

Dear Sirs,

I am writing as a private citizen who lost some eyesight following a stroke 6 years ago when I was 32 and as a result now rely 100% on Public Transport and private hire vehicles to commute. I have a young family and have used public transport considerably over this period and am very interested in the subject after reading the PWC report.

The new rolling stock and upgrades to stations are fantastic for travelling and it is easy to see the increase in passengers taking the opportunity of travelling into the Belfast by public transport, avoiding traffic congestion etc. at not much more personal cost (if any) than by private transport. Public transport also allows people to remain productive whilst on the move, with many working commuters working when travelling. I often do likewise when travelling from my home in Lurgan to the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, a journey which used to take me the same amount of time by car, yet allows me to get over an hours work done in comfort whilst travelling.

The positive environmental implications of increased use of public transport speak for themselves, whilst a reduction in private vehicles on roads could make our already overstretched road network more accessible for commercial traffic which is essential in the current tough economic climate. The examples used by PWC in comparing capital investment in public transportation as opposed to road networks in N.I. with other countries is quite startling.

The point I wished to make to the enquiry relates to the added value of some existing bus services and possibilities to redesign services which will reduce cost, maintain service levels and free up resources to be used elsewhere. This example is quite simple in nature, but if the practice is replicated across N.I. it is potentially a very significant area which I would respectfully suggest deserves to be looked at.

I have lived in a housing estate in Lurgan which is considered to be unionist all of my life. Next to it lies a housing estate which is considered to be nationalist. There is little (if any) trouble in any of the interface areas. The unionist estate is served with a town bus service that operates every 30 minutes from 9.00 to 5.00 each day, whilst the nationalist estate service operates every hour. Each uses one of the large 52 seater buses and averages 5-10 passengers per trip who are mainly elderly. This timetable has remained the same as far as I can remember from when I was a child, the estates had just been built and many of the residents did not have cars.

There is an obvious social need to provide these services, but to a lay person questions of value are raised as to why one of the smaller 20 seater buses are not used on the routes which are more fuel efficient and do not cause as much congestion, particularly when going into what is a very busy town centre for traffic. I cannot logically work out why a smaller bus is not used unless it is a question of capital investment for stock of the smaller buses. Taking this to the next level however I cannot foresee why the service to the unionist and nationalist estate cannot be combined into one town service again using one of the smaller buses, given the low levels of cross community tension and the fact that it is elderly people using the service.

This would at worst free up two large buses to be replaced by two smaller buses, and at best would free up two large buses and two drivers, to be replaced by one smaller bus and one driver. The resources could then be used to either lower cost or redirected to other areas of the network on which there is a larger demand. I am also not just making this point about Lurgan, but also throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

I have travelled extensively and every town service I have come accross seems to be similar, with only a handful of passengers on a large vehicle. As I said earlier this might be due to the capital required to replace larger vehicles with smaller ones, but the benefits to be gained both in operating costs and environmentally as well as the possibilities to reconfigure services to other parts of the network at no additional cost seem to a lay person to be worthy of serious consideration.

This submission is intended to be constructive and in no way should be read as any form of complaint.

Kind regards

Lee Wilson  
Lurgan