

Date 14 September 2017

Response to Staffordshire 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
- 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
- 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.
- 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**

Bus Users has gained knowledge and insight through talking to Staffordshire County Council bus users regarding the effects of the loss of bus services on some communities and would be happy to share this learning with Staffordshire County Council officers and offer some advice on how best to mitigate the effects of the proposed cuts.

Whilst Bus Users is aware that Staffordshire County Council is using this consultation to plan for the future, we hope that the local authority will also be conscious of any changes to the commercial network in the meantime. Furthermore, changes to schools admissions procedures, permissions granted for new developments, changes to hospital specialisms and so on will all need to factor in public transport options.

¹ Transport Statistics Great Britain

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 Staffordshire 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.

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. It has been acknowledged by the council, 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.

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 we welcome any proposal to open up school services to the wider community. However, it could be that this alone may not provide a secure and consistent enough option for passengers in rural communities to use to access work, unless they are employees of a local school. We urge you to consider ways to lengthen the time available for the buses to run services, so that more people can use the bus and create a commercial need to run limited services in school holidays.

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.

² Transport Statistics Great Britain

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 damaging 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.

Whilst the council has had some success in encouraging operators to take on services which were previously deemed uncommercial, we would strongly encourage services to be monitored to ensure communities do not become cut off.

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 struggle to attend 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. Passengers in Ipstone explained how they depended on bus services to get them to appointments at Royal Stoke Hospital as well GP and dentist appointments in Cheadle and Leek, which they will not be able to travel to if proposed cuts are made.

If services are lost, many individuals will be forced to look for alternatives including Dial-a-ride. 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 Dial-a-ride schemes make a valuable contribution to the overall transport plan, they cannot be expected to meet all the needs of residents or be presented as an "either/or" offer.

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.

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

It should also be highlighted that the Department for Transport is currently reviewing section 19 and 22 permits. This could have a massive impact on the community transport market, resulting in some providers withdrawing services and passengers experiencing a loss of access to transport which was their only access to independent travel.

Our research suggests that people would like more money provided to local bus routes, but not to the detriment of existing dial-a-ride services. Whilst community transport can be perceived as far less convenient and does not go where people necessarily want to travel, residents we spoke to do not want to lose what they have. 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

Sample comments from our research

- I have Arthritis in both knees. We live in Foxt and we would be totally stranded if current services were cut. Our nearest bus would be 32, which is a two mile walk for me. My daughter is 22yrs of age and has learning difficulties and uses the bus to get to college and I have two sons one doing Voluntary work to get experience in the workplace to get a job. He relies on the bus service to get to job interviews etc. If this bus stopped my son would have to leave home at 6am daily to walk the two miles to get daughter to college in Leek plus same in the afternoon. I just don't know how we would cope and manage. I 'm worried sick what might happen.
- My family live in Ipstones, I don't drive wouldn't see my family so often. Residents in Foxt & Whiston will be stranded without the bus. Nearest would be Kingsley Holt to Cheadle which is at least a 2 hour walk. People couldn't get to Doctors. For those in Foxt & Whiston nearest shop is Cheadle or Ipstones which is too far to walk.
- Route 109, Leek – Macclesfield use this service for shopping and getting to Doctors appts. Would be totally stuck without it. Would have to walk over a mile with walking stick which is impossible live on quite a steep hill.
- Route 116: I live alone in Cheddleton, I don't drive and would be totally stuck without bus service. This bus saved my life and sanity when my husband died. I was so depressed I've met many new friends on this bus, we all 'muck in' together and help each other. This a vibrant community on wheels especially on Market day.
- I live in Cresswell, life would be difficult, I would be stuck in having to rely on my family to help with shopping, my children don't live locally so I would be well and truly stuck in four walls' especially in the winter. My Dr is in Cheadle no direct bus there from Cresswell so have to get taxi costing £20 stands to sense if bus goes taxi companies will increase their fares.

PLEASE NOTE: Bus Users would be happy to discuss our views and findings share our research with Staffordshire County Council officers and, if requested, offer some advice on how best to mitigate the effects of any cuts that do go ahead.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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