

## **Statement from Revd Martin Blewett, Rector of Timsbury, Camerton, Priston & Dunkerton**

### **Introduction to the Presentation of a Petition from villagers of Timsbury, Farmborough, High Littleton, Hallatrow and Tunley concerning the withdrawal of bus services on the 179 First Bus route.**

Good evening, thank you for this opportunity to present this petition signed by over 1,000 local people in Timsbury, Hallatrow, High Littleton, Farmborough, Camerton and Tunley. It is a petition that requests that funding be provided to re-instate the weekend First Bus 179 service to these villages, several of which I am Vicar, and to prevent the potential withdrawal of the whole service in the summer of this year and thirdly to argue for a more fully thought-out and strategic provision of rural public transport in our region.

For many in our rural communities, bus services are a necessity and not a luxury. If you do not own a car or are unable to drive, you find yourself without access to essential services. I have met people since the withdrawal of an hourly service who are unable to get to work, people have lost their jobs, older people are unable to attend hospital appointments and people are unable to get to the city for essential shopping and can no longer access entertainment events or sporting fixtures. There are young people who are now isolated from their friends. For many of those responding to the petition, inability to get to their place of work was a major concern, and this will consequently have a significant economic impact on our villages and the City. I am aware of people who are considering moving away from the area due to lack of public transport.

This is already the case: can you imagine the impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable people in these villages if the entire 179 service is withdrawn as proposed later this year?

I ask you on behalf of these signatories and the people of the rural villages of BANES whom you represent and serve, to use the powers at your disposal to protect the public transport which is vital to rural communities. Considerable development is planned for these villages over the next year, increasing the population. With already over-full roads public transport is essential for sustainable and environmentally sensible development.

In addition to the humanitarian and economic concerns that I have mentioned, if the City is to seriously address and implement a Clean Air Policy then adequate provision of public transport must play a part in the reduction of emissions and in our environmental strategy.

Whilst I recognise that funding for subsidies is a finite resource and that to my knowledge you do not yet have a magic-money tree, the provision of subsidies to ensure the continuation of rural bus services must be prioritised over subsidy to urban services where alternative transport is available. It is unthinkable that such a large population of people should be entirely without access to public transport.

I have confidence in the commitment, capability and compassion of the Council to rise to the challenge that the provision of fair, accessible, affordable and dependable rural public transport presents. I would respectfully ask you to hold in mind that for many in our villages, bus transport is not a luxury: it is a lifeline. Without that lifeline, opportunity is being denied to many young people and lives and villages blighted.

I hope we can count on your help.

**Revd Martin Blewett.**