

Improvement of Bus Services from/to South Wonston V1.0

John Cooper, South Wonston Parish Council, 23rd November 2021

Introduction

In the spring of 2021 the government announced a bus initiative that opens the possibility of funding for improved rural bus services.

This document discusses the problems with the current bus service provided for the village of South Wonston. It is intended to provide input on the problems and priorities to Hampshire County Council (the local transport authority) as it prepares its response to the government bus initiative.

South Wonston is situated approximately 5 miles north of the centre of Winchester and has a population of around 2800. It is semi-rural and many residents have to travel to Winchester for employment, school, college, shopping or access to other transport links. Unlike people living close to the city centre South Wonston residents do not have the option to walk to the city; cycling is possible but the new 'safe cycle route' means using a busy section of Andover Rd for last parts of the journey. Travel to the city is a straight choice between car or bus for most people.

South Wonston is on the 86 bus route which links Winchester with Whitchurch and Basingstoke. Worthy Down and Sutton Scotney are on the same route. Stagecoach South is the only operator.

The first version of this document focuses on travel between the village and Winchester; other destinations may be considered later.

Goals

The main goal of the parish council for public transport is to achieve better transport to/from Winchester for those who do not have full-time access to a car or choose not to use their car. This is aligned with the long-term need to reduce the climate impact of travel, particularly from car use.

Summary of Problems with Existing Bus Service

The bus service provided for South Wonston suffers from the following problems (in approximate order of priority):

1. The price of single and return fares is uncompetitive. The current return fare is £5:80. Car journeys to Winchester are far cheaper and more convenient.
2. There no Sunday service.
3. There is only a 2 hourly service on Saturdays.
4. There is no evening service (the last bus from Winchester leaves at 18:50)
5. There is no early morning service (the earliest bus is 7:21 – making it impossible for London commuters to arrive at their work before 09:00)
6. The price of season tickets is poor value for money and does not reflect the length of journey or the level of service provided.

Analysis / Discussion

Service Level

Comparison of the - South Wonston Winchester service with other villages shows that South Wonston is under served compared with some other similar-sized communities at similar distances from the city centre.

This is illustrated by comparing the service from Colden Common (another village of similar size and distance from Winchester, to the south of the city) and Hursley (a smaller village south west of the city).

	Colden Common to Winchester (69 + E1 Services)	Hursley to Winchester (66 Service)	South Wonston to Winchester (86 Service)
No. of Buses each Weekday	20 (+ 1 Fri Late)	28 (+1 Fri Late)	13
No. of Buses each Weekend	24	36	7
Late Evening Service Fri/Sat	Yes	Yes	No
Sunday Service	Yes	Yes	No
28 day Season Ticket Cost	£88.70	£88.70	£88.70

Source: Published timetable on Stagecoach web site as of 2nd and 31st October 2021

Ticket Pricing

The table below gives ticket pricing for South Wonston and some other local communities.

From	Distance (miles)	Single	Return	7 day (mobile)	28 day	Pence per mile (single)
South Wonston	5.1	£4.10	£5.80	£23.70	£88.70	80
Colden Common	5.4	£4.10	£5.80	£23.79	£88.70	75
Three Maids Hill	2.8	£2.85	£4.30	£14.00	£51.20	101
Kings Worthy	3.1	£2.40	£3.90	£13.50	£51.20	77
Alton	18.50	£5.70	£7.30	£23.70	£88.70	30
Guildford	37.7	£5.70	£7.30	£23.70	£88.70	15

Source: Stagecoach.com, web site as of 21st October, based on a journey 22nd October to arrive by 9.30am

Note that a single from Guildford only costs £1.60 more than a single from South Wonston despite being over 7 times further.

The cost of a return journey to Winchester by car is estimated at £4.40 (including 3 hours daytime parking in a 'inner' car park), well below the return bus fare of £5.80. Car travel also has the benefit of being able to travel exactly when required and not having to wait for the 1 bus per hour.

This means there is no incentive for people to switch from car and, if you have no access to car, it's much easier to get a friend or relative to drive into Winchester to pick-up/drop-off, which means 2 car journeys instead of 1 bus passenger journey.

Season Tickets

Season tickets are one the most unreasonable aspects of the current service.

The only type of season ticket available for travel from South Wonston to Winchester is the Megarider. This allows someone to travel anywhere in the Stagecoach South network and it is priced accordingly. However for the vast majority of people this has no value – they get no benefit from free travel from, for example, Arundel to Chichester; what they need is a good value for their regular commute.

The pricing of the Megarider Gold season ticket throws up some bizarre anomalies:

- **It costs the same amount to commute the 37 miles from Guildford to Winchester as it does for 5 miles from South Wonston!**
- Someone travelling from Colden Common has access to 45 services each week; for exactly the same price someone travelling from South Wonston only has access to 20 services. Same price but half the service!

Some of these issues arise from the fact that Stagecoach only offers two zones of season tickets:

1. Winchester City;
2. Whole of the Stagecoach South area.

Stagecoach does offer more levels of season ticket in other similar cities e.g. Lincoln, which has 3 zones:

1. Lincoln City;
2. Lincoln City and surrounding villages;
3. Whole of Stagecoach East Midlands area.

This demonstrates that the ticketing infrastructure exists within Stagecoach to provide better levels of season tickets for villages surrounding Winchester such as South Wonston.

Priorities for Improvement

Input from the residents of South Wonston has highlighted the following priorities for improvement of the service:

1. Having a Sunday service.
2. Better value for money (including singles, returns and season tickets).
3. A late evening service, specifically a bus back from the city at end of the evening, say 10:15pm, on at least Friday and Saturday, as is provided for other communities.
4. An early morning service to connect with commuter trains. Some research is needed to determine the timing of this service.
5. A more frequent Saturday service.

Conclusions

This document has highlighted, and provided evidence, that the bus service between South Wonston is very poor compared with other similar communities. It is also overpriced compared with some other longer journeys.

In addition the current level of season ticket pricing is inflexible leading very poor value for money.

In terms of price and service, the bus service is not a viable alternative to car travel.

The Government Bus Initiative: Bus Back Better can provide funding a radical improvement. However this does need Hampshire CC (as the local transport authority) and Stagecoach (as the incumbent bus operator) to be open to creative options and to take decisive action in order to secure government funding for improved services.

Provide a good service and passengers will use it!