

Local bus routes to hospitals in Brent

What are the main issues?

Good public transport access to health facilities plays a vital role in helping local people, especially those from poorer communities get the care that they need to maintain healthier lives.

Problems with local bus routes to health facilities can reinforce social exclusion as people from poorer communities are more likely to rely on public transport, especially buses for travel. Poverty and social exclusion are experienced by many of the boroughs residents. Brent is ranked 81st in the Index of Multiple Deprivation and 14.9% of its population are living in the most deprived wards in the country. A Social Exclusions Unit, report entitled "Making the Connections"¹ states that nationally over a 12-month period, 1.4 million people admitted to missing, turning down or choosing not to seek medical help because of transport problems.

This can lead to poorer health, late diagnosis or healthcare not being sought. Costs are also transferred to the provider due to wasted resources through missed appointments, delayed discharge from hospital, unnecessary home visits and delayed treatment of illness that could potentially have been treated much earlier.

Local hospital travel plans highlight that bus routes to Northwick Park and Central Middlesex hospitals are not meeting the needs of patients and staff.

Bus routes to Northwick Park hospital stop three hundred metres away from the main entrance and access to the hospital is via a subway which is often perceived to be unsafe. Nor is there a direct bus route from the south of the borough to the hospital which is in the north.

Central Middlesex hospital is serviced by two of the most unreliable bus routes in London²

The impact of this has led to increased use of London Ambulance for non urgent travel to and from hospital and a greater reliance on the dial a ride service which is not a designated outpatient service. The NHS also runs a staff shuttle service between Northwick Park and Central Middlesex hospitals These options are not only more expensive but could also be less environmentally sound than if the bus links were in place.

The Public Transport Liaison meeting³ has on a number of occasions discussed this issue. A solution is yet to be reached as London Buses'

¹ Social Exclusion Unit: Making the Connections, Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion, 2003

² Transport for London Bus Performance Statistics

³ This is a meeting of all local transport providers including, LB Transport department, London Buses, London Underground and train operating companies

position is that the hospitals are adequately serviced and they do not have resources to implement any of the suggestions made by the council.

A Northwick Park Liaison group has recently been established by the North West London Hospitals Trust to lobby Transport for London to improve transport links to the hospital. The membership includes Brent, Harrow and Ealing Councils and Westminster University.

Another important implication for this work is the recent review of health services conducted by Lord Darzi. The report entitled *Healthcare for London – A framework for Action* looks at the key issues facing Londoners in terms of health and healthcare provision.

The report proposes new delivery models for health services in which routine healthcare should take place locally. Many Londoners have said they would like most out patient appointments to happen in local settings. The review states that more complex care should take place in centralised in specialist larger centres.

If the proposals in the report are implemented it could lead to a greater reliance on local transport, there is also the wider issue of ensuring that effective strategic partnerships between the council, local health bodies and transport providers are in place to facilitate any changes in health care services.

This review is currently being consulted on across London. A London wide health overview and scrutiny committee has been set up to develop a detailed response.

Why are we looking at this area?

The underlying problem is the need to improve the partnership working between bus network planning and local health catchments areas. Health facilities such as hospitals share information on their travel plans, however London Buses are not obligated to take them into consideration when planning their services. There needs to be a united approach in matching suggestions from travel plans and the commissioning of services.

What should the review cover?

- Gather good practice on how other councils have tackled this issue
- Speak with Transport for London on how to improve local hospital access
- Speak with London Buses on how to improve joint working and resolve issues around Northwick Park and Central Middlesex hospitals

- Review partnership working for planning bus routes to hospitals in Brent.
- Review the councils approach to working with London Buses on bus route issues.
- Get evidence from the Northwick Park Liaison group on the key issues

What could the review achieve?

- Influence London Buses to improve bus routes to local hospitals in Brent
- Recommendations on improving partnership working between Transport for London, London Buses and the council on bus routes.