

COVENTRY DRIVER IS ON TOP OF THE WORLD



CI Kerry Blakeman WMP with NXCOV Master Driver Sammy Khumalo

A Coventry bus driver has beaten off competition from 45,000 employees from across the whole of the National Express Group, including colleagues from Spain, Morocco, Germany, Bahrain and America, to win the Customer Value Award for 2016.

Sammy Khumalo had already won the National Express UK Bus Award for Driver of the Year in February 2016 and was put forward for the global awards, which were presented in London on 27 April 2017.

Managing Director of National Express Coventry, Martin Hancock, said: "We are absolutely thrilled for Sammy and proud of this impressive achievement. Sammy joined National Express in 2013 and after only three years, he'd already gained the additional skills required to become Coventry's first Master Driver.

"During 2016, Sammy also got 12 consecutive "gold" driving scores, measured by the on-board bus telematics. That's a remarkable achievement. Combined with a 100% attendance rate, with zero incidents or customer complaints on his record, Sammy is clearly a real credit to National Express Coventry.

"Sammy always sets himself the highest standards in driving and customer service, and our other drivers frequently seek his advice and guidance."

To achieve just one gold score, a bus driver must demonstrate exceptional vehicle control and fuel efficiency, combined with smooth braking and acceleration. A driver who can achieve this is providing an extremely comfortable ride for his passengers. It is almost unheard of for any driver to maintain that consistency for a 12-month period.

National Express Master Drivers have to pass advanced motorist and customer service qualifications over and above basic driver training, as well as recording exemplary driving scores on the in-bus computers.

Chief Inspector Kerry Blakeman of West Midlands Police, who sits on the Bus Alliance Board, commented: "It's wonderful news that Sammy has won this international customer award. Sammy is a great advocate for National Express and really sets the benchmark for drivers to aspire to in terms of great customer service. The award is thoroughly deserved and is a huge endorsement of Sammy's achievements and the Master Driver programme."

We want to hear from you!

The West Midlands Bus Alliance is comprised of representatives from bus operators, local councils, Highways England and other partners - and we'd be delighted to hear from you.

This is your newsletter, so please let us know about any projects you are involved with so that best practice and successes can be celebrated and shared with all the partners.

Projects could include new facilities for passengers, bus priority measures designed to increase punctuality and reliability, harnessing the latest technology to make integrated travel even more seamless, staff who have achieved great things or gone

above and beyond in their day-to-day duties or new initiatives aimed at increasing patronage.

They could also include innovative ticketing initiatives, cutting-edge solutions to reducing carbon emissions, network reviews and the introduction of new routes.

Please contact Matthew Finn at the West Midlands Combined Authority if you would like any of the excellent work the Bus Alliance is doing included in future editions of the newsletter.



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BUS ALLIANCE



BUS ALLIANCE WELCOMES NEW MAYOR

We would like to extend our congratulations to Andy Street, the first-ever Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority, on his election victory earlier this month.

On behalf of everybody on the West Midlands Bus Alliance Board, along with our Alliance members, I would like to say how much we are looking forward to working with Andy in the months and years ahead.

I am delighted that the new mayor is able to join us at our next Board meeting in July. We are extremely interested in hearing his views and vision for the role of buses going forward, partnership working between operators, local authorities and highways in the region - and continued investment in what is a real success story for the West Midlands.

The Bus Alliance is an award-winning UK first. We have not looked back since its inception as we strive to make buses the sustainable travel mode of choice for residents, commuters and visitors to the region.

We have led the way in providing innovative answers to some of the most pressing problems affecting the wider transport network in the region, including tackling poor air quality in our towns and cities and reversing the downward trend in bus passenger numbers.

The Bus Alliance is recognised by industry peers and policy-makers in Westminster as a great example of best practice and of what can be achieved when all parties pull together in the same direction to improve the bus offer for customers, help reduce congestion and cut harmful emissions.

We believe that the argument for continued investment in the latest, hi-spec, low-emission vehicles, associated infrastructure such as priority bus measures on our highways and partnership working between the public and private sector for the good of both passengers and the environment is clear.

This is a very exciting time for public transport in the West Midlands and buses in particular. We are confident that the mayor will continue to champion the role of buses as a credible vehicle for change.

Linda McCord
Chair, West Midlands Bus Alliance



WEST MIDLANDS BUS GARAGES AMONGST BEST

IN THE UK

The excellence of National Express West Midlands' (NXWM) engineers has been recognised with an Institute of Road Transport Engineers Certification (IRTEC) Award.

The Bus Alliance member's depots in central Birmingham, Acocks Green, Yardley Wood, Bordesley Green, Perry Barr, West Bromwich, Pensnett, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Coventry all qualified for the prestigious accolade.

IRTEC is widely recognised as the leading industry benchmark of transport engineering. It assesses and licenses the safety and competence of technicians who maintain and repair vehicles. Auditors from the Freight Transport Association, which runs the

IRTEC scheme, visited every National Express bus garage and closely examined the work going on there.

John Parker, National Express Engineering Manager at Birmingham Central garage, commented: "I'm really proud of the team. The FTA don't just give these awards away. Our engineers really do have to perform at the highest level to gain this level of recognition. To achieve this award, we are independently assessed in a number of key engineering areas such as tooling, systems, training records and calibration."

In addition, NXWM has been recertified to the new 2015-standard ISO 9001. All eleven of the operator's UK bus garages

- including the 10 West Midlands sites - were judged to meet the internationally recognised standard.

British Standards Institution staff visited several garages to audit systems, processes and communications, examining how vehicle inspections, maintenance, services and MOTs were carried out. They also looked at training records and the measures NXWM use to monitor the performance of bus services.

ISO 9001 standard is based on a number of quality management principles, including a strong customer focus, the motivation of top management, the process approach and continual improvement.

CRIME DOWN DURING CHRISTMAS PERIOD

The Safer Travel Partnership's Christmas crackdown drastically reduced crime on the region's buses. Offences on the bus network in Birmingham City Centre during Operation Snow - when the city's famous market was running - were down 57% compared with 2015.

Birmingham's Christmas market is incredibly popular. It coincides with the start of Christmas shopping and increases the footfall in the city centre, with many visitors using public transport.

As an indication of the size of the crowds, December 2016 saw an

unprecedented increase in passenger footfall at New Street, with 5.9m passengers using the station, compared with 2.5m in December the previous year.

Inspector Rachel Crump of West Midlands Police's Safer Travel Team, an integral member of the Bus Alliance, said: "Between 17 November and 29 December 2016, there were only 10 bus offences in the city centre. Theft and robbery were down, and we saw a big fall in violent offences.

"Operation Snow aimed to prevent crime and reassure shoppers by providing

a high-profile presence at key public transport interchanges, dealing with incidents in a robust and timely manner - nipping trouble in the bud. We always want people to enjoy Birmingham at Christmas safely and peacefully, and these great results show our approach to protecting passengers is working."

Transport for West Midlands, West Midlands Police, British Transport Police and transport operators make up the Safer Travel Partnership, which exists to make public transport in the West Midlands even safer.



John Parker (centre) with (l-r) Josh Brelsforth, Reece Scott, Dan Perigo and Dylan Young



The newly-branded Service 228 at Merry Hill Bus Station

THE RIGHT BRAND OF CUSTOMER SERVICE!

West Midlands Bus Alliance member and operator Hansons has taken on board the thoughts of customers and provided a service to fill a gap in service - helping passengers and saving them money.

The Service 228 was the first ever commercial route the company introduced. Since its introduction it has proved to be a very popular and successful route and the only bus linking Kinver in South Staffordshire to the West Midlands conurbation and a local hospital.

Margaret Hanson, of Hansons, said: "We always listen to our passengers and the people of Kinver were having to take taxis if they needed to go to Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley.

"As the 228 was laying over at Merry Hill Bus Station for some time we decided to look into whether it was feasible to use that time to get to Russells Hall.

"After a few experimental runs at various times of the day we decided to give it a try and so far the service has been very well received."

This is also the first time that Hansons have used specific route branding on their vehicles.

The 228 route has designated buses which only operate between Kinver, Woollaston, Stourbridge, Penfields, Merry Hill and Russell Hall Hospital. And the company's longest serving drivers, who have been on the Service 228 since 1996, are also part of the new initiative.