

## Talking Together Transport Listening Event

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008

Chair: Steve Rose, Chief Executive of the Darlington Partnership

Panel Members:

Gordon Pybus, Darlington Association on Disability (DAD)

Simon Houldsworth, Transport Policy Manager, DBC (Darlington Borough Council)

John Anderson, Assistant Director, Chief Executive's Dept, DBC

Mark Ellis, Arriva

Dave Morrison, Licensing Officer, DBC

### Question 1

Visually Impaired people find it difficult to identify if a bus is coming and if it's the bus they want. Often they miss buses that fly past and don't stop. Are there any developments in the pipeline for Darlington to have talking bus stops or other IT support to help visually impaired people know that their bus is coming? How can someone who can't see be expected to know when his/her bus has arrived if it can't stop at the correct bus stand? This particularly applies to the stands outside Waterstones and Marks & Spencers where numerous buses are pulling in and out constantly. I find myself having to walk up and down as buses arrive and exit stands to check service numbers.

### Response to question 1

Simon Houldsworth: The Council has looked at talking bus stops. They can be an irritation to their neighbours. There are ones which only talk when a person who needs it is there. We are also looking at a low-tech trial in Sunderland involving a Braille number board that users can hold out.

Mark Ellis: Overcrowding at bus stops needs to be looked at and Arriva are going to look at tweaking some of bus times and hope to specifically address this in April.

Gordon Pybus: People need to know what buses go from each stop especially if the route is not just for a single bus. Drivers need to be aware that a visually impaired person may be every bus stop. Service in transport is a duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Buses are one of few options open to visually impaired people. They can't get the full benefit of hail and ride.

Suggestions from audience:

- Pad with 3 numbers to hold up
- Buses could slow down at the bus stop
- Use a mobile phone technology
- In London buses talk at each stop e.g. 'this is the 54 for Croydon'

Mark Ellis: There is a potential opportunity to find out which of these suggestions work best. Arriva and Gold will pursue. If we learn of a problem with a driver, they are suitably instructed.

### Question 2

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Why can't all of the Pelican Crossings in the town bleep when the green man comes on? The cone, below the button that you press when you want to cross the road is a complete and utter waste of time. By the time one feels for this cone and finally finds it, the green man might have turned back to red. Bring back the bleeps! Every other town in the UK has them, so why should Darlington be any different?

Response to question 2

Simon Houldsworth: There are several issues: safety – the Council feels it is too easy to not pay regard for any traffic that's around and just walk out when the bleep goes, and there are many crossings especially in the town centre, which have 2 sections (like on the ring road) and the Council is worried there is confusion about which bleep is sounding. Rotating cones and rotating tubes are fitted as standard. DBC can offer training if a member of the public needs it. Some authorities do provide bleepers but we do it this way in Darlington for reasons of safety and avoiding confusion, and to issue a positive command. Colleagues have spent a lot of time looking into this.

Gordon Pybus: it is quite a few years ago since we had bleepers. There was opposition from shops and residents getting the beeping noise all the time. There was inconsistency and at a meeting in Darlington a few years ago people said they wanted consistency. At the time the views of people were taken on board. It can be looked at again if people's views have changed.

Question 3

Can a list of what routes accessible buses run on and at what times be produced so that we know to plan our journeys?

Response to question 3

Mark Ellis: There is one on the Local Motion website. If there is a problem with a bus, we can't always guarantee that a bus will be low floor. We have made a commitment that all buses in Darlington will be low floor by 2011.

Simon Houldsworth: It is possibly time to have a look again at the information given on bus stops. There may need to be a decision among bus users about what you need to know on your bus stop.

Gordon Pybus: There is always an issue if people are expecting an accessible bus and one doesn't turn up. Under the DDA there is a service obligation. For accessibility, you would need 100% accessible buses and for that not to be the same space for shopping or pushchairs. It is no good having a place on a bus if the place isn't vacant.

Mark Ellis: We ask people to move shopping or pushchairs but we can't force them and have checked that we are within DDA about this. All policies are checked through our legal team

Gordon Pybus: There can not be a blanket decision given by anyone on people's rights under the DDA. If you do have a problem you have a right to make a complaint, and all complaints are to be addressed on their own merits.

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Audience Member: I am visually impaired. Going back to timetables, bus stands hold a lot of information but we can't access it, can Arriva produce a timetable for a specific route as we've not all got access to the internet.

Mark Ellis: This done on regular basis for individuals. Telephone 08448 004411.

#### Question 4

I am hearing impaired and find it very disconcerting when cyclists come whizzing past me and I haven't heard them approaching. Can anything be done to help those who have invisible disabilities?

#### Response to question 4

John Anderson: The first thing is about the behaviour of cyclists –the Cycling through the town Talking Together event heard many different points of view. There are things we need to do to raise awareness and promote and enforce responsible cycling. Cycling is a good thing to promote but it needs to be done in a responsible way.

Gordon Pybus: Imagine how hard it is for someone with a hearing impairment. There are still times when people get too close, even people who regard themselves as responsible cyclists. People are becoming anti-cyclist.

Audience member: When using the bridge near the college, a lot of cyclists have nearly hit me. Cyclists just don't think about deaf people at all. A route is made for cyclists and another for pedestrians and a number of cyclists use both. Why don't you put cycle routes next to the road? Cycling on pavements has stopped some older people coming into town.

Simon Houldsworth: Cycle lanes are planned with a huge amount of care and attention to safety and guidance. That cycle lane near the college is turned around to what we normally do, because of the specific nature of the site. Because cyclists join from the south east and leave to the college on the same side, we would have had people and cyclists crossing each other and weaving between paths. The bridge is purpose built to complete that route. The current narrow road bridge is not the permanent solution. Cyclists are asked to get off at that section and the vast majority do cycle responsibly. We do find that pedestrians like to walk in the cycle lane.

Gordon Pybus: DAD disagreed with plans and we asked for it to be changed before and after it was done, and now people are complaining.

Discussion about whether there is evidence to support the claim that older people (and disabled people) aren't coming into town and how we can investigate this.

Chief Inspector Paul Unsworth: Cycling is an emotive issue, and our experience is that we have serious concerns about public safety. We get a significant number of complaints from pedestrians about the behaviour of cyclists, a significant number of complaints from cyclists about motorists, and a significant number of complaints about officers issuing tickets to motorists. This needs close attention in the future. We would like to know how the public might wish us to proceed with in terms of safety and enforcement. We can issue a fixed penalty if people are cycling on a pavement.

#### Question 5

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Why amend the 31 and 30 routes into number 3? The revision means that I, along with many others cannot visit my GP, dentist, library nor have a reasonable choice of shops using public transport. Also as I previously had a choice of 5 buses and hour into town I now have only 3.

Response to question 5

Mark Ellis: Changes were made on 20<sup>th</sup> July following a consultation exercise with the Council. Last year 80% of people wanted a quick service into the town centre and there were financial issues. We thought the Number 3 would please more people, but we did have concerns that the Number 3 wouldn't cover so many people. We have received concerns and complaints and as a result introduced the Number 77 in October to help get people to Cockerton.

Simon Houldsworth: Arriva put in the Number 77 at their own risk which answers a lot of the feedback. If people don't use it, the service will not be able to continue but Arriva have listened to a lot of feedback from people in the west end.

Audience Member: They took a bus off where there's a need for that bus, and a need for buses to some places after 6pm. If people want to put on leisure activities on evenings or Sundays how can this be done. Not everyone has a car. Including young people.

Simon Houldsworth: There are difficult choices to make in providing local bus users with services they may need, and the Council will be making these difficult decisions. We have heard from a lot of people and will look at the evidence before making choices.

John Anderson: The world of buses is a very complicated affair and on one hand is a commercial operator and on the other hand the Council. The Council does have an obligation to look at how it plugs the gaps and we work with transport operators to do that. The Supported Buses event later this afternoon is about focusing that side of the equation but it is very complicated and there are a lot of tensions around the choices.

Audience Member: I am a guide dog user. Our area has dropped from 4 buses an hour to 1 bus an hour, on Hollyhurst Road. I am self employed and use public transport. I now have to use taxis and my overheads have substantially increased. Because all routes work out of the town centre we have to change buses in town to get to the railway station or the Civic Theatre, but if returning late at night I need to change buses in town and would not do that as it is no longer safe for a vulnerable person to do this in town at night. This is also an additional expense which would not necessarily be relevant for a sighted person.

Simon Houldsworth: Arriva looked at the evidence we all collected, and most people want that into town and out of town journey. Cross town routes are more complicated to operate. Hollyhurst Road to the train station may be one thing the Council may not be able to solve. There are 2 buses per hour in Hollyhurst Road area.

Mark Ellis: We knew that the changes would be potentially controversial but felt there wasn't a huge number of people making cross town journeys and that where this did happen the links did remain. Passenger numbers have increased since the changes on 20th July.

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## Question 6

Why are those who opted for taxi vouchers (equivalent to 20 return bus journeys) denied a national bus pass? Regular bus users must use much more.

## Response to question 6

Simon Houldsworth: The Council has a duty to provide a statutory bus scheme and the Council has extended this at its own discretion to give everyone free all day local travel. The Council may also choose to offer people an alternative concession and Councillors chose to retain the taxi vouchers scheme. Again it is entirely at the Council's discretion and there is no statutory obligation to provide this.

## Question 7

We are constantly being bombarded to use public transport in preference to other forms of transport so why is there no regular bus services between the town centre and the Memorial Hospital, Dr Piper House, and Shopmobility? It is a service that could easily be incorporated into buses serving Cockerton, Branksome or Barnard Castle and would only take a few minutes.

## Response to question 7

There are many frequent bus services that travel along Woodland Road past the Hospital - these include routes 1, 1b, 2 & 3. In addition, service 19 travels past the Hollyhurst Road entrance and service 70 goes into the Hospital grounds. Adding diversions to existing bus routes is something that both Arriva and the Council consider for their bus routes; however longer journey times may deter people from using the bus and mean that another vehicle is needed to maintain the frequency. Current costs for each bus used each year are about £90,000.

Arriva's changes to commercially operated bus services from July 2008, are designed to provide bus services that can compete with the car for the journey to town, which is the journey that 80% of bus users want to make on a regular basis. Bus stops are placed at regular intervals along these routes, subject to road safety and need. The Council will consider the merits of a further bus stop on St. Augustine's Way given this request (adjacent bus stops already exist in Bondgate and Northgate).

Question 8: Will we ever get a bus station or interchange in Darlington? It would help to alleviate congestion. Because buses cannot get parked next to the pavement at their stop, bus users often have to step on to the road in front of another bus to be able to board their bus. This is very dangerous, especially for visually impaired people. A bus station or interchange would also have the added benefit of making long distance travel more pleasant and safe and would encourage people to return to Darlington

## Response to question 8

Gordon Pybus: At meetings Stagecoach and Arriva have said they won't use a bus station. Now that legislation is changing so Councils have more say about where buses go, this might change. The major problem is where buses don't park correctly at the kerb, particularly for visually impaired people. Also where buses pull up next to

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bollards and lampposts etc there can be a problem if the person and the guide dog go different ways round them.

Mark Ellis: This is a thorny issue and goes back to where would a bus station be? People want to be as close to town centre as they can and Northgate and Tubwell Row are probably as close as they want to get. We have found that slightly out of town stops are not as well used. Potentially a bus station would not be located where our customers want to be, so I think that would be a no for us.

John Anderson: The prospect of a bus station is not on the horizon. The design of the pedestrian heart was changed to accommodate bus access into town. We understand that a lot of bus users like to use bus stops in the town centre. Where would we put a bus station which is a large land take, and would give other problems such as accessibility to shops etc. A third issue is around costs, the cost to build and the revenue cost to run it. Who would pick up those costs? The bus company don't really need it to pick up their service so they won't, or it would be through the Council? The Council has just consulted on the development brief of the Feethams/Beaumont Street area and have a proposal to improve the waiting area for national buses.

Audience Members: Older people in the Mowden to Brinkburn Road areas say they daren't go into town now because of congestion. I would like the people from the panel to come down and see the congestion as so many people come down and swarm towards buses. To say we don't need a bus station in that situation is ridiculous.

Mark Ellis: If people don't stand in a queue in the bus stop, they may not do so in a bus station either. We now have a supervisor who floats round the town centre Monday to Friday 9.00 to 5.30ish and I will ask them to have a look at this. In the meantime we do need to look at spacing of buses and we will do this.

Audience Member: Some buses already drop people off then go round the corner to pick new passengers up, but it doesn't help as there is too many people at the bus stop. Time for serious discussion and to look at cost and options

Steve Rose: Costs and location do have to be considered but you are welcome to write to me telling me where you think it should be. The cost of a bus station could be passed on through bus tickets or council tax.

## Question 9

Why can't Darlington have a Park and Ride scheme, with cycle hire (directions for cycle routes are already in place)?

## Response to question 9

The Council commissioned specialist consultant, WS Atkins, to carry out a feasibility study of a Park & Ride Scheme for Darlington. The study found that there was insufficient demand to justify the provision of a scheme. The Council's Cabinet have considered the report and have decided not to proceed further at the moment. Cycle facilities could be considered as part of any future scheme. Currently, the Council is working with the rail industry on a travel plan to help people get to, and from, Darlington Station. Part of this work is to examine the feasibility of providing cycle hire facilities here.

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## Question 10

How does the Council know how people use the buses when the destination for people with a pass is not recorded? How does the Council pay Arriva for concessionary fares - per journey or a single flat rate?

### Response to question 10

The Council pay a sum for each trip made by concessionary fare passholders who get on a bus in the Borough. The value of the sum paid varies over time based on the average fares paid by other bus users. The payment system is designed to be in accordance with the law governing concessionary fare schemes, and does not require Arriva to record the destination of each passholder.

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