

Easingwold Town Council

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Clerk: Mrs J Bentley

To: Cllr David Ireton, Chairman, North Yorkshire Council
Mr Richard Flinton, Chief Executive Officer, North Yorkshire Council
Mr Guy Opperman MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Roads & Local Transport
Mr Kevin Hollinrake MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Enterprise & Markets

CC: Cllr Nigel Knapton, North Yorkshire Council
Councillors - Easingwold Town Council

Dear Sirs,

Bus Services – Easingwold & District

I have been asked unanimously by the Councillors of Easingwold Town Council (ETC) to write to you regarding recent changes in the availability of bus services to Easingwold and its district. Whilst public transport availability in the district has been reducing gradually for many years; recent changes and their effects have been extremely damaging. We now lack any semblance of a night or Sunday service to and from Easingwold or any of the surrounding villages it serves as a service centre. Our last bus is now at 6.30pm and earlier on a Saturday. For our rural community this change has severe consequences and we have received many complaints from our citizens about the adverse effects it has caused to their lives and livelihoods. We agree with them, and we are collectively very concerned about this. We would like to ask that you all look again at the public transport arrangements in the region; and help to identify ways in which these essential services can be reintroduced by making them both affordable and viable.

Whilst recent Government policy changes to public transport and bus fares might suit an urban environment, we believe that they have had severe, and probably unintended, consequences in our rural setting. We should like to explain why.

Firstly, it is best to describe our citizens and their needs. Whilst our town and district enjoy the benefits of living in a wonderful and green environment; we also bear its consequences. As shown in the 2021 Census, our population is ageing with 53.1% over 50 compared to 37.9% across England and Wales as a whole. Also, our social and economic connections are spread. Houses, families, friends, facilities, resources, and work are dispersed. 35.7% are travelling 10km or more to work compared 17% generally for England & Wales. 'Working from Home' is helping but is lower at 27.8% than the average 31.2% for England and Wales. Thus, public transport to work or for access to these local, but dispersed resources is essential for many.

Whilst it is true, we have a proportion of well-off people in larger homes; the majority are not, and some 48.7% show one or more of the Census assessed measures of deprivation. Whilst car ownership and use are high, often the elderly, young or more deprived cannot drive or cannot afford to drive. Neither can they always walk or cycle the distances involved. Often, they have Sunday jobs or work rotating shifts. They must use public transport to facilitate their lives. This makes public transport and public services an imperative commodity, and any form of its withdrawal causes disproportionate deprivation and harm to them.

For our community the working week often is not oriented to the traditional Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 common in cities or urban conurbations! Many of our jobs are both poorly paid (minimum wage for many, but much less if you are young); and are operated across widely differing hours. Jobs tend to be far away from people's homes in our small town or its surrounding villages. They are often in agriculture, retail, hospitality, tourism, health, or caring. Equally, with dispersed families and relationships, visiting and supporting family and friends, going to the shops, dealing with personal business, visiting services etc. means travelling many miles. The absence of public transport in the evenings and Sundays causes economic pain and significant social isolation.



Despite these local concerns we are appreciative of the pressures and constraints on both North Yorkshire Council (NYC) and our local bus operators. We have great sympathy for them in choosing or trying to find the optimum courses of action, or trying to sustain a profitable business.

We are aware that North Yorkshire is our country's largest and most rural county, and that NYC has great difficulty in delivering its support and public transport subsidies fairly and effectively. Currently, it has some £1.6 million per annum available for subsidies, and it does not go far compared to the demands upon it. The result being that NYC do not fund any night-time services. They always concentrate any subsidies into the core working hours of Monday to Saturday. Neither do they fund or support any Sunday services.

We believe that this sum is inadequate. Even then, its use in this way seems to us far more suited to towns and cities than to our more rural community's needs.

Turning to our local bus operators. They say that:

- Regarding the evening/night bus services, only the last bus is commercially viable; the other evening routes lose them money. They cannot employ a driver for one run only. So, the whole late evening/night service becomes unviable.
- The Sunday bus services are heavily impacted by the £2 fare cap and the concessionary fares. The operators do not receive enough Sunday income from these routes to make the services viable. They have tried subsidising the services themselves; but had to stop as it was impossible to identify a viable way forwards given current NYC and Government policies.

From our perspective, as a town council and seeking to support our citizens in the best way possible, we would like to offer to be involved in trying to find creative ways forward that might help resolve this dilemma and restore some rural bus capacity beyond the core, weekday hours.

Some initial thoughts from us include:

- Not all Concessionary Card holders are poor or unable to afford occasional fares. Would it be possible to offer fully concessionary fares only in the peak hours – should card holders wish to travel in the evenings or on Sundays they could be charged say half-price or offered a 25% reduction?
- Equally, could the £2 cap be removed from the evening and Sunday services for rural journeys, such that the bus company can charge higher fares and help make these services pay?
- Can levels of compensation be adjusted to be greater for rural routing and provided faster to ease operator viability and cash flows?
- Could a system of community buses be created providing affordable (but higher) fares; so, a more flexible and taxi style approach to journeys centred on service hubs like Easingwold?
- Could the Government use more of its 'levelling-up budget' to focus more resources and money on these extended rural services? Especially since, with the HS2 cancellation, the Government has pledged to use the £36bn saved for: 'improving road, rail & bus connections, especially in the North'. Rural needs, usages and costs are inevitably different from their urban counterparts.

We say all this because the consequence of the current combination of policy and economics means that every night and all day on Sunday many of our citizens get nothing! They miss out or they are scrambling around seeking solutions from friends or good will. Whilst these exist in our area, this is not a long-term solution. Especially since migration to greater public transport use is a strategic aim. Surely, we can find a way to improve this situation. Facilitating better public transport would help our people to make bigger economic and social contributions to our area, improve their lives, and reduce carbon footprints.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Bentley
Town Clerk