

Date 22 December 2017

Response to Norfolk County Council's consultation on the proposed reduction of subsidy for buses.

Summary of main points of the response:

- Bus travel accounts for nearly two thirds of public transport journeys but does not receive a proportionate public sector investment¹
- Bus services are essential to enable people to access education, employment and vital services
- Avoidance of social exclusion reduces the burden on local health and social services and buses are key to this
- Vulnerable people will be particularly badly affected by the proposals, especially young people, the elderly and disabled people of all ages.
- Home to school transport costs could be cut by the provision of subsidies to appropriate bus services
- Community Transport (in various forms) will not be able to bridge all the gaps which would be caused by the proposed reduction in bus subsidies
- The effect of such cuts on the local economy, congestion and integrated transport options should not be underestimated
- The contribution of the bus to the working of the economy and society is multi-faceted. The bus is not simply a transport mode – it is far more than that.
- Bus Users UK would urge the council to consider the requirements of **Section 63 of the 1985 Transport Act** to provide 'socially necessary' buses by reallocating a proportion of their budget to subsidise bus services in order to meet these needs.
- Bus Users UK would also urge the council to assess whether the proposed cuts would contravene their duties under the **Equality Act 2010**

Who we are

Bus Users UK champions the interests of bus and coach passengers throughout Britain and is the official body to oversee bus users' complaints in England (outside London) Wales and Scotland under the EU Passenger Rights Regulations.

Passengers understand that Norfolk County Council, like every local authority, is required to make substantial savings in the current climate. However, it should be noted that bus travel accounts for nearly two thirds of public transport journeys but does not receive a proportionate public sector investment².

¹ Transport Statistics Great Britain

² Transport Statistics Great Britain

Prioritising savings is always going to be a difficult job. But when deciding those priorities it needs to be considered that bus services are not simply a dispensable luxury. You have acknowledged that bus services are essential to enable people, including those on low incomes and with disabilities, to:

- Access employment
- Access education
- Access health services
- Access shops as both a necessity and a social activity
- Avoid isolation and social exclusion
- Enjoy a greater degree of well-being

The first three of those requirements are always at the top of local authority spending priorities and removing subsidised bus services risks people losing access to those essential services and can result in an increase in the demands on other council-provided services, such as adult social care support.

Bus services can access shopping centres in an environmentally-friendly and more effective way than the private car, and bus users contribute to the high street economy in a way which is often underestimated. Removing access to bus services and thereby denying access to local retail centres to people without private transport is likely to stifle economic growth.

Avoidance of social exclusion and encouragement of well-being is key and can often reduce the burden on local health and social services and enable more active citizenship.

Even for those able to afford to run a car, bus services can provide an alternative which is sustainable and can provide better access to town centres, alleviating congestion at peak times and on minor or busy roads.

Impact of proposals on access to Education & Employment

Home to school transport is one of the biggest parts of a local authority's transport budget and many of these costs could be avoided by providing an adequate bus service. Getting children and young people onto a local bus service increases their self-reliance and independence, gets them used to travelling by bus, increases activity levels, reduces congestion and encourages young people to think about the bus as a sustainable future source of transport.

Young people reliant on home to school transport cannot take part in extra-curricular activities and cannot therefore broaden their horizons as easily as their urban counterparts. These extra-curricular activities will often make a difference to an employer when noted on a personal statement or CV.

Entry level jobs tend to involve unsocial hours and weekend travel so anything which would impact on people's ability to access employment needs careful consideration if it is not to have a deleterious impact on the ability of employers to find and retain local staff. This means that the apparently simple step of cutting evening and weekend bus services is often causing harm to those most in need.

Impact of proposals on access to Health and Social Care services

Decreasing access to buses will increase the burden on other parts of the council's budgets such as social services which will have to deal with more cases of depression and anxiety. Access to community groups provides help and support upon which the NHS and social services currently rely and the removal of that access would cause additional burdens on child and adult social care budgets.

If the proposals were to proceed as suggested, many residents would not be able to attend morning or late afternoon medical appointments due to the lack of appropriate bus services. The “Later life in rural England”³ report by Age UK is a wide-ranging assessment of the challenges facing older people living in rural areas, with lack of transport identified as a major issue given that 35% of older households do not have access to a car. The transport chapter highlights the importance of regular, convenient and reliable bus services to the lives of older people and identifies reductions in service as a serious concern, impacting on all aspects of their lives. It calls on local authorities to recognise the wider value of bus services in preventing social isolation and to base funding decisions on impact assessments and not simply on costs and the number of people using a service.

While community transport can make an excellent contribution to the overall provision of services, they cannot replace a regular service. Many such options are limited by eligibility criteria, range, times and availability of volunteers. While community transport and DRT schemes can make a valuable contribution to the overall transport plan, they cannot be expected to meet all the needs of residents, whether to make an onward travel connection, to get to a large town or city, to visit relatives in care or to attend a medical appointment.

Impact on housing

The additional erosion of communities if public transport is decreased should also be noted in the wake of closures of libraries, post offices, GP surgeries and in some cases, local schools as a result of funding cuts. Many people moved to communities on the basis that there is a bus service to access hospitals, shops etc as they became less able to drive. If transport links are cut, there will be an inevitable movement of people towards urban centres. Given the lack of social housing in urban environments, this shift will add to the workload of the housing departments in local authorities and increase the burden on housing associations.

Impact of proposals on local economy

Most bus users use the bus to access shops both to purchase goods and to meet friends. Reducing services will inevitably reduce the number of customers visiting the shops and will have a far-reaching effect on the economies of those communities but also the livelihood of the traders.

Removing bus services will also prevent people from attending cultural and social events, particularly as some of the funding for later bus services is being proposed for removal. The impact on theatres and cinemas in smaller communities and even city centre environments will be far-reaching. Many people have stated that, whilst they may be able to get to evening events, they will not be able to get home and the cost of a taxi makes the evening prohibitively expensive.

The “Buses and the Economy II” report of in July 2014, commissioned by Greener Journeys and the DfT, states that:

- There is a significant relationship between accessibility by bus and employment.
- People in urban areas who are currently unemployed and seeking work depend heavily on the bus for access to employment.
- The bus is a vital artery for shopping trips. Bus has the largest market share of retail/expenditure trips to city centres.
- The bus has an important social insurance dimension. This is the value placed on having the option available of using the bus, plus any social or community value buses have on behalf of others.

³ www.ageuk.org.uk/herefordshireandworcestershires/campaigns-and-events/later-life-in-rural-england

Environmental impact

The National Planning Policy Framework⁴ states that transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development but also in contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives. The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel. Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.

The “Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon”⁵ white paper recommends offering people sustainable transport choices, that will stimulate behavioural change. The Door to Door Strategy⁶ builds this by setting out the Government’s vision for an integrated transport system that works for everyone and makes journeys by a sustainable means an attractive option. The stated benefits of this are explained as:

- Protecting the environment- by increasing the use of sustainable transport to help cut carbon emissions and improve air quality.
- Boosting economic growth – by improving connectivity and interchange and cutting congestion to help link businesses and markets
- Supporting society – by providing a well-connected and accessible transport system that is safe and secure to help improve public health and the quality of life
- Deliver a good deal for the traveller - by integrating the door-to-door journey as a whole to help make travel more reliable and affordable.

Buses offer a clean, green, flexible, accessible and affordable means of making the county’s transport plan sustainable and environmentally-friendly and could aid the achievement of environmental and sustainability targets.

Reliance on Community Transport

Solutions involving community transport, or using taxis, demand-responsive transport and so on to reduce the cost of individual journeys to more remote locations, can be non-inclusive. Many of the community transport schemes already in use across the country operate under Section 19 permits which limits their use just to members of the scheme. Use of Section 22 permits enables community transport to benefit the whole community and to enable people to make journeys spontaneously. This may well reduce the cost savings somewhat but will give greater benefit. Greater value could also be attached to bus services in some parts of the county by effective marketing; many of the routes affected are scenic and could be attractive for leisure travel if properly marketed.

Our research suggests that more people would like to see more money provided to local bus routes rather than encouraging reliance on community transport which is perceived as far less convenient and does not go where people necessarily want to travel. Community Transport removes the ‘impulse purchase’ element of bus services and implies that everyone is able to plan their lives at least 24 hours ahead (in some cases three days in advance). This particularly impacts on those living with or caring for someone with progressive illnesses or mental health issues whose ability to go out cannot be taken for granted from one day to the next. There are also concerns that, should more bus services be removed, such services would not be able to deal with the demands.

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-growth-cutting-carbon-making-sustainable-local-transport-happen

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/door-to-door-strategy

Passengers with learning disabilities or dementia will struggle to remember to book a service ahead and, having done so, may not be relied upon to remember the booking on the correct day. Removing regular bus services takes away the routine which many people have worked hard to learn as part of travel training.

Impact of proposals on the future sustainable growth of public transport

Bus use is highest amongst those aged 17-20 and 60+. Bus Users UK would like to see young people wanting to continue to use the bus longer term rather than automatically considering a driving licence as soon as they can. Furthermore, Bus Users UK would like to encourage local authorities to implement schemes to encourage young people to use the bus, such as the young person's discount and discounts for those in full time education.

Particular concern was raised with us by students from East Kent College regarding the reduction of evening services, as this would affect their ability to work late at college in study groups or attend evening activities and career advice sessions hosted by the college. The young people said that the loss of evening service would mean that they would need to seek alternative modes of transport and, where affordable, learn to drive.

The Equality Act 2010

From 5 April 2011, s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 extended the duty of authorities in respect of people suffering any of the "protected characteristics" of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation - to any "public authority". The Act requires that every public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to "remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic" and to "encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low".

It would be difficult to see how the proposed reduction of bus service subsidies would not contradict the requirements of this Act.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bus Users UK – www.bususers.org
Chief Executive Officer – Claire Walters
Director for England – Dawn Badminton-Capps
Email: enquiries@bususers.org
Telephone: 0300 111 0001