

**Child & Young Person Bus Fares and Public Transport in Wiltshire**

**Purpose of Report**

1. Due to the Wiltshire Assembly of Youth (WAY) raising concerns about youth travel across Wiltshire, this short paper will address some of the specific points highlighted around fares and Wiltshire Council's overall approach to public transport.

**Background**

2. Bus services in the UK operate under the provisions of the Transport Act 1985 which is based upon the principle of the free market where businesses will seek to maximise the opportunities open to them, including competing with other bus companies. These bus services are known as **commercial services** and the bus company takes all the financial risk (and profit) involved in running them. About 50% of bus services in Wiltshire are commercial.
3. When producing the Act, Government recognized that there would be insufficient demand for some bus services to be commercial, so allowed local councils to procure bus services, which were deemed socially necessary. These bus services are known as **supported services**. They could be whole routes in less busy areas, or journeys at certain times of day (evenings and Sundays usually) on routes which are commercial at other times. About 50% of bus services in Wiltshire are supported, at a cost of £5 million per year.

**Main Considerations for the Council**

Child/Young Person Fares

4. The availability of discounted fares for children and young people must be viewed against the background that bus services are commercial. Therefore, the adult single fare should be considered as the standard fare. But bus companies are businesses just like any other, so they see a marketing opportunity to offer discounts on some types of tickets. A return bus ticket is similar to a "buy one, get one half price" type offer, and just like "buy one get one half price type" offers, some bus companies offer return tickets whilst others do not. Each will have its own reasons for its decision.

5. Many bus companies also see a commercial advantage to offering a reduced rate for children and young people. In recent years the age at which the adult fare is payable has seen an upward trend as bus companies seek to attract young adults to use their services rather than them getting a car at the first opportunity.
6. The geography of Wiltshire, with settlements spread around Salisbury Plain, has resulted in there being no dominant bus company in the county. This means that not only the age at which adult fares become payable varies, but so too does the level of discount offered. Each bus company will have its own reasons for its decisions, just as one supermarket might choose to price an item differently to another. Where Wiltshire Council supports a few journeys on an otherwise commercial route, the fares follow the policy of the company which runs the commercial journeys. However, when all journeys on a route are supported, then fares are in line with the Terms and Conditions of our contract. This means that the majority of the supported bus network have child/young person fares available to 5–17 year old's (i.e. up until the day before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday).

#### Season and Multi-Journey Tickets

7. Bus companies may choose to offer season tickets, and/or multi-journey tickets on their services. These might be offered between two specific points, or across the whole of their network, or just a part of it. Sometimes these tickets will be offered with a child/young person rate, sometimes not. It is the commercial decision of the bus company. Some will view a child/young person fare as a “special offer” and will also view a season/multi-journey ticket as a special offer and, in line with many shops, will not allow two “special offers” on the same base price. Other bus companies view their market differently and price their service accordingly, which may mean that child/young person rate return tickets work out cheaper than a season ticket which is based on the full adult single fare.

#### Geographic Coverage and Length of Day of Wiltshire's Bus Network

8. Overall, Wiltshire has a very good bus network, both in terms of geographic coverage, and its frequency. This is the result of many years of proactive work with the bus companies by the Council's Passenger Transport Unit. It has resulted in a strong commercial bus network, which is complimented by the supported bus network. Unlike many areas nationally, Wiltshire Council has chosen to keep funding for supported bus services at an acceptable level, enabling it to keep services and journeys running in locations and at times which would not be served in many other local authority areas. This then supports those in our community who rely on access to essential services, such as shops, doctors or hospital appointments.

#### Lack of Capacity at Peak Times

9. Inevitably, there are some journeys on some bus routes which are very popular, making the buses very busy. Where the demand comes from a number of traffic generators (i.e. more than one school) the bus company will often carefully schedule the journeys to spread the load across two buses. This might result in one group of passengers “just missing” one bus and having to wait for the next, but will allow another group to board a bus which would otherwise be very busy and risk leaving people behind.

10. There are often differing opinions as to what constitutes a “full bus”. For some it would mean not being able to get a double seat for themselves, for some it would be to get a seat, while for others it would be to get on the bus without exceeding the authorised capacity.
11. Simply running another bus at peak times is not an option. On current figures, a 30-seat single deck bus costs about £200,000 a year to run, on a Monday to Saturday bus service, so it must bring in revenue far in excess of that which cant be collected by running for half an hour at each end of the day. Wiltshire is an area of almost full employment and bus companies find it hard to attract drivers, which is an additional constraint when planning bus services. In many ways, a lack of capacity at peak times and the lack of discounts for students travelling to sixth form/college are the opposite ends of the same problem.

## **Proposal**

12. This report responds to the issues raised by representatives of WAY; however, a more detailed account on fares and potential options for youth travel has not been able to be considered in the short timescale since the issue was raised.
13. Therefore, it is proposed that officers will:
  - Complete a more detailed analysis of what child / youth fare options are available and clarify the position across Wiltshire
  - Report on what safe alternatives there are to public transport.

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:**

None

## **Appendices**

None