

Scrutiny Panel Bus Review

1. Summary of feedback and information from participating companies and organisations

General feedback

- Town is congested, making bus operations more challenging (Arriva, Panther, Heddingham & First Bus)
- Car parking charges in town centre are too low and prevent modal shift from car to bus (Arriva, Panther & First Bus).
- Community transport schemes benefit from using bus lanes but use of stops is sometimes questioned (when being used for a not-for-profit service run for a community/public use) (Community360 (C360)).
- Community groups operating under Section 19 Permits (transport of members but not the public) also provide support and signposting for service users) (C360).
- Essex County Council (ECC) are investing in local buses, Park and Ride and Community 360. ECC has recorded slight increases for bus use in Colchester and believe competition between operators has kept fares down (ECC).
- Fares and multi-operator season tickets are good value (First Bus).
- Colchester Blueprint meetings are positive and useful (several operators and ECC)
- 40% fewer teenagers have driving licenses, compared to the figures for 1997.

Work underway to improve punctuality

- Arriva: Building live surveillance centres to manage services. All buses have GPS & radios. Trialling of new working method in Southend led to punctuality almost reaching 95%.
- ECC: Reducing congestion by increasing bus use. Bus lanes introduced and A12 junction 28 improved.
- First Bus: Use of AVLS (automatic vehicle location system). Data used to refine future service changes. Feedback from public tracked to improve quality.
- Heddingham: They use satellite tracking and messaging to and from vehicles. Twitter is used to flag issues and a customer line is operated. It would help operators to have ways to work with ECC to manage the impact of road works and recommend a Punctuality Improvement Partnership is developed between ECC and operators.
- Ipswich Buses: Have increased frequency on their route but priority bus lanes on the Ipswich Road route would help.

Current efforts to increase bus usage in Colchester

- Arriva: Looking to engage more with local business community. Lack of ECC funding however leaves a significant risk for operators, with a currently declining market.
- ECC: Held promotional campaign for Park & Ride in early 2018. Promoting use of Colchester Borough Card multi-operator season ticket.
- First Bus: Now using digital platforms, mobile and contactless payment ticketing for buying tickets. This removes barriers. Bus tracking app introduced, and larger buses on busier routes.
- Hedingham: An increase in frequency and timeliness of services can be used as a driver to increase use of buses. Plans include improved marketing/presentation of the fleet and better wi-fi in vehicles.
- Ipswich Buses: A new network is in operation with revised fares, contactless and app payment, along with a new website. Marketing is to be improved.

Work ongoing to reduce emissions

- Arriva: Won £1m from ECC to convert Colchester fleet to the Euro 6 emissions standard.
- Community 360: Have replaced several older, less efficient buses
- ECC Sustainable Travel Planning Team works with firms to implement travel plans. £500k government funding secured to convert 30 Colchester buses to Euro 6 standard.
- First Bus: Introduction of Euro 6 standard buses and upgrading of vehicles already in service. Green road system fitted to improve driving style and cut idling.
- Hedingham: Want to upgrade fleet to Euro 5 standard, but this would be dependent on the awarding of contracts on more than just competitive pricing. Euro 6 standard is commercially sustainable for new additions to the fleet.
- Ipswich Buses: Improving fleet to Euro 5 standard
- Panther: Fleet in Colchester area is 'Low emission zone' compliant

Moves to increase Accessibility

- Arriva: Use of 'ArrivaClick' flexible minibus service.
- Community 360: Most buses are fully accessible. Gradually replacing older models with new ones which include tail lifts. More capital funding support is needed for this.
- ECC: Over 100 smaller infrastructure issues dealt with, but topography and design of town cause difficulties which are difficult to mitigate.
- First Bus: All vehicles now DDA compliant and drivers are trained to consider access issues as part of their CPC course. Improvements to town bus stops would help give access where customers need it.

- Heddingham: Raised concern bus stops present issues e.g. buses not being able to always pull up flush with the kerb, through design of the kerb or illegal parking. Bus station area is poorly laid out (also mentioned by Panther) and improvements for stops should be discussed at Colchester Blueprint meetings.

Ways to achieve improved dialogue with bus companies:

- CBC need to meet bus company representatives individually in private to discuss issues, as commercial sensitivities often apply (Arriva).
- Have a regular meeting for bus users, CBC representatives and bus company representatives to discuss issues and requests (Arriva, Panther and Community 360).
- Make sure that community transport scheme operators are included in meetings on public transport (Community 360)
- Continuation of ECC's 'Colchester Blueprint Programme' (engagement between ECC, CBC and bus operator representatives). Meetings for resident representatives to meet bus operators will continue (ECC and First Bus).
- Voluntary Quality Bus Partnerships can be effective, and it would be useful to engage with key stakeholders (e.g. the BID) to feed into bus operations.
- Regular email newsletters and consultation with operators (Panther).