

Upper Wharfedale *Venturer* – Service Update – February 2021

We are conscious that over the last few weeks there have been an unusual number of service problems with the 72B *Venturer*, and we felt it would be useful to issue a service update explaining what has been going on.

Since the end of the first Lockdown in July last year, the *Venturer* has been operating in “Covid Secure” mode, with a number of changes designed to make travelling on the bus as safe as possible. These measures include reduced number of seats to enable social distancing, contactless payment, driver screen, significantly increased cleaning regime etc.



We have managed to keep the service going, and through the summer and autumn we carried ~60% of our usual passenger numbers. We are very grateful to North Yorkshire County Council for additional financial support which has made up for lost fare revenue.

The pandemic has had an impact on us, however. In March last year we were expecting to sign a new contract with NYCC which would have included a replacement for our old friend 4040 – the original *Venturer*. Clearly, with the pandemic just starting and a message from central government that people should not use public transport, neither we nor NYCC felt it was sensible to enter into a new four-year contract nor to invest in a new vehicle. Accordingly, we agreed to carry on with the old bus under an extension to the original contract, and to review the situation once things became clearer. Almost a year later, and with the bus having now covered over 120,000 miles, we are in the same state, with little prospect of sufficient clarity to enter into a new contract any time soon.

The problem with this is that the bus is showing its age and we have had a series of faults in the last few months which have required immediate rectification; without a spare vehicle, this inevitably leads to service outages while we get a replacement vehicle or get our bus repaired – which in itself can be challenging due to staff shortages at the workshop due to people self-isolating.

In addition to the problems with the bus itself, there has been a spate of bad weather which has also caused service interruptions. While snow and ice are a problem every winter, this year the timing has been particularly unfortunate and again the pandemic has had an effect; the significant reduction in traffic flows as a consequence of lockdown has meant that the roads have taken much longer to clear once they have been gritted. This has been a particular problem north of Kettlewell as the traffic flow on this part of the route has not been enough to clear the snow and ice from the road. While maintaining a service for essential users is very important, our number one priority must be the safety of our passengers, our drivers and other road users. If we do not feel the service can be operated entirely safely on a particular day, then we don't run it.

We remain committed to providing the service. As the weather improves, we anticipate that the problems with the bus will reduce as some of the recent breakdowns have been caused by water and ice damage. In the longer term we hope to be able to agree a new contract with NYCC, and with a new vehicle, get back to pre-pandemic service levels. In the meantime, we will continue to work to minimise service issues and to communicate service updates through Facebook, Twitter, the UWB website and UWB service texts.

Contact details are below. To receive UWB SMS text updates please text “UWB update” to 07802 350699. If you have any queries about any of this, please feel free to email info@upperwharfedale.com