



Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation response to the County All Party Parliamentary Group and County Councils Network joint inquiry “The decline of rural buses” (July 2020)

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CIHT is a charity, learned society and membership body with over 14,000 members spread across 12 UK regions and four international groups. We represent and qualify professionals who plan, design, build, manage and operate transport and infrastructure networks. Our vision is for world-class transportation infrastructure and services. Our values are to be Professional, Inclusive, Collaborative and Progressive.

1. CIHT welcomes the opportunity to comment on this inquiry by the County APPG and CCN. We believe that public transport services are vital to a modern transport network and has a key role to play in reducing carbon emissions from transport and improving air quality. CIHT also made this point in our 2020 budget submission to HM Treasury where we called for increased investment in public transport services.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic is a threat to the transport decarbonisation agenda as public transport usage is likely to go down. Public transport will face a challenge in attracting passengers and concerns about COVID-19 will inevitably impact public transport demand in some way. Even if demand should not reduce, supply will for as long as the government’s guidance for transport operators is to maintain social distancing measures. London Underground have said that they expect to only be able to carry 13-15 percent of the passengers it normally carries.
3. It must be said that all public transport must be inclusive and accessible and in accordance with equality and discrimination laws.
4. This issue is exacerbated in rural areas as they are already negatively impacted by limited services. It is important to consider the social value of bus services and the connectivity they provide to people which must be taken account of.
5. Even with innovative funding ideas and demand responsive services, there will still be a need to subsidise these vital connections to rural communities. The true cost and benefit of running these services must be considered, and not just the operating cost versus the fare box revenue. A wider assessment that includes social value, environmental impacts, carbon footprint, access to jobs and more should be used.
6. With that said, CIHT also recognise that there are potential benefits in innovating bus services. One such innovation relates to the digitalisation of bus services and flexible, or demand responsive, bus services. In CIHT’s recent submission to the Department for Transport’s Future of Transport Regulatory Review we advocated a more flexible regulatory regime that must allow local authorities to develop services that are suited to their local contexts.
7. Specifically, The Bus Service Operators Grant should be adjusted to enable the viability and sustainability of flexible bus services. The pump-priming is important to enable the services to continue to operate. It might operate as an economic subsidy but the social inclusion benefits particularly in rural areas through flexible bus provision make this financial mechanism valuable.
8. In terms of new development, CIHT believe that the integration of planning and transport is a key element of achieving a sustainable transport system. Spatial planning should be

focussed on getting homes and jobs close to amenities and integrating sustainable transport solutions into local plans, masterplans and transport strategies that support people's travel needs. CIHT published a report with advice on how to achieve this in 2019 called "Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places". The publication is available here: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/better-planning-better-transport-better-places/>.

9. A strategic approach can help to create a step change in the availability and relevance of public transport with benefits stretching along extended corridors and having an impact across a wider rural area. This is entirely consistent with National Planning Policy Framework policy for rural areas, where development in villages is recognised as having a potential role in supporting local services, and the availability of services serving a wider number of settlements.
10. In rural areas where there is new development the layout to accommodate buses needs to be agreed as well as the routes and this should be done as part of the initial planning process and not as a matter of detail.
11. New developments should be built in line with the principles for 'public transport-oriented development' of which the basic principles are: build compact nodes of development along a public transport route; develop at higher densities close to the public transport stops and; provide a mix of land uses to reduce the demand for travel.
12. The National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG) also requires local planning authorities to consult with relevant infrastructure providers as well as building dense development that facilitates sustainable transport such as public transport. But this does not necessarily happen and is a point that still needs to be stressed.
13. Providing for a bus network should be considered as part of the infrastructure delivery plan as well as community infrastructure levy.
14. In 2018 CIHT published the report 'Buses in Urban Developments' which although mainly centred around the urban context does also have recommendations that apply to rural settings. The report is aligned with the Bus Services Act 2017's objective of creating a simple and cost-effective route to franchising. The report also refers to the National Travel Survey that shows how public transport involves more active travel than car-based transport and therefore has a positive health benefit.
15. There is a critical need for a long-term plan for a bus network and frequency built into local authorities' transport strategies as well as all relevant local plans for rural and urban areas. Such a strategy must be developed in dialogue with the local bus industry and should include issues like ticketing, waiting facilities and making available real-time information taking account of where and why people need to travel.