mass production facilities and ultimately maintenance. Economic growth is slow but steady and there is unlikely to be a drop in demand for commercial vehicles. With uncertainty over international trade following Brexit, commercial vehicle operators are probably holding onto their existing vehicles longer than planned. For workshops, demand for their services will if anything increase. That means retaining skilled fitters is crucial, as is attracting new recruits.

The job of fitters is beginning to change as workshops introduce digital systems and paper is rapidly disappearing from the workplace. The DVSA is already moving toward electronic reporting with their Earned Recognition scheme and busy workshops are beginning to introduce tablets to replace job sheets, time sheets and inspection reports. The introduction of this wireless technology in the workshop is part of a wider digital transformation encompassing stores, purchasing, accounts and transport operations.

With these new generation computer systems offering mobile working, workshops are arguably seeing the biggest change in the way they operate since the introduction of power tools. The paper forms that have been used pretty much unchanged for 50 years are about to disappear. So are the filing cabinets, wall charts, clocking-in cards and document archives. Not only that, but the systems are challenging long established ways of working and enabling better - more efficient, safer and more productive - procedures to be introduced.

Moving away from paper to digital working represents a major commitment by the company; something that will require management time to introduce but something that is crucial to the future of the business - and ultimately inevitable. Staff need to be fully on board with the change and that's not always easy. For those familiar with their paper forms the arrival of a tablet is not always welcome, because it represents a change.

However, to successfully introduce digital working, it is more important than ever to retain staff. It's essential to secure engagement with the

workforce right from the outset, with key workshop staff being given a proper stake in the project. For those objecting to change, giving them ownership and responsibility will help win their acceptance and help address their objections. The software is after all very simple to use and provides considerable added benefits to getting their work done, such as instant access to historical job data, parts issuing, as well as quicker and better job allocation.

One successful approach to engagement is to identify and support 'Workshop Floor Champions'. There is a wealth of knowledge held in the heads of the more experienced workshop staff and it's important to capture that knowledge quickly. Having been stuck with a paper jobcard for years, they will welcome being involved and in being able to make instant digital changes. Whether it be assigning componentry to inspection checks or calculating standard hours, they know the assets inside out. When they get their tablets they are usually genuinely excited to see what they have helped create.

Although the most experienced and mature fitters sometimes take a little longer to grasp using a mobile device, it is notable that the quality of data they subsequently enter is usually very good. For younger recruits that grew up in the smartphone era, the tablet is very familiar territory but their lack of experience and perhaps lack of appreciation of the importance of the data, means that their data entry can be a bit shoddy. It's therefore a good idea to give more experienced fitters responsibility for training new staff and apprentices. They'll not want to be shown up by younger upstart Millennials and with the added responsibility they will want to make a good impression and set the highest standard of data entry.

With digital reporting systems soon to provide vital performance data on the fleet from vehicle type and individual parts. More importantly here it will provide a real insight into the workforce so each individual can be assessed in a fair, undisputable way. Are they doing things properly? How productive are they? Are they good at some jobs and bad at others? This intelligence will help considerably in managing staff and providing the right support to help them improve and reward them when they do. Jobs can be assigned to those that are best suited and that will motivate them. The 'system' therefore becomes a valuable personnel management tool that can be used to get the most out of each person and that will make them feel more valid and motivated. Ultimately that's what is needed to help ensure they are happy in their job. If they are happy that will feed into the team and they will stay and that's good for business.

Signing off PO's on a phone

Getting management sign off on purchase orders can be problematic and delay jobs. Those authorising a PO aren't always in the office so Freeway has developed a management app that allows the assigned manager to sign off purchases from their smartphones. A sign-off request is automatically sent to the appropriate manager based on the order value and this can be approved or rejected by the manager using a smartphone.

"For managers, this is a brilliant addition to Freeway," says Eddie Street of London Bus operator Tower Transit. "I don't need to be at my desk logged onto my PC to deal with things such as PO authorisations. I can basically keep my finger on the pulse wherever I happen to be and know that I am not holding up any work."

Freeway Gets the Go-Ahead

Bus operator, Go-Ahead Ireland, is launching Freeway Fleet Systems' bespoke fleet management software into its Irish operation. At the end of the implementation, Go-Ahead Ireland will have full web app functionality, allowing all engineers to complete inspections, raise defects and request parts digitally, removing the need for any paper-based forms. It is Go-Ahead's intention to later roll Freeway out to all other Irish depots that are planned to open in the coming months.

Go-Ahead is Ireland's newest bus company which is quickly becoming a familiar site on Dublin's roads and the organisation already employs nearly 300 people and runs a fleet of 125 single and double deck buses.

Freeway and its local implementation partner, Genie Insights Ltd, have been working on a bespoke specification to handle Go-Ahead's unique organisational intricacies. As a result, Freeway has successfully developed a number of solutions for complex integrations including a remote authorisation process for all procurement to be handled in Newcastle, UK. Freeway has managed to provide an integration solution into Go-Ahead Group's accounting system, Oracle, whilst also handling the VAT complexities that an operation in Ireland created.

Chris Stringer, Head of Engineering at Go-Ahead Ireland commented: "Having researched the market and having invited a number of providers to engage with us, we ultimately selected Freeway for a number of reasons. The system's impressive customer portfolio, coupled with the company's interest and ability in getting the solution right for us, gave us confidence that it could handle the specific complexities of our industry and organisation. From the outset, Freeway showed a high level of professionalism and patience with the specification taking a number of months to finalise".



Smart Ticker for Reading

Reading Buses is the first operator to take advantage of a new technical innovation that sees bus drivers using ticket machines to enter their vehicle inspection reports. The result of integration between system suppliers Ticker and Freeway. Reading Buses see the link as an important step in managing the fleet and in particular compliance.

On entry by the driver, the inspection data updates the central fleet maintenance system in real-time, eliminating subsequent manual data entry of reports. With data being received automatically from Ticker's in vehicle machines, defects are immediately flagged on Freeway for appropriate action such as the immediate scheduling of repairs to critical defects.

"Although there are smartphone apps for pre-check inspections, we were concerned about extending the use of mobile devices to drivers when they already had a data entry terminal for ticketing," says John Bickerton, Head of Engineering and Innovation, Reading Buses.

"With Freeway now able to receive inspection data wirelessly from the ticket machines, we will no longer have the administrative burden of reviewing defect cards manually. We have instant, accurate data on the system before the bus departs the depot. It means we can improve workshop scheduling and deal immediately with any issues, with minimum disruption to operations," adds Bickerton.

"Although a smartphone solution is really easy to configure and use, we realise that there are very real budgetary, technical and in some cases legal constraints to providing each driver with a personal mobile device. Integrating with Ticker was first suggested by Reading Buses and we are pleased to have them on board as the first to utilise the solution," says Patrick Tandy, Managing Director of Freeway Fleet Systems.





Seeing the bigger picture at trentbarton

trentbarton is spearheading some pioneering technical innovations as part of a planned digital transformation of its engineering operations. The developments include large display screens in the workshop enabling the whole engineering team to see the fleet and workshop status, interactive touch-screen information terminals, and an integrated electronic clocking facility for workshop staff. The developments are all being trialled as part of the system from Freeway.

First established over a century ago and still independently owned, trentbarton is one of the prominent bus operators within the East Midlands. trentbarton has one of the youngest, hi-tech fleets in the UK with over 300 buses, operated from five depot locations.

“Having already updated our operations IT our priority is now engineering. We see data transparency between operations and engineering as crucial and we need a system that can provide real time visibility across the company, allowing us to improve efficiency and productivity,” says Mark Greasley, Group Projects Director, trentbarton.

trentbarton has also been behind integration between Freeway’s workshop software and Omnibus passenger transport software. This gives operations complete visibility of vehicles in terms of availability, outstanding defects, recently completed work and compliance status. Freeway also connects to Omnibus clocking-in terminals allowing workshop staff to clock-in in the same way as drivers and other staff, giving visibility from within Freeway of the availability of workshop staff.

The large screen displays being introduced at trentbarton provide a new way of visualising and prioritising the workshop activity in the form of an electronic 24 hour sheet. On a large LED screen, a rolling colour-coded tabular chart provides an instant visual view showing defects, job status and staff resource availability.

“Freeway becomes part of the engineer’s toolbox, with visual communication of fleet status and history to help in diagnosis – a sort of doctors report for shop floor,” says Carl Yeaman, Director of Engineering.

The Omnibus Connection

Continued from front page... The integration includes connection to Omnibus clocking-in terminals, allowing workshop staff to clock-in in the same way as drivers and other staff; something that was previously not possible. This provides visibility from within Freeway of the arrival of workshop staff for optimal work allocation.

“For bus operators, the seamless integration of fleet management and operations software represents the Holy Grail in system development; the final missing link in the information chain,” says Patrick Tandy, Managing Director of Freeway. “No longer do operations managers need to call the workshop to find out what’s going on – everything they need to know such as when a vehicle is booked in for a service, what defects need fixing and when, are all visible within Omnibus.”



DVSA Compliance Update



Freeway has been busy developing a variety of handy tools to simplify the management of compliance for the DVSA’s Earned Recognition scheme. The first is an easy to use tracker software that automatically alerts fleet managers to any outstanding compliance issues, keeping check on maintenance records and displaying colour coded alarm status if compliance data is missing. Lists are then generated automatically showing all items that need to be addressed in order to meet the 5 Earned Recognition Key Performance Indicators required by the DVSA.

The second tool is a ‘defect manager’ app that promises to speed workflows and gives finger-tip access to an array of defect-related data, including historical records of previous maintenance work and parts. For use by workshop staff, the app provides real time access to documents about the vehicle being worked on, including parts, manuals and diagnostic sheets. It also allows identification of the parts related to a defect and enables direct issue or request from stores.

During the Earned Recognition Pilot phase of the scheme earlier this year Freeway worked closely with DVSA and the four operators who participated in the trial - Tower Transit, RATP Yellow Buses, CT Plus and Reading Buses.

