

Begin forwarded message:

From: Cllr Richard Wilkins <richard.wilkins@somerset.gov.uk>
Date: Jan 2, 2025 at 4:15 PM
To: Keith Wheatley <keithwheatley@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk>
Subject: RE: Buses

Dear Keith,

Thank you for your e-mail regarding bus services 22,22A,22B and X22 which operate between Wellington and Taunton.

These services are almost entirely operated commercially by First South West Ltd, with only the evening journeys after 8pm funded by Somerset Council, and as such we have limited power to intervene directly in these operations. For contracted services we are able to take more direct action in relation to the conditions contained within our contracts.

We are aware that in the lead up to Christmas, First South West were experiencing some technical issues in relation to the way some of their services were provided which caused some significant disruption as the number of drivers needed to operate services temporarily increased. Our understanding is that these issues have now been resolved and just prior to Christmas we noted a significant improvement to the problems that were being experienced earlier in the month.

Our Transport team were aware of these problems, and we received several complaints about the services directly affected and more general complaints about other services during this disruption. Our transport team work closely with both the FE Colleges in Taunton but are not aware of any specific complaints from either of the two colleges about services from Wellington during this period.

It is important that passengers raise their concerns about reliability of bus services, and with commercial services we advise that in the first instance they should approach the operator concerned (in this case First South West) and I would urge passengers to contact the operator direct. This can be done by phone on 0345 646 0707 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday or by e-mail through their website www.firstbus.co.uk.

However, if problems persist we are happy to take these up directly with the commercial operator, but we do need details (times and dates, and the nature of the issue) and in the case of First South West our passenger transport team meet with them once a month and will raise any persistent issues reported to us with them, seeking assurances that they are aware of the issues and the measures they are taking to resolve them.

There are of course many reasons why bus services are delayed or cancelled and some of these are not within the control of the bus operator, but for those that

are we expect the operator to take all possible actions to rectify the situation as soon as possible and in the meantime keep passengers updated on the nature of the issue and when and how it will be resolved.

I will ask our passenger transport team to raise the issue of unreliability on services serving Wellington when they meet with First South West in January. In the meantime if anyone would like to send us details of the issues they are experiencing with these services then this can be done by contacting the passenger transport team by e-mail transport@somerset.gov.uk or by calling Somerset Direct on 0300 123 2224.

Kind regards



Cllr Richard Wilkins
Lead Member for Transport & Waste Services



From: Keith Wheatley <keithwheatley@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk>

Sent: 18 December 2024 16:38

To: Cllr Richard Wilkins <richard.wilkins@somerset.gov.uk>

Subject: Fw: Buses

You don't often get email from keithwheatley@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Richard,

I'm one of the Lib Dems on Wellington town council and I thought you'd want to see this letter that a cross-party group of Cllrs has today sent to local press and media about the dreadful state of the bus service between our community and Taunton.

If you are able to throw any light on the issues with First Bus please do let us know. Perhaps they are suffering extreme driver shortages or vehicle defects but their comms to the travelling public are not at all good.

It may be that Somerset Council has no leverage as these are not subsidised routes, I believe. However, as the strongest arm of local government in our area we feel that the Council is best placed to offer some action. I gather from colleagues that the situation in Minehead and Yeovil is every bit as bad as our local A38 problems.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Keith

Cllr Keith Wheatley
Member for Wellington SE
07710 326698

As town councillors and regular bus users we want to register our extreme disappointment with the marked deterioration in the reliability of the service from Wellington to Taunton.

With four routes; 22, 22A, 22B and 22X servicing a five-mile route it's reasonable to expect a frequent, and crucially, reliable service. And that is what the First Bus timetable appears to offer. The reality is woefully short of that.

Each of us has recently put up with long waits in the damp and cold winter weather either for buses that are up to an hour late or cancelled altogether. Yet, more importantly than a few councillors being inconvenienced, we've seen elderly and disabled people stranded and distressed, unable to get home or make a hospital visit.

Other people rely on a bus to get to work. Turn up late too often and you may get the sack over punctuality issues. This is not remotely acceptable or fair.

On weekday mornings in the town centre there is always a large group of students waiting for the 22X service to take them to Richard Huish College. Very often they are waiting far too long, missing lectures or going home in frustration and disgust. It takes determination to stick to and complete an A-level course and these young people are having their life chances affected by the bus issues.

To add to these shortcomings, bus users with a smartphone can now track the bus they are waiting for on a variety of real-time online maps. During the day there ought to be three or four different buses visible at different stages of their journeys. Disgracefully there are quite often no buses at all visible between Wellington to Taunton on the map.

The town council will be discussing the bus crisis, and that is the word to describe it, at its meeting on Monday, January 6th at 7.00pm and welcome the public to come along and contribute their views and experiences.