

CILT airs support and caution on Transport Select Committee bus reforms

A recent report from the Transport Select Committee urging the Government to overhaul local bus services and establish a national baseline for connectivity, which would safeguard rural residents across England, has received a cautious welcome by CILT(UK).

Over the past ten years, numerous regions across the country have experienced a reduction

in bus routes and service frequencies. The Government is now aiming to improve the sector's unfavourable conditions through the provisions outlined in its Bus (No.2) Services Bill. CILT(UK) also helped shape the debate thanks its experts from its Bus & Coach Policy Group who contributed their knowledge and guidance.

Austin Birks FCILT, CILT(UK) Vice Chair of the Board and Chair of the Bus & Coach Forum, reacted by saying: "This is big step in the right direction and something the sector will be most welcoming of. Declining

bus services in rural areas has been of big concern for some time and the impact this has on already isolated rural communities. This will help ensure a minimum level of service and give many people a much-needed lifeline. In addition, the Government's target to reduce emissions, and sustainability goals, will help the bus sector, the government and passengers alike."

This legislation intends to facilitate the establishment of franchised services by more councils, similar to those implemented in Manchester and London; promote collaborations between private bus companies and councils through Enhanced Partnerships; and establish a definition of 'socially necessary services' while mandating local authorities to compile a list of such services.

Austin added: "Work between councils and franchises is fundamental in making these plans work. The partnership model has seen great success elsewhere and we need to build on this."

The reduction of bus services in rural regions is causing social isolation, restricting access to essential services and is impacting local economies. A decrease in bus routes and less frequent services is also leaving many rural residents stranded, especially those who do not own a car. Those influenced are dependent on expensive and irregular alternatives – affecting their ability to access employment, healthcare and other crucial amenities.

Lee White, CILT(UK) Bus and Coach Policy Group Chair, added: "Like most in our sector I was also pleased with the suggestions made by the Transport Select Committee. But we must also be cautious of how this will support delivery and ensure changes made work for the long term not just the now. One of the key priorities must be to ensure buses have bus lanes to utilise and have the support of local councils. Buses will not be favourable if you are stuck in the same traffic as the car user – instead we must find pull factors to ensure the public see buses as a viable alternative to the car.

"Finally, councils and franchises need to work closely to safeguard the needs of the urban and rural potential bus users are met – ensuring both have adequate services – all whilst operating reliable and affordable services for existing users. The suggestions made by the Transport Select Committee is a sign of progress, but the devil is in the detail, and we must ensure buses play a central role in our future plans for public transport." ☹

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