

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council

via email only:
public.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk

Emily.Smith@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Tel: 01235 422644
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Oxon
OX14 4SB

9 February 2022

Dear Chancellor,

I am writing to ask for your urgent help to protect bus services in the Vale of White Horse district and across Oxfordshire more widely.

As you are aware, the government has provided some support for bus operators during the pandemic through the Coronavirus Bus Services Support Grant, which has been very welcome. However, this funding is due to end on 5 April.

I understand that there is no certainty of central funding for the Bus Improvement Plans and the Enhanced Partnership with Oxfordshire County Council is not due to begin until October. Even if the funding is secured later this year, Oxford Bus Company and other local operators have informed me that local bus services here risk being reduced by up to 30 per cent, including ALL our Park and Ride provision.

A 30 per cent cut in bus services would be incredibly difficult for residents and local businesses at any time, let alone as our local communities recover from the pandemic.

The Vale of White Horse is a rural district that is home to hundreds of businesses, including the internationally significant Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre, which bring significant numbers of visitors, many of whom rely on successfully integrated public transport services to commute by bus and rail in our district.

Our residents are also able to use an integrated bus and rail service, via Didcot Parkway to travel to other nationally important business hubs, such as London, Swindon and Reading. Any reduction in bus services that support this vital integrated transport system would be devastating. More locally, public transport is relied upon by children living in rural areas to travel to school and due to the high cost of car ownership in rural areas, bus services are a vital component of addressing and reducing inequality and in raising opportunity.

As well as the potential damage to the local economy with the loss of these bus services, public transport is a vital lifeline for many vulnerable people that my council serves. Those most in need could suffer disproportionately if public transport services stop – increasing rural isolation, reducing access to education and employment opportunities, and impacting the independence of individuals that do not have access to a car or cannot afford costly taxi journeys.

As a council, and in partnership with our neighbouring councils, we take the climate emergency very seriously. We aim to ensure that our recovery from the pandemic is as low carbon, inclusive and sustainable as possible. Public transport is a vital part of our journey to a zero-carbon district, county and country, so to see further losses to our bus services at this time would be a harmful backwards step.

The impact of any cuts to local public transport could have a hugely negative impact on my district, our residents and community organisations, businesses, planning decisions and our ambitions to create healthy well-connected places to live.

Therefore, I am writing to ask for your help to prevent this coming to pass by taking the following action:

- Immediately (before 25 February) extend the Bus Recovery Grant until October. This would remove the imminent cliff edge that our bus services face and enable them to continue operating at the current level until the new funding arrangements come into force.
- More generally, I would urge you to ensure the funds available for public transport are enhanced, particularly in rural areas, where it is too far for some to walk and cycle to and from work, schools and to access services. Investing in reliable rural public transport is key to tackling rural isolation and unemployment, as well as reducing our carbon emissions.

I urge you to make a prompt decision and announcement on extending the Bus Recovery Grant, and ensure funding for public transport, especially buses, help to build a sustainable recovery across the country and especially in rural districts, like the Vale of White Horse.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council

Copies to:
David Johnston MP
Layla Moran MP

Vale of White Horse District Council, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire,
OX14 4SB www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

