

# Use of **facebook** and **twitter** by Public Transport operators and authorities in a time of crisis

Experience from the UK and Ireland

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# UK & Ireland PT Travel Info providers

## Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales)

### Heavy Rail:

- National Rail Enquiry Service
- Train Operating Companies

Air: Airlines and Airports, as elsewhere

Coach: Operators (main is National Express)

### Bus / Light Rail / Trams:

- Operators (in 'normal' operations some bus operators don't get much involved apart from t/ts and special offers)
- Local Authorities (and LA Partnerships) (London – elsewhere only in part)
- Traveline (regional system) is main source normally ('local travel')

Transport Direct overall

## Northern Ireland

Translink for most non-air services

## Ireland

Bus and coach operators: Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Aircoach etc.

Rail: Iarnród Éireann

Light Rail: Luas

Air: as elsewhere

# Crisis timeline

- In Context: followed a very bad winter in 2009-10
- Cold weather from 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov, snowfalls from 24<sup>th</sup> Nov
  - NE and Scotland most affected immediately
  - Temperatures plummeted 26<sup>th</sup> November - 27<sup>th</sup>: Ireland severe
  - North of England very bad
- 2<sup>nd</sup> December: London / SE badly affected
- 9<sup>th</sup> December: thaw
- From 16<sup>th</sup> December: new cold front, followed by (e.g.)
  - Heavy snow
  - Extreme weather warning NI
  - M5 gridlock
  - Coach passengers had to stay overnight at Birmingham
  - Overnight temperatures as low as -8°C in SE
- The UK's December the coldest since 1910
- Thaw began by New Year; slow recovery

# Social Media can give good disruption info

- Personal
    - or at least selective
  - Can be in Real Time (or very near)
  - Allows responses
    - both bilateral and multilateral
  - Harnesses the power of the group
  - Tweets can be very specific and timely
- BUT:**
- Keys are:
    - getting the 'core' information correct to the level of customer expectation
    - having local information control integrated with operational control

# What makes SM viable in disruption?

## Smartphone ownership and use

- OfCom Communications Market Report 2011
  - Huge growth in smartphone numbers in year since last CMR
  - 27% of UK adults now claim to own one
  - Almost half (47%) of all teens (aged 12-15) have a smartphone
  - 59% bought their phone in the past year
  - Volume of data over UK's mobile networks rose by 67% in 2010
  - Activities that were traditionally PC/laptop based are now commonly conducted on a smartphone
  - Social Networking done regularly by 62% of teenage smartphone users
  - Even 40% of adult smartphone users do Social Networking frequently on smartphones

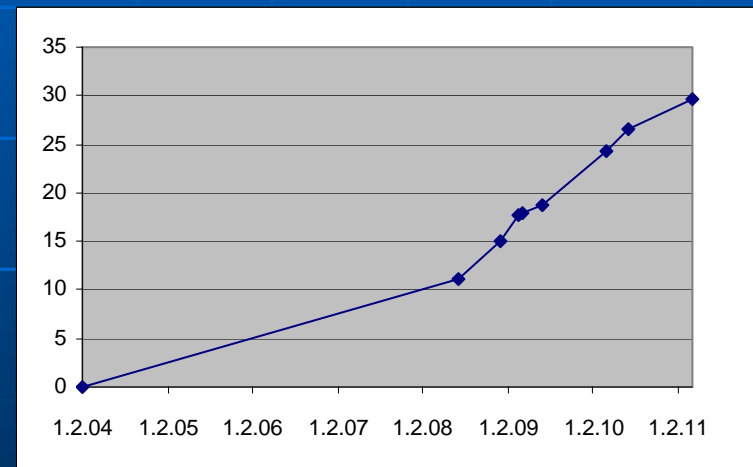
Source: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk>



Facebook's mobile functionality has been continually increasing

- Launched 2006
- Sep 2009: 65 m users worldwide (each month)
- Feb 2010: 100m users worldwide
- Now > 250m users
- Facebook mobile messaging app launched August 2011
- People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users

### UK Facebook users (millions) (total)



Source: Facebook website and blogs: facebook.com

Source: <http://www.nickburcher.com>

Started March 2006

Traffic notoriously hard to measure

Dick Costolo (CEO): Twitter's aim is to "Instantly connect people everywhere to what's most meaningful to them."

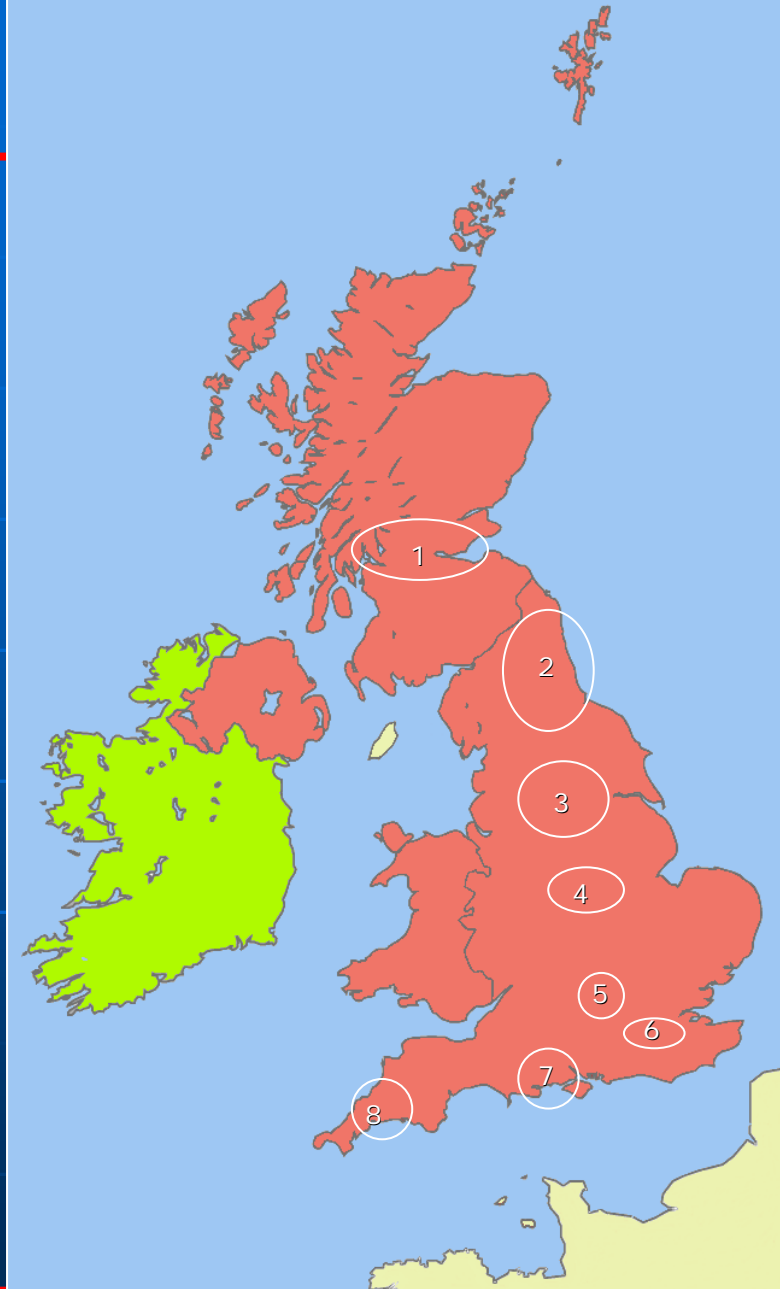
**Twitter a good platform for quick messages about disruption**

40% of tweets originate on a mobile device (*'Guardian'* March 2011)

# UK and Ireland

## Areas most affected where Social Media was used prominently

- 1 Scotland central belt  
Lothian Buses; First Glasgow; Traveline Scotland, Tactran
  - 2 North East  
Go North East; Arriva NE; Traveline NE
  - 3 Yorkshire  
First W, N & SY; Arriva Y; Metro (WYPTE); Transdev
  - 4 Nottingham area  
TrentBarton; Nottingham City Transport
  - 5 Reading  
Reading Transport
  - 6 London and the South East  
Metrobus
  - 7 Wiltshire / Hampshire / Dorset area  
Wilts & Dorset; Southern Vectis
  - 8 South West  
First D&C, Plymouth Citybus
- Plus National Rail universally, plus several TOCs
- Plus Iarnród Éireann



# SM 'disruption' use by different modes

- Rail
  - Direct feeds from National Rail Enquiries
  - But PIDD didn't work fully, plus DARWIN not ready
  - Plus train-planning not fully co-ordinated with pre-planning
  - NRES performed but its components weren't all giving correct info
  - So Twitter feeds (inc. from TOCs) were really valuable
- Air
  - Disruption info (or link) sent from Twitter site which was really there for marketing
    - Birmingham Airport, bmibaby
- Coach
  - National Express
- Bus
  - Varied widely between regions and between operators in the same region
- Authorities (and Authority Partnerships)
  - Generally left to Traveline – response varied greatly

# The 3 types of bus operator response

## 1. Social Media used as essential medium for delivering timely information on disruption

- Generally, those operators that see marketing as a high priority, particularly those which emphasise brands
  - a) Twitter to Facebook: mostly 'push' only
  - b) Only Twitter: mostly include two-way

## 3. Social Media not used



Copyright : Nottingham City Transport


## 2. Social Media used but only as an information supplement: may not be integrated closely with operations


# Go North East during the crisis (1)


- 100 to 200 tweets per day. Nearly all related to disruption
- Link to separate Posts pages on Facebook giving area info
- Q&A on website about Facebook page
- During the crisis Website seemed to be sub-ordinate to Facebook
- Drivers' reports come in from 0530: Facebook page updated from just after 0600, from 3 control centres. Updated regularly as morning picture emerges, and through the day

Go North East's Profile

 **Go North East**  
The following services 17/40/41/333/80/85/86/309/310/19/1/2/318 - Have all now been suspended for the evening due to adverse weather and poor road conditions  
19 December 2010 at 19:02 · Like · Comment

 5 people like this.

 **Elaine Vickers** Av just been out and the roads r terrible so i don't blame u for taking them off people should be more understanding  
19 December 2010 at 19:16 via Mobile · Like ·  11 people

 **Bill Snowden** Bleeding typical ..... my 8hr 30 mins shift finished at 17.30, dipped out again :-(  
19 December 2010 at 19:27 · Like ·  1 person

 **Ian Brown** Alot of people will never understand elaine as they only care for them selves lol Unfort its the world we live in :/ But your right, id like to see them sit in the drivers seat :D  
19 December 2010 at 19:27 · Like ·  4 people

 **John Ingledeu** There is like no snow on the roads or ice really is a joke 1cm of snow and busses are off go north east your services have been a joke the last few months number 1 and 2 late all time I had to wait bloody hour n half for one of your busses one night and half hour late is the norm  
19 December 2010 at 19:31 · Like

 **Samantha Childs** John :1 the only services that are coming off are the Percy main busses  
2: if you get the bus I would assume you don't drive there for how would you know the conditions of the roads wev just come from Wallsend n the roads wer descusting. Where the ice and snow melted on the roads it's now frozen and with the snow laying ontop it's tretorous. :)  
19 December 2010 at 19:35 · Like ·  1 person

 **Elaine Vickers** Exactly i wouldn't like to drive a bus in this weather so wouldn,t expect someone else to put themselves in danger  
19 December 2010 at 19:35 via Mobile · Like ·  1 person

# Go North East (2)

**Q: A lot of people have been attracted to your Facebook page during this bad weather; will you be keeping it going when the weather has cleared?**

**A: Yes we will be continuing to provide updates on our services for customers come snow, rain or shine! Along with our website, this will be a great place to get information on future changes to services, consultation on our plans, fares and ticketing news and special offers, including offers available exclusively to customers using Facebook and Twitter.**

We are looking to increase the number of people involved and times we 'open' on Facebook more permanently in order to give people as good a service as possible on Facebook.

If customers have complaints about specific incidents, we would recommend emailing customer services [customerservices@gonortheast.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@gonortheast.co.uk) or via the [contact us link](#) on the website. To make sure you get the big news on services and special offers, we recommend you register for our [e-newsletter via our website](#).

Extract from website Q&A page. Plus:

*"During severe weather conditions or during other major incidents Facebook is proving an extremely valuable way of keeping customers informed"*

Though shortly after Q&A page was written Facebook went into "meltdown"

5,000 fans Sep 2010

25,000 Dec 2010

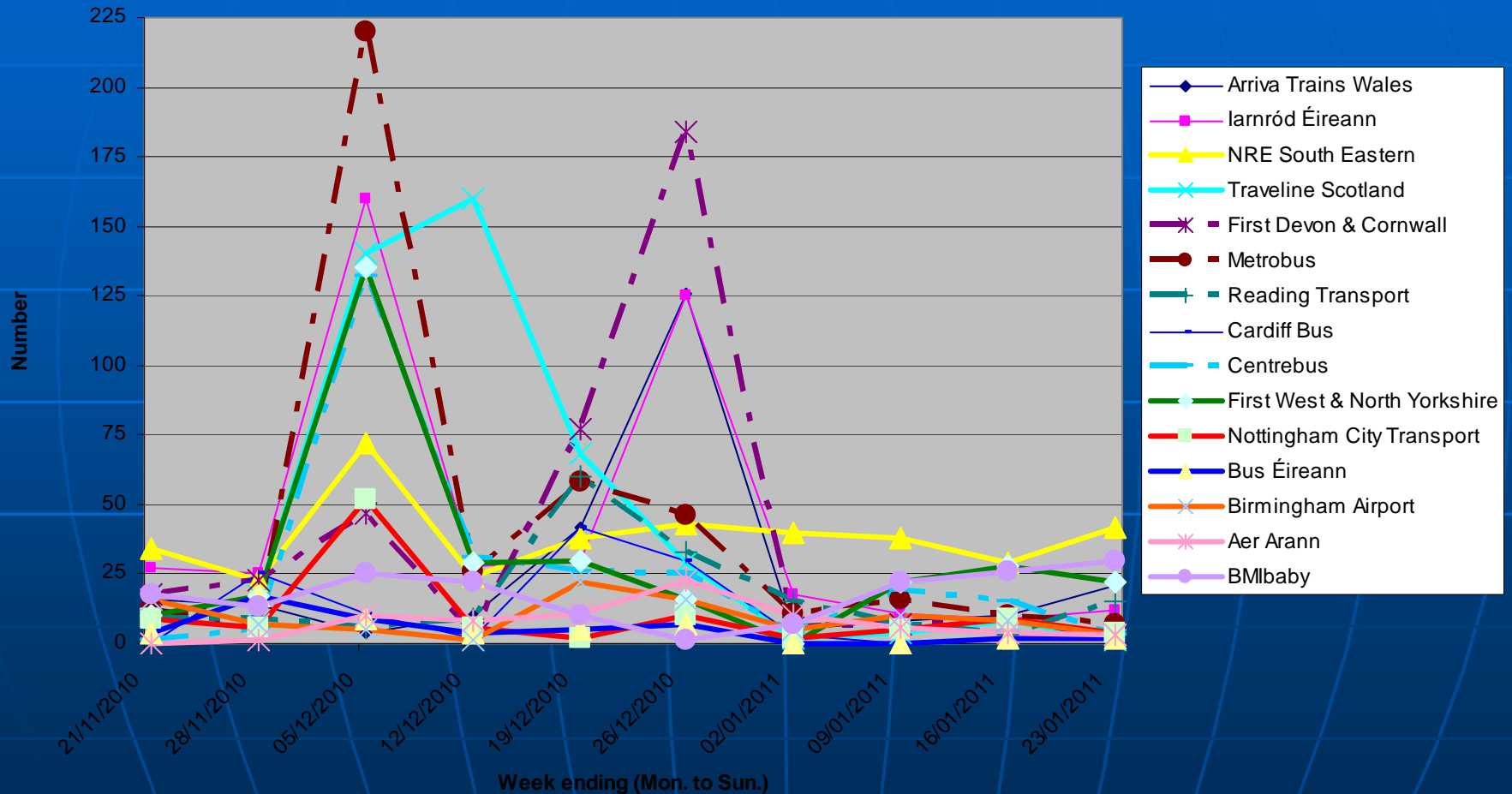
38,000 June 2011

38,500 Aug 2011

Multi-disciplinary team leads Facebook site, plus about 10 staff adding information received from Service Delivery Centres, incl. the MD

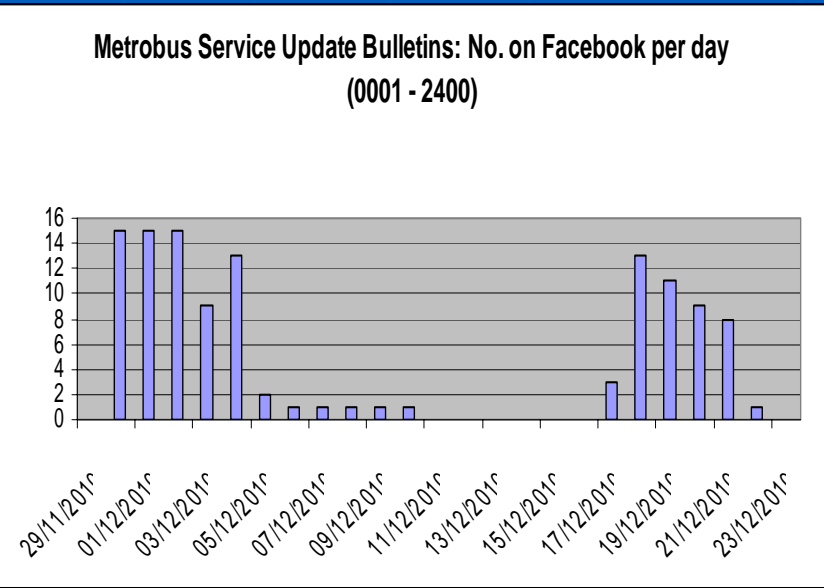
# Twitter sample activity

'Non-personal' Tweets per week



# Global Bus Disruption information posts

Metrobus had used Facebook in Winter 2009-10



Updates were All services at first: then restricted to non-London services

Write a Note

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METROBUS's Notes  
Notes About METROBUS

**Browse Notes**

- Friends' Notes
- Pages' Notes
- My Notes
- My Drafts
- Notes About Me

Jump to Friend or Page

**Subscribe**

- METROBUS's Notes
- Report

**SERVICE UPDATE AT 2133 ON TUESDAY 30TH NOVEMBER**

by METROBUS on Tuesday, November 30, 2010 at 9:33pm

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**NO SERVICE AT PRESENT ON ROUTES 54, 130, 138, 146, 161, 181, 261, 284, 320, 336, 352, 353, 358, 367, 409, 411, 420, 430, 435, 460, 464, 480, 541, 542, B14, R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, T32 & T33**

**THE FOLLOWING SERVICES ARE OPERATING WITH SEVERE DELAYS AND ARE RESTRICTED AS FOLLOWS:**

- Route 1 is unable to serve Tollgate Hill and Creasys Drive, terminating at Broadfield Barton. Also unable to serve Gossops Green (running direct to Bewbush via A23 and Horsham Road)
- Route 2 is unable to serve K2 or the Ifield West loop (still serving Dobbins Place)
- Routes 4 & 5 are unable to serve Pound Hill and from Three Bridges Station are running along Worth Park Avenue to terminate at Ridleys Corner. Also unable to serve Martyrs Avenue, Langley Parade and Langley Drive, operating direct to County Oak via London Road
- Route 10 is unable to serve City Place or Broadfield Barton North (still serving main Barton stop)
- Route 20 is unable to serve City Place, Horley Station Interchange, Creasys Drive, Coachmans Drive Central/South or Broadfield Barton North (but is serving main Broadfield Barton stop)
- Route 64 is operating between Thornton Heath and East Croydon only.
- Route 75 normal route with delays
- Route 98 is operating normal route with delays
- Route 100 is operating between Three Bridges Station and Horley Library only
- Route 119 not serving Corkscrew Hill and Addington Road in West Wickham or Denning Avenue and Warham Road in South Croydon.
- Route 127 is operating between Tooting and Wallington only
- Route 200 is unable to serve City Place, Langley Green, Ifield or Gossops Green (running direct along A23 from London Road to Horsham Road then Bewbush)
- Route 202 is operating between Crystal Palace and Lee Green/Catford only. Buses unable to serve Sydenham Hill, Wells Park Road and Kirkdale in Upper Sydenham.
- Route 273 is unable to serve Cuckfield Road and Willow Way in Hurstpierpoint.
- Route 293 is operating between Morden and North Cheam only
- Route 391 is unable to serve Copthorne Village, Crawley Down, Turners Hill Road or Crawley Down Road (running direct along A264)
- Route 405 not serving Warham Road, Pampisford Road and Russell Hill.
- Route 465 is operating between Dorking and Gibbons Roundabout (south of Leatherhead) only
- Route X26 normal route with delays

**WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHAT LEVEL OF SERVICE WILL OPERATE IN THE MORNING. PLEASE CHECK BACK HERE FOR UPDATES IN THE MORNING**

# More Sample 'conversations'



**Bluestar**

U1c Winn road is not accessible so we are using Lodge Rd  
Also Station Hill towards rail station, but we drop you off the other side  
December 18, 2010 at 7:31am · Like · Comment

View all 5 comments



**Terry Stanton** Hello will there be a service from botley onto southampton  
December 18, 2010 at 8:34am · Like



**Norhidayah Azman** thanks for the update!  
December 18, 2010 at 9:32am · Like

Write a comment...



**Muhammad Ghazzal**

kindly tell me blue star 1( from sou to win ) running??? urgently plzzz  
December 18, 2010 at 7:24am · Like · Comment



**Natalie Gregory**

is the number 18 runni  
December 18, 2010 at 7:21am · Like · Comment



**Mandy Brennan** Nat I did c 1 when I came home from work x  
December 18, 2010 at 7:25am via Facebook Mobile · Like

Write a comment...



**Lizzi Buckingham**

Hiiii is number 2 running through bishopstoke??  
December 18, 2010 at 7:17am via iPhone · Like · Comment

Abigail Whiteford-Allen likes this.



**Bluestar** Yes at present  
December 18, 2010 at 7:19am · Like



**Lizzi Buckingham** Thanks, even trough Stoke park road, because that bit usually gets cancelled :/  
December 18, 2010 at 7:22am · Like

Questions may get answered by others

Not every question gets answered

Source: Bluestar Facebook 'wall'  
December 18th 2010

# Long-term effect on SM strategies

The crisis served to:

- Create a 'pool' of supporters
- Cause consideration of different markets, not just young people
- Showed that young people are a target that can be reached
- Raise perceived value of Social Media outputs (e.g. Twitter RT feeds)
- Encouraged multiple displays: e.g. Twitter display alongside Journey Planners

# Lessons for the next weather crisis

- Integrate information streams / processes
- Don't neglect other media
- Continue to 'nurture' Social Media fans / followers
- Be aware of the next technology consumer-product 'leap': consider how operational and information systems can relate to that
- Be prepared

# Conclusions

- Social Media is a natural tool for giving **bus & local travel** information during Disruption (compared to use on other modes)
  - Bus service disruption has very specific **local** effects
  - Ability of bus operators to give **complete** information by other means is limited
  - Specific Real-time information throughout journey has more 'use' than it has for other modes: mobile-based **SM tools can be used throughout bus journey** (to give and receive)
  - Bus market is generally **younger** than for rail
- But Social Media works best where Operator or Agency has:
  - Commitment to relate to customers
  - A commitment to clear brand marketing

# THANK YOU

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