

HEAD OF TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Report to Maidstone JTB July 2010

The withdrawal of the Arriva 101 Service from Bus Stops at Cobtree Golf Course and Salisbury Road, Kits Coty

Introduction

On Monday 28 June Arriva withdrew their 101 bus service from serving two bus stops on the A229 at Cobtree Golf Course (A229 northbound) and opposite Salisbury Road, Kits Coty, (A229 southbound). Both withdrawals were on health and safety grounds. Arriva's action was prompted by a number of incident reports from their drivers which highlighted concerns over the location and layout of the stops.

Background

The 101 is a frequent express service linking Maidstone and Medway. It is provided on an entirely commercial basis and, because Arriva were so concerned over health and safety, they withdrew the service at very short notice. It is understood that information was posted on all of the buses on the route on 23 June as well as at local stops and drivers were speaking to affected passengers. The number of passengers using these bus stops is relatively low. Some 21 passengers were recorded getting off at the Cobtree stop by an Arriva survey of 28 September 2009, 15 of these on 3 occasions between 15.45 and 16.17. No passengers boarded the bus during that day.

Arriva issued the following press release prompted by the reaction to the withdrawal of the service from the Cobtree bus stop: "We have had to take the decision to withdraw the Service 101 stop at Cobtree Golf Course on safety grounds. The location of this stop requires buses to pull out of a short lay-by directly into traffic which at that point is entering the 70mph zone and which is being joined by traffic coming off the M20 slip road just behind the bus stop. Drivers of vehicles joining the main carriageway will be concentrating on what is approaching from their offside and will often not notice a bus pulling out in front of them. The speed and density of traffic at this point of the A229 therefore creates a serious safety hazard and can cause considerable delays while our drivers wait for a safe distance between other vehicles to allow them to join the flow. Representatives of Kent County Council have considered the feasibility of making adjustments to the sites but this is not currently possible."

Kent Highway Services have explored alternative designs for the lay-bys including lengthening the exits in order to allow buses to build up speed prior to joining the main road traffic flow. Subject to outline design and the presence of statutory undertakers, costs are estimated at £100k for the Cobtree lay-by and £250k for the Salisbury Road lay-by. Given the limited

number of passengers using these stops, it would be difficult to justify this level of investment particularly with the recent cuts to capital budgets.

150 Bus Service

The bus stops in question are also served by the 150 operated by Kent Top Travel under contract to Kent County Council. This provides 6 journeys Mon-Sat from 7.45 to 17.09 inbound to Maidstone from the Salisbury Road Stop and 6 outbound journeys to Lords Wood and Walderslade between 8.40 and 17.52 from the Cobtree Golf Course Bus Stop.

Following Arriva's action, County Council officers have been monitoring the impact on passengers and are investigating some amendments to Service 150 to try to accommodate some of the affected journeys. An additional bus stop could be introduced in the Chatham Road/ Lower Bell area to serve Kits Coty passengers who would otherwise use the Salisbury Road Stop. The 16:04 from Maidstone Chequers can accommodate the afternoon peak of passengers recorded by the Arriva survey.

A Safety Engineer has undertaken a full review of the bus stops in question and the Service 150's ability to access them safely. Forward visibility of the stops meets the required standard and there is no record of injury crashes on the A229 involving bus services for the past 6 years (crash investigations normally look at 3 year data). Carriageway relining, vegetation clearance and repainting of the shelters are recommended to improve driver awareness of the bus stops and the fact that they may need to slow down. Increasing the exit taper lengths would be an improvement, but it is not considered essential. The 150 buses are single deck and they have a better acceleration rate compared to the double deck 101s and so there is less of a problem for them in picking up speed when joining the traffic flow. In respect of Cobtree the 150 Service goes via the Running Horse Junction whereas the 101 follows the grade separated route and needs to cross the traffic joining from the M20 prior to accessing the bus stop.

Conclusions

The Service 101 is provided on a wholly commercial basis by Arriva and so the County Council has little influence over this decision. Whilst their concerns are understandable their decision in this matter is disappointing. Safety checks have been undertaken and the Service 150, provided under contract to Kent County Council, will continue to serve the bus stops in question.

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