

LOCAL BUS SERVICE REVIEW 2009/2010



At a meeting on 15th September, the Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council resolved to address a potential overspend in the budget for local bus support by cutting a number of supported services. This decision was clarified on 13th October, when it was further resolved to remove financial support from only a small number of poorly used bus services while at the same time conducting a far-reaching Review of local passenger transport provision. **That Review is about to start.**

Understandably, one of the intended outcomes of the Review will be a reduction in costs. The current expenditure by Central Bedfordshire Council on supporting local bus services amounts to nearly £2 million per annum, although it is not a statutory duty (unlike school transport). The Council currently supports a large number of services which are not otherwise commercially viable, because passenger numbers are low. It was County Council policy to support these services, but the priorities of the former County Council do not necessarily coincide with those of the new Central Bedfordshire. We shall therefore be reassessing all of these supported services to ensure that they provide value for money. The challenge facing the officers and consultants conducting the Review will be to achieve financial savings whilst maintaining the most cost-effective services. This challenge will be greatest in rural areas because that is where passenger numbers are lowest.

There are several aspects of the Review. As well as looking at local bus services, the reviewers will also be scrutinising the Council's procurement of school transport, as well as the way that the Council manages Social Services transport. One possible outcome of the Review might be a move towards further integration of some or all of these constituents.

While the Review is ongoing, the Council will also be working on producing its next Local Transport Plan. As part of this process, officers will be talking to a whole spectrum of interest groups and opinion formers to establish what the Council's priorities need to be in terms of transport provision. New transport policy emerging from this process will feed directly into the Local Bus Review, so that the proposals generated by the Review most accurately reflect the views and wishes of the wider Central Bedfordshire public.

Between now and next Spring, the Council will be collecting data, talking to bus operators, bus users and interest groups. **We believe that it is essential to talk to the people who use these services so that the results of this Review reflect their opinions.**

We are very interested in the views of Town and Parish Councils, who have the valuable function of channelling grass roots thoughts and opinions about bus services into the Review process.

Towns and Parishes will have a 2-phase involvement in the Review:

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| <i>Now</i> | <i>Late Spring / early Summer 2010.</i> |
| Invitation to input ideas about existing service provision, possible new services and possible redundant services into the Review. | Invitation to comment on the proposals generated by the Review, in so far as they affect your local area. |

In terms of the input that you could make now, the sort of questions you might like to consider are:

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| <i>Does the bus always need to go to the same town, or could it more usefully go to different places on different days?</i> | <i>Do we need a peak-hour service, or would we be happy to wait until after the school buses have finished their morning run?</i> |
| <i>Do we need a bus service every weekday?</i> | <i>Does our bus really need to take us all the way to town? Would we be happier with a bus which ran more often but only took us to a place where we could catch a good connecting service?</i> |
| <i>Are there times of the day when two buses run at nearly the same time?</i> | |
| <i>Is there sufficient local interest in setting up our own community transport project?</i> | <i>Could some sort of organised lift-giving scheme be better than a very infrequent, bus service?</i> |
| <i>Does our bus service really give us what we need, in terms of access to work, shops and services?</i> | <i>What would it take to persuade us to leave the car at home and go by bus?</i> |

A NOTE OF CAUTION....

Please remember that the underlying premise is that the Council will be able to make cost savings at the end of this exercise. Town and Parish Councils are requested to be circumspect about any proposals they make for improved or more diverse bus services. Commercial services (i.e those that don't have to be paid for out of the public purse) are rare. Any proposal for a new bus service needs to be accompanied by suggestions as to how it will be funded.

Please note also that councils are prohibited from directly subsidising village bus organisations (like the Wanderbus) but there is nothing to prevent these organisations from submitting tenders to do local bus work on behalf of the Council. The Review is likely to generate a great many opportunities for small transport providers to enter the local bus market.

"I look forward to reading your written submissions and hope that we can reshape the bus network into an efficient and useful set of services that meet the needs of users and council tax payers alike. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the process."

Simon Ayres
Public Transport Manager
Central Bedfordshire Council

| WHAT IS COVERED IN THE REVIEW? | WHAT IS NOT COVERED IN THE REVIEW? |
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| <p>Fully supported local bus services. Examples of these are Grant Palmer 74, 197, 200, 202, Herberts 185, 187, Meridian Line E1, E2, E3 etc., J&D E7, Centrebus 20, Expresslines M2 and Red Kite 77.</p> | <p>Commercial bus services. These are bus services that operate without any financial support from the Council. Examples would be Stagecoach J2, S1, M1, M2, M3, M4, Arriva 24, 31, 38, 69, 70, Centrebus 82 or Grant Palmer X34.</p> |
| <p>Partially supported local bus services. Services where several journeys per day are provided commercially, but the supported journeys make up a substantial proportion of the whole service, for example: Grant Palmer DB1, 10, 36A, 36C, X42 and Centrebus DB2, 231, X31.</p> | <p>Community Transport The Council does not directly support the Whitbread Wanderbus, Ivel Sprinter, Flittabus or Road Runner, and has no control over their routes or timetables. However, we will be talking to these operators to see whether there is scope for the voluntary sector to take on more services which are currently provided by conventional bus companies. Some capital funding may be available.</p> |
| <p>School Transport. This includes contract buses that are not open to the general public, as well as school buses that are technically open for all members of the public to use.</p> | |
| <p>Social Services Transport. This covers services for the benefit of frail elderly people run by the Council's own fleet of wheelchair-accessible minibuses, and also similar services which the Council procures from the private sector.</p> | |