

Joint Scrutiny Review of Local Bus Service Provision in the Greater Norwich Area – meeting held on 22 October 2009 at Norwich City Council

The outcome was a decision to recommend to Norwich City Council and the two District Councils that the joint Task and Finish Group be reconvened for one or two meetings to:

- a) Flesh out Terms of Reference for a Bus Users Association and a Joint Bus Policy Group, with the intention of re-presenting these to the County Council. The Chairman of the City Council will write to the Chairmen of Norfolk County Council, Broadland and South Norfolk Scrutiny Committees inviting them to nominate a representative to participate in further Joint Scrutiny.
- b) Discuss further the provision of a real-time electronic map of bus services in the Greater Norwich area.
- c) Explore the opportunities for public transport presented by the Local Government Act 2008.

During the course of the 2 hours we were invited to comment upon :-

- * reliability and performance of buses
- * a DfT letter showing only limited support for fuel tax subsidies; removing obstacles to through ticketing; enhanced role for traffic commissioners.
- * operators responses to the City Hall questionnaire.
- * the final report of the previous joint Bus Scrutiny Committee.
- * comments from the 3 Councils plus Norfolk County Council's views on the previous Committee report.

Importantly it was the Norfolk County Council view that the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) represented a better forum for discussion of bus matters than a new joint Scrutiny C'ttee and that Bus Users UK should be invited to consider setting up a local Norfolk Group. The Norfolk County Council multifaceted resolution of 26-8-8 also appointed City Council to liaise with Government and bus companies over a variety of issues including whether bus companies would participate in a "buswatch".

During our Q&A/debate points about how Busnet influenced timetabling, identified problem road infrastructure/traffic conditions; time keeping, digital displays, bus modernity or not, how concessionary fares reimbursement costs were arrived at; 33 newly refurbished "first" buses for Norwich; fuel tax rebate; bus fuel use efficiency; through ticketing.

This all helped to convince me that Norfolk's bus users and their advocates in the 3 local Councils need locally rather than nationally based scrutiny. My understanding of the GNDP is that Officers may well be assessing bus transport and recommending what they see as improvements but they are nowhere near offering opportunities for scrutiny of detailed infrastructure issues by elected members or the public and as such I cannot agree the NCC proposal.

The view of the meeting was that scrutiny should be at 2 levels :-

- 1] A Policy Group akin to the Rail Policy Group
- 2] A forum whereby residents can make their views known.

Experience with Rail Policy Group suggests that a full morning can easily be taken up and therefore I felt compelled not to push the reported South Norfolk Council resolution which preferred a combined Rail/Bus Policy Group.

Leslie Dale.

Rep to the Norwich City special Bus Scrutiny Committee