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promoting quality public transport.....

Matthew Moll
 Enhanced Bus Partnership Manager
 Public & Integrated Transport
 Lancashire County Council
 County Hall
 Preston

26th April 2024

Dear Matthew,

LANCASHIRE AND BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We give below our comments on this consultation.

2. Gaps in the existing bus network.

2.1 It has been and is well documented that rural areas in particular suffer from a lack of regular bus services. Lancaster Bus Users Group (LBUG) has provided information about gaps in Lancaster, Morecambe and elsewhere. On a positive note, we understand that bus services have been reinstated in the Hodder valley by 21 Transport Ltd. We understand that the service has recently started but we were not able to find any information about the operator!

3. Access to employment etc

3.1 This is especially relevant in rural areas where public transport is lacking.

4. The provision of information

4.1 The ease of finding out about your bus journey in advance is crucial. Printed timetables should be available to the public in all towns, including public buildings such as Tourist Information Offices and libraries. Information must be kept up to date and internet search procedures as well as the availability of paper-based information need to be as clear as possible.

4.2 When making journeys real time information at bus stations and stops is a basic need. On the bus there should be next stop visual and audible information covering stopping patterns, retrofitted to older vehicles as quickly as possible and fitted to all new vehicles as standard.

5. Marketing and promotion

5.1 We have little to add to the ideas forward by LBUG.

6. Fares initiatives

6.1 We agree with the views of LBUG regarding integrated ticketing and adjustments to the ENCTS eligibility, applicable across Lancashire (& Blackburn).

6.2 The following extract from the 2022 BSIP speaks volumes – “There is currently no commercial multi-operator ticket available in Lancashire or Blackburn with Darwen. This lack of multi-operator tickets may be a barrier to travel across the county due to the range of operators and the differing geographical extent of each operator. Where services are provided by more than one operator, it forces people to choose between operators (and thereby accept the frequency offered by one operator) unless they are to pay both operators separately. Where destinations require a change of bus (such as Royal Preston Hospital) it forces people to pay again where that bus is provided by a different operator. The outcome is that people find different ways to travel, or that they are deterred from travelling at all. Special fare arrangements are available on Lancashire tendered services only regarding acceptance of other operator’s tickets.”.

6.2 Finding out about bus fares has long been a vexed issue that we have reported on in the past. Whereas there is a general lack of transparency regarding point-to-point bus fares (except in the case of Stagecoach services on the web) the flat £2.00 fare has greatly simplified the situation.

7. Integration with other modes

7.1 There is scant mention of the advantage of bus/train integration in the 2022 plan. Much, much more should be done to encourage bus/ rail integration, in particular. One seriously lacking issue is the easy availability of up-to-date information at rail and bus stations/bus stops about interchange with complementary modes. We are currently carrying out an exercise into this.

8. Bus priority

8.1 We understand that around 95% of delays and cancellations to bus services are due to traffic congestion, roadworks and badly/illegally parked vehicles. As well as bus lanes bus priority measures should include bus stop clearways (which should be at every bus stop), parking and loading restrictions, clearly marked and enforced box junctions and traffic light

priorities. Lancashire County Council should be credited for the bus priority measures already in place, but more are needed, and they need to be enforced to avoid delays to buses.

8.2 The BSIP should also include an undertaking to minimise the effects of road works/ closures on bus schedules.

9. Bus stop and bus station infrastructure

9.1 Bus stops should be fully accessible with, as a minimum, a hard standing area with raised kerb where necessary, bus stop pole & flag and current timetable displayed. As above, real time information should be provided as widely as possible.

9.2 Bus Stations must be kept safe, clean, well maintained, accessible to all, have public toilets open at all times buses are running and have up to date information available, including printed timetables available for all operators' services.

10. Use of technology

10.1 Real time information and on-bus next stop information, alluded to previously, should be priorities in technological advancement.

11. Accessibility of bus services

11.1 We welcome such initiatives as level boarding access at stops and wheelchair spaces on buses. The role of the driver in dealing sympathetically with the less mobile is important. One example – having pressed the stop button, passengers must feel confident to remain in their seats until the bus has come to a stand.

12. Other ideas

12.1 Passenger engagement is vital. Passengers should be aware of the existence of independent bodies representing their interests – Transport Focus, BUUK and also where appropriate local Bus User Groups e.g. LBUG. Appropriate information pertinent to this should be displayed on buses and bus stations, perhaps related to complaints procedures.

12.2 Coaches are an important part of the road based public transport system but do not appear to be referred to in the BSIP (unless we have missed something). For example, two Coach operators serve Lancaster with regular timetabled services, but there appears to be little or no mention of them on the Council's public transport information.

12.3 We suggest that there is reference to information about regular timetabled coaches being available in the same way as bus timetables. Coach stops need to be in appropriate locations and have space to allow the

loading/unloading of luggage (often in underfloor lockers) and to enable wheelchair lifts to be deployed.

12.4 School Buses - one of our Directors has supplied the following narrative.

“Many Lancashire schools are served by buses, some are ‘normal’ buses which call at schools, some are contract buses, and some are timetabled services but for school pupils only. Bus stops at/outside schools need to be provided, must meet accessibility standards, must have bus stop clearway markings that are robustly enforced. For example, there is a lay-by for buses outside Carnforth High School, but it is usually filled with parked cars (locals and parents).”

12.5 “The way the national bus information flows means that comprehensive information is available. As a result, anyone can look at e.g. Google Maps, Apple Maps, and easily see all the buses that serve every bus stop. While this is excellent, ‘closed door’ bus services do appear in this information with nothing to say these particular buses are not available to the general public. With the increased use of e.g. smartphones, this is becoming a significant problem which needs fixing.”

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,

John

John Moorhouse
Director and Company Secretary

