

BUS USERS' MANIFESTO

The purpose of this manifesto is to provide a template for discussion with Dorset County Council about the types of services they will support in future.

It sets down a number of basic principles applicable to the relationship between the County Council and the Council Tax payers of Dorset in relation to the minimum standards of public transport that need to be provided on strategic routes.

Millions of bus passengers who rely on services outside London have been let down by a lack of competition and the failure of deregulation. They include the poorest fifth of all households, who cannot afford cars and yet who end up taking more taxi journeys each year than any other income group because of the unreliability and high fares of their local buses.

“Greasing the Wheels: Supporting and Improving Britain’s Rail and Bus Services” the recent report from the IPPR think-tank, calls for local transport authorities modelled on Transport for London to be introduced across the country, with powers to introduce more successful London-style bus regulation. We support that call.

Background and overview of transport needs, legislation and options

The problem in Dorset

Rural Dorset contains a number of villages where there are no retail, health or education services. 27% of the population is aged over 65. Key services are provided at the main towns in the county – Dorchester, Blandford, Weymouth, and further afield in Yeovil, Bournemouth, Exeter and Salisbury. Secondary Schools and Colleges of Further Education are also spread over large distances and Job Centres are also mainly located at larger market towns. The distances required to access services make it particularly hard for the vulnerable groups referred to above to access services without a fully-functioning, co-ordinated public transport network.

The de-regulation of bus services means that it is no longer the responsibility of Local Authorities to provide transport – merely to ensure that significant major transport links are maintained by private providers. Local Authorities were tasked to provide subsidy to ensure that such links were maintained in the event of commercial operators failing to provide the services, and to recognise a duty under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 to “*secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider is appropriate to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not, in their view, be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose.*”

We believe that Dorset County Council has signally failed in this duty.

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Research - Andy Pennington. Collation and additional material - Cllr Ros Kayes.

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There is a further problem in Dorset arising from the rural isolation faced by vulnerable groups.

The House of Commons Transport Committee Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, “Passenger transport in isolated communities” makes the following observations:

People who live in isolated communities use passenger transport to access employment, education, training and healthcare. Passenger transport in isolated communities is therefore a concern for not only the Department for Transport (DfT) but other Departments and agencies. The DfT must show strategic leadership in driving joined-up policy making to allow people who live in isolated communities fully to participate in society.

Older people, younger people, unemployed people, people on low incomes and disabled people who live in isolated communities rely on passenger transport and are disproportionately affected by inadequate or reduced services. We conclude that policy makers must take the needs of all those vulnerable groups into account rather than making potentially damaging trade-offs between them.

We recognise the importance of community transport, but believe that Central Government and local authorities are being unrealistic if they expect voluntary community transport projects to compensate for decreased bus services.

The report details the particular vulnerable groups thus:

- *Older people. Many elderly people are unable to drive, in which case passenger transport is their only option. Older people use cars less and travel by passenger transport more than the middle-aged.*
- *Younger people. Like older people, younger people use cars less and travel by passenger transport more than the middle-aged. Young people make significantly fewer car journeys than in the past. In the mid-1990s, the average young person took almost 600 car journeys each year; that figure decreased to 377 trips in 2011. Some 48% of 17 to 20-year-olds held a driving licence in the early 1990s; today, 38% of 17 to 20-year-olds hold a driving licence.*
- *Unemployed people. Passenger transport is essential for unemployed people, because it allows them both to sign on at a jobcentre and to look for work. That is a particular concern in urban areas, because some 77% of jobseekers in British cities outside London do not have regular access to a car, van or motorbike.²² More widely, two out of five jobseekers cited lack of transport as a barrier to finding work.²³ A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study found that while 70% to 90% of unfilled low-skilled job vacancies were easily accessible by car, only 35% to 55% could be reached within 30 minutes by public transport.*
- *People with low incomes. Low-income families are more dependent than others on bus travel. People in the lowest income quintile make three times more journeys by bus than people in the highest income quintile.*
- *Disabled people. We heard that passenger transport allows disabled people to access employment and community and family life. Some 60% of disabled people have no car in the household, and disabled people use buses about 20% more frequently than the non-disabled population.*

We believe that in failing to secure adequate public transport for such individuals, Dorset County Council is denying their rights to access services.

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The legal context – what are the duties of Dorset County Council and how well is it adhering to them?

The 1985 Transport Act deregulated bus services in Great Britain (outside London), and since then bus companies have been free to run bus services where they like, at their own commercial risk. Local transport authorities identify needs not met by the commercial network and invite tenders from bus companies to operate those services.

The 2008 Local Transport Act brought in new provisions whereby local authorities can require a minimum frequency, operating hours or put an upper limit on fares, in agreement with the operators involved. It is also possible to exclude non-participant operators from using the infrastructure provided. At present, this does not happen in Dorset where not only has subsidy for routes been slashed but concessionary fare rebates make it difficult for bus operators to run commercial routes, not least because they also faced with a 20% cut in fuel rebate.

Therefore, although many bus services are commercial ventures run by private-sector bus companies, they cannot run effectively in isolation. There is a mutual dependency between bus companies and local transport authorities.

Local transport authorities:

- fill the gaps in the commercial network by inviting operators to tender for socially-necessary services
- provide infrastructure, in the form of bus stops, stations, bus priority measures etc
- provide more sophisticated systems such as real-time information systems and integrated ticketing schemes

Bus operators:

- enable local authorities to meet their strategy for a public transport network through the commercial network
- minimise the need for public funding through running commercial services

Total transport'

The concept of Total Transport involves pooling transport resources to deliver a range of services. For example, it might involve combining hospital transport with local bus services. That new approach could revolutionise transport provision in isolated communities by making more efficient use of existing resources. It is an approach recommended by the Transport Select Committee and one which is currently being investigated by Dorset County Council.

The Right to Accessible Community Services

(Accessible is defined as meaning 'within reasonable travelling distance by publicly- provided transport.')

We believe that residents of rural Dorset face unfair discrimination in the difficulties they experience in accessing services which are essential to the living of sustainable, healthy life in this rural county. As such they should have the following rights to access

1. transport to school and education from age 5 to 19,
2. transport to facilitate employment and education opportunities from age 16 to 25,
3. transport to places of employment (usually in the larger towns or cities),
4. transport, to provide leisure and sporting activities,
5. transport to accessible primary and secondary health care facilities,
6. transport which provides an alternative to the car for essential journeys.

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Following the Beeching Report in the 1960s many rural towns lost their train services and there was an expectation that bus links would replace the public transport connections hitherto linked by train – especially to larger cities and centres of employment.

Rather than this taking place, bus services have been whittled down to the bone over a number of years.

Residents of rural Dorset need:

- 1) Public Transport access to major towns in order to access work, school and public services
- 2) Public Transport that connects them to rail and coach routes to the UK transport infrastructure (such as Axminster, Maiden Newton and Dorchester which have connections to Exeter, Bristol and London) to enable them to access services and employment
- 3) Adequate transport that gives access to post-16 education that reflects the individual student's needs. This means potential access to Yeovil, Weymouth, Kingston Maurward, Exeter and Poole and Bournemouth colleges. Students aged 16 and over have a right to appropriate further education that will enable them to develop suitable skills to either continue to university or employment
- 4) Access for residents living in villages or hamlets without shops, post offices, GP surgeries, schools or other facilities, to appropriate public transport to enable them to reach those facilities
- 5) Dorset residents having outpatient treatment in larger urban centres such as Southampton or Bournemouth need public transport that can get them to those centres
- 6) Dorset residents who are signing on with Job Centre Plus or taking part in Work Programme Activities, need access to public transport to facilitate this
- 7) Dorset businesses, many of which are Small or Medium Enterprises need, access to appropriately trained employees who are able to reach their place of work and customers who can access their services
- 8) Dorset residents need the same level of access to leisure and sporting opportunities to facilitate a healthy and happy life as residents in the conurbation
- 9) Dorset residents should expect the development of a sustainable transport plan that sees development of public transport links capable of replacing journeys by car to significant destinations.

Bus Companies need:

- 1) Regular and co-ordinated contact with local transport authorities and support for maintaining essential routes
- 2) Fair and proportionate reimbursement of concessionary fares that does not result in loss and which will enable them to sustain services
- 3) A commitment from central government to add a rural weighting to fuel subsidies which reflects the cost of diesel at £6 per mile, a cost has a crippling impact on rural providers

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The responsibility to Stimulate demand

Section 1.4.1 of Dorset's Local Transport Plan argues for an improvement in public transport as a sustainable alternative to the car, committing the authority to

- a) Maintain and improve levels of access to key services and reduce dependence on the car, and
- b) Support and promote a culture of community led rural access solutions creating easier longer distance trips to urban areas by public transport

This has clearly not been adhered to

The **Transport Select Committee** considers that this can best be brought about by transport authorities working closely with providers and stimulating demand.

"The key factor that shaped passenger transport provision in England since the 1950s was the growth of private motoring. Over time, increased car ownership reduced demand for passenger transport, which in turn reduced passenger transport provision and incentivised car ownership. That downwards spiral was most apparent in rural areas, where the majority of people currently own a vehicle. Some 9% of households in rural areas in Great Britain do not own a car compared with 45% of people in London boroughs, 33% of people in metropolitan built-up areas and 27% of people in large urban areas."

Action for Communities in Rural England told us:

It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. While there is no alternative, more who can afford to do so are forced into car ownership. The problem is reversing that trend. If there was regular and reliable transport, more families would feel confident not having to rely on buying their own car.

We call on Dorset County Council to work with transport providers to ensure effective marketing of transport services in order to redress this balance.

Concessionary Transport

We are calling on Dorset County Council to reconsider its level of reimbursement for fares on concessionary bus passes, recognising the impact of low reimbursement on the sustainability of services, and to alter this upwards in line with the national average;

A mandatory bus concession for older and disabled people has been in place since 2001. The scheme has gradually been extended since its introduction and since April 2008 has provided free off-peak local bus travel to eligible older and disabled people anywhere in England.

The scheme is enshrined in Primary Legislation through the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and the Transport Act 2000 (as modified by the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007).

Reimbursement

TCAs are required by law to reimburse bus operators for carrying concessionary passengers, on the principle that the operators are "**no better off and no worse off**" by **taking part in concessionary travel schemes**. The aim is not to subsidise bus operators, but to pay for any increased costs that they have incurred.

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Reimbursement of bus operators is divided into two elements: revenue forgone and net additional costs. Revenue forgone is the reimbursement of fares that operators would have received from concessionary journeys that would have been made in the absence of a scheme. The average fare forgone is generally not the same as the quoted commercial cash fare but should be calculated as an the quoted commercial cash fare but should be calculated as an average of all ticket types that would have been available to concessionaires in the absence of the scheme.

The proportion of observed concessionary journeys that are made purely because of the concession are referred to as 'generated journeys'. The only extra funding requirement associated with generated journeys should be the net additional costs that bus operators incur from these additional journeys. These are namely wear and tear on buses and possible costs from changes in service frequency or density. In very exceptional cases, net additional costs will include the costs to operators of buying an extra vehicle to cater for generated journeys.

Calculating concessionary travel reimbursement is predicated on determining what would have happened in the absence of the concessionary scheme and requires TCAs to estimate the following components of reimbursement:

- The fares that operators would have offered and concessionary travellers paid in the absence of the concession
- The proportion of total observed concessionary journeys that would have been made in the absence of the concession
- Any net additional costs that operators have incurred as a result of the concession.

We believe that because in Dorset the concessionary fare rebate is much lower than for example in Somerset (where it is 55% of the journey price), bus operators are substantially '**worse off**' as a result of this scheme and as a result services are being cut. We are calling on DCC to recalculate its level of reimbursement.

Quality Contracts

Quality Contracts enable the local authority to take over responsibility for providing the entire network in a given area from the operators and effectively suspends the deregulated regime. Both the **Transport select committee** and the **IPPR** believe exploring these is essential for rural areas.

This would involve entering into one of the following forms of partnership with providers:

1. Voluntary Quality Partnership

Quality Partnerships were enshrined in the 2000 Transport Act.

Typically the local authority will undertake to provide bus priority measures, new bus stops and/or real time information systems in return for bus operators providing new vehicles with improved levels of accessibility and environmental performance and/or enhanced driver training, and maybe an enhanced level of service. Quality Partnerships may be between a local authority and a bus company, or between more than one of either.

2. Statutory Quality Partnership

As Voluntary Quality Partnership, where a minimum frequency of service, operating hours and an upper limit on fares etc can be backed up with a legally-enforceable agreement under conditions spelt out in the 2008 Local Transport Act.

3. Quality Contract

The local authority takes control of a bus service, a group of services, a corridor or an entire network. The commercial network is suspended and the local authority plans the service and timetable, and sets fares levels. It takes responsibility for marketing the service and running the ticketing system. Bus companies bid for rights to run the bus services and are paid by the local authority to do so. Fares collected on the bus are paid to the local authority. On-the-road competition between bus companies no longer takes place.

In Summary, we call on Dorset County Council to

- 1) Reconsider its level of reimbursement for concessionary bus passes, recognising the impact of low reimbursement on the sustainability of services, and to alter this upwards in line with the national average;
- 2) Recognise its duty under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 to “secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider is appropriate to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose and to recognise this specifically in relation to economically significant routes upon which both jobs and the livelihood of town centres depend,
- 3) Recognise its duty under section 108(1)(b) of the Local Transport Act 2000(b) for the LA to carry out its functions so as to implement the policies of section 2.4.1 of its Local Transport Plan to :
 - a) Maintain and improve levels of access to key services and reduce dependence on the car and
 - b) Support and promote a culture of community led rural access solutions creating easier longer distance trips to urban areas by public transport
- 4) Lobby government for the implementation of a rural weighting on fuel costs
- 5) Consider entering into a legally enforceable Quality Partnership through which key services are locked in with providers
- 6) Further explore its work, just now beginning , on total transport
- 7) Invest to save by stimulating demand in order to reduce car ownership and increase bus use.

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