

A summary of the governments £220m “better deal for bus users” and how to make suggestions for improved or enhanced bus services in Wiltshire

Briefing Note No. 20-10

Service : Communities & Neighbourhood Services – Passenger Transport

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Date Prepared: 17th February 2020
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The government has recognised the important role that buses play and has announced a £220m competitive funding pot available for local authorities to bid against. This [link](#) provides the detail behind its “better deal for bus users” approach, which is summarised below, outlining Wiltshire Councils position for this exciting opportunity.

National bus strategy

The government has recognised that in investing in the bus, it requires a workable national bus strategy. It is going to use this round of bidding to help shape that strategy and will further develop it throughout this year and next.

Bus priority

It is recognised that the bus plays a pivotal role in enhancing the economy, with bus users generating £64billion of economic output each year. However, many local authorities do not always provide the bus with the priority it requires when designing road schemes. Therefore, all new road investments in England which receive central UK government funding, will be required to either support bus priority measures, or explain why doing so would not be necessary, or appropriate in that instance. All future funding bids will need to explicitly address this issue.

As well as providing local authorities with funding to invest in bus priority measures, the government will refresh the department’s guidance to provide up to date, and relevant advice on prioritising those vehicles which can carry the most people. This will ensure local authorities have the information they need to improve the speed of bus journeys, and further support the case for bus priority measures.

Fares and payment

The government is actively looking to work with local authorities and operators to identify ways to encourage operators to implement multi-operator tickets and fares caps, either in relation to the price paid for individual journeys or a daily or weekly cap (so you never pay more than the price of a daily or weekly ticket regardless of the number of journeys taken).

To make it easier for passengers to pay for their journey on the bus, the government will work with industry to ensure that all buses accept contactless payments. The five largest bus companies have already rolled-out contactless payment devices across their networks, as have many medium-sized operators.

In Wiltshire the vast majority of all bus services have contactless pay facility. Those few remaining services that don't will do so during 2021 and all future tenders will require suppliers to provide contactless payment facilities.

Passenger information and publicity

One of the recognised barriers to catching the bus is that there is not always enough information available and when it is, it might be inaccurate, or difficult to understand. As part of its "Bus Open Data" programme, the government is currently developing a new bus open data portal, which will contain information on bus services for use by app developers. Significant progress has been made, with the intention that fares, and location data will be available from January 2021.

Wiltshire Council already contributes to the portal through its commitment, along with all other local authorities in the South West and bus operators, to Traveline Southwest, where we have been feeding data into a system for many years now, that produces timetable, fare and real time passenger information. We are also about to invest in a replacement programme for the real time passenger information displays that can be found at bus stops informing the bus user when the next bus is arriving. Added to this, we are about to employ, on a part time basis, a post responsible for marketing the bus in Wiltshire, in partnership with key bus suppliers.

£5 billion fund announced

Following the announcement of the £220m a further package of £5 billion is to be invested over five years and will boost bus services by focusing on a range of priorities, set to include:

- Higher frequency services, including evenings and weekends, to make it easier and less restrictive for people to get around at any time of day
- More 'turn up and go' routes where, thanks to higher frequency, people won't have to rely on timetables to plan journeys
- New priority schemes will make routes more efficient, so that buses avoid congested routes and can speed passengers through traffic
- More affordable, simpler fares
- At least 4,000 new Zero Emission Buses to make greener travel the convenient option, driving forward the UK's progress on its net zero ambitions
- Over 250 miles of new, high-quality separated cycle routes and safe junctions in towns and cities across England; and
- Dozens of new 'Mini-Holland' schemes to transform town centres across the country and make them safer to get around

The details of this significant fund will be made available in the spending review later this year but reaffirms this governments priority towards bus.

What are the available funds?

Superbus networks (up to £70m available)

The primary objective of this £70m fund is to increase bus patronage in an urban area through a package of measures covering bus priority, reducing bus fares and increasing service frequencies. Unfortunately, Wiltshire does not qualify, as it requires the money to be used on one town, or city, with a population of more than 75,000 people.

Tackling air quality and greenhouse gas emissions (up to £50m available)

The Government is seeking expressions of interest from local authorities and bus operators in developing an all-electric bus town or city. This will see an entire location's bus fleet changed over to zero emission capable buses. The town, or city, will serve as a model for zero-emission bus travel and feed into the overarching national bus strategy.

As many buses as possible are to be exclusively electric, with scope to test innovations such as longer distance hybrids, which operate in electric-only mode within the town or city. Local authorities will need to show how this supports their wider plans for public transport in the town or city. Up to £50 million will be invested to contribute to new buses and the supporting infrastructure.

From Wiltshire Council's perspective this would support our pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030 and the wider environmental improvement. This will however be a challenge, as there are no settlements that readily meet the requirements, as set out in the bid criteria. Salisbury would however be the most obvious choice, and discussions are to be had with representatives of the GoAhead Group in the coming weeks to determine whether such a scheme might be viable for Salisbury.

On-demand services (up to £20m available)

To trial on-demand services in rural and suburban areas the government has established a fund of up to £20 million. Demand responsive transport (DRT) services have been used for some time to replace infrequent, traditional services which do not meet a local community's specific needs, with ones which can get closer to where people live, at a time convenient for them.

Wiltshire Council has significant experience in this area and still currently operates DRT. It is not possible at this stage to determine exactly what an expression of interest would look like, or include, but officers are discussing what needs are not currently met and where perhaps existing DRT could be improved. We would be very keen on submitting a bid for this and building upon our extensive experience of DRT.

Supporting bus services (up to £30m available)

Much of this funding is for experimental projects and a lump sum of £671,171 has been specifically allocated to Wiltshire Council to improve local bus services over a 12-18-month period and it is this funding which we are seeking advice from elected members and town and

parish councils on the best way to spend it. This briefing will also be sent to Community Engagement Managers and area boards.

The Government has informed us that it expects this funding to be used to improve the provision of local bus services in one or more of the following ways:

- increasing evening or weekend frequencies, or supporting additional seasonal services in tourist areas;
- restoring lost bus routes, where most needed, to ensure people have access to public transport services;
- supporting new bus services, or extensions to current services, to access e.g. new housing, employment opportunities, healthcare facilities etc.

The Government also expects us to provide them with an outline of how the money will be used before they release it to us but has given us very little time to do this. We can therefore only do a very basic consultation exercise in the time available, which is why we need your assistance.

We would therefore be grateful to receive from you, details of any requests you have received for bus service improvements, that you believe are causing problems for residents in your area and which you are confident would be well used by them if provided. Please email this information direct to Wiltshire Council's Passenger Transport Unit at buses@wiltshire.gov.uk by **Friday 27 March 2020**, so that they can assess the feasibility of introducing these on an experimental basis using this funding.

While compiling these requests, please bear in mind that this funding is time limited, with no guarantee that further funding will be available at the end of the experimental period to allow the improvements to continue. Please also bear in mind that use of this money will need to be spread around the county and so requests for small improvements to existing services are likely to be more successful than those for completely new all-day services, which could cost in the region of £150,000 per annum to operate and be difficult to resource.

Please accept our apologies for the short timescale for this consultation, but the deadlines have been imposed upon us by the Department for Transport and are necessary in order for us to be able to claim the funding in good time to spend during the next financial year.

If you wish to discuss this request in more detail, or obtain guidance on the feasibility of a suggestion before submitting it, please ring Wiltshire Council's Bus Network Manager on 01225 713454 or email him at buses@wiltshire.gov.uk.

The government is hosting a series of events in February and March to further explain the detail behind the schemes, where Wiltshire will be represented. If there is anything of note from those meetings members, town and parish councils will be updated.