

## **Transforming Transport: Public Consultation November 2010 Local Bus Services and Community Transport Interim Support Strategy**

### **Introduction:**

This public consultation process has occurred during October and November 2010 and has included a variety of methods, targeting a range of people and organisations. This report summarises the highlights and will be followed by a detailed report.

There were three main strands of the consultation:

1. restricting the time before which national concessionary pass holders may board a local bus service and travel without payment
2. introducing a fare on dial-a-ride services for bus pass holders
3. support to bus services – priorities and other ways to meet residents' transport needs

### **1. Consultation on restricting the time before which national concessionary pass holders may board a local bus service and travel without payment**

**Method:** 1,820 questionnaires were posted to bus pass holders (a 5% sample)

#### **Summary of Results**

- There were 912 valid responses (50% response).
- 71% of respondents make up to four journeys per week using their bus pass.
- 10% of respondents use their pass on a daily basis.
- 77% of respondents travel at least once a week before 09.30 in the morning.
- Only 2% of pass holders travelling before 09.30 do so for the purpose of getting to work.
- The main reasons for doing so are health (doctors/hospital appointments) and to go shopping.
- 58% of respondents said that it would cause no inconvenience, or only minor inconvenience if use of the free pass is restricted to after 09.30 on weekdays.
- 23% of respondents claim that limiting bus pass availability to 09.30 would cause major or significant inconvenience and/or expense.
- 67% of respondents felt that, if use of the pass before 09.30 were to be restricted, this restriction should not apply to people with disabilities.

### **2. Consultation on introducing a fare on dial-a-ride services for bus pass holders**

**Method:** 2,000 questionnaires were sent to all users of the three dial-a-ride services (a 100%) sample

#### **Summary of Results:**

- There were 455 valid returns (23% response).
- On average, 43% use the dial-a-rides to attend medical appointments, although this figure is much lower outside Leighton-Linslade.
- 31% of all respondents use dial-a-rides to go shopping, and 21% use it for social/recreation/leisure purposes.
- If the dial-a-rides were not available, 55% of users say that they would not be able to travel. Only a very small proportion would walk, take a bus or drive themselves, but 24% feel that they could get a lift if needs be.
- 76% of respondents would suffer major or significant inconvenience or disruption if the dial-a-ride services were not available.
- 95% are prepared to pay a fare as a contribution to maintaining service levels.

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- The median figure for an appropriate fare suggested by respondents is £1.50
- The individual comments made on the questionnaires stress the significance of the dial-a-rides in providing mobility for people who would otherwise find it very difficult, if not impossible, to go out. Users generally fear that they would be confined to their house, and made dependant on others to get their shopping, or to take them to medical appointments or social clubs.

### **3. Consultation on the future of bus services in Central Bedfordshire**

**Methods:** Survey and public workshops on which type of local bus services is most important for the Council to support.

- 5,000 questionnaires for distribution on local buses across Central Bedfordshire
- 5 workshops have been planned for completion by 23 November, one facilitated by the Rural Communities Charity and another delivered in partnership with Voluntary and Community Action.
- The workshops targeted particular groups, e.g. older people, people in rural areas including parish councillors, adults with learning difficulties, and voluntary and community organisations.
- Workshop Questionnaires were posted to 1,376 residents, town & parish councils and voluntary and community organisations.

#### **Summary of Results**

##### **Questionnaires on the local buses:**

- 668 questionnaires were returned.
- Of these, one third of respondents did not tick the not to state that they are a Central Bedfordshire resident.
- All respondents rated rural bus services as top priority for continuing Council support.
- Strongest support was for buses from rural villages to the nearest town, followed by buses from rural villages to the nearest regional centre (such as Bedford, Luton, Milton Keynes).
- There was strong support for buses to hospitals, doctors/dentists surgeries and health centres.
- There was only moderate support for urban bus services, even though the greater proportion of questionnaires was distributed on predominantly urban services.
- There was relatively little support for maintaining bus services in the evening or on Sundays.
- The lowest level of support was for transport to schools for children not in receipt of free school transport (i.e. those living less than 3 miles from their nearest catchment school). In fact, there are very few such services in the Council's supported service portfolio.
- 71% of all respondents were travelling on a free senior citizen's concessionary fare pass, and 74% are aged 60 or over.

##### **Workshops and Workshop Questionnaire, as at 22 November:**

- 4 workshops have been held with an average of 26 people attending each one. There will be one more workshop with the Advocacy Alliance on 23rd November.
- 74 questionnaires which went out with the workshop invitations have been returned.
- In the postal responses, there is little agreement on the priorities the council should adopt, although there is a slight preference for providing a basic standard

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of regular bus service in rural areas, even though few people may use it. In the workshops, this option was clearly the most favoured.

- In both the workshops and the postal returns, the second highest priority is to improve overall transport efficiency by attracting people from their cars and freeing up road space for all.
- The idea of helping local development by providing public transport links to major employment areas is strongly supported, as is the notion of helping the most disadvantaged in the community by targeting services and concessions towards the most needy.
- However, some delegates commented that they were being asked to choose between a number of unacceptable solutions.
- 69% of postal respondents supported the idea of a £ per trip support measure, with the average level for such support being set at £2.81
- 54% of postal respondents supported the idea of a passenger utilisation trigger with the average trigger being suggested at just under 7 passengers per journey.
- Questionnaire respondents and workshop participants supported the Council developing proposals for smaller-scale, demand responsive, local, flexible services such as:

	<i>Workshops</i>	<i>Postal Responses</i>
Local community organisations running their own vehicle serving a local estate or village	Most popular	Joint 2 <sup>nd</sup> most popular
Concessionary fares on taxis /private hire cars for people in villages with no bus service	2 <sup>nd</sup> most popular	Joint 2 <sup>nd</sup> most popular
Taxi or private hire operators running to a limited number of key destinations on demand, with users sharing taxi fare	3 <sup>rd</sup> most popular	Joint 2 <sup>nd</sup> most popular
Taxi or private hire operators running specific demand-responsive bus routes, at bus fares	4 <sup>th</sup> most popular	Most popular
Organised car sharing schemes	Not supported	Little support
Promoting rural car clubs and car pool schemes	Not supported	Little support

- Respondents were generally sceptical about expecting the community to provide more transport support for itself (Big Society) – 38% yes, 62% no.
- The respondents concur with the Equality Impact Assessment that those affected will be older people, those on low incomes, people in rural areas without cars, and carers.
- At all workshops people suggested campaigns to get more people on buses and to publicise bus services