

From: Harrison, Dave - Oxfordshire County Council
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Subject: RE: Correspondence from Witney Town Council

Dear Mr Clapton

Thank you for your correspondence of 30 January 2024 regarding local bus service H2, and please accept my apologies for the delay in response.

Service H2 is tightly timed and unfortunately an extension of even a couple of minutes is not possible without the need to either reduce the frequency or introduce additional vehicles. Currently, the off-peak cycle time (the time it takes to get from Witney to Brookes and back, plus stand time at each end) is 120 minutes including 10 minutes of layover (8.3%). This is already below the industry desirable standard of 10%.

The route is already one of our most expensive contracts at £237,000 per annum and therefore it is not possible to commit to additional resources from our own budgets.

You may be aware that the residential and commercial development at Oxford North will be providing a significant amount of Section 106 funding for service H2, broadly equivalent to the cost of two additional buses for eight years. We are in the process of considering how best to use this funding, and the terms of our agreement with the developers states that we need their prior sight and approval before entering into a tender process.

Broadly at present I see two options – one to run a 30 min frequency service between Eynsham Park & Ride and Headington, or two to run a 30 min frequency service between Oxford North and Headington with an hourly extension to Cowley. This, of course, assumes that the Council is in a position to maintain its funding for the existing service, but neither option would result in a service between Witney and Churchill Hospital without changing buses at Eynsham. We may be able to utilise some developer funding from elsewhere in the district to bridge that gap, but this is currently uncertain.

We intend to make these changes to service H2 in October 2024, subject to:

- reopening of Botley Road;
- commencement of the traffic filters project;
- agreement with the developer; and
- occupations on the site meeting current expectations.

Of course, it may be that the traffic filters project delivers sufficient benefits to release additional journey time to make additional enhancements possible, and this will be kept under review.

In terms of real time information provision, we have substantial Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funds for improvement of the display estate but within Oxford it is almost entirely dependent on the City Council's re-procurement of their bus shelter contract, which was due last year but has been repeatedly delayed. The County Council are keen to ensure that abortive works are not undertaken by installing display screens in shelters that are then removed in the event that the incumbent provider does not retain the contract.

Unfortunately Stagecoach's centralisation of customer services has resulted in longer response times and poor accuracy of answers, particularly in relation to local knowledge. This is a frequent complaint and one that I have raised with local management on a number of occasions.

I trust that this sets out the current position in relation to these issues. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries.

Dave Harrison

Public Transport Team Leader

Environment and Place

Oxfordshire County Council