

BUS SERVICE MEETING
MONDAY 27TH FEBRUARY 2006 11am
RED LION, WARMINGTON

NOTES

Attendance

Councillor P Padley (Northamptonshire CC), Jonathan Cowe and Andrew Coleman (Northamptonshire CC) James Freeman (Stagecoach in Northants - operating service X4) Philip Norwell (Stagecoach in Peterborough - operating service 13/14) Les Rolfe (representing Phil Hope MP), Mr D Rowell, Mr M Dixon and Mr D Short (representing Warmington Parish Council and 14 Parishioners).

Discussion

All attendees were in possession of a list of the issues to be addressed together with a copy of the bus timetable pertaining to Warmington. Mr Rowell thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Mr Norwell began the discussion by outlining the setup for the provision of the bus services. Stagecoach in Peterborough operate the 13/14 Service whilst Stagecoach in Northamptonshire operate the X4 Service. The X4 may be regarded as the commercial service with the 13/14 service supplementing this service by providing what the Local Authority deems socially necessary. These requirements are put out to tender and financed with revenue from the Local Authority.

Mr Norwell explained that over the years the use of the 42 service (now 13/14) has been diminishing. It has been kept going by linking it in with school contracts. The changes which took place in October 2005 were as a result of discussions as to how best to use this resource. The feeling was that there was little service through Tansor and surrounding villages and that this situation could be improved. The service was therefore spread more thinly to more villages and out to Thrapston with the result that it now operates every 2 hours rather than every hour. The buses were renumbered at the same time to fall into line with new renumbering.

Mr Norwell explained that it was felt that buses were required to arrive in both Oundle and Peterborough around 8.30 am and between 9.30 am and 10 am to cater for people travelling to work, to the doctors, the market and shopping. The 14 service goes by the Doctors in Oundle. Mrs Hall pointed out that it is not always possible to make an appointment to visit the Surgery first thing in the morning.

Mr Dixon asked what money the Local Authority receives to fund extra bus services. Mr Cowe explained that there are two budgets, the traditional budget and the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant (RBSG) which was set up in 1998. Other money has been bid for over time, but this has now all come to an end. Whilst the budgets do go up by inflation the bus company inflation is greater than normal giving a greater divergence in figures over time.

Councillor Padley pointed out that it is one of the aims of the County Council to improve bus transport over time and thus more money should give some hope for the future. Mr Cowe suggested that a village with a population of 2,000+ would expect to receive an hourly bus service whilst villages with a population 500 – 2,000 would expect to receive a

peak 2 hourly service or less together with various off peak services. In this light the service provided to Warmington is good for the size of the village.

Councillor Padley commented that one of the main problems is that not all buses come into the village. The bus does travel through Elton which is smaller and some of the industrial estates in Peterborough. Mr Freeman explained that the X4 service was established in April 2004 as a fast inter urban service running from Peterborough to Milton Keynes. As such it has been very successful with passenger numbers increasing by 88%. The problem is balancing the needs of through passengers with those of local passengers. When the service deviates from the standard it is known that passengers are lost. Mr Freeman commented that in order to provide a deviation through Warmington he would need to be convinced that the deviation made sense. His inclination would be not to turn buses off their route. He agreed, however, to give the matter consideration.

Councillor Padley pointed out that she represents 22 villages of which Warmington is the second largest. Given the size of the village Councillor Padley wondered if a pilot could be considered or some buses routed through the village. Mr Freeman pointed out that to attract and retain passengers it is necessary to keep the frequency of buses the same.

Mr Freeman pointed out that from 3rd April the X4 is to run every hour on a Sunday.

Having listened to the discussion Mr Norwell felt that there is a gap in the schedule which can be filled to alleviate one problem. It is his intention to look at running the 14.55 to Oundle and the 15.10 to Peterborough through Warmington thus adding another service in the afternoon. This service currently turns off at Elton.

Councillor Padley pointed out that this still leaves the problem of the lack of a bus in the evening. Improved lighting was suggested, but although this would help the walk back to the village is still dangerous at night and in bad weather.

Councillor Padley raised the issue of the timetable being changed with very little notice. She suggested that at least three weeks should be given. It is the responsibility of NCC to notify the Parish Council. At this point Mr Dixon read out some of the comments of Mr Du Croz regarding the lack of consultation, lack of notice and timetables. Mr Norwell disputed some of this. He felt that timetables were given out by bus operators. It was agreed that improvements could be made however. Mr Cowe agreed that publicity at bus stops could be improved. There is currently investment in new software which will serve this purpose and it is hoped that a more systematic approach will be adopted. There are currently around 3,000 bus stops around the County. Some timetable cases have been acquired and they will be utilized where possible. Mr Austin pointed out that the bus shelters along the A605 need to be improved.

Mrs Hall asked about the possible use of smaller vehicles. It was pointed out that this is fine until it is necessary to cope with larger numbers of passengers at peak times. Mrs Hall also asked whether a service to Serpentine Green would encourage use. It was suggested that this would only serve to detract from other services.

Mr Norwell mentioned the changes to concessionary fares. From 2nd April it will be possible to obtain free travel after 9.30 am but only within the East Northamptonshire District. Money is provided by Central Government to District Councils and they set their rules as they see fit. ENC are not part of any scheme outside their district. The alternative is for passengers to utilise the token scheme and benefit from half price travel. Councillor Padley suggested that it is the intention of NCC to look at a County Scheme after 1st April.

Mr Rowell pointed out that a survey undertaken by ENC suggested that 75% of people were in favour of bus tokens. Mr Rolfe commented that it should be borne in mind however that the people that they asked were those already using the tokens.

Councillor Padley raised the further issue of the consultation desk at Peterborough closing at 5 pm. Mr Norwell commented that work is being undertaken with Peterborough City Council to extend these hours by looking at various partnerships.

Mrs Hall asked if links between services could be better. It was pointed out that attempts were made to provide the best service possible. Mr Freeman pointed out that the reality is that large numbers of people are required to justify changes and large sums of money are required to implement changes. For its size Warmington currently has a good level of service.

Mr Short commented that he has often seen buses waiting around and asked if it was possible to utilise this time to route the bus around the village. It was explained that 16 minutes is allocated for the bus to travel from Peterborough to Warmington and 6 minutes for the bus to travel from Warmington to Oundle. This allows the necessary leeway for traffic congestion. To deviate from this could cause disruptions to the timetable.

Mrs Davey expressed her view that the X4 service is not a village service. She highlighted the dangers of walking back into the village suggesting that she is very much against her teenagers utilising the service.

Councillor Padley stated that she has 4 points from the meeting to take back to NCC:-

- 1) The lack of buses into the village in the evening. Can a subsidy be found for this?
- 2) Timetable changes. How can they best be managed in the future?
- 3) Concessionary Fares. Can a County wide policy be implemented?
- 4) The approach to the village. Can this be improved by improvements to the footpath and lighting?

Mr Rowell concluded the meeting stating his view that everyone is now much more aware of the views of all parties. Mr Norwell is to provide a further bus service in the afternoons. Mr Freeman is to give consideration to the routing of the X4 service and inform the Parish Council of his findings. Mr Rowell felt that all aspects had been covered with the exception of cleanliness. Mr Norwell pointed out that cleanliness can be a problem with their policy of cleaning the buses mid day. He is an advocate of out stations which he believes would help to address the problems.

The meeting closed at 12.25pm.