

I would first like to pay my respects to Pete Wood who died last week, he was a dedicated member of the West Harptree Parish Council for many years, and leaves a lasting legacy.

Today, I would like to speak to you today regarding the X91 and X99 or locally known as 'The Big Lemon' bus service, which serves the Chew Valley and Bristol area. With thanks to The Chew Valley Sustainable Transport Group – volunteers: Jackie Head, Elaine Workman, Phil Collins and the other members of the Chew Valley community who has kept this project alive and they have worked so hard in getting the project off the ground and in forming a growing bus community.

The Chew Valley area was once served 376 bus service but faced changes in public transport funding, policy decisions by WECA and along with local councils, made the decision to restructure rural bus services in early 2023.

While the Demand Responsive Travel called WestLink was a step forward, many of the Chew Valley Community felt the service was hard to navigate, it was hard to book via the app and that the services were cancelled at the last minute, often leaving people including vulnerable women stranded or people being unable to attend appointments.

With this in mind, local campaigners and transport groups have lobbied WECA to reinstate or improve services, arguing that the cuts have left many rural residents isolated and without reliable transport options. The Big Lemon bus project has stepped in to provide those services.

The big lemon has been in place now for over a year and is a vital link to ongoing bus service to access the wider Bristol and Bath areas. There have been 3361 journeys in 2024 and 3044 individual journeys in 2025 showing a significant increase in the

number of users. This enables members of the community to be more active and feel and less isolated.

The scheme comes to an end in April '26 and the group still do not have guidance from WECA on what success looks like or how this continues, partly due to the new Mayor, but even before this the group were pushing for meetings to understand what the plan is.

It's not just about transport—it's about reducing social isolation, boosting local economies and promoting sustainable travel.

Investing in rural bus services isn't just about mobility—it's about keeping communities connected and thriving.