



Joint scrutiny review of local bus service provision in the greater Norwich area

2007/08

Members

Broadland District Council

Councillor Balcombe
Councillor Debbage
Councillor Knowles
Councillor Teager

Norfolk County Council

Councillor Boswell
Councillor East
Councillor Spratt
Councillor Ward

Norwich City Council

Councillor Driver
Councillor Little (A)
Councillor Lubbock
Councillor Stephenson

South Norfolk District Council

Councillor Lewis
Councillor Dale

Transport Officers

Norfolk County Council

David Cumming, Principal Integrated Transport Planning Officer
Ian Hydes, Network Projects Manager

Norwich City Council

Andy Watt, Head of Transportation and Landscape

Scrutiny Committee Officers

Broadland District Council

Matthew Cross/Martin Thrower

Norfolk County Council

Ian Lambert/Keith Cogdell

Norwich City Council

Andy Emms/Jenny White

South Norfolk District Council

Tony Fielder

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Introduction

At its meeting on 28 November 2006, Norwich City Council agreed the following motion:-

'Council believes that despite the improvements in punctuality and performance recently, First Eastern Counties Buses Ltd is providing an inadequate and expensive service using a substandard fleet.

The recent fare increases disadvantage less well off people and deter usage of public transport to the detriment of the Council's wish to encourage alternative forms of transport other than cars.

Consequently, Council:

- (1) calls on First to moderate its charging policy to encourage greater bus use;
- (2) resolves to invite the Scrutiny Committees of the City Council, Norfolk County Council, South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils to undertake a joint investigation into First bus services to the Greater Norwich Area and to ask First to cooperate in this investigation;
- (3) calls upon Norfolk County Council to work with the Greater Norwich Partnership to develop a bus strategy that has firm and as far as possible enforceable commitments to improving bus services that serve the Greater Norwich Area.'

Following the motion, Norwich City Council officers contacted Broadland District Council, Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk District Council to enquire whether they would be willing to take part in a joint investigation into local bus service provision in the Greater Norwich area. It was agreed that a joint scrutiny committee (task and finish group) of 12 members (four from each local authority) should be created. A list of members can be found on the inside of the front page of this report. Scrutiny Support Officers and transport professionals from the local authorities supported the group.

The main local bus services Anglian Bus and Coach, KonectBus and First Eastern Counties, were informed of the decision to create the joint scrutiny committee.

All agendas, reports and minutes of the joint scrutiny committee are available on Norwich City Council's website www.norwich.gov.uk.

Terms of Reference

The Scrutiny Committee Officers from the four councils created a draft terms of reference that were then considered and agreed at the first meeting of the joint scrutiny committee. The terms of reference provide an overview of the aim of the joint scrutiny committee which was to review the current level and quality of local bus service provision in the greater Norwich area and identify if

further steps could be taken to deliver the first class bus service that the area expects.

The Terms of Reference are attached at appendix A.

The Review

A total of five meetings were held during the review, all of which were open to the public. The initial meetings provided members with an introduction to the relevant regulatory framework including the possible impact of impending new regulations and opportunities for and barriers against improvement. Members also received information regarding current service routes; pricing policies and procedures; and bus service reliability and performance data.

Members agreed a work programme to help direct the work of the committee and Scrutiny Officers. The work programme included a public consultation exercise; discussion with bus operators; and information from transport officers on national issues. The ultimate aim was to agree a set of recommendations regarding improvements that could be made by the government, local authorities and the bus operators, to improve local bus service provision in the Greater Norwich area. The work programme can be found at appendix B.

Public Consultation

As part of the scrutiny investigation, the view of a wide range of bodies was sought. A consultation letter was sent to over 400 organisations, including community groups, Parish councils, businesses and representative groups. A list of some of the consultees can be found at appendix C. The organisations were invited to submit evidence of any general or persistent issues both good and poor relating to punctuality and reliability; customer care; current pricing and usage etc. Comments were also requested on whether any communities were not serviced by bus routes, or where more services were needed; experiences of bus services in other parts of the country and how the local services compare; and finally, whether they were a regular bus user or not. Over 50 written representations were submitted.

News Releases were issued informing members of the public about the consultation and offering them the chance to submit comments by letter, email, through a dedicated phone line, or to attend the public meeting. Over 150 responses were received.

An officer summary of the consultation responses can be found at appendix D.

At a public meeting members considered the consultation responses. The responses were also used to inform a question plan and discussion with Bus Operators.

Consultation with Bus Operators

The bus operators (Anglian Bus and Coach, KonectBus and First Eastern Counties) kindly agreed to respond to a set question plan proposed and agreed by the members, which was circulated in advance of a public meeting. The Bus operators provided written responses and attended the meeting to answer supplementary questions. The Bus Operators provided a presentation on their service provision and were also able to comment on issues outside their control and what other agencies could do to help. This informative meeting was useful to identify the external factors affecting local bus service provision.

National Issues

At the final meeting held in February 2008, members were updated on national issues, specifically Putting Passengers First and the Transport Innovation Fund. Some members suggested that they could have received more information on how these national issues would affect improvements/new partnerships moving forward, and there should be consideration of the opportunities that these could create. However, the majority of members considered it was necessary to come to a view on the situation in the Greater Norwich area at this time and to publish conclusions and recommendations that might help to improve services in the shorter term.

They considered that the opportunities that might accrue through the Transport Innovation Fund were matters that should be considered in the future once decisions had been made by relevant authorities. It was suggested that this joint scrutiny committee should meet again at an appropriate time in the future to discuss local bus services in light of those decisions.

Conclusions and Resolutions

Members considered the draft conclusions and recommendations that had been prepared by officers based on the work undertaken and the findings of the review to date and concluded that –

- (1) the benefits of competition and choice are not sufficient to outweigh the disadvantages caused to customers regarding service coordination and through ticketing, by the present competition rules. (It was noted that Councillor Little did not agree with this conclusion);
- (2) organisations with legal powers to influence the use and design of road space should give sufficient attention to the special needs of bus services. Often the result of the use of these powers may act to disadvantage bus users and operators compared with other road users. This includes the police dealing with traffic incidents, those maintaining roads and underground services below them, and enforcing parking and delivery restrictions. This increases

the local problems of providing reliable bus services in a medieval city centre.

- (3) the active participation of bus operators and punctuality improvement partnership and The Traffic Management Act Working Group was welcomed.
- (4) the active participation of First Eastern Counties in the Joint Improvement Plan was welcomed.
- (5) the recent investment by bus operators in vehicles, staff training and (First) staff improvement forums was welcomed.
- (6) the evidence suggests that better communication could greatly assist potential users and overcome misunderstandings.
- (7) that the predominant business model for non-supported services is frequent services along the main radial routes into / from the city centre was noted.
- (8) that there were a number of high level and national issues which may affect local services in future.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) thank the public, bus operators and local organisations who responded to the consultation;
- (2) acknowledge the effort that bus operators have been making to constantly strive to improve the services they provide;
- (3) recognise that to get the best level and quality of local bus service provision in the Greater Norwich area, the bus operators, local authorities and the Government need to work together;
- (4) **ask the Government to consider** –
 - (a) the disadvantageous position that bus operators face re duty on fuel compared with rail and aviation and the effect on fares and patronage;
 - (b) the regulations which prevent bus operators discussing matters such as service / route provisions, as this seems to result in some duplication of the services;
 - (c) enhancing the role of the Traffic Commissioners and making them more local covering smaller areas.
 - (d) allowing more local discretion for local authorities to introduce arrangements tailored to local circumstances.

(5) ask the bus operators to consider –

- (a) partaking in a BusWatch group;
- (b) informing the councils of illegal parking / loading hotspots – so that parking enforcement can be well informed and targeted when necessary (Bus operators should be informing Norfolk County Council about these issues as part of punctuality improvement partnerships);
- (c) using their best endeavours to ensure that all vehicles comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 as soon as possible and certainly well in advanced of the legislative deadline of 2017;
- (d) extending the hours of operation of existing daytime routes to include evenings and Sundays where this is currently not provided.
- (e) consulting local people, including residents' organisations and parish councils, before making changes to routes / timetables;
- (f) review how customers are informed of changes in routes / timetables to ensure the information is readily available in a timely manner.;
- (g) promoting sections of routes that operate on a "Hail and Ride" basis and to clearly mark buses/timetables accordingly.
- (h) provide clearer information including changing the design of their timetables to show main stops along the route, not just the final destination and displaying intermediate stops on buses.
- (i) introducing multi-operator day tickets to cover all operators and services in the Greater Norwich area.
- (j) consider the scope for using fare pricing to encourage patronage and to publicise discounts / special offers more widely.

(6) ask Norfolk County Council, as Local Transport Authority, to consider –

- (a) creating a Bus Users Association;
- (b) acting as a channel to enable multi-operator ticketing between services provided by different operators;

- (c) the possibility of going out to tender to provide evening and Sunday services on routes where regular daytime services are already provided
- (d) preparing and publishing a map that combines all the routes serviced by all operators in the Greater Norwich area.
- (e) changing the design of timetables, including those on bus stops, to show main stops along the route, not just the final destination;

(7) **ask all local authorities to consider –**

- (a) setting up a Joint Bus Policy Group with similar terms of reference as the Joint Rail Policy Group;
- (b) the needs of bus operators in plans for new developments (bus lanes, width of junctions, positioning of “street furniture” etc);
- (c) infrastructure improvements to allow maximum benefits from the use of low floor buses e.g. lowered kerbs at bus stops;
- (d) ensuring that the Traffic Management Act Working Group monitors parking enforcement;
- (e) the timings of their services (e.g. street cleaning, gully emptying, bin rounds) to ensure that they have as little impact on bus services as possible;
- (f) improving communication with bus operators including advanced notification of road works and other temporary obstacles.

- (8) reconvene the Joint Scrutiny Committee undertaking the review of local bus service provision in the Greater Norwich area at an appropriate time in the future to consider any opportunities for public transport that are presented after the Local Transport Bill has been through Parliament.

Appendix A

Terms of reference for scrutiny of

The current level and quality of local bus service provision in the greater Norwich area by First Eastern Counties Buses and other providers.

Scrutiny by

A Task and Finish Group of 12 members (four from each local authority) from Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council, South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils.

The group will be supported by Scrutiny Support Officers and transport professionals from the local authorities.

Purpose and objectives of study

To review the current level and quality of local bus service provision in the greater Norwich area by First Eastern Buses and other providers, and identify if further steps could be taken to deliver the first class bus service that the area expects.

Tasks

1. To understand the context for bus service provision (i.e. regulatory framework and current transport policies)
2. To review the performance of the local bus service with particular regard to punctuality and reliability, customer care, engineering standards and investment in the fleet
3. To review current pricing and usage.
4. To gather comparative data for similar areas
5. Identify any areas for, and barriers to, improvement in the provision of local bus services to the greater Norwich area.

Phases of Scrutiny Work

1. Members to determine the shape and structure of the scrutiny (e.g. a whole day scrutiny session; or smaller panels etc)
2. Gather supporting information and consult with service providers and users including:
 - First Eastern Counties Ltd
 - Other service providers
 - Councillors
 - Transport officers
 - Local Businesses
 - The public
3. Undertake scrutiny
4. Develop conclusions and recommendations

Scrutiny Bus Review Committee

Work Programme

Date of Meeting	Topic	Objective	Method
13 July 07 12.30pm City Hall	Introduction	To agree the committee's Terms of Reference; to receive a presentation on the current regulatory framework and the background of local bus service provision in Norwich; and consider the scoping of future work.	Presentation
4 Nov 07 5.30pm County Hall	Consideration of Background Information	To receive information on concessionary bus fares, current service routes, pricing policies and procedures, reliability and performance; and to consider how to consult the public on service provision.	Discussion of background information
16 Jan 08 6pm St Andrews Hall	Consideration of Consultation Feedback	A fact-finding session, providing the public, organisations, parish councillors and businesses with an opportunity to raise issues related to the local bus services provided.	Consultation – letters inviting either written evidence or attendance at the public meeting
7 Feb 08 5.30pm County Hall	Discussion with Bus Operators	To put questions to the Bus Operators informed by the above public consultation session. This will be a two way process. The Bus Operators will also be able to comment on issues outside their control that affect service provision and what other agencies can do to help.	Questions to Bus Operators
22 Feb 08 5.30pm City Hall	Summary of Review and Agreeing Recommendations	Opportunity to discuss all evidence provided with Local Authority Officers and be briefed on how these could be affected national issues (i.e. Putting Passengers First, Transport Innovation Fund, Franchising and Congestion Charging). Scrutiny Bus Review Committee to agree recommendations.	Questions to Local Authorities/Officers

List of Consultees

A&P Transport	Connexions Norfolk
ABD Representative for Norfolk	Consignia Property Holdings
Access to Music	Costessey High School
Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities	Costessey Junior School
Age Concern (Norfolk)	Cotman Housing Association
Age Concern Norwich	Council for National Parks
Angel Road First School	Craft Guild
Angel Road Middle School	Creative Arts East
Anglia Television	Diocese of Norwich
Anglian Water	Distribution Centre
Anglian Water Services Ltd	Dowson First School
Art Architecture	Earlham High School
Arup Transport Planning	Earlham Nursery School
Association of British Drivers	East Anglia Art Foundation
Association of Town and Parish Councils	East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust
Avenue Middle School	East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust
BBC East	East Anglian Business Environment Club
Bignold First School and Nursery	East of England Development Agency
Bignold Middle School	East of England Tourist Board
Blackdale Middle School	Easton College
Bowthorpe Community Partnership	Eaton Hall School
British Horse Society	Eaton Rise
British Motorcyclists Federation	EEDA
British Trust of Conservation Volunteers	Energy Saving Trust
Broadland Housing Association	English Heritage
Broads Authority	English Nature
Burning Shed	English Regions Cycling Development Team
Bus and Coach Council	English Welsh and Scottish Railway
Business and Professional Women (BPW)	Environment Agency
Campus Services Manager	Fairway First School
Camriders	Fairway Middle School
Catton Grove First School	Federation of Small Businesses
Catton Grove Middle School	Financial Industry Group
Cavalier Travel	Flagship Housing Group
Cavell First and Nursery School	FPDSavills Ltd
Central Norwich Citizens Forum	George White Middle School
CGNU (Norwich Union)	Go-East
Chapel Break First School	Go-East
Chapelfields	Government Office East
Church Commissioners for England	Group Lotus PLC
Churches Council Forum	Hainford First School
City College Norwich	Hall School
City of Norwich School	Harford Manor School
CityCare	Harvey & Co
Civil Aviation Authority	Heartsease Community Middle School
Clover Hill First School and Nursery	Heartsease First School
Clydesdale Bank PLC	Heartsease High School
Coach Services Ltd	Heigham Park School
Colman First School	Hellesdon County High School
Colman Middle School	Help the Aged
Community Music East	Housebuilders Federation
Confederation of Norfolk PTAs	Housing Corporation (Regional)
Confederation of Passenger Transport	HSBC

Hudson Architects
 Icen Partnership
 Inland Waterways Association
 Inspire
 Inspire East (EEDA)
 Institute of Food Research
 Jarrold & Sons Ltd
 Jarrold Department Store
 JobCentre Plus
 John Innes Centre
 John Innes Foundation
 John Lewis
 Julian Housing
 Kettle Foods Ltd
 Knowland Grove Community First School
 Lakenham First School
 Lakenham Middle School
 Larkman First and Middle Schools
 Learning & Skills Council Norfolk
 Learning Skills Council
 Leeway Norwich Women's Aid
 liftshare.com
 Light Rail Transit Association
 Living Streets
 Lloyds TSB Bank plc
 Lowestoft and Waveney Chamber of Commerce
 LSI Architects LLP
 Magdalen Gates First School
 Mancroft Advice Project
 Marsh
 Mass Market Renewables
 May Gurney Integrated Services plc
 Member of European Parliament
 Mile Cross Community Middle School
 Mill View Middle School
 Mills & Reeve
 MIND
 Moonraker Motorcycles
 Mott MacDonald
 Mousehold First & Nursery School
 Multicultural Consortium
 National Car Parks
 National Farmers Union
 National Federation of Bus Users
 Natwest & Royal Bank of Scotland
 NELM Development Trust
 Nelson First School
 Network Rail
 New Museum of Contemporary Art
 New Writing Partnership
 Norfolk & Norwich Race Equality Council
 Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust
 Norfolk & Waveney Mental Health Partnership
 Norfolk 21
 Norfolk Accident Reduction Partnership
 Norfolk Ambulance Service
 Norfolk and Norwich Transport Action Group (NNTAG)
 Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health Partnership
 Norfolk Association for the Disabled
 Norfolk Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 Norfolk Children's Services
 Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People
 Norfolk Constabulary
 Norfolk Dance
 Norfolk Environmental Waste Services
 Norfolk Federation of Womens Institutes
 Norfolk Fire Service
 Norfolk Gardens Trust
 Norfolk Group of Advanced Motorists
 Norfolk Health Authority
 Norfolk Landscape Archaeology
 Norfolk Local Access Forum
 Norfolk Motorcycle Action Group
 Norfolk Older Peoples Forum
 Norfolk Primary Care Trust
 Norfolk Probation Board
 Norfolk Rail
 Norfolk Rural Community Council
 Norfolk School Governors Network
 Norfolk Tourism Management Partnership
 Norfolk Tourist Attractions Association
 Norfolk Wildlife Trust
 Norfolk Youth Offending Team
 Norman First and Nursery School
 Northfields First and Nursery School
 Norwich & District Citizens Advice Bureau
 Norwich & Norfolk Against Climate Change Coalition
 Norwich & Norfolk Association for the Blind
 Norwich & Norfolk Community Arts
 Norwich & Norfolk Pensioners Association
 Norwich & Norfolk Voluntary Services
 Norwich 21
 Norwich Access Group
 Norwich Agelink
 Norwich Airport
 Norwich and Districts Trade Union Council
 Norwich and Norfolk Transport Action Group
 Norwich Area Development Agency
 Norwich City Football Club
 Norwich Consolidated Charities & Anguishes Educational Foundation
 Norwich Cycling Campaign
 Norwich Friends of the Earth
 Norwich Fringe Project
 Norwich Hackney Trade Association
 Norwich Heritage Economic & Regen. Trust
 Norwich Historic Churches Trust
 Norwich International Airport
 Norwich Primary Care Trust
 Norwich Puppet Theatre
 Norwich River Valleys Strategy
 Norwich Road Action Group
 Norwich School of Art & Design
 Norwich Society
 Norwich Union

Norwich Youth Voice
 Notre Dame High School
 NRP Enterprise Ltd
 NVS
 One
 Orbit Housing Association
 Peterborough - Norwich Rail Users
 Pricewaterhouse Coopers
 RAC
 Rail Passengers Council
 Railfuture
 Ranworth First School
 Regional Cities East
 Royal National Institute for the Blind
 RSPB
 Scarnell Road
 Securicor Cash Services
 Shaping the Future (Transport Group)
 Soup Ltd
 South Harford Community Middle School
 South Norfolk Council
 Sprowston Community High School & Arts College
 St Andrew Bridewell Alley
 St Johns RC First School
 St Lukes and St Augustines Churches
 St Martins Housing Trust
 St Michaels VA Middle School
 St Thomas More RC Middle School
 St. Stephens Community Partnership
 Steeles
 STEER (Sustainable Transport & Env. Eastern
 Region)
 Sustrans
 Targetfollow Estates Ltd
 Targetfollow Group Limited
 Taverham High School
 Tenant and Resident Associations
 The Blyth Jex School
 The Broads Society
 The Bure Centre
 The Castle Mall Management
 The Clare School
 The Countyside Agency
 The Department of Transport
 The EV Group
 The Forum Trust Ltd
 The Hewett School
 The Housing Corporation
 The Norwich Society
 The Old Drill Hall
 The Parkside School
 The Ramblers Association
 The Sportspark
 The Vauxhall Centre
 The Wherry Housing Association Ltd
 Theatre Royal
 Thorpe & Felthorpe Trust
 Thorpe Hamlet First & Nursery School

Thorpe Hamlet Middle School
 Thorpe St Andrew High School
 Tops Property Services Ltd
 Transport & General Workers Union
 Transport 2000
 Tuckswold First School
 Tyndall Centre
 Unilever Bestfoods UK
 Union of UEA Students
 University of East Anglia
 Visit Norwich
 Voices Against Violence
 Wellesley First School
 Wensum Middle School
 West Earlham Community First School
 West Earlham Middle School
 Whitlingham Charitable Trust
 Women's Employment, Enterprise & Training Unit
 Woodland Trust
 Woodside First and Nursery Community School
 Yare Valley Society
 YMCA Norfolk
 Youth Work Development Unit

Joint Review of Local Bus Service Provision in the Greater Norwich Area

Wednesday, 16 January 2008

Officer comments relating to the consultation responses received from organisations and the general public.

1. Punctuality and Reliability:

Punctuality and reliability are important issues for passengers. Poor punctuality and reliability can result in a loss of passenger confidence in the service. Feedback from passengers tends to indicate that they feel First perform worse than Anglian and Konect. The county council has to report on bus punctuality for the Local transport plan and there is a new bus punctuality indicator in the new set of indicators for the Local Area Agreements from April. Bus companies and the county council monitor punctuality by using the ACIS BusNet system and undertaking roadside monitoring. The roadside monitoring allows other things, such as destination displays, to be checked.

The Traffic Commissioner sets standards for bus services and expects that a minimum of 70% of buses are on time (no more than one minute early or five minutes late) at timing points along a route. The county council has set up punctuality improvement partnerships with all major operators with the aim of working together to improve punctuality. The draft local transport bill allows the Traffic Commissioner to hold the local transport authority accountable for poor punctuality as well as bus operators.

2. Customer Care:

The main feedback from passengers is that drivers often do not understand customer needs and can be rude. This comment is aimed mainly at First, feedback about Anglian and Konect drivers is positive. All drivers will have to hold a certificate of professional competence from September 2008 and this should help to improve driver standards. First have committed as part of the recently signed joint investment plan, to improve driver training, to invest in customer services and employing on street supervisors.

3. Fares:

Passenger are generally concerned about perceived high fares, the withdrawal of ten trip ticket by First and the fact that tickets are, in the main, not available on the services of other operators.

Bus companies are free to set fares at whatever level they deem appropriate. First withdrew their ten trip tickets because they believed fraudulent use was taking place. The comments also demonstrate there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of what is available which could be addressed by improved

publicity. The county council could, with operator agreement, introduce a ticket available on all services and this is something that will be pursued.

4. Communities Serviced/Not Serviced:

This section of the summary sheet details feedback from customers about areas not served by buses or that do not have services at certain times such as evenings and weekends. A number of the areas which people perceived did not have a service actually do have one.

Under current legislation bus companies are free to run what services they like, they set the route and determine the timetable and fares. The county council can provide a subsidy for services in areas not served but cannot subsidise services where a commercial service exists. At the present time the county provides around £4.5M/year subsidy for bus services (including Park and Ride).

The county council works with bus companies to encourage them to change their network in light of customer demand.

5. Comparison of Services to other Areas of UK:

Passengers perceive services in Norwich to be worse and more expensive than those in other areas of the country particularly London. It is difficult to comment on this as a wide range of issues can affect service level and fares such as demographics, car ownership, quality of road network, congestion and subsidy provided by the local authority to provide services. In London the operating regime is different.

6. Accessibility to Information:

Passenger feedback indicates that it is sometimes difficult to find out about what buses run, information about fares and service changes. Also, that information is hard to understand and sometimes out of date.

The county council produces timetable information for services operated under contract and bus companies produce information for services run commercially. This information is available from the bus station, tourist information centre, libraries and other key locations. The county is also looking at the way it provides information to make it easier to understand.

Information is also available on bus company and Traveline websites. Bus companies will also give out timetable information to callers or for impartial advice on all services, users can call Traveline. The county council has also provided at SMS code at many stops and this work is ongoing to provide a code at all stops. This will enable customers to text the code to a number in order to receive the times of the next three buses to depart from that stop.

Future developments could include e-mail or text alerts of service changes etc.

7. Condition of Buses:

The main theme of passenger feedback was that buses are old, dirty and not easy to get on and off. The majority of Anglian and Konect buses are easy

access vehicles. First have recently signed a joint investment plan with the county and city councils which will see an investment of just under £1m in new vehicles by 2010. Newer vehicles will also be cascaded from other parts of the country. Legislation requires all buses to be fully accessible by 2017.

8. Other:

Passenger feedback covers a range of issues including suggested routes and infrastructure improvements.

Ian Hydes, Network Project Manager, Norfolk County Council

A more detailed analysis of each of the consultation responses received from organisations and the general public are available via the 'Council Meetings' link on the Norwich City Council website www.norwich.gov.uk

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