

Summary of meeting held 22nd of September 2022 19:30 – 21:00 to discuss the sudden decision of Stagecoach to axe to 11 & 12 bus route.

Present:

- Representatives from Quy, Bottisham, Lode & Longmeadow, Swaffham Bulbeck, Swaffham Prior & Burwell Parish Councils
- Representatives from Newmarket Town Council
- The Principle of Bottisham Village College
- Councillors Claire Daunton, Alan Sharp, John Trapp, Charlotte Cane
- Members of the A to B1102 Group

It had been hoped that a representative from Stagecoach East would join the meeting, but Stagecoach were in the end not able to join. They did, however, invite further engagement and a meeting with Stagecoach is diared for Friday 30th September. This meeting was arranged in August to discuss improving the 11 bus route but will now have a slightly different agenda.

Agreed AIMS of the Meeting:

- To identify and understand the issues and questions that need answering / addressing in order that either than existing service or a modified bus service can continue to serve our communities
- To identify the actions we as a group need to take to move these issues / questions / ideas forward
- To provide a conduit of consistent, correct information to our communities

The Chairman of the a-political A to B1102 Group, chaired the meeting.

Issues & Questions that need answering / addressing in order that the existing service can be retained, or a modified service can be procured

A range of issues were identified, many of them shared in all our communities, neatly captured by one Parish Councillor as the 4 Es: Employment, Education, Environment and the Elderly:

- The axing of the No 11 and No 12 routes will leave a wide swathe of East Cambridgeshire without a bus service, including the 4th largest settlement in East Cambridgeshire – Burwell (noting the three larger settlements Ely, Littleport and Soham all have train stations)
- The timing of the notice into government cancelling the services together with the speed of the termination has thrown many people into panic. 30th October is just at the end of Half Term.
- Without these services, children and young adults, including a disproportionate number of people from disadvantaged backgrounds will not be able to get to school, unless parents are able to drive them to the school / college
- Withdrawing this service will undo a huge amount of work done as part of the East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area – levelling up to improve the lives of disadvantaged children in accessing quality education and support – currently using the service to access Bottisham Village College
- Many of the future intake of 300 children into Bottisham Village College who live outside the catchment area will be negatively impacted if the service is withdrawn as they are not entitled to the free school bus services – if numbers fall below 300 pupils this will have a knock-on impact to funding to the school which could result in the loss of teachers and services.

- Many people working in Cambridge, Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and other centres served by the buses will cease to be able to get to work
- The elderly and the isolated will find it more difficult to access healthcare and day centres
- At a time when the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership (GCP) is consulting on congestion charging in Cambridge and promoting a huge “shift” to public transport, when all our communities are being encouraged to tackle the “climate emergency”, forcing people back into their cars is counter-productive, working against the stated aims of the County’s Local Transport Plan

Who is responsible for our Bus Services?

It was recognised that Stagecoach East are a commercial organisation with an obligation to their shareholders. They have no statutory duty to provide services. Policies and Objectives for local transport and the management of spending of local transport budgets sits with the Cambridge & Peterborough Combined Authority i.e. the Mayor, but even then, it should be noted, there is no statutory duty for a service to be provided to all communities¹. Whilst Stagecoach is, understandably, in the “firing line” for our collective anger at the decision to withdraw the services, it is the Mayor and Combined Authority who are best placed to find a solution – whether that is through Stagecoach or another provider.

An opportunity to re-look at the services in order to improve them, build patronage and make them more cost effective:

It was recognised that, whilst limited, the financial data supplied by Stagecoach makes clear there are significant and unavoidable financial issues that need to be addressed regarding the financial viability of the current service provision. There was broad agreement that a short, medium and long-term solution needs to be found:

1. Short – funding to enable the service to continue or a new service is provided whilst,
2. Medium-term – work is done to better understand the public’s travel needs (including which sections of the route are most well used), to look at the route, make it more attractive to users and more efficient
3. Long-term – link the improved service into the wider GCP Cambridge & wider County plans for a car-free, public transport orientated future in order to meet our Net Zero commitments.

The levels of financial losses reported were also questioned with regular bus users citing passenger journeys that were full to capacity. It was also noted that Stagecoach had failed to consult with any of the Councillors present and the committees they sit upon, including the County Highways & Transport Committee. It was apparent that there had been discussions with Suffolk County Council but it was unclear whether consultation had occurred with the Mayor or Combined Authority in Cambridgeshire.

Actions:

1. **Our Councillors will push the Combined Authority to achieve “a stay of execution” to act to find funding to protect the services in at least some form to enable them to continue beyond the 30th October 2022, so that:**
2. **Work can be done to create a more cost-effective and more attractive service offering that will attract more people to use the bus more frequently – the A to B1102 Group will create**

¹ See <https://www.local.gov.uk/systra-lga-bus-report>

a passenger survey to better understand the needs of our communities as regards bus usage

- 3. All will engage with our MPs to make the case for a viable future bus service for our communities.**
- 4. We will meet again within the next two weeks.**

Post Script:

On the 22nd September, Mayor Dr Nik Johnson secured £1.7m of funding to contribute towards protecting the bus services affected (including the No 11 and No 12 routes) in the short term – see:

<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/mayor-dr-nik-johnson-statement-on-stagecoachs-withdrawal-of-bus-services-from-october-30/>

What can you do?

- Sign the petition if you haven't already done so: <https://bit.ly/3f0vZ3d>
- Come to a meeting in Newmarket on Monday evening. No amount of digital action can replace physical presence.
- Use the bus in the next two weeks.
- Take pictures of your journey to show how many people are on the bus
- Share this information where you can!
- Complete our survey when we have it ready.

The A to B1102 Group,

www.atob1102.org

Look for us on Facebook.