

**Minutes of Crosspool Forum Special Open Meeting – 30th May 2014.  
The 51 First Bus Service**

**St Columbas. 7.00**

**Present;** Ian Hague; Steve Reynolds; Gillian Drinkwater; John Holliday; Faye Buxton  
Chris Batchelor; Ian Jenkinson

**Councillors** – Rob Frost, Geoff Smith, Ann Murphy, Chris Woodcraft

**First Bus Company** – Adam Timewell (Commercial Manager);  
John Eardley (Business Manager)

60 Residents.

**Ian Hague** had been asked to chair the meeting so welcomed everyone, & introduced the company representatives. **Adam Timewell** then spoke about his Australian origins (Sydney) & 16 years in buses, both there, Dubai & now S Yorkshire. He said he was “just as frustrated as (the audience) with the punctuality” of the 51, but noted that recently the tram line repairs and Charnock roadworks had been having a major impact – though it was “particularly frustrating” for our area that these were at the other end of the 51 route. The next big change will come in Sep., & they are looking to improve punctuality with particular problems regarding accessibility on West St (outbound). He hopes they will be given sufficient notice with regard to the proposed tram works here, but is not sure of the impact that will have. There are “grave concerns” on Mappin St. with the bus stop entrance, which is making it not a safe place for passengers or buses. This is “definitely on the agenda & (he wants) to resolve it as soon as possible”. There is some “good news” – the 51 is getting a “full fleet of brand new double-decker buses” from Sep. First wants to have a “standard fleet” on the whole route, & there is “sufficient capacity” for double-decker use. However he knows there are concerns with the lower deck capacity “after 9.30”, & is “mindful of the issues” with people who can not climb the stairs. ( Adam also covers York, Doncaster & Rotherham – some 70 routes all told).

Almost 30 questions were taken from the floor, & answered by Adam or John.

## **QUESTIONS**

1/Concessionary fares starting time of 9.30 does not work; eg from Coningsby House to get to hospitals or to city meetings for early appointments. People can no longer rely on the service so are inclined to use their cars, drive to eg a 52 route & park – in order to get somewhere reliably on time. APPLAUSE ( There are also a lot of youngsters on that bus – why? An extra bus was requested for this time.)

2/ Inaccurate or nonsense time displays at the stops.- ‘Bermuda triangle’ effect of buses going missing!. Can management not check from the transponders exactly where any given bus is? The ‘counting down’ function would appear to mean the company knows exactly where a bus is.... but then they disappear!

3/ The arrival of 3 no. 51s together (while 8 or 9 no. 52s went past!) – a very regular occurrence, day & evening.

4/ Driver problems – not ‘kneeling ‘ the bus for people with mobility problems to get on easily. Drivers have told people the 51 is a “dreaded route”. They complain people are always asking them why they are late & what has caused it – which slows them down further! Passengers have been told by drivers that at Lodge Moor “we are entitled to a break”,(- there was even a suggestion they are holding card schools up there!-) One lady & friend had been left standing in cold, wet windy conditions at the Claremont stop on a Sunday – while the bus went sailing past. It was pointed out that people on the 51 usually thank the driver & say goodbye - drivers should be reminded they are doing a service & people need respect. However if there is “low driver morale” can they be motivated or incentivized? Is this just a 51 problem? (There was a floor request to the travelling public not to use derogatory terms about the drivers – they “are a nice bunch of people”). ( A resident did think the female drivers had a better attitude!). Buses stopping across pelican crossings at Weston Bank was deplored. It was however noted that time given to drivers (20 mins) to cover their route (Lodge Moor to the centre) had scarcely changed over the years – despite the huge increase in traffic.

5/ High St stop – the 51 driver should wait for any 52s to move before opening his doors. We need a dedicated stop – severe H & S issues here.

6/ Double prams or shopping trolleys taking up too much space so it is impossible to get past them in the aisles.

7/ Bus bunching - & why do they all crowd together at the Lodge Moor terminus & travel back down together! This has been going on for years. There is a problem with non-arrival etc in the evening – so it can not be simply the traffic.

8/ Do bus inspectors still exist? Could they be put on this route - & Adam & John too – to see what is going on. There also used to be 'regulators', working in town to keep their fingers on the pulse of bus movements.

9/ The ethos of the company was brought up; how important is 'public service' to them? While it was acknowledged it is a private company & must make money, why does the 51 just have the one bus company willing to run a service – a lot of the Crookes buses (52) are never full yet still run. People feel they are badly served & have been for years. (Stagecoach was asked up at Crystal Peaks recently whether they would be willing to run a 51 – but declined – "no money in it" . Geoff Smith said he could ask again). It was felt the route "had been a poor relation for years" Does First have "entrenched ideas & mindsets" – is it difficult to get changes made? Who has the power to oversee the service – SYPT, the council, etc?

10/ Splitting the 51 route was brought up; why could there not be a 'little runner bus' collecting from Lodge Moor & taking people to Broomhill – where there is then a choice of buses for further travel inbound. (The same would work for travelling from Broomhill back to Lodge Moor). APPLAUSE. If this is not acceptable what about Pinfold St as a turn around for the 51? (APPLAUSE) – or the bus could travel to the market and turn left there, to come straight back?

11/ Fulwood Ward has the 120 & 51, & the local councillor said there were similar grumbles about bunching from people equidistant between the 2 bus routes.

12/ Performance indicators? What are they & can they be shared with the Forum & the counsellors? For instance does First know exactly how many people use the 51 to cross the city from Charnock to get to the RHH or to other hospitals - & how many travelling inbound stay on the bus beyond the centre? Are there what appear to be 'missing buses' ?

13/ 'Not in service' buses; how can they come past waiting customers (while partly full) & display this sign? They have to go up the usual route anyway so why not accept people? APPLAUSE

14/ Some sort of 'oyster' or 'smart card system for payment for everyone? – so no fumbling with coins & swiping & waiting to see if a ticket would be issued. Can there be signs telling people to have their money or passes ready before they board? ( It was suggested that as in the hospitality industry a more effective option is a sign saying something like "78% of our travellers have their money or passes ready")

15/ The "wonderful 51 service" leaflet! A WI lady had this delivered to her at Handsworth – some 10 miles from our route! It compares the 51 favourably to the supertram & suggests the 51 is better ... at Herdings.

16/ Bus tickets costs? In some cases it can be cheaper for eg 4 full-payers to get a taxi! Will the government's promised money make a difference?

Ann Murphy has a petition with over 100 signatures on it regarding the 51 service ,& many emails of individual stories of problems; this all shows how serious this problem is. This service is costing people both time AND money – missing railway trains & having to buy a new ticket, or having to give up waiting for a bus & call for a taxi.

## ANSWERS

**To Question number 2/ Bus transponders;** It is "quite difficult to analyze the lengths of gaps between sensors" – so it could be an engineering problem, or management issue. The new buses will help alleviate the former – the breaking down problems. ( There are no current staff shortages which would mean buses were missing, but why they seem to disappear no-one knows!). Buses pass trigger points in the network but there are "very few " of these - & if the bus does not turn up at the stop at the expected time the display resets itself. The 2007/8 buses have an older version of this tracking system. Sheffield has 281 vehicles (& c 680 drivers), & Olive Grove Depot is the largest in the UK. In the next few months there will be some re-structuring & by the spring we should have a named Route Manager, but things will need time to take effect.

**4/ Driver behaviour.** The drivers should make the buses "kneel", & there have been some "driver behaviour issues" which they are "trying to stamp out" – this is on John's agenda.

Things have in the past been managed from the driver's perspective & not the customer's. He said the waiting time at Lodge Moor is a 'recovery' period ( a cushion to help the time table) - & not divers' entitled time off. They are having "customer service" instilled in them, so in his "personal view" a driver sailing right past waiting people was not acceptable – "some drivers do need reminding people pay their wages"" ! - the "customer comes first" & "the customer is the business". On driver morale, lots of routes suffer the same way – but drivers are at the moment not dedicated to just driving one route. However this might change, & this area have a smaller pool of drivers they can talk more easily to about any issues that arise.

**6/ Prams/buggies/shopping trolleys** taking up space – a difficult one to answer.

**7/ Bunching;** Adam said they were as "confused" as the residents are about this, and are "keen to address it". They have been trying different things but nothing has really worked. – it does appear to be a management rather than time-tabling issue. Bunching is "inconsistent" – they can tell when it is happening but not why. Every route has problems with punctuality at times. Sheffield has a very difficult terrain – bus manufacturers test their vehicles here – on the 51! (The ex-London buses they bought – 33 of them – had to have new engines in 9 of them within 6 months! – the route "eats buses" !)

**8/ There are roving inspectors** – some have been on the 51 quite recently. Adam has travelled on the route himself but it was obviously a good day with no problems! Adam's team wants to work with the controllers & supervisors on how to manage bunching & identify problems - & to get consistency across the board. They have access to CCTV & radio links, but "acknowledge they do not do a very good job on a daily basis" – this is definitely on John's agenda.

**9/ Different companies to run a 51?** This issue was before Adam's time, & has a lot of history. It is a "good question" why we were so badly served in the first place. His remit is to ensure an adequate service across the city, so he agreed some areas might have too many buses & some not enough; this will be" a long & arduous" process to change this, but he is "keen" to look at the resources.(The "level of competition" is a downside – fighting over patches!). The Optio scheme with the 52 also has legal issues – where 2 operators run the same route. With regard to 'entrenched ideas', it will probably be a lot easier now than it would have been 18 ms to 2 years ago , as there has been a culture change in Sheffield & S Yorkshire. There is a new & enthusiastic management team with "fresh ideas & a new approach", a "clear vision". So John has a new role, & First is changing its structure at the local level. They are both eager to take the issues back to the depot & deal with them!

**10/ Splitting the route?** This is" being looked into as a possibility from September", as they can quite see why we think it is necessary, & inbound passengers do not tend to cross the city. There is no "natural terminus" in Sheffield – the bus station is not central for most people. The "preferred option" is to run the 51 to the markets & then turn round.

On responsibility, the SYPTE, bus companies & council are responsible equally, with equal input.. The bus operators have most influence in service but the 'in charge' element is equal with the same goal. John & Adam are taking our concerns very seriously.

**12/ Performance indicators etc?** They know there are keys times of day when Charnock people need to get to the hospitals & university, so it is a "difficult balance" to know where to break the route for them – no obvious turn-around spot. They are quite happy to share their information with us on punctuality & reliability etc.

**13/ 'Not in service' buses** – Adam will look into the process of communication with control, & how this can be dealt with.

**14/ Day & weekly tickets** are being introduced for 'students', with school campaigns to get the message across. In Oct tickets can be bought ahead by Smart phone – these are being trialled in Aberdeen & Worcester. Special cards are also being looked at. As regards signage – they are trying to move away from lots of signs on buses –while it is "frustrating" it can be difficult to change people's behaviour.

**15/ Leaflet;** there were distribution problems with this, & the campaign has been dropped! Faults have been picked up & there is "local ownership & control" now. Any complaints should be directed to Adam & John – not via Customer Services.

**16/ Ticket costs?** This is not Adam or John's responsibility, but they think these are among the lowest in the region – though there is some adjustment to come with single ticket prices. Any government money might go to the infrastructure.

**Ian** asked Adam & John to come back to the next Open Meeting (31st July) & report on their progress? They were happy to do this, & are "always available" & "approachable".

