

A6 Duffield Road Bus Lane

Evidence from *trent barton* for Overview and Scrutiny Commission - 24 November 2008.

Detailed Evidence

1 Overview

- i Punctuality is known to be the single most important aspect of any bus service to its customers. Frequency, fares, cleanliness, service, comfort, accessibility, information – none rate as important as punctuality. Yet it is the one thing that the bus operator alone is powerless to deliver – without bus lanes and similar priorities.
- ii So the stakes could not be higher. The City Council has demonstrated in this new bus lane a positive, long term vision for Bus Quality Partnership which a) has worked and b) has in turn inspired bus operators to commit to further investment in Derby.
- iii Bus Quality Partnership (strongly advocated in both current and proposed transport legislation) involves operators and authorities identifying routes where growth of custom can be achieved through investment in quality by the operator, and the delivery of bus priorities by the authority. One powerful objective is to afford travellers a viable choice between bus and car for certain journeys, which makes better use of roadspace, reduces congestion and gives immediate environmental benefits. The schedule of bus priority schemes and other measures is written into the Local Transport Plan. This is a statutory document to which operators and authorities sign up and which in turn becomes the bidding tool to secure Department funding for bus (and pedestrian/cycle etc) schemes.
- iv Before the A6 bus lane was actually delivered, *trent barton* took the step of investing close to £2m in new buses for the A6 bus routes, known as *the sixes*. The City's pledge to make the bus lane permanent was seen by *trent barton* as a positive indication that effective bus priorities, as outlined in the Local Transport Plan could be delivered. The company accordingly placed a £1.2m order for a brand new fleet to be operated on another of its major Derby routes (Mickleover).
- v On the strength of the positive market reaction to the bus lane, discussions have taken place between *trent barton* and Derby City Council over the possibility of increasing the frequency of bus service along the A6 by 50%.
- vi *trent barton* has openly commended Derby City Council for introducing the Duffield Road Bus Lane, thereby putting the interests of a large number of people (who choose public transport) ahead of a small number of motorists.
- vii When roadspace is at premium, it clearly makes sound sense to cater for the most people rather than the most vehicles. Moving people in cars is an inefficient use of roadspace and generates a disproportionate volume of atmospheric pollution.
- viii So this is not simply a matter of whether the Duffield Road bus lane should stay or go. If the City Council is unable to deliver its promises laid out in the Local Transport Plan – against which bus operators have forecast substantial programmes of investment - the future of

public transport in Derby is not sustainable. It must be assumed that if the bus lane, or any part of it is withdrawn, there will be no likelihood of the City's Local Transport Plan pledges being politically deliverable.

- ix This will result in a downward spiral in public transport of the kind which largely prevailed for almost four decades as private motoring became materially cheaper and widespread. Passenger numbers will fall. Vulnerable groups will suffer. Investment will be slashed. Jobs will be lost. Congestion will increase as displaced bus users return to their cars. Buses will therefore decline still further as fares increase and services are cut. Retailers will feel the loss of trade.

2 About *trent barton*

- i *trent barton* is a much awarded, market-leading and independent bus operator known for growing markets through quality. It has one of the most modern, low-emission and easy-access major bus fleets in the UK with an average age of just 5 years. The company was the first in the land to achieve a 100% easy-access bus fleet, ten years ahead of national targets.
- ii We have been introducing new bus services, improving frequencies, and extending periods of operation as the market has grown and we are the only bus company in the UK to offer its customers an on the spot, money back guarantee for any reason if customers are dissatisfied.
- iii The new buses entering our fleet in the last two years have been fitted with double glazing, air-conditioning, leather seats, audio and visual bus stop announcements and other comfort features. Next year we will introduce the UK's most advanced smartcard system.

3 Outcomes – how the bus lane has exceeded all expectation

- i The new bus lane has worked. Bus ridership on our Duffield Road routes has increased by 8.3% since the bus lane was introduced. In the same period patronage on our other Derby routes varied between growth of 1% and decline of 0.5% on a like for like basis.
- ii Independent research conducted by Research and Marketing Associates for Derby City Council found that:
 - 33% of passengers were likely to use the bus more often thanks to the new bus lane.
 - 39% could have travelled by car instead
 - Increased bus use was almost twice as likely to be from car-owners than non car owners. This illustrates the point that bus journey times need to be as quick and reliable as possible to appeal to those who have cars available.
 - When asked what further improvements they would like to see, no fewer than 90% of passengers' gave MORE BUS PRIORITIES as their top choice. This was viewed as more important than extra buses, cheaper buses, air-conditioning and other similar benefits.

Journey time savings may be hard for some to place in context but every minute saved on a bus route makes a difference. For instance the bus lane saving of 4 minutes between Allestree and Derby means that it would be possible to run eight journeys an hour instead of just six with the same number of buses between the two points. This makes a huge difference in attracting new customers – a much better frequency.

4 The purpose and value of Bus Lanes

- i No one is expecting or asking that people abandon their cars. But UK transport strategy has acknowledged that car use, as opposed to car ownership, is higher for the UK than almost anywhere else in Europe. And the real cost of motoring is falling. Unchecked, the problem is going to get far worse.
- ii Unlike trains, for example, buses have to share their operating track with all manner of other vehicles, whilst at the same time running to a published timetable. The random nature of this means that no two days are usually the same. This is naturally a repeated source of anxiety for people who choose to use buses.
- iii The average motorist has to sit in a traffic jam once or twice a day. Buses have to do so repeatedly in timetabled cycles – so delay effects all journeys, incrementally, in all directions.
- iv Unlike the motorist, the bus cannot set out a little earlier if heavy traffic is expected, nor take an alternative route.
- v The bus operator can do very little to redress this without building a lot of spare time (some of it 'just in case') into the timetable. Since the bus must adhere to its timetable, it cannot take advantage of any time saved on the schedule if traffic is less heavy – the bus has to wait. This makes it a less likely choice for people who could use a car and just as frustrating for everyone else. In Social Exclusion terms, longer journeys to work mean a narrower radius (ie less choice of employment) for jobseekers and workers.
- vi The huge amount of extra buses and drivers built into timetables for this reason is bound to have an effect on fares and upon the operator's ability to serve wider markets or increase frequencies. This resource is instead squandered, every day, effectively standing still in traffic.
- vii Bus Lanes and other priorities are based on the simple premise of getting the quart into the pint pot when demand for roads space outstrips supply. Buses carry large volumes of passengers, whilst the average car occupancy rate is still only 1.3 per vehicle.
- viii Bus Lanes are a very clear signal to those who choose buses that their choice is supported. They can depend upon a less-obstructed, quicker journey and they can see for themselves that they were justified in not bringing their car into town.
- ix And on the other hand, motorists can see that buses have a fast track and that they may be better to travel by bus if other factors are about equal. Generic research conducted by *trent barton* two years ago showed that around 20% of motorists were starting to consider the prospect of switching for certain journeys at certain times of day. So a near market is available if the right catalyst can be delivered.
- x *trent barton* has long had a policy of recruiting for attitude, training for skill, which means that our ideal bus driver comes not with previous experience, but with sensitivity and people skills. The stress of driving repeatedly in heavy traffic (with the attendant friction of passengers concerned about getting there on time) takes its toll, however, so that bus operators are less likely to retain the very people whose skills can generate growth of custom. Since the introduction of the A6 bus lane, many regular drivers on *the sixes* routes that use the corridor have said that they have felt less stressed and that their customers are happier.

- xi The actual number of buses that use any bus lane is of no significance, (a red herring frequently used by opponents of bus lanes) – just as the number of trains that use any given stretch of line. The matter is volume (supply and demand) related. The operator will adjust supply to fit demand. Historically supply of bus journeys has fallen as the volume of cars expands, this in turn creates more traffic, delays still more buses, and puts still more cars on the road.
- xii Where people can make a choice between car and bus it is clearly in everyone's interests that they should do so.
- xiii Many towns and cities are now approaching gridlock at certain times of day. Road building solutions are not feasible, punitive measures such as road pricing are gathering momentum. Bus Lanes reward those who choose the bus and encourage more people not to bring a car into town.

5 No middle ground

- i Long experience of bus lanes and bus priorities elsewhere convinces us that such measures should be all or nothing. For example, the notion that bus lanes might only be in force at certain times of day confuses the motorist, who might then inadvertently contravene. Other drivers see cars in non 24 hr bus lanes (illegally or not) and conclude that it is ok for them to drive in them too, at any time. This makes enforcement intensely problematical and renders the priority itself useless. The police clearly have limited resources to enforce. Clear, unambiguous, consistent measures are essential. Once again, the message to both the motorist and bus passenger is that bus users are important.
- ii And it has to be said that the A6 bus lane in itself, welcome as it is, is by no means comprehensive. Cities with a long-standing commitment to public transport access have created continuous priorities so that the bus can move seamlessly to its destination. This is bound to attract market growth and make the most of available roadspace.
- iii We have praised Derby City Council for having started from a funding base which has been historically lower than average and taking steps towards putting such measures in place.
- iv The A6 bus lane should therefore be viewed not by any means as an end in itself as a component of what should build into a comprehensive package of measures designed to support those who choose to travel by bus – with clear environmental benefits into the bargain.

6 Concluding remarks

- i We started by saying how high the stakes were in considering this matter of one comparatively short stretch of bus lane.
- ii Without a consistent and incremental political approach, there can be no Local Transport Plan (in itself a serious Statutory matter).
- iii *trent barton* has undoubtedly committed more to investment in public transport in Derby than the City has been able to deliver in priorities. However, having developed robust partnerships with the new Unitary Authority we have felt that between us we could agree a long term strategy for excellence in public transport.

- iv As far back as 1994, the pioneering *spondon flyer* virtually **DOUBLED** bus ridership and has been frequently held up as a national example. We gifted the *spondon flyer* to Derby City Council as a ready made Bus Quality Partnership – an example that could be used to underpin Local Transport Plans. Other initiatives followed. We recently doubled the frequency of our route from Heatherton to Derby (*harlequin*) and have developed longer-distance routes into Derby which have grown passenger footfall massively – with obvious benefits for city traders. We have extended many routes through to 3am, added commercial Sunday timetables and replaced whole bus fleets barely 5 years old.
- v But without bus priorities, this cannot be sustained. Even after the coming of Westfield, *spondon flyer* has nosedived, so fraught with delay are the inbound buses.
- vi Which is why we view the A6 bus lane so critically. Removal or dilution of this facility would signal the political inability of the Authority to guarantee its Local Transport Plan pledges. Decline in patronage in Derby bus routes would undoubtedly ensue unchecked. Conversely the commercial returns generated by Nottingham are more attractive (even before Westfield's planned redevelopment of the Broadmarsh centre) and there is an established political will to extend robust priorities for buses.
- vii Having worked with the officers and members of Derby City Council so positively for so long, we hope that the A6 bus lane signals a robust approach which will attract further investment and commitment from bus operators working in partnership with a progressive Authority, securing Department funding and guaranteeing prosperity as well as environmental benefits for the city.