

Colney Heath Parish Council



Clerk to The Parish Council
Parish Office
83 High Street
Colney Heath
Herts. AL4 0NS
Tel: 01727 825314
Fax: 01727 825327
Email: colney2heath@btconnect.com

Mr Mike Davey Co-ordinator
TPL/01
Competition Commission
Victoria House
Southampton Row
LONDON WC1B 4AD

Re TPL/01-ACQUISITION-ARRIVA Plc & SOVEREIGN BUS COMPANY

1st September 2004

Dear Sirs,

You requested our opinions on the above merger, we offer an overview of the typical scenarios that result in public anger and disquiet over rural and into town bus services who ever is the operator. We are relatively unfamiliar in particular with these two bus companies, but suggest that their operations are seen are throughout our county, and with this merger may at some future time may indeed provide our services.

Rural services start off with good intentions and service, especially a new operator. After a short period with commercial pressures on fare/passenger numbers the busses are taken off and service becomes less of an important issue to the operator.

We then see the demise of the independent operator, who because of size caves in to the competition especially if large, the economies of scale rule then applies. This then destroys local services by independent operators, starves them of any funding to top up any loss making routes. Big companies consolidate routes and rural public suffer.

Disabled access is another issue with large operators; 2004 is the year for Disabled people to get their access options in place for all public venues, including transport. It is a big issue in our Parish; we find operators are dismissive in recognising their obligations under the 2004 Disabled Public Access Act. All sorts of excuses prevail. We have taken the matter right up to MP and County Authority, no resolve, Mothers with pushchairs and infants to manage also find climbing aboard not easy. More low step or hydraulic platform busses in operation or set the precedent to provide them

Most people in rural areas want a decent service, passenger numbers are never going to be as large as town services, they just want a reliable service to and from the local town to shop, or work visit hospital or dentist etc. Our nearest town is St Albans, 5 miles where some of the local people have to leave the area here at just after 7am to

get to work at 9am arriving far earlier than they need because the operator has too few drivers, busses or they are on schools contracts at the peak time. Or that is the only bus until next mid morning time. Complaints are more often rebuked with excuses.

You asked our opinions; we are surely not alone in our overall criticism whoever the operator. Please take this as a general overview which may allow the Commission to hear about the public concern over such mergers which in the bigger picture may after take over eventually not provide adequate service expectations to the needs.

There needs a scrutiny exercise to ensure that any merger is not intended to cherry pick the busier in town routes and eventually lower rural service levels and on the less profitable routes. This often overlooked when such mergers or consolidation occurs. Rows of empty or nearly empty busses in convoy in the shopping areas or town and none to the villages for two hours, a fairly typical viewpoint in the public observation.

So if at least your commissioners consider our main gripe-

- Better time tables suit to public needs-e.g. for work at a decent time
- Disabled Access-provision to meet the Act and where the service is required

We have all the contact details at the page header including e-mail, one point my title- it is Mr John Dean for your data base, not Mrs.

Yours Sincerely,

John Dean
Clerk to the Council



Cc Cllr Corley