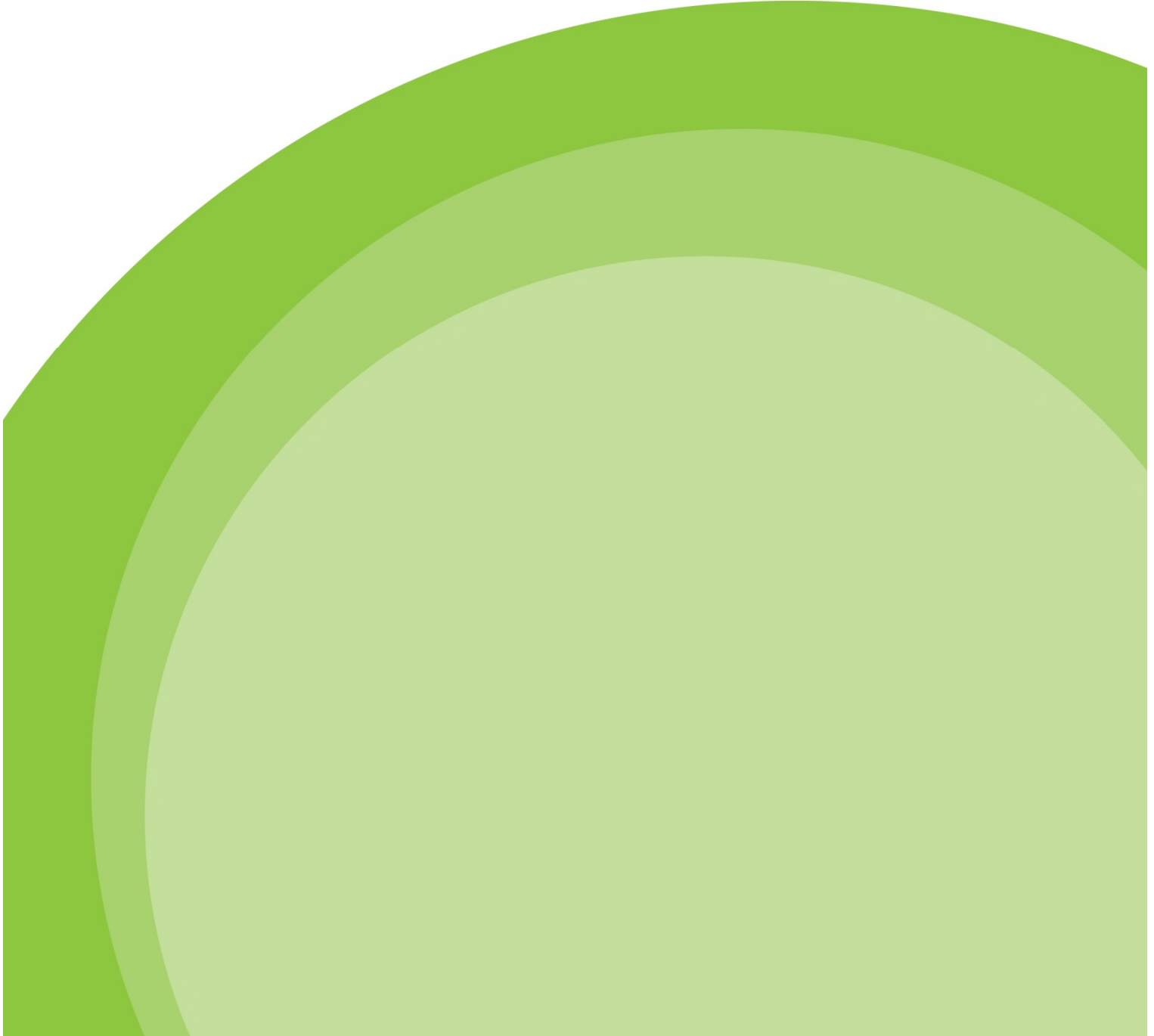




Public Transport Proposals including: Subsidised Bus Services, Concessionary Travel and Community Transport

Draft Passenger Transport Strategy 2016



Executive Summary

The Passenger Transport Strategy aspires to

- Support residents to access employment and services they need to live well through a range of passenger transport services
- Ensure that residents at risk of isolation and deprivation are able to access the transport they need
- Support and strengthen a mixed economy of transport services, including commercial, voluntary, community and subsidised options.
- Achieve value for money for residents and council tax payers

Subsidised Bus Services (page 4)

Proposals:

- New network of core, secondary and least-used routes with subsidies determined by a Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process
- Subsidies limited to times of higher passenger demand:
Monday to Friday 8am to 6.30pm
Saturday 8am to 3pm
No subsidies for Sunday services

Concessionary Travel (page 10)

Proposals:

- Adopt national time regulations for free travel for bus pass holders:
09:30 to 23:00 Monday to Friday, all day Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.
- Changes to travel pass issue and renewal:
No automatic renewal
Online applications from 2017

Community Transport (page 13)

Proposals:

- Introduce clear and transparent tender process for awarding of funding to support Dial a Ride services
- Encourage voluntary community bus service providers to take on additional services

Introduction

The aims of the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) is to deliver transport services that are safe, effective and fit for purpose and provide a framework for decision making processes in relation to all PTS services.

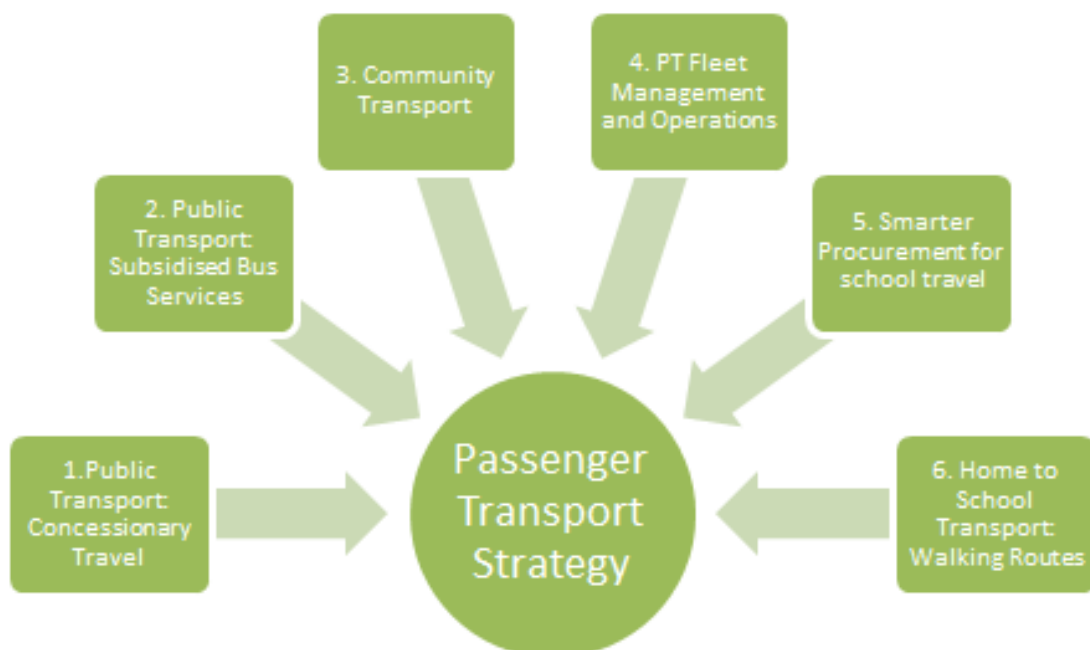
The PTS will be developed alongside and sit within the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) which is also currently under review.

The Strategy will set out the Council's objectives for passenger transport in Central Bedfordshire and will be supported by relevant policies and best practice.

The Strategy refers to users of road based 'public' transport such as commercially operated local bus routes and community transport as well as fleet transport for the provision of home to school transport and home to day setting transport for vulnerable children and adults

Scope of the Passenger Transport Strategy

- Subsidised Bus Services
- Concessionary Travel
- Community Transport
- Home to School Transport – Safe Walking Routes
- Fleet Services and Operations



Subsidised Bus Services

1. Background information

- 1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council currently subsidises many bus services although this is not a legal requirement.
- 1.2 The Council subsidises bus services to ensure social inclusion (the need for everyone, especially older people, to be able to shop and visit family and friends).
- 1.3 Many types of local bus service require financial support because they are not commercially self-sustaining, generally because of the low number of passengers. Where the majority of the passengers are free bus pass holders, this can affect the revenue of bus operators and the commercial viability of services.
- 1.4 There are currently around 85 conventional bus services in Central Bedfordshire. Of these, around 45 receive a subsidy from Central Bedfordshire Council. The subsidy can cover the whole service, or parts of the service. The remaining services are fully commercial.
- 1.5 There are a number of services which cross into neighbouring local authorities. These services are often subsidised by the other local authorities.

2. Proposals

2.1 Subsidies will be determined by a Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process

- 2.1.1 The following five key principles are considered in the Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process to determine how subsidies will be allocated.

1. Available alternatives

- Central Bedfordshire Council aims to ensure there is a network of services, with subsidised bus and community bus services provided where there is a proven need to connect people with family, friends and shops.
- Duplication of subsidised bus services is avoided in order to improve sustainability.

- Where there may be currently more than one service from some villages to a number of destinations, priority is given to the service with the highest demand.
- An alternative service is considered to be any viable alternative, be it another bus service, community transport, voluntary transport or taxi

2. Accessibility

- Central Bedfordshire Council aims to ensure there is bus service provision in areas where there is proven demand, of more than seven passengers per journey, from older people and people with a disability.

3. Commercial bus services

- The Council encourages the provision of commercial services, providing operators with advice and expert knowledge when required to do so, in preference to subsidising services at taxpayers' expense.

4. Reducing congestion

- An evaluation is made on how many passengers use each journey. There are certain journeys which may have very few or no passengers, but the return journey is quite well used. Therefore an average number of passengers per single journey is considered. With a single journey of an hour in length, an average of seven or more passengers per journey could be considered to be the minimum number of passengers required on average to subsidise a service. Fewer than seven passengers could be accommodated in a taxi or voluntary transport.
- Central Bedfordshire Council should ensure that bus services are provided in accordance with the Local Plan.

5. Affordability

- With a greater emphasis on a commercially provided bus services, the finances available can be more targeted.
- Central Bedfordshire Council takes account of available budgets in determining the frequency of individual services, and the provision of services normally running with less than seven people.
- The subsidy for individual one-way journeys currently costs between £0.08 and £17.50. To ensure that Central Bedfordshire Council is obtaining the best value, the cost per passenger for each service should be reviewed in relation to the available budget.

- Many councils are looking at a maximum of £3 per passenger. The cost per passenger is higher in rural areas, and therefore a variable maximum rate will be considered – for example £1.50 per passenger in urban areas within two miles of a town centre; £2.00 per passenger in urban fringe areas within four miles of a town centre; £3.00 per passenger in rural areas. Provision of any service beyond £3.00 per passenger would be assessed on a proven need for social inclusion of older people and people with a disability which could not be met by any other form of transport service.

2.2 Creation of a network of core, secondary and least-used routes

2.2.1 A network of core, secondary and least-used routes (Appendix A) will be created as part of the Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process with priority being given to services on the core and secondary network.

2.2.2 Core Network

2.2.3 There will be a core network across Central Bedfordshire with a desired minimum of 10 journeys in each direction per day, Monday to Saturday. Core routes (defined as services connecting major towns with a proven demand for 10 or more journeys in each direction per day) will be expected to be mainly commercially provided, although subsidy may be required in some instances to maintain the desired minimum frequency.

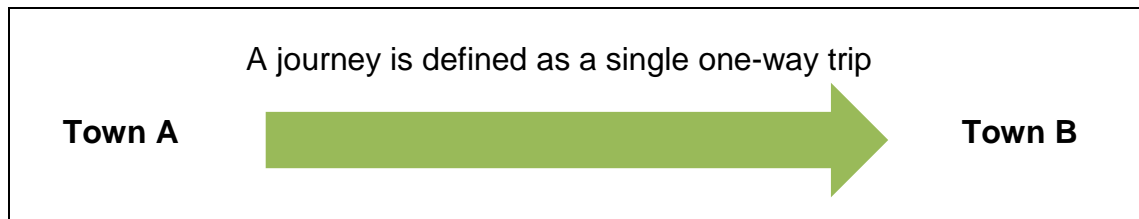
2.2.4 Secondary Routes

2.2.5 Secondary routes will be feeder services to a local town where there are shopping facilities and connections to the core network. Such services would have a desired minimum lower frequency, possibly four journeys in each direction per day Monday to Friday **between 8am and 6.30pm** when there is higher demand; and two journeys in each direction per day Saturday.

2.2.6 Least-used Routes

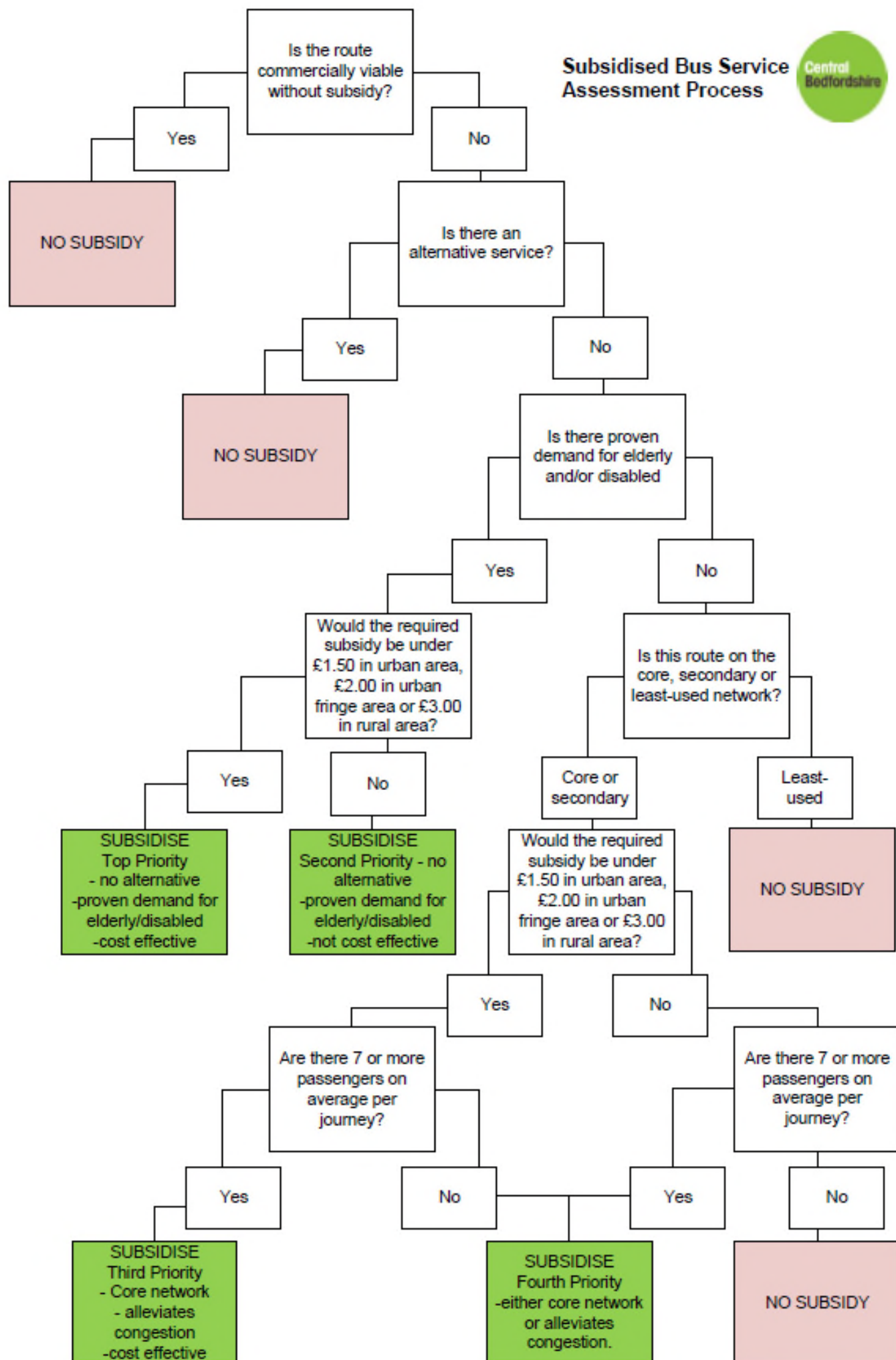
2.2.7 Least-used routes would be seen as infrequent services where there is limited demand, necessary for social inclusion so people can visit family, friends and shops. Such services would vary from one journey per week to one journey per day, or alternatively would be met by the voluntary sector.

2.2.8 Central Bedfordshire Council will work with bus operators to redraft timetables but will also look at alternative solutions for services bus operators no longer wish to provide, such as community transport and voluntary bus services.



Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process

Central Bedfordshire



2.3 Restrictions to subsidies for Saturday services

- 2.3.1 Passenger levels on bus services on Saturdays have fallen over the years. In the smaller towns, this is particularly noticeable in the afternoons and evenings.
- 2.3.2 The Council subsidies will be allocated to those times of the week when there is more demand. Due to lower demand on Saturday afternoons and evenings, it is proposed that only commercial services would operate at this time. Subsidies will therefore only be considered for services **between 8am and 3pm**.
- 2.3.3 There will be no change to services while they are covered by development funding from a Section 106 agreement.

2.4 Withdrawal of subsidies for evening and Sunday services

- 2.4.1 In the previous consultation in 2012, evening and Sunday services were seen as lower priority. Although there is a need for bus services at such times, the demand for bus travel is much lower.
- 2.4.2 In times of restricted finances, it is proposed that Council subsidy should be allocated to those times of the week when there is more demand. Evening services after 6.30pm and Sunday services therefore will only be provided on a commercial basis without subsidy.
- 2.4.3 Currently the evening and Sunday services in the towns of Biggleswade, Sandy and Shefford are subsidised. Although bus operators may choose to operate a limited service commercially, this could only continue with high enough passenger numbers.
- 2.4.4 Evening and Sunday services will continue if they are supported by a Section 106 agreement from new development funding.

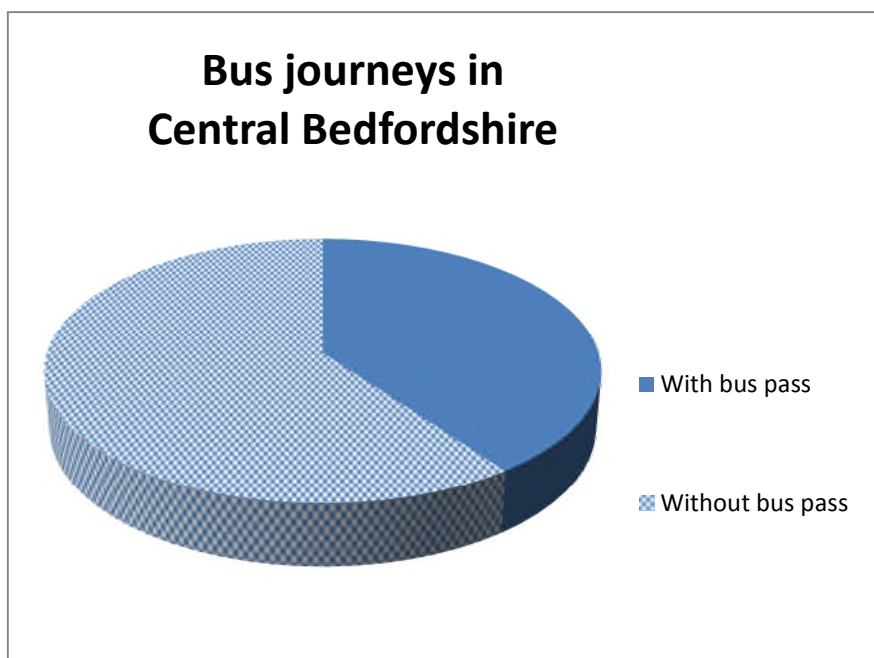
Policy PT1:Subsidised bus services

- Subsidies will be determined by the defined Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process using the network of core, secondary and least-used routes
- Subsidies will be limited to times of higher passenger demand:
Monday to Friday 8am to 6.30pm
Saturday 8am to 3pm
No subsidies for Sunday services

Concessionary Travel

1. Background information

- 1.1 The English National Concessionary Scheme allows free travel on local buses across England for older people (currently those over 63) and people with a disability on Mondays to Fridays between 09:30 and 23:00, and any time on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. The age at which residents are entitled to a free travel pass is currently rising, and is the equivalent to the retirement age of women.
- 1.2 The current Central Bedfordshire Council scheme also includes the additional discretionary elements:
- Free travel for Central Bedfordshire residents before 09:30 and after 23:00 (Monday to Friday) if the journey starts in Central Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire.
 - If mobility is severely impaired so that assistance is required when travelling (either because of age or disability), there is entitlement to a Companion Pass. This allows a companion to travel free with the pass holder in Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton and Bedford.
 - Travel on Dial a Ride services, for scheme members, for a special fare.



- 1.3 Travel passes are issued free to those entitled who apply. They have a life span of five years, after which they are renewed automatically. Should a travel pass be lost, there is a fee of £11 (from April 2016) for a replacement. This does not apply if stolen. There are approximately 43,000 pass holders in Central Bedfordshire. Their journeys represent in approximately 40 per cent of all total bus journeys within Central Bedfordshire Council.
- 1.4 Central Bedfordshire Council also provides a Travel Aid scheme. This allows discounted travel for the unemployed on many local bus services for a fee of £5 for 28 days. Applications for Travel Aid passes are made via local Job Centres.

2. Proposals

2.1 Applying national time regulations Monday to Friday

- 2.1.1 In Central Bedfordshire most journeys using travel passes are made between the hours of 09:30 and 23:00. Therefore the Council will discontinue use of the Travel Pass scheme before 09:30 and after 23:00 on Monday to Friday. This is in line with the national scheme which is based on usage of buses by individuals over the age of 60 at the time of introduction (this has now increased to 63 the national retirement age for women in England and will increase to 65 by 2020)
- 2.1.2 Where infrequent services are provided, exceptions to the 09:30 rule will be allowed. If there are not any bus services from a town or village between 09:30 and 10:30, free travel would be allowed on the latest journey prior to 09:30 (if there is one). For example, if there are buses departing from a village at 08:00, 09:00, 11:00, the concessionary bus pass can be used on the 09:00 departure.

2.2 Changes to travel pass issue and renewal

- 2.2.1 Travel passes have a lifespan of five years after which they are currently automatically renewed. In future pass holders will need to apply for a new travel pass when renewal is required. This would be free of charge. At the current time, a large number of passes are reissued only to be returned due to the holder having moved or passed away. The new process of reapplying will remove any distress which may occur if the passholder has died.

3. Other concessionary schemes

3.1 Companion Passes

3.1.1 There are currently no proposals to change the issue of Companion Passes. They would continue to be used within and from Central Bedfordshire, and in other local authorities for which an agreement has been made with Central Bedfordshire Council. This currently applies to Bedford, Luton and Hertfordshire. The agreements with other local authorities are subject to change.

3.2 Travel Aid

3.2.1 The Travel Aid scheme will continue for bus companies wishing to participate, at no additional cost to Central Bedfordshire Council. It is understood that this scheme may be superseded by bus companies' own schemes or changes to Universal Credit.

Policy PT2: Concessionary Travel

- National time regulations for free travel for bus pass holders adopted: 09:30 to 23:00 Monday to Friday, all day Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.
- No automatic renewal of travel passes
- Move to online applications for travel passes from 2020
- The Travel Aid scheme will only continue for bus companies wishing to participate, at no additional cost to CBC.

Community Transport

1. Background information

- 1.1 There are two types of Community Transport: Dial a Ride and voluntary community bus services. The first receives regular financial support from Central Bedfordshire Council; the second does not (apart from reimbursement for journeys made using a bus pass).
- 1.2 There are three Dial-a-Ride operators within Central Bedfordshire: Buzzer, South Beds Dial a Ride, Link a Ride. They provide door-to-door services for older people or those less mobile who are unable to use buses. They operate on a charitable basis, but staff are paid.
- 1.3 There is a Service Level Agreement between Central Bedfordshire Council and the Dial a Ride operators until March 2017 - with each operator receiving a grant from CBC and a contribution for each passenger journey.
- 1.4 There are four voluntary community transport operators providing bus services within Central Bedfordshire: Flittabus, Wanderbus, Ivel Sprinter and Roadrunner. These are charitable organisations run by volunteers. They have fixed regular routes which are open to the general public, and they charge fares and accept bus passes.

	Dial a Ride	Voluntary Community Bus Services
Operators	Buzzer South Beds Dial a Ride Link a Ride	Flittabus Wanderbus Ivel Sprinter Roadrunner
Charity	✓	✓
Paid staff	✓	✗
Volunteers	✗	✓
CBC grant	✓	✗
Accept bus passes	✓ ¹	✓
For older people and people with a disability	✓	✗

¹ At a special fare

1.6 Dial a Ride

- 1.6.1 Financial support for dial a ride services is discretionary. They currently receive an annual grant and a concessionary reimbursement of £1 per passenger per journey. There were 35,776 passenger journeys in 2014/15.
- 1.6.2 Passengers pay a special concessionary fare. Higher fares are charged for some journeys with allowance sometimes made for the amount of time a journey takes.
- 1.6.3 The quality of service provided by the current Dial a Ride operators is very high. There are instances where the Dial a Ride driver may be the only person the customer sees in a number of days. The following tasks may be undertaken: driver sees the customer inside the house, assists with carrying shopping, checks to make sure a pre-booked passenger is not waiting anywhere, and adjusting the time return journeys from medical appointments if the user is running late.

1.7 Voluntary Community Buses

- 1.7.1 There are four operators providing bus services using voluntary staff. Three of these offer a range of infrequent services to some villages in Mid Beds. The fourth operator is based in Bedford Borough, but provides a limited service to some villages in Marston Vale.
- 1.7.2 These services are open to all, and operate in much the same way as conventional buses to a fixed timetable. Concessionary bus passes can be used on these services.
- 1.7.3 Voluntary bus services are particularly useful in areas where a very limited bus service is needed (perhaps once a week). However, there is a limit to the services that can be provided. Therefore the services usually just provide one return journey to a town, where it waits for two or three hours before bringing the passengers back. It can also be seen as a day out for the volunteer driver.
- 1.7.4 Central Bedfordshire Council does not make any financial contribution to the running costs of these services. The operators are reimbursed for concessionary bus passengers. Grants are available from central government from time to time.

Proposals

2.1 Dial a Ride

- 2.1.1 In order to create a clear and transparent process for funding Dial a Ride services, the council will introduce a tender-based system where organisations are invited to provide Dial a Ride proposals for Central Bedfordshire with options for members of the public to pay part of the fare. Market research was undertaken with Community Transport and Central Bedfordshire Council Fleet Service users between 23 November 2015 and the 11 January 2016. The outcomes from this research will be used to inform the requirements for the Dial a Ride service provision going forward.

2.2 Voluntary Community Buses

- 2.2.1 The Council will encourage voluntary service providers to take on additional services which cannot be met by conventional bus services.

Policy PT3: Community Transport

- A clear and transparent tender process for awarding of funding to support Dial a Ride services will be implemented
- Voluntary community bus service providers will be encouraged to take on additional services that cannot be provided by conventional bus operators.



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