Saving time, money, and keeping passengers on the move

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Martin Fisher
Motor Transport Manager, Bristol Airport

Located eight miles south of the city of Bristol and serving over eight million passengers a year, Bristol Airport is one of the UK’s fastest growing regional airports. It is also one of the most efficient – the organisation is immensely proud of being named the most punctual in the world in 2014, and in 2018 came joint first for the 5-10 million category at the Airports Council International Awards.

So when it became clear that an opportunity existed to further improve the efficient and safe flow of passengers, the Transport Management team turned to surveillance solutions expert Synectics for help. The opportunity in question? The airport’s bus fleet.

When better bus surveillance means better business

Unlike many airports that are solely served by external bus operators, Bristol Airport runs a fleet of 11 Mercedes-Benz Citaro vehicles, including Citaro G articulated or ‘bendy’ buses, to help transport passengers between their car parks to the terminal efficiently and safely.

The buses feature luggage racking, a driver microphone/speaker system, and LED destination displays with interior display screen showing important passenger information to help ensure a smooth transition from the bus to the car park. They also incorporate Synectics’ surveillance solutions, comprising high-quality recording equipment integrated with telematics and Synectics’ cameras (internal and external), an addition that is making quite a difference.

Martin Fisher, Motor Transport Manager at Bristol Airport, explains: “If we don’t keep our buses moving efficiently around the airport, it causes unnecessary hold-ups and disruption to passengers – that’s bad for business. Having on-vehicle surveillance helps us avoid those scenarios in several ways and influences how we train new drivers.”

Using footage and telematics data from the buses, driver activity, driving style, and exact manoeuvres taken can be analysed to ensure buses are being driven optimally. Martin continues: “They have to operate in pretty confined and busy areas so it’s helpful to be able to really fine-tune performance.”
Improvements by design
For an airport known for its efficiency, “fine-tuning” is also paramount in other areas. Greg Price, Lead Account Manager at Synectics, comments: “Like many of the customers we work with, Bristol Airport approaches vehicle surveillance from a number of angles. It isn’t just about investigating onboard incidents; it’s actually a business tool that can be used to support a wide range of safety, security, and operational objectives. By listening to these needs and gaining a clear understanding of goals, we are able to deploy the best solution – one tailored to exact requirements.”

For Martin, one such operational objective is to understand where infrastructure layout might be further optimised. “By reviewing the footage from external cameras, for example to see why there have been delays or damage to the vehicles, we are able to identify any problem areas or incident hot spots. An example of this is where an existing parking layout might be making life difficult for our bus drivers. Once aware, we can make the necessary changes to make sure everything flows smoothly.”

Saving money by verifying claims
As the fifth busiest airport in the UK outside London, another issue Bristol Airport has is traffic. In addition to receiving local train and bus services from both Bristol and Weston-super-Mare, multiple bus operators from outside the area also have regular routes to the airport from locations including Swansea, Plymouth, and Bath. Combined with taxis, passenger drop offs and collections, and passenger parking, at peak times it is a busy transport hub for the area.

“Before we had the onboard vehicle surveillance”, explains Martin, “we had no visual record of how incidents involving vehicles could have occurred and how to prevent similar incidents in the future. Since commissioning our first surveillance solution from Synectics in 2014, there have been many benefits and it has helped improve both safety and efficiency for both passengers and for our staff and our drivers.”

Supporting airside accuracy and passenger safety
In addition to providing surveillance solutions for Bristol Airport’s landside buses, Synectics has also started to retrofit the airport’s airside buses which operate between the terminal and the aircraft.

A Synectics system has been fitted to the newest of 12 Cobus 3000 buses currently in operation at the airport, to ensure it brings the same benefits as the systems fitted to its landside fleet. As well as aiding the drivers navigating the busy airside road system – for example showing rear view cameras when reverse gear is selected – the cameras also help monitor passenger safety, comfort, and wellbeing, alerting drivers to any problems or medical emergencies whilst on board the bus.
Surveillance support that makes life simpler
In addition to the cost, efficiency, and passenger safety benefits of having bus surveillance, one of the main reasons Bristol Airport continues to work with Synectics is the way support and service are provided.

Martin said: “For each new Citaro we receive, we know Synectics will work with Mercedes and EvoBus GmbH to ensure the solutions we need are factory fitted to specification, but we also know that we can call on the team to retrofit where needed, as is the case with our airside Cobus 3000 vehicles.”

Global airport and transport infrastructure expertise
Synectics works with airports and transport operators around the world to help enhance passenger experience through a wide range of surveillance solutions. From protecting urban public transit systems – rail, bus, and metro – serving major travel hubs, to helping airports streamline, connect, and centralise command and control of security, safety, and operational systems, Synectics’ range of expertise, technology, and global experience means it is able to offer a truly end-to-end service across all transport and infrastructure settings.

Customer view
“We initially chose Synectics because the company has a reputation for quality, flexibility, and the professionalism of its engineers. We’ve never been disappointed in that respect. But the best thing is that they just make our life simpler.

“The team at Synectics really listens to our needs. For example, with such minimal drive times we haven’t yet felt the need to adopt WiFi on our vehicles – which would in fact allow us to transmit data wirelessly – so rather than sell us a solution that doesn’t meet our current needs, Synectics has developed the best possible solution while still making sure we are prepared for the future as our requirements develop. It’s just a great working relationship.”