

New Web site lets you compare bus tickets

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FILE - In this April 14, 2008 file photo, a BoltBus, en route to Philadelphia, is shown parked in New York, waiting for passengers to board. (AP Photo/Daniel Sorid, file)

(AP) -- Intercity bus travel has taken off in the last few years. Now a new Web site makes it easier for riders to find their routes.

BusJunction.com works something like Expedia or Orbitz in the way it helps travelers find their way in a crowded market. But unlike those two popular airfare Web sites, BusJunction doesn't sell tickets; it steers its users right to the online ticketing on the bus companies' home pages. It's an aggregator of data, like Kayak.com, not a booking site.

This is a critical difference, according to Arthur Frommer, the venerable [travel](#) writer and a strong supporter of BusJunction. That way, the company stays independent from all its bus lines, and doesn't favor any bus company at the expense of customer choice, he said.

"They simply perform a journalistic function; they simply tell you what's available," said Frommer in a phone interview. "I find it reassuring that they have no axe to grind, they get no money out of the sale of their ticket."

BusJunction searches 12 premium bus lines, including Megabus, Boltbus, Vamoose, DC2NY, Fung Wah, and Greyhound. According to founder Matthew Keller, the DC-based company serves 31 cities in the East and Midwest and will find users an average ticket price of \$25. The most popular destinations are Washington, Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston.

Before buying tickets, users of www.busjunction.com can see which routes have amenities like onboard Wi-Fi and power outlets. The company focuses on premium lines and steers clear of lesser-known mom-and-pop operations that might not offer reliable service, said Keller.

"We wanted to get the bus lines that offer the most amenities, so that's the ones we're focusing on," said Keller. "There are a handful of (lines) who offer no amenities. There are certain bus lines that have questionable reputations. We're trying to steer our passengers away from those lines just to serve them better."

"Some of these companies are a little scary," agreed Frommer. "You wonder with some of these totally unknown firms whether they have insurance, whether they're hiring qualified bus drivers, whether they're going to go bankrupt."

Bus travel has grown significantly in the last few years after declining for about four decades, according to a recent study from DePaul University. The study said scheduled bus service grew 9 percent between 2007 and 2008.

Much of the traffic is focused on the crowded corridors of the East Coast, where parking is an especially large headache in the major cities, and where many urban dwellers don't own cars.

And it's not hard to see why bus travel is more attractive in the current economic downturn. A quick search of weekday fares on BusJunction yields a price of just \$15 for a one-way, four-hour trip between New York's Penn Station and Boston's South Station. Through Orbitz, round-trip flights between those two cities on the same day cost between \$199 and \$1,134.

"Especially on the East Coast and in the Midwest, where companies like Megabus are flourishing under the banner of low cost travel, BusJunction will become an indispensable tool for comparing the fares," said Cynthia Drescher, an assistant editor at the travel Web site Jaunted.com.

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