
SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Information and Analysis

Context

1. Most bus services in Darlington are operated commercially¹ by Arriva North East and Go North East focused on the town centre. In the case of Arriva, this follows a widespread review of bus routes in 2008 when they analysed where and when bus users travelled. The Council currently chooses to pay for additional bus journeys where it feels that there is unmet travel need, either on the basis of individual journeys or for complete services. There are 14 contracts in place at the time of writing, with an intended expiry date of 2 May 2014. The cost of these contracts is approximately £140,000 per annum. In addition, the Council contributes towards the cost of contracts let by Durham County Council (two contracts) and North Yorkshire County Council (one contract) for bus services that operate into the Borough. The budget is also used to fund the Council's commitment to the Traveline public transport information service and at stop bus timetables.
2. Cabinet proposed to completely withdraw all funding from supported bus services on 22 November 2011. An equalities impact assessment is included in this report for Members' attention prior to making a decision on this proposal.

Review process

3. The process to understand the impact of the proposal involved:
 - (a) Talking Together events during November 2011 to January 2012.
 - (b) Budget consultation meetings with protected characteristic groups.
 - (c) Interviews on bus by market research specialists, NWA, sampling 1,047 users.
 - (d) Meetings with the Association of Parish Councils & Parish Meetings, Stillington & Whitton Parish Council.
 - (e) Telephone interviews with residents of Sadberge, following on from a survey carried out by the Parish Council in 2010.
 - (f) Other Budget feedback.
 - (g) Sample patronage information.

Findings

¹ Under the 1985 Transport Act, bus companies may decide to operate bus routes at their own commercial risk, under the regulatory control of the Traffic Commissioner. As businesses, bus companies provide buses to make money, not meet social need. Local Councils may choose to pay for additional bus services where there is unmet travel need, although these cannot compete with commercially provided bus services.

Talking Together

4. The Council held several Talking Together Events over the period November 2011 to December 2012. This gave people the opportunity to talk with Cabinet members directly, hear about all the budget proposals and make comments. Recorded comments were as follows:
 - (a) The loss of service 20 in the inner west end will cause real difficulty for those without access to a car in this area, since the next available bus services are along Coniscliffe or Woodland Roads.
 - (b) The loss of a link between the Mowden area and Cockerton due to the withdrawal of the commercially provided service 77 and proposed withdrawal of service 16. This loss prevents direct travel by bus to Cockerton for shopping and to the Memorial Hospital.

Budget Consultation Meetings with Protected Characteristic Groups

5. Meetings with local people in protected characteristic groups were held during December 2011 and January 2012. Whilst most of those attending the events made comments including about the consequences of changes to commercially operated bus services such as service X66, some impacts were recorded. The following impacts were recorded at the Community Partnership meeting:
 - (a) Some people may not be able to get to work if the proposal is implemented. The example of access by bus for staff at Morrisons, North Road was quoted following on from the loss of evening bus services in the 2011 budget decision.
 - (b) The proposed change in school transport causing a multiple impact if the alternative public bus service was withdrawn under this proposal.

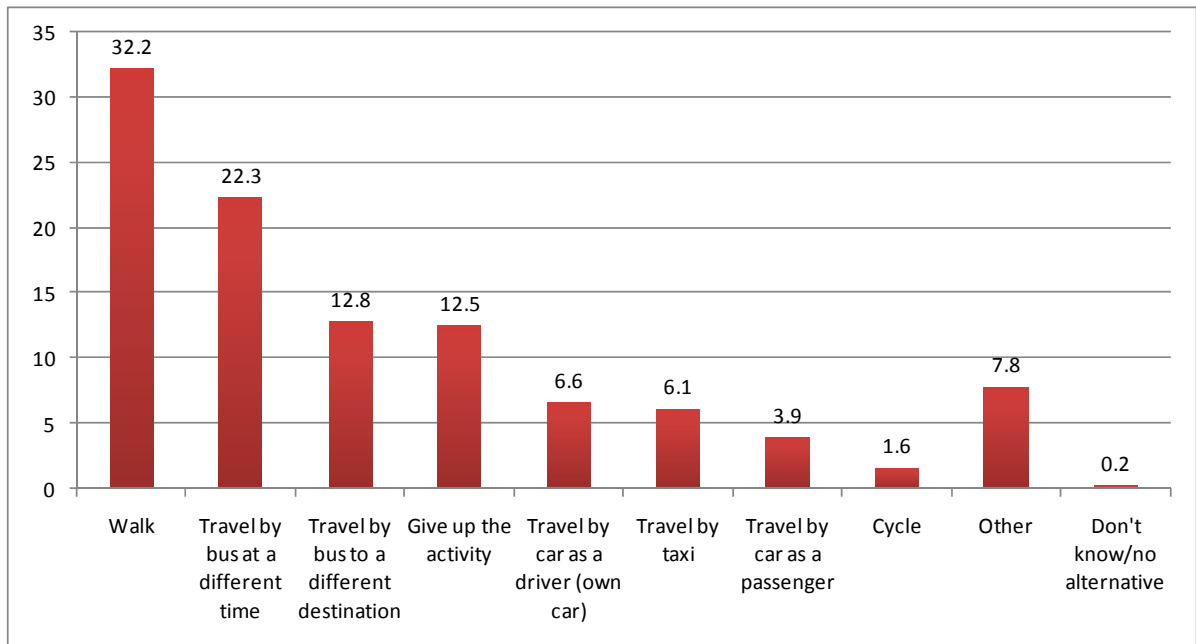
Interviews on Bus

6. A total of 1,047 interviews were completed by market research company NWA on a sample of bus journeys affected by the budget proposal during December 2011 and January 2012. This process involved over 198 hours of interviews being carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. In addition, a small number of completed questionnaires were handed in directly to the Council and these have been included in the analysis. The journeys interviewed included the replacement minibus journeys on service 20 that were operated due to the closure of Kent Bridge and on the now withdrawn commercially operated service 77 around Mowden (to better understand travel patterns in the west end of Darlington).
7. In terms of a characteristic supported bus service user, most:
 - (a) Lived in the DL1 and DL3 postcode areas (78%) which encompass the urban area. A further 9% lived in the DL2 postcode area (the rural east, south & west of the Borough);

- (b) Were aged over 55 (62%) – 44% were over 65;
- (c) Had a bus pass by reason of age (54%) with a further 4% having a pass due to disability;
- (d) Used the bus often – 32% said daily and 10% daily during the week. A further 41% said between two to four times per week;
- (e) Travelled because of a need to go shopping, to the bank, the hairdresser or similar personal business (51%). A further 25% used a supported bus service to get to work; and
- (f) Would walk (32%) or find another bus assuming there was one (22%) if the journey was not available. This overall pattern changes in rural areas where the distances are greater and there a fewer alternative travel choices. Overall, 13% would give up the activity they were doing through the use of the bus as illustrated in the graph below.

What would you do if there were changes to Services – All Services

(Q10: % response – total sample – 1050 respondents)



8. The graph shows the total recorded responses in answer to the question “what would you do if there were changes to the bus service, so that it no longer ran to your usual destination at the time you normally use it?” Additional analysis of the home postcodes of bus users seems to imply that the alternative to rural bus services (numbers 16,17,18, 20 & replacement minibus) is less likely to be walking or cycling due to the average travel distances involved (although it should be noted that people living in the town itself also use these services). An example of this is service 17 to Bishopton, where 9% would walk and 3% cycle compared to urban area service 4 (46% & 15%). Equally, residents of rural areas seem to be more likely to give up an activity (especially those recorded on service 17) although this also applies to the Blackwell area (service 29).

Other Meetings

9. Officers attended a meeting of Stillington & Whitton Parish Council (within the area of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) at which the budget proposal was discussed. Local people use Darlington supported bus service 17 to get to work and education in the town. Subsequently, the Parish Council have written a letter setting out the importance of the bus service for work, education, shops and other services – Darlington is preferred to other towns by some residents due to its physical layout. The Parish Council requested help about community transport (advice on operation & grant applications; also perhaps some funding) if funding for the bus service is withdrawn. They also ask for the merit of a through service to Stockton to be explored, thus sharing the costs with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.
10. Impacts recorded at the meeting were as follows:
 - (a) Three people without access to a car rely on service 17 to get to work in Darlington, one of whom has been told by her employer that she would be dismissed if she could no longer get to work on time.
 - (b) Potentially others would give up their activity (shopping, visiting friends) and would face real difficulty in attending doctor and hospital appointments.
 - (c) Residents of the village also would have to reconsider where they currently go to College, or potentially go to College, if there was no direct bus service to Darlington.
 - (d) Those impacted would feel isolated and abandoned.
11. At a coffee afternoon at Heighington Parish Church, local people spoke about their use of service 16 from Heighington, School Aycliffe to Newton Aycliffe to reach the local doctors' surgery, Post Office & supermarket. Residents of School Aycliffe also spoke about their need to get to Darlington for hospital appointments, shops and meeting friends. Many bus users could not see a way around not using the bus; some thought they would have to walk up to two miles each way to either Heighington or Newton Aycliffe – along part unlit roads in both cases. Impact interviews were carried out with 35 residents and a summary of the impacts recorded is given in **Table A**. Most people interviewed only provided comments about what they used the bus for and did not identify any impacts.

Table A: Impacts recorded at Heighington Parish Church

Impact (comments received not included in this table)	Count
Give up activity	5
Give up activity (implied)	2
Social isolation	1
Loss of independence	1
Loss of confidence	1
Move house	1
Poor health	1

12. Three respondents included a comment that a minibus service from Heighington to Newton Aycliffe could be an alternative solution. Such a link would permit interchange with other

bus services in Newton Aycliffe as well as providing public transport access to the local doctor, supermarket, Post Office, leisure centre and other facilities.

13. An email objecting to the proposal has been received from Heighington Parish Council on the grounds that the withdrawal of service 16 would prevent elderly people and those without access to a car from travelling from School Aycliffe or Heighington. (This journey matters because, as noted above, the local doctor, Post Office and nearest supermarket are located in Newton Aycliffe.)
14. At a meeting of the Association of Parish Councils & Parish Meetings held on 5 January 2012, representatives attending the meeting expressed concern about the impact on workers needing to access jobs, students travelling to College and people without access to a car. Some of those present were willing to explore any mitigation measures such as a lower frequency or higher fares to offset the cost of providing supported bus services although they made the point that they felt that the tax receipts from rural areas more than outweigh the value of services received, with this proposal creating a disproportionate impact on rural areas.

Telephone Interviews

15. In 2010, a survey of residents living in Sadberge was carried out by the Parish Council (findings previously reported to members on 13 September 2011). The survey evidenced the need for services 17 & 18 demonstrating that there is a group of residents who rely on the bus in order to live their lives – 17 residents responded to the survey detailing journeys for shopping, Doctors appointments, taking children to school and visiting friends. Various impact statements were recorded in the survey, including “we would feel trapped and isolated, thus affecting our mental health”.
16. A series of detailed telephone interviews was carried out with some of the respondents to the 2011 survey who had agreed to be contacted about the impact of the current proposal. The information is presented in full in **Table B** to demonstrate the sort of impacts being recorded.

Table B: Summary of impacts recorded from telephone conversations with residents of Sadberge

Individual	Bus pass	Access to a car	Current bus use	Impact
1	No	No	Once a fortnight to get to shops, Doctor & other services	Would reduce frequency of trips, since have to walk. Has a disability affecting travel choices.
2	Yes	Yes	Several times each week to get to work, library, shops & Arts Centre	Would reduce frequency of trips and have to drive.
3	Yes	No	Every two days to get to shops, bank, Post Office & Doctor	Would have to move house since dependent on the bus. Has a disability affecting travel choices.
4	Yes	No	Uses bus at least weekly to go to Doctor, shops,	Would need to rely on family, but frequency of trips significantly

			family & friends	reduce since they live outside of the area. Would become socially isolated and less independent.
5	Yes	Yes	Once a week to go shopping and visit friends. Car not always available.	Would have to move house to carry on independent life since would have to travel less often if no bus and give up some activities. Has a disability affecting travel choices.
6	Yes	No	Two or three times a week to go shopping, bank, health appointments & friends	Would need to walk or use a taxi to undertake essential journeys as a carer, but taxis expensive and would give up seeing friends. Would become socially isolated. May need to move house.
7	No	No	Relies on bus for all journeys if timings work for work, shopping, Doctor & friends.	Would need to walk, cycle or use a taxi to undertake essential journeys. Taxis are expensive so would give up unessential journeys and rely on others, thus losing independence.
8	Yes	No	Twice a week for journeys to the shops, Doctor, Hospital & family.	Would give up activity – loss of family contact would cause social isolation & “devastation”. Need to rely on others so loss of independence.

17. The telephone interviews demonstrate that bus users in Sadberge are often older people, people who do not have access to a car and who need the bus to undertake essential trips to the shops, Doctors, family and friends. Several respondents identified the potential for social isolation and a loss of independence. Three even felt that they would need to move house to protect their independence and ability to live, with consequential impacts on personal finances and local community. Sadberge Parish Council have previously made representations concerning the importance to the community of a bus service in preventing the creation of a dormitory village open only to those with access to a car. They feel that this causes a threat to their community which is made up of a range of ages and occupations, since the lack of public transport would inevitably result in a village centred around travelling elsewhere with a loss of community.
18. Telephone interviews were also carried out with residents of other rural areas. An example impact is from a regular bus user with no access to a private car for much of the time. They use the bus three or four times a week to go shopping, go to the bank, hairdresser and other facilities in the town centre as well as visit friends. The impact for them is that the proposal would mean that they effectively would have to give up all the activities they undertake by bus and consequently that they would need to move house to be able to eat. They would lose their independence, since they have no family or friends who are able to help easily. They are also a carer for a family member and the loss of the bus would make it very hard to continue to care for the individual concerned.

Other Budget Feedback

19. Thirteen responses were recorded by email, telephone and through comments boxes. Four recorded impacts were given; the other responses being comments on the proposal.
 - (a) A loss of independence and extra cost of having to pay for a carer to accompany him.
 - (b) Give up activity.
 - (c) Loss of independence and increased reliance on friends.
 - (d) Loss of independence causing eventual depression and being housebound.
20. The comments received included requests for additional bus services, the merit of planning a contingency fund and a request to cross-subsidise supported bus services from commercially operated daytime routes. The latter is not possible in law.

Patronage Information

21. The patronage information provided below in **Table C** is from a representative sample period in October/November 2011. The information for service 16 is now slightly out of date since an extra journey previously operated as service 19 is included in this contract. This change follows the operation of urban area service 19 journeys commercially by Arriva from 2 January 2012.
22. The patronage information reflects the fact that services 16 to 20 operate all day, Monday to Saturday, whilst the early morning contracts typically equate to a handful of journeys used by people travelling to work or other essential business.

Table C - Patronage information

Contract No	Times of Operation	Route	Operator	16/10/11-12/11/11	
				4 Weekly	Days
DBC0901a-13a/b	Monday – Friday early morning	Town Centre – Firthmoor	Arriva	68	20
DBC0902a-10	Saturday morning	Town Centre – Whinbush	Arriva	56	4
DBC0904a-4	Monday – Friday early morning	Town Centre – Minors Crescent	Arriva	97	20
DBC0904b-4	Saturday morning	Town Centre – Minors Crescent	Arriva	88	4
DBC0905a-14	Monday – Friday early morning	Morrisons – Town Centre – Skerne Park	Arriva	138	20
DBC0905b-14	Saturday morning	Morrisons – Town Centre – Skerne Park	Arriva	125	4
DBC0906b-7	Saturday morning	Town Centre – Harrowgate Hill	Arriva	83	4
DBC0907a-2	Saturday morning	Town Centre – Branksome	Arriva	30	4
DBC0908a-11	Saturday morning	Town Centre – Red Hall	Arriva	122	4
DBC0914a-20	Monday – Saturday (PH)	Town Centre – Neasham	Scarlet Band	3,974	24
DBC0916a-16	Monday – Friday	Newton Aycliffe – Mowden – Town Centre	Scarlet Band	5,325	20
DBC0916a-16	Saturday	Newton Aycliffe – Mowden – Town Centre	Scarlet Band	948	4
DBC0917a-17/18	Monday – Saturday	Town Centre – Sadberge	Scarlet Band	2,618	24
DBC0919-23	Monday to Saturday	Glebe Road – Town Centre – The Broadway	Arriva	1,000	28

23. Services 16, 17, 18 & 20 serve the rural areas of the Borough and are the last bus services to Great Stainton, Neasham, Sadberge & School Aycliffe. Service 17 is also the only bus service to Darlington from Bishopton. These services currently cost circa £107,000 per annum in total.

Conclusion

24. Most bus journeys in Darlington are operated commercially by Arriva North East and Go North East. The majority of travel needs by bus in the Borough are met through these commercial operations. These journeys are complemented by those provided through 14 contracts paid for by the Council and a contribution towards the costs of contracts issued by both Durham and North Yorkshire County Councils.
25. There has been an extensive engagement process. Recorded impacts include loss of independence, travelling less often, social isolation and even having to move house. Whilst the datasets need more analysis, it seems that bus users in the rural areas of the Borough have less alternative travel options than those living within the town.