

PARK AND RIDE, CHRISTMAS 2003

A meeting was held on 22nd January, to which all the partners were invited, with the aim of reviewing the pilot initiative.

A copy of the passenger usage figures is appended for information.

Key findings

- Operationally the scheme worked very well and the timetable was achieved. In fact this route was the only one in Carlisle which did not experience significant delay due to traffic congestion during the Christmas period.
- Users of the service were very complimentary and a number of positive letters have been received. Generally the media coverage was very positive and supportive.
- There appeared to be some confusion over the target users. The location of the parking site (Kingmoor Park) was such that visitors from the north and east were the key area. Areas to the south and west were not targetted.
- The scheme started too early and a more realistic start date would be the Christmas lights switch on. Similarly, the take-up on weekdays was poor with an obvious lack of support from people working in the City Centre and their employers.
- Marketing of the initiative started too late to be included in the general material/advertising for the Christmas in Carlisle. Where some specific publicity was given for the Fireshow there was a higher usage.
- The parking site at Kingmoor Park had a number of advantages but was not directly adjacent to a main route.
- Those partners who made financial contributions had these capped. The revenue income was significantly lower than forecast which has been directly borne by Stagecoach. There was no apparent impact on car parking income as a result of the initiative.

Lessons Learned

The review has provided some valuable learning which would help shape any similar scheme in the future.

- No sites exist in the South or West without major capital investment. Subject to availability and costs, Kingmoor Park is likely to remain the best option in the short term but better signage would need to be investigated.

- The service would not start until late November and a reduced frequency of service (every 20 minutes rather than every 10 minutes). Four buses would be adequate (rather than the 5 used in 2003) and late night Thursdays and Sundays would not be included.
- Earlier start to marketing would be needed with a larger budget for public awareness/advertising.
- City Centre employers would need to provide a much greater commitment to a similar project.

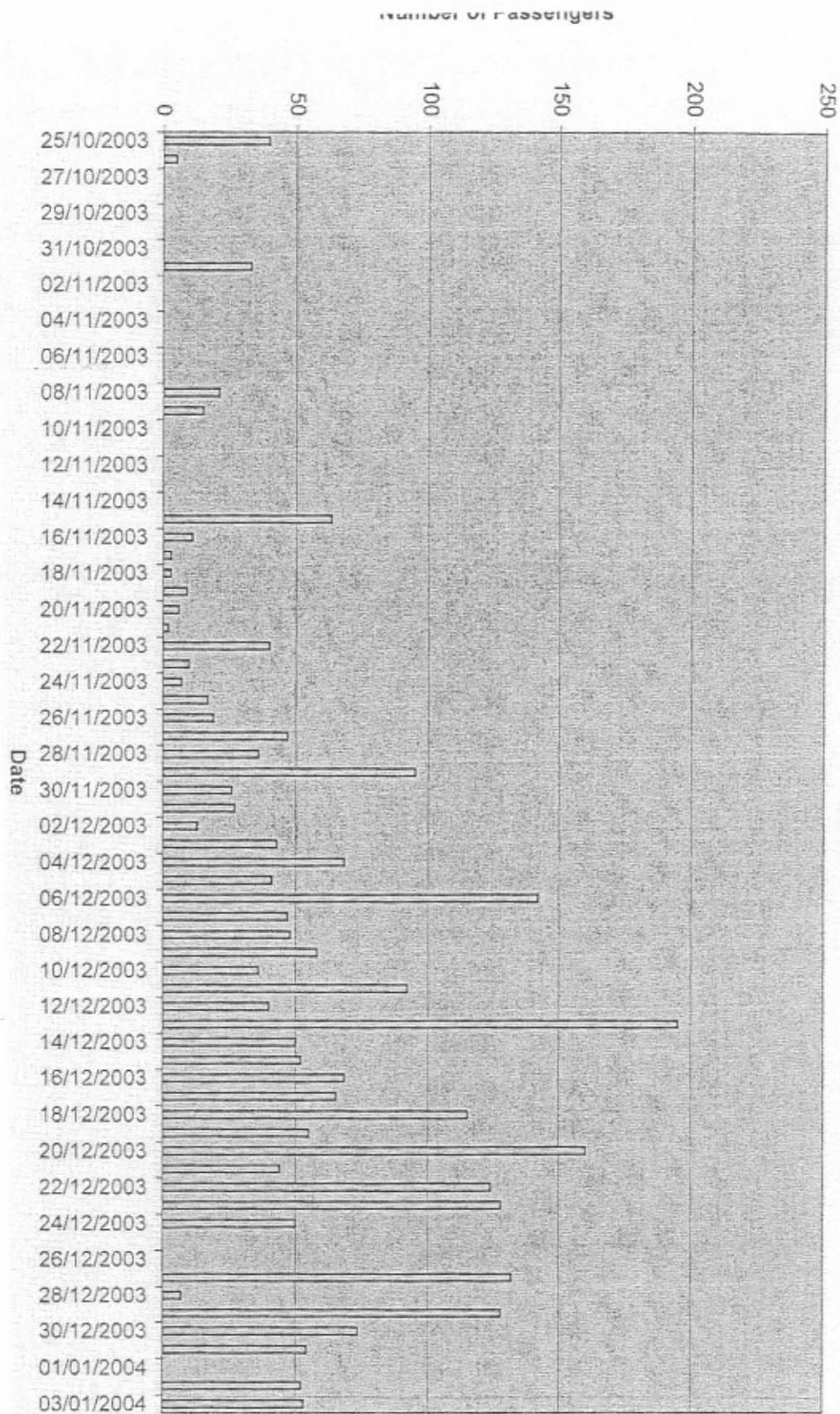
Should a future scheme be implemented on this basis then the total cost would be in the region of £70,000. This would be offset by any charging revenue but Stagecoach would not carry any financial risk in the future.

Way Forward

The pilot initiative took some time to gain momentum but this is not surprising because of the behaviour/culture change it introduces. To repeat a similar scheme in future would initially appear to be prohibitive when assessed on a cost/user basis. However, some consideration needs to be given to other alternatives which need to be put in place at Christmas to deal with the increased traffic flows in the City Centre. If Carlisle is to continue to act as a Regional Centre and sustain economic vitality a do nothing option is not sustainable.

M Battersby

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Park & Ride Passenger Usage