

# TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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***Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport***

***promoting quality public transport.....***

Our Area, Our Future  
 Cumbria County Council  
 The Courts  
 Carlisle  
 CA3 8NA

17<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Budget Consultation**

We are very concerned about the effect on passengers of proposals to cease subsidising bus services in Cumbria altogether. We appreciate the severe budgetary constraints that the Council is working under but there are bound to be adverse effects on those who rely on these services and have no practical alternative options. The wholesale cutting of services on this scale is bound to lead to social exclusion, especially in rural areas.

We feel bus services should be further up the list of priorities and other ways of reducing operating costs to mitigate wholesale cuts should be explored. Would it be possible to explore other sources of grant aid? If it is decided to examine this proposition in more detail there should be a detailed examination of individual services to assess ridership and thorough consultation with users on specific proposals. We can only trust that the response from local passengers/groups will highlight need in individual cases and make a case for retention.

To say that subsidising bus services is not a statutory function is open to question as the authority has a duty to ensure an adequate level of public transport.

Replacing bus services with Demand Responsive (DRT) and Community Transport (CT) is not always effective and such services are not accessible for visitors, not just tourists, to the area. Scheduled bus services provide a means of transport which people can choose to use, while CT and DRT are transport means of last resort. Quite simply, scheduled bus services can stimulate demand and grow, while CT and DRT cannot.

Furthermore, CT and DRT services have a much higher cost per passenger than bus services, so spending on them actually benefits far fewer people than it would have done if used to retain some of the bus services proposed for withdrawal. Surely this cannot be good value for money. The contribution of CT and DRT to the local economy is limited.

Registered Local Services generate enormous “cross sector benefits”. They can, and do, reduce the cost of statutory transport otherwise provided by education, social services, NHS (and some retailers and employers). But these cross sector beneficiaries do not make any compensatory payments to their Local Transport Authorities.

A mechanism for capturing these cross sector benefits is sorely needed. In 2004 when Sheffield Hallam and the Countryside Agency carried out research into sustainable rural transport it was estimated that such a mechanism could make a high proportion of such unremunerative services commercial. Can other sources of transport funding from e.g. health/ education budgets be pooled?

Young people are becoming increasingly disenfranchised from car ownership because of the rising costs of motoring and they are relying more and more on public transport.

We are also concerned that if and when commercial services cease to operate the county council will not fund any replacement. Surely in this scenario each case should be examined on its own merits and the council should pay heed to its duty to ensure an adequate level of public transport.

In conclusion we primarily contend that subsidised bus services should not be cut wholesale. If bus subsidy savings are to be explored a detailed examination of individual routes taking into account the wider benefits of social inclusion and cross sector benefits should take place and there should be full consultation with users on a route by route basis. In general, we support the Campaign for Better Transport’s call for a new approach to supporting buses and local public transport. There should be long term planning of investment as with rail and roads and minimum access standards for hospitals, colleges and other vital services. Central government should understand the importance of buses.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully

*John A Moorhouse*

John Moorhouse  
Company Secretary