

Major campaign underway to get East Midlands based bus real time information system to 'show the right bus time'

A press release by the local group Campaign for Better Transport, Leicestershire and Rutland.

After 8 years of operation and a reported £2.5 million spend, the bus real time information system in place in the Three Cities and Three Counties part of the East Midlands is still not working properly in Leicester says the Leicester Campaign for Better Transport.

This real time bus information system computer is based in and running from Leicester, but covers the main part of the East Midlands. The Leicester City Council, that operates the system on behalf of other councils and the bus operators, agreed earlier in 2008 to send the poor performance of the system to its Transport Task Group Scrutiny Committee for investigation. This follows on from an earlier, but apparently ongoing investigation of the financing of the system by the Council's Audit Committee.

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

"As the Audit Committee meets in private behind closed doors we do not know what conclusions they are going to come to and The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport is not involved in that side of things. But the Leicester Campaign for Better Transport really wants to have a big say on the operational and performance scrutiny side of this investigation and we have been 'co-opted' on to the Council Task group. One of the first things we did was to try to get more information and so have submitted and asked 137 questions to the Council to answer at the Transport Task Group as part of its review of the system that began on 26 February 2008 at the Leicester Town Hall."

The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport very much welcomes the opportunity to participate in the working of this Transport Task Group.

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

"The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport firmly believes that the system, if operating properly and taking advantage of all it offers, is a good thing. Throughout its eight years of use, there has never been, however, a period of time, or an area of operation, where The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport has been satisfied that the system has produced accurate and dependable information of the quality which it should be capable of delivering. Street surveys, even as recently as last week, show that this system is still broken and not working as it should."

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

"The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport has had much correspondence with and many meetings with City Council staff and bus operators and some meetings with Elected Members since the system was introduced. The motivation always has been to point out that the system does not, and has never, functioned satisfactorily, and the desire is to see it work properly for the

benefit of bus passengers and all others involved.”

“The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport sees this Task Group needing to review the cost, management, operation and utility of the system very thoroughly and also to consider other things.”

SAID THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

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“The Leicester Campaign For Better Transport wants to see big improvements coming along as a result of this scrutiny that deal with faults such as buses on tracked routes not being detected by the system, and phantom journeys being indicated by buses that do not really exist and also deal with shortcomings such as the absence of information for non-tracked buses leading to uninitiated passengers not realising that there may well be non-tracked buses well before the next tracked one, especially in the evenings.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“As well as this there must be a view taken about the future planning for enhancements of the system such as extending the system to cover the whole network in the evenings and on Sundays when so few buses are operating, and displays for drivers in their cabs so that they know precisely what time they are to leave every stop.”

137 Questions

The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport has sent a series of 137 Questions to the Leicester City Council covering the operation of the system in Leicester and the rest of the East Midlands.

The answers to these the Leicester Campaign for Better Transport believes are needed to enable the Task Group to understand the current situation and formulate its proposals.

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“These 137 questions are offered as the accumulated wisdom gained from the years of discussions held with the system managers and because The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport regards the system as a current failure, which must be turned round as top priority, into a success.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport strongly supports real time bus information and has supported Leicester in adopting this here 8 years ago. The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport is also quite indifferent about actual product choice, that is, brand of the kit they bought, which is up to whatever advice the council received at the time. The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport does not have any connection with any of the companies making such systems. The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport just recognises that the Leicester system is not working. Bus passengers agree with that.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The real time system does not meet public expectations by a long way and possibly not even meet the original City Council objectives set out in the first place 8 years ago, so what are these? Can we see them?”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The task group needs to accumulate information on aspects of the system. The Task group needs answers to questions to inform its recommendations. The questions that the task group may want the answers for, to form its opinions, and to consider actions to recommend, are on the list sent in. Obviously the objective is to make it work. Make it work means for all buses all the time. A priority for starting to put it right is that it must work 100% at critical times, like for late night and low frequency services. Make it work means to quantify poor current performance, analyse the reasons and improve performance dramatically.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The Leicester Campaign for Better Transport thinks targets for improvement for Council managers, with timescales and public monitoring should be set, but has not yet decided about what these should be. Targets cannot reasonably be set until the extent of the poor performance is quantified.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The Leicester Campaign For Better Transport thinks that it is essential to be in the possession of accurate detailed current data and information in order to engage properly in a public debate, so that city council officers can know that results are being formulated in the context of the best possible information, with which they can be fully comfortable and to give robust reassurance on the validity of future actions they may be asked to pursue, following the task group reporting to Cabinet.”

THE LEICESTER CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT SAID

“The Leicester Campaign For Better Transport thinks that existing management information formats, that previously extensive discussions with the now retired head of the service, amongst other things, revealed were being commissioned two or three years ago, will be sufficient in their width, breadth, depth, spread and relevance of coverage to be capable of well informing any debate in the task group and that none of the information asked for in the questions is outwith that which Leicester Campaign for Better Transport members have previously been reassured is already collected and readily available.”