

## **Statement to B&NES Cabinet Meeting – Ian Downey**

### **Proposed cut to bus services in the Chew Valley**

On 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023, West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and Bath&NESomerset Council announced that they are planning to cut – without consultation - multiple bus services that serve the Chew Valley as of April this year. It is unacceptable to remove so many bus services at one go across a rural community where public transport provision is already poor. For example, there is one direct bus per week to Bath – the seat of my local authority, to whom I pay Council Tax.

The proposed cuts include the 672 (Blagdon-Broadmead) service. This is my only public transport route to Bristol from the Chew Valley. The frequency of 672 buses has been cut back before. It now provides only the most basic service. It is relied on by many commuters, shoppers and the public. I use it regularly to get to my office. Indeed, one reason I recently changed job to work in Bristol was the advantage of a local bus service. Without it I have no option other than using a car for this and other journeys.

I understand there may be some extended support for the 672 from B&NES until June 2023 but nonetheless, the proposed cuts all round are a fundamentally regressive step that will remove any ability for people to go about their business and leisure by public transport in the Chew Valley.

The proposed action runs contrary to policies on promoting active travel, achieving CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reductions, decreased pollution/congestion, etc. Promoting bus travel is an important element of achieving all those objectives. It is vital infrastructure to get to urban centres, venues, railways and hospitals. Bristol parking costs have doubled, and a clean air zone introduced. Bus passenger volumes are increasing. The cuts would leave no buses in the Chew Valley at all!

The cuts also undermine recent B&NES investment to improve highway infrastructure and accessibility around the Chew reservoir area. New bus stops and better pathway access have been specifically installed to improve access and presumably attract visitors. The proposed cuts mean visitors will have to drive to the area (where car parks are already regularly full) nullifying the benefits of promoting sustainable, accessible, active travel. This just squanders the potential benefits after making all that outlay.

It is unclear how or where the proposed ‘demand responsive transport’ minibus services will operate in the Chew Valley. Personally, I think it will be less convenient, more time consuming and expensive compared to the current bus service provision. Hence it is an unattractive option and likely to be unworkable. On fares and levels of subsidy, it is not clear why the £2 fare cap was extended to the 672 service. I considered the previous fare structure to be comparatively reasonable. To cut the single fare from Chew Valley to Bristol by 50% is just another – convenient - factor undermining the funding of public transport as a service.

In summary, the proposed cuts are being made without proper consultation and without the identification of comparable or improved alternative. They undermine the Council’s credentials on air quality, emissions and congestion. These bus services are crucial in connecting isolated communities and persuading drivers to use public transport instead. Their proposed removal makes a mockery of the aspirations to promote active travel. It causes great anxiety and inconvenience to residents and visitors alike.

The intended plan to leave rural areas with zero bus services is irresponsible and entirely unacceptable. It is morally unsound and very poor value for money for the taxes I pay. I expect more concerted endeavour from WECA and B&NES to secure government support for bus services under threat.

I urge WECA and B&NES to reconsider this decision expect good news on what actions they propose to take to ensure the continuity of these vital services for outlying districts beyond April 2023