

Loss of bus service 4 and the blether bus : an update #dundeewestend



During the COVID-19 health emergency, some bus services have not run and these have included the “blether bus” service (run by the City Council) and Service 4 (run by Xplore Dundee).

The council’s Parking & Sustainable Transport Team Leader recently advised councillors as follows :

“As a response to lockdown, declining passenger numbers and the unavailability of bus drivers who were shielding, all bus operators reduced their commercial service offering in March/April 2020. This meant reduced frequencies on core routes and in some neighbourhoods the suspension of non-core bus services.

With financial support from Scottish Government, the bus industry has been able to slowly reintroduce services and increase frequencies so that passengers could return to services with confidence that they would be able to physically distance themselves from other passengers. Overall passenger numbers are now hovering between 55% and 60% of pre-covid levels but bus service provision is running closer to 90%. Within that overall picture of reinstated services, there are two commercial services operated by Xplore Dundee that have not been reintroduced and following discussion with Christine McGlasson, MD at Xplore Dundee, I can advise that there are no immediate plans to bring back either Service 4 (Dryburgh – Lochee – West End – City Centre) or Service 23 (Woodside – City Centre). Therefore, for the immediate future the residents in these communities will be required to walk further to access other buses operating on the core routes.

Separately, as lockdown approached, the Council took the decision to withdraw its minibus operations from service – including the Blether Bus Services, the weekly Shoppers Bus and the Out & About trips. More recently we have fielded a handful of enquiries about when these services might restart. Given the elderly user group that would normally travel on these services, the compact design of the minibuses and the requirement to have these vehicles available for school runs (with additional hygiene measures) it is

not our intention to restart these services in the immediate future. We will keep the situation under review and take guidance from public health colleagues. We will communicate any decisions with users as best we can using a number of different channels in the weeks ahead.

The next couple of years will bring major challenges for the UK's bus industry but we will work closely with all the bus operators in Dundee to give them as much support as possible as they face that challenge."

I have spoken with many residents who miss the services that are currently not running. For example, the loss of Service 4 adversely affects many older folk in the Magdalen Yard Road, Windsor Street and Roseangle areas as there is no other bus service there and, for many elderly residents, a steep uphill walk to Perth Road to the nearest bus services. One resident in the area made what I felt was a very good suggestion of asking Xplore Dundee to temporarily do a minor re-routing of Service 17 to cover the area.

I raised this with the Managing Director of Xplore Dundee who replied as follows :

"I know this is very difficult, trust me, and I sympathise greatly with these communities. I understand why your constituent thinks this would be an easy fix and I do appreciate her suggestion, but it is not that easy. The 17 is established as a service for travelling to/from the district centre on Perth Road which would have to be missed in order to serve Magdalen Green and cause problems for existing users. Equally, the 17 is already quite a circuitous route between Ninewells and the City Centre so adding this in would not go down well with those who already use the service.

Clearly, the 17 is a core service carrying many passengers, although sadly many less than pre-Covid -we are currently at 59% of pre-Covid patronage. We believe that deviating from this core service and district centre would only switch off more customers from using the service than we would gain in going into this area. I hope you can appreciate that, despite really feeling for the people who are adversely affected, we could not encourage a further decline to our business in the present circumstances. We are having to make some really tough choices throughout this time as we don't have the resources to do everything.

I hope this at least answers your question and sorry I can't give you better news."

I will continue to pursue the issue of the lack of any bus service here and hope that it will be possible to restore Service 4 in the near future.