

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET MEMBER MEETING – JOBS, ECONOMY AND
TRANSPORT**

4 March 2014

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**PETITION – OBJECTION TO THE 44A BUS FROM
CHESTERFIELD TERMINATING AT COAL ASTON AND NOT
CONTINUING TO SHEFFIELD**

(1) **Purpose of the Report** To consider the County Council's response to a petition received requesting the reinstatement of the previous half-hourly 44a local bus service from Coal Aston to Sheffield.

(2) **Information and Analysis**

Background

A petition was received at the Cabinet Member Meeting – highways and Transport on 16 April 2013, objecting to the 44a bus service from Chesterfield, terminating at Coal Aston, thereby giving residents one bus an hour to Sheffield (Minute No.58/13 refers).

Services 44 and 44a are commercial services that operate between Chesterfield and Sheffield. In April 2013, the 44a was reduced from a half-hourly service to an hourly service between Coal Aston and Sheffield whilst retaining the half hourly frequency between Coal Aston and Chesterfield.

It was resolved that the Cabinet Member - Jobs, Economy and Transport should be asked to investigate the matters raised in the petition.

Under the terms of the Transport Act 1985, the County Council has to identify socially necessary bus services which are not provided by the commercial bus operators. The Act does not set out the level of support required for bus services that are deemed socially necessary. In Derbyshire, 85% of the local bus network is operated commercially without subsidy from the local authority.

Current Situation

Since April 2013, the commercial 44a service from Chesterfield to Coal Aston has operated hourly from Coal Aston to Sheffield giving 13 journeys each way to and from Sheffield, Monday to Friday, and 12 journeys each way on Saturdays. From Coal Aston to Chesterfield there are 22 journeys in each direction, 12 on Saturdays.

Public

Prior to 2009, Service 44a operated at this frequency and, from 2009 to 2013, it was half hourly along the whole service. The change from hourly to half hourly in 2009 was a bid by Stagecoach to develop the 43 and 44 services. Whilst it reported a doubling of passenger numbers on the 43, there has only been a 20% increase in passengers on Service 44. Given the increase in operating costs during this time, Stagecoach decided it was no longer viable to continue Service 44 as a half hourly service and so have reverted to the previous frequency.

For those able to walk the half mile from Coal Aston to Batemoor, the 43/43A service to and from Sheffield is available half hourly.

Options for Consideration

It seems unlikely that a commercial solution will be forthcoming. Stagecoach is unable to reinstate a loss making service and no other bus operator has stepped in to provide the journeys that have been taken off between Coal Aston and Sheffield.

Reinstating a half hourly service would involve providing contracted hourly journeys in between existing commercial ones. This would also enable consideration to be given to a request from Apperknowle residents to reinstate part of the former 253 service to provide the village with a direct bus service to Sheffield. This service could be worked with the requested 44a journeys to provide a Sheffield to Apperknowle (including Coal Aston) service. Either option would entail a two bus operation requiring significant expenditure for which there is currently no provision. A half hourly service would undoubtedly carry passengers currently travelling on the existing hourly service, thus affecting its viability and ultimately, the Council could end up having to fund this service too if it was withdrawn. It could also take passengers a way from other commercial services operating to and from Sheffield centre.

Conclusion

An hourly service, whilst not providing the same convenience as a half hourly service, does enable essential journeys to work, education, healthcare and other such necessary journeys.

There is no budgetary provision for the County Council to provide the level of frequency requested by the petitioners. Any provision could only be made by withdrawing, or reducing support for other services elsewhere in Derbyshire.

In the circumstances, it is concluded that the additional cost cannot be justified and it is recommended that the local Member and lead petitioner be advised accordingly.

Local Member Comment

Councillor Diane Charles has been consulted and has no additional comments.

(3) **Financial Considerations** The Council must ensure the finite funds are best targeted to provide service provision while being mindful of best value. To restore a half hourly service would require significant additional expenditure estimated to be in the region of £100,000 each year. This would produce limited results, given the experience of the previous half hourly commercial operation. Any additional provision could also affect the viability of the remaining commercial service as passengers would be spread across the whole service.

To include the Apperknowle extension would cost an estimated £150,000 per year.

(4) **Environmental and Health Considerations** Whilst a half hourly service would reduce waiting times, giving service users greater convenience, an hourly service does enable travel to and from essential services, including peak commuter journeys in and out of Sheffield.

(5) **Transport Considerations** As set out in the report. The actions also seek to provide journey opportunities to locations for all members of the community.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources and property considerations.

(6) **Key Decision** No.

(7) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(8) **Background Papers** Correspondence held in the Transport and Technical Policy Division. Officer contact details – Janet Pickersgill, extension 36734.

(9) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That:

9.1 The Cabinet Member notes that the current local bus support budget is already fully committed and the significant additional cost to replace a commercial withdrawal could not be justified.

9.2 The local Member and lead petitioner be advised of the views as set out in this report.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment