

## Portishead Residents Bus Service Meeting notes 09-02-22

### Initial points from speakers (also include slides pdf online)

- **Councillor Bob Bull, Portishead Town Council:**
  - Thanked everyone for attending.
  - Reminded that Portishead Town Council has no jurisdiction over buses, the Council's role is to facilitate the discussion.
- **Carl Nicholson, Integrated Transport mgr, oversees public transport (joined by Lee Murphy), North Somerset Council:**
  - Bus services are operated commercially (no longer run by Councils). In the last decade funding for supported services across North Somerset fell from £1 million to £60 thousand.
  - During the pandemic, the Government covered some costs to keep buses running, this funding is scheduled to end in April 22. COVID-19 has affected bus usage significantly, so this gap in funding cannot be filled commercially. North Somerset Council has requested further funding from the Government, but none is agreed.
  - In preparation for this funding problem, in January North Somerset Council and First Bus started to rationalise the network. The changes were made to Portishead buses to reduce duplication, and place emphasis on the whole connected network not direct buses. Carl said this is not an ideal solution, but it is what can be afforded at the moment.
  - The 'Bus Back Better Strategy' for the West of England including North Somerset is here <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/transport/bus-strategy/>. This will bring a more joined up approach with public and private sector funding committed.
  - Portishead Town Council showed a slide showing First Group company profits
- **Doug Claringbold, MD, First Bus West of England:**
  - Response to Portishead Town Council's First profit slide: the slide shows the whole First Group's accounts not just First Bus West of England; First is a private operator with a responsibility to shareholders to try to make a profit; the company is trying to do its best with limited resources; the slide does not show investment back into the service e.g., £7 million just spent on new buses for North Somerset.
  - These are challenging times, for all in the bus industry and for Government which must make difficult spending choices. The First Bus biggest challenge is much lower patronage, short notice of Government funding decisions and lack of long-term plan from Government.
  - Patronage in North Somerset is now down to 59% but First Bus is still covering 90% of the mileage, this leaves a big funding gap, then in April Government funding stops and this is not viable. The operators hope the Government funding will be extended, but no news yet.
  - The First Bus team attended to listen to residents' views as First may have got it wrong but reminded the room that they have to focus on the majority view. People who are happy with service are not represented here tonight.
  - Here to listen to questions to see if there's a better way of doing things. May not be able to do what people want, but will certainly consider it.
  - Also, Karen Nelson Ops Manager for North Somerset and Chris Hanson, Ops Director First West of England attended.
    - Chris Hanson: main changes to Portishead routes:
      - Village Quarter presents a major challenge to get through estate due to badly parked cars.
      - First Bus has lowered the fares (following consultation)
      - He apologised that First didn't give sufficient notice of changes, also that driver sickness / shortages have caused delays or non-running buses

### Audience questions and comments:

- Waverley Court residents:
  - Bus times have changed leaving 20 mins to do what she needs in town or wait 2 hours for next bus:
    - Carl, NSC: The 57 & 59 are supported services, the ambition (if patronage increases or funding is found) is to change to a 1-hour schedule in future. The bus serves the whole District. He will take this away and look at it.
  - Since X3 is no longer running, the Stagecoach service is not assisting passengers, so it is not wheelchair accessible. Other residents agreed
    - Carl, NSC: NSC contracts this service so he will investigate this immediately. He will contact Waverley Court residents with an update.

- Bus to Cribbs Causeway / Southmead Hospital:
    - When will X5 run straight to Cribbs Causeway? It now takes 2.5 hours and 3 bus changes.
    - People need to get to Southmead hospital (Porters service busy but 1 passenger in car at a time)
    - Younger people are missing out on social and employment opportunities by not going to Cribbs. It takes 2 hours each way.
    - An alternative route to Cribbs from Clevedon to Portishead via Longcross this has 1,400 people on petition.
    - Could the bus connect to rail service at Shirehampton?
    - Could Sheepway be missed out to speed up the service?
    - Stopped bus from Weston in Gordano Rd to Cribbs Causeway, it now needs a connection
      - Chris, First Bus:
        - First Bus ran the direct X5 for a few years, the M5 added delays and had poor patronage. They gave up the service to another operator which stopped it during COVID-19. When First Bus took it back, it was running at a loss. In future they could consider something different if patronage increases. The fast service to Bristol is now busy.
        - First Bus is prevented from stopping on Port Way, but will look at the suggestion.
        - Would a less frequent direct bus work? Audience generally said yes, but must be every day.
        - Sheepway avoids people having to cross a busy road where there was an accident plus Conference Road stops are very busy.
      - Carl, NSC:
        - NSC has no funding to support a service to Cribbs. Unreliability made the route unsustainable.
        - Concessionary passes do not offer enough fees to support services alone.
        - Bus stop naming is very difficult to change
      - Councillor Bob Bull, PTC: suggested this bus stops at the school on the way out of town.
      - NSC and First Bus: will look at the suggestions and discuss with West of England Combined Authority.
- Village Quarter / Marina services:
  - A pregnant lady with a pram reported, it is difficult to get from the Village Quarter up the hill.
  - As a deaf resident, a bus service is required in the Marina. Why was the bus 3 cancelled?
  - Need yellow lines on Phoenix Way and ticket people parking to block the road
  - Lack of yellow lines has been a problem for years, why hasn't anything been done? Bus company has now been forced to cancel X3
  - Why wasn't single decker put on for X3?
    - Chris, First Bus:
      - Parked cars have been a problem for 10 years, this has been discussed with previous NSC staff.
      - Understands yellow lines are an issue for resident parking.
      - Some lines are in place but not enough.
      - Some people want buses through Village Quarter some don't.
      - First Bus single deckers are the same length and width as doubles so would not solve the problem. Stagecoach has smaller buses, but they are too small to run to Bristol.
    - Carl, NSC:
      - Residents were surveyed and 50% wanted cars 50% wanted buses.
      - The smaller buses can get through but not suitable.
      - Councillor Bob Bull, PTC:
        - Has asked for yellow lines on Phoenix Way, but NSC declined it.
        - Could the road become 1-way?
- Bus information and reliability:
  - Bus to Cribbs didn't turn up, waited  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour in cold. Electronic info did not give real time info

- Timetables are very high up
- Chris, First Bus:
  - Apologised for any inconvenience. They are working on real time information improvements.
- Carl, NSC:
  - Information has been disrupted due to short notice changes due to COVID-19.
  - Only 3 people putting timetables up across North Somerset including Carl. They are working on it
  - Lee apologised for a problem he had with the information system, which he's trying to fix
- Other comments:
  - The X4 is putting children's lives at risk, they must now cross a busy road to change bus to get to school or walk along narrow payments.
  - What data was used to drive changes? Pill received increased services using the same data.
  - Residents cannot now get to Weston College or Weston town centre directly.
  - Weston has had lots of investment on the new bus station it's not fair.
  - The bus from the Ship Pub to Sainsburys has been replaced with a 2 hourly bus, this is a problem.
  - To encourage more bus users, you have to make improvements.
  - Can Portishead go into the Bristol price zone to increase footfall?
  - No bus down High St and Bristol Road
  - The White Lion bus stop needs to have name changed to Old Mill
    - Carl, NSC:
      - Bus stop naming is very difficult to change
  - Councillor Sue Mason, PTC: A resident at the top of Nore Road emailed Liam Fox MP questioning the changes in service (email and response):
 

“Wednesday 2 February 2022  
Dear Liam Fox,  
Following the publicity given to the Levelling up criteria announced by Michael Gove this morning, I thought I would make you aware of the scorched earth retrenchment policy from First relating to bus services in the Redcliffe Bay end of Portishead. Immediately before lockdown, First printed timetables for a range of services serving Portishead. These included the X4 Bristol to Portishead via Pill, every 30 minutes, the x3 Bristol to Portishead via the Marina and Martcombe, every 30 minutes, an X3x hourly service via the Avon bridge, M5 and Portway, a rerouted X5 in Portishead serving Nore Road giving access to Weston and Cribbs causeway. There was also the 90 minute frequency 88 service giving access to Nailsea, Yatton for the station and Congresbury.  
I am now left with just the first named service x4 Bristol to Portishead every 30 minutes following the latest bonfire of the bus timetables, which has left Redcliffe Bay with a far far worse level and range of service than it had 2 years ago. It would now take me the best part of 2 hours to get to Cribbs causeway or Southmead and would require a change of bus in Bristol., a far cry from the 20 minute direct service we had previously.  
The latest changes to the x5 service means that upper Portishead and upper Clevedon are not served at all. Indeed the entire route of the x5 is now at sea level. Given the nature of the hills of the west side of the Gordano and the age profile of the residents one would have thought this would have been a priority.  
I would urge you to open a dialogue with Portishead Town Council who are most unhappy at the changes, and who have already written to First.  
Far from levelling up, these changes represent the exact opposite of what is proposed in this mornings policy announcement”.

“Thank you, Mr ....., it is a disaster area. Dr Fox has written yet again to First, having been in touch with ..... NSC with little success.  
Yours sincerely  
Ione Douglas MBE (Mrs)  
P/A to the Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP”

    - The Panel did not agree that no response was made to Liam Fox MP

- After the meeting PTC have been told by the resident that Liam Fox MP did receive a response from NSC and First Bus.
  - Councillor Caritas Charles, NSC:
    - Thanked First Bus
    - Referred to company's profit
    - Claimed First Bus knew about the changes earlier than the announcement.
    - Asked them to work with communities.
    - Doug, First Bus:
      - Profit is essential for First Group shareholders, unfortunately the West of England network is not viable as a standalone service.
  - Councillor Nicola Holland, NSC / PTC:
    - There is a Climate emergency, we need to see buses on roads not cars, if NSC does a district wide study on who would use buses rather than cars if services improved, would First Bus work together?
    - Carl, NSC: that is the plan going forward with the new strategy. Some decisions will of course affect car users.
- Councillor Bob Bull, PTC:
  - Thanked the speakers and the 153 residents for attending
  - Summarised: residents were unhappy with notice given about changes, and many of the changes made.
  - Suggested regular meetings to discuss proposals, alternatives, and make sure residents' views are heard
  - Send any further comments for his attention to [office@portishead.gov.uk](mailto:office@portishead.gov.uk) or put through Folk Hall letter box or post to The Folk Hall, 95 High Street, Portishead, Bristol, BS20 6PR.
  - Information will be added to the Council website <https://www.portishead.gov.uk/>
- Chris, First Bus: He is happy to arrange regular dialogue with residents.
- Meeting to be arranged first week in April