



Transport issues

Southampton LINK has received many concerns from the public about the transport to health service facilities for a number of years. Concerns are generally about the poor standard of transport to hospital, especially the SGH and about car parking at the SGH.

As the review is concentrating on public transport I will not include matters of car parking other than in passing.

Probably our first major awareness of transport as a serious issue was during the consultation on the change of operating hours for the Bitterne Walk-in-centre. This resulted in many adverse comments such as *"Residents in the east of the city (The "Cinderella" of Southampton) cannot easily access emergency medical facilities."*

Our report contained the following statements:

'... a large number of respondents expressed their view that health services such as the Minor Injuries Unit at the RSH, and A&E at Southampton General are difficult to access via public transport. Travelling there as an alternative to the walk-in centre can require two buses or an expensive taxi fare, and is particularly difficult for the elderly, or mothers with young children.'

'Many responders commented on the absence of alternative services in the east of the city. There was a general feeling that their needs were not being met, with a particular series of negative comments on the lack of public transport to access SUHT and other services based in the centre and west of the city. Bus transport was especially criticised as well as high taxi fares and distinct lack of suitable parking if private car access was possible.'

We concluded:

'Southampton LINK understands that this is a difficult issue and that the majority of public transport is operated on a purely commercially basis. Nevertheless, it is right that the concerns of the public on the East of the City are noted and that the NHS and City Council should co-operate to attempt to improve the situation especially in respect of health related transport needs.'

This report was issued to the scrutiny panel at the time.

Similar comments have been received at almost every public event that we have organised. Our most recent event was entitled 'Your Views Count' at which Transport and access to hospitals was heavily criticised, predominately because of:

- Poor bus links
- Constant route changes
- Poor timetabling.
- Insufficient service to SGH.

In passing it is interesting to note that criticism was also given to parking within hospital grounds. Main concerns were

- Availability.
- High cost of parking at SGH.
- At SGH handicapped parking was both inadequate (hence always full) and too far away from the hospital main entrance

Attendees of the event emphasised significant improvements were needed if people were to rely on public transport to get them to hospital. Suggestions put forward:

- Hospitals should support people to plan their journey beforehand.
- Improve the availability of transport information.
- Offer information and reduced cost taxi service as operates in Eastleigh, for the whole of Southampton.

They also suggested that improvements could be made and cost could be reduced if practitioners minimised delays to patient appointments, (thus preventing unnecessarily high parking charges)

Southampton LINK has also reviewed the report conducted by SVS for NHS Southampton City on Urgent care. The survey engaged 42 families in different locations across the City. Although the survey was specifically about unscheduled care and not specifically about transport issues it is nevertheless interesting to consider the findings and relevant in that it is everyone's interest to see emergency facilities used appropriately. It is no surprise that transport played a major part of the feedback and was raised in most sessions.

For families living in the west of the city access to the Walk in Centre or Minor Injuries Unit entailed using two or even three buses, which run on an irregular basis. This proved difficult in terms of both time and cost. Added to this was the difficulty of having to take more than one small child on this long journey, particularly taking into account one of them was ill. Use of the Minor Injuries Unit was further compounded by the families' perception of the St Mary's area as being unsafe, with them being particularly unlikely to visit the area in the evening. In this instance families were more likely to use urgent care services inappropriately if they were unable to get a GP appointment.

Families on the east of the city felt it relatively easy to access the Bitterne Walk in Centre, with its close proximity to bus routes. They felt the service in Bitterne enabled them to gain a trusted opinion quickly, to see if they needed to take further action. Inappropriate access of A&E was unlikely due to the travel involved (again two or three buses) and the related issues as reported by the families from the east. Similarly to families on the east this group of families were also reluctant to use the services provided at the RSH Minor Injuries Unit due to perception of the area as unsafe and the difficulties of travelling there by public transport.

A further comment was received that it was difficult returning home from A&E after the buses had stopped running.

It is also worth noting that Help the Aged conducted survey of 12,418 people of which 97% were over 60 years old. They reported:

- Local bus usage increases with age.
- Limited access to public transport means 37% of Registered Disabled people are forced to use taxi services compared to only 5% of the able - bodied.

The Principal problems were:

Difficulty in getting from/to home and the bus stop.

Problems getting to a seat before the bus moves off.

Inconvenient bus schedules and hard to read timetables.

Poor service to SGH from the East of Southampton.