



FOREST

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

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Dear Ms Kelley

Re: ARRIVA CrossCountry Services to Lydney and Chepstow

I write on behalf of the Forest Economic Partnership's (FEP) Transport and Infrastructure Sub-Group who provide a combined voice for local businesses and communities within the Forest of Dean regarding the pressing issues affecting both the District and cross borders.

We have recently been made aware of the withdrawal of train services to Chepstow and Lydney provided by Arriva CrossCountry, and we have discussed the matter with community representatives with particular interest in rail.

Whilst we understand the challenges facing you due to COVID-19 and that this is not a route in contract with the Department of Transport, the withdrawal of all but one of the seven scheduled stops in Chepstow (northbound and southbound) and the reduction from five to two (northbound) and five to one (southbound) for Lydney will be detrimental to the Forest of Dean. For example:

- Prior to lockdown, Lydney saw its largest growth in rail users with a 27% increase in footfall over the last 4 years. The stations both in Lydney and Chepstow are key gateways into the Forest of Dean and the AONB of the Wye Valley.
- With domestic tourism key to the economic recovery of the Forest of Dean restricting access permanently to those looking to travel to and from the Forest of Dean will have a larger effect on the post-covid recovery.
- The Forest of Dean is subjected to not one, but two "bottlenecks" at either end of the District (A48/A40 heading into Gloucester and the A48 heading in Chepstow) which causes major concerns for commuters.

In view of this FEP has already made representations to GCC to safeguard and improve rail transport services at Lydney Station and has championed this as part of its contributions to the emerging Local Transport Plan. Rail is key to the mass transport solutions needed to move visitors and commuters into and out of the District long term and within covid restrictions.

A WeTAG/WebTAG study jointly commissioned by authorities in England and Wales is highlighting public transport as a key feature in getting vehicles off the roads and generally reducing congestion. An increase of residential properties in the south of the Forest of Dean for whom the public transport has become significantly less attractive due to unreliability and decrease in services has led inevitably to seeing residents reverting back to car travel.

As you may be aware in December 2018, the Forest of Dean District Council became the first council in Gloucestershire to declare a climate emergency and the FEP is working closely with them to reach Net Zero by 2030 by promoting active travel and the use of public transport, along with projects in collaboration with Gloucestershire County Council, Stagecoach, Dial-a-ride and private SMEs around rural Mobility as a Service. Regular reliable services into the District is vital to achieving this goal and whilst at present, due to Covid-19 there may be a stigma created by negative messages from Government on public transport, it is still important to aim to build back better.

This letter will be copied to a number of organisations including the DfT and Welsh Government as well as local MPs to make them aware of our concerns.

In summary the removal of these services is of great concern to the Forest Economic Partnership and as such, we urge you to clarify that on ARRIVA CrossCountry Service changes in both Lydney and Chepstow are temporary and normal service will resume before the end of 2020.

Kind regards,

Andrew Callard

Andrew Callard
Chair of Forest Economic Partnership (CIC)