

Written evidence submitted by the Bakewell Bus User Group (BCC0108)

Bakewell Bus User Group was founded in spring 2024, because of local residents' frustration with local bus services. The group meets monthly in Bakewell, and collects evidence of bus user experiences and wants, as well as discussing ways to increase bus patronage by residents and visitors. We are part of East Midlands Better Buses, a coalition of bus user groups across the East Midlands Combined County Authority.

In my submission I refer to the terms of reference and will cover:

- The social and economic impacts of poor connectivity on access to education, healthcare, employment, and social inclusion in communities, as well as on the economy of towns and villages.
- The effectiveness of current funding models and governance structures in enabling local transport authorities and commercial operators to improve, sustain and keep bus services outside major metropolitan areas affordable, and the potential effectiveness of alternatives.

Executive summary

- Inadequate bus services cause social and economic inequalities between those who have access to other means of transport and those who are reliant on buses.
- Unreliable bus services can be the result of an old fleet which is hard to maintain, but smaller bus companies do not have the resources to bid for funding for new vehicles.
- Residents in rural areas need services that run more frequently than every two hours, that start earlier in the morning and finish later to allow access to education, work and leisure activities, and that run directly to important locations like hospitals and railway stations.

Section 1: The social and economic impacts of poor connectivity

The experiences related by members of Bakewell Bus User Group provide numerous examples of the impacts of poor connectivity. Three examples are given here:

1. An elderly lady in the village of Youlgrave, which is two and half miles south of Bakewell, gave up her car about five years ago. Her sight is

starting to fail, and she does not like to go out at night. The local subsidised bus service runs six times a day between 0743 and 1753, Monday to Saturday. There is no Sunday service. Bakewell Town Hall, which provides a programme of live and screened music and drama, including NT Live screenings, has recently started putting on Sunday matinee performances, aimed at catering for the many elderly people living in Bakewell. The lady in Youlgrave would like to go to these Sunday afternoon performances, but as there is no bus on a Sunday she is unable to go.

2. Residents of Bakewell are lucky to have a direct hourly bus service to Chesterfield Royal Hospital, approximately 15 miles away by road. This bus also serves Chatsworth House, which requires at least a 10 minute diversion from the direct route, longer if the bus gets caught up in visitor traffic queuing to park. The bus route also serves an estate on the way into Chesterfield, and another one on the other side on the way to the hospital. This means the scheduled bus journey is 1hr15min, while the travel time in a car from Bakewell to the hospital is normally between 30-45 minutes, depending on traffic. Residents of outlying villages who have to rely on two-hourly services to get into Bakewell before they can even catch the bus to the hospital are often forced to arrive very early for appointments or endure long waits to get home. This means a half hour medical appointment at lunch time can take all day to attend and get home again.
3. Buxton is a town of over 22,000 people approximately 12 miles from Bakewell. It has an opera house and hosts the internationally renowned Buxton International Festival and Festival Fringe, and the International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival every summer. It has a direct train connection to Manchester, which takes about an hour to get to Manchester Piccadilly. An hourly bus service links Buxton to Bakewell. The first bus from Bakewell to Buxton arrives in Buxton at 0915, and the last bus from Buxton to Bakewell leaves Buxton at 1808. This doesn't run early enough to allow people from Bakewell (or anywhere along the A6 corridor from Derby, where the bus starts) to commute to jobs or education in Manchester by public transport. It doesn't run late enough to allow people from Bakewell to attend cultural and leisure events in

Buxton in the evening, never mind attending evening events or classes in Manchester.

Recommendation:

Rural buses should run seven days a week, and not exclude Sundays.

Consideration should be made to overall journey times; particularly for time critical journeys such as to hospitals or rail stations.

Buses should run early enough to allow people to get to work and education, and late enough for people to attend social and cultural evening events.

Section 2: The effectiveness of current funding models and governance structures

Bakewell Bus User Group receives frequent reports of problems with the reliability of our existing bus services. Cancellations are common, and this prevents people accessing work and education. Many of Bakewell's café workers commute in from Sheffield, but because of the age of the buses used on that route breakdowns are common, resulting in long waits for a replacement bus or lifts from kind strangers.

Our small local bus company, which runs most of our village routes and the Chesterfield service, suffers from frequent cancellations due to broken down vehicles and staff shortages. Larger bus companies like Stagecoach and GoAhead have already rolled out electric buses in places like Oxford, and electric buses are due to be rolled out in Chesterfield this spring, yet residents of Bakewell and surrounding villages are travelling in bone shaking vehicles which have frequent problems, and there is no prospect of them being replaced. Smaller bus companies do not have the administrative time and knowledge to put together bids for funding such as the Zero Emission Bus Regional (ZEBRA) funding from the Department for Transport.

Recommendation:

A mechanism to allow smaller operators to obtain new electric buses should be developed to improve reliability of services as well as reducing emissions and air pollution.

We would be pleased to provide further information to inform this inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact us at bakewellclimateaction@gmail.com

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