

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Tim Gornall
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 Lancashire County Council
 Room D3, PO Box 100
 County Hall, Preston
 PR1 0LD

16th January 2014

Dear Tim,

Subsidised bus services – budget proposals

We are very concerned about the effect on passengers of these proposals. We appreciate the severe budgetary constraints that the Authority is working under but there are bound to be adverse effects on those who rely on these services and have no practical alternative options. Cutting services 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? Indeed there appears to have been no detailed examination of individual services to assess ridership. We can only hope that responses from local passengers/groups will highlight need in individual cases and make a case for retention. That said our perception is that this consultation exercise has not been well publicised and many users will not be aware of the proposals.

In our letter to you of 28th August on the subject of Bowland Transit service reductions we made reference to the LCC Local Transport Plan dated May 2011. It appears that the budget proposals now being made are completely at odds with the principles of accessibility, especially in rural areas, as set out in the Plan.

Ceasing to support evening and Sunday services does seem to have very little justification behind it. Sunday is the second busiest shopping day and stopping evening services will damage the evening economy and adversely affect those who work in the evening or need to get home in the evening. We know of at least one example of evening services conveying night staff to a rural nursing home.

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 fewer people. Surely this cannot be good value for money. Their contribution to the local economy is limited.

Furthermore, we are worried that whereas capital funding may be available for CT and DRT, revenue funding may not be available so that there could be funds to buy minibuses, etc but no funds for servicing, maintenance, running costs and eventual replacement – a step further towards decline.

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. For them evening services in particular will be especially vital.

We cannot comment on individual services to a significant degree. We give an example below which shows the kind of local issues that these proposals will create and this illustration could well be repeated elsewhere.

- The Lancaster to Silverdale service which runs until 11 p.m. at night in both directions was only established last year by the previous council. Its existence and benefits are only just being realised by villagers on the route and several are beginning to find it is an excellent method of travelling to evening and social outings in Lancaster. It takes 2/3 years to establish these routes and it is unacceptable that it is to be withdrawn before it has been tested. Most rural evening services to and from Lancaster (and no doubt elsewhere in Lancashire) are used by young people too young or not able to afford to drive or wisely not wishing to drive to access entertainment - but not in enough numbers

to make the bus a paying proposition. At least where such services are cut one bus into town circa 19.00 hrs and the last bus back should be preserved on social benefit grounds.

- There are also excellent services to Kirkby Lonsdale and Knott End which are used by young people too young or not able to afford to drive to go into town for the evening with some routes providing a service until midnight.

We are also concerned that there could be further cuts when existing subsidised bus service contracts expire and that where commercial services cease to operate the county council will not fund any replacement. Surely in both these scenarios 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 contend that a rethink and more detailed examination of individual routes taking into account the wider benefits of social inclusion and cross sector benefits is necessary. 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 Moorhouse
Company Secretary