

Response sent to Devon CC stakeholder consultation on Bus Service Improvement Plan, August 2021



Transport Co-ordination Service
County Hall, Topsham Road

Organisation you represent

[Transition Tavistock \(Travel Action Group\)](#)

Question 1

What do you see as biggest barrier to bus travel in Devon at the moment?

Insufficient services – both routes and frequency. This means that in rural areas neither residents nor tourists actively consider bus travel as an option if they are able to drive. Some are therefore unaware of buses which they could use for some of their journeys. Unless this is addressed the county will remain over-dependent on cars, with the resulting traffic slowing public transport and making walking and cycling, even for short trips, unsafe in many villages and sections of towns.

Question 2

What areas would you see as a priority for the Bus Services Improvement Plan in Devon from the following list (please rank in order of importance from 1-7):

Area	Please rank 1 – 7 (with 1 being the most important)
Cheaper fares	6
Extend the bus network to include more places	3
Increase frequency of services (eg weekly to daily, twice a day to hourly)	2
Expand services into evenings and weekends	1
Bus information that is easier to understand and consistent across bus operators	4
Improved integration with other modes – rail, cycling, park & ride etc	5
Buses that are easier to use – common branding across operators, simpler fares and ticketing, availability of electronic information - online or a Smart Phone App.	7

Question 3

Please add any comments/ other areas for improvement you would like to be considered when we write our Bus Service Improvement Plan:

These are local reflections based on informal conversations our community group has had with people in Tavistock and the surrounding villages. They complement research based findings from national groups including the Campaign for Better Transport, Bus Users UK, and the WI (Get on Board insights in to women's perception of buses), which we urge Devon decision makers to take into account.

We recognise that cost is a deterrent for those who do not qualify for a bus pass, though this is partly because most of the costs of running a car are not experienced at the point of travel. Simpler ticket purchase and multi-journey / multi-operator passes could reduce the perceived difference.

However, given Devon's demographics, and road safety concerns with some elderly drivers, there would be significant improvement if all those eligible for a pass are able to, and choose to, use public transport for most journeys beyond their walking / cycling limit. This needs a significant extension of routes, but also good communication.

To overcome reluctance, attention is needed to comfort and convenience at bus stops as well as on board. In West Devon the state of bus stops appears dependent on parish council action, and the facilities and condition vary hugely. People see a scruffy stop with no seating, and an illegible print timetable (if any) as a sign that the bus itself will be unpleasant, although in fact comfort on board has greatly improved. We welcome the fact that more buses are now wheelchair accessible, but would like this to be universal, and for better safe, traffic free routes between bus stops and nearby housing.

The printed timetable and map from Travel Devon are well presented, but not widely known or available. For tourists to be car free, clear online information which they can access before booking accommodation and when planning days out is essential. Proactive engagement with tourism both in devising the plan and publicizing improvements to services is important.

The multiplicity of services and lack of any co-ordinated publicity from the different providers leaves a patchwork of services and many people unsure what they are. For example, route 89 is a potentially useful looped route round Tavistock, but (unlike in eg Falmouth) there is no route map at stops to encourage use. There is no direct bus to Launceston, which is currently just as significant a connection as Okehampton. This leaves significant villages such as Milton Abbot without a bus connection.

The Tavistock – Okehampton route will increase in importance as soon as rail services to Okehampton reopen (early 2022?). We think it extremely important that frequent, direct, buses are provided from the start, even if it takes time for use to build up. This could be a key option to connect Tavistock to long distance rail routes for domestic and international car-free travel, and also an additional benefit connecting the two towns for work and leisure, while reducing traffic on the A386.

The Plymouth daytime service (route 1) is good, but timing of evening services seen as too sparse for use for eg theatre trips. The connection to Plymouth station sort of works but is not ideal due to the siting of the Plymouth stops. The length of the journey from Tavistock to Plymouth is close to the psychologically important limit of 1 hour. We are very concerned that Devon CC and Plymouth CC will accept further diversions of this route to serve new estates on the north of Plymouth, thus extending both the timetabled trip and (more important) passengers perception of how much contingency they need to allow, eg to catch a train.

While we welcome "Bus Back Better" and the development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan, we urge a move to more holistic planning of transport across localities which starts from the perspective of making it easy for people to make sustainable choices. This is particularly important for new housing, as research by Transport for New Homes has pointed out.

As a border area with both Plymouth and Cornwall, we hope that the Devon BSIP will ensure that these connections are well catered for, not left on the margins of all plans. In particular, tickets and information integrated across these areas would be an asset for both residents and visitors.