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For immediate release

Bus services – help the council plan the route forward

Wiltshire Council is asking for people to help shape the future of local bus transport, as part of an ambitious Government strategy to improve and transform services across the country.

Earlier in the year the Government published its 'Bus Back Better' vision, which underpins a national bus strategy for England that sets out ambitious reform of how services are planned and delivered.

Around £3bn has been set aside by the Government to make improvements throughout England, and Wiltshire Council is looking at how Wiltshire and our residents can benefit from this. The Government's strategy complements the council's aim to encourage more people to travel by bus to help support its carbon neutral objectives, and to reach and connect more people who live in rural communities.

The council has already been successful in getting some money from the fund, with a successful bid of £1.2m to improve demand responsive transport in the Pewsey Vale area. This will be in operation next year after a public consultation, which will help establish the most appropriate way for the service to be provided. Demand responsive transport is a flexible mode of transportation that adapts to the demands of its user groups.

In order to put together its own Bus Service Improvement Plan to share with the Government, the council is asking local people and representatives from businesses and organisations to fill out a short survey to help it establish where the current bus service offering is working, where it could be better and where it simply doesn't provide what is needed. The survey shouldn't take longer than five minutes to complete and the council is keen to hear from non-bus users, as well as those who currently use them, as this will provide a much more wide-ranging picture of the current situation and people's circumstances.

Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, said: "National funding of this scale to improve bus services is a unique and exciting opportunity and one that we're determined to capitalise on. In a vast rural county like Wiltshire, public transport connects our communities, brings people together and runs through the heart of the county.

"I encourage as many people as possible to take part in our short survey, including those who don't currently use buses, as this will provide us with vital information as we make our

local bus services plans. We want to improve services in the county, so to get passengers' insights, habits and their thoughts on how the pandemic has affected things will prove to be really useful.

“The feedback received will really help shape our thoughts and make a difference to our plans. I thank everyone for taking the time out to support us.”

The survey will run until 23 August 2021. It can be found online at <https://surveys.wiltshire.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=162679536235> and hard copies will soon be available at libraries and the council's main hubs.

More information about the Government's Bus Back Better can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>.

As a prelude to this, in March 2020, Government granted Wiltshire £671,000 as revenue support to help to improve the provision of local bus services and the council is in the process of establishing what that will be spent on, and will keep stakeholders updated.

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