

Service 25/25A Consultation Report

This note summarises the results of our consultation on service 25/25A, which was carried out to inform changes that are planned for April 2010. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed along the whole route in County Durham and Tyne & Wear. The form was also available on-line at www.simplygo.com. Just over 300 responses were received, providing a good sample of customers' views.

The key findings were as follows:

- **70%** of respondents were 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour' of our plans to increase the service frequency between Chester-le-Street and Langley Park. Only **4%** were 'against' or 'strongly against' this.
- **57%** of people said that Eldon Square is their preferred bus stop in Newcastle City Centre. This was followed by New Bridge Street (**24%**), Pilgrim Street (**8%**) and Newgate Street (**5%**).
- **89%** of respondents said they would not have any problems using double-deck vehicles. Of the remaining **11%**, nearly half said they would only experience any difficulties if there were no seats available on the lower-deck.
- **81%** of people were 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour' of our plans to give this service its own identity, including a new name and colour for buses to make them easy to recognise. Only **4%** were 'against' or 'strongly against' this.
- **49%** of respondents said they would travel more frequently if we run this service as an express between Wrekenton and Gateshead Interchange, stopping only at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Only **8%** said they would travel less frequently.
- **49%** of people would not be affected by our plans to re-route buses along Waldrige Road in Chester-le-Street, omitting Second Avenue, Bullion Lane and South Approach. **38%** were 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour' of this, but **14%** were 'against' or 'strongly against' it.
- **63%** of respondents said they would not be affected by our plans to run all buses via North Lodge and Barley Mow, omitting Picktree Lane. **25%** said that they would travel more frequently, whereas only **12%** would travel less frequently.
- **34%** of people said they would travel more frequently if a Cheap Day Return ticket were made available to the Metrocentre by changing buses at Gateshead. However, **65%** said that this would not affect their travel patterns.

Several other comments were made in the consultation, although not in response to the specific questions. There were **two** particular themes in the points made:

- Requests for evening and Sunday buses to run to/from Newcastle rather than starting/finishing at Gateshead Interchange.
- Complaints about overcrowding on morning peak journeys from Birtley and Portobello to Newcastle, especially when a single-deck bus is used.

We are very pleased that the majority of our plans received a positive response from customers. Based on the results of the consultation and detailed analysis of travel patterns, we will be making the following changes from Sunday 18 April 2010:

- The frequency of the service between Chester-le-Street and Langley Park will be increased to give a bus every 30 minutes for most of the daytime on Mondays to Saturdays. Buses will continue to run hourly in the evening and on Sundays.
- Monday to Saturday daytime journeys will be extended to Eldon Square in Newcastle, with alternative bus stops in John Dobson Street (inbound) and Castle Garth (outbound).
- Double-deck vehicles will be used to accommodate the growing passenger numbers and alleviate overcrowding.
- All journeys will be re-numbered X25 and will run fast between Wrekenton and Gateshead Interchange, stopping only at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.
- We will retain the existing route in Chester-le-Street, providing a more frequent service for people on Second Avenue, Bullion Lane and South Approach. Whilst only 14% of customers were 'against' or 'strongly against' our plans to re-route buses along Waldrige Road, this would leave a large area with no service.
- All journeys will run via North Lodge and Barley Mow, omitting Picktree Lane. Customers in Picktree Village and High Rickleton have four alternative buses per hour to/from Chester-le-Street on services 50/50A and M3. Journeys to/from Newcastle and Gateshead can be made by changing buses at Washington Galleries, with more frequent links compared to the current 25A.

In view of the additional comments received in the consultation, we are looking at how we can provide more direct links to/from Newcastle in the evening and on Sundays, removing the need to change buses in Gateshead. We are also planning to launch a new brand identity for the service – full details will be announced in spring 2010.