Customer Insight

Review of Supported Bus Services 2011

Consultation Report
1. Summary of main findings

Before looking at how we can restructure services to meet our budget objectives, we asked a series of questions to gauge public opinion on some key areas of bus services, particularly those areas that affect the cost of services. We also invited open comments so that all views on local bus services could be expressed.

The consultation found that bus services are used for a wide range of journey purposes, including travelling to work, access to shops and services as well as for leisure. There is also evidence that our supported services are heavily relied upon by some local residents, particularly those that have no alternative means of travel.

Key areas of response to the public questionnaire include:

- 57% stated that their local bus service is either ‘important’ or a ‘lifeline’
- 85% consider access to employment, shops or services as priority
- 81% support a reduction in the frequency from daytime services into the evenings and on Sundays if necessary
- 66% support an hourly frequency or less for evenings and Sundays
- 65% would consider switching to community based transport

The results of the survey, alongside consultation with bus operators and other key stakeholders, will be used to guide our thinking when reviewing the options for supported bus service contracts at the end of the year.
2. Introduction

North Somerset Council needs to save £47.3 million following the government’s comprehensive spending review. This represents a saving of £1 in every £3 that we currently spend. This means we do not have the choice of carrying on as we are, and we must consider changes to all of the council’s services, including supported bus services.

The council spends more than £1.1 million per year on supported bus services. These are bus services that are not operated commercially and the council decides to fund these services using public money.

A full programme of consultation has been undertaken. The main principle of this consultation was to engage with all key stakeholders at an early stage. This would enable us to gain all views and interests prior to redesigning services, and prior to making any decisions.

This report summarises the response to the public survey, which ran between 18 July and 12 August 2011, and also provides a summary of the consultation with other key stakeholders.

The public survey comprised a questionnaire which could be completed online, with paper copies also made available at the council gateways, including libraries. Posters advertising the survey were displayed at local bus stops, on local bus services, at council gateways and on the council’s website.

We received a total of 562 responses to the questionnaire. The sample is a good match to the population characteristics of North Somerset and the known profile of bus passengers. The response included:

- 60% Female / 40% Male
- 55% Over 60 / 45% Under 60 (13% aged 15-29)
- 30% Disabled / 70% Non-disabled

For more information about the survey or this report you can contact:

Public Transport Team
Town Hall
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
North Somerset
BS23 1UJ

Email: public.transport@n-somerset.gov.uk
3. Main results of public survey

The responses to key questions within the survey are shown below.

Q1. Looking back over the past year, how often on average have you personally caught a bus in North Somerset?

![Bar chart showing frequency of bus use](image)

- **Daily**: 40%
- **Weekly**: 38%
- **Monthly**: 12%
- **Every three months**: 4%
- **Every six months**: 2%
- **Around once a year**: 1%
- **Less than once a year**: 1%
- **Never**: 3%

Q2. Please tell us the number or numbers of the services you use most often?

The results of this question will be used for cross-analysis purpose.

Q3. What times do you normally use the bus on weekdays and weekends?

![Bar charts showing bus use times](image)

**Weekday Users**
- **Mornings (6am-noon)**: 43%
- **Afternoons (noon-6pm)**: 38%
- **Evenings (6pm-9pm)**: 14%
- **Nights (9pm-midnight)**: 7%

**Weekend Users**
- **Mornings (6am-noon)**: 37%
- **Afternoons (noon-6pm)**: 38%
- **Evenings (6pm-9pm)**: 17%
- **Nights (9pm-midnight)**: 10%
Q4. What do you use the bus for? (tick all that are relevant)

- Going shopping in the town centre: 68%
- Visiting the town centre or other leisure facilities: 51%
- Going to appointments, such as the doctors or dentist: 43%
- Going to a supermarket or other shops for groceries: 42%
- Visiting the hospital: 40%
- Going to social groups or visiting friends: 40%
- Going to and from work: 31%
- Travelling for work: 11%
- Going to school / college or university: 6%
- Other (please state below): 11%

Q5. If you use the bus for more than one purpose, what is your most important reason for catching a bus? (tick one answer)

- Going to and from work: 28%
- Going shopping in the town centre: 18%
- Going to a supermarket or other shops for groceries: 14%
- Visiting the hospital: 9%
- Visiting the town centre or other leisure facilities: 8%
- Going to appointments, such as the doctors or dentist: 8%
- Going to social groups or visiting friends: 6%
- Going to school / college or university: 3%
- Travelling for work: 2%
- Other reason: 4%
Q6. Which sentence best describes how you feel about your bus service or services? (tick one answer)

- It’s a lifeline [36%]
- It’s important [21%]
- It is better for the environment than alternatives [11%]
- I can’t drive [10%]
- It gives me my independence [6%]
- I only use it occasionally when I have no other option [3%]
- I prefer to travel by bus [3%]
- It’s nice to have [2%]
- It saves me money [2%]
- It gives my children their independence [1%]
- Other (please state below) [4%]

Q7. How much more money, if any, would you pay in fares for each return trip to keep your bus service running? (results exclude concessionary pass holders)

- Up to 50p more [29%]
- Up to £1 more [21%]
- Up to £1.50 more [6%]
- Whatever the price needed to be to keep it running [18%]
- None (I would not pay more) [26%]
Q8. Would you be willing to use a community bus service that you had to book in advance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If it was the only way to keep my bus service running</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably yes</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9. If we offered a multi-operator ticket that could be used on any bus service in your area, is this something that you think you would use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q10. Could you tell us why you never use bus services?
(for those that answered that they do not use bus services – 17 respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not think the buses are very nice</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have my own transport</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like waiting at bus stops</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no service in my area</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not think buses are reliable</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Q10, responses recorded in the ‘other reason’ category included:

- Not sure of the timetables
- Website information is confusing
- I have not needed to use them yet, but may do so in the future
- Too expensive, but may use them when I get a bus pass
- I am disabled and not all of the buses use accessible vehicles

Q11. As we have a set amount of money we will have to focus on the most important bus services. Which from the list below do you think we should prioritise? Services which help people......

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go to and from work</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel for work</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to school / college or university</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a supermarket or other shops for groceries</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go shopping in the town centre</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the town centre or other leisure facilities</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to health appointments</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the hospital</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to social groups or visiting friends</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Q11, responses recorded in the ‘other reason’ category included:

- Transport for the elderly
- Transport for those that do not have a car
- Unable to choose between the priorities as some are equally important

Q12. The higher the quality, or nicer, the bus the more expensive it is. As we cannot do both with limited money, which would you say is more important?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality or Quantity?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More buses (lower quality)</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More quality (fewer buses)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q13. Passenger numbers usually drop in the evenings and on Sundays. Do you think we should run a different timetable for these low peak times?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should we run a different timetable at low-peak times?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q14. How often do you think bus services should run at evenings and on Sundays?

![Evening and Sunday Frequency chart]

- More than every 30 minutes: 2%
- Every 30 minutes: 13%
- Between 30 minutes and hourly: 20%
- Hourly: 41%
- Every one to two hours: 19%
- Less than two hourly: 6%

Questions 15 to 17 – Gender, Age and Mobility

Questions 15 to 17 were included in order to ensure that the survey response was representative of bus passengers, and included views from different age groups and both disabled and non-disabled passengers.

The results are:

- 60% Female / 40% Male
- 55% Over 60 / 45% Under 60 (13% aged 15-29)
- 30% Disabled / 70% Non-disabled

Q18. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

The open question at the end of the questionnaire, which invited open comments and suggestions, resulted in some 309 comments. These were wide ranging, although some common themes have emerged. A summary of the key issues that emerged from this question are summarised below.

Rural Services

There was a high level of feedback in support for services in the rural areas of the district, particularly areas where there are no alternative services available. This has demonstrated a high level of support for the 121 service, particularly from villages between Wrington and Bristol where no other services are available. Other services that had a high level of support included the 83 and 85 services in Weston-super-Mare and the 660 and 692 country services.
Examples of this feedback are shown below

‘The 121 route is a lifeline for a number of elderly and limited mobility passengers’

‘The 121 is a total lifeline to me, as I am too young to drive I rely on the bus to get me places when my parents can not give me lifts’

‘As a non-driver, I would be isolated if the 121 bus did not run’

‘There are so many people that would not be able to get to work if the 121 was discontinued’

‘The 660 bus connecting Yatton with the surrounding villages is a lifeline. Without the bus some villages would be cut off altogether’

‘The 661 is extremely important to us as a family. We all regularly use Yatton train station and as none of us drive a regular bus from Clevedon to Yatton is essential’

‘The service 692 has become a lifeline for me. I am disabled and living on a hill. I would have little or no chance of being able to get about to the shops or visit friends if we did not have a bus serving this area’

‘Number 692 is useful to me by saving car use. It is also very important to many other elderly people in the area who have no personal transport’

‘The 83 is an essential service for all age groups in Bleadon village. I rely on it to take me to work and my elderly father relies on it for shopping in town, going to the village shop and keeping social contact’

‘I think the 83 bus service is invaluable, we would be lost without it, especially as it is so hilly in the Ashbury Drive and Worlebury area’

‘Living in a village, the bus service is the lifeline to the outside world, especially when you are disabled and do not drive’

‘Country services are vital’

‘Without the bus, I would have to buy and run a car, which would be considerably more expensive’
Concessionary Travel

Several comments were submitted through the questionnaire relating to use of the free bus pass, from both pass holders and non-pass holders. These comments have the same emphasis, suggesting that pass holders could make a contribution, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis, to help financially support local services.

The DfT have contacted all concessionary authorities and have made it clear that this approach is not permitted.

Examples of this feedback are shown below

‘As a bus pass holder, I would rather pay something towards the cost of running the buses than have services cut. Say, £1 around town and half price outside of the area’

‘They should charge older people again instead of letting them take advantage of free travel’

‘I use my bus pass more than once a week…perhaps a base fare of £1 for any journey, or an annual fee to obtain a bus pass would be acceptable and possible for most?’

‘One of the key reasons why many supported services are not making any money is that most of the passengers are pass holders, who do not pay anything’

‘I have a bus pass, but would be willing to pay a reasonable percentage of the fare in order to keep the service running’

‘Why not restrict free bus travel for senior citizens to times when less people use bus services…there is currently a lack of seats at peak times which does put some fare paying passengers off’

‘I think it’s unfair that bus prices are so high for young people…especially when considering some OAPs with a high income get the bus for free’

‘The OAP bus pass system is not fair on other low income groups’
Accessibility and Integration

A common theme was the wish to see better integration between services, including other modes of transport, particularly rail services. The general accessibility of these services, such as low-floor access and effective timetabling, were also identified as important.

Examples of this feedback are shown below

‘I would like to see a more frequent bus service in the late afternoon / early evening to tie in with office work hours’

‘The current bus times for a 9-5 job in Bristol are not particularly well suited’

‘The one grumble that I have is that it's very difficult to get a bus from Portishead to a rail station’

‘Having a bus from Portishead to a rail station would seem like joined up thinking’

‘Lack of integrated ticketing and journeys with trains is a problem’

‘I need a one-day or weekly all modes of travel ticket for the Avon area. Other areas have them, why can't we?’

‘It is a shame that the 121 and 126 services are not compatible with each other’

‘It would be useful for the 5 or 7 to go via Weston-super-Mare train station…bus services to the train station are very poor at present’

‘The 661 bus is the only link between Clevedon and Yatton train station, if this was removed it would make getting to work and back extremely difficult and inconvenient’

‘I would support a more regular service Clevedon to Yatton train station and vice versa’

‘We would definitely use the 121 service if it was available in the evenings. We quite often get the bus to Churchill but end up having to get a taxi back’

‘It would be nice to be able to get a bus which goes through Weston Village AND the Worle High Street. It's silly that I'd either have to walk or catch a bus to opposite ends of the town just to go a few miles north’
4. Consultation with other Stakeholders

The following list summarises the groups that have been engaged as part of this consultation:

- Town and Parish Councils
- Bus Passengers (public survey)
- Local Bus Operators
- Local Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride Operators
- Cross-boundary Transport Authorities
- Older people (through the Age Concern network and Senior Citizens Forum)
- Disabled groups (through the Physical and Sensory Impairment Group)
- School groups (through local Partnership Managers)

Each of these groups are being consulted on an individual basis and with a tailored methodology. This approach is necessary because we need to ask different questions of different groups.

Town and Parish Councils

We wrote to all local councils seeking their views on local bus services. As part of this process we also attended local council meetings, as well as meeting with ward councillors.

The following councils submitted formal comments as part of the process:

- Backwell Parish Council
- Banwell Parish Council
- Blagdon Parish Council
- Brockley Parish Council
- Churchill Parish Council
- Cleeve Parish Council
- Clevedon Town Council
- Congresbury Parish Council
- Dundry Parish Council
- Kingston Seymour Parish Council
- Locking Parish Council
- Nailsea Town Council
- Pill & Easton-in-Gordano Parish Council
- Portishead Town Council
- St Georges Parish Council
- Walton-in-Gordano Parish Council
- Winscombe & Sandford Parish Council
• Winford Parish Council
• Wraxall & Failand Parish Council
• Wrington Parish Council
• Yatton Parish Council

The general response from town and parish councils was in relation to services that operate through their respective areas, recognising the local importance of services.

Some individual suggestions were put forward, particularly in rural areas where there is low patronage, for reduced levels of service in preference over the withdrawal of service.

**Service Operators**

All local operators of bus services and community transport services were invited to discuss their views on the local supported network.

Meetings were held with many local operators and this has helped to identify what changes could be made operationally, and also what changes in terms of contractual matters between the council and operators, to reduce costs.

**Diverse Groups**

Local representatives from diverse groups, including from the elderly, disabled and schools sector were consulted in order to gain their views.

Three key themes have emerged from this consultation, as summarised below.

- Access in the rural areas is particularly important for elderly, disabled and youth groups, who would otherwise face isolation without accessible public transport services. This is also relevant for those on a limited income
- Bus services to Bristol hospitals and clinics are inadequate. Services to Weston General Hospital are also important, particularly to older people, both for accessing health services and also for visiting
- Bus services to and from local railway stations are also important, particularly for those without their own transport needing to travel further afield
5. What the results mean

We have used the results of the public questionnaire, alongside the consultation with other key stakeholders to guide our thinking on what changes would be possible.

Key areas of the actions that we propose are summarised below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60% say their main reason for travel is for work, accessing local shops</td>
<td>We will prioritise the daytime services that provide access to employment, local shops and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and services, and 77% consider that these journey purposes should be the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>council’s main priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57% of respondents state that their services are either ‘important’ or</td>
<td>This response is largely from services where there is no alternative means of travel in villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a ‘lifeline’, with a further 10% using the services as they can not drive</td>
<td>and rural areas. We will prioritise these services and look for alternative solutions where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74% of respondents would be willing to pay more to keep services running</td>
<td>savings need to be made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(responses from non-bus pass holders)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65% of respondents would consider using a book-in-advance community</td>
<td>We will consider introducing community bus services in the rural areas, where it is particularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transport service as an alternative</td>
<td>expensive or inefficient to use conventional bus services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action: We do not propose to raise fares on supported bus services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However, we have made changes to the contract arrangements to give</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>greater control to bus operators, although the council will control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial setting of fare levels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action: We will consider introducing community bus services in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rural areas, where it is particularly expensive or inefficient to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional bus services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response: 86% of respondents would prefer greater quantity of service, rather than quality of service</td>
<td>Action: We will prioritise securing bus services. Higher quality emission standards and other quality factors will become a secondary consideration where appropriate. Low-floor buses, which provide greater accessibility, will be adopted as a general standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response: 81% of respondents think that we should operate different timetables in the evenings and on Sundays when patronage is lower, with 66% supporting an hourly frequency or less</td>
<td>Action: We will explore the option of reducing frequencies in the evenings and on Sundays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. What has been done?

We have made the decision to tender for both existing services, and also new alternatives that may be cheaper. The reason for this is that we need to test the market to see what is affordable. For example, there may be operational reasons which mean that a lower frequency service is not much cheaper than the current provision.

We have set out a broad strategy which will seek to prioritise daytime services which provide access to employment, shopping and services, and will redesign other services to make them more affordable. We will seek an approach that ensures that no area loses public transport services altogether. However, it may be necessary to introduce something in a different format, such as a community transport service, or a reduced frequency service.

The new options that we have put forward within the round of tendering have taken into account the feedback that we have received in the public survey. Examples of this include:

- combining the functions of existing services into one, for example exploring the potential for a combined 660/692 route
- continuation of the connections between Clevedon and Yatton train station, and extending the rail/bus link to Portishead
- focussing on commuter friendly timetables that will allow passengers to reach their destination for a 9 to 5 work pattern
- extra options for evenings journeys on the 121 service
- maintaining evening and Sunday services, but exploring lower frequencies
- focussing on the provision of service, rather than seeking high quality solutions that would be more expensive
- exploring options for community led bus services in areas that are expensive to serve by traditional bus services
- recognising the dependency on services in the rural parts of the district

There are also other areas where we will take further action. These include:

- looking at opportunities for greater engagement with passengers to allow their feedback to influence the supported bus network. We will explore ways of setting up a local bus user group and work is already underway on this
- providing feedback to the local operators, both positive and negative, as a result of the survey
- continue to work with operators to influence and enable commercial bus services that better suit the needs of local passengers
The operators will submit bids to the council in early December for running services from April next year. Work will therefore be undertaken during December and decisions will be taken by the Executive Member for Transport in late December and early January.

Details of supported services for April 2012 and beyond will be announced in January 2012. Information will become available on the council’s website and at local bus stops.

For further information on this report, or to discuss the procurement process in more detail, you can contact the public transport team.

Public Transport Team
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Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
North Somerset
BS23 1UJ

Email: public.transport@n-somerset.gov.uk