

Post 16 Transport update

The year 11 students had to apply for sixth form education in January and we have still not heard whether there will be any buses from Sedbergh to QES and QKS next year. Janey Hassam (Sedbergh PC clerk) and I felt that we needed to raise the profile of the problems facing post 16 students and we organised petitions from students on both buses and I presented them at the last cabinet meeting. This has raised some media interest and I have since been on Radio Cumbria and the Gazette is putting together an article at present.

To summarise:

- There are students half way through their AS levels who do not know whether they will be able to complete their courses and year 11 students who have applied for sixth form not knowing whether there will be transport. They have the option of going to QKS or QES but they have no idea whether transport will be available to either or both schools or whether there will be any difference in cost. Some sort of commitment from CCC that they would ensure that transport would be available and an approximate cost would have been very reassuring to students!
- There are plenty of families who do not fall into the low income bracket who will not be able to afford to drive their children long distances to school, or if a solution is found pay the significantly higher fares that have been forecast.
- I had a meeting with members of the transport team in July when I was told that solutions would be found. Although we have badgered the schools, the councillors, David Laws, and provided likely numbers of students for each school, we still have no solutions at present.
- The only solution proposed was the 502 bus to QKS which was meant to replace the Woofs bus last November. The solution was found to be unworkable and the Woofs bus was saved for the year. We won't be so lucky next year.
- The problem with this solution is that it is paid for by Kendal College and works to their timetable which has longer days as students only attend 2-3 days per week. The bus leaves Kendal in the rush hour and so takes longer and students in Sedbergh won't arrive home till 6 and much later in outlying areas (probably 6.20 pm at Garsdale Head). This is far too late for A'level students who have 3 to 4 hours of homework most nights.
- This will severely disadvantage these students and will no doubt have a detrimental effect on their results. The council have not said whether they will try and find a more appropriate solution.

I have been promised another meeting with Andrew Moss (Assistant Director of Transport) to discuss the Garsdale feeder bus. I find this quite awkward as all the students next year live only 4 miles from Sedbergh and numbers have become quite low. We can share lifts and this is what College students have had to do in the past, but I realise that if we accept this then it will be harder to reinstate transport in the future for students living further up the dale. It is also probable that some working parents may not be available to pick their children up from Sedbergh. If the Parish Council wishes to ensure that transport is available in the future, to all parts of the dale, they really need to help fight for the feeder bus. Other county councils ensure that all students have access to transport, or alternatively help with mileage costs, or provide mopeds. The government recommends that transport should be available for distances over 3 miles.

What is CCC doing and where are we now.

The council has been a bit more active recently and have had a meeting with David Laws recently. Their idea of a rural pupil premium has been shelved until after the election, but they are now talking about trying to utilise the 16-19 bursary. This is normally only available to low income students but they are going to try and make a case to include rural pupils. They are also talking about spending council capital to buy a mini bus for schools such as Settlebeck to transport the students to sixth form when they leave. There is considerable concern that it can't go to QES and QKS at the same time and certainly would not have the capacity to transport all the students (45 ish) who presently attend QES.

We will apparently hear in March/April whether there will be core route transport or not, when it runs and how much it costs. This is far too late for the year 11 students to make an informed choice. The council has decided to help schools organise transport once they know how many students are applying there. The only problem is that if students discover that if transport to one school is much cheaper then they may well decide to change school or, if very expensive, drive themselves in! This may alter the costing and feasibility of the bus

Rural students in Cumbria whose catchment school has a sixth form are paying only £360 per year for transport on the school bus. This means that some areas of rural Cumbria will have the cheapest post 16 transport in the UK, whereas other areas such as Garsdale and Sedbergh may well have the most expensive transport or none at all!

If Garsdale is to remain attractive to families it is important that post 16 transport to school and college is available.

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