

Service 253, Borders Buses – Response of Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council to proposed timetable changes.

The community and its Community Council, wish to strongly resist the reduction in service 253 (Berwick upon Tweed to Edinburgh and vice versa) as we feel it will have an extremely negative effect on the resilience and sustainability of our local community.

Response from Borders Buses: We sympathise with residents as our commitment is always to provide and operate a reliable bus service in the Borders and beyond.

Unfortunately, some bus routes are scarcely used and must be tailored accordingly. We have noticed many comments are about evening journeys and times when we currently do not operate, there is no change to some of the bus provision.

Whilst we appreciate that the case for these changes will probably be based on the need for business efficiency, we feel that transport to small rural communities needs to be a service as well as a business enterprise, and we would hope that despite the potential small numbers of users, such a service could be subsidised by more well used routes. Each journey made by members of this community, is important to them.

Response from Borders Buses: There are eight buses northbound and eight buses southbound which is a reduction from 12. We believe this is still a good service for a small rural community.

The timescale for this proposed change is also far too short to enable proper and full community engagement. We received and forwarded SBC's email on 24th April. On 25th April, I emailed SBC asking for a longer period of consultation, as our next Community Council Meeting was not until 9th May. I received a response to this on 30th May, saying that due to the timescale of the bus company having to make submissions to the Traffic Commissioner's Office by 18th May, it would be difficult to take our comments beyond 2nd May deadline. However, given that there was only one week available for consultation, it is an indication of the strength of local feeling that so many responses have been gathered. We may need to make further comments on this issue asap after our Community Council meeting.

Our community supports a lot of older people, who do not drive, and do not use IT, so they rely on bus services to get them to and from supermarkets (usually Asda in Dunbar) as well as other services such as banking etc. To increase the gap between services to 2 hours makes this an untenable wait for those most marginalised and vulnerable in this community.

Response from Borders Buses: We monitor usage and where there is little

to no demand we must tailor our network to suit how the service is being used.

We understand that at the times when the new proposals indicate an hourly service, there is also an additional service run by East Coast Buses (formerly Eastern Scottish) covering part of the route and serving Dunbar. It would seem logical to look at integrating services to ensure that an hourly service, between providers, is retained for this community.

Last year (2017) saw the demise of our local doctor's surgery in Cockburnspath. Patients of the Eyemouth Medical Practice, who owned and ran the satellite service in Cockburnspath, now, have to travel to Eyemouth for appointments, or Coldingham. Some patients have moved their GP to Dunbar, believing that the bus service was at least better and they could get to and from Dunbar more easily, but if these proposals go ahead, they will also be faced with a two hour wait to return home. Particularly when unwell or disabled, this has a very negative effect, again on our most vulnerable group of residents. The alternatives would be a taxi journey costing as much as £40 for a return trip.

Many local people work in Dunbar and rely on the bus service to get them to work and back again. The effects on individuals would potentially be to give up employment, or move from the area due to poorer services. Many local people also work at Torness Power station and work various shifts. Some members of the community work at McDonalds in Dunbar and rely on buses to get them to and from work. As their work involves shifts, often at weekends and finishing late, they may have to give up work. This particularly, but not exclusively, affects younger people.

Response from Borders Buses: Our bus service is designed around our customers demand and usage, Unfortunately, we cannot create a timetable to work around individual needs ie: shift patterns. We heavily monitor usage and where there is little to no demand we must tailor our network to suit demand. Our timetables are not written in stone, if we see an ncrease in bus usage we would consider increasing frequency.

The last bus on weekdays, connecting Eyemouth High School (our local catchment high school) to Cockburnspath and Cove, leaves Eyemouth at 1640h. This effectively prevents high school children attending some after school activities as they cannot use public transport to get home afterwards. There will also be a knock on effect with parents having to leave work early due to not being able to use the after schools service, and an increase in vehicle traffic to pick children up later.

Response from Borders Buses: Currently the last weekday bus service from Eyemouth High School to Cockburnspath is 1640, we have made it slightly later at 1652 with amendments.

One lady has responded recently, saying that she had to move from Cockburnspath, due to a difficult pregnancy, and difficulties with public transport which did not allow her to access hospital and doctor's appointments easily. She did this when the service was (as previously) a two hourly one, and has commented very negatively on the plans to partially revert back to this level of service.

Response from Borders Buses: Our bus service is designed around our customers' demand and usage. We heavily monitor bus stop usage and where there is little to no demand we must tailor our network to suit demand. Although reduced we are still offering a reliable bus service in the area.

Some of our younger people, going out at night to Dunbar or even Edinburgh, feel that the loss of services will negatively affect them – particularly the later buses. This doesn't help us retain young people in the area

Response from Borders Buses: We haven't made any changes to night time journeys. Alongside rail we still operate a reliable bus service in the area.

Cockburnspath Bowling Club - most of their tournaments and competitions are run at weekends. The reduced service will have a negative impact on players from Grantshouse and Dunbar, who form part of this lively club and have an adverse impact on the team and its ability to play in fixtures.

Response from Borders Buses: As above.

Cockburnspath is the end of the Southern Upland Way, as well as a major part of the Berwickshire Coastal Route. We frequently, particularly in the summer, attract large numbers of walkers, who rely on the bus service to return them, often to Edinburgh, Berwick or Dunbar for either accommodation, or links to the rail network.

As there is no public transport linking Cockburnspath to Borders General Hospital in Melrose, or indeed the Courts now situated in Jedburgh, people have to travel via Edinburgh to pick up relevant transports. This involves linking in with train times at Dunbar and a forward journey. The dilution of the 253 service will have an effect on how reasonable it is for people to do this as their connection to Dunbar may be affected, making an already intolerable journey even more so.

Some services don't come into Cockburnspath, yet it is seconds off the main road – we are at a loss to understand why this is?

Response from Borders Buses: There are many references to services not going into Cockburnspath. All services passing southbound and northbound go into Cockburnspath. We will no longer serve Dunglass but will serve Cockburnspath.

May we suggest that a solution may lie in the joint working between East Coast and Borders Buses, and that a service operates from Berwick upon Tweed to Dunbar? If this service was aligned to meet needs and link with train and bus times from Dunbar towards Edinburgh, it would address local concerns and maintain links with Edinburgh, whilst retaining a local service here? Additionally, people could continue to use their bus passes.

Response from Borders Buses: This is something we could explore.

In conclusion, our community feels strongly that it is already isolated, despite being in close proximity to a major trunk road (A1), and has for many years suffered poor public transport links. The increased service (to hourly during the week) had been very much welcomed as a step in the right direction in assisting rural communities without their own infrastructure, to survive. The move towards greener economies and encouraging the use of public transport has never been more important, and, should these proposals go ahead, we see this as an environmentally unfriendly backward step.

Borders Buses response: Since we began operating in the area (Feb 2016), Borders Buses has invested millions in new vehicles, ticketing systems and a mobile app, all of which are designed to make bus travel easy for current and new bus users. Unfortunately, this still doesn't (in many cases) encourage more people use the bus more frequently.

We would be grateful if you would consider these responses in your submission to Borders Buses, and to the Traffic Commissioner's Office. We have also advised our MP (John Lamont) of these new proposals and await his response.

P M Hood (Chair); K Tulloch (Secretary), Cockburnspath and Cove Community Council.

2nd May 2018.

Email: pmhood20@gmail.com; katetulloch@btinternet.com; secretarycccc@live.co.uk