



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT TASK GROUP
(STAR TRAK – BUS COMPANY INTERVIEWS)

Held: THURSDAY, 12 JUNE 2008 at 9.30am

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Russell – Task Group Leader

Councillor Byrne
Councillor Newcombe

Councillor Palmer
Councillor Thomas

Also in Attendance

Andy Brookes
Mike Keen
Bernard Marriott
Steve Smith
Andy Thomas
Steve Zanker

Campaign for Better Transport
Committee Services Officer
Campaign for Better Transport
Arriva Midlands
Head of City Development
First Leicester

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R. Blackmore, Hall and Porter.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Newcombe disclosed a personal and non-prejudicial interest in the issues to be discussed as he was a bus driver employed by a company operating within the City.

Councillor Thomas disclosed a personal and non-prejudicial interest as he had an objection to companies who provided a service to the public at a profit to the company.

3. INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Russell outlined the basis of questions to be put to the bus company representatives present at the meeting as follows: -

Has Star Trak increased passenger numbers, is there anecdotal evidence
Confidence in the system
Providing passengers with a good service
Does system work
Main barriers to 100% success
Roll out across all routes in the City
Investment in Star Trak
Dots or not
Buses running early – good or not

Officers reported that it would be possible to demonstrate to members the management information available on Star Trak and available to Arriva Midlands and First Leicester.

Campaign for Better Transport stated that whilst investment in new vehicles in Leicester had been good there had been cases of reasonably new Star Trak equipped vehicles being cascaded to another area that did not have Star Trak in operation.

4. PRESENTATION FROM CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

A presentation, previously seen by some members of the Task Group, was given by Campaign for Better Transport. The presentation highlighted issues around the actual operation of the Star Trak system from the perspective of bus users. The presentation centred on one particular bus corridor into the City between Western Park and the City Centre.

At the conclusion of the presentation the First Leicester representative stated that he was not comfortable with the presentation, as he would have preferred to see recommendations on the table. Councillor Russell stated that this concern would be addressed at the next meeting.

5. BUS COMPANY INTERVIEWS

At this point of the meeting a series of questions were put to: -

Mr. Steve Zanker – First Leicester
Mr. Steve Smith – Arriva Midlands

The responses are also shown.

1) Has Star Trak increased the numbers of passengers carried on Star Trak routes. Is there anecdotal evidence to support this?

Arriva

Difficult to say as the operating conditions over the past 2 years has been difficult. Arriva had invested £10m in new low-floor vehicles and it

was difficult to assess the benefits against the on-going city centre operating experience.

First

On the 22 route, as well as several other routes, passenger growth had been experienced. On the 22 the public perception had been that the service seemed to be more reliable. There was no evidence to support that the introduction of Star Trak had increased passenger numbers.

2) Do you have confidence in the Star Trak system?

Arriva

Yes, and the 153/154 route, converted in 1996/7 had become one of the most successful Star Trak routes operated by Arriva, although it was predominantly a rural route and was not high frequency. Within the City Centre there had been a number of reliability issues with Star Trak that had now largely been addressed by the City Council. A large influx of new vehicles for the City Centre – Wigston services had led to delays in getting electronic timetables to be available, due to issues with setting up the on-board equipment.

First

Yes, the system provides much data that can be used by management, although this was not fully utilised at present. First had invested in a large number of new Star Trak fitted vehicles and by tackling one bus corridor at a time the implementation had worked well, although it may have been better to just tackle one route at a time. Overall the system worked well but it was felt that more work was required to make the system totally effective.

3) Do you feel that Star Trak offers passengers a good service?

Arriva

The system offers confidence to passengers, particularly in isolated areas where the need to know that a bus is going to arrive is crucial.

First

Regarding the 22 route, on Belgrave Road, only 2 routes are shown on Star Trak, although there are at least 6 other bus routes serving the road, and people were not necessarily aware of these services. Star trak was more useful in areas where there were fewer services. The inbound facility towards the City centre was probably less useful than the outbound facility. Overall it was not felt that 'real time' information could be taken in isolation, rather taken as part of an overall package of better quality vehicles and reliability of services.

Early Running of buses

The bus company representatives were questioned as to the possible early running of buses.

The Task Group was informed that early running of buses was unacceptable. Bus routes were registered with the Traffic Commissioners and timing points on all routes had to be at least every

15 minutes. Bus companies were required to to run to timing points no more than 1 minute early or up to 5 minutes late. There were difficulties in getting consistency of times on a bus route, with the differing levels of traffic in peak and off-peak periods. The opinion of the Traffic Commissioners is that if bus companies are aware of variations they should tell bus passengers. Star Trak allowed for these variations but as conditions varied during the day then the signs might not always reflect this. Officers stated that the timing points on a route were the onus of the bus operator, Star Trak showed where the bus actually was. Bus Timetables did not always distinguish between timing points and non-timing points, hence the confusion.

First stated that random weekly checks were made on a selection of Star Trak and non-Star Trak routes, that sometimes resulted in minor timetable changes. Currently 89% of the Leicester fleet was Star Trak fitted and 78% of vehicles on Star Trak routes were Star Trak equipped and operational. A person had recently been appointed at Leicester to address Star Trak issues.

Arriva stated that they undertook covert monitoring of actual timed points and were now just gaining the benefit of management reports that the Star Trak system was able to generate. Currently all Star Trak routes were covered with 100% Star Trak equipped vehicles, although there were several issues around repairs to equipment, but the reliability rate was around the early 90%.

It was generally felt that it was important to make it clear to the travelling public that at those bus stops which were not timing points, buses may not arrive at the times shown.

- 4) Do you feel confident that you have the systems in place to improve the performance of Star Trak?**

Arriva

Yes, systems were in place but an instant repair could not always be made.

First

Yes, now better equipped to deal with issues than previously.

- 5) What do you think are the main barriers to achieving 100% performance on Star Trak bus routes?**

Arriva

Equipment failure, wiring failures, transmitter issues. Overall Arriva confident that it could do better.

First

Not easy to recruit people with sufficient knowledge of Star Trak systems. Now the users were jointly paying for the maintenance of the

Star Trak system. First were striving for 100% reliability.

6) Investment in Star Trak?

Arriva

Massive investment in new low-floor vehicles in Leicester all fitted with Star Trak equipment. Faults in equipment were tracked and reported.

First

Looking to roll-out Star Trak benefits on a route by route basis and getting all vehicles used on those routes fully Star Trak equipped and the on-route equipment fully operational.

7) Dots or no Dots?

Arriva

Tend to agree that timetable time should appear on Star Trak, rather than just dots, case of affecting confidence of passengers.

First

Agree that estimated time rather than dots would be preferable.

View expressed that an indication be provided on bus stops explaining the meaning of the dots on the signs.

Other Issues

Arriva

Junction Control – looking forward to point whereby Star Trak equipped vehicles gain a few seconds priority at signalled road junctions. Junction priorities for buses at certain junctions would also be of benefit to help maintain scheduled running.

First

Timings - Like to see consistency of running times on routes. Able then to utilise resources more effectively.

Causeway Lane -

Arriva and First expressed some concerns around the commencement of using the bus stops in Causeway Lane, but stated that they would keep the matter under review and keep officers informed.

6. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 12.02 pm.

