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Copy to Cllr Stella Smedley

13th October 2008

Dear Steve,

Transport to East of Nottingham

Better Transport continues to have useful dialogue with your officers and in general I believe we are working towards the same goals, so it is rare that I feel the need to write to a higher level. The rail timetable proposed for December coupled to other transport issues east of Nottingham is such an occasion, as the problems cross departmental responsibilities.

Setting the Scene

Better Transport of course applauds the new Sunday service and late train on the Robin Hood Line, but we need to put this into context. Here is a table illustrating the nonsense of what will happen. I have taken a random station – Sutton Parkway – and compared it with stations east of Nottingham. 2008 is the current service and 2009 the future service:

Number of Sunday trains to Nottingham	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	0	10	Brand new service
Radcliffe	6 ¹	1	84% reduction

¹ Winter service. Summer total is 9 trains = 89% reduction.

Time of last train (M-F) to Nottingham	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	21:58	22:57	About hour later
Aslockton	22:10	20:02	About 2 hours earlier

Number of Nottingham commuter departures 16:30 to 19:00 M-F to:	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	4	4	No change
Radcliffe	4	2	50% reduction

Number of Nottingham commuter arrivals 07:30 to 09:00 M-F from:	2008	2009	
Sutton Parkway	4	4	No change
Lowdham	2	1	50% reduction

The question being asked east of Nottingham is, 'what have we done to upset the bureaucrats?'. I know it isn't true (I hope), but it has been noted locally that public services appear to be axed in Tory boroughs in order to fund Labour boroughs.

Buses

During my campaign against the rail service cuts, I managed to interest a few passengers who will be seriously inconvenienced in a bus alternative, the 90 route from Nottingham to Newark, where it feeds into the East Coast Main Line at Northgate. From 21st September, NCT abandoned the route. At least Marshalls stepped in to save the service, but a few early/late journeys are withdrawn. These were the very journeys that provided an alternative to the axed trains.

What do the citizens of Rushcliffe make of this? Within a few weeks they hear of their train services being axed, followed immediately by the bus service!

There was once a Grantham – Nottingham bus service, but is now reduced to a token service, although there other NCC funded services in the area.

Hardship/Social Exclusion

I have handed details of what is happening to our legal experts as I do wonder if responsibilities are being ignored. To close a rail station requires due process, yet it seems to render a station useless, causing considerable hardship, can be done without any question being asked.

Similarly with commercial bus services, so Marshalls are within their rights to axe certain route 90 journeys. But who worried about the woman who worked constant night shift in the packing department at Boots and no longer has a bus home? That same early axed bus carried an Afro-Caribbean gentleman to work in Newark. I'm aware and concerned for these people and have no idea what they now do. I doubt that anyone else is concerned or is even aware of them.

Here are some specific examples of hardship related to rail:

1) *As part of this revision, the only late afternoon/evening trains from Nottingham which will stop at Bottesford² will be the 17:34 and the 20:55. Previously there were trains at 17:50 and 18:50.*

I work from 9-17:30 so you can see that I could not catch a train at 17:34 and that the 20:55 is ridiculously late (especially given that I have two young daughters who I hardly see as it is) so I don't know how I would get round this.

I know that there are a lot of people who work in Nottingham and rely on this service - there are regularly at least 15 people who get off the 17:50 train at Bottesford (making it one of the busiest stations on the line) and I cannot understand the logic of this decision.

2) *I work in Derby and my reason for moving to Radcliffe was the convenient train service which meant that I could leave my car at home. At present I get the train from Radcliffe at 06:37am and return on the 17:50pm train from Nottingham. Under the proposals that I have seen there will be a train at 17:34pm from Nottingham (which I will miss as my train from Derby doesn't get in until 17:40pm), the next train is proposed to be at 20:45pm. I will therefore either have to wait at Nottingham station for three hours or ask my wife to come in to Nottingham in the car to pick me up.*

It is not as if I am the only person getting off at Radcliffe from the 17:50pm train, there are usually three or four of us. It is stupid in my estimation that a large population centre such as Radcliffe will not have a train stopping between the 17:34pm train and the 20:45pm train.

I did used to think that it was Government Policy to get us off the road and on to public transport, but I believe this to be a fallacy. This action will increase my journeys by car into Nottingham by 5 car journeys (there and back) per week.

One other example I have put to Gedling. Youths at weekends/school holidays used the train from Netherfield with their bikes/skate boards to the popular park in Radcliffe. From December this will become impossible.

I am aware that NCC has a process for determining a hierarchy for bus funding. I suspect the A52 corridor fails to tick any box, it being an affluent area. But how does the hierarchy cope with decisions made on living in the area based on public transport convenience, but that transport is suddenly axed? Then what about climate change/modal shift – the corridor may be affluent but has perhaps the greatest potential for delivering modal shift.

Questions

This leads to questions:

- 1) Has anyone at NCC looked at the total picture of hardship, climate change gases or modal shift in reverse (rail/bus to road) that will be caused by the new rail timetable coupled to cuts already imposed on bus services?
- 2) By default, rail was the local Nottingham – Grantham mode of choice. This will no longer be true, so does the whole structure of bus services along the A52 corridor need to be reviewed?
- 3) Reading carefully terms of the Railways Act and responsibilities of The Office of Rail Regulation I do wonder if there is a case for a legal challenge against the proposed rail cuts. Or at least a challenge that ensures the

² Yes, Leicestershire but I trust this will not be another victim of cross border problems.

status quo prevails until a neutral body looks into the cuts and reports back. Has NCC considered this?

- 4) The service level has been dictated by DfT. What action has been taken by NCC to secure additional funding from DfT to cover socially necessary bus operations to plug the gaps created?
- 5) Who is funding the alternative bike/skate board park in Gedling now access to the one in Radcliffe is being axed?

Actions

Some of my questions could be considered actions, but here a few ideas on how to alleviate the problems:

- 1) One train in isolation is causing the greatest problem – 17:50 Nottingham – Skegness, which becomes an ‘express’. It is a mystery to me why EMT will not stop this train at all stations between Nottingham and Grantham, unless it really is to wreck the commuter base of the line so the stations can be closed in due course. Lobbying EMT is pointless and instruction can only come from DfT.
- 2) With the usual mix of tendered and commercial bus services it is a nightmare providing an integrated network, but a few ideas:
 - a) Premier Travel operates 55 Bingham – Bottesford and X1 Aslockton – Nottingham. Could these merge to provide a peak service from/to Bottesford (with a service out of Nottingham around 17:45 to replace the 17:50 train), then the rest of day a service connecting with trains at Bingham. Ideally the bus should run from Bingham station. It will be argued there isn’t room to turn a bus at Bingham station, but this *must* be looked into.
 - b) Radcliffe loses out however on the above. The bus service between Radcliffe and Bingham is poor. Should the 55 start back from Radcliffe?
 - c) Could commercial service 90 help? I made no progress in the past with NCT but Marshalls may be more interested. The 90 currently misses out key population centres and going via Radcliffe centre could help – it could regain the A46 taking the back road from Radcliffe. Serving Bingham too may be a step too far, but would fill gaps.
 - d) Ideally there should be links to Grantham too and Centrebus’s services need reviewing along with those of Premier Travel.
 - e) I appreciate this covers Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. I also appreciate such bus services fall between funding gaps and may not happen as a result. Solutions need to be found.

More Background

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/nottinghamshire_local_group has more background to the Better Transport campaign against these service cuts.

Yours sincerely,

David Thornhill
Chair – Nottinghamshire Campaign for Better Transport