

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY: HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT SUB-COMMITTEE

MEETING WITH STAGECOACH SOUTH-WEST (SSW), 25 AUGUST 2016, 11am.

SSW: Bob Dennison, Managing Director
Robert Williams, Commercial Director

ECS Keith Lewis, Peter Cleasby, Christo Skelton

Congestion

1. SSW agreed this was a continuing problem. Like any bus operator, they would welcome more bus priority measures provided they were practical and enforceable. Bus lanes, traffic-light phasing, queue relocation¹ were all useful techniques. An example of a low-cost but very beneficial measure was at Livery Dole/Heavitree Rd/Polsloe Rd, where DCC had agreed to remove the part of the yellow box on the right-turn lane from Heavitree Rd into Barrack Rd, which enabled buses to enter the junction before the lights turned against them.
2. Alphington Road was a particular problem: although it was lightly used by buses (2 per hour), the knock-on effects elsewhere had major impacts (eg Cowick St, Exe Bridges). The route via Preston Street to avoid New Bridge St would be improved if the yellow box on Western Way was larger. An eastbound bus lane through Heavitree, where sufficient road/pavement width was available, would be useful. A bus priority at the junction of Heavitree Fore Street and North Street would allow traffic to by-pass congestion at the traffic lights.
3. SSW noted the tendency of Devon CC to argue that lack of money prevented anything being done. KL commented that shovel-ready schemes were valuable, when pots of money did appear.
4. BD noted that car parking in Exeter city centre was much cheaper than in many other comparable places. Lower fuel costs were also encouraging people to drive. In the last 12 months he had observed congestion getting worse.
5. BD noted that he had been responsible for Stagecoach's part in developing a Guided Busway system in Cambridgeshire², based on an old railway track. Unlike rail, the bus had route flexibility at either end of the busway, using public roads. The land-take was also reduced because buses operated in narrow corridors. However they were not suitable for city centres because of the obstacles presented to pedestrians in crossing the tracks.

Exeter route network

6. SSW thought the current bus network was about right. There might need to be some minor changes in the light of the move of the depot to Matford. They saw little attraction in circular routes beyond the R and S, because the absence of sizeable district centres on the edges of the city meant that the demand was not there.

¹ Queue relocation (also known as traffic metering) is a measure in which the flow of traffic is controlled at upstream junctions by adjusting signal timings to reduce capacity, so that this junction becomes more critical than the one downstream. The downstream junction is the main junction whereas the upstream junction is the metered junction. Along with this, the bus lane running up to the upstream stop line enables buses to by-pass the relocated traffic queue.

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridgeshire_Guided_Busway and <http://www.thebusway.info/>

Information for passengers

7. RW explained that the real-time information screens were provided by DCC, using SSW information generated by the ticket machines on their buses (part of a national Stagecoach project). The way in which DCC presented the information was not always clear: a shown clock time was a timetabled time, whereas an arrival shown as being in x minutes was a prediction based on live data.

8. DCC had decided against putting real-time information screens at stops outside city centres. They considered better value was obtained by investment in data transmission technology, eg to smart phones. Stagecoach's own website, designed to be mobile friendly, provided live data; this was also available to on-board users as their buses became wifi-enabled.

9. Traveline SW provided information for texts at other bus stops. It was for TSW to decide whether this was timetable information or real-time running, though both were available from SSW. The overall picture was one of inconsistency, though it was within SSW's gift to resolve it.

Engines not being turned off when waiting

10. CS presented the result of his mini-survey. SSW said that drivers were supposed to turn off engines if the expected wait was longer than 2 minutes. The issue had also been raised by councillors at Exeter HATOC. They would continue to remind drivers of the importance of complying.

11. On pollution, SSW noted that 100% of their fleet was at Euro 3 emissions standard or better, with 60% better than Euro 4. Newer buses met Euro 6. Brexit would not impact on these standards because manufacturers would have no interest in making lower quality engines only for the UK market.

12. Alternatives to diesel were available, but all had high capital costs and some had high running costs (eg gas, which required infrastructure). Aberdeen had the biggest fleet of dual-powered buses (diesel and electric).

University

13. CS presented a guide to which buildings were served by which bus stops on the Streatham campus.

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Action points for ECS HTSC (PC to initiate)

- A. Develop a plan to lobby DCC and others for measures to beat congestion.
- B. Ask ECS members to contribute suggestions for congestion hot-spots that need attention.
- C. Consider how to pursue the inconsistency of public information point.
- D. Include a summary of this meeting in a HTSC report in the next newsletter

PC