

Cllr Susan Van de Ven  
Total Transport Member Steering Group  
Via email

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Our Ref:

Dear Susan

## **BUS SERVICE REVIEW – COMMENTS ON REMOVING ALL SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES**

Following the July 2016 Cambridgeshire Future Transport meeting here are comments from Fenland District Council about the proposal to remove all subsidised bus services.

### **Headline Comments**

As you are aware Fenland District Council submitted a detailed written response about all the proposed options for the last meeting (please see the letter attached as appendix 1). We raised a number of concerns about option 1 most notably that we believe this option and option 8 will have the biggest impact on local communities. We wish to reiterate this statement in the strongest possible terms.

We are also still concerned about the level of information that is available from which to make decisions about each option. We raised this in our June 2016 comments. We stated that further information was needed particularly in respect of the financial savings that will be made for each option. It seems that some of this task has been done for the Ely area as part of the Total Transport work. This does not necessarily reflect Fenland though and we will demonstrate this in our comments below.

We fully understand the difficulties arising from austerity and the budget reductions that form part of this approach however; we would like to see a more balanced approach that uses the remaining budget to minimise the impact on local communities.

### **Matters for consideration**

#### **Economic Development and Access to Employment**

We wish to express particular concern about the availability of bus services at peak times for commuters should option 1 be progressed. Opportunities for employees to travel have already been reduced within the Fenland area in recent years and we know this is causing difficulties for local residents.

Fenland district is also one of the most deprived in Cambridgeshire and ranks 94 out of 326 nationally in terms of deprivation levels with parts of Wisbech and March identified as the worst areas. Plans and strategies for regeneration and economic growth are therefore essential. Equally, around 1 in 5 households within Fenland do not have access to a car and should option 1 go forward opportunities to access employment and education may well be reduced.

Whilst we understand the County Council's perspective that implementing option 1 will provide equity across Cambridgeshire in terms of the approach, we consider that the Fenland area will be particularly disadvantaged in respect of access to services and to jobs.

#### Use of existing bus services in Fenland

We would like to draw to your attention to tables 1 and 2 which can be found in appendix 2 attached to this letter. This sets out the level of use of subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride in Fenland. You will note that the level of use of subsidised bus services is ten times greater than the use of the dial a ride. Whilst it might be true to say that not all the current journeys need to be made we would suggest that the majority of them will be necessary. We have concerns about how these journeys can be made by alternative transport. Many of these journeys are also being made to and from locations that have no commercial services and cannot therefore be picked up by other bus services. Whilst railway travel in Fenland continues to increase there are only 3 railway stations within Fenland District and therefore most communities are not served directly. A bus journey is typically required to access a railway station in Fenland for a person who does not have access to a car.

#### The ability of the remaining passenger transport to address demand

Based on the above use of subsidised bus services in Fenland we are far from convinced that the remaining commercial bus services and FACT have the resources to transport all the people that would be displaced by the removal of the subsidised services. This raises significant concerns about how people will travel in the future.

We would also like to point out that the Cambridgeshire Future Transport (CfT) work to date has not come up with any other solutions in Fenland, in each case where a subsidised service has been reviewed. If there was a cheaper solution the CfT work would have looked to put such a proposal in place.

It is our view that a discussion is needed with FACT to better understand their capability to deliver further work, within their existing resources. There is also a need to understand the resources that would be required to accommodate most of the journeys currently being made by subsidised bus services should they be removed.

In our opinion FACT could potentially cover off peak journeys, especially within the villages. We are not sure about their ability to also transport commuters within their existing resources. As stated above the removal of bus services for commuters could have a serious impact especially for young people who do not drive. We would like CCC to instigate proactive discussions with FACT as soon as possible before making any key decision about removing all subsidised bus services in Fenland.

The cost of alternative transport options

We would draw to your attention, appendix 2 Table 2 below. This shows that some of the subsidised bus services in Fenland have very low costs per passenger e.g. 78p and 90p. It is very doubtful that FACT or any other transport provider could operate such a service for the same cost. FACT would also need larger vehicles to accommodate such large passenger numbers.

Based on the passenger numbers and the cost to provide services it is our view that the remaining CCC passenger transport services funding, in providing value for money should consider continuing to fund some of these lower cost services.

Ongoing commitments to fund alternative transport options to subsidised bus services

In the Fenland context the removal of all subsidised bus services will create a heavy reliance on community transport, particularly for the villages but also for our market towns. We are very aware that the community transport sector is also facing funding pressures. Will CCC be making a longer term commitment to fund community transport if it removes all subsidised bus services? Without such a commitment, and should community transport not be supported, along with the removal of subsidised buses substantial parts of Fenland could end up with no public transport at all in future.

The information in this letter sets out the response from Fenland District Council in respect of option 1 to remove all subsidised bus services. We are content for this response to be circulated to all members of the working group before the October 2016 meeting.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Simon King  
Hereward CRP Chairman  
& FDC Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Transport

CC: Toby Parsons – Cambridgeshire County Council

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## Appendix 1

### FDC written response on each option for the July 2016 Meeting

Dear Toby,

I'd be grateful if you could distribute this at the above meeting and read out FDC's comments on each option when it is discussed if appropriate. Please also accept Cllr Butcher's apologies.

Many thanks,  
Simon

Item 5 relates to Cambridgeshire Future Transport and future options for bus and community transport services from 2017-18. The above paper makes clear that a current budget of over £1.5million will be reduced to £500,000 by April 2018. The impact of this is going to be significant because the Fenland area currently receives a sizeable sum of funding across Community transport and subsidized bus services. The current budget has a breakdown and there are separate pots of money for bus and community transport. The £500,000 is not broken down so this adds a further consideration.

#### Key issues

- How does concessionary fares link with these options? Has a decision yet been made about concessionary fares for dial a ride?
- The information for each option gives no indication of the actual likely budget saving. It is therefore not possible to compare and contrast options in terms of making savings. The amount of money to be saved by each option is important in this context. A table setting out the figures against each other for the 8 options is needed.

Option 1 – Withdraw all subsidised bus services from April 2017 – Should this option go forward consideration is needed around bus services at peak times. FACT could potentially cover off peak journeys but the removal of bus services for commuters could have a serious impact especially for young people who do not drive. We agree with CCC that this option would ensure equity across the County in terms of bus service removal but we are not sure it would achieve equity in terms of access to non- transport services or for work purposes.

Option 2 – Withdraw all Saturday Services from April 2017 - This will leave many areas but especially the villages with limited or no transport. This is not ideal but we know from the removal of Saturday FACT services that many people will change their plans and make journeys in the week. There will still be some bus services as a number are commercial, especially those relating to work journeys.

Option 3 – withdraw off-peak bus services where alternative transport exists – this option will affect many of our bus services, as most are delivered on this basis. I think the big question with this is to understand whether FACT have capacity to take all the extra journeys. If they don't have the capacity what extra would be needed and is it affordable? Where would the extra money to take the extra capacity come from?

Option 4 – Withdraw peak time bus services with an average ridership of 5 or less passengers per day – we are not sure that there are any services in Fenland that fall into this bracket. However, if there are we would assume that FACT could accommodate these people because we are talking about small numbers of people. From our perspective this may be a better option to take forward than some of the others.

Option 5 - Focus on low performing routes, high cost per passenger of £6 or higher per passenger – There are no such bus services in Fenland. The Fenland subsidised services have the lowest costs per passenger in the County. This reflects the limited other transport available.

Option 6 – Combine off-peak routes into one contract, with a weekly timetable – This would mean that each bus service would operate on certain days of the week. They would not be Monday to Saturday as a present. There is a need to understand in much more detail what this would mean for Fenland. There would be a compromise for local people with this option but at least there would be a bus service on certain days. Understanding how community transport links with this option for transport on the days when the bus service is not available will also be important.

Option 7 – reduce the days of operation of off-peak journeys by 50% - This is similar to Option 6 above and it raises the same issues as stated above.

Option 8 – withdraw community transport grants from 1 April 2017. With the loss of bus services in Fenland this will leave limited or no transport in many parts of Fenland. It is also likely to mean that FACT will no longer be in operation. It will also see the removal of the car scheme subsidy as well which will equally not support Fenland residents.

FDC's view is that options 1 and 8 are the most controversial and they are also likely to have the biggest impact on local communities. For options 2 – 7 more information is needed to understand what each option might look like. If these options are developed with the local communities there could be a way to minimise the disruption to local people.'

**Appendix 2 – Use and cost of existing Subsidised Bus Services and community transport in Fenland**

**Table 1 – Levels of use of the subsidised bus service from CfT Reports in 2014**

<b><u>Bus Service Number</u></b>	<b><u>Service Location</u></b>	<b><u>Annual Passenger Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Level of Subsidy</u></b>	<b><u>Cost per year</u></b>
31	Whittlesey. Pondersbridge	62,821	£0.78p	£49,271.30
9 & 35	March School times	15,968	£1.79	£28,652.50
56	Manea/Benwick	22,728	£1.65	£37,411.41
33	March town Service	41,710	£0.90p	£37,360.42
56	Wisbech – March (Neal Wade School)	10,858	£4.11	£44,580.39
46	Wisbech – Wisbech SM - March	13,604	£1.95	£26,500.38
50	Wisbech – Long Sutton	16,931	£3.16	£53,500.71
390	Wisbech – Parson Drove – Throckenholt - Peterborough	1,469	£4.22	£6,199.89
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>175,231</b>	<b>£18.56</b>	<b>£283,477</b>

**Table 2 – Level of use of the Dial A Ride (DAR) based on 2015/16 concessionary fares monitoring**

	<b><u>Service Location</u></b>	<b><u>Annual Passenger Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Level of Subsidy Per journey*</u></b>	<b><u>Cost per year</u></b>
FACT DAR	All DAR services	17,755	£3.51	£50,000

\*please be aware that this figure is a basic average estimate based on passenger numbers. It does not take account of all the individual journeys and routes. The cost per individual journey will be very different depending on where people are travelling to and from.