

Weston with Gayton Parish Council

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Passenger Focus
FREEPOST (RRRE-ETTC-LEET)
PO BOX 4257
Manchester
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Dear Sir/Madam

Complaint regarding the revision of the X1 Bus service to Weston on Trent, Staffordshire

I am writing to you, on behalf of Weston with Gayton Parish Council, to ask for your assistance with a bus service issue that is concerning our parishioners.

1. Background

Weston on Trent is a small rural village in Mid Staffordshire that has historically been provided with a limited, County Council supported bus service. This is currently the No. 5 service, provided by Arriva, which links Weston with its nearest town, Stafford.

In 2004, this limited service was enhanced by service X1, managed by Bakerbus. This service was originally provided to link the Stoke on Trent and Stafford campuses of Staffordshire University and, whilst it ran through the village of Weston, it did not travel into Stafford town centre, but stopped on the outskirts, at the Beaconside University Campus.

In 2006, the X1 service was expanded and funded to provide a service into Stafford town centre and its railway station. This new service was funded by London Midland Trains as part of the alternative travel arrangements necessary to support the West Coast Mainline rail upgrade. For three years the enhanced X1 provided the villagers of Weston with an efficient half hourly service, between 0740 and 1930, to and from Stafford town centre. This provided 17 journeys per day Monday to Friday and 11 journeys at weekends.

In September 2009, following completion of the West Coast Mainline upgrade and the subsequent withdrawal of funding by London Midland Trains, service X1 reverted to its original timetable. This means that it no longer serves Stafford Town centre. Weston residents once again have to rely on the limited 5 Arriva Service. This runs between 0655 and 1720 but only provides 8 journeys per day. (See appendix A)

The X1 now provides Weston with only 10 journeys a day, but does not serve the town centre. This is because a number of the previous journeys have been graded as 'expresses' and serve the university without passing through Weston. No service is now provided to Weston at weekends. The X1 terminates in Stone, a town 7 miles north of Weston. (See current timetable at appendix B)

Staffordshire County Council has gained the agreement of Bakerbus to run the X1 to Stafford hospital, where it can link with other Arriva services. The County Council has also agreed a through-ticketing arrangement with both bus operators. The hospital is between the university campus and the town centre. However these arrangements are currently not operating effectively and the residents of Weston have made a number of complaints to the Parish Council.

2. Complaints to Parish Council

The Parish Council has received a number of complaints about the current X1 and it's linking services. They fall into a number of common concerns that are outlined below.

The revised arrangements do not provide a direct link to Stafford railway station.

The earliest service 5 from Weston departs at 0740, this is not early enough for commuters to arrive in Stafford town Centre and walk to the railway station and pick up relevant trains.

The last 5 service from Stafford departs at 1720 this is too early to be of use to for commuters returning to Stafford by train. The only public transport option is to take an Arriva service 842 to the neighbouring village of Hixon. On arrival in Hixon the 852 becomes a 5 service and returns to Stafford via Weston. This journey takes 1 hour 10 minutes to travel 7 miles and two fares must be paid.

The linking arrangements between the X1 and the Arriva services, at Stafford Hospital, are not operating effectively. This is due to either the X1 or an Arriva bus being late and the planned link failing.

The X1 at 1700 from Stafford no longer serves the hospital and now departs from the University. This totally negates the linking arrangements for this journey.

232 residents of have also signed a petition, asking for reinstatement of the full X1 service, a copy is attached at appendix C for your information. (I apologise for the quality of this copy, the original was given to Bill Cash MP)

3. Actions Taken

Parish Councillors have met with officers of Staffordshire County Council Integrated Transport and Planning Team, and expressed residents concerns about the changes to the X1 service. The County Council states that the provision of the Arriva No. 5 service is "sufficient for the vast majority of existing and potential passengers" and that it cannot justify the cost of reinstating the enhanced X1 service. (See appendix D)

They also informed us that Bakerbus is currently funded to provide the X1 service linking the Stoke and Stafford campuses of Staffordshire University. They are not funded to provide a service into Stafford town centre.

They also confirmed the previous funding, from London Midland Trains, which allowed the enhanced X1 service, was only temporary funding (because of the West Coast Mainline rail works) and this funding has been withdrawn.

A resident has been in contact with our MP, Mr B Cash and asked for his support. He raised the matter with the Department for Transport and their response was that the provision of local bus services is a local County Council issue. (See appendix E).

You will see from the above that the Parish Council has not currently been able to gain support, for the reinstatement of the enhanced X1 service, from the bus company or from local or national government.

As consequence, the council has looked for other pressure groups or organisations that may be able to assist us in achieving our goal. Three organisations were identified, the Independent Traffic Commissioners (supported by of the Vehicle Operators and Standards Agency), the Bus Appeals Body and Bus Users UK. The role of each of these organisations was explored and the results of this are outlined overleaf.

Independent Traffic Commissioners: A complaint can be made to the commissioners if a bus company is operating outside the terms of its operator's licence. Bakerbus is not in contravention of its operator's licence.

Bus Appeals Body: This organisation deals with delays/non arrival of a bus, incorrect fare charging and inappropriate driver/employee behaviour. It does not deal with provision of a bus service or the timetabling of a bus service. The Bus Appeals Body cannot assist in our case.

Bus Users UK: This is a user group; it has no direct powers but acts as a facilitator.

- It would arrange meetings with the bus operator and local authority to discuss issues and ensure a response. The parish council has already contacted Bakerbus and the County Council and has received responses from both
- It would facilitate a complaint to Bus Appeals Body. As stated above the Bus Appeals Body cannot assist with our case.
- It would help with a making a complaint to the Traffic Commissioners. As stated above, this is not relevant to our situation.

Bus Users UK would be unable, therefore, to add to the process we have already used.

4. Support Requested:

The Parish Council has not currently been able to gain support, for the reinstatement of the enhanced X1 service, from the bus company or from local or national government. All other available transport pressure groups have been considered and the operating scope of these groups mean that they would not be able to assist.

We ask that Passenger Focus review the information in this letter and judge if we have a case for the reinstatement of the full X1 service and if so advise us on the best way to proceed.

Parish Councillor Cliff Gilbert is dealing with this matter on behalf of fellow Councillors. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact him on 01889 271304 or leyfields@btinternet.com.

Yours faithfully

Judith Gilbert
Parish Clerk