



Wiltshire Council Public Transport Policy

August 2023

Wiltshire Council

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Foreword

Good public transport links are vital for the success and prosperity of Wiltshire's communities, allowing access to our towns and city, schools and colleges and places of work and leisure. They also help support our Business Plan goals for vibrant, well-connected communities and help us in meeting our climate change objectives, by supporting both the decarbonisation of existing transport and increased use of public transport options.

Whilst the Wiltshire bus service network has remained similar in structure for some years, the market for bus travel has changed significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hybrid working practices have affected the demand for travel at peak times, while bus use by concessionary pass holders remains below pre-Covid levels, which has affected the demand for off-peak travel. These significant changes mean a review is necessary to assess if the bus service network is now fit for purpose.

The Council has prepared this revised public transport policy to ensure that we continue to meet our statutory duties whilst delivering value for money public transport services for Wiltshire residents, in line with the objectives of our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Our aim is to have a revised policy and a re-evaluated network in place next year. Your input is essential to inform our final approach.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Wiltshire Council ('the Council') recognises the essential role public transport plays in enabling all sectors of society to access jobs, education, healthcare and other facilities and services, as well as reducing congestion and improving air quality in our towns and cities.
- 1.2 This document, which has been prepared in response to the priorities set out in the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan, sets out the overall Policy for the Council in relation to public transport. The Policy is in line with the Council's Business Plan outlined in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 below.
- 1.3 The overall aim of this Policy is to provide a framework within which evidence-led decisions can be made regarding investment in public transport to:
 - ensure that residents in Wiltshire can access the facilities and services which enable them to enjoy a good quality of life, in support of sustainable economic growth
 - encourage residents to choose public transport for journeys to and from work
 - enable visitors to explore the many attractions that the beautiful county has to offer, without the need to rely on travelling by private car
- 1.4 This Policy will, once adopted, replace the Public Transport Strategy contained within the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP3), which itself will be superseded by LTP4 in the coming months.
- 1.5 The Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and we committed to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030. Our Climate Strategy highlights transport, including a shift to more sustainable modes of travel, as important in meeting the county's net zero ambitions.
- 1.6 The Policy outlines our principles for promoting and supporting public transport in all its forms across the County.

2. National Context

- 2.1 The Public Transport Policy reflects a range of national strategies:

National Bus Strategy 2021

- 2.2 In March 2021 the UK Government published the National Bus Strategy (NBS)¹ 'Bus Back Better', which outlined long-term ambitions for the bus industry in the wake of challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBS set out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.
- 2.3 The NBS outlined the need for closer partnership working between each Local Transport Authority and the bus operators in its area, including on infrastructure, network development, marketing and branding.
- 2.4 In accordance with the NBS, the Council prepared a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for the county and has established an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with local bus operators which is working hard to improve bus services and enhance infrastructure in the county. The Enhanced Partnership made an Enhanced Partnership Plan in March 2022 which outlined how the partners will work together to improve public transport in Wiltshire.
- 2.5 Although the Council was not successful in securing funding from the original BSIP awards, it was allocated funding via the Government's 'BSIP Plus' funding round which was announced in May 2023. This funding will assist us to deliver more of the elements contained in the BSIP whilst continuing to support bus services in the county. The Enhanced Partnership will review its Enhanced Partnership Plan to improve its chances of securing funding in future funding rounds.

Decarbonising Transport – A Better, Greener Britain

- 2.6 In July 2021, the Department for Transport also set out its ambitions to decarbonise the nation's transport in its Transport Decarbonisation Plan (TDP)². The TDP set out what government, business and society needs to do to reduce transport emissions in order to achieve net zero emissions across all transport modes by 2050.
- 2.7 The TDP recognised the role of public transport to help achieve this net zero target. The first of the Plan's six strategic priorities focusses on 'accelerating modal shift to public and active transport'.
- 2.8 This Public Transport Policy aims to address some of our key carbon neutral goals, focussing on vehicle emissions and modal shift towards public transport.

¹ Bus back better - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² Transport decarbonisation plan - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Inclusive Transport Strategy

- 2.9 Published in 2018, this Strategy set out the Government's plans to make the country's transport system more inclusive and to make travel easier for disabled people³. By focussing on the inclusion of disabled people, many of the improvements will also benefit other travellers.

Future of Mobility – Urban Strategy

- 2.10 Published in March 2019, the UK Government's 'Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy' outlined the government's approach to maximising the benefits from transport innovation in cities and towns. It set out the principles that will guide government's response to emerging transport technologies and business models⁴.

Rural Mobility Strategy

- 2.11 The Department for Transport launched a call for evidence in late 2020 to inform the preparation of a future of mobility strategy for rural areas⁵. Although the strategy has yet to be published, the evidence identified digital demand responsive transport (DDRT) as a means of catering for the needs of areas where a viable commercial model for a transport network may not exist⁶. This Public Transport Policy recognises the roll of DDRT in addressing the access challenges of some of its more rural areas.

Unleashing Rural Opportunity

- 2.12 In June 2023, the UK Government released a policy paper entitled 'Unleashing Rural Opportunity' to outline how it plans to support growth and prosperity in rural areas. One of the areas outlined for action in the paper is 'building connections through improved digital connectivity and transport options'. The paper highlights the aim to improve access to public transport in rural areas and refers to a forthcoming 'Future of Transport Rural Strategy' which will set out principles to support new innovative technologies in improving access to services, tackle isolation and increase access to jobs in rural and remote areas. We will ensure that the principles in the Rural Transport Strategy are reflected in our proposals to improve access for rural communities.

³ The Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁴ Future of mobility: urban strategy - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁵ Future of Transport: rural strategy – call for evidence - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁶ Future of Transport: Rural Strategy Call for Evidence (publishing.service.gov.uk)

3. Local Policy Context

- 3.1 This Public Transport Policy is designed to contribute to delivering a number of the Council's objectives:

Wiltshire Council Business Plan

- 3.2 The mission of the Council's Business Plan⁷ is to ensure:

- **Empowered People** - the people of Wiltshire are empowered to live full, healthy and enriched lives
- **Resilient Society** – our communities continue to be beautiful and exciting places to live
- **Thriving Economy** – our local economy thrives and is supported by a skilled workforce
- **Sustainable Environment** - We lead the way in how councils and counties mitigate the climate challenges ahead

- 3.3 Public transport has a key role to play achieving each of these four objectives of the Business Plan:

- **Empowered People** – public transport enables people to access the facilities and services that enable them to lead a full life
- **Resilient Society** – communities that are supported by reliable public transport service are likely to be more inclusive and balanced, with all members able to fully participate
- **Thriving Economy** – public transport assists people to access jobs and training opportunities within and beyond the county boundary, enabling them to contribute to the local and regional economy
- **Sustainable Environment** – good quality public transport contributes to reducing the number of cars on the road and emissions will continue to fall as older buses are replaced with low and ultimately zero-emission models

Wiltshire Climate Strategy

- 3.4 The Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and committed to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030. Our Climate Strategy (2022 - 2027)⁸ highlights transport, including public transport, as essential in meeting the county's net zero ambitions. The key objectives in relation to public transport are:

- To achieve a transport system in Wiltshire that has zero carbon emissions, acknowledging the different solutions for our towns and city versus rural villages

⁷ [BusinessPlan.pdf \(wiltshire.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Wiltshire_Council_Climate_Strategy_2022.pdf](#)

- Creating the infrastructure for increased walking, cycling, shared and public transport and use of alternative fuels, including electric vehicle charging points
- Achieving high-quality public transport and transport hubs that offer a pleasant and convenient way to get around, and seamless combined journeys

3.5 These climate objectives have informed this Public Transport Policy.

Air Quality Strategy

3.6 Covering the period 2019 – 2024, the Air Quality Strategy⁹ focusses on improving air quality in Wiltshire, as well as seeking to prevent any future deterioration and encourage interventions that will reduce nitrogen dioxide and fine particulates across the county.

3.7 There are currently eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Wiltshire. Three are in Salisbury and the others are one each in Bradford on Avon, Calne, Devizes, Marlborough and Westbury.

3.8 This Public Transport Policy will help to achieve air quality improvements by delivering attractive public transport services that offer a viable alternative to travel by car. The increased use of low and zero-emission buses in the county will also help to improve air quality.

Local Transport Plan (LTP3)

3.9 The long-term transport vision as set out in LTP3 (2011 – 2026) is:

To develop a transport system which helps support economic growth across Wiltshire's communities, giving choice and opportunity for people to safely access essential services. Transport solutions will be sensitive to the built and natural environment, with a particular emphasis on the need to reduce carbon emissions

3.10 Although LTP3 will be replaced by LTP4, the principles of access to essential services and the need for carbon emission reductions remain relevant.

3.11 In addition, our vision for 2026 in the Public Transport Strategy contained within LTP3 is for:

a public transport system that provides the level of access that people across the county need in order to allow them to lead satisfying and fulfilling lives, and that in and between the main centres of population provides an attractive alternative to the private car that is able to make a major contribution to achieving sustainable transport objectives

⁹ Appendix 1 Wiltshire Air Quality Strategy Document.pdf

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

3.12 Published in 2021, the BSIP for Wiltshire has a clear vision:

With investment and a process of positive, sustained improvements in our bus services, infrastructure, information and ticketing offer, we aim to achieve a virtuous circle of investment and passenger growth. We recognise that increasing bus use for everyday journeys will contribute to achieving a wide range of our policy objectives, such as decarbonising transport, reducing inequalities and using our transport network and road-space much more efficiently.

3.13 The BSIP is consistent with LTP3 and will be reflected in the emerging LTP4. This Policy supports how we will work through the Enhanced Partnership to deliver on the priorities of local residents and businesses to encourage more use of the bus¹⁰:

- More frequent buses
- Real time bus information at bus stops
- Buses in the evenings

3.14 The BSIP outlines the Enhanced Partnership's intention to work to improve bus service provision in line with a priority route hierarchy, based on frequency and demand, of:

- Superbus routes, including routes in Salisbury
- Interurban routes
- Town networks
- Rural routes

3.15 'Superbus' is the name given to the network of key routes in the county which the Council intends to prioritise for improvement, by enhancing service frequencies and upgrading infrastructure in order to grow patronage and enhance the customer experience.

¹⁰ As part of the public consultation undertaken in advance of preparation of the BSIP, respondents were asked: 'What would encourage you to use the bus?'

4. Setting the Scene

- 4.1 The latest Census showed that in 2021, the population of Wiltshire was 510,300 - an increase of 8.4% from 470,981 in 2011¹¹. Wiltshire is a predominantly rural county, with a population density less than half the national average. 47.5% of residents live in rural areas compared with 17.1% across England as a whole. Beyond the rural centre of the county, Wiltshire is home to a large number of urban areas. There are 13 settlements with a population of more than 10,000 people. Salisbury is the largest city in Wiltshire (home to just over 46,000 people), followed by the towns of Trowbridge (45,000) and Chippenham (35,000)¹².
- 4.2 Although the Wiltshire bus service network has remained similar in structure for some years, the market for bus travel has changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, there were 12.9 passenger journeys made on local bus services per head of population in the county, compared to 19.7 in 2018/19¹³. The emergence of hybrid working policies has affected the demand for travel at peak times¹⁴, while concessionary travel remains well below pre-Covid levels, affecting demand for off-peak travel.
- 4.3 Pre-Covid, the majority of daytime bus services in the Salisbury area, were run with a view to making a profit. Services within the city generally run every 15–30-minutes during the day. At night and on Sundays these services only run once per hour and are mostly financially supported by the Council.
- 4.4 Outside the Salisbury area, only 30% of the bus network is run commercially (with a view to making a profit) and, in many cases, the profitability of the service is heavily influenced by the carriage of school and college pupils. On supported services (those that are financially supported by the Council), buses tend to operate hourly or less, which is not sufficient to attract mode shift. Some services run less often at weekends, with very few services outside Salisbury operating in the county on Sundays.
- 4.5 The Council financially supports the remaining 70% of the bus services in the county at a cost of £5.75m per year¹⁵. Some services are fully supported by the Council, others are partially supported. There is concern among bus operators that services which were profitable before Covid may not return to profitability, which could place further pressure on the Council's limited bus budget.
- 4.6 Against the backdrop of increasing demand for public funding, the Council is committed to facilitating and supporting a mix of public transport services which reflects the differing geographies of the county and offers an attractive alternative to the private car.

¹¹ 2021 Census - Wiltshire Council

¹² [Wiltshire_and_Swindon_Needs_Analysis_2021_OCSI_WCF.pdf \(wiltshirecf.org.uk\)](#)

¹³ [bus01.ods \(live.com\)](#)

¹⁴ [Our changing travel – how people's travel choices are changing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ 2022/23 figures

Bus operations in Wiltshire

- 4.7 Four main bus operators provide commercial services in Wiltshire:
- Go South Coast (operating mainly as Salisbury Reds in South & East Wiltshire)
 - Stagecoach West (North and East Wiltshire)
 - Faresaver (an independent operator in West/North Wiltshire)
 - First which operates between Bath and West Wiltshire
- 4.8 These operators also operate services that are financially supported by the Council in the same areas, along with several other smaller bus operators and community transport providers in Wiltshire.

Demand Responsive Transport

- 4.9 Demand Responsive Transport or 'DRT' is the collective name for a range of bus and taxi services which operate in response to bookings received. Services may operate on a fully-flexible basis without any timetable or there may be timetabled services which will deviate off route in response to bookings. Services operate using physical bus stops or 'virtual' bus stops – agreed stopping points where there is no formal bus stop. A door-to-door service would only be offered to passengers with mobility difficulties. Historically, 'Connect2Wiltshire' was the name for these types of bookable bus and taxi service in Wiltshire. 'Wiltshire Connect' is the new name for dynamic DRT (DDRT) in the county, whereby bookings may be made in advance and in real time. Services operate in several rural areas, including Mere, the Vale of Pewsey and the Woodford Valley. Further information about these services is available at www.wiltshireconnect.co.uk
- 4.10 The Council was successful in securing funding from the Department for Transport's Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) to enhance the DRT service and vehicles deployed in the Vale of Pewsey.

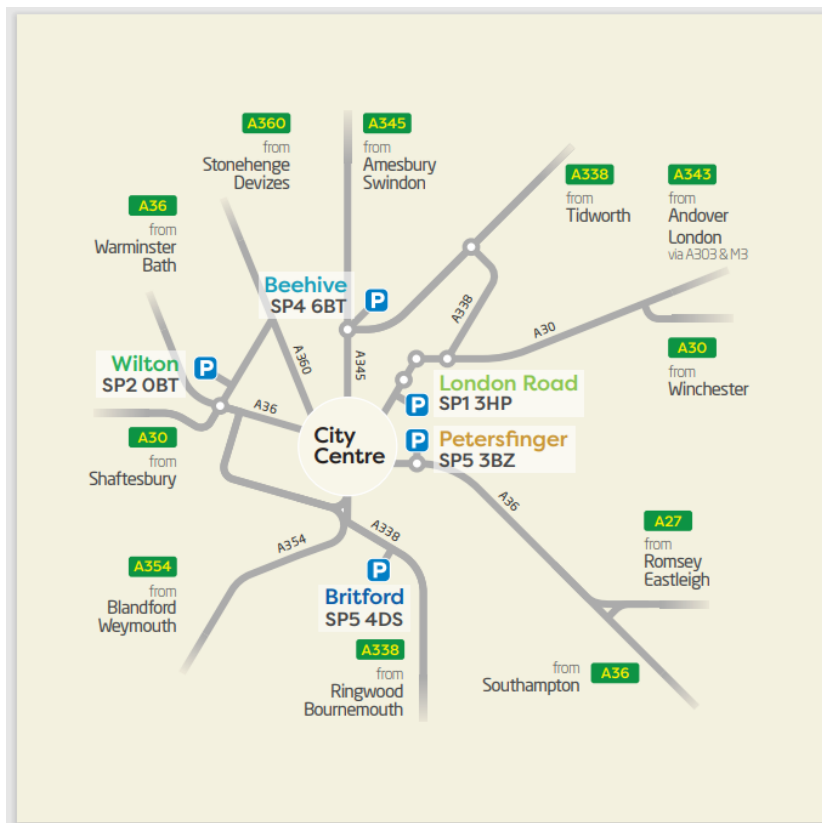
Park & Ride

- 4.11 Salisbury is the only settlement in the county served by Park & Ride services. There are five Park & Ride sites on the outskirts of the city (see Figure 4-1¹⁶), three of which – Beehive, London Road and Petersfinger - are owned by the Council. The sites at Britford and Wilton are leased until 2063. Beehive, London Road and the Wilton site form part of the existing commercial bus network in Salisbury. At Britford and Petersfinger there is a dedicated bus service for the sites. All sites permit members of the public to travel to Salisbury by car, park for free in secure car parks and complete their journey into the city centre by bus.
- 4.12 The bus contract for the Park & Ride sites is currently held by Go South Coast (Salisbury Reds). Since the opening of the first site in 2001, the Park & Ride service

¹⁶ Salisbury Park&Ride Services - Salisbury Reds

has always required subsidy from the Council. Before the Covid pandemic, at four of the sites (excluding Petersfinger), the Park and Ride bus service ran approximately every 12-15 minutes for most of the day, Monday to Saturday. However, due to Covid and significant changes to working and leisure patterns, passenger numbers have remained well below pre-Covid levels. In addition, services have been running to a reduced 30-minute frequency, mainly due to bus driver shortages – an issue which is affecting bus services both locally and nationally.

Figure 4-1 Park & Ride sites in Salisbury



Community Transport

- 4.13 Community Transport is the name given to any type of transport run on a not-for-profit basis to assist people who cannot access private or public transport, owing to lack of available public transport, health, disability or mobility problems, cost factors and other personal reasons. Community First runs 42 link schemes and 21 local minibuses across Wiltshire and Swindon, with 2,000 volunteers involved in supporting the service.
- 4.14 Link schemes are volunteer-led services which aim to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged, elderly or disabled people by helping them access important local services including medical appointments. As the transport service is provided by volunteers using their own cars, passengers are invited to give a donation to cover the

cost of running the service. Local Link Schemes are run by a group of volunteers managed by a Link Coordinator who helps to connect passengers with volunteers.

- 4.15 Community Minibus Groups in Wiltshire and Swindon run transport services for the benefit of the local community on a not-for-profit basis. The majority of vehicles are wheelchair accessible and offer regular day trips or routes at affordable rates. Many Community Minibus Groups are registered charities and mostly volunteer-led, but some use a mixture of paid and volunteer drivers.
- 4.16 Community First is supported by a small grant provided by the Council each year. These schemes are mainly aimed at elderly and less mobile residents who would struggle to use conventional public transport services.

5. Purpose and Scope of Draft Policy

- 5.1 The draft Policy sets out the objectives and supporting principles that guide the Council's support for public transport services in Wiltshire.
- 5.2 The Policy focusses on road-based public transport services operating in Wiltshire. These include conventional 'big bus' services and other public transport solutions using a range of smaller vehicles. The Policy excludes rail (other than connectivity to rail stations); commercial taxis and private hire services; dedicated home to school provision (services supported by the Council where there is no option for students to be carried on the local bus network); and specialist transport services for education and social care purposes.

Statutory duties

- 5.3 The Policy meets the statutory duties placed on the Council by the Transport Act (1985), which made bus service operation a profit-driven business. The 1985 Act requires the Council to have regard to the needs of its residents. The Council may decide to step in to support services, however, the duty is to consider need, not to support services. The Act also includes a specific requirement to consider the needs of older and disabled people, with powers to provide funding for service provision such as Community Transport.
- 5.4 The Transport Act 2000 (amended in 2008) introduced the means for local authorities and bus operators to enter into bus quality partnerships. It also required authorities to consult on, and determine, what local bus information should be made available to the public and the way in which it should be made available. Where satisfactory arrangements for information provision cannot be made with operators, authorities are required to make information available.
- 5.5 The Bus Services Act (2017) provided additional powers enabling us to form a formal partnership with bus operators to improve transport networks, as well as offering the option to pursue franchising. The Council formed an Enhanced Partnership in April 2022 to enable us to deliver on the priorities contained within the BSIP, subject to funding.

6. Policies and Links to Business Plan

6.1 Based on feedback from local stakeholders and good practice in the delivery of public transport services, the following policies aim to improve public transport provision in the county and deliver on the Council’s strategic objectives as outlined in its Business Plan, alongside its BSIP priorities.

Policies	Links to Business Plan Mission
<p>P01 The Council will encourage public transport operators to meet the access needs of the county on a commercial basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People - increased awareness will encourage more use of bus services, enabling people to access jobs, training, education, health and other facilities and services
<p>P02 The Council will encourage residents and visitors to use public transport whenever possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Community – residents will be able to make informed decisions about how they travel, rather than feel that they have to use a car for all journeys • Sustainable Environment – fewer cars on the road will have positive benefits for air quality and contribute towards the council’s net zero targets • Sustainable Environment – tourists making informed travel choices will have a less damaging impact on the county’s air quality
<p>P03 The Council will work to ensure that long-term, cost-effective access by public transport is planned in to new developments and financial contributions are secured from developers to support that provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thriving Economy – residents and employees of new developments will be able to access jobs, training, education, health and other facilities and services by means other than a car • Sustainable Environment – new developments will be better connected to the local area, minimising the number of car journeys generated

<p>P04 – The Council will consider the role of demand responsive transport services, financially supporting and promoting them as appropriate to complement mainline public transport services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People – people will be able to travel at times to suit them • Resilient Society – communities that may not have had a bus service will have more choice about how they travel • Thriving Economy – more connected communities will be better able to access jobs, training, education health and other essential services
<p>P05 –The Council will work with bus operators to ensure that public transport information is up to date, clear and accurate, and available via a wide range of printed and digital sources, including the Council's sustainable travel website www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People – people will be able to make informed decisions about how they travel before they begin a journey, as well as having reassurance during a journey
<p>P06 – The Council will explore options for implementing high frequency, high quality bus services on key corridors in the county</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People – people are more likely to use buses which are frequent and reliable • Resilient Society – people will be able to make decisions about how they travel to access essential facilities and services based on the availability of high frequency, high quality bus services • Thriving Economy – people will have better access to employment and training opportunities
<p>P07 - The Council will work to improve interchange between transport modes (such as rail and bus) to increase travel by public transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Society - people will be able to complete journeys by public transport without the need for a car • Thriving Economy – people will have access to a wider range of employment opportunities • Sustainable Environment – better interchange will result in fewer cars on the county's roads
<p>P08 – The Council will encourage the use of low and zero emission vehicles on commercial public transport services (and move towards low emission vehicles on supported services) to improve air quality across the county</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Environment – fewer diesel buses on the road will have positive benefits for air quality and contribute to the council's net zero targets

<p>P09 The Council will promote concessionary travel to encourage elderly and disabled customers to access local facilities and services by bus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People – concessionary travellers will be able to lead a full life by using the bus to access local facilities and services • Thriving Economy – more concessionary travellers will assist operators to continue to provide commercial bus services as well as support the local businesses that those passengers frequent
<p>P10 Where residents are not able to access public transport services, the Council will champion independent living among residents by encouraging use of community transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered People – all residents will be able to access the facilities and services they need, including those who are less mobile • Resilient Society – community transport will provide a safety net to enable people to live independently for longer
<p>P11 The Council will prioritise support for public transport which provides access to employment and training, education, essential shopping and healthcare</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thriving Economy – people will have access to a wider range of employment opportunities • Sustainable Environment – fewer people commuting by car at peak times will have positive benefits for air quality and contribute towards the council's net zero targets • Empowered People – school pupils will learn independence skills by travelling by bus • Resilient Society – school pupils who travel by bus are more likely to use the bus outside of school and become bus-using adults • Resilient Society – residents will be able to retain their independence and have access to services outside of the home
<p>P12 The Council will ensure that the public transport it supports offers value for money for the county's taxpayers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Society – the Council will ensure that the services that it supports meet its key objectives and aspirations for the county • Sustainable Environment – the Council will support bus services where there is sufficient demand and consider alternative provision in areas where demand is lower to avoid underuse of vehicles

P13 The Council will ensure that cross-boundary services form an important element of the county's public transport network

- Thriving Economy – the Council will support cross-boundary services as appropriate to extend Wiltshire's employment market beyond the county boundary

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