

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Doing Buses Differently; Proposed Franchising Scheme consultation

I am writing on behalf of Whalley Range Councillors, in response to Doing Buses Differently, the proposal to franchise Greater Manchester's bus services.

Bus services are essential from connecting people to jobs, friends and life opportunities, to linking them with essential services like GPs, hospitals and libraries, to freeing up road space and cleaning up the air that we breathe.

Whalley Range, Manchester and Greater Manchester residents need vastly improved services in our area. Public transport is raised regularly at our surgeries, local community events and other forums and communication with Whalley Range residents, community groups, schools, businesses and places of worship in the ward.

Recent bus service losses in parts of the ward such as the 85A via Withington Road, and historic losses such as for example the 16 service are a major concern for our residents and have a negative impact in our communities, from social isolation to forcing people in their cars as there is no alternative option for people to get where they want to go.

We have previously supported a local campaign led by the Whalley Rangers, a local community group in response to evidence of need in the area and the loss of another bus service to get Stagecoach to trial a bus service that goes through Whalley Range's main shopping area - the 85A service. This saw a tremendous amount of effort being put by passionate local volunteers that care for where they live and want our area to thrive. A ward wide campaign was run, jumping every hoop Stagecoach has asked which eventually resulted in the provision of a service on a trial basis, only for it to be withdrawn a few months after as the route was deemed 'uncommercial' leaving people angry, disappointed and isolated. Age Friendly Whalley Range & Chorlton is another local group that has campaigned for better bus services in our area, particularly to our local hospital - Central Manchester Foundation Trust (MRI).

More recently another service was recently introduced without any consultation with local residents, never mind with local members, without any promotion of the service to local residents that might have used it, only for it to be deemed again not profit making, so that was withdrawn too.

Cuts in the frequency of services as well as the absence of services in the evenings and weekends is another problem for our residents. For residents who are working early start or late finish shift work or residents who want to enjoy Manchester's night time economy the only available option is a taxi or the use of their own vehicle. Residents who relied on bus to get into MRI, Withington hospital for out-patient appointments are left to their own devices to pay for taxi or use a very unreliable ring and ride service and in many cases an ambulance.

The above mean that many of our residents have long walks to bus stops to catch expensive, unreliable buses that don't always directly take them where they want to go. Buses also don't link with the two metrolink stations adjacent to the ward. Furthermore, due to the absence of integrated ticketing, residents are faced with different fares and companies due to uncoordinated ticketing policies by different operators because it appears customer experience travelling in our city is of no concern for the operator.

Moreover and of particular concern to our residents is the state of the bus fleet in the City. Our Whalley Range residents are taking action on climate change and for a city that has ambitious targets and is leading the way in becoming carbon neutral, having also recently declared a climate emergency our residents expect and demand profit making businesses subsidized by the public purse as well as everyone else in the city to play their part in tackling this challenge. Our residents want no less than a zero carbon emissions fleet, cleaner buses that are not running empty in some of the city's busier corridors when communities that don't have access to private vehicles are left with no option to invest in a vehicle in order to go about their daily lives.

As elected representatives, it has been frustrating to have been feeling powerless and completely unable to influence, be listened to or even have a say on bus services in the city and/or our ward, especially when the consequences of unaffordable, unreliable, dirty and expensive bus services are laid bare in our interactions with residents of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.

I am therefore writing to express our support for the buses to return to democratic control through a franchising model.

Thank you for considering our response to the Consultation.

Cllr Angeliki Stogia  
Cllr Mary Watson  
Cllr Aftab Razaq