

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

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| Budget Proposals 16/17 Phase Two: Public Transport | | Mark Edwards – Head of Highways & Transport | 24 March 2016 Version 2 (Executive/Council) |
| Proposal: | <p>In addition to Phase One, it is proposed to reduce the budget by a further £460,000, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service reductions as listed in Table One of the Consultation Summary Report • withdrawal of funding for the Readibus scheduled service that serves the Newbury/Thatcham/Reading corridor • removal of the West Berkshire additions to the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (i.e. travel 9:00 to 9:30am, companion passes, mental health entitlement and use on Handybuses and other community minibus transport) • removal of the development and maintenance of the Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) System | | |
| Total budget 15/16: | £1,463,090 | Recommended officer saving 16/17: | £815,000 (56%) |
| Initial proposed saving 16/17 (incl. Phase One and Two): | £815,000 (56%) (Phase One - £320,000) | Final recommendation to Executive/Council: | To note the changes to the public transport service, to proceed with the savings proposal and to make £337,000 of transitional funding available in 2016/17. |
| No. of responses: | <p>In total, 399 responses were received, 327 of which included comments. Of those who responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 370 from individuals • 14 from groups/organisations • 14 from Town/Parish Councils • One from a District Councillor <p>54 responses were from non-users of the service.</p> <p>We also received one petition.</p> | | |
| Key issues raised: | <p>The key concern from the ending, or severe reduction, of any of the current contracted local bus services and the scheduled Readibus services, is that this would result in residents being isolated from vital services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shops (119 responses) • medical services (105 responses) | | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational establishments (104 responses) • employment (69 responses) • banks, post offices, council offices (44 responses) • libraries, especially if all but Newbury library closes (14 responses) <p>The key consequences of such isolation were cited as; reduced life opportunities and reduced quality of life. This could possibly lead, particularly in the case of Readibus users, to loneliness and depression and in some a serious deterioration in health. 24 respondents believed this would result in increased NHS and care in the community costs.</p> <p>Eight people alleged they would have to move house if they lost their village bus service, because of their remoteness from essential services.</p> <p>The loss/reduction of local bus services was believed, by 14 respondents, to threaten the economic well being of Newbury and Thatcham, where much shopping and business is carried out by the rural population.</p> <p>43 responses believed that further traffic congestion and environmental pollution would result from current bus passengers having to travel by car. There would also be a higher demand on limited car parking spaces, particularly at hospitals /surgeries.</p> <p>The ending of the council’s enhancements to the national concessionary fares schemes was believed to largely target the vulnerable and least well off members of the community. This was particularly the case for the ending of the companion bus pass (8 responses) and acceptance of the pass on Section 19 services – Readibus, Handybuses and other community minibus services (36 responses).</p> | |
| <p>Equality issues:</p> | <p>The main people believed to be adversely affected by the proposed public transport savings were:</p> <p>The elderly (189 responses), the disabled / infirm (137 responses), job seekers (13 responses), non drivers / those without access to a car (125 responses), those on a low income (67 responses) and pupils & students, including those with SEN (115 responses).</p> <p>The responses and recommendations received suggested using existing resources more efficiently (e.g. not running</p> | |

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| | <p>journeys that carry low numbers or using smaller vehicles for these journeys) and getting better returns from these resources (e.g. increased promotion of the services and raising fares). It was suggested we could introduce other low cost transport services into the district such as the post buses and opening our closed door home to school contracts to the public. Changes to commercial services to cover areas where bus services may be withdrawn were also put forward, as were changes to the statutory Off-Peak National Bus Pass Scheme.</p> | | |
| Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users: | Suggestion | Council response | |
| | Charge holders of the national off-peak bus pass, when they travel on local buses, or on Section 19 services. Restrict the issue of the pass to disabled residents and limit the occasions an individual can present their pass. | None of this is legally permitted, except the last suggestion for users of the Readibus, Handybus and various community minibus services. | |
| | Raise local bus fares. | Fares in West Berkshire are relatively high and increasing them could result in some people choosing not to travel on the buses. Higher fares could increase the amount the council reimburse bus companies for carrying concessionary passengers free of charge. | |
| | Lower local bus fares. | This could reduce the revenue the council receive back from some of it contracted bus services. | |
| | Promote the services more. | The council does make bus service information available via its own website, through Traveline, with timetables at bus stops, and though the Travel Guide. It is difficult to see how this could be improved cost-effectively where the population is widely and thinly dispersed as it is in West Berkshire. | |
| | Reduce less-well used journeys, or use smaller vehicles on them. | The economics of bus operation mean that less-well used journeys operate at minimal cost, and using a mix of vehicles with larger vehicles required at peak times would cost more. | |
| | Allow the public on school buses. | This is not possible without additional cost due to disability legislation. | |
| | The volunteer transport sector may be able to meet more demand, although their capacity to do so is limited by the availability of | The council has commissioned a total transport study to advise on the future shape of community transport in the District. The council is still | |

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| | volunteers. It is also felt that volunteer drivers may not be keen on handling cash fares, especially the taking of fares from vulnerable passengers etc. | awaiting the final report. | |
| Alternative options for applying the saving in this area: | Suggestion | Council response | |
| | Replace existing bus services with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand responsive services • Dial-a-Ride services • Volunteer services, including car schemes, and extend national off-peak bus pass to these services • Taxis • Lift share scheme | Such services may well be able to meet some of the demand along some of the current bus corridors where numbers travelling are low. The volunteer sector already operates services in some of our villages which are remote from the public transport network and where numbers wishing to travel are low. Taxis and demand responsive services could have a role to play in similar areas and possibly deliver a small amount of savings. Respondents warned that the existing community transport schemes in the district had a shortage of volunteers so it would not be easy for this sector to operate more services. | |
| | The council look to operate all the services in-house. | The council is already operating some local bus services in-house under a Section 22 Permit. Further expansion of the bus services it can operate is being considered. It is believed it would be uneconomical for the council to operate any vehicle larger than a 16 seat minibus due in part to the differences in licensing regime required. | |
| | Have feeder services from the villages to the main bus routes. | Feeder services may be able to deliver some savings. Hopefully the Total Transport study will highlight any such opportunities. However, there is a general reluctance amongst the population to transfer from one vehicle to another on relatively short journeys, when the place of transfer is open to the elements and connections are not guaranteed. | |
| Increase expenditure on local bus services. | The counter argument to savings was to increase expenditure on bus services to deliver improvements. This could attract more patronage and fares revenue. This would possibly be the case in the towns where more people could benefit from any such improvements. The | | |

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| | | impact in the rural areas would probably be less because of the lower numbers of people living there. | |
| | Don't build the Wharf Bus Interchange. | There is a need for the buses to have a terminus and turning point in Newbury, more so if the pedestrianised area of the town centre is to be preserved. | |
| | Raise Council Tax or Parish Council Precepts. | This would be a matter for the Council Members and Parish Councils to decide. | |
| | Open the Vodafone bus services to the public. | This option is being explored with Vodafone and the bus company, but a solution is not yet available. | |
| Suggestions for how others may help contribute: | Responses suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charities or big business could operate, sponsor or fund the threatened services. • Seek changes to commercially-operated services. • Council members and/or officers should face further cuts to benefits/salaries/pensions/expenses. | | |
| Officer conclusion: | Based on feedback from the consultation, it is proposed to make a number of changes to the original proposals including changes to services 101/102/104 and 105 and their replacement with two new services 11/12. It is also proposed to introduce a number of minibuses to replace service 90 (Lambourn to Swindon) and the replacement of some rural parts of services 90 and 143. There will also be changes to the Readibus service. | | |

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