

**NATIONAL EXPRESS WEST MIDLANDS
DUDLEY AREA NETWORK REVIEW
COMMENTS OF WEST MIDLANDS CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT**

The Campaign for Better Transport is a national campaign promoting the use of sustainable transport such as walking, cycling and the use of public transport such as buses, rail and Metro. We want to see the creation of a transport system that is a real alternative to the private car.

We welcome the consultation exercise into the proposed options for changes in and around Dudley. However, to describe the exercise as a “Dudley Area Network Review” is something of a misnomer, since the consultation is covering a wider area than the borough of Dudley. Indeed, the consultation exercise could lead to major changes covering services in Wolverhampton, Sandwell and the north west of Birmingham as well as Dudley. Describing the exercise solely as a Dudley area consultation may mean that input from passengers outside of Dudley and using routes like the 87 and 74 has been missed, as they may have felt the consultation did not apply to their services.

We note that the review has been reported in the *Express and Star* (both on-line and print) and details have been circulated via various social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook. However, there has been little other publicity other than this. Also, we are disappointed to note that once again despite our comments to the South Birmingham Network Review back in August there has been no information provided to customers about the availability of paper questionnaires for those who are not computer literate or who prefer to complete surveys such as this via hard copy.

Services from Dudley - Birmingham

It is right that the company is looking at ways to improve services between the centre of Dudley and Birmingham. The current pattern of services simply is not competitive. The result is that it takes longer to travel from Dudley to Birmingham via any of the current routes offered than it does to travel an equivalent distance elsewhere on the network. The improvements should be prioritised. There are good reasons for doing this:

- The promised extension of the Midland Metro line from Wednesbury – Brierley Hill, which would allow trams to run from Dudley into Central Birmingham and would offer improved connectivity, has not yet been delivered. The continual delays to this project are unacceptable – the line should have been opened years ago.
- The poor connectivity has contributed to the decline of Dudley town centre which has resulted in businesses relocating away. If Dudley is to regenerate and have new developments (as West Bromwich has done) there is an urgent need for improved public transport links.
- There have been complaints about parking in and around Dudley town centre. An improved bus service could offer a solution.
- The alternative to the NXWM services from Dudley to Birmingham is travelling towards one of the stations on the Stourbridge line to travel to Snow Hill or Moor Street. The trains during peak-time are often overcrowded. Car parks at stations are overflowing.

We also know from improvements elsewhere (the X51 and Sutton – Birmingham services) that if NXWM with partners including TfWM and the local authorities, gets it right and delivers a dramatically improved product, then patronage and revenue will increase.

Service 74

In order to make the route more reliable we would support making the 74 operate between West Bromwich and Birmingham City Centre only. However, the company needs to ensure an adequate replacement is provided to cover the route between West Bromwich, Great Bridge, Dudley Port and Dudley. There are various ways this could be done; one suggestion that should be considered is extending the 79 from West Bromwich out to Dudley, though there is the complication that the routing the 79 takes to get into and out of West Bromwich is exactly the same as the 74 from Dudley Street to the bus station.

An “X87”

We would support this proposal; on the proviso the new service is a **complement** to the existing 87 route through Cape Hill and Dudley Road rather than a replacement for it. It should be operated like the X51/51 are. In terms of where it goes next after Oldbury given the need for faster public transport services to Dudley going there would seem the optimum solution, although the opportunities for fast running from Oldbury to Dudley, via Dudley Road West are limited. Running along the current 120 route from Dudley to Oldbury would take longer than that used by the 87.

Service 120

This route should continue to run at its current frequency from Oldbury to Birmingham – it is an extremely popular service. It would be useful to understand what options there are to cover the route between Oldbury and Dudley should extending the proposed fast service along there be considered unfeasible.

Service 126

This is a serious problem route. It seems that there are three options:

1. *No change but review of management of route*

Continue with the current routing, including making the Birmingham City Centre terminus in Colmore Row permanent. However, if this is the preferred option then the management and control of this route needs to be improved as the current arrangement is simply not delivering a consistent acceptable level of performance. There are notable pinch points across the route such as Birmingham City Centre, Hagley Road from Bearwood to Five Ways, the Birchley Island Junction 2 with the M5, Burnt Tree Island in Dudley and Wolverhampton City Centre (which will be considerably more difficult than usual owing to the works for Midland Metro). If this is the preferred option then control and management of the route needs to be split between Birmingham Central and Wolverhampton, with much quicker action to attempt to maintain services should serious problems occur. Should half the PVR be stuck in Wolverhampton then there needs to be resource provided to ensure a service is provided on the southern part of the route and that passengers living on the Wolverhampton Road south of Dudley are waiting half an hour or more for a service to Birmingham.

2. *Limited stop Wolverhampton – Birchley Island*

Continue with the current routing, including making the Birmingham City Centre terminus in Colmore Row permanent. However, the route of the 126 from Wolverhampton to Birchley Island is made limited stop which potentially be quicker in terms of running time. Another all stops service would need to be introduced running between Wolverhampton and Birchley Island to cater for local passengers. This would also be preferable to limited stop running

along the Hagley Road – the various routes combined operate a very high frequency particularly through Bearwood and Edgbaston – an area with a high population density and where reducing stops could make bus use less attractive, by making services less frequent.

3. *Split the route*

The 126 is curtailed to run from Birmingham to Dudley only and a replacement route covers the portion from Dudley to Wolverhampton. This does mean that passengers will have to change buses. Whilst the comments about through passengers are noted there will be very few doing a journey north of Dudley to Birmingham as the end to end journey time is so uncompetitive – it is quicker to travel into Wolverhampton and get the train from the rail station although the journey will be more expensive. However, changing buses in Dudley Bus Station (a TfWM managed facility with staff) is preferable than having to do so elsewhere. And if a more reliable service is operated as a result, it is preferable to waiting at a dingy stop on the A4123 on a bad night, where problems miles away are causing serious perturbations.

Service 127

We agree with the suggestion of splitting the service at Blackheath to offer a more reliable service for passengers between Blackheath, Dudley and Merry Hill. However, it may be helpful for interchange around Blackheath to be revisited with colleagues at TfWM as it would be desirable for a 127 Blackheath – Birmingham service and the replacement Blackheath – Dudley – Merry Hill service to use the same stops.

Service 140

On paper increasing the frequency of the 140 to every 20 minutes seems a good idea and certainly we would always welcome more frequent services. However, it would be desirable to maintain a link between Blackheath and Halesowen along the current 241 routing without passengers being forced to change buses in Quinton, which is not a natural interchange point.

Russells Hall

In order for all of the estate to be served it would be desirable for the current pattern of two routes to be maintained. Should services operate only along Overfield Road and Russells Hall Road we predict the people who lose their bus service will be up in arms.

Service X96

This is not a limited stop service so should lose the “X” prefix. Diverting the 27 into Wrens Nest to replace the X96 from Dudley would result in a service with a 20 minute frequency being replaced with a half hourly one (hourly for Jews Lane). This could not be considered to be an improvement, so is not supported.

Kevin Chapman

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