
PETITION REQUESTING THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW DIRECT BUS SERVICE FROM ALVASTON, ALLENTON AND NORMANTON TO THE CITY HOSPITAL

Introduction

The majority of medical services currently provided at the Derby Royal Infirmary, DRI, will transfer to the City Hospital between February and July 2009. A petition has been submitted requesting the introduction of a new direct bus service from Alvaston, Allenton and the Cavendish area of Normanton to the City Hospital to make it easier for people to reach the site.

Current situation

There are already very good bus links between the City Centre and the City Hospital site as can be seen in the table in Appendix A. These services then link with the existing frequent services from the south of the city such as 36,37,38, from Sinfen, Sunnyhill and Normanton the 40,41 from Alvaston, Allenton and Normanton, and the 42,43,44, 45 from Alvaston and Boulton. All of these routes operate at least 4 services an hour during the day Monday to Saturday. Whilst people do have to interchange between buses to make the onward connections to the hospital once the new bus station opens in late 2009 most bus services in the city will start from there which will make changing between services easier.

In addition to these conventional bus services the City Council pays for Derby Community Transport to provide a ring and ride bus service for people who struggle to use standard bus services. This provides a door to door service from peoples homes to any health service facilities within the city such as the hospital, doctor surgeries and dentist in a wheel chair accessible vehicle. The service runs from 7am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Patients can take their carer with them on this service at no extra cost.

Future provision

Discussions have already taken place between the City Council, the Hospital Trust and the two main private bus companies about the potential of introducing a direct bus service from the City Hospital to the southern suburbs of the city. In the past there was such a service however it was withdrawn because too few people used it to make it commercially viable. Despite the imminent closure of the DRI neither of the main bus companies felt that such a direct service would generate enough passengers to be financially viable without some kind of ongoing and direct financial support from either the council or the Hospital.

It is hard to say how much it would cost to introduce a direct service from the southern suburbs of Derby to the City Hospital without going out to competitive tender. However looking at the other bus services which the Council supports we estimate to provide a half hourly service from Alvaston, Allenton, and Normanton to the City Hospital from approximately 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday would cost over £150000 annually. Unfortunately, neither the Hospital nor the City Council has funding available to provide this level of support.

The Department for Transport, DfT, has announced that during 2009 they will be running another round of their Kickstart competition. Under this programme the DfT provides £25million nationally to fund the introduction of new or improved bus services. A key criterion for successful bids is that services must have the potential to become commercially viable within a short time period of no more than three years. Local authorities working in partnership with commercial bus operators need to submit bids for some of this funding setting out what their project aims to achieve and the costs involved. Funding will be available for a maximum of 3 years after which time the new service would need to become either commercially self financing or be withdrawn. As this is a national scheme any bid submitted would be in competition against projects from around the country and there is no guarantee we would win the funding required. Furthermore, the bus operators have already expressed their doubts about the commercial viability of such a service.

Fares

People over 60 and certain disabled people are entitled to a National Concessionary Travel Card (Gold Card). This gives them free bus travel between 9.30am and 11pm Monday to Friday and all day at weekends and on bank holidays. For those not entitled to receive the card the City Council is working with the bus companies to introduce a new integrated bus ticket which can be used on any company's bus services in Derby. This will reduce the cost of travel for people who have to change between services operated by different bus companies to reach the hospital.

Conclusion

We estimate that the end to end journey on the proposed service from Alvaston to the City hospital would be approximately 45minutes. Given this lengthy journey time and the potential frequency of such a service it would be quicker for passengers from many of the areas on the suggested route to continue to travel on the existing services into the city centre and then out again to the hospital. The introduction of the integrated bus ticket in 2009 will help to reduce the costs of changing buses operated by different companies and the opening of the new bus station will make it physically easier. Those people who do find it physically difficult to change buses already have the opportunity to access the ring and ride bus service which offers a door to door service in a wheelchair accessible vehicle to the City Hospital and other health service facilities.