Jane Markham - Clerk, Draughton PC From: Resident

 5 September 2021

**BETTER BUSES**

**Introduction**

1. You asked me to consider CPRE’s proposals for “Bus Back Better” in North Yorkshire prior to a Parish Council (PC) discussion at its 13 September meeting. It is not clear to me how comprehensive NYCC’s consultation has been or will be but that see that a deadline appears to have been passed on 3 September. I am therefore copying this to CPRE and DalesBus. ***Overall, I recommend that Draughton PC supports the CPRE paper and submits proposals for local services itself.***
2. This note has the underlying axioms that good local bus services are general economic and social benefits, that we should try to use them to the maximum to obtain those benefits, and that even a small community such as our own can do so. At a macro policy level, the Climate Emergency and other issues also suggest a need to reduce personal private transport use where possible. The CPRE paper underlines these, and they form part of the background to its own recommendations.
3. An omission from the CPRE paper is specific reference to the needs of infirm and disabled people, though its recommendations would also benefit them generally. In this respect, provision of infrastructure – such as raised kerbs – may be as important as provision of a service, since there is little point in providing a service that people are unable, physically, to use. The extent to which such improvements are possible may depend on what proportion of Government funding is or can be allocated between specific County Council budgets.
4. The following paragraphs comment on current services in this part of Craven, and potential for their improvement, with particular emphasis on the Skipton-Ilkley (64) and Skipton-Harrogate (59) routes, and the corridor between Addingham and Grassington (74A) which runs through the parish between Lobwood House and Bolton Bridge. They are from the perspective of a Draughton resident and regular bus user.

 **Improved Connectivity**

 Skipton-Ilkley (64)

1. This service is currently operated on a purely commercial basis and therefore receives no subsidy. It (and its predecessor X84/784) has been severely truncated during the past thirty years. For example, until the mid-1990s there was a full seven-day service between Skipton and Leeds so that it was possible to travel by bus from Skipton and Draughton on a Sunday until 11:50 pm. The former operator then withdrew all evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday services and those days are unlikely to return.
2. At the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown the same operator withdrew all services between Skipton and Ilkley for two months, then removed the through service to Otley and Leeds. The new operator has integrated a renumbered 64 service with its service 62 between Keighley and Ilkley. This has improved timekeeping and reliability, with an hourly service in each direction on weekdays and Saturdays, but only during the day. Thus, the first service from Draughton towards Skipton is at 8:18 am (9:23 am on Saturday) and towards Ilkley at 8:51 am (9:51 am on Saturday), whereas the last bus towards Skipton is at 5:35 pm (4:23 pm on Saturday) and towards Ilkley at 5:59 pm (4:51 pm on Saturday). There are still no Sunday or Bank Holiday Monday services. The very limited DalesBus 884 and linked seasonal services are not relevant in this context since they serve an entirely different purpose, for the most part do not visit the village and hence provide little direct benefit to local people.
3. The current diversionary route between Draughton and Skipton as a result of Skipton High Street’s closure has had a significant effect on passenger numbers: the service is inaccessible between the Bus Station and Overdale. High Street reopening will allow the operator to resume operations along the original route if it chooses. This would potentially increase passenger numbers by up to or exceeding fifty per cent at certain times. It would also offer the flexibility to use double-deck vehicles should user volumes justify it (the low bridge on the Otley Road diversion prevents this at present).
4. Since the 64 route is operated commercially, service improvements presumably fall outside the County Council’s direct control. Nevertheless, ***I suggest that the PC recommends that the County Council works with the operator to try to achieve the following:***
5. ***Extending the current Monday-Friday timetable to include Saturdays***
6. ***Providing an earlier weekday departure in both directions for school/work traffic***
7. ***Introducing a two-hourly service on the route during the evening and on Sundays (up to – say – around 9:00 pm)***
8. ***Further integrating the route with the operator’s other local services (specifically the Keighley-Skipton 66 service) on a trial basis to provide a half-hourly weekday daytime service between Skipton and Ilkley***.

Skipton-Harrogate (59)

1. This weekday service was abandoned when NYCC withdrew subsidy during austerity. It was often well-patronised but mainly by concessionary pass holders. It was possible to hail buses on the A59 at Draughton Bottom and – with notice to the driver – alight there. In summer 2021 DalesBus has been operating a two-hourly Saturday service on the route, but running “fast”, so that option is not available. Whatever the other arguments, there would be justification for resuming the weekday service if the new unitary authority were to fail to meet its commitment to keep services local by transferring some or all of them to Harrogate for whatever reason. Essential local services should be accessible to all, and if they were to be centralised in Harrogate, people would need public transport to reach them.
2. There are alternative routes, for example by train or by travelling through Ilkley (using the 64 and X52 buses), but journey times alone make them inadequate substitutes. The direct bus journey time between Skipton and Harrogate is 45-50 minutes. Using the train via Leeds takes 1 hour 50 minutes to 2 hours in each direction. Using the 64 and X52 buses takes 1 hour 40 minutes outbound and 2 hours 5 minutes inbound. ***I suggest the PC recommends that consideration be given to restoring a direct Skipton-Harrogate bus link on weekdays.***

Wharfedale: Ilkley-Bolton Abbey-Grassington (74A)

1. This service was operated by “Pride of the Dales” until its demise some years ago. The County Council took over the route on an emergency basis using a minibus. It operates twice a day in each direction on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only (separate DalesBus arrangements apply at weekends). Since then, there appears to have been no serious review of the operation, or attempt to find an alternative operator. The current service seems to satisfy no-one. I deal with other issues resulting from use of minibuses elsewhere, but note that a single walking group boarding at Ilkley can fill a bus, making the service inaccessible to local people whether in Ilkley itself or along the route (and it is hardly Covid-secure!).
2. There is no weekday link at all between Skipton and Wharfedale villages between Addingham and Grassington. This could be partly remedied by extending the current Skipton-Embsay service from Embsay along Low Lane and the A59 to Bolton Abbey village, where it would connect with an improved 74A service. Ideally – and subject to agreement with the Estate – it would terminate in either the Village or Cavendish Pavilion car parks rather than at the Devonshire Arms turning circle.
3. Therefore, ***I suggest the PC recommends that:***

 ***(a) Restoration of a two-hourly 74A service in each direction on weekdays***

***(b) Replacement of minibuses with larger vehicles on the route***

***(c) Consideration to be given to extending the Skipton-Embsay services to Bolton Abbey, to connect with enhanced 74A services.***

**Increased Capacity**

1. Paragraph 11 mentions the capacity problem facing people wanting to use the minibus service along Wharfedale. Others include a complete lack of provision for wheelchair users (which is potentially if not actually discriminatory and could leave the County Council at risk of prosecution), or for pushchairs, luggage etc… Many of the minibuses in use require users to negotiate steep, narrow steps to board or alight rather than the low floor arrangements standard on larger vehicles. The same issues apply to all services operated by minibus.
2. CPRE’s disparagement of so-called “demand-responsive” services is quite correct. In practice, these services do not address possible demand nor are they responsive. They normally require at least twenty-four hours’ notice, which is useless for an urgent visit to a doctor’s surgery, dentist etc… They also require an unreasonable degree of forward-planning on the part of the service user. For example, to travel on the South Craven service between Skipton and Lothersdale you have to book using a Northallerton telephone number that is available only between 10 am and noon from Monday to Friday.
3. Therefore, ***I suggest the PC:***
4. ***Supports the redeployment of all minibuses currently operated on local services and their replacement by larger capacity vehicles***
5. ***Supports CPRE’s call for “demand responsive” services to be replaced by regular (if limited) accessible minibus services.***

**Improved Infrastructure**

1. During austerity the County Council has explicitly refused to provide bus stop signs, shelters, display boards and seating and will not replace those that are damaged or missing. It has also devolved local timetable provision completely to operators, with results that we have observed in Draughton and elsewhere locally (DalesBus are excepted as they do provide timetable information). This suggests that – whilst CPRE may be correct to call for provision of parking at certain locations – something more basic is needed first.
2. More important than provision of car parking is ease of access for elderly people and those with disabilities. Their difficulty in using minibus services is mentioned elsewhere, but it is not straightforward for them to use modern low-floor vehicles unless raised kerbs are installed. We see this frequently in Draughton where the stop is adjacent to a nursing home and “sheltered” housing and the kerb is low or (eastbound) flush with the road. An ageing population means that an integral part of any infrastructure improvement programme should be provision of raised kerbs at stops adjacent to residential and nursing homes, or where the age/disability profile of the local population is known to be high.
3. Unless private operators can be found to operate current minibus services, their replacement by larger vehicles would presumably be a cost falling on the County Council. It is not clear whether this would be classed as an infrastructure cost (it is certainly a capital cost) or whether it could be met by other means. If such cost has to be met from “Bus Back Better” funds, it is unclear how much scope there might be for other infrastructure work.
4. From a leisure perspective, I note that in West Yorkshire and East Lancashire there is generally a bus stop adjacent to every public footpath that crosses a bus route and this is an arrangement that could usefully be adopted in North Yorkshire. Unfortunately, the only such candidate in Draughton is roughly opposite Berwick Intake and its position on the Chelker Bends probably rules out such an arrangement on safety grounds.
5. I suggest that ***the PC recommends that the County Council:***
6. ***Reinstates funding for replacement of bus stop furniture and enforces its policy of requiring operators to provide timetable information in display boards***
7. ***Sets aside funds for raising kerbs, initially at stops close to residential and nursing homes.***

CW (email address supplied)