



Kirklees
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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Ad Hoc Scrutiny Review

Report on

Members Influence on Local Bus Services

February 2001

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

KIRKLEES METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL INTO

MEMBER INFLUENCE ON LOCAL BUS SERVICES

1. The Panel was formed in Autumn 2000 and consisted of Cllrs Annie Smith (Chair), Mary Granger and Colin Watson.

The panels terms of reference were to examine the way in which elected Members of Kirklees Council can have more influence in local bus services, by looking at the roles and relationships with Metro/West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, (WYPTE), the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority (WYPTA) and local bus operators.

The Panel issued/received questionnaires, and has spoken to Council nominee members of the WYPTA, officers of Metro and bus operators Arriva, First Huddersfield & Yorkshire Traction. It subsequently met with Councillors to provide feedback from its deliberations and agree priorities.

2. ***What the Panel Found:-***

- The Council nominees to WYPTA have a good understanding of the extent to which WYPTA can (or cannot) help. Their understanding helps them to explore more successfully their way through the PTA/PTE. There is a lack of certainty about what role KMC members nominated to the PTA are expected to take. For example the role of PTA Members on Passenger Consultative Committees need to be addressed.

- Metro (WYPTE) has a limited role in supporting those bus services which bus companies do not wish to operate commercially. Metros' role is still (after 15 years) misunderstood by the public and by many Councillors.

Metro is seen to work with this Council, Councillors and the community to develop bus services, particularly using funding such as the Rural Bus Initiative. There are many examples of good practice; the importance is to draw on this to develop new initiatives.

- Bus Operators are (of necessity) commercially aware, and are only willing to operate services where there is potential for profit. There is a commitment to long term passenger growth, but services which are consistently unviable will be withdrawn. Market growth seems to be best achieved by providing high frequency services along main corridors. Minibus operation is rarely commercially viable .

Operators want a dialogue with Councillors. They want engagement in wider issues about Planning, Highways etc. They are happy to deal

with specific complaints and issues raised by members, and to attend meetings but want these to be on a limited number of occasions with a proper agenda of issues. Attending all area forums was impractical.

The Panel thought that a greater willingness to share information would help, although recognised the constraint imposed by competition legislation.

3. *Issues Raised by the Members Survey*

1. Contacting the right person is sometimes difficult in Metro (and in bus companies).
2. Local members felt that sometimes Metro policies do not reflect the needs of their local community.
3. Where members have an understanding of the organisation (Metro) they are more likely to be happy with the process, even if they do not like the outcome.
4. There was both negative and positive feedback about Metro and Bus Operators.

Issues raised by Parish Councils are similar to those identified by Councillors, with a suggestion from one Parish Council that joint funding improved relations with Metro and Operators.

4. *Issues Discussed at Member Meeting*

- Community Bus Initiatives
- Working with the community to ensure 'normal' bus services can be operated successfully and more cheaply than previously
- Getting 'inside' the PTE
- How the proposed PTE/Operator/Councillor liaison would work, and how this would link to the Passenger Consultative Committees.
- Does KMC get its share of subsidised services?
- 'Metro' not forthcoming about information on service reliability
- How information flows to Councillors
(use of e-mail enables more direct communication & feedback)
- Extent to which Metro should be accountable to Kirklees for the Council levy, and whether this should be through the PTA representative or more directly
- Better press coverage and promotion, linked to improving services particularly in evenings.
- State of some bus stations in North Kirklees

5. *The Panel has deliberated issues regarding*

- How to maintain and develop services in less commercially viable, areas, as operators concentrate on main road routes.

- issues around 'enforcing' commitments given by operators through quality partnerships and corridors.
- the success of KMC in rural bus partnerships
- preparing ourselves to target similar funds which might be on offer for urban areas.
- whether 'Metroline' was a bureaucratic blockage between customers and bus operators or an essential database enabling Metro to understand customer complaints and needs (and a data source for ensuring contract compliance on tendered service)
- whether there were sufficient high level staff within Metro dealing with bus service issues. There was some evidence to suggest that more investment in investigation and analysis of travel need (eg focused public consultation) could produce considerable savings in producing more specifically directed tendered bus services.
- If the Council's planning policies caused difficulties for ensuring good local services into housing and other developments.

5. ***The Panel felt that it was important to build Partnerships with Metro and Bus Operators.***

Solutions suggested by Panel.

- a) A more overt involvement of all partners in decision making. May link to issues such as Integrated Transport Strategies. Developing partnerships with Metro and Operators should maximise benefits from government initiatives.
- b) A regular meeting or forum between WYPTE and bus operators with Members and Council Officers & WYTA representatives to deal with high level issues. This has also been recommended through Regeneration MB (perhaps North and South Kirklees as separate meetings as the main operators are different).
- c) Better Training offered to KMC Members about the role of WYPTA/WYPTE (ideally delivered by the PTE, perhaps with operators).
- d) A simple guidebook of roles, definition and how to reach the right person in Metro would be helpful. [We might be able to get bus operators to provide contact names as well (including e-mail addresses)]. For inclusion in the Ward Tool Kit
- e) Named individuals within Metro (and ideally bus operators) to promote direct "point of contact" for Members .
- f) Information flows (perhaps by e-mail) directed where possible on a more personalised basis (eg on an area basis)
- g) A protocol of information entitlements from Metro.

- h) Role of KMC Member nominated to PTA needs to be clarified. Do they represent the PTA to the Council, or the Council to the PTA.
- i) Metro to be asked to review if sufficient resources are devoted to research and localised co-ordination and liaison on bus service issues.
- j) The practicality of operating local bus services needs to be considered in making planning decisions, with stronger liaison with Metro and operators.

Annie Smith (Chair of Panel)
Mary Granger
Colin Watson

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The Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance of the Scrutiny Panel

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Neil Holt - WYPTE
Graham Riley - First Huddersfield
Mike Power - Yorkshire Traction
Neale Wallace - Arriva Yorkshire

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