

## Councillors Briefing Note

No. 295

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### **Public Transport review - members briefing note for full council on the 10th May**

#### **Purpose of this briefing note**

To inform members about the current position of the review of public transport, in preparation for Full Council, where a debate will be held on the Salisbury Journal's petition Stop Bus Cuts [STOP BUS CUTS](#), which has secured over 6,000 online and paper signatures.

#### **Background to Public Transport in Wiltshire**

Roughly 50% of the bus mileage that operates in the county is operated on a commercial basis with no funding from the Council, while the other 50% is not considered by the operators to be commercially viable and is funded by and operated under contract to Wiltshire Council. In the 2014/15 financial year, Wiltshire Council spent £4.653 million on supported bus services (including demand responsive services but excluding the Salisbury Park & Ride), plus a further £984,500 of funding provided by central government to replace the Bus Service Operators Grant that they used to pay direct to the operators.

The largest proportion of spend (42% of the total) is on regular rural services. These typically operate between two market towns (e.g. Malmesbury – Cirencester, Shaftesbury - Salisbury), although their main function is to provide a service from the intermediate villages to either or both of the two towns. They currently provide at least 4 journeys every weekday in each direction, often running two hourly or sometimes more often in each direction.

Town services (for example in Devizes, Trowbridge, Melksham, Warminster etc.) account for the next highest proportion of spend (20% of the total), followed by non-commercial strategic network services, evening services, infrequent rural services (mainly shoppers buses running only on certain days of the week), and Sunday services in that order.

Support per passenger journey ranges from 0.19pence per passenger trip to £17.57 per passenger trip, but overall the average is £1.97 per passenger trip, with rural services generally costing more in relation to the number of passenger trips, reflecting both the lower population density of the areas served and the less frequent (and therefore less attractive) service offered. The Local Transport Plan states that Wiltshire should, unless there are extenuating circumstances, support up to £3.50 per passenger trip.

In addition to the costs to the public transport budget identified above, many supported bus services also either carry school or college students who are entitled to free transport, or are operationally linked to school or college transport journeys. The costs of providing this transport are charged to the education transport budget, and this integration of transport and the associated sharing of costs plays a vital role in reducing the cost of providing the public bus service. In the same way, entitled school and college students are also allocated to many commercial bus routes and this helps to support their viability.

In 2014/15 the council also spent £381,600 on support for community and voluntary transport. This provided grants to support the operation of existing community transport minibuses, voluntary car and Link schemes, and also funding for staff in the voluntary sector who work with community groups to support and maintain their activities and to assist them to expand. Most of the community minibus schemes provide services for particular client groups, particularly elderly or disabled people who are unable to use ordinary bus services, although some also run community bus services open to the general public. The Link schemes, of which there are currently over 40 covering 98% of rural addresses in the county provide transport for essential journeys that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to make.

### **Local authority supported bus services in a national context**

Due to a significant reduction in government spending and the discretionary nature of public transport, there has been a widespread reduction in supported public transport throughout England in the past 3 to 4 years. These bus service reductions are set to continue for many local authorities.

Wiltshire has made some service reductions, but on the whole has largely protected its public transport network in line with its current Local Transport Plan. There is also no plan to make any bus service reductions in the 2016/17 financial year.

According to The [Campaign for Better Transport](#):

- 64 per cent of jobseekers either have no access to a vehicle or cannot drive
- Young people are amongst the biggest users of bus services , whilst 40 per cent of people over 60 use the bus at least once a week
- Passenger cars produce nearly 60 per cent of all CO2 emissions from road transport in the UK, compared with just 5 per cent from buses
- If drivers switched just one in twenty five of their car journeys to bus or coach, it would mean one billion fewer car journeys per year
- Every £1 of public investment in buses provides between £3 and £5 of wider benefits
- Bus commuters generate £64 billion in economic output every year

Some other rural authorities such as Devon and Cornwall are yet to make any real significant reductions to public transport, as they have prioritised this, recognising the strategic importance of public transport for both the economy and social / health care reasons.

### **Pre Consultation**

As a first step in the review, a pre-consultation scoping paper, associated documents and questionnaire was developed to provide key stakeholders and partners with an overview of passenger transport, and an opportunity to shape the scope of the review. The paper, associated documents and questionnaire were made available via the council's consultation portal between 8th July and 31st August 2015. Five workshops were undertaken during the pre-consultation phase with key stakeholder groups, to discuss the scoping paper, and to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to communicate their priorities, ideas, and concerns. Discussions were also held with key Wiltshire Council services and bus operators.

Some 160 questionnaires were returned and a bus survey was provided by Christian Malford Parish Council. Other non-questionnaire responses were also received from various groups. A paper, setting out all the questionnaire comments received along with the council's responses was posted on the council's LTP3 webpage in October 2015.

In brief summary, the key points that came out of the pre-consultation exercise are as follows:

- The overall feedback highlighted the importance of bus services to users, communities and public sector service providers.
- Community transport will not be able to provide transport alternatives on any significant scale.
- There is little scope to make subsidised bus services commercial.
- There were no new 'big ideas' suggested that would make significant financial savings within the necessary timeframe.
- There is limited potential for further savings in other areas of the Council's public transport budgets.

### **Public consultation exercise**

Based on the pre-consultation findings and in the context of Wiltshire Council's continuing budget pressures and the experience of other councils, officers developed six savings options for supported bus services that were included in a 'Public Consultation Paper' (which also included information on the national and local policy context, relevant research findings (including the extent of bus service cuts in other local authority areas) and current bus service provision in Wiltshire). Questions on the savings options (and other relevant questions) were also included in an associated questionnaire.

It was highlighted in the consultation paper and questionnaire that the consultation was focused on Wiltshire Council supported bus services and *not* commercial bus services. It was also highlighted that the consultation was not a detailed consultation on particular routes, timetables or destinations, and as there would be many combinations of possible supported bus service changes, the council had not yet determined what these changes might be (information on bus services 'at risk' was provided however). Instead, it was made clear that responses to the consultation would help guide the council's subsequent decisions on any supported bus service changes and determine impact and priority of bus usage, as best a questionnaire can do.

The full suite of consultation documents was as follows (all of which were made available on the Wiltshire Council Consultation Portal):

- Public Consultation Paper
- Questionnaire
- Frequently Asked Questions paper
- LTP Public Transport Strategy (current version)
- Bus Services that operate with funding from Wiltshire Council (as at December 2015)
- Bus Service Maps
- Equality Evidence Analysis Document
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
- Habitat Regulation Assessment.

The public consultation exercise was undertaken from 11 January 2016 to 4 April 2016 (the Strategic Environmental Assessment being available from 15 February 2016 to 4 April 2016). A variety of means were used to inform people of the consultation:

- Wiltshire Council Consultation Portal
- Documents made available in specific libraries
- Questionnaires made available on supported bus services
- Press releases
- Parish newsletters
- Social media promotion
- Area Board 'Chairman's Announcements'
- A featured item on the 'News from Wiltshire' section of the council's website
- Correspondence with Chambers of Commerce
- Correspondence with Salisbury and Chippenham Business Improvement Districts
- Emails sent to some 6,000 Area Board contacts
- Promotion of the consultation by DEVELOP (which supports voluntary and community organisations) and the Wiltshire Forum of Community Area Partnerships
- Included in the November 2014 business newsletter sent by the Economic Development Team to some 2,000 business contacts
- Emails sent to Wiltshire 100 business contacts (107 businesses)
- Emails sent to some 4,000 Leisure Service contacts.

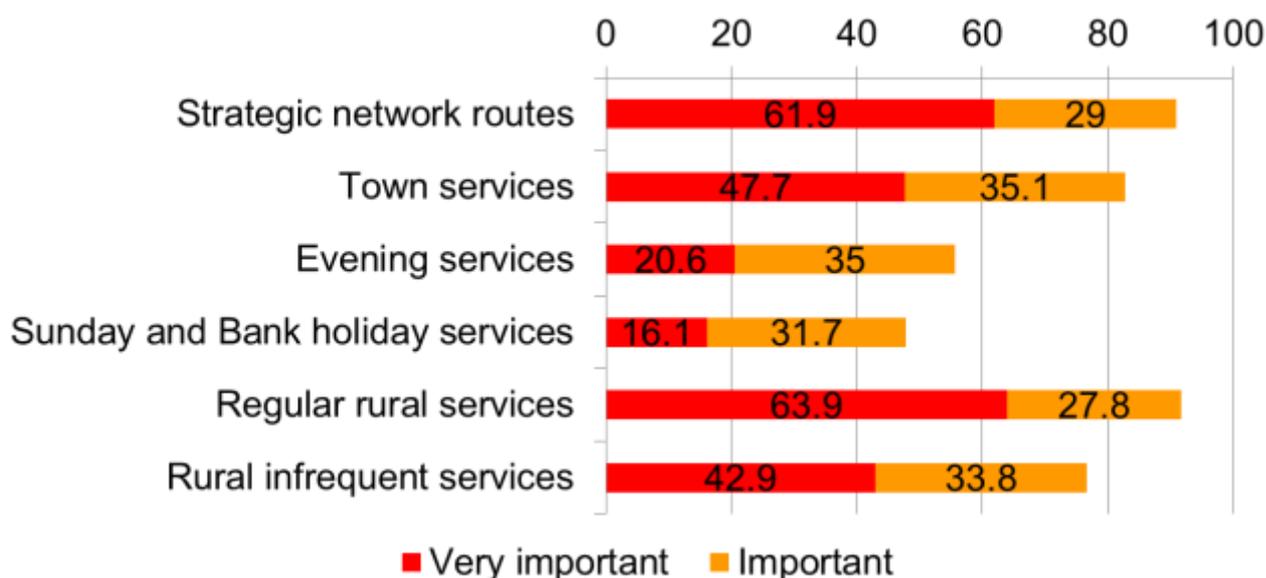
## Emerging Consultation Outcomes

Over 11,000 questionnaires were returned, making it the second largest response to any Wiltshire Council consultation. Due to this significant number, it is not possible to provide the final results at this stage, particularly as there is significant analyses of the free text comments (4,000) received, which are all being read, categorised and sub categorised.

In general, those people who have responded to the questionnaire can be categorised as follows:

- 42% are male 57% female
- 58% of respondents are over 65 years old
- 28% of respondents say they have mobility problems
- 62% of respondents have access to a car but 28% do not
- 64% have a concessionary bus pass

The results very much followed the same line as the outcomes from the pre consultation phase, with the main priority being on rural and strategic network services, so that people / communities do not become isolated. There was less of a priority placed upon on evening's and Sunday services. The table below represents the different types of service that was consulted upon and the priority the respondents placed upon each of them.



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### Option 24/7

Option 24/7 is a community interest group, details of the group can be found at the following link:

<http://option247.uk/index.html>

Their proposal is to franchise bus services in Wiltshire, by using revenue generated from the commercial, profitable bus services (not subsidised or managed by Wiltshire Council), to subsidise the bus services which Wiltshire Council funds. Powers to achieve this already exist in current legislation, but to date no other local authority in the country, including the large metropolitans, where bus usage and profitability, are significantly higher than in Wiltshire have achieved this.

New legislation in the form of the buses bill will likely receive royal ascent in the spring / summer of 2017, which will make it clearer how franchising and enhanced partnership working with bus suppliers and other key stakeholders might look like. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily tie in with the timescales for this review. However, the Option 24/7 should not be discounted and officers will continue to work with representatives of the group to develop the concept. Officers and members have met with representatives of 24/7 on three separate occasions, who have presented their ideas this included a workshop event

### **Future Process**

A paper outlining the results of the consultation will be presented to the Environment and Select Committee on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016 and Cabinet on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016. Following this, it is planned to bring a paper to Cabinet in September 2016 outlining recommendations for the future of public transport provision in Wiltshire. The recommendations will determine how the review should progress. It maybe that further public consultation is required, particularly if more significant bus service reductions are required.

Members will be kept up to date on the progress of the review through overview and scrutiny meetings and further briefing notes, where required.