

MINUTES OF THE LOCAL BUS SERVICES TASK & FINISH GROUP

WEDNESDAY 1ST MARCH 2012 AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Foord (Chair), Councillors Hinkley, Hopkins, Hussain and Rivers.

LBC SUPPORT OFFICERS / ADVISORS:

Keith Dove	- Transportation and Regulation Service Manager, LBC
Farah Ismail	- Consultation Officer
Matt Hussey	- Democracy and Scrutiny Officer, LBC

PUBLIC:

None

ACTION

6. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Moles.

7. MINUTES OF 15TH FEBRUARY 2012 (REF: 2)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2012 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. EVIDENCE GATHERING (REF: 5)

Keith Dove, Transportation and Regulation Service Manager gave a presentation in regards to his service area's involvement with Local Bus Services in Luton.

Members were informed that Transport Strategy service covered three main areas of major transport projects, highway implications of planning developments and transportation strategy sustainability. Key projects currently under construction were the Luton Dunstable Busway and the new interchange outside of the central railway station. Also, it was planned to build a travel information hub next to the interchange next year on the Bute Street car park site and the southern end of Station Road. He added that as part of the Town Centre Transport Scheme, Hucklesby Way would be extended under the station station Car Park through to the junction with Hitchin Road, continuing via an improved Crescent Road to Crawley Road and St. Mary's. The intention would be to sever Guildford Street as there was a conflict between pedestrians and cars.

He went on to say that the Busway would have several benefits for the remainder of local bus services in that it would bring to the town:

- Real time passenger information
- CCT and Help Points at bus stops
- Level boarding
- Travel plans and initiatives
- Digital Voice Announcements
- Smart Cards

By introducing these measures, service standards would be improved. Also bus users would be able to have improved travel to major sites in Luton (e.g. Power Court and Napier Park mixed use sites) as well as other entertainment and educational facilities within the wider conurbation.

However, by providing an improved transport infrastructure, there was a danger that residents might not use it. Therefore, the Council were looking at a number of initiatives over the next 2-3 years funded by Government Grants (the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Better Bus Fund) to encourage people to use the local bus services. Low levels of public transport use was more prevalent in more affluent areas of the town, although these were well served by public transport. To encourage usage, 24,500 households would be contacted annually to answer questions on journeys and plan how these could be made using more sustainable travel such as the bus.

Councillor Hopkins enquired about the Hip Hop ticket which could be used on the main bus services in the town.

Keith Dove replied that there was an issue with the pricing structure in that when a passenger purchased a ticket, that bus company would receive the fare and not those of other operators that the passenger might use subsequently for the remainder of their journey. Unfortunately, because of this Grant Palmer had withdrawn from the scheme as it was not financially viable to them. However, Grant Palmer would come back into the scheme once Smart Cards were introduced as profits from fares could easily be proportioned to each bus company.

He went on to say that traditionally, Councils were not very good at advertising schemes and initiatives to customers but were planning to market these more readily using Government Revenue Funding.

Farah Ismail enquired if the Council had access to local bus companies' satisfaction surveys.

The Transportation and Regulation Service Manager replied that operators would provide the Council with information if requested.

The Democracy and Scrutiny Officer suggested that outcomes of the customer satisfaction surveys be requested when each bus operator was invited to attend the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Hinkley raised concern that people working in out of town centre locations such as industrial estates and business parks were not well catered for

with bus services.

The Transportation and Regulation Service Manager suggested that companies could pool together their resources and commission a bus to bring their employees to work. He added that Council could act as broker between the employer and the bus operators.

Councillor Rivers commented that the Council were in a 'chicken and egg' situation in that poor traffic flow has a knock on effect for bus services. If traffic flow were improved buses would also benefit.

The Transportation and Regulation Service Manager informed Members that the Councils congestion strategy identified three main congested corridors into the town centre; the Luton Dunstable Corridor, the A6 corridor from North Luton and the A505 corridor from East Luton. Improvements were being focused on these three areas, although there were limited opportunities to introduce further bus priority measures to increase the reliability of local bus services.

Resolved: That the Report (Ref: 5) be noted.

9. CONSULTATION NEEDS ANALYSIS (REF: 6)

Farah Ismail, Consultation Officer informed Members that there had already been several consultation exercises undertaken that incorporated local bus services. She went on to say that the Luton Citizens Panel, which had a membership of 1000 residents, had conducted a survey in September 2011 and had had a 50% response rate. The survey had shown that only 8% of residents who answered the question were over 65 years of age and used the bus mainly for shopping trips.

The survey had also shown that the majority of residents were satisfied with bus services provided in Luton, with satisfaction rates ranging from 57% to 78%. This was particularly the case with the number of stops, (78%), ease of getting on/off (78%) and frequency (74%). Residents were least satisfied with the accuracy (59%) and amount of information (57%).

However, evidence from other consultations had shown a dissatisfaction rate of one in five. Dissatisfaction was mostly found from children and young people including students, the 25 to 44 age group and residents from deprived areas. The majority of complaints surrounded the cost of travel and the lack of information in regards to information and discounts available to passengers.

Members were informed that three different focus groups had been held to discuss sustainable transport with groups for older people, 16 to 20 year olds and a mid range group. Outcomes of the focus groups had shown the older users were satisfied with services provided, but that younger aged users were dissatisfied, although all user groups felt that the buses themselves needed improvement.

Consultation with younger users, who were dependent on bus travel, had shown that if better and more affordable services were provided they would use buses more frequently. Young people had also suggested that better services should be provided in periphery areas of the town, and that electronic information should be

used at all stops in the town.

The Consultation Officer informed Members that a recent Employees Survey in regards to Work Place Travel had shown that not many employees used the bus, but that 50% used alternative means of sustainable transport, for example walking and cycling. Respondents had also indicated that if fares were cheaper they would use buses more frequently.

She went on to suggest that the Task and Finish Group utilise the Council consultation template, and that this would be circulated to Members.

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She also suggested that Ethics Panels could also be used for any consultation the Group wished to carry out. Other Groups that should be consulted with included disabled users and that the Group needed to consider what issues they wanted to explore and tailor five key questions to specific groups.

In regards to travel concessions available to bus users, many people were not aware of these. Therefore the Group needed to look at how users could be informed of offers, schemes etc.

She added that the employees Work Place Travel survey needed further exploration in order to ascertain how bus usage could be improved.

Resolved: That the Report (Ref: 6) be noted

4. PROJECT MANAGING THE REVIEW/WORK PROGRAMME (REFS: 7 & 8)

Resolved: The Local Bus Services Review Task & Finish Group requested the following:

- Grant Palmer and Centrebus be invited to the next meeting.
- That Arriva be invited to attend the Task and Finish Group on 2nd April 2012.
- That Members inform the Democracy & Scrutiny Officer of suggested questions to be asked during evidence gathering.
- That Councillors Hinkley and Hussain attend the Luton Senior Peoples Forum in order to gather evidence from older users of local bus services.
- That Councillor Hinkley and the Democracy and Scrutiny consult with disabled users and the Disability Resource Centre in regards to disabled users of local bus services.

5. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (REF: 8)

That the Task and Finish Group meet at 6.00pm on the following dates:

- 20th March 2012

- 2nd April 2012
- 16th April 2012
- 1st May 2012
- 17th May 2012

NOTE: THE MEETING ENDED AT 7.30 PM