

MARKYATE PARISH COUNCIL

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Clerk to the Council: Mrs J Bissmire

Mr Mike Davey
Inquiry Coordinator
Competition Commission
Victoria House
Southampton Row
London WC1B 4AD

27 August 2004

Dear Sirs,

The anticipated acquisition by Arriva PLC of the Hertfordshire Bus Operations of Sovereign Bus and Coach Company Limited.

I refer to your letter dated 13 August 2004 regarding the above. My council would make the following response.

We can only speak with regard to rural services, and while there is a real demand for a reliable bus service, there are not the customers, or even potential customers to make an economic bus load for a practically frequent service for more than one provider. The fear we would have with a monopoly provider would not be escalating prices, but the withdrawal of the service altogether because it could be deemed uneconomic.

There is a Government commitment to provide a rural bus service, but we do not believe that the County is looking at the overall needs of rural communities like ours and showing any ambition to meet this commitment. In particular, there are two budgets, one for school transport, the other to subsidise 'essential' services. Yet other County resources are aimed at looking to reduce the school run, seemingly oblivious to other County policies which are forcing more parents in rural areas into making the school run due to the lack of any alternative. This 'school' run continues until the young people from the village are old enough and have enough money to become car owners, able to drive themselves, because there is not an adequate bus service to get them to and from college or work either.

The Parish Council recently carried out a survey of bus use with respect to Markyate, and believe the findings are relevant. We are already progressing our conclusions to bring in the other villages which are served by the same routes currently. We propose that these communities work with the County and the bus company of companies to design a service which will be supported.

When such a bus service is scheduled it will need to meet the following essentials:-

1. Offer a sufficient **return** service
2. Offer a **reliable** service, both in terms of running to time, and even more important **running** as timetabled. Too many buses do not turn up, creating a great reticence to commit to making the journey by bus.
3. Running with adequate frequency. A wait of more than half an hour is not acceptable, particularly in the evening.
4. Keeping the clients well informed, both with regard to the timetable, but most important, with regard to any changes to service **AT THE TIME**. Computer screens should be used to inform just as they are used at airports. General publicity is also

important so that occasional users know what service is there. The Parish Council would be pleased to cooperate with this.

If Arriva becomes the monopoly bus provider in Hertfordshire, it must be willing to work with the County, and more important, with the local communities to provide the service that is needed. And the County must be prepared to look at the needs for transport from rural communities with joined up thinking, which will enable them to make real savings by reducing the need to subsidise services, while also making a positive contribution to reducing the rush hour traffic.

It should be noted, that while not a big company, there is a second bus company operating through Markyate at present largely on the 343 route. It may be keeping fares down, but it is also attempting to compete for the same customers as Arriva, by running to a similar timetable, so it is not adding to the real service on offer, but diluting the potential income to both companies.

At present fares are not seen as a major factor in the option to go by car or bus. Presumably there are constraints which can be made on monopoly service providers, who work with the County to include non-economic services, sponsored by the County to provide for essential public needs. And of course for many potential users there is a choice to be made if the fares are too high, go by car.

In conclusion then, permit the monopoly, but form a realistic partnership to get good economic services where ever possible. There is a viable market if the provision is well designed.

Yours faithfully
MARKYATE PARISH COUNCIL



Jennifer Bissmire
Clerk to the Council

Enc:

Markyate Parish Council - Bus Use Survey 2004

The detailed results of the survey are given on the attached table.

The 52 returned forms, gave the views of 98 respondents, 49 of whom use the bus service regularly. This is not a representative result, which can be grossed up to give an 'all village' answer. The respondents have self-selected, but the views of 49 bus users gives a useful insight into the effectiveness of the current bus service and the effect of the change that was proposed.

The Dunstable - St Albans route is the better used one, with 66 respondents travelling regularly to St Albans, 54 to Dunstable. (Not all travelling by bus).

The Luton- Hemel Hempstead route has 41 travelling regularly to Hemel Hempstead, 39 to Luton. (Again not all using the bus service).

As many travel to Harpenden as Hemel Hempstead, 41, but this will be almost certainly all by car.

With half the respondents being users of the bus service, less than half (20) find the service adequate, while 27 find the service poor. Of those three who find the service good, one particularly cited the 'In Motion' service.

It is unfortunate that about a third of regular travellers did not give the reason for their travel. Nevertheless, 34 travellers were 'must' travel; 27 to work and 7 to school/college.

Just over half of the respondents do **not** have use of a car. Good reason to react to a bus use survey. With 43 with use of a car, to find 27 using the car in preference to a bus is to be expected.

While one would not suggest that massive fare increases would be tolerated, there is minimal evidence that cost is an important factor in deciding whether or not to use the bus service. The quality of the service is the problem.

Because the survey did not beg specific answers, the comments are generated by the respondents. Reading between the lines, I would say that although punctuality and reliability are important on the outward/morning journey, travellers are able to fit their needs with the outward service offered.

The return journey would seem to be the biggest problem. The services are too infrequent, and do not run late enough. The cost of parking in the town centres is a big deterrent to regular car use, but no one is going to use the bus to get to work if they cannot get home again. Six respondents said they would lose their job if the evening 343 service was stopped. One said they could only do overtime now if they had a lift home, while another would depend on a lift every day instead of some days.

The Bus Companies currently consult with County, but the Parishes are excluded. This needs to change. The St Albans - Dunstable route affects Markyate, Flamstead and Redbourn, and their Parish Councils are best placed to represent their residents. County may be interested in the cost of subsidising services, we would contend that the service would be economic, and not need subsidy if the local needs were being met. Note that looking at current bus usage by counting passengers on a particular bus is as much an indication of failure to meet a need as it is lack of need for the service.

1. Look into improving the return/evening services - say on bus per half hour between 4.00pm and 8.00pm
2. Look into improving punctuality/reliability.
 - While running a service into Dunstable in the morning, could the St Albans service start from Markyate, to avoid the Dunstable traffic and the queue along the A5 to the village.
 - Discuss (with traffic planners at County/St Albans) re-instating the three lane queue at the Batchwood roundabout in St Albans. The reduction to two lanes has resulted in peak-time queues almost back to Redbourn.
 - Stop drivers by-passing the villages to make up time when delayed.
3. Look into introducing a service to Harpenden
 - One has just been started. It needs to be widely publicised to let potential travellers know it exists. It needs a useable return service - half hourly 4.00pm to 8.00pm?
4. Look into having live service information available in the village. This could probably be located in a shop/shop window for security.
5. Look into streamlining the service to Hemel Hempstead. Could the tour of Redbourn be reduced, or separate services run for Markyate and Redbourn residents? Maybe the latter could use the M1, and serve the Industrial estate?
6. Look into testing possible services by local surveying, to check that the identified needs would be met.
7. Look into extensive advertising of the existing and future bus services in conjunction with the Parish Councils.

MARKYATE PARISH COUNCIL - BUS USE SURVEY

AGE	UNDER 16	16 TO 18	18 TO 60/65	60/65 PLUS	Age not given	ALL AGES
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	5	7	47	35	4	98
HAVE REGULAR USE OF A CAR	(1)	(3)	29	11	3	43
TRAVEL REGULARLY TO:						
Dunstable		2	22	27	3	54
Harpenden	1	2	22	13	3	41
Hemel Hempstead			20	20	1	41
Luton			21	17	1	39
St Albans	5	2	30	25	4	66
Watford			4	1		5
Other		2	3			5
USE THE LOCAL BUS SERVICE		4	22	22	1	49
FIND THE BUS SERVICE: Poor	1	1	9	14	2	27
Adequate	1	1	11	7		20
Good		1	1	1		3
TRAVEL TO: School/college	3		4			7
Work	1	2	20	3	1	27
Shops			11	8		19
Leisure/other			9	3		12
DON'T USE LOCAL BUS BECAUSE:						
Have own car			17	8	2	27
Unreliable			2			2
Poor/Inconvenient service		1	3	3		7
No service		1	2			3
Long route (to Hemel)			1			1
Cost				1		1
Disabled				1		1
CHANGES TO INCREASE BUS USE						
Reliability & Punctuality			4	4		8
More frequent service			3			3
Later hours			7	2		9
Guaranteed Service			1	2		3
Service to Harpenden			2	2		4
Direct Service (Hemel)			1			1
Cheaper fares			1			1
AFFECTED BY LOSS OF EVENING SERVICE	3	2	18	11	2	36