

Which bus services are being cut and why? Q&A

The Chew Valley Area Forum, Climate & Nature Emergency, Sustainable Transport Group (CVAF C&NEWG) have been working with B&NES & WECA for the last 2 years to try to get improvements to bus services in the Chew Valley and we are now having weekly joint meetings with transport planners in B&NES/WECA to help ensure that local people get the maximum support in transitioning to new services. Below is our best effort to give clear information about the emerging situation with bus changes. We hope this helps people understand why we are where we are now. We will update it as things evolve.

What changes are happening?

At the end of March the following services will cease to operate in the Chew Valley:

640: Bishop Sutton to Keynsham,
752 Hinton Blewett to Bath,
754 Hinton Blewett to Radstock.

At the end of May the 672: Bristol to Blagdon will cease to operate in the Chew Valley.

On 3rd April Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) will begin in the Chew Valley.

At present B&NES Council is also liaising with WECA to see if 2 new fixed route services (526 & 527) can also be put in place, funded by Bus Service Improvement Plan money.

Why are existing services being cut?

A year ago CVAF C&NEWG warned of the threat to B&NES supported routes because of the rising costs to B&NES set against a fall in their local authority budgets. At the time we urged people to use these buses or they would be withdrawn. Within the year the situation with funding has worsened to the point where existing routes are costing B&NES over £40 per customer, per journey, to maintain. All of the supported bus services across B&NES & WECA as a whole, were put out to tender last year and the costs of services had increased by an average of 116%.

Covid, Brexit, and years of reductions in central government funding to local government have created a perfect storm. In Covid we were forced off buses for health reasons, and whilst government offered interim funding to grow back passenger confidence (Bus Recovery Fund paid to service providers), the world has changed; people work from home more, some have not yet learned to trust buses again, some regular users have died, and others wanting to use buses could not make the existing services work for the journeys needed.

At the end of March 2023 the government Bus Recovery funding to bus operators ends. Add to this a shortage of bus drivers; some returning to Europe post Brexit, some moving into delivery jobs, and some having died or being invalided through Covid. So in recent tenders, bus companies necessarily raised their cost demands for supported services and local authorities had a lower budget to meet this demand. Hence the cuts.

Why has B&NES saved services in Bath rather than in rural and semi-rural areas?

Initially, last December, WECA proposed that only 2 supported bus services should run (based on huge cost increase) and B&NES stepped in to find funding for an additional 10 (a 38% funding increase). At this point in time they assumed that the Chew Valley and nearby rural areas, who had lobbied for 5 new fixed route services funded by Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) money had been successful, as these had all been designed by WECA, tendered and bid for alongside DRT; they are

517: Chew Magna – Wells,

518:Midsomer Norton – Radstock 519:Keynsham Circular,

522:Odd Down to Brislington

526:Chew Valley Link,

527:Chew Magna – Anchor Road, Bristol

hence their choice to save routes in and around Bath.

B&NES only discovered in January, days before the WECA vote, that 517,518,519,522, 526 & 527 would not be given BSIP funding and they are now lobbying WECA to have these routes introduced.

CVAF C&NE Sustainable Transport Working Group

This information was accurate on 26/1/23

More up to date information can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/858992922045608>