

Kirkby Stephen Town Council

Meeting of 8th August 2023

Public Transport

Report of Adrian Waite

Introduction

Having been asked to take the lead on public transport issues, I have had meetings with former town councillor Mike Walker, the Town Clerk, Cllr Neil Hughes of Westmorland & Furness Council, Tim Farron MP and John Carey of the Settle-Carlisle line. I will also be meeting with Chris Leech of the Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company and will be attending community bus providers' site visits with representatives of other councils later in August.

Kirkby Stephen to Penrith 563 Saturday bus

On 3rd July 2023 we issued a press release to announce the extension of the Kirkby Stephen to Penrith Saturday bus service from July to October 2023. This was covered in the local media. It was also copied to other interested parties including information centres and local councillors along the route. A review is planned in August followed by a meeting with Westmorland & Furness in September.



Promotional Leaflets

Our current bus and rail timetable leaflet was printed in the spring and is now out of date. It has been suggested that we should publish an updated version in the autumn and should budget to publish updated versions in future years. The spring version cost @£450 to produce and distribute and an autumn edition could be expected to cost a similar amount. It is recommended that the Council agree to publish a revised timetable leaflet in autumn 2023 and to delegate authority for approving this to myself, the Town Clerk and Cllr Paul Richardson as Chair of the Council.

Extension of 563 Bus Service to Sedbergh and Kendal

Councillors may be aware that Woofs of Sedbergh have withdrawn their Sedbergh to Kendal service. This has opened up the option of extending the existing 563 Penrith to Kirkby Stephen service from Kirkby Stephen to Sedbergh. I understand from discussions with Tim Farron MP that Stagecoach would be amenable to this if they could be offered either a subsidy or a guarantee. I recommend that this be discussed further with Stagecoach when we review the 563 service with them later in the month.

Communications from the Public

A member of the public has contacted Cllr John Murray. His observations that are relevant to the Town Council are in the appendix to this report.

Other Suggestions

Other suggestions include:

- A leaflet for circulation in Penrith and other places that promotes the bus service and Kirkby Stephen as a destination of choice for people to visit for shopping or recreational trips.
- A leaflet that promotes linear walks using the bus either for the outgoing or return service. I have raised this with Walkers are Welcome and, while there are difficulties devising such routes, they are considering options.
- Carrying out a survey of bus and rail users – both those from Kirkby Stephen and those who are visiting Kirkby Stephen.

Councillors are asked for views on these suggestions.

Adrian Waite
July 2023

Appendix – Communication from a member of the public (excerpts)

"I had another pleasant day in Kirkby Stephen on Saturday using the 563 bus from Penrith. I brought along two of my Cornish friends who were staying with me, they very much liked KS. We supported local businesses while we were there, as I have done on all previous visits.

"Great news the 563 Saturday trial is extended until October 2023 with a review of figures in August to look at the viability of the service through the winter / indefinitely. Great the numbers using it have been better than anticipated so far, which just shows the bus can be attractive / viable in a rural area and with it bringing many benefits to the local community. This bus service benefits the residents of the three towns and the villages in between, supporting the local economy along with health / well-being and offering a sustainable way to explore the towns and villages of the Eden Valley without the use of a car.

"The numbers may be better than anticipated but these could be even better, if the service was promoted more. There has been very little in the way of publicity in Penrith which is disappointing. The town has a population of circa 17k (2021 census) and a decent sized market to tap into, to get people into the Eden Valley by bus to explore the town and villages, meet family and friends etc. Not forgetting removing traffic off the busy A66 by using the bus. The government flat fare Single of £2 is an ideal way to get people to trial the bus – many could be first time users."

Suggestions going forward for the 563 Saturday bus:

- The first bus from Penrith that leaves the bus station at 0747 retimed to 0835, this being a more reasonable time on a Saturday morning and would save the bus / driver waiting an hour at KS station for the return trip at 0940.
- Retimed bus at 0835 could also start from Penrith railway station making connections with trains on the West Coast Main Line and other Stagecoach services at Penrith bus station i.e. the 104 / X4 / X5.
- Better promotion of the service to raise further awareness and not just by social media.

Suggestions for the 563 bus in general with some additional funding to achieve this:

- Operate six days a week i.e. Monday to Saturday.
- Extend beyond Kirkby Stephen to Sedbergh and Kendal offering journeys to / from the Eden Valley from Penrith and Kendal, two sizeable towns.
- Sunday service – seasonal (Easter to October) similar to seasonal services in the Lake District.

Bus stops.

The 563 route is very much lacking clear bus stop signage either in a having a stop post with a sign or road markings, below are some examples. How do new users know where to catch the bus?

- Kirkby Stephen - between the railway station and the Pennine Hotel / Costa in both directions, there is only one stop and that is at Croglin Castle Apartments, there is a timetable hidden on a road sign post – see attached. Surely another stop is required on South Road. The stop outside the cemetery also has no sign / markings.

