

Information

for County Councillors

Sheet Number:
2022-27/08



From:	Mike O'Dowd - Jones Strategic Commissioning Manager – Highways & Transport
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Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:	David Carter, Interim Director of Economic & Community Infrastructure Operations
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Date:	05 August 2022
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To:	All County Councillors
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Bus it! New campaign to boost bus passenger numbers

Introduction

Passenger levels on Somerset's bus services are only about 70 per cent of pre-Covid numbers due to combination of changing working habits and older bus pass users staying away.

This autumn the Government will be ending Covid subsidies for operators – First Bus South West has already announced a number of cuts and changes it plans to introduce from 9 October because of inadequate usage and the drop in funding. Action is needed to try to safeguard some of these routes before cuts are implemented, but also to protect other routes.

In the current climate rising energy costs will make buses more relevant – we need to protect and build on capacity at a time of rising household budgets.

What are we doing?

Somerset County Council, backed by the Somerset Bus Partnership, is launching the Bus It campaign to encourage people back on buses or to think about using them. Ultimately the Council will step in to protect some key routes but promoting bus use is vital to help ensure long term bus service improvement.

Key campaign messages

- The price of fuel is soaring – you could be saving money using the bus
- How much is it costing to run the car?
- Compare the costs with using the bus

- Help cut congestion and CO2 - support climate change
- We need to use it or lose it!
- The best things in life are free – are you using your bus pass?

Campaign channels

- Local media, Newsquest/Reach PLC – PR and paid-for advertising
- Social media channels – SCC corporate/Travel Somerset, district, parish and town partners, bus groups, community groups, operators
- Radio/TV – interviews with lead member/bus partnership

Materials

- Press release
- Web page www.somerset.gov.uk/busit - dedicated page with cost calculators and fares information (going live from Monday 8 August)
- Ads/digital posters (attached)
- Social media gifs/ads

Please spread the word on your own channels – we're happy to provide any of the materials to members.

Further notes:

- As commercial withdrawals are being made we are considering each one and working with the operator to minimise the impact, including looking at how the services can be re-configured to meet the most essential social needs, and considering use of any available council subsidy.
- Bus Service Improvement Plan money unfortunately can't be used to fund existing services, but we hope it will be able to be used for some targeted trials of cheaper fares in the Taunton area along with bus priority infrastructure aiming to make bus travel a much more attractive option and build a case for more BSIP money in the future.

For more information about the campaign contact:

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