

Bus consultation response to the call for evidence

The decline of rural buses: a joint inquiry by the County APPG and CCN

- 1 This response is made by the Shropshire-wide bus upgrade project, a project funded by the Foundation for Integrated Transport in London

<http://www.shropshireruralbuses.org/>

<http://integratedtransport.co.uk/>

- 2 The contact person for the Shropshire project is Professor John Whitelegg

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- 3 The aims and objectives of the project are summarised on the web site home page:

Welcome to the Shropshire wide bus upgrade project.

Our aim is to promote services, identify ways in which services can be improved and identify ways in which improved services can be funded and delivered.

Buses are very important to local communities and the local economy. They have a vital role to play in delivering Shropshire Council's high level

strategic objectives.

Improved bus services and a shift away from car use to sustainable transport choices (buses, walking and cycling) are essential to the urgent need to reduce congestion and deliver new policies and measures that are needed to convert the Council's recently declared climate emergency into actual reductions in CO2 emissions.

A shift from car to bus will reduce CO2, reduce pollution and recognise the needs of all those in society that may not have access to a car or be able to drive.

- 4 The Shropshire bus project has set up a team of “bus champions” and has contacted all 12 town and 76 parish councils to ask for their comments and suggestions on whether or not bus services in Shropshire meet the needs of Shropshire's communities
- 5 The detailed responses and specific suggestions for new services, increased frequencies, connections with train stations and connections with our two main hospitals will be listed in the final report which will be published in July 2020
- 6 It is already very clear that bus services in Shropshire are not fit for purpose and do not meet the needs of commuters, college students, those who need to make contact with trains or hospitals.
- 7 The Shropshire project has carried out a detailed review of bus service provision in comparable rural/market town areas in Sweden, Switzerland and Germany and has documented the high quality, connected, frequent bus services serving rural communities 7 days a week in these countries. The detailed review is available here:

<http://integratedtransport.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FIT-Shropshire-Buses-Report-web.pdf>

- 8 Most bus services in Shropshire (we are not looking at town services in Shrewsbury) are infrequent, stop running in the early evening, do not run on Sundays and do not connect with train stations. They are very poor indeed and a resident in a comparable rural area in Sweden, Germany and Switzerland has a much better level of service which provides a much higher level of support for rural areas
- 9 We are now 10 months into our 12 month project. Our preliminary conclusions are as follows:

- Shropshire has very poor quality bus service provision
- This poor quality provision directly conflicts with Shropshire Council's own policies including reducing CO2 emissions in line with its declaration of a climate emergency in May 2019, policies that commit to improving air quality, policies that claim to support rural areas and the reduction of congestion in Shrewsbury
- There must be a serious, funded, year-on-year programme of improvement and in our final report we list the priorities all of which have come from submissions from town and parish councils and bus champions
- We strongly recommend the establishment of Regional Transport Authorities (RTA) to co-ordinate services, link bus and rail and match timetables to the needs of rural communities. We welcome privately operated bus services but they must sign up to integration and co-ordination and the supervision of a RTA.
- We recommend a Shropshire travel card based on the same principle as the Oyster card. This would allow the holder to use every bus and every local train in Shropshire, every day and without handing over cash or using a debit card and at a significant discount compared to walk-on fares. The current system of multiple operators requiring separate ticketing is backward and as far from any sustainable transport principle as it is possible to go
- Even though we are not looking at Shrewsbury town services the majority of services serving rural Shropshire start and finish at Shrewsbury bus station. This bus station is not fit for purpose. It is dirty, smells of urine, has no staff to help passengers, no real time information screens and is closed on Sundays. The complete closure of a bus station on a Sunday is a clear sign that all is not well in Shropshire. We need a new high quality bus station with staff and real time information systems and café facilities that reflect 21st century standards

10 The bigger picture

There are a number of large, strategic, organisational and funding issues that must be addressed if we are to improve buses. We can still proceed to improve buses without addressing these large issues but we will waste a lot of time and energy for relatively small gains. There are 3 fundamental issues that must be addressed:

Funding

Bus funding cuts are well known

“Part of the problem has been chronic underfunding - almost £400 million has been cut from local bus funding in the last decade alone - resulting in fewer and fewer services and a reduction in the quality and usability of local buses. Our latest report on bus funding, *The Future of the Bus*, showed that national government support for buses is now £234 million a year lower than in 2009/10, and local authority funding for buses is £163 million lower in real terms compared to ten years ago – a reduction of over 40 per cent.

Small wonder then that well over 3,000 local authority supported bus services have been lost or reduced in a decade - 243 in the past year alone - with over half of local authorities cutting their financial support for buses by 50 per cent or more since 2009 and ten local transport authorities providing no financial support for buses anymore. Rural areas have been particularly badly hit with some towns and villages left without any public transport at all.”

<https://bettertransport.org.uk/blogs/buses/turning-round-the-fortune-of-the-bus>

There must be no more funding cuts and bus services should be supported at a level no lower than that prevailing in 2009/10.

This major change in funding is not enough. We now have enough accumulated evidence on the efficacy and outcomes associated with the sustainable transport agenda. The evidence base includes the full deployment of demand management, travel plans, congestion charging, Swiss style public transport, total integration of bus and rail as is the case in Switzerland and Germany and policies that have a track record of reducing congestion, air pollution and carbon. We strongly recommend the reallocation of the national £27 billion road building budget to the delivery of world best walking, cycling and public transport, including a bus system as good as Switzerland.

The exact amount of reallocated funding for buses would be the subject of an investigation into budgets deployed in support of buses in Sweden, Switzerland and Germany to produce an estimate

for Shropshire. The funding for buses would be guaranteed year-on-year for at least 10 years would embrace capital projects and revenue support and would not subject to cuts.

De-regulation and privatisation

The current system of running buses is not fit for purpose. We need the same system that exists in slightly different forms in Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. We urgently need “Regional Transport Authorities” who would plan, organise and deliver highly co-ordinated services, set fares and introduce a stored card system (e.g. the Oyster Card) to cover all journeys made by bus, tram and local rail. We could copy the German initiative and set the price of this card at 1 Euro per day. It would cost the passenger c365 Euros pa (approximately £ 320 pa at 1st May 2020 exchange rates). Privately run buses would still provide services but within an entirely new co-ordinated contractual framework. It is not possible to run a bus service that provides integration and co-ordination unless new systems are put in place along the same lines as Sweden, Germany and Switzerland.

Standards

There is a clear need for national standards. The privatised system has not delivered the promise of a public transport service organised around high quality standards. Switzerland provides an example of standards in its adoption of “pulsed” timetabling:

“Pulsing is a system of timetable planning and co-ordination that makes sure all bus and local train modes can work together and passengers can switch effortlessly at defined hubs from one mode to another or one bus to another within a matter of minutes and simply by walking a very short distance. Pulsing works well in rural areas and offers clock-face timetables in areas of low population density with a high degree of reliability and certainty in reaching destinations” (Petersen 2016)

Mees (2010) has captured the essence of pulsed public transport planning in his description of Sternenbergr in the Canton of Zurich (population 351) , Bauma (population 1,000) and Hinwil (population 5,000)

“Sternenberg with a population of 351 compares well with many of Shropshire’s villages. Unlike Shropshire’s villages Sternenberg has 7 buses each weekday, 5 on normal weekends and 7 on summer Sundays and holidays. Each Sunday bus leaves at 24 minutes past the hour, connecting with trains arriving at 20 minutes past the hour. The bus calls at the church, dropping off hikers, then does a circuit of the main hamlets collecting locals before returning to Bauma to connect with an outward train. Once they board the bus the residents of Sternenberg don’t need to worry about timetables. Each bus meets the train at Bauma which in turn connects at the regional hub of Winterthur with another train to Zurich and major centres across the canton. Each of these trains is met by connecting bus services at stations en route, providing access to every place with more than 300 residents or jobs” (Mees, 2010, page 4)

The Swiss approach is ideal for Shropshire and is fully documented in a “Transport for Quality of Life” report:

Britain should aspire to give every citizen Swiss-style freedom to travel conveniently by public transport between any two places bigger than a small village

In the Zurich city-region, the regional transport body (Zürich Verkehrsverbund, ZVV) defines three levels of service for buses. Level 1 is hourly, and is for settlements above 300 people. Level 2 is half hourly, and is on corridors where flows from multiple settlements combine to give strong demand. Level 3 is every 15 minutes, or more frequent where there is demand, and is for large dense settlements. Services operate between 6am and midnight. Connections are given high importance, with buses arriving at stations a few minutes before trains and departing a few minutes after. Services run to clock-face timetables (i.e. repeating hourly) on regular intervals

http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/190607_A_Nationwide_Public_Transport_Timetab le.pdf

Conclusions

- 1 We welcome the opportunity to submit this response
- 2 We have assembled an evidence base from town and parish councils and bus champions in Shropshire that shows beyond any doubt that bus services are not fit for purpose in this county and provide a sub-standard quality for local residents, those without cars,

- college students, commuters and those who need to travel to our two main hospitals, The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and the Princess Royal Hospital in Telford
- 3 There is no reason why Shropshire's residents should have such a poor quality, unco-ordinated bus service which is vastly inferior to the services provided in Sweden, Germany and Switzerland
 - 4 Improving Shropshire's bus services requires major structural, organisational and funding changes so that we have a Regional Transport Authority and a guaranteed funding stream for a period of 10 years at a per capita level that is agreed by national government and paid directly to unitary authorities and county councils.
 - 5 We strongly recommend the adoption of Swiss public transport standards as a standard for England and one that will be applied in Shropshire

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Source:

http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/190607_A_Nationwide_Public_Transport_Timetab le.pdf

- 6 We accept that some improvements can be made without the major changes we suggest and we need to find ways to upgrade thinking and priorities in counties like Shropshire so that we can at least achieve the progress made by Cornwall Council. We need to understand why Cornwall Council funds buses at twice the per capita rate as Shropshire Council (Appendix 1). There should be a recommended per capita funding of bus services that would protect residents from the very low level of funding that currently applies in Shropshire.
- 7 The quality of bus services and level of co-ordination and attractiveness of fare systems must be specified in DfT guidance and linked to funding. Councils that deliver on a set of agreed Key Performance Indicators will receive funds and those that do not will lose funding. Our final report will present a list of KPIs and recommended quality standards linked to those KPIs. It is not acceptable that bus service quality should be left to the vagaries of the council chamber and the alacrity with which councils cut bus funds to "balance the books"

- 8 There is no reason at all why Shropshire's residents should have to put up with bus services that are so much worse than those routinely available in Switzerland. Poor quality bus services are a political choice and national politicians and Shropshire's councillors have chosen poor quality.

References

Mees, P (2010) Transport for suburbia. Beyond the automobile age. Earthscan, London

Petersen, P (2016) Watching the Swiss: a network approach to rural and exurban public transport, Transport Policy, 52, November 2016, 175-185

Appendix 1

Shropshire Council budget spend on buses compared with Cornwall Council

Key data

	Shropshire	Cornwall
Population 2018	320,300	565,968
Public transport subsidy, 2016-17	£2,787,665	£10,438,000
Public transport subsidy, 2017-18	£2,865,153	£11,476,000
Public transport subsidy, 2018-19	£2,820,933	£11,735,000
Per capita subsidy, 2016-17	£8.70	£18.44
Per capita subsidy, 2017-18	£8.94	£20.27
Per capita subsidy, 2018-19	£8.80	£20.73

Source for Shropshire: Source: FOI response from Mark Barrow, Director of Place, 25th March 2020

Source for Cornwall:

<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/38156430/budget-for-last-3-financial-years-in-various-spending-areas.pdf>

Accessed on 31st March 2020

Conclusion

Cornwall Council spends more than twice as much per capita on supporting buses as does Shropshire Council