



Vital Surrey bus reduced from hourly to three mornings a week

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People who wait for buses are often left disappointed and that only looks set to continue after the company behind an axed service said it was "not likely" to return. Residents in Horley gathered at what they have dubbed a 'ghost' stop in protest to the axing of the hourly 424 bus which served their estate and went between the town centre and Gatwick Airport. It has left them with just a single service - but that just runs three mornings a week.

Councillor Neha Boghani, Green Party member for Horley East and Salfords said: "For Surrey County Council, whose strapline is 'we leave no-one behind', to cut buses this savagely without even any public consultation is shameful, and a dereliction of their commitment to serve all residents. Our residents deserve better." One resident at the bus stop protest said the loss of the route had taken away her social life with another adding the impact had been unbelievable. She said: "There are so many elderly people and people with disabilities living around here and we can't afford to keep taking taxis."

Metrobus's commercial director Nick Hill said the two-way loop the 424 used to run along made it unreliable and the decision was made to simplify the route. The detour through Horley Riverside Gardens Estate was then dropped to make scheduling more reliable and because it was so poorly used - it would only pick up passengers on one in five journeys. He said: "It is not likely that a conventional bus service will return to the area on a frequent basis due to such low demand. Residents in the area do also have other alternatives: much of the area is a short walk to access more frequent bus services."

The dial-a-ride type service Surrey Connect is to be made available in the area and for Gatwick Airport. A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said they understood the disruptions alterations to bus services can make but that no areas have been left unserved by the cuts. They said: "Residents in the Horley Gardens Estate were previously served by Metrobus service 424, however data showed less than one passenger per journey travelled on most of the 424 journeys, which was unsustainable. This area continues to be served by local bus service 26 three days a week, providing links with Horley Town Centre and Hookwood Tesco, as well as the Surrey Connect service, which operates between 7am to 7pm weekdays and 8am to 6pm on Saturdays, with alternative services available for most passengers within a five-minute walk."

"These changes form part of a wider review, which has seen the off-peak service 100 rerouted from Park 25 in Redhill, where data showed a usage of less than one passenger per journey, to instead serve residents in Westvale Park, Horley. This has enabled in the region of 4,000 otherwise isolated residents to be served, and initial patronage figures from the bus operator indicate that the number of passengers now travelling in the area have since quadrupled. Residents in Park 25 continue to be served by service 100 in the peak hours and on Sundays, and off-peak service 424 provides an hourly service throughout the day. We will continue to work alongside bus operators to create travel opportunities which encourage greater bus use and will keep the prospect of rerouting an alternative service via Park 25 under review."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Cllr Neha Boghani right), Green councillor for Horley East, with residents of the Gardens Estate, south Horley, at the 'ghost bus stop' where they used to get on the 424 Metrobus (image Cllr Boghani)