

**With James Freeman's Responses appended in heavy type**

*With CADRA's further comments in italics*

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This note provides CADRA's comments and interpretation of the proposed changes to Reading Transport Ltd (RTL) service Route 22 in Caversham Heights. This includes a brief overview of the existing route and the proposed route and examines the beneficial and negative effects.

**Thank you for taking the time to send us CADRA's response. We really appreciate the time and effort that has gone into this.**

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 RTL have proposed changes to Route 22 to reduce the running costs of the service which has suffered from reducing passenger numbers. The proposed changes would remove Route 22 from Priest Hill, The Mount and Albert Road between The Mount and Highmoor Road. The revised route would be along Hemdean Road, to Oakley Road, Kidmore Road then Albert Road. The sketch plan provided by RTL buses is unclear about the route between the Oakley Road/Kidmore Road junction and the Highmoor Road/Albert Road junction. There are two possibilities:

- From Oakley Road, turn left into Kidmore Road southbound, turn right into Highmoor Road westbound turn right into Albert Road northbound to resume the original route and utilise the existing Albert Road bus stop just north of Highmoor Road; or
- Cross over Kidmore Road and turn right into Albert Road northbound missing out the stop in Albert Road just north of Highmoor Road.

**The route to be taken by the revised 22 is the second one described above. A new stop will be sited in Oakley Road to replace the one in Albert Road near Highmoor Road (which becomes an inbound stop). There is already one stop lower down in Oakley Road.**

- 2.2 The reverse journey is similarly ambiguous between the Highmoor Road/Albert Road junction and the Oakley Road/Kidmore Road junction. The two possibilities are:

- From Highmoor Road eastbound, cross over Albert Road, turn left into Kidmore Road northbound and turn right into Oakley Road; or
- From Highmoor Road eastbound, turn left into Albert Road northbound, turn right into Oakley Road eastbound and cross over Kidmore Road.

**The route will again be the second one described above. The bus stop in Albert Road will therefore switch to being an inbound stop. A new stop will be sited in Oakley Road.**

- 2.3 RTL have asserted that one bus, at a cost of £150,000 per annum, would be saved but have not provided an estimate of the changes in revenue and running costs that would occur or costs of infrastructure that would be required. Clearly the alternative routes would have different impacts on passenger convenience and legibility and different road safety impacts. These effects are discussed below.

**The combined proposals allow the withdrawal of one bus from the complete 22/23/24 cycle. This saves at least £150,000 per year. We expect the revenue effect on the 22 to be minimal, as this routes takes the least revenue of the three and carries up to 50% concessionary pass holders, which generate a very low level of revenue in comparison to cash payers. Frequency enhancements on the busier sections of the other routes, to every 15 minutes, especially on the 23 (which is the strongest of the three routes by quite a margin), are expected to be revenue enhancing – thereby improving the overall revenue/cost balance.**

*No estimates of expected passenger numbers have been given (or, apparently, made). We believe that the Route 22 changes will result in fewer passengers from Caversham Heights and that frequency improvements will not significantly increase overall passenger numbers on the Hemdean Road section between Oakley Road and Priest Hill. This is partly due to the missed stops and partly due to the increased travel distance and journey time for Caversham Heights passengers. Any apparent increases passengers on Route 22 will be in Hemdean Road and will be due to sharing of existing trips between the three services (22/23/24). We believe that the overall passenger flows on Routes 22/23/24 will be lower than on the existing routes and, as RTL have not provided estimates, this argument cannot be refuted.*

*50% concessionary pass holders are largely elderly or mobility impaired, many of whom, are unable to drive, have given up private cars or will do in future. Removal of the service is a poor result, considering the aims of the concessionary pass principle which is to increase peoples' mobility and maintain their independence. (NB Albert Road Day Centre and Sheltered housing in The Mount.)*

### **3 Existing Route 22**

- 3.1 Route 22 between Hemdean Road and Highmoor Road serves six bus stops:

- Priest Hill (southbound);
- The Mount at the junction with Blenheim Road (southbound);
- The Mount between St Anne's Road and Kidmore Road (northbound);
- Albert Road at The Mount (southbound);
- Albert Road at The Mount (northbound); and

- Albert Road at Highmoor Road (southbound).
- 3.2 If the re-routed northbound service does travel along Oakley Road directly to Albert Road, the northbound stop just north of Highmoor Road should be included in this list.
- 3.3 Recently these bus stops have been provided with modern facilities, at some expense, such as: high Kassel type kerbed platforms; real-time passenger information, bus stop cage road markings and a passenger bus shelter.

**All inbound stops will still be provided with a service. This is because Reading Borough Council have used their powers under the 1985 Transport Act to procure a replacement facility from Highmoor Road to Caversham Library via Albert Road and Priest Hill, provided by services 18/28 running Mondays to Saturdays. The bus stop infrastructure has been in place since 2005 and is a matter for RBC, not Reading Transport Ltd. In fact, bus stop posts and real time information displays can be moved elsewhere at minimal cost and there are no shelters on the outbound side.**

*These replacement services were not mentioned in the note about 22/23/24. No mention is made for serving the outbound stops in Priest Hill and Albert Road. A reliable **two-way** service is required to attract **two-way** bus travel.*

*Why not use RBC's subsidy to maintain and improve the existing Route 22 services?*

*Again no estimate has been given for relocating bus stop infrastructure some of which was only installed over the last year (2010). As Council Tax Payers we are interested in this issue and RTL should be too, as a responsible public transport provider.*

The existing route for the 22 bus service between Hemdean Road and Albert Road has a number of problems which affect the journey time and reliability of the service:

- The left turn and right turns into and out of Priest Hill at the Hemdean Road junction has poor turning radii for large vehicles such as buses and during peak periods delays can occur for Reading bound buses.
  - Priest Hill has car parking on both sides which can interrupt the free flow of traffic.
  - Priest Hill/St Anne's Road/The Mount junction – the approach to the junction from the south is steep and vehicles have to give-way to vehicles travelling between St Anne's Road and The Mount.
  - The junction of The Mount with Kidmore Road is narrow due to the 'triangular' traffic island.
  - The acute bend at the junction of The Mount with Albert Road can be difficult to negotiate if there are closely parked vehicles or large vehicles travelling in opposite directions meet within in the bend.
- 3.4 Though this section of Route 22 is less than ideal, it has been used for over 25 years with relatively few reported incidents and journeys can be slow in peak traffic conditions.

There is plenty of scope for inexpensive highway improvements that could significantly improve journey times, reliability and the convenience of the route. For example:

- Priest Hill/Hemdean Road junction the left turning radius could be increased though there is a BT service cover that would need to be moved (cost should be obtained from BT).
- Priest Hill car parking should be rationalised to one side only. Many houses have off street parking and it is, after all, a bus route.
- Priest Hill/St Anne's Road/The Mount junction. The unusual priority arrangement is a leftover from the days when buses used St Anne's Road to get to Caversham Heights and no longer makes sense. Priority should be changed to favour the straight route, Priest Hill to The Mount.
- The Mount/Kidmore Road junction. The 'triangular' island was necessary when there was a large tree in the middle of the junction. Since the tree was felled some years ago the island is redundant. The island should be removed to simplify the junction and provide more space for turning vehicles. The junction could be made a simple priority junction or, preferably, changed to a mini-roundabout, which would have a beneficial traffic calming effect on Kidmore Road/The Mount and would make egress for southbound buses much easier.
- The acute bend at the junction of The Mount with Albert Road could be improved with a local ban on parking.

**All points noted and I do agree with them. All these proposed measures cost money, of course, and are not in the gift of RTL – but the important part here is that we seek to *enhance* the revenue on the 22 by running it along the length of Hemdean Road, thereby providing a combined 15 minute frequency with the 24 – itself reduced like the 22 from every 20 minutes.**

*Improvement in frequency along Hemdean Road is welcomed. We remain unconvinced by the assertion that revenue will be enhanced as this will require an increase in passenger numbers. RTL have not provided passenger evidence of increased demand.*

#### **4 Proposed Route 22**

- 4.1 If Route 22 service is re-routed new bus stop facilities will be needed. The information from RTL does not indicate where these might be located. It is reasonable to assume that at least four new stops would be needed two in Oakley Road between Hemdean Road and Kidmore Road and depending on the chosen route two new stops between Kidmore Road and Albert Road. If the direct Oakley Road route is chosen a new stop in Albert Road may also be needed.

**See my responses above (2.1 and 2.2). New bus stops will be sited and provided in the normal way. At least two existing stops will be reused (one in Albert Road and one in Oakley Road).**

*No cost estimate has been provided for new infrastructure (NB there is no Stop in Oakley Road at present and will have to be provided). Have the residents adjacent and near to the new stop locations been consulted? If so, what was their response?*

- 4.2 The existing journey between Hemdean Road and Highmoor Road is less than 1.0 kilometre; the proposed route is approximately 1.5 kilometres (an additional running and time cost).
- 4.3 The new stops will require similar facilities to the existing stops (ie Kassel kerb platforms; real-time passenger information, bus stop cage road markings and passenger bus shelters). There is a significant cost implication for Reading Borough Council/Reading Transport Ltd/JC Decaux for these new facilities and for removal of redundant equipment, kerbing and road markings on the old route. **Agreed.**
- 4.4 The new route is not without its own traffic and route problems:
- Oakley Road has a steep gradient on its approach to Kidmore Road. The Kidmore Road/Oakley Road is a crossroads junction with priority given to Kidmore Road. Westbound buses would have to give-way to Kidmore Road traffic and then start on the steep gradient. This junction has been the site of a number of traffic accidents in recent years and has suffered a measurable increase in traffic flow since the closure of Gravel Hill.
  - If it is intended that buses will travel straight across Kidmore Road into the western section of Oakley Road buses will have to wait for a long clear gap in both north and southbound Kidmore Road traffic. This wait can be significant during peak periods. Northbound buses will then have to make a right turn into Albert Road. In the reverse direction buses will have to make a difficult acute right turn from Albert Road into Oakley Road.
  - If it is intended that buses will turn left from Oakley Road to reach Highmore Road and Albert Road buses will have to make a difficult left turn manoeuvre pass over speed cushions, make a tight right turn into Highmoor Road and another difficult right turn into Albert Road at the Highmore Road crossroads.

**These problems are common to the whole operation in the Caversham Heights area and were a factor in our decision to introduce shorter double-deck buses onto the 22. Please note that these are to be changed again to more modern double-deckers in September, which have more bell pushes on the lower deck (a complaint that has been made repeatedly about the existing buses).**

- 4.5 There is little scope for engineering measures that could mitigate these problems for buses except, perhaps, a change in priority at the Kidmore Road/Oakley Road junction.

## **5 Implications for Bus Passengers**

- 5.1 RTL has cited falling passenger numbers to justify the proposed route changes (and the difficulties for buses on the existing route). A quick glance at the map of Caversham

shows that the existing route serves a large passenger catchment area between Hemdean Road and Highmoor Road including the Albert Road Day Centre. **Yes, there are certainly passengers using the two main stops that we will be omitting from the 22's route. Our surveys show about 90 a day. In view of these numbers, RBC has taken the decision to provide a basic service to serve the two stops. The exact timetable will be published in due course, but I understand that about five journeys a day are planned to give good access at shopping times. The service will be a loop from Central Reading via Tesco King's Meadow, Reading Bridge, Caversham Centre, St Peter's Hill, Highmoor Road, Albert Road, Priest Hill, Caversham Library, Reading Bridge and Tesco, proceeding to Friar street, the St Mary's Butts. On Saturdays, Tesco will be omitted and the bus will be numbered 18, as opposed to 28 on Mondays to Fridays.**

*These services are hardly a useful substitute for the current direct Route 22 service to Reading Station and Town Centre – the diversion to Tesco is about 2 Km, with more delays at the proposed Tesco Stop and at the Vastern Road roundabout (which can be significant during busy periods).*

- 5.2 The proposed route would abandon these potential passengers but provide a service for another group of passengers. No estimates of the changes in bus ridership have been provided but it is doubtful if the 'new' passengers attracted to the service would be greater than the 'old' passenger numbers. **We believe that the new route will attract more extra passengers, thanks to the increased frequency in Hemdean Road.**

*Nb These will be passengers who could use the 23/24 services along Hemdean Road – Caversham Heights passenger losses will be a **net loss** to bus services (to say nothing about their loss of convenience). See response to 2.3 above.*

- 5.3 It is reasonable to assume that a significant number of existing passengers use concessionary pass holders during the off-peak periods but many of these people rely on the service to travel to Reading and beyond. Concessionary passes are also a source of revenue. **Yes, up to 50% of 22 passengers use concessionary passes. They do indeed provide revenue, but a lot less per trip than cash payers. This is an uncomfortable economic reality, but needs to be understood because it affects the economics of providing services where there are a lot of pass holders travelling.**

*As stated before, concessionary pass holders are less likely to be car drivers and will be the most severely affected by the changes.*

- 5.4 It is also doubtful if the increased frequency of buses along Hemdean Road will increase ridership significantly on the revised bus services. Again no estimates of passenger numbers have been provided. **All our experience shows that a significant increase to frequency (as in 20 to 15 minutes) will generate extra journeys.**

*This is a reasonable assertion (though no passenger estimates have been provided). The opposite is also true which is why fewer passengers use the current Route 22 service than previous services. The extreme version of reduction in frequency is to remove the service completely, resulting in zero passengers.*

5.5 In recent years a number of changes have been made to bus services in Caversham Heights that have significantly reduced the attractiveness of bus travel to and from Reading town centre. Some of these are given here:

- A one-way bus loop was introduced north of Highmoor Road with a bus stand/lay over point near Albert Road Recreation Ground. People with destinations in Caversham Heights beyond this point have to wait on the bus until the lay over period (at least 10 minutes) is finished or complete their journeys on foot. **This is not new. Single loops in one direction at any given frequency generally attract greater use, as the greater frequency counteracts the longer journey times in decision making. This was recently confirmed in research on the 9 route in south Reading.**

*In the case of Route 22 the frequency has been reduced and the lay-over point is in the wrong place. It is also counter to the experience of other operators (ie London Buses) where two-way/parallel services (even if hooked back) are favoured because they cover a larger catchment and provide a legible and convenient service. Non-parallel routes are being eliminated wherever possible elsewhere. It is of course possible to do this in Caversham Heights as it was done previously.*

- In the Reading bound direction people who live on the first part of the loop have a long walk to a stop.
- Removal of direct services to the Royal Berkshire Hospital and current confusion caused by the closure of the bus station outside Reading Railway Station and unhelpful bus stop grouping in the town centre has resulted in people using their cars to access the hospital. **Actually, although still not making enough revenue to cover the direct costs of operation, passenger numbers have increased since the changes introduced on 18<sup>th</sup> April. That said, we shall be improving the layout of stops in Friar Street from 26<sup>th</sup> September and introducing an extra pick-up for the 9 to the RBH adjacent to the 22 stops from that date.**

*We would like to study this data and compare it with seasonal data from previous years.*

- The reduced service frequency (to 30 minutes) has had a detrimental impact on the elderly and those people who are less able to walk long distances. **Many other parts of Reading have half-hourly services.**

*No doubt 30 minute services are inconvenient to residents of other parts of Reading too. Caversham Residents are also **Reading Residents** and frequently need to visit other parts of the town by public transport.*

- Poor service frequency after 19:00 has discouraged the use of buses by people commuting to London by rail and increased 'kiss and ride' car traffic in both the morning peak period London bound journey and after 19:00. **Two years ago I was persuaded by local people to try running a half-hourly frequency on the 22 (then the 9) to Caversham Heights all evening, Mondays to Saturdays. In the light of poor use, we had to reduce this back to every 60 minutes this April. The bus thus released now runs hourly instead to**

**Lower Caversham, where it has been welcomed and where use is building very well.**

*It takes a considerable time for people to change their habits. For rail commuters to London, having to wait for an average of 30minutes after arriving from Paddington on a 25 minute service, this does not make sense. Therefore, most resort to some form of car travel. After a long, tiring day in London walking or cycling is not an attractive proposition.*

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 The proposed changes to bus services on Route 22 are likely to further reduce bus usage by people living in Caversham Heights. **Maybe, but we doubt that there will be much reduction.**

*This is because previous service alterations have reduced bus usage to a very low level already*

- 6.2 The cost savings of one bus and £150,000 per annum has been suggested by RTL. **We are in a position to comment on our own costs!**

*RTL changes have an effect upon RBC's budget and ultimately upon levels of Council Tax. RTL cannot act in isolation and MUST, responsibly, take this into consideration.*

- 6.3 No estimates of passenger and revenue changes have been provided. Unless it can be proved otherwise we believe that revenues will be reduced further. **As already mentioned, we wouldn't be doing this whole package if we didn't believe that it could be revenue-enhancing overall.**

*NO facts have been provided; belief is inadequate.*

- 6.4 No estimates of the costs of removal of existing and provision of new bus stop infrastructure have been provided. **This is a matter for Reading Borough Council and is marginal in the overall picture. Besides, few stops will be totally abandoned.**

*It should also be a consideration for RTL, see 6.2 above.*

- 6.5 No estimates of the additional mileage costs have been provided. **Our biggest cost is driver time and this proposal reduces it overall – thus producing a saving. The extra mileage is tiny per trip and is counteracted totally by the reduced frequency.**

*Driver time would be saved by reduction of services; increased journey distance would increase driver, fuel and wear and tear costs; reduced overall ridership will reduce revenues. Once again, robust passenger estimates are needed.*

- 6.6 The map of the proposed route changes are ambiguous as they do not show which route is intended between Kidmore Road and Albert Road. **Clarified in this response.**

- 6.7 No attempt has been made to **increase** bus usage by reversal of poor past decisions on bus routing or frequency in Caversham Heights (or indeed the closure of the public transport interchange at Reading Railway Station). **Actually, this proposal is all about increasing bus usage. Overall, since 18 April the whole RTL network has seen increased use, including 22/23/24.**

*Not in Caversham Heights and it is unlikely to increase bus usage in Hemdean Road. Comparison of seasonal passenger flows in previous years is needed, to demonstrate if these (welcome) increases are significant. Other global/economic factors may also be contributing to changes. Proper analysis would demonstrate if statistically significant changes have occurred. If the increases are found to be significant, why reduce service provision?*

- 6.8 These proposals for Route 22 show a distinct lack of interest, within the Borough and RTL, in encouraging increased use of public transport and reduction in the use of private cars. **They recognise the realities of present day economics. Caversham Heights has a disproportionately high car-ownership level and route 22 has the highest number of concessionary travellers as a proportion of the total of any Premier route in Reading. It is an absolute requirement that RTL is viable – this is laid down by the 1985 Transport Act.**

*High car ownership does not mean that everyone has access to a car (ie elderly, persons with disabilities and young people). People with cars available would also like to use buses to visit the town centre for work, shopping and leisure.*

*Of course RTL must be viable but discouraging bus usage will not improve revenues. RTL's business is, after all, to provide public transport.*

- 6.9 We believe that the case has not been made for changes to Route 22 and, therefore, CADRA cannot support the proposed changes to Route 22. **Noted.**
- 6.10 *Unfortunately we remain convinced that the proposed changes will provide poorer services for Caversham residents, will inflict additional costs on RBC and will damage RTL's long-term revenues.*