

Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2013 at 7.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor Tallack (Chair)  
Councillors Hawthorn, Legg, D McCall, I McCall, McKenzie, Wallis and Wharton

**Officers:** N Fenwick (Assistant Director [Planning and Transport]), B Matthews (Head of Transportation Services), A Coleman (Passenger Transport Manager), C Jarman (Senior Passenger Transport Officer) and D Proctor (Technical Manager)

**Apology:** Councillor Klein

**Also Present:** Councillor Bint, N Small (Stagecoach), P Morgan (Arriva) S Winston (Arriva), L McCord (Passenger Focus), K Wilson (Bus Users Group) P Ballantyne (Bus User Group), D Worley (Bus User Group), V McPake (Bus User Group), A Francis (Bus User Group) and 1 member of the public

**ET07 MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 July 2013 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**ET08 ACHIEVING SUCCESSFUL BUS SERVICES IN MILTON KEYNES**

The Committee received a presentation from the Passenger Transport Manger which covered the following points:

- (a) current legislation;
- (b) recommendations from the Bus Strategy Review Group which took place in 2002;
- (c) the demographic and growth of bus patronage in Milton Keynes;
- (d) the results of the recent bus passenger survey undertaken by Passenger Focus;
- (e) subsidised bus services and concessionary fares;
- (f) the Better Bus Area Project;
- (g) the Electric Bus Project; and
- (h) Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI).

The Committee then received a summary of the findings of the recent bus survey in Milton Keynes from the representative of

Passenger Focus, which also addressed how this compared with other unitary authorities.

The representative of Passenger Focus suggested that the main areas for customer concern tended to be related to value for money, punctuality and reliability. She considered that for those areas where punctuality was good, customers then took views on other aspects of the service, for example, concerns over personal safety, which could be seen as a barrier for women and vulnerable groups using the service.

The Passenger Focus representative reported that punctuality was given a high priority in those areas which scored highly in the survey. Therefore it was important to consider what prevented buses from being punctual, which could include issues around parking and a lack of enforcement.

The Passenger Focus representative explained that 'drivers' of consumer dissatisfaction included how delays were dealt with, in particular how customers were kept informed and advised of the potential onward journey time. Therefore, if the Council was able to identify the factors of dissatisfaction it might assist with benchmarking against other authorities and allow improvements to be identified.

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Development Manager for Stagecoach which detailed the following points:

- (a) the areas serviced by Stagecoach and staffing levels;
- (b) a summary of the patronage;
- (c) how the Passenger Focus survey assisted with improving the service;
- (d) the different physical infrastructures of Oxford and Milton Keynes and how this resulted in the differing service options available to each authority and the way planning policies could be used to assist with bus services;
- (e) the impact of new developments and the need for positive planning which allowed sustainable transport solutions;
- (f) the conditions needed for growth and investment in bus travel;
- (g) the importance of partnership working and a commitment to provide a high quality service; and
- (h) the importance of staff training, a well maintained fleet and reliability of the service.

The Committee received a presentation from the representative for Arriva which detailed the following points:

- (a) the changes to the services offered by Arriva over past few years and the issues it had faced;
- (b) the importance of partnership working, in particular with the Council;
- (c) the branding and marketing strategies for the company;
- (d) the internal re-structuring which had taken place within the management team;
- (e) the ability of the company to re-invest as profit was being made;
- (f) growth in passengers numbers over the past three years;
- (g) areas for improvement, which were informed by the Passenger Focus survey, along with the companies own annual survey, which included the punctuality of service, smoothness of the journey and information at bus stops;
- (h) ongoing initiatives, which included Real Time Passenger Information, the establishment of an Integrated Control Centre to monitor and manage performance and a driver coaching programme,
- (i) other initiatives being introduced included new forms of ticket issuing, e.g. from smart phones; the electric bus projects and the introduction of a night bus; and
- (j) the standard procedure for addressing breakdowns.

The representatives from the Bus Users Group outlined the following main areas of concern for passengers:

- (a) the condition of the buses;
- (b) punctuality and delays;
- (c) ride comfort;
- (d) the parking of cars and lack of enforcement of parking, in particular at Station Square;
- (e) the location and maintenance of bus stops;
- (f) the lack of priority for buses; and
- (g) discrepancies in the information displayed by the Real Time Passenger Information system and bus arrival times.

The Bus Users Group representatives outlined the following initiatives, which in their view, might lead to improvements:

- (a) Increased bus priority measures, including phasing of traffic lights, in particular at the area around StadiumMK;
- (b) a long term programme of investment;
- (c) a review of the Bus Strategy;

- (d) the lengthening of lay-bys to allow buses to accelerate longer before joining the road;
- (e) reduced speed on grid roads;
- (f) measures to address the fear of crime by cutting back vegetation near bus stops and along Redways; and
- (g) improving the interchange at the hospital.

The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport who highlighted the areas of work which were taking place and indicated that work was being undertaken by officers to identify issues and create solutions. The Cabinet Member highlighted that where it was relatively simple to reduce car journeys by increasing bus usage, the need to make changes at junctions and other road improvements could potentially receive a lower priority than areas where greater effort was needed to increase bus usage, thus allowing the limited financial resources available to be targeted.

The Cabinet member also raised the point that the current bus timetable was not as user friendly as it might be and, as an important piece of marketing material for the bus service, it was important to address this. The Cabinet Member also acknowledged that schemes such as traffic light phasing, improved interchanges for buses and improvements to ticketing arrangements,, along with making bus journeys more appealing, and changing the perception of motorists to encourage greater bus usage were all positive actions which could be made to improve the services delivered in Milton Keynes.

In response to questions from Members, the Committee noted the following points from the witnesses:

- (a) that the main areas of customer dissatisfaction were a lack of punctuality, reliability and also the relationship between drivers and passengers;
- (b) that there was an acknowledgement that there needed to be a balance between car users and the bus services and that it was important that the two operated successfully together;
- (c) that planning policy might be able to assist with difficulties experienced by buses on some housing estates in particular;
- (d) that there might be an option for developers to make additional contributions to meet new services needs as Milton Keynes expanded;
- (e) that problems with services might have prevented some people accessing employment opportunities, e.g. being late for interviews, or late for work due to late buses;
- (f) that low car ownership / limited access to a car tended to be concentrated on particular estates, so increasing the reliance on public transport;

- (g) that there might be areas where partnership working between the Council, utility companies and bus companies could be improved with regard to the planning of road works to reduce disruption;
- (h) that bus services to areas which had low population density might need additional subsidies to make them viable;
- (i) that the Council could:
  - (i) identify hotspot areas for delays
  - (ii) enable a consistent time from Milton Keynes train station to the Food Centre
  - (iii) consider how traffic lights were phased
  - (iv) look at junctions where there were regular delays; and
  - (v) look at areas where parking problems were causing delays to buses.
- (j) that in some areas it was not physically possible to make any drastic changes to road layouts which would improve services; and
- (k) that there were some bus priority measures in place, but there was further scope for improvement.

The Chair thanked the witnesses for their contributions during the meeting.

**RESOLVED -**

That Cabinet works with bus companies to identify points where traffic light phasing and junctions could be improved and that this is taken into account during the budget setting process.

**ET09**

**REFERRAL FROM CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE**

At its meeting on 23 July 2013, the Corporate Affairs and Performance Select Committee, having considered the Corporate Performance Report, requested this Select Committee to consider a number of Performance Indicators, which fell within the Committee's area of scrutiny responsibility, where performance had consistently not met targets, or data was not available, specifically indicators:

- (a) NI 193 The proportion of Municipal waste land filled;
- (b) NI 168 Principal roads where maintenance should be considered;
- (c) NI 169 Percentage of Non Principal roads where maintenance should be considered (local authority B and C roads surveyed); and

- (d) BV 224b Percentage of the unclassified road network where structural maintenance should be considered.

With regard to indicator NI 193 (Municipal Waste Landfill), it was noted that performance was below target as a result of a delay in the commissioning of the residual waste treatment plant at Bletchley Landfill Site, which, under the current interim residual treatment waste contract, had been due to be in place by October 2012. However, it was noted that the plant was not commissioned until April 2013, due to ongoing operational issues which were being addressed with the Council's contractor and appropriate actions were being taken to bring the plant back on programme. It was anticipated that the Plant would result in an increased diversion in waste from landfill and achievement of the target performance during 2013/14.

With regard to NI 168, NI 169 and BV 224b it was reported that officers had indicated that the data for inclusion could only be prepared following a software upgrade on the 'Confirm' System. Once the software has been upgraded officers would be able to instruct contractors to complete the data review and feed the information into the system. It was hoped that the upgrade would be received in the next couple of weeks and then data included to show how performance compared to targets set.

**ET10**

#### **MAJOR EVENT MANAGEMENT REVIEW GROUP**

It was reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting held on 2 September 2013, approved the setting up and proposed scope of a Major Event Management Review Group. It was noted that the scope of the Review Group would tie in with this Select Committee's work programme theme of 'Visiting MK'.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 22:08 PM