

Bus Back Better update – informal bus survey Briefing Note No. 21-14

Service: Communities & Neighbourhood Services

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We wanted to update you on the Government's national bus strategy and the work we're doing in Wiltshire to improve local bus services.

To recap, on 15 March this year the government published its Bus Back Better vision, which underpins a national bus strategy for England and outlines ambitious reform of how bus services are planned and delivered.

The strategy will deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered. It will make buses:

- more frequent
- more reliable
- easier to understand and use
- better co-ordinated
- cheaper

The strategy is seen as an important part of the levelling-up agenda and recognises that where commercial bus companies and local transport authorities work closely together buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way to improve transport. Some £3bn has been set aside in this parliament to be spent on increasing bus usage nationally through the national bus strategy. In addition, and as a prelude to this, in March 2020, Government granted Wiltshire £671,000 as revenue support to help to improve the provision of local bus services.

Thank you to those of you that took the time out to respond to Briefing Note no. 21-08 by providing your suggestions for new services or changes and/or additions to existing services in your communities by using the money awarded. We will look through and consider all the responses that have been sent and keep you updated on the plans.

The Government's strategy complements our aim to encourage more people to travel by bus to help support our carbon neutral objectives, and to reach and connect more people who live in rural communities who don't have a viable way to get around.

The council has already been successful in getting some money from the £3bn fund, with a successful bid of £1.2m to improve demand responsive transport in the Pewsey Vale area. This will be in operation next year after a public consultation, which will help establish the most appropriate way for the service to be provided.

We are holding an informal consultation with the public and businesses to help shape our work as we look to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan later this autumn. Our local bus services plan is a requirement in order to be part of the Bus Back Better strategy.

Alongside all the existing information we have on services and usage, this non-statutory survey, that will run until 23 August 2021, will give us an even better understanding of how bus services are used and how usage has been affected by the pandemic. The survey shouldn't take longer than five minutes to complete and we are keen to hear from non-bus users, as well as those who currently use them, as this will provide a much more wide-ranging picture of the current situation and people's circumstances. The survey can be found at <https://surveys.wiltshire.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=162679536235>, and we'll make hard copies

available as well.

The Government's strategy and associated funding is an exciting opportunity to improve bus services throughout England, and our focus is to successfully make improvements in the county that will benefit all those that use bus services, which in turn may attract new users, too. We recognise how important public transport is, particularly in a vast rural county like Wiltshire, and when done right it's the lifeblood of many a community.

We would appreciate your support in spreading the word about our survey and encouraging people and representatives of businesses and organisations within your communities to take part.

If you have any questions about this ongoing project, then please don't hesitate to get in touch.

We will keep you updated.