

Biggar Community Council Consultation on Public Transport.

Overview

Responses were obtained from:

1. An event at the Gillespie Centre on Sat 22nd June 2019 (50-60 people attended)
2. A Survey Monkey questionnaire with 24 respondents run during June and July 2019.

Both the Gillespie Centre event and the Survey Monkey poll also involved a consultation on Health and Social Care, and asking people what other issues they thought Biggar Community Council should focus on.

The Survey Monkey poll allowed open-ended text responses to each of the questions posed and restricted the survey to one submission per device.

At the Gillespie Centre, attendees were asked to put their comments on Post Its which were displayed on flip chart paper. If someone agreed with a comment which had already been made they were asked to indicate this by sticking a coloured dot to the post it. Respondents could see other people's responses which may have provoked them to agree or make similar comments, but in some cases people disagreed with previous responses which prompted them to post the opposite view.

None of the responses reflect the view of Biggar Community Council as a body, although Council members may have responded as individuals. This collection of local opinions is simply a starting point for discussion.

Three questions were asked in all of the settings:

What is good about public transport locally?

What is not so good about public transport provision locally?

How could public transport be made better locally?

Inevitably there was some overlap and repetition in the answers to these questions.

Numbers in brackets in the report indicate a number of similar responses.

What is good about public transport locally?

General

One comment suggested that public transport in general was fine, while another stated that it was fine during the day.

Another stated that public transport was good for people who live in Biggar and Lanark, but implied that it might not be for people outwith these towns.

Buses

The Biggar to Lanark bus service was felt to work well with 11 respondents making this point at the Gillespie event and three via Survey Monkey. Other services which were praised were Biggar to Peebles (5), Biggar to Moffat and Lanark to Wishaw and Hamilton.

The friendliness and helpfulness of bus drivers was commented on by or agreed with by eight people at the Gillespie Centre event, but was not mentioned in the Survey Monkey poll.

The Biggar to Edinburgh service received some praise, with seven respondents saying it was good, but three of them qualified this by saying it was only good during the day time.

One respondent felt that local bus services in general were excellent.

The ability to pay bus fares with a card was welcomed (4) as were monthly season tickets on the Biggar to Edinburgh buses.

Trains

There was one comment stating that the Lanark to Glasgow rail service was good.

Active transport

There were no comments from the Gillespie event giving examples of what works well with active transport, but the Survey Monkey poll yielded a number of examples.

The suitability of the area for walking and cycling was commented on positively. Six responses mentioned walking, which was described as being “safe”, “good”, “working well” “Ok” and easy to do. Three responses mentioned cycling positively. The Healthy Valleys Walking Group was praised (2).

What is not so good about public transport locally?

General

Public transport was felt to be key in a rural area, but was felt to be inadequate locally with poor connectivity and a network which didn't work for those who don't live on the Lanark/Biggar bus route.

Transport to medical appointments was highlighted as a particular issue. Two respondents commented that there are no direct services to any of the main hospitals (e.g Wishaw, Hairmyres and Monklands).

The inability to use public transport in the evening was highlighted along with the lack of affordable public and community transport.

Buses

A large number of the comments referred to the 101/2 service to Edinburgh, and the bus-train connection in Lanark.

24 respondents commented that the evening 101/2 bus services to and from Edinburgh were “poor”, “awful”, “unusable” or “non-existent”. This was adversely affecting people's ability to work, visit family and have a social life. The Sunday service to Edinburgh was described as “very poor”. Two respondents commented on a lack of buses to Edinburgh generally.

Several responses highlighted issues with the comfort of the buses used on the 101/2 route. These included uncomfortable seating and lack of seat belts (3), general comfort and feeling that the current buses were old or “town buses” which were unsuitable for this route (5). It was felt that coaches similar to those used on the X74 service should be used on this route. Lack of toilets was highlighted as an issue given the length of the Dumfries to Edinburgh route. Temperature control on these buses

was stated to be poor, with some passengers having to open windows to avoid over-heating thereby exposing other passengers to drafts, while in winter buses were too cold (6). Lack of luggage capacity was also mentioned (4) along with overcrowding which was felt to be a particular problem in the late afternoon when school pupils travel home from Edinburgh.

The buses on the 101/2 route were felt to be unreliable leading to delays and cancellations on the route (10)

The 101/2 service SW of Biggar was described as “barely adequate” (2).

There were also concerns about connections between the 101/2 and the 91/191 in Biggar (3), and one response commented on poor connections in Edinburgh e.g between the 101/2 and the Lothian Buses 38 service.

The connection between the 19/191 Biggar to Lanark service and trains in Lanark was also a major concern with 23 respondents commenting on this “stressful” connection.

The Biggar to Lanark bus service was felt to be too expensive (3)

The 91 service from Biggar to Peebles was described as “limited” (3) or more optimistically “nearly adequate” with the lack of an evening service mentioned.

Several “missing” bus routes were mentioned (journeys which people would like to make but can’t). These were Biggar to Carstairs Junction to catch trains (11), Biggar to Livingston (9), Biggar to Carnwath (5), Biggar to Glasgow and Biggar to the Gyle. The need for an internal bus service within Biggar was raised, particularly connecting the Bield sheltered housing to the rest of the town. This would become more important if the Bield developed as a social hub, and as the size of Biggar increases. The lack of a direct connection between Biggar and Wishaw was noted. Better connections to the east were also suggested e.g to West Linton.

Several responses mentioned bus infrastructure. The area around Lanark bus stance was said to be “unwelcoming” with nowhere to wait (5), and the removal of the lay-by from the main stop on the north side of Biggar High St was felt to have caused “chaos” (6). The lack of real time signage at Biggar or Lanark advising bus arrival time was also mentioned.

One respondent stated that the MyBusRural and the Rural Development Trust bus between Crawford and Biggar are not adequately publicised. A particular concern is that these services do not appear on websites such as Traveline Scotland.

General comments stated that bus times have been cut, and there are not enough buses.

Trains

There were no comments on train services from the Gillespie Centre event, but a number of comments were made via Survey Monkey.

It was felt that train cancellations were frequent, and there were not enough trains at Carstairs. Carstairs station was said to feel “unsafe” by passengers waiting for the sleeper.

The lack of train services to the south from Clydesdale was highlighted, and it was also felt that there was a lack of trains to Edinburgh (2) and Glasgow from the Clydesdale area.

Two people felt that the distance to stations to catch trains to Edinburgh and Glasgow was too far.

Active transport

The non-availability and state of pavements within Biggar was highlighted (5), and this was felt to be a particular issue for disabled people.

It was felt that there were not enough pedestrian crossings on the A702 in Biggar, and the timing of the crossing were ineffective, with the delay before the traffic is stopped being so long that the road has cleared before the light change.

The lack of cycle lanes or path was raised by three respondents. Cycling on the A702 was felt to be dangerous, with car owners having a poor attitude to cyclists (2). Speed limits were not being adhered to, and visibility on Biggar High Street was poor.

How could public transport be made better?

Buses

Many of the suggestions for improvement re-iterated but reversed the things which weren't so good about public and active transport i.e re-instating the late evening service from Edinburgh (16), improving the comfort of buses on the 101/2 route (11), providing services on missing bus routes (11), more buses on existing routes (6), better connections (5) improving the evening service between Biggar and Peebles (2), better Sunday services to Edinburgh

Dropping the Penicuik section of the route was suggested as an improvement to the 101/2 route (5).

There were suggestions that a mobile app giving bus times and live bus time displays at stops would be welcome (3). Buses that carry bikes was also suggested, as were electric buses round Biggar and local communities.

Imaginative solutions to rural transport e.g. return of post bus, use of SLC vans going that way anyway was one idea to improve road-based public transport.

It was suggested the bus layby on the North side of Biggar High St should be reinstated.

At a strategic level, one response suggested that better regulation of bus services and public ownership could be beneficial.

Trains

A station at Symington with a park and ride was the most popular option (12 responses). Carnwath and Beattock were also mentioned as locations for new stations. More trains on existing routes (5), and more parking at Carstairs were also suggested.

Active Travel

A number of suggestions were made to improve active travel links.

More cycle paths and cycle lanes were suggested generally (6), and more specifically, an off-road link between Symington and Biggar which was accessible for wheelchairs and mobility scooters (8) which could be continued onwards to Thankerton (4). A long-distance cycle and walking route to Leadhills parallel to the Southern Uplands Way was suggested (2). There was also a suggestion of pedestrian-only paths. One respondent asked that existing cycle paths should be maintained and serviced, and another suggested that better information about local walks would be helpful. It was suggested that Scottish Borders Council could provide some good examples of cycle routes and paths beside roads to give safer, separated active travel options.

One response requested more cycle racks.

Speeds on Biggar High Street and the surrounding areas were felt to be excessive, and speed limits are not enforced or were unenforceable.

General

An incentive scheme to encourage people to leave their cars at home when shopping in Biggar was suggested (2). This could bring health benefits.

Clearer signage to off-street public parking areas and an additional public parking area in Market Road were suggested.

There was also a call for less emotion and more science.

Conclusions

While some positive aspects of public and active travel were identified in the Biggar area, there was widespread concern about a number of issues, particularly the deterioration in the 101/2 Dumfries to Edinburgh service which now have no late evening provision. A number of missing bus routes were identified, and it was felt that public transport was “barely adequate SW of Biggar”. The vehicles used on this route were widely viewed as being uncomfortable and unreliable.

There was also a strong view that the bus-train connection in Lanark needed to be improved, and that a bus link to Carstairs Junction would be beneficial.

Lack of pavements and obstructions to pavements where they do exist were felt to be hindering walking as an active travel mode, while road safety considerations made cycling unattractive on main roads, with a particular need for improvements between Biggar and Symington.

Many of the suggestions for improvement directly addressed these points, but some suggested other innovations such as improved real time information on bus arrival times, electric buses,

What next?

Biggar Community Council intend to use this consultation publicise the findings of this survey widely, and to use it as the basis of the Community Council’s response to consultations which it responds to

on this topic, in particularly the newly-launched Scottish Government Consultation on the draft National Transport Strategy for Scotland and the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) process.

Biggar Community Council will circulate copies of this report to individuals and organisations including:

David Mundell MP.

Aileen Campbell MSP and South of Scotland Regional MSPs.

Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity.

Cllrs Alex Alison, Eric Holford and Ian McAllan.

Other Community Councils in the surrounding area.

Gordon Mackay, Head of SLC and Transportation Dept.

Alan Bannister, SLC Access Officer.

Regional Transport Authorities responsible to local public transport provision (SPT, SWESTRANS, and Scottish Borders Council).

Cllr Dr Martin Bartos, SPT Chair.

Bus Users Scotland.

Bus Users UK.

Stagecoach SW Scotland.

Stuarts Coaches.

Borders Buses.

Scotrail.

Network Rail.

Sustrans.

Ramblers Scotland.

Copies will also be made available to the public via the Biggar Community Council website and social media and in Biggar Library and the Gillespie Centre.

Biggar Community Council will issue a press release to local press highlighting the main findings of the survey.