

**UTTLESFORD TRANSPORT FORUM
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2007 AT DISTRICT
COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX**

THOSE PRESENT

District Councillors Jackie Cheetham, Catherine Dean, David Gregory and Mark Lemon, Murray Hardy, Sue Locke and Jeremy Pine (UDC), Richard Gravatt and Linda Smart (ECC), Andre Morris and Ben Wallace (Stansted Transit) David Corke (LA21 Transport Group), Barry Drinkwater (ULODA), Paul Garland (LA21), Kris Radley (RCC Essex) and Ian Willard (Saffron Cycle Campaign).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1. Apologies were received from Peter Blanchard (Walden Travel, CPT Essex) David Carmichael (UCT), Guy Dangerfield (Passenger Focus), Richmonds Coaches and Chris Stoneham (ECC).

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 24 OCTOBER 2006

2.1. These were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as an accurate record.

3. ACTION ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1. Re Minutes 6.1 – 6.3, David Corke queried what had happened at last November's Environment Committee about the bus survey that LA21 had undertaken. Paul Garland clarified that the 10 recommendations made by LA21 had been endorsed by the Environment Committee, to be passed to ECC. **David Corke to be supplied with a copy of any letter sent to ECC.** Catherine Dean referred to long delays in getting replies from ECC, due to staff shortages.

3.2. Catherine Dean reported the constant requesting of ECC to provide timetable information on bus stops. Richard Gravatt explained the current procedures, which involved 2 people for the entire county. ECC had agreed to take over responsibility for roadside information, and were out to tender. However, there were current legal issues between ECC and the bus operators, which had halted the tendering process. Operators had been asked to come up with suggestions, but were under no legal obligation to do so. In answer to a question from Jackie Cheetham, he contrasted ECC's position with that of TfL, which ran the London bus network with a £0.5 billion budget. Mark Lemon felt there was extreme public frustration over the lack of information and that all bus operators should be written to. Richard Gravatt felt that the outcome of the consultation with bus operators should be awaited first.

3.3. Paul Garland queried what was happening about replacing timetable boards that had been removed. Richard Gravatt said that the project involving replacing poles should have dealt with boards as well. He was worried if this hadn't happened, which might be because of staff difficulties at the Area Highway Office. Chelmsford was better provided because all information is produced by the commercial operator, where there are a large

number of passengers. The situation in Writtle was similar to Uttlesford. Paul Garland said he was happy to pass on his data to ECC.

3.4. David Corke praised the situation in Chelmsford. He said that in the northern part of Uttlesford, 90% of buses are contracted to ECC who receive the fare money and pay the operators. This disincentivises operators to improve services. He offered the services of LA21 at £2.50 a stop until the issues between ECC and the operators were sorted. Richard Gravatt asked that this request be put in writing by LA21 to John Pope at ECC. **LA21 to write to ECC.**

3.5. Richard Gravatt explained that 15% of ECC's subsidy budget went on buses in Uttlesford serving only 5% of the county population. This was expected in an area where commercial viability was difficult. ECC was interested in supporting services. Jackie Cheetham said there was good timetable information at Stansted Airport.

3.6. Andre Morris disagreed with David Corke's views. Tendering did require operators to take on risk – if revenue went down, the operator was hit. In answer to a question from Mark Lemon, he confirmed that operators did liaise with ECC. David Corke replied that some information he had obtained from ECC therefore appeared to be wrong. Referring to the earlier part of the discussion, Andre Morris said he did not know the Stansted Transit could publish timetable information in the boards.

4. UTF TERMS OF REFERENCE

(Note: The Forum discussed items 4 and 5 together. For the purpose of these minutes, the points made have been separated into the 2 discrete headings where possible, although there is some overlap).

4.1. Paul Garland ran through the grid that Catherine Gaywood had provided on suggested terms of reference. Having terms of reference could give some structure to decision making, but might limit what the Forum could consider. The Forum was both reactive and proactive as required. Jackie Cheetham asked for the original terms of reference, remembering that the UTF had originally been established as a conduit for transport issues.

4.2. Jeremy Pine read out the relevant minute from the UTF meeting on 16th January 2002 when John Bosworth acted as facilitator:

“The Uttlesford Transport Forum will meet quarterly for the agreed 12 months experimental period until September 2002. After that date it will review its future. The overall objective is to promote and develop the greater use of public and community transport in the District, including cycling and walking. In the initial 12-month period, the Forum will try and introduce some practical initiatives in close co-operation with partners, providers and users”.

Subsequently, the Forum had continued, but without any obvious reaffirmation of its terms of reference. Jackie Cheetham queried whether the Forum was Uttlesford led or more community based. Jeremy Pine said the minutes

showed that it had an evolving membership, with a number of core members and others attending when relevant issues were coming up. Paul Garland emphasised the contribution made by partners trying to promote more environmentally friendly transport and a public transport safety net.

5. UTF REPRESENTATION ON LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP.

5.1. Paul Garland said that the LSP had a high priority, and the UTF could become the local transport arm as in Brentwood. It could act as a feed of information on local transport priorities. Catherine Dean said that the Forum needed to look at its structure in view of partnership working. The Forum could become the transport group for Uttlesford Futures, and should be represented on the LSP Board to take recommendations forward. Jackie Cheetham felt that it was inadvisable for transport to remain within an environment remit, as that was too wide.

5.2. Linda Smart mentioned that someone from Tendring's Transport Forum attended the LSP, and Kris Radley said that Tendring had a transport and access group linked to the LSP. Mark Lemon said that he favoured representation on the LSP as Uttlesford was very rural, and there were accessibility issues to key services. Sue Locke mentioned that the PCT fund UCT to provide a hospital car service.

5.3. David Gregory said that the points made should be considered and discussed at a later date by a smaller sub-group. David Corke was concerned about what the Forum should do with its decisions. It should be able to communicate directly with operators. Jackie Cheetham said this was done already, as not everything went back to Committee. David Gregory asked whether Parish representatives should come to the Forum rather than other local groups. Richard Gravatt felt the parishes should be asked, but feared the Forum could become unwieldy as a result. **Paul Garland, Catherine Gaywood, David Gregory and Jeremy Pine to set up a small task group and to seek appropriate legal advice.**

6. FUTURE OF 333 BUS SERVICE

6.1. Catherine Dean reported that this service was due to be withdrawn from Stansted Mountfitchet from 5 February. It started on the Council estate, and picked up elderly people and mothers hourly to Bishops Stortford, Harlow and Epping, taking in 3 hospitals. The operator, Excel, say the service is not well used. Councillor Alan Dean had sent out a questionnaire and had received 148 replies indicating that the service was used. Essex CC had pointed out that VL7 was an option, but it takes 53 minutes to get to Stortford and doesn't call at hospitals. The 333 would instead run from the airport. One key issue in LTP2 was access to health services. It was important that ECC now subsidised this service.

6.2. Richard Gravatt explained that Excel were losing money on the 333 and were a commercial operator. The loss was a substantial one, and ECC was under considerable financial pressure. It was necessary to look at the overall

level of transport. Councillor Bass would be discussing next week, but it would be a big decision to continue the service. David Gregory pointed out that the profitable section of the 333 route was in competition with Arriva.

6.3. Richard Gravatt explained that this issue was a common one in Essex. The Government was reducing funding on the Dengie Peninsula. Community transport was often looked as an option. Catherine Dean said that no-one used VL7, as they all used the 333. Richard Gravatt explained that the VL7 was introduced following consultation in 1998, and it meets cost / passenger criteria. There was no way of compelling Excel to continue the service. Jackie Cheetham said that the Health Authority was concerned about accessibility, and the 333 was the only bus that stopped at all 3 hospitals. Was the PCT intending to do anything? Mark Lemon felt it was incredible that the service could be taken away without consultation, especially with the PCT. Will Councillor Bass be speaking to the PCT? Jackie Cheetham felt that a letter should be written to the Chief Executive of the PCT, copied to Councillor Bass. Richard Gravatt said he would consider the comments about VL7. It was, however, difficult to make regular public transport work for health services due to the irregularity of journeys.

POSTSCRIPT: Essex County Council has now announced that it will fund a new service (7A), which will start on 12 February 2007 running between Maitland Road and Bishop's Stortford interchange via Herts & Essex Hospital. The service will be hourly 0900 – 1400, return 0925 – 1425 and will be operated for 6 months pending a review of services in the Stansted Mountfitchet area.

7. BLUE TRIANGLE HERITAGE BUS ROUTE

7.1. David Gregory referred to the report to the Community Committee on 18/1/07, which supported the establishment of this route. There had been informal discussions with Blue Triangle. A case for funding was being prepared, based on 6 services a day on Summer Sundays with a provisional timetable.

7.2. Jackie Cheetham queried whether UDC would be asked for funding, feeling that the 333 was the priority. David Gregory said that UDC would promote, but external funding would be needed. £32k was required. UDC and ECC should meet. Richard Gravatt said that ECC was not in a position to say either yes or no. The service would be included in ECC's standard publicity if it was registered. Funding would be a Cabinet Member decision, but this needed raising now if the service was to commence from the end of May. One possibility was to look at advertising paid for by the destinations that would benefit. Jackie Cheetham said there were other service demands – customers would pay for this service if they wanted it. Would an approach to EEDA be worthwhile?

7.3. David Corke said this was a tourism operation and should be supported from other sources. It was separate from the 333. It would provide a Sunday service to Thaxted and Saffron Walden, which ought to exist under ECC

minimum standards. David Gregory said it would cost £52 to register the service but nothing to de-register.

8. AUDLEY END AND GREAT CHESTERFORD STATIONS

8.1. Linda Smart explained that ECC was now looking at delivery. With regard to Audley End, the DfT would be funding new stairs and lifts under “Access for All” in 2008-9. A recent meeting had taken place and proposals were being drawn up. Network Rail was acting quickly and the design was already out to tender. DDA compliant ramping would also be installed and there would be funding for a base for a new passenger shelter on the northbound platform.

8.2. In answer to a question from Paul Garland, Linda Smart emphasised that the interchange work for which £50k had been allocated under LTP2 would continue. Consultants were discussing delivery with the Area Highways Office. Importantly, the £50k could now be carried forward into the next financial year, allowing 14 months for completion.

8.3. Linda Smart explained that Great Chesterford was more complicated as delivery would have to be by Network Rail. The initial phase would be a 20-space car park with a “High Street” environment, with DDA compliant spaces near the ticket office and cycle parking.

8.4. Catherine Dean asked whether ECC was negotiating with Network Rail over the pedestrian crossing at Elsenham station. Linda Smart said that local parents had taken the initiative here, possibly with the Area Highway Office. **Linda Smart to check and report back.** Barry Drinkwater asked whether ULODA’s input to the work at Audley End had been taken into account. Jeremy Pine said that any comments he had received had been sent to Mouchel Parkman. **Jeremy Pine to check and report back.**

8.5. Linda Smart explained that the station works had been reported to the North Area Panel, and at the next Panel meeting she would setting out in more detail timescale, responsibility and funding. Park and Ride was not being taken forward due to UDC Member opposition. Jackie Cheetham asked to see a plan and asked whether there was any ECC funding for a cycle rack in Saffron Walden.

9. INTEGRATING PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR SAFFRON WALDEN

9.1. David Corke briefly ran through the items listed in his paper, namely:

- Passenger usage statistics – data should be accurate, complete and open to public inspection.
- Withdrawal of route 18 – threatened withdrawal needed wide publicity now.
- Withdrawal of route PB1 – ECC should produce plans to reinstate proper bus services for Littlebury.
- Publication of bus fares – ECC should give fare information on all stops and timetables.

- Interavailability of tickets – Why will ECC not do the same as Hertfordshire, which provides PlusBus, network tickets etc in Bishop's Stortford and throughout the county.
- Ghost bus stops – ECC should mark the important ghost stops and remove the rest from its database.
- Review of Walden area buses – ECC should be requested to carry out the review soon and openly.
- Issue of bus passes by UDC – passes should be issued on a 12-month basis from the date of issue complying with Government advice and spreading pressure on staff time throughout the year.

9.2. In response, Richard Gravatt acknowledged that the data provided for route 17 was incorrect, but other data was accurate. A lot of work was involved in providing information under the FOI Act, but it would be done. Fare information has to be carried on the bus and, by law, has to be provided on request. There is a problem with constantly changing fares and changing timetable information at £38 a go. Route 18 was costing £5.47 / passenger (above ECC's criteria of £5). An inspector would be checking on bus and ECC was looking at the problem.

9.3. PB1 was withdrawn by Royal Mail following a long debate and the offer of additional funding. The cost of a replacement bus service was prohibitive. The current temporary solution had been worked up with Parishes. On ticket interavailability a good point was being made. A possibility would be to look at WAGN stations in Essex. A similar ticket to Interlink could be looked at, but would exclude X services as they are premium.

10. NEW BUS / COACH STATION AT STANSTED AIRPORT

10.1. Jeremy Pine reported that work was scheduled to be completed in February. The weather had caused some delays, but there is now some access under parts of the new canopy.

11. TAXI ISSUES

11.1. Barry Drinkwater asked if there were any issues. He confirmed that ULODA represented all licensed operators. David Corke commented that some taxi services appeared to be half way between a bus and a genuine taxi and wondered how links could be improved. Murray Hardy explained that the 1985 Transport Act did allow Hackney Carriages to run like a small PSV. He confirmed that he had a list of registered taxi services, although some just did school contracts. He worked together with Barry Drinkwater on promotion. David Gregory asked whether there could be an article in Uttlesford Life.

11.2. Ian Willard asked who one could complain to about taxi services. Murray Hardy said it was to himself, but try to resolve with the taxi company first. Linda Smart confirmed that she was the person to contact on taxi issues relating to the proposed Audley End station layout.

12. OLYMPIC GAMES PREPARATION

12.1. This item was deferred until the next meeting due to time pressure. Jeremy Pine confirmed that this issue was now a standing item on both the Bus and Coach and Rail Working Groups of the Stansted Area Transport Forum.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13.1. Paul Garland announced that LA21 would be launching its public transport information at the Mayor's sustainability event in Saffron Walden Town Hall, and alternatives to cheap flights. Jackie Cheetham said that a similar initiative was needed for Great Dunmow.

13.2. Andre Morris announced that the 347 service would be upgraded to 3 journeys per day.

14. ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

14.1. The following were suggested:

- Putting passengers first – DfT's new bus policy
- Green travel planning
- Update on Government guidance on rights for people with disabilities
- Olympic Games preparation

15. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

15.1. The next meeting will be on Tuesday 27th March 2007 at 10.00am in the Council Offices, Great Dunmow.