

Bus route meeting, Newcastleton
Note of meeting at Buccleugh House on 30.01.2024

In attendance

Ross Sharp-Dent	Waste and Passenger Transport Manager, SBC
Gordon Grant	Principal Transport Officer, SBC
Sarah Culverwell	Community Engagement Officer, SBC
Cllr Watson McAteer	Councillor for the Hawick & Hermitage Ward
Greg Cuthbert	Local resident
Gary Cuthbert	Local resident
Susan Armstrong	Local resident
Dean Armstrong	Local resident
Jim Lewis	Chair of Newcastleton Community Council

Apologies

Barbara Elborn	Newcastleton Community Council / Newcastleton Community Trust
----------------	---

Welcome & introductions

All were welcomed to the meeting and introductions were made around the table.

Main Agenda

GG advised that he has been in talks with Alistair Telford regarding the current bus service and the challenges that are currently in place for service operators. GG openly discussed the challenge at Council regarding budget to keep services going. Gordon opened discussions to the room, as to how the community suggests may be the best use the budget, and the services and areas which they feel are the priority.

JL suggested that the Workers bus (8:15 meets X95) and the later shopper's bus (9:05) could be combined with the potential removal of the 9:05 bus.

The group felt that that the priority is for workers, as it is of the most importance to the economy of the residents.

Susan noted Concerns over 127A service (Newcastleton to Carlisle), if this was lost as this is used for workers. There were discussions over how well the service is used.

GG- As attendees were only made up of those that used the worker's bus. Should there be changes to the shopping bus those users' views will need to be taken into consideration.

DA – Advised that the Telfords service is on time every day, that it's the connecting bus, which is run by Border Buses, where there is an issue. He said that Border Buses do not ask if the connecting bus from Newcastleton has arrived, which has left people being stranded. He suggested that should the X95 service be reliable that he would use it.

GG reported that the Service Officer has only advised of 2 occasions that the service has failed on the workers bus to Carlisle, where the Canonbie Service links with the A5.

GG presented the group with the 'ticket data', which breaks down the bus routes and the number of users using the service and how much funding each of the bus routes brings in. This is a useful guide for the Council to monitor the usage of the bus routes. The 128 Service North to Hawick shows as being poorly used and brings in funding of £4k per year, while costing £48,338.28 to run.

He explained that concessions reimbursement rate (through the Under 22 bus pass and over 60s buss pass) has had an impact on the funding that the bus service brings in, as the government only give the provider

55% of the ticket sales. This affects the operator and has led to some routes operating at a loss, as operators still have the same costs for staff, fuel, and driver costs.

Shared Prosperity Funding has been secured to fund a Taxi Bus, there is potential that this could operate 2/3 days per week on the Newcastleton - Hawick Route. This then frees up the 128 Service, to put service straight back though at 9am (5 per week), Newcastleton to Hawick Monday to Saturday. Also, due to the turnaround time (returning 45 mins later), potentially run the service one way and then taxi bus on the return.

RSD re-enforced that SBC don't want to cut services and that there has been a complete network review and aim to deliver services as best as possible with the buses available. However, costs are going up. He asked the group to consider, in regard to suggestions put forward at the meeting, what happens when the SPF funding runs out, as there is only 1 year of funding. This would have to be mad clear that it would have to be reviewed and if no further funding is available the route has potential to be put at risk.

GG Enquired about other potential funds, available locally through windfarms or community funds. JL advised that Newcastleton do not receive any windfarm funds and do not have any other funding pots that could be utilised.

Meeting summary

- Currently the 127A [Newcastleton to Carlisle] is one of if not the most popular bus with traveller numbers from the Village.
- Due to work Commitments and although on paper the connection should work with the X95 this at times has not happened leaving bus users unable to continue their journey and have an impact on employment. This does need further exploration to establish the number of missed connections.
- Economically for the village the most important thing is to provide consistent transport for residents to attend work and further education. Shopping is important for residents for social purposes, but residents advised that this is trumped by economics for the village every time.
- It appears that the 128 [Newcastleton - Hawick] is hardly used outside of school transport and the 17:15 which can be used by school children that have after school clubs. There are underlying factors here at work as well with the timings of arrivals in and out of Hawick - enough time to do shopping, limited times at the weekend etc.
- As SPF funding has been secured for a "Taxi Bus" service for Newcastleton then this will look to replace the 128 allowing additional funds to be realigned with the 127A to look to extend the "workers" Bus all the way into Carlisle giving certainty for those using it that they can arrive for work and college in time.
- Currently the shoppers bus leaving Newcastleton at 9:05 will continue however it was muted that the 07:00 and 09:05 could be combined although this would be as a last resort.
- Unfortunately, with the SPF funding only lasting 1 year it is more than likely that this will have to be revisited in a year's time but hopefully there will be some additional data from the Taxi Bus allowing a more educated arrival at a timetable serving Newcastleton with Hawick.

Actions

- GG: Prepare a draft timetable which can be presented to the community and be shared at the upcoming Community Council meeting on CC meeting on 13 Feb.
- SC: To prepare meeting notes and provide to JL.
- GG to discuss feasibility of proposals with Alistair Telford.
- JL: To present at the CC for feedback from the community, which will be reviewed an minuted.