

Shropshire Bus Project Summary Report



Foundation for
Integrated Transport



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September 2020

The Shropshire-wide bus project is a response to the decline of bus services in a typical rural England county council area. The response highlights the reasons (social, economic, environmental) why we need much-improved bus services and what can be done to deliver these improvements. The project was launched at a public meeting in June 2019 in Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury. The extent of the problem and decline of rural bus services has been summarised by the County Councils Network (CCN):

Figures from the County Councils Network (CCN), which represents 36 county and unitary councils in England, show that funding for bus services for those areas has almost halved by £89.8m since 2010 – a 46% drop.

In addition, The Campaign for Better Transport recently analysed the Department for Transport's figures and found that over 3,000 bus routes have been reduced, altered or withdrawn between 2010 and 2018.

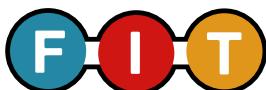


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The Shropshire project was funded by the national organisation, the Foundation for Integrated Transport (FIT). FIT was established in 2014 to promote sustainable and transformational transport solutions:

- Where people can travel without using a car and with minimum impact on other people and on the environment
- A world with a human right to get around
- Volunteering and social enterprise have full reign to contribute to people's need for mobility
- Trains and buses are integrated and complemented by safe and attractive routes for walking and cycling

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The Shropshire bus project was a 12 month project with the very simple objective of exploring the ways in which bus services in Shropshire could be improved and to engage with members of the public, councillors, town and parish councils and others to stimulate a positive and supportive attitude towards improving bus services.

At a very early stage “improved” was defined as encompassing a major contribution to improving quality of life in rural communities, reducing greenhouse gases and supporting all age and income groups and all those who live in rural areas to be able to access destinations without a car and supporting economically strong and lively rural communities.

The work of the project is described in more detail on the web site:

www.shropshireruralbuses.org/



Methods

The core work of the project was engagement with councils and stakeholders to provide briefings and ask for specific suggestions for improvements and/or support for policies that promote bus services. There were 10 strands in the engagement strategy:

1. Contact with 12 town councils and 76 parish councils asking for comments on bus services in their areas and requesting suggestions for improvements.
2. E-mails to all 73 Shropshire Council councillors providing evidence for the support of improved bus services and asking for suggestions.
3. Direct contact with the leaders of all political parties and independents on Shropshire Council asking for a statement about aspirations for improved bus services. Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties replied and the Conservative Party did not reply.
4. Discussion with the Shropshire branch of the Women's Institute (3,500 members in 120 locations). The WI passed on information about the project to all members and John Whitelegg was invited to speak at the AGM which was then cancelled as a result of "lockdown".
5. A public meeting in Highley organised by the Shropshire councillor for that area.
6. Appointments and discussions with 7 "bus champions" based across the county.
7. A presentation to the Shrewsbury Civic Society Open Forum (30.11.19) on alternatives to spending £74 million on a new road and advocating improved public transport infrastructure as a much more effective measure to achieve all the Council's objectives than a new road.
8. Public meeting in Craven Arms (28.11.19) on the importance of buses in reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector.
9. Talk to the Shrewsbury Labour Party Women's Group, 12.10.19, about the bus project, carbon reduction and congestion.
10. E-mail contact with all 3 Shropshire Conservative MPs asking for support for improved bus services. They all replied positively.

Key outputs

1. Media coverage (available on the project web site).
2. Evidence presented to the inquiry by the County All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), supported by the County Councils Network (CCN) on the decline of rural bus services including recommendations to government (available on the project web site).
3. Specific bus service improvements with costings.



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Specific bus service improvements with costings

A key objective of the bus project was to interrogate all the suggestions we received and identify a small number of representative improvements that would be widely applicable across the whole of Shropshire.

Route	Cost <small>(Note 1)</small>
A Sunday service to Shrewsbury bus station. The Meole Brace P&R service extended to Bayston Hill.	£36,000
A bus-train connection. Bishop's Castle to Craven Arms.	£260,000
A key corridor. Reinstate the 141 Ludlow to Bridgnorth via Ditton Priors.	£306,000
A service to a hospital. A direct service from Craven Arms to Princess Royal Hospital or a direct service from West Felton to RSH.	£335,000
Connecting Ellesmere. There is a bus route that runs from Wrexham to Whitchurch but nothing from nearby Ellesmere to connect with these towns or to the existing bus service. A proposal would be to run a bus from Overton to make connections with route 146, to go to Ellesmere then onto Whitchurch in a V shape.	£260,000

Note 1

All costs are based on standard industry data plus 10% profit margin. The costings do not take into account revenue of any kind e.g. concessionary fares or subsidy. The service frequency is delivered by one vehicle.

Key Recommendations to Shropshire Council

1. Shropshire Council increases its bus support budget from £2.8million in 2018-19 to £6.39 million in 2021-22. The £6.39 million figure is based on the Cornwall Council per capita subsidy applied to the Shropshire population.
2. The increased funding for improved bus services should be linked to an increase in the diversity of operators. We recommend that the council give careful consideration to alternative ways of providing bus services, modelled for example on the success of the West Oxfordshire Community Transport Company Ltd.
3. Shropshire Council should invite bids from town and parish councils for specific improvements to bus services and use this increased level of funding to adopt a rolling programme of improvement based on the bids over the next 10 years. It is essential that there is a 10 year improvement commitment including county-wide timetables (printed and on-line) and a single ticket.
4. Shropshire Council adopts the Cornwall bus policy based on the Bus Services (2017) Act and adopt the “single ticket” model. This will cover every trip and every operator across the county as a whole. It is up to the Council to



work out how this will be done but we recommend the Cornwall approach.

5. Shropshire Council should deploy the same financial skills that were used to provide £20 million of funds for the North West Relief Road and provide funding for a new bus station in Shrewsbury, much improved Park and Ride in Shrewsbury and Ludlow, real-time information systems for Shrewsbury and Ludlow bus services, a single-ticket offer covering all bus services in the county irrespective of which operator provides the service and much increased bus shelter provision.
6. Shropshire Council should jointly fund (with the NHS) a fully electric bus, free to use, from Shrewsbury bus station, every 10 minutes (including Sundays) to the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital (RSH). The rationale for this is that RSH is the largest car trip generator in Shropshire. RSH has 1787 car parking spaces and hospital car trip generation can reach 3 million pa (for example Derriford Hospital in Plymouth). Providing free bus services in high quality vehicles will introduce bus use to a much larger pool of potential users. In addition

to its marketing significance it would reduce congestion and air pollution in Shrewsbury and make a contribution to reducing Shropshire's total carbon emissions and avoid the need for a £5 million spend on a new multi-storey car park at RSH.



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