

ARRIVA REVIEW GROUP

13th July 2012

PRESENT – Councillors Cossins, L. Hughes, Lawton, Lewis, Long (in the Chair) and E. A. Richmond.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Grundy, Harman and Wright.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Cartwright, Curry, Francis, Hutchinson, B. Jones, Mrs. D. Jones, Lee, D.A. Lyonette, McNab and J. Taylor.

REPRESENTING ARRIVA – Mr. N. Knox, Area Manager, Mr. P. De Santis, Commercial Manager and Mr. J. Rochford, Darlington Depot Manager.

OFFICERS – Mr. Steve Petch, Lead Officer for Place Scrutiny Committee, Mr. Alan Glew, Head of Place, Programmes and Projects, Mrs. Sue Dobson, Sustainable Transport Manager, Miss. G. Hutchinson, Sustainable Transport Officer and Mrs. Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Purpose of the Meeting – To investigate how commercial bus services within the Borough can be improved, in terms of quality and reach of services, following concerns raised by members of the public.

Points Discussed and Considered -

- Sue Dobson, Sustainable Transport Manager, provided an overview of the reasons for the meeting today and in doing so provided clarification on several issues as follows -
 - The concessionary fares scheme was a Statutory National Scheme which was introduced through legislation, it was not possible for eligible pass holders to make a financial contribution, however, they could choose not to show their pass and pay full fare if they wished. The Scheme operates on the basis that the bus operator is no worse and no better off and that no money is lost or gained;
 - Commercial services operate to the providers own timetable, supported services get funding from the Council which will be withdrawn entirely at the end of the year. This has already resulted in reduced evening and Sunday services. Arriva do not run any supported services for the Council anymore but have taken on some of those routes commercially; and
 - Darlington Borough Council has duties under the Highways Act to ensure that traffic keeps moving and within that duty it has an important role to ensure bus services operate to timetable. It is also a requirement of the Transport Act that the Council ensures bus timetable information is made available to the public.
- The Chair advised that prior to the meeting Councillors had been contacted and asked to provide any areas of concern within their Wards relating to Arriva. The responses had been collected and summarised within a table of comments and would form the basis of the meeting. The main issues were summarised as follows :-

- Punctuality;
 - Drivers' attitude;
 - Buses not turning up;
 - Cleanliness and condition of buses;
 - Demand for Bus Station;
 - Buses pulling away from stops when passengers are running to catch them;
 - Access for wheelchair users
 - Fares are too high;
 - Drivers were changing route without notice;
 - Buses were not running to timetable at peak times;
 - Passengers were being left at bus stops;
 - Engines were not switched off when buses were stationary; and
 - Suggestions for re-routing of some services.
- Consideration was then given to individual Members' concerns with Arriva responding as appropriate;
 - Councillor Cartwright provided evidence for the retention of a bus service for Mayfair/Laburnum/Glebe Road in Harrowgate Hill Ward and proposed that a diversion could be made every one or two hours in order to meet the needs of people living in the Ward. She also stated that at a public meeting with Arriva assurances were given that the service would be reviewed and requested an updated position;
 - Mr. Knox advised the Group that all bus networks were in the process of being looked at with Northumberland and Teesside networks being the latest. Darlington's network would be looked at early next year but it was hoped that any urgent issues could be addressed sooner. The Commercial team had been strengthened and the timetabling was currently being looked at for various areas. Arriva confirmed that the comments received at today's meeting were a useful start to planning the review, but that urgent areas of concern could be investigated sooner, e.g. Firthmoor, early morning service had been reinstated by Arriva following withdrawal of funding by Darlington Borough Council for that service;
 - Councillor Copeland raised concerns relating to the attitude and lack of assistance of some drivers towards the elderly and disabled making independent travel very difficult for these people;
 - Mr. Rochford stated he had attended a meeting of the Darlington Learning Disability Partnership Board meeting to ascertain what was working and what was not. He also

advised that training had been undertaken by all Arriva employees and meetings were held to achieve improved services. An electronic copy of the Training Schedule could be supplied to the Group if required. Mr. Rochford also advised that individual instances of poor driver behaviour were currently being dealt with by internal processes;

- Following a question regarding the proportion of complaints to journeys the Group were advised that staff attitude accounted for eight per cent of complaints and that the level of Arriva North East complaints had dropped over the last twelve months. Concerns around reliability and punctuality were classed as complaints and subsequently monitored via a system, which every driver was logged into, called RESPOND which could analyse the driver, route, speed etc . It was also confirmed that compliments are also received and these are acknowledged at the Make a Difference Awards for staff;
- Sue Dobson advised the Group that Officers had been invited to observe driver training on disability awareness in 2010 which was also attended by DAD, GOLD and the Youth MP. The training was very interesting and highlighted some of the issues tackled by Arriva to improve passenger satisfaction;
- Councillor Crudass advised the Group that most of the rural residents of Darlington were served by longer distance core routes and that the comments he received were all fairly contented;
- Councillor Francis made some general comments regarding the service generally being poor within Darlington, the attitude of drivers; the inconvenience of having to catch four buses to get from Firthmoor to North Road Morrisons, cleanliness of the buses and the overall general condition of buses. All these issues were addressed during a PowerPoint presentation later in the meeting;
- Councillor Hutchinson made reference to complaints received following removal of Service 10 at peak times without notice and the complete removal of Service 6/6a without any consultation following removal of subsidy. General issues regarding attitude, cleanliness of buses and punctuality were also raised;
- Arriva's representatives advised the Group that, following removal of subsidy, an analysis of several services had been undertaken to determine if they could continue commercially which had resulted in timetable changes. Arriva also acknowledged the point in relation to lack of consultation and advised that as the support had been withdrawn the service had to be withdrawn. Arriva's representatives recognised that more consultation was required so that problems could be resolved and ideas explored;
- Councillor Johnson requested consideration of re-routing Service 75 or 76 along Salutation Road to compensate for the withdrawal of Service 77;
- Mr. Rochford informed the Group that there were several planned time-trials due to take place over the coming weeks to assess the impact on timetables, punctuality etc. This would explore the effect over several peak times;
- Councillor D.A. Lyonette suggested that due to the withdrawal of Service 16 the re-routing of Service 75 could alleviate any problems and was advised that that would form a bigger review of the network dependant on the outcome of the time trials;

- Following a question by Councillor B. Jones the Group were informed that a new generation ticket machine had been introduced which marked all trips on a smart card reader. The machine could be manually overridden if not working properly;
- Councillor B. Jones advised the Group that he disagreed with Arriva that some of the Services had been withdrawn due to low numbers as Service 5A was the only service for the village of Brafferton and was heavily relied upon by the residents. He suggested that a 0.4 mile diversion could be made through Brafferton to reinstate the service. He also questioned why Service 6 had to always operate on a clockwise route and if there was the capacity to operate a counter-clockwise service;
- Arriva accepted that there could be discrepancies in the figures of passengers as the generation ticket machine assumed that if there were seven passengers going one way there would be seven returning and would not allow for anomalies, for example, if a passenger had got a lift in one direction. Arriva also stated that the University of Leeds Transport Studies had, at the request of the Government, undergone a survey the highlighted the importance of building a strength of busy buses. An evaluation exercise was being undertaken with Durham County Council on schemes/services especially the Darlington – North Road – Aycliffe – Durham corridor and it was envisaged that buses would be more evenly spaced along this route. It was a commercial judgement that core services should not be diverted off the main road. It was also confirmed that the clockwise route of Service 6 would be looked at and that staff would be told that passengers could remain on the bus;
- Councillor B. Jones further asked if Service X66 – Darlington- Stockton – Middlesbrough could divert through Sadberge off the A66 as a bus turning point had been built to accommodate a bus at Sadberge. Arriva representatives advised that this could be looked at as it would appear that Service X66 was a local bus for Darlington as well as a link to Middlesbrough;
- Councillor Lawton raised several areas of concern for North Road Ward which included only one bus per hour between 10.00am and 6.00pm, lack of a bus service on evenings and Sundays, local services being withdrawn and Darlington residents having to use buses destined for Middlesbrough, Bishop Auckland and Durham, the GPS system in bus shelters not working properly, poor publicity around changes to bus services, random dropping off points, Service 14 and 14A being unreliable, confusion on Prebend Row due to all buses arriving at once, the area west of North Road having no services in the evenings and on Sundays, difficulties encountered by the elderly when boarding and disembarking from Service X66 due to it being a coach service and provision of a larger bus shelter outside Morrisons on North Road. Councillor Lawton also asked why buses do not allow passengers heading for North Road to board at Stands A, B and C;
- Arriva advised that there were very few services in the United Kingdom that were run on evenings and Sundays as they were not commercially viable, the Durham area review would focus on the North Road corridor and it was envisaged that many of the problems highlighted would be addressed with buses operating every seven to eight minutes. It was essential to get the timings of buses right to ensure punctuality;
- Councillor Lee highlighted several areas of concern around punctuality, buses not turning up resulting in passengers suffering, driver attitude, cleanliness of buses and passengers

being left at bus stops in rural areas of the Borough.

- Ms. G. Hutchinson advised the Group that the GPS display was to be changed to allow for an additional rolling line that would describe the difference between real time and timetabled times and would show when the next bus was due. A message could also be displayed when buses were not operating due to roadworks and this would be investigated. It was also stated that displays operated in real time unless the bus was not fitted with the correct equipment. Arriva requested specific dates and times so that Councillor Lee's concerns could be addressed. With regard to driver attitude Arriva accepted that a small percentage of drivers needed re-training and that the majority of them do a good job. When a complaint is lodged Arriva can determine the driver and take appropriate action. With regards to cleanliness of buses the Group were advised that the buses are cleaned by cleaning contractors and begin their day in pristine condition. It is the passengers who litter and spoil the buses during the day and if drivers were to clean buses it would have an impact on punctuality. It was highlighted that it was the passengers that needed to be educated if they wished to travel on a clean bus. With regard to engines constantly running when buses are stationary the Group were informed that a large percentage of vehicles have an automatic shut off which is activated after a period of three minutes. There was an eco-system on vehicles which could be analysed and the statistics could be used to determine how buses were being driven, the bottom ten per cent of staff are interviewed to ensure improvements are made;
- Councillor Hutchinson raised concerns around the lack of service in Albert Hill area due to road works being undertaken. However it was accepted that it was physically impossible for Arriva to provide the service at such short notice of road works being undertaken in the area. Ms. Dobson advised that Officers work hard to keep the roads open and use traffic lights where possible; however on this occasion the instruction was to close the road completely. Problems would be caused if buses were to operate in smaller streets therefore it was decided to stop the service on this occasion;
- Councillor Mrs. D. Jones thanked Arriva for reinstating the Middleton St. George service till 8.00pm and requested that the service be operated in a two way loop as elderly residents in Middleton One Row had difficulty walking great distances whilst carrying shopping. Councillor Mrs. Jones also stated that drivers stopped for periods up to ten minutes at various locations and that it would be better to reinstate the service rather than have the bus standing with its engine running;
- Arriva apologised to Councillor Mrs. Jones for not responding sooner and stated that her concerns would be investigated; and
- Following a request for a contact within Arriva to pass any comments it was agreed that Sue Dobson and Gill Hutchinson would forward all comments to Arriva in one e-mail rather than Arriva being bombarded with many single e-mails.

Following the detailed discussion noted above Arriva showed a PowerPoint presentation which highlighted the problems reported, Darlington's lost mileage, the results of a satisfactory survey on Darlington's Depot, newer and refurbished buses to be introduced to the fleet, promotional events undertaken by Arriva, customer and stakeholder engagement, cleaning of buses and the pilot programme 'Polish and Promote' which would coincide with North Road improvements, driver attitude and Darlington customer comments.

Sue Dobson showed a further PowerPoint presentation highlighting Darlington Council's investment in the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements (TVBNI), which included ongoing improvement works at North Road, the Inner Ring Road and Yarm Road/McMullen Road roundabout. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) project 'Local Motion' was explained, which included specific marketing of public transport, Individualised Targeted Marketing (ITM) work which targeted various groups of people in order to encourage them to use public transport, the possible use of smart phones to promote events, new services and vehicles, training for drivers and a transition event for pupils entering secondary school which taught them how to use a bus, provision of bus information and the monitoring of services and customer satisfaction.

Funded through the LTP and TVBNI there were also on-going bus stop improvements which included raised kerbs, dropped kerbs, bus shelters, conversion of hail and ride and information provided at bus stops which was updated overnight if there was a service change.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Group be extended to representatives of Arriva for their frank and honest responses.

(b) That this Group looks forward to improved partnership working with Arriva.