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## **Decision Session - Executive Member for City Strategy**

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2009

Report of the Director of City Strategy

### **Petition requesting the Council make representations to bus companies to improve bus service provision in the South Bank/ Bishopthorpe Road area**

#### **Summary**

1. The report considers a petition presented to the Council earlier this year calling on the Council to make representations to improve the bus service between the South Bank / Bishopthorpe Road areas and the City Centre.

#### **Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member for City Strategy is recommended to:
  - i) Note the content of the petition.
  - ii) Support options a, b, c and e.

Reason: Council officers are working to further promote, sustain and develop the local bus network in South Bank and along Bishopthorpe Road. These measures would all, potentially, improve the quality of service offered to residents in the area.

#### **Background**

3. The Council has received a petition signed by 270 residents concerning the frequency and reliability of bus services in the South Bank area. There are currently two public bus services operating in this area:
  - a. Route 11 (Bishopthorpe – South Bank – City – Heworth)
  - b. Route 21 (Colton - Acaster Malbis – Askham Bar – South Bank – City)
4. Route 11 has operated on a commercial basis (without Council subsidy) on weekday and Saturday daytimes since the route was formed as part of the First 'metro' bus service re-organisation in September 2001. Evening and Sunday services have always been operated on a tendered basis with Council subsidy.

5. Route 11 connects Bishopthorpe to the City via Bishopthorpe Road and South Bank before heading on to Heworth. The service operates on a half hourly frequency during the daytime and hourly during the evening and on Sundays.
6. Since 2001, minor modifications have been made to this route, most of which have been made in an effort to improve the reliability of the service (eg operating via Scarcroft Road instead of Nunnery Lane from Bishopthorpe, changed in October 2004).
7. Service 21 provides additional connectivity for the residents of South Bank and Bishopthorpe Road into the City Centre and to Askham Bar Tesco. Until 27 April 2009, this service only operated on a Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
8. The service is now operated every other hour, six days a week (off peak only) by Harrogate Coach Travel with Council subsidy.
9. To comprehensively serve the residents as far as is possible, both services 11 and 21 loop round Queen Victoria Street – Knavesmire Road – Campleshon Road then onto Bishopthorpe Road travelling both into and away from the City Centre.

## **Consultation**

10. The reliability of route 11 has been raised on a number of occasions since the service was launched. First Group has made numerous efforts to improve the route.
11. Councillors Merrett and Gunnell met with Council officers and the former Managing Director of First York, Richard Eames on 8 December 2008, to discuss how the reliability of service 11 might be further improved.
12. First Group and officers are both of the view that delays in the South Bank area are sporadic and are often caused by highway obstructions i.e. parked cars. Reliability on route 11 suffers as a whole, however, as a result of congestion in the City Centre. This predominantly has a negative impact on the northern half of the route as the longest delays are on the way to and after the railway station from Blossom Street.
13. First Group, Transdev and Harrogate Coach Travel have all been consulted over the last year on what changes they might make to their services as a response to the development of the Terry's site. Officers are currently unaware of any concrete proposals to enhance services but are expecting that the Terry's site developer will have to improve the peak service offering in order to meet Section 106 requirements.
14. Council officers have approached First Group to understand whether they might be prepared to enhance the bus service provision in the Bishopthorpe Road area. A response was received on 11<sup>th</sup> May stating that:

*'The service is currently a marginal service for us and is therefore not in scope for any frequency enhancements'.*

15. Council officers also raised the issue of service reliability with First Group. The company has responded by providing information taken from the bus monitoring software utilising data gathered by GPS equipment (fitted to every bus).
16. To classify as operating 'on time', the Traffic Commissioner requires that services run between a window of one minute ahead of schedule and five minutes behind schedule. Over a four-week period, 368 journeys were monitored. When averaged on a daily basis (specific journey data was not provided), all of the journeys from Bishopthorpe to town were 'on time'.
17. Route 21 was taken over by a new service provider on 27<sup>th</sup> April. No data on the reliability of this service has been gathered to date. The route will be monitored as part of the Council's ongoing contract monitoring activity.
18. Any Ward Councillor comments on this report to be reported at the meeting.

## Options

19. The following options are presented for the Executive Member's consideration to improve the reliability of the service:
  - a. Consider making changes to the operation of Queen Victoria Street and Balmoral Terrace through traffic management measures to assist the progress of buses through the street (for example by installing formal passing places or by converting the road into a one way street from Bishopthorpe Road towards the Knavesmire).
  - b. Examine the potential for more effective enforcement measures to improve bus priority in the City Centre.
  - c. Discuss redistribution of the route 11 timetable with First Group, giving particular consideration to delays in the City Centre and at the Heworth end of the route.
20. The following options are presented for the Executive Member's consideration for the enhancement of the services:
  - d. Give consideration to enhancing the frequency of either service 11 or service 21 through an open tendering process.
  - e. Continue to proactively seek possible frequency improvements in conjunction with the developers of the former Terry's factory site.

## Analysis

21. **Option a.** As indicated in paragraph 12, sporadic obstacles have caused a majority of the delays in South Bank to routes 11 and 21. Parking on both sides of Queen Victoria Street and Balmoral Terrace result in only one vehicle being able to travel down these bi-directional roads at any time. There are no formal passing places along the road and buses have often had to

negotiate difficult manoeuvres to avoid cars travelling in the opposite direction (or wait whilst the third party reverses).

22. Network Management advise that consideration has previously been given to transforming these two roads into one-way streets. The cost of such an exercise was deemed prohibitive. Officers believe that a number of formalised passing places might be a less controversial and less expensive solution to this problem but would suggest that further monitoring of the road is undertaken before such changes are introduced.
23. **Option b.** Whilst the bus tracking data outlined in paragraph 16 above identifies that the services operating from Bishopthorpe towards the City Centre are predominantly 'on time', the data also suggests that there are significant delays being caused to the Heworth end of the route as the bus travels in to town.
24. Feasibility work is currently being undertaken on Blossom Street to improve traffic flows in the area. Service 11 will benefit with any measures introduced to reduce delays to all of the routes entering town along this corridor.
25. Through the Quality Bus Partnership, First Group has raised the misuse of Coppergate by cars during restricted hours as one of the key causes of bus delay in the City Centre. Network Management are currently investigating technological measures which might be employed to enforce the restrictions (eg CCTV or a rising bollard). Without the necessary powers to enforce moving traffic offences, it is difficult to identify a workable solution.
26. **Option c.** Officers are prepared and willing to spend time identifying possible improvements which might be made to the route 11 timetable. Discussions with First Group over the specific details of their timetables are more challenging than they have been in the past as a result of staffing changes but it is hoped that these will soon be completed and the cooperation previously enjoyed from First Group will be built upon.
27. **Option d.** Service 11 operates on a commercial basis during the daytime. Any attempt to partially subsidise the service could have the unintended consequence of destabilising the service and result in another entire route for the Council to subsidise. Such a service would probably be on an hourly frequency so would be worse for residents than that which currently exists.
28. Enhancement of service 21 (operated at a cost of £46,866 per annum to the Council) could be considered but may also have the adverse effect of destabilising the commerciality of service 11.
29. **Option e.** Continuing to proactively seek possible frequency improvements in conjunction with the developers of the former Terry's factory site on either of the above routes is the most likely way that a sustainable network of bus services in the South Bank area is to be achieved.

## Corporate Priorities

30. Support for the bus services in this area would contribute to the following Corporate priorities:
- **Sustainable City** - There is considerable scope for reducing vehicle congestion delay on the overall network through greater bus use, thereby reducing the associated adverse affects, such as air pollution.
  - **Inclusive City** – The introduction of a range of sustainable bus routes across South Bank and Bishopthorpe Road increases access to opportunities and facilities by a wider (and potentially cheaper) range of travel choices.
31. Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 (LTP2): Support for the services outlined above would contribute to several of the aims of the second Local Transport Plan, namely:
- To tackle congestion
  - To improve economic performance in a sustainable manner;
  - To enhance opportunities for all community members, including disadvantaged groups, to play an active part in society;
  - To reduce the impact of traffic and travel on the environment, including air quality, noise and the use of non-renewable resources.

## Implications

- **Financial**

Any action taken, which incurs additional cost for the Council will erode the planned saving of £22,000 per annum achieved by rationalisation of the 21 and C1 bus services in the past year. Depending on which option, if any, is progressed, the cost could easily exceed the original saving on a budget which has been subject recently to severe upward pressure.

Enhancement of Council supported bus services could have the undesired effect of de-stabilising one of the more fragile commercial bus services in the City.

- **Human Resources (HR)**

There are no HR implications

- **Equalities**

There are no equalities issues except to note that the Council cannot force a bus operator (whether First or any other) to introduce or enhance bus services.

- **Legal**

There are no Legal implications

- **Crime and Disorder**

There are no Crime and Disorder implications

- **Information Technology (IT)**

There are no IT implications

- **Property**

There are no Property implications

- **Other**

There are no other implications

## **Risk Management**

32. There are no known risks.

### **Contact Details**

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**Report Approved**

**Date** 19.05.09

**Wards Affected: Micklegate**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### **Annexes**

Annex A – A copy of the front page of the residents' petition