

Bring back the postbus

This would be part of a strategy to reverse the severe decline in postal services in recent years as a result of commercialisation. I don't know whether the Scottish Parliament would have powers to apply these principles to postal services in Scotland, but they would be valid in the rest of the UK too.

I am calling for mail to be handled as follows.

A: There would be an initial delivery from sorting offices -- or in some cases directly off incoming trains -- to local post offices, from which delivery to homes and offices would be made later. Places on the line of route, and premises that were nowhere near a local post office, would receive deliveries at this stage only if they were beyond the reach of the local delivery teams mentioned below. Passenger carrying vehicles (i.e. postbuses) would be used in areas that do not have their own comprehensive regular interval bus networks, i.e. where this would give a significant improvement in the overall level of service. As house to house deliveries would not be made at this stage, journeys would be significantly faster than many postbuses used to be during delivery runs.

B: Mail would then sit in local post offices for 1–2hr, during which people would be able to collect their own mail if they so wished. In urban areas especially, many people would probably find it convenient to do so on the way to work.

C: Mail would then be delivered to people's homes, in most cases using bikes. Any mail that could not be delivered, e.g. because it required a signature, would be returned to the local post office with a notice put through the mailbox of the relevant householder.

D: In the afternoon the postal vehicles would then do a run picking up mail from postboxes and taking them to sorting offices; and, in rural areas, carrying passengers. In remote areas this run could be combined with the delivery run of A above.

I understand that one of the reasons why postbuses fell into disuse was that they had been intended to run at times suitable for local shopping and therefore became of little use when delivery and collection times were reorganised. The above, however, would be based on the concept that in remote rural areas any service at any time is a worthwhile plus, certainly for visitors; and if necessary other supported services, possibly demand responsive, or school journeys and the associated positioning workings, could be used for the other leg of people's shopping trips.

Apart from providing useful rural transport, this would have the following additional advantages:

(a) People could collect urgent mail en route to work instead of having to wait till they got home in the evening.

(b) By providing an increased role for local post offices this scheme would help to make them viable. In remoter areas the offices might close while the relevant staff did home deliveries, but as long as people know the hours of closure this should not cause too much inconvenience.

(c) At present having to go to a sorting office to collect mail is a major inconvenience (from my house in Cambridge it's an hour and a half round trip, and I often have to ask people not to use options that require signatures as these days mail tends to come in when one is unlikely to be at home). By contrast, going to a local post office would take me half an hour -- and even less if some of the offices that closed during the great purge were to reopen.

In areas like the Highlands this would form part of a scheme which would enable people to travel direct from an overnight train from London to any community or remote farm whatsoever.