

HRA Submission



Southampton City Council Enhanced Bus Partnership Forum Meeting

Monday 20 May between 4-6pm at the Civic Centre, room 121

Highfield Residents Association is seeking the reinstatement of the unilink bus service U1 to include the stop at Central Station for the reasons set out below.

Background

During the redevelopment works at the Central Station, the unilink bus U1 was re-routed. Once the redevelopment was completed the stop at Central Station was not reinstated. This was the only bus service to have previously connected and integrated transport between Southampton Airport, major rail networks to London and the South West, Isle of Wight ferries and served residents of your wards in Portswood, Highfield and Swaythling.

Members have contacted HRA and report they are very inconvenienced by this and were not consulted. Any Highfield resident continuing to use U1 to the station has to walk from the Civic Centre stop to Central Station and/or back. This involves difficult crossings of two main roads. Recently HRA received further reports of specific difficulties from members who went to The Avenue to catch a U2 bus to Central Station around 10am, only to find a 43-minute delay time for the next U2 bus. This service is timetabled for five times per hour at this time of day. They had to take the next U1, as to wait would have meant that they would have missed their train. Even with small cases, they had to tackle the crossing of Civic Centre Road and then the A3024, inner ring road, to reach Central Station on foot. They reported other people struggling due to the volume of traffic, including seniors and students.

As a consequence of the re-routing of the U1, a large part of Highfield is no longer served by a direct bus to Central Station. To reach the station by bus, residents now have to take two buses at extra cost and significant additional time. A direct U2 or U6 bus requires a walk to Portswood Broadway, Highfield Interchange or onto The Avenue. These routes only have a frequency every 13-15 minutes compared with the U1 every 8 minutes.

These cuts in service come at the very time when the Council is promoting the Connecting Southampton / Connected Southampton 2040–Local Transport Plan and the significant project on Portswood Broadway to close the road to cars in order to encourage bus travel. Bluestar's decision is actually disrupting Southampton's integrated travel with no direct bus service between travel hubs.

Without knowing the local area or consulting a number of bus routes and timetables the actual reduction in service is buried in the detail. The few comments received in reply from Bluestar to HRA members are not supported by any data, e.g. *“... some customers will have been inconvenienced but the decision to re-route away from central station is the best solution for the route overall”* and, *“Very few customers used the U1 to/from central station south.”*

In the past months, this regrettable cut to service has been discussed at three HRA Committee meetings when it was decided that the Chair should follow-up on this decision. An email had been sent from the HRA Chair, Prof R Brown, to Councillor Keogh on 11 January and a reply was received on 12 January, including a quote from Bluestar, *“Very few customers used the U1 to/from central station south.”* Councillor Keogh also stated that user groups were actively encouraged to represent the views of residents at Forum Meetings.

Emails about the cuts to the U1 unilink service were sent to Richard Tydlsley, General Manager of Bluestar, on 28 February and 18 April. There has been no reply to date.

The HRA request for reinstatement of the U1 route is supported by Councillors John Savage, Katherine Barbour and Maire Finn of Portswood Ward and Councillor Fielker of Swaythling Ward.

The matter is now presented to the SCC Enhanced Bus Partnership Forum:

1. Has the removal of the unilink U1 bus service to Central Station, which provided a direct link between the three major transport hubs in Southampton (Southampton Airport, Central Station and Town Quay as well as the University), had a negative impact on travel connectivity in Southampton and is this acceptable to the Council?
2. What is the consultation process between an Enhanced Bus Partner and the Council prior to any service cuts which would impact previously integrated, major Southampton transport hubs? Was this process followed in the case of the U1 re-routing?
3. What data on bus performance before and after the U1 service change will be provided and how will this be reviewed, particularly the impact on Highfield bus users?
4. Will Bluestar urgently consider a reinstatement of the U1 service to include the stop at Central Station?