

SKILLS, ECONOMY AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMISSION

21ST NOVEMBER 2022

RESPONSE FROM STREETSCENE, PUBLIC REALM DIVISION CLIMATE HOMES AND ECONOMY

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUS SERVICES IN HACKNEY

Buses are an essential service in Hackney. Hackney has the highest mode share of bus users of all London Boroughs and has in the past benefitted from a comprehensive and frequent network of daytime and Night Bus services.

The Council also has a long history of supporting buses and in particular bus priority, through a comprehensive programme of bus priority lanes on Council roads, as well as prioritising buses in the design of other roads schemes. Recently the Council consulted on extending the bus lane hours on Mare St to improve journey time reliability on 5 routes and extended the bus lane hours on a bus lane on Graham Road to include Sundays.

In the last 5 or so years patronage levels have dropped significantly in some inner London boroughs and on parts of routes running through central London demand has dropped by 12% in three years.

It is right that TfL continually reviews the bus network to ensure it is meeting the needs of Londoners, in particular where they believe that demand is further expected to fall due to other factors such as the opening of the Elizabeth Line, in response to changing travel patterns or to accommodate an overall increase in bus trips.

However, it must do so in a way that does not further disadvantage the most disadvantaged residents, who often rely on buses and it must avoid creating a spiral of declining services that leads to further declining use.

More recently, TfL's financial position as a result of a large drop in fare income during the pandemic has meant that further frequency reductions have been implemented on bus services.

We have already communicated our concerns to TfL including in a meeting of the Commissioner last year, but what is needed is a fair settlement from Central

Government to TfL to ensure that bus services, which are essential to Hackney residents are maintained.

A three year deal had been requested to provide long term stability and to avoid a scenario of 'managed decline' which could see wholesale withdrawal of bus routes and an 18% cut in the bus services. The latest settlement only covers the period up to April 2024 but does avoid the managed decline scenario

Bus Route 'simplifications'

In 2021 TfL consulted on a package of changes to routes in the Hoxton and Archway areas aimed at avoiding duplication of services following the drop in demand. In Hackney route 21 would be withdrawn from Southgate Road and diverted via New North Road to terminate at Holloway Nags Head.

Consultation closed in early January 2022 and although the Council expressed concerns and requested that sufficient capacity be maintained on that corridor TfL concluded that the cuts should go ahead. However, no date has been proposed for implementation. At the time we also requested that TfL extend route 135 from Old Street to Hoxton to serve the Colville Estate but this was not agreed.

According to TfL demand in Hackney at the time had dropped by an average of 10%. Officers queried this and revised patronage figures for 2016/17 were updated to show in some cases higher levels of patronage than had been assumed hitherto.

Cuts to bus frequencies in Hackney

For the past few years the drop in passenger numbers and the need to make savings as a result of a large drop in fare income during the pandemic has meant that further frequency reductions have been implemented on bus services. Although predominantly aimed at central London routes (where the drop in demand has been the highest) as these routes pass through inner London this is having a major impact in Hackney.

TfLs rationale has been that *“in central and inner London, increased rail capacity and improved active travel options have continued to change the way people travel. Demand on many routes was declining prior to the coronavirus pandemic, and while the long-term impacts remain unclear, ridership is not expected to fully return to pre-pandemic levels in the near future. Making some frequency reductions at certain times to reflect projected usage will help rebuild our financial sustainability by reducing operating costs – ensuring we can continue to invest in the services that customers rely on. Londoners will continue to experience an accessible, regular and reliable service.”*

Following the Government's earlier financial settlements, a 4% cut in bus mileage is to be achieved by 2024/25 and the Council has questioned why these were being implemented now.

The Council has expressed concern that many cuts have been communicated with only a few days notice, and at the lack of requirement to consult - a decision confirmed by Heidi Alexander, former Deputy Mayor for Transport at a meeting of the GLA Transport Committee in answer to questions from Assembly Members.

Frequency cuts on Hackney's bus routes continued to be introduced throughout 2021 and up to the present time. In the past 12 months there have been frequency cuts on over half of the Council's 47 daytime bus routes representing over 50% of the network.

In addition there have been frequency cuts on night buses since 2017 and these are impacting on low paid key workers many of whom are women. The Council is concerned that if frequencies drop on routes on busy corridors such as Kingsland High Road and Southgate Road which are still busy that passengers may suffer hardship. TfL should be requested to consider this before cutting services indiscriminately.

Central London bus changes

In May TfL opened a consultation on changes to a number of bus routes across some mainly central and inner London boroughs. The proposals will have a significant impact on the bus network as a whole resulting in the withdrawal of 13 routes with routes extended in the majority of cases as replacements. The rationale for the changes is falling demand post pandemic and lack of revenue support from central Government. In Hackney Routes 4, 11, 78, 242 and 349 will be withdrawn completely. Consultation ran until August and the Council's response is summarised below. If agreed, the changes are likely to be introduced in stages in 2023.

Impact on Hackney's bus network

Withdrawal of Route 242 and withdrawal of 135 from Old Street

This route is to be withdrawn completely. It will be replaced by an extension to Route 135 (at a reduced frequency) which currently runs from Crossharbour to Old Street.

In Hackney this means the loss of a direct link between Bishopsgate/Liverpool Street and Old Street. The direct link to Aldgate on the 242 will be maintained with the 135 diverted away from Liverpool Street via Commercial Street.

The N242 Night Bus between Homerton and Tottenham Court Road is to be retained and renumbered N135.

Withdrawal of Route 4 and partial withdrawal of 236

Although this route has little impact on Hackney the proposal to extend Route 236 from Finsbury Park to Archway to replace it will. TfL propose to withdraw the section of Route 236 between Homerton Hospital and Hackney Wick - terminating the service at Homerton Hospital.

Extension of Route 56 to Embankment

Route 56 is to be extended to the Embankment no longer directly serving Barts Hospital

Withdrawal of Route 349

Route 279 would be restructured to run between Waltham Cross to Stamford Hill as a part replacement and would no longer operate between Seven Sisters and Manor House station.

Changes to Route 205

This route serves the city fringe area of Hackney. It provides a good link to the main line termini and is a useful alternative to the Circle line for those who may be carrying luggage, are less able bodied or looking for a cheaper travel alternative. It serves several key hospitals and town centres and as such it should be retained in its current form and branded as an orbital bus route to increase patronage.

Withdrawal of Route 78

This route serves south London and terminates at Shoreditch. To compensate it is proposed to extend Route 388 from London Bridge to Bermondsey and Peckham.

Withdrawal of Route 11

This route runs from Fulham to Liverpool Street terminating at Appold Street. To compensate it is proposed to extend Route 26 to terminate at Victoria.

Summary of the Council's response :

- Save the 236, which needs to continue to run from Hackney Wick to Homerton Hospital. The proposals threaten this part of the route.
- Reconsider changes to route 56, which will remove a direct link between Hackney and Bart's Hospital, which provides specialist diagnostic cancer services.
- Save the 242, which is set to be removed and replaced with an extension of the 135 at a reduced frequency. If the 242 is to be replaced with the 135 then this should continue to serve Bishopsgate and Liverpool Street. Prior to these proposals, the Council had been in discussion with TfL about extending the 135 to Hoxton. This would now no longer be possible.
- Reconsider the withdrawal of the 349, which means residents lose a link between Stamford Hill and Manor House.
- Reconsider changes to the 476, which TfL is proposing to run from Northumberland Park to Newington Green, losing its link to King's Cross. If the change must be made, the Council is urging TfL to reroute the bus from Newington Green to Moorgate along Southgate Road, replacing links that will be lost when the 21 is withdrawn
- Object to the proposed changes to the 205 and suggest that it be branded as an orbital bus route.
- Recent research by LondonTravelwatch has highlighted that bus passengers tend to be those on lower incomes, and are more likely to be people of colour, women or younger people. Whilst any cuts or reduction in service will affect passengers across London, it is those on lower incomes who will be most affected and hit hardest, because other modes of public transport are too expensive for many bus passengers to use as an alternative. This is certainly the case in Hackney. Similarly, although the Hopper fare allows (limited) change of buses at no extra cost, such interchanges need to be convenient with easy short changes between stops with clean well maintained shelters and countdown signs at stops. The area around Old Street, for example, is challenging with no improvements proposed with the current works at the roundabout. This is of particular concern to patients of Moorfields Eye Hospital and the elderly and infirm generally, as well as people with disabilities.

IMPACT OF CUTS TO BUS SERVICES ACROSS HACKNEY ON THE COUNCIL'S GREEN AGENDA

If the Mayor of London is to achieve his target of 80% of journeys in London being made by walking, cycling or public transport by 2041, bus use will need to increase by 40% from pre-Covid levels. Large scale cuts and reductions in bus mileage will

make it harder to achieve this target and also impact on the positive aims of using the bus as envisaged in TfL's recent Bus Action Plan and in Hackney's LIP (Local Implementation Plan) which envisages an increase in the number of public transport trips per day from 181,000 in 14/15-16/17 to 214,000 by 2021 and 265,000 by 2041.

Frequency cuts to bus services have impacted on all wards but the effects are probably more acute in the north and east of the borough where the bus is the dominant mode of transport and which impacts more on low income groups.

The Council also wishes to see a rapid electrification of the bus fleet. However there are currently only two electric bus routes that serve the whole borough (106 and W15) with additional routes (43, 214) serving the periphery. Electrification of bus routes is enabled through TfL's bus tendering programme and local authorities have little input into this. As a consequence the borough's wish to see bus electrification tie in with Council initiatives such as filtered streets cannot be met. In the medium to long term Hackney should (hopefully) see an increase in electric (and possibly hydrogen) bus provision but at the moment this does appear to be hit and miss. The Council is willing to engage with TfL to facilitate a further roll out of zero emission buses.

DNW/STREETSCENE/11.2022