

OUR BUSES ARE UNDER THREAT

April 2022 was meant to augur in a new era for our buses. It was the month when the £3 billion as part of Bus Back Better, National Strategy for Buses for England, could be used to improve bus services. People could be invited to abandon their cars and opt for the 'greener' option of going by bus on journeys to nearby towns and villages.

To improve buses across the county, Somerset had put in a bid for £163 million of Bus Back Better money. That was the sum of money Somerset needed because Somerset bus services currently are the worst rated of any county in England. But the Bus Back Better fund has been over subscribed 8 times by all the bids from across England and so it's unknown how much money Somerset might get. But it's unlikely to get anything like what Somerset needs.

The 2 years of Covid with endless warnings not to use buses has seen bus passenger numbers down 40% on pre Covid levels. This has meant the Government has had to step in and subsidise bus services in order to keep them running. To fund this the Government has diverted more than half of the £3 billion pot allocated for transforming our bus services to just maintain our current bus services.

Worse still, the Government has still not said whether it will keep funding our existing bus services from April.

If it doesn't, then without this subsidy, bus services across the county (including here in Somerset) could "fall off the side of the cliff" (as said by Wera Hobhouse, Bath MP). It's been estimated 30% of bus services would go. Some bus services could even disappear completely.

Without this Covid Bus Recovery Grant, a leading bus operator has said, "The bus sector is hurtling towards disaster."

So what can we do?

Could you please ... today ... send an email (doesn't need to be long) to the Government Buses Minister demanding that the Covid-19 Bus Recovery Grant funding is continued beyond April. Send it to BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON (Buses Minister) - email verec@parliament.uk. Also copy your email to your MP:

- o MARCUS FYSH (Yeovil) - email marcus.fysh.mp@parliament.uk
- o IAN LIDDELL-GRAINGER (Bridgwater and West Somerset) - email ianlg@parliament.uk
- o DAVID WARBURTON (Somerton and Frome) - email david.warburton.mp@parliament.uk
- o JAMES HEAPPEY (Wells) - email james.heappey.mp@parliament.uk
- o REBECCA POW (Taunton Deane) - email rebecca.pow.mp@parliament.uk

Please also copy in Somerset Bus Partnership to any emails too. Our email address: somersetbuspartnership@gmail.com .

Additionally, if you should speak to any of the candidates for the Somerset Unitary Council May 5th elections, please ask them what their plans are to protect and improve our bus services here in Somerset. There's never been a time when our bus services in Somerset have been at so much risk.

Somerset Bus Partnership Team

<https://www.somersetbuspartnership.co.uk>