

PROPOSED CUTS TO BUS SERVICES

Part of the plan of Shropshire Council (S.C.) to cut their outgoings is to reduce their subsidies to bus service operators, whilst retaining those services which are deemed essential and make economic sense. We understand that the figures at present are:

total subsidy for bus services	annually £2.9m
contribution from central government (2011-12)	1.14m (to be reduced further)
from S.C. sources	approx 1.8m

intended saving from S.C. public transport budget £716,000.

Re LEEBOTWOOD and LONGNOR

Both of our bus routes, 435 and 540, are affected.

Route 435 (Ludlow/Shrewsbury): the service interval was increased to (approx) hourly a few years ago and S.C. is considering reverting to 2 hour gaps when it is more lightly used, ie between 9.0 and 3.0, retaining the full service at the busier times, especially when needed for work and education

Route 540 covers Cardington/Shrewsbury via Church Stretton and Acton Burnell on weekdays, with only a single service daily - early morning into Shrewsbury, afternoon return. On Saturdays it is extended south to Acton Scott with at least 2 services in each direction. There is no Sunday service.

At present there is good weekday usage during term-time, and the return journey is timed for student rather than adult convenience. During educational holidays usage is much reduced but Saturdays are usually boom time for these buses.

[Figures provided to S.C. by the route operator, Boltons.]

Financially the picture is, frankly, bleak. Currently for the 540 -

Estimated S.C. subsidy to Boltons (2010/2011)	£83,000
Estimated income from fares	approx 9,800
Subsidy per passenger journey	nearly £7 (£14 return)

S.C. agreed in December to remove subsidies from 'high cost' bus services; 540 is among the routes being considered. Without the subsidy the service would almost inevitably close. The decision is due in April 2011.

POSSIBILITIES re 540

- 1 The Saturday service might be sustainable as (almost?) self-financing, dependent on the local operator.
- 2 S.C. must provide a service for certain groups of schoolchildren and students, so a bus might be run on weekdays during term-time (approx 190 days per year) with

residents permitted to use it. However, there would be no service on weekdays outside the school and college term.

3 Other services available:

Shropshire Link: can be used only twice per week and has to be booked separately on each occasion. Suitable availability cannot be guaranteed. For use only outside times of peak travel. Useful for occasional rather than regular travel.

Shrewsbury Dial-a-Ride: service available for those with hampered mobility.

SUGGESTED ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The fact that S.C. must reduce its outgoings, and that subsidised bus services must share the pain, cannot be ignored, but we cannot know how any individual area of expenditure fits into the overall plan. The Transport Department is planning to save £716,000 from the bus services, but it is not a hard and fast target.

Like all other Parishes we have the opportunity to argue the case for softening S.C.'s intentions re our services. Please see the bottom of the page for the address and cut-off date for comments. Time is short.

Here are some of the points which have been raised;

540 is used by some as an alternative to car; carbon saving would be reversed
Is car sharing a reliable alternative? (Insurance?/days off?)
Any other environmental issues?
'Rural isolation' – would any areas lose their only bus service?
Transport for non-drivers? - including under-age, over-age, those not owning a car or trying to avoid using one (not to mention alcoholics!)
Crossing the A49 to the bus stops on foot is not a welcome prospect, but not out of the question for the nimble and courageous. Not advisable for anyone with impaired mobility.

For further information please contact any of

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or passtrans@shropshire.gov.uk - for further information and questionnaire.

The consultation is open only until 21 March, so please download the questionnaire and submit your comments asap. The helpful staff in the transport office may allow a day or two extra but responses have already been heavy - so the sooner the better.

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