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Deluge of protest at 'bizarre' plan to change bus routes

Concerns have been raised over "bizarre" plans to change most bus services across the district.

It comes after operator Stagecoach announced a new timetable on Tuesday, June 13, and a "shorter than usual consultation period of just 13 days".

Cllr Nigel Collor of Dover District Council, said he has received a deluge of concerns in the space of the first 24 hours.

He said: "We're concerned about the proposed reduction to services in rural communities, and also the plans to reduce Saturday afternoon services in Dover town centre.

"This seems a bizarre move just at the time the new St James development will stimulate travel into the town centre, and as housing growth continues across the district.

"In the space of 24 hours I have been inundated with concerns from bus users and urge residents, businesses and community organisations to make their views known to Stagecoach.

"I will also be raising my concerns about the limited period of consultation for such far reaching proposals across the district."

The stagecoach consultation said: "The proposals include adjustments to most bus routes to reflect passenger usage."

It follows a detailed analysis of the current bus network.

MP For Dover and Deal Charlie Elphicke described the plan "appalling and inexcusable".

He said: "Some would lose their only regular service.

"These changes are appalling and totally unjustified.

"There are reductions for almost every village, just when we are getting more investment and housing all over the district.

"People are quite rightly fuming. The two-week window for consultation - and the vague wording in it - is unwarranted, inexcusable and unacceptable.

"I have written to Stagecoach's area director making my views known in no uncertain terms and asked for a meeting as a matter of urgency."

River Parish Councillor Sue Nicholas said: "The consultation is so short. We discussed it at the parish council meeting last night (Wednesday) but we are very limited."

The 60A, which Cllr Nicholas fought for in 1998 when she lived in Lyndhurst Road, covers St Radigunds, and Whitfield.

She added: "A lot of people already have to walk a long way to catch the bus to the main road if they are in the hills. Making them walk right down to Lewisham Road makes it unusable.

The 15b goes through River and is used by people from Temple Ewell.

Patients heading to the doctors, now relocated in Temple Ewell, will struggle according to her, and chemist users from Temple Ewell use the service to go to the



Stagecoach is changing bus links to Dover, Deal and Sandwich

'HAVE YOUR SAY'

A spokesman for Stagecoach said "It's important to us that we give people the opportunity to have their say which is why we've launched this consultation.

"These proposals reflect the results of a detailed analysis of passenger usage and journey patterns. They also take into account the growing challenge of traffic congestion on our roads.

"There are a number of changes proposed, some of which curtail existing links that have been poorly used while others open up new journey opportunities. It's important to emphasise that existing school bus services will be largely unaffected by these proposals.

"We urge anyone with an interest to read our consultation document which provides an overview of all the changes that are proposed.

"For some areas we're proposing a slight reduction in service on Saturday afternoons to reflect the reduced demand.

"We are aware of the upcoming St James development and the proposals for the western docks and will be ready to respond as demand dictates."

"I would add that at this stage the proposals are provisional and therefore we haven't formulated detailed route diagrams and timetables which will of course depend upon the outcome of this consultation."

Chilton Way pharmacy in River.

Cllr Nicholas said they may have to extend the service that goes through St Radigunds which, with lots of push chair and pram pushers getting on, will lead to buses being too full.

"And it makes it a longer journey having to go round St Rads."

She also said children attending River Rprimary may find getting to school difficult.

Dover District Council is urging residents and organisations

to give their views to Stagecoach.

By Wednesday, the news of the changes had not filtered through but a worker at River Pharmacy who did not wish to be named, said she is not aware of customers worrying about reaching the pharmacy as many walk or drive.

Meanwhile reader Brenda Baker of Marshborough Road, Woodnesborough, said: "The document is very unclear and appears to be deliberately vague about the routes proposed. For the many vulnerable people in the villages that do not have access to the internet and that rely on the buses, the first they will know about this is when the bus doesn't arrive.

"I think it is very underhand and does not give people enough time to look into the effect it will have."

And Eastry parish clerk Sarah Wells said there were no notices about the consultation at bus stops. She said: "It's hard to say if there will be problems as the consultation document gives such limited information. For all we know we may end up with a better service, but it's hard to say with the current level of information.

"How long they will have to wait in Sandwich to pick up other services? That's fine in the summer but a bit grim in the winter if you have to wait around for 10-15 mins. There is no indication of whether bus journeys will take more or less time without timetables. It's also hard to tell if people will be affected without route maps."

■ The consultation was launched on June 13 and responses must be made to Stagecoach by Monday. To have your say email southeast.enquiries@stagecoachbus.com quoting "Dover Area Proposals" in the subject line. Alternatively you can write to: Stagecoach South East Dover Area Proposals, FREE-POST RTLL-RCTZ-AKAK, Canterbury, CT1 2SY.

■ To view the changes in full, according to the bus stop you use, visit: stagecoachbus.com/serviceupdates