

Cash for buses

It looks like government has discovered buses as a subject for spending commitments. This is good news e.g.

1. The **Better Deal for buses** said, in a government press release on 30 September 2019, that £220 million is available for 2020-21. This was updated in more detail on 6 February 2020 when it was revealed that Shropshire would receive **£319,302** from a west Midlands total of £20 million and an overall improvement budget of £30 millions.
2. Within *Better Deal for buses* we find **the All-electric bus town** plan which has a fund of £50 million for towns where Air Quality Assessments say that amelioration is needed. Ludlow has no relevant Air Quality Assessment data. (Referred to previously by Robin Pote Andy Boddington and John Whitelegg). This is evidently a small portion of bus funding available
3. On 11 February 2020 the **Statement on Transport Infrastructure** (HS2 etc) announced £5 billion for 4000 new buses and bus services, the detail will be available in the Budget next month.
4. The government pledge to spend £170 million on more electric buses in rural areas is either journalistic inaccuracy by the Times. (Remember the Shropshire Star wrongly reported that a bus trial had been held between Shrewsbury and Ludlow). Or it is a leak saying how some of the £5 billion will be spent.
5. DfT recently announced an additional £220m to “deliver a bus revolution to boost services and make journeys greener, easier and more reliable.”
6. Last month, the Chancellor, Sajid Javid, announced an extra £30m to improve existing routes and restore lost services as part of a £220m spending boost for buses.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-transport-infrastructure-11-february-2020>

Whilst spending commitments for buses are welcomed we need to keep in mind that we have had many years of bus cuts and bus services in rural England (including Shropshire) are in very poor condition:

More than 3,000 local bus routes have been lost or reduced over the past decade, according to a new study.

The Campaign for Better Transport said local authority funding had fallen by more than 40% while central government funding had fallen by 19% in that time.

The group said national government spending on bus services had fallen by £234m, in real terms, over the past decade.

Meanwhile, spending by local authorities was £163m lower.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50166423>

The cuts in services and funding are savage and have hugely damaged bus services in a way that will take many years of sustained high level funding to repair.

One-off, headline-catching announcements of funding are not good enough. We agree with the Campaign for Better Transport:

“But the Campaign for Better Transport has called for a "ring-fenced, long-term fund" to rejuvenate Britain's bus network and support discounted fares for concessions such as students and elderly people.”

Also we need to adopt the regional transport authority model used in Sweden and Germany to deliver a co-ordinated network of bus services at a frequency that meets the needs of passengers. This is totally lacking in Shropshire.

The one-off headline numbers are not enough to upgrade Shropshire's buses to a 21st century standard linked to policies that will deal with climate change and air pollution. The deficit in Shropshire is huge and includes:

- Priority for buses at signalised junctions in Shrewsbury
- Bus lanes in Shrewsbury that are not blocked by parked vehicles
- A major promotional campaign (e.g. for new housing) that includes printed timetables and other information as in best practice Cornwall
- Integration so buses meet trains and vice versa
- Year on year increases in bus funding from Shropshire Council
- A modern, 21st century Park and Ride service (100% electric) for both Shrewsbury and Ludlow
- A new bus station on the current site in Shrewsbury that is as good as Truro bus station in Cornwall (helpful staff, real time information, open 7 days a week, clean and not smelly)