

Hello Graham

[5th February 2020 in reply to mine of 17.11.19, 3.2.20 and 5.2.20]

After speaking with Wiltshire Council we have become aware of work you have undertaken with regards to a review of bus services in Melksham which raises some concerns.

We can confirm that we have been working on a revised X72 timetable to come into effect from 6th April. Firstbus supplied Wiltshire Council with comprehensive loadings figures for each stop/trip over the past year which has assisted us greatly in identifying where passenger flows are and gives us an idea of capacity levels required on certain trips. The timetable is 90% complete but we are not able to publish details of this yet as they are subject to change given that the evening and Sunday elements of the service are currently out for tender. We then need to notify DVSA of the changes before they can be made public. In this draft timetable we have provision for the replacement of the evening service should we be the successful tenderer and filled many of the gaps which are currently served by the D3.

With regards to the evening/Sunday tender there is very little comment we can make about this in terms of service levels, who may be operating it etc etc. I would also make you aware that there is one piece of information which on which you are incorrect or have been misinformed. When First cancelled the 234 service in 2015 the evening and Sunday service never went out to tender. It was used as a cost saving exercise by Wiltshire Council. We have no issue running evening or Sunday services, as our recent introduction of the x31 evening and Sunday (commercial) service demonstrates, it is simply that Firstbus, in recent years have been awarded the contracts due to submitting the lowest prices. Why they continued to operate the x31 on Sundays commercially is a question we continue to ask ourselves to this day, but whilst they were operating it there certainly was no need for us to get involved. Given that the D3 evening/Sunday has at least been tendered I would take this as an indication that funding is available for replacing the lost evening/Sunday services unlike in 2015 with the 234/X34.

Further to the D3 evening services I understand you have also been working on redesigning the 68/69 service and Melksham Town services. Wiltshire Council have advised that any change to these timetables would involve a retendering process. With regards to the 68/69 service we currently operate this contract and it extends through to 2022. We have purchased vehicles for this contract and designed duties accordingly which also involves the Corsham Town service for the duration of this period. You do not appear to understand that with all the uncertainties surrounding bus funding at the moment the last thing operators would want is for their contracts to be cut short and retendered. I also suspect that the Council would be wary of carrying out such an exercise given the concerns about whether they could afford any new prices submitted and therefore finding that service levels may have to be reduced in order to become affordable.

Obviously you have not spoken to us about your plans. You will understand that whilst you may have spoken to 'key stakeholders' about your ideal bus network around Melksham you haven't made the key bus operator in Melksham aware of your plans which undermines any kind of working relationship which could develop. This reminds us of a similar issue we had with 'Transwilts' 18 months ago when they gave wholehearted biased support to the D3 service at the expense of our x72 service. It seems that MRUG is now on it's own agenda behind the backs of bus operators whilst suggesting to the public you are working for all concerned.

Regards

Daniel

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