Buses Matter:
a report by Campaign for Better Transport for the RMT

Local bus networks provide a vital public service all over the country, linking people to
services, shops and friends and family. This short report draws together research on the
value of buses, and looks particularly at vulnerable bus user groups. It makes the case that
buses provide vital support to social capital and argues that funding cuts to buses are a
false economy, because of knock-on negative impacts for local economies, for society and
for the environment.

Executive Summary
Local authorities provide buses that are socially necessary but not commercially viable, but these
are in jeopardy as a result of an overall 28% cut to local authority transport revenue funding. Bus
companies provide most services in the UK on a commercial basis, but a 20% cut to the fuel tax
rebate (known as BSOG) in 2012 will combine with a cut of between £54 and £100 million to the annual
public expenditure on concessionary journeys from 2011. The loss of revenue will result in higher
fares and reduced services.

Bus services face cut after cut, which could tip services into a spiral of decline from which they
will struggle to recover. In some areas entire bus networks could be left in tatters. Evening and
weekend services will become a thing of the past in many areas, and additional provisions to
encourage bus patronage, like concessionary fares for young people outside the core statutory
concessionary provisions, are in jeopardy. In particular rural county councils tend to provide a
larger proportion of bus routes than urban authorities, meaning lifeline countryside bus services
are under particular threat from local government budget cuts.

Vulnerable people across the UK who rely on buses for essential journeys could be left stranded.
Poor bus provision magnifies social problems, obstructs the delivery of other public services and
holds back the economy. Already
bus provision in many areas is
not fit for purpose. Improving bus
provision requires political attention
and financial support. Bus use, if
cultivated, promises to be a key
part of a transition to a low carbon
economy.

There are 123,000 employees in the
bus industry, however as revenue is
lost this number will reduce, adding
to the problem of unemployment,
putting pressure on the remaining
staff and affecting the quality of the
service provided to the public.

We applaud innovative approaches
to passenger transport provision and
local authorities need to be looking to
the range of powers at their disposal, including quality partnerships and regulation through quality contracts, in order to find solutions that meet the needs of their localities. We await with interest the outcome of report by the Competition Commission on the bus industry, but it is already clear that all options for reform of the industry need to be examined, including whether there is a greater role for municipal ownership and not for profit services. But transport schemes of any nature cannot work properly without proper funding and if the cost is passed on to the passenger then schemes will only be a service of last resort for those who have no other transport options, rather than a positive alternative to car use.

Politicians appear to be out of touch on this issue and do not appreciate the social value of buses. Buses matter and must be attributed the political importance and funding that they deserve. The report provides evidence of the specific impacts of bus cuts on vulnerable user groups as well as for the environment and for local authorities;

**Young People** need affordable bus services in order to give them a chance to take up opportunities in education and work, and to take the first steps to independence. Studies have shown that one in five students has considered dropping out of further education because of financial cost, and transport is the greatest cost of participation.

**Older people** have benefited from free bus travel in ever growing numbers; however, bus cuts could mean that concessionary pass holders could end up with no buses to get on. Many older people would be cut off from social activities, health services and shops.

**People on low incomes** will be disproportionately negatively affected, contrary to the Government’s assertions that cuts would not hit the poorest hardest. Poorer people are less likely to have a car. Some children from poor families are put at further disadvantage because their parents cannot afford bus fares to get them to colleges and services. Children from low income families are at risk of poverty if affordable transport is not available.

**Jobseekers** in the Welsh town of Merthyr were told by Iain Duncan Smith to get on the bus to Cardiff. However evidence from the Citizens Advice Bureau show that many people who want to work are unable to take jobs, or are forced onto benefits, because of insufficient and expensive bus provision. Surveys have shown that overall a third of jobseekers say poor transport options is the biggest barrier for them finding work.

**Local businesses** rely on buses. Shoppers travel by buses, particularly to the high street which means that poor bus provision is a barrier for local economic growth. Redundancies in the bus industry, and the associated negative social and economic impacts, will also be felt in localities.

**Disabled people** use buses more often than non-disabled people, and are less likely to have the choice to take a car. Cutting bus services can mean cutting people’s only independent access to transport.

**Rural communities** suffer from buses that are infrequent, expensive, and in some areas non-existent, causing isolation and suffering for many. People who fall into one of the above bus user groups who also live in the countryside are doubly disadvantaged.

**Climate change** means that we need to shift away from high carbon modes of transport, like driving, to lower carbon modes like public transport. Cuts to buses take us further away from meeting vital emissions reductions targets. The UK’s domestic transport emissions are still rising. Research shows that buses offer a viable low carbon alternative to car use, but increasing bus patronage requires political will and financial support, which are both currently lacking.
Introduction
Two-thirds of public transport journeys are made by bus\(^1\), making buses the most frequently used mode of public transport. Twenty five percent of households in the UK do not have access to a car. Even for rural households this figure is 10% while in built-up metropolitan areas, the equivalent figure is 32% and in London it is 43%\(^2\). Despite the vital role of buses in the day to day lives of millions of people up and down the country, buses are often undervalued by government decision makers.

Bus cuts and rising fares are not simply matters of inconvenience. For many people without access to a car, buses are the only way they can travel to health services, colleges and places of work. Poor bus provision magnifies social problems, obstructs the delivery of other public services and holds back economic recovery. Reduced pay and redundancies in the industry as a result of cuts will impact lives, the welfare bill and local economies. Further, bus travel must be cultivated as an alternative to car use if the government is to meet its carbon emission reduction targets. Buses provide the vital link between different kinds of sustainable transport — train, tram, taxi, cycling and walking – so good door-to-door public transport cannot happen without them.

The impact of buses goes far beyond the remit of the Department for Transport, affecting government objectives and provision in a broad range of areas, from health to the economy.

The risks
Bus services are under threat from the cumulative impacts of multiple funding cuts. Local transport authorities provide buses that are socially necessary but not commercially viable, but these are in jeopardy as a result of an overall 28% cut to local authority transport revenue funding. Further, ring fences for local transport funding, like the rural bus subsidy grant, have been removed\(^3\). Bus companies provide most services in the UK on a commercial basis, however a 20% drop in the fuel tax rebate (known as BSOG) available for buses from 2012\(^4\), will combine with a cut of £54 to £100 million to annual public expenditure on statutory concessionary journeys from 2011\(^5\). The loss of revenue will result in higher fares and reduced services. Where essential services are cut by commercial operators, local authorities will be left with an even greater burden to carry.

Bus services face cut after cut, which could tip services into a spiral of decline from which they will struggle to recover. In some areas entire bus networks could be left in tatters. Evening and weekend services will become a thing of the past in many areas, and additional provisions like subsidised fares for young people and concessionary fares for bus pass holders outside of the statutory minimum hours are already being lost.

Rural county councils tend to provide a larger proportion of bus routes than urban authorities, meaning lifeline countryside bus services are under particular threat as a result of government budget reductions. For example, in North Yorkshire, the Business and Environmental Services directorate has to find savings of £10.2 million out of its total budget of £69 million before March 2015\(^6\). As a result the Council is withdrawing all supported evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday bus services to make savings of £600,000\(^7\). Despite an overwhelming negative response to the public consultation, councillors have approved the plans\(^8\).

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2 DfT, National Travel Survey 2010 (http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/databasemiraclespublications/nts)
3 DfT, Transport Spending Review, 2010 (http://nds.co.uk/clientmicrosite/Content/Detail.aspx?ClientId=202&NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=416118&SubjectId=36)
4 Ibid
5 Local Transport Today, Rural Bus Fears Prompt Revision to Concessionary Fare Guidance, 10/12/2010 (http://www.transportxtra.com/magazines/local_transport_today/news/?id=25146)
7 North Yorkshire County Council, 2010 (https://www3.northyorks.gov.uk/n3cabinet_exec/reports_/20101221_/05budgetings/05budgetings/05budgetings.pdf)
Young people

“Access to affordable transport is a social exclusion issue. The cost of transport excludes many young people from access to further education and other facilities such as training, employment and services.”
Max Ferguson, MYP West Cheshire, Youth parliament debate in the House of Lords chamber, May 2008

Young people value buses and want more affordable fares, and are particularly affected by poor bus provision. Buses help young people make their first steps to independence and are important for personal development. For many, the availability of bus services means the difference between taking up education, training and employment opportunities, and becoming a NEET\(^9\) statistic. Positive experiences of using buses encourage bus patronage later in life, thereby reducing future car journeys.

Concessionary fares for young people are provided by local authorities on a discretionary basis and this has resulted in a postcode lottery for young bus users. Moreover, non-statutory concessions are exactly the type of provisions that will be vulnerable to local authority cuts as they struggle to find funds to run the minimum essential services.

Research by the UK Youth Parliament shows that rural areas are a particular cause for concern among young people, with the cost of fares and the lack of services at evenings and weekends the main complaints.

“Many of the rural areas of Kent had no buses after 6 or 7 pm and for some young people this meant they could not take the jobs or college places they wanted. In some areas, such as Romney Marsh, it was costing families £40 per week per person just to get to school; and cost was given as a reason why young people did not access swimming pools, clubs and other leisure activities.” \(^{10}\)

Research by the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit has also shown that affordable transport is a substantial barrier for young people accessing further education\(^{11}\). This is a major concern and risks undermining efforts to get more young people into post-16 courses. Some of the most worrying findings of the research include:

- More than one in five students have considered dropping out of further education because of financial difficulties. Transport costs are the biggest expenditure associated with participation in post–16 education.
- Nearly half of 16–18-year-old students say they find their transport costs hard to meet.
- 6 per cent of students have missed college at some point in the previous year because they could not afford transport costs.\(^{12}\)

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9  NEET is an acronym for the government classification for people currently “Not in Education, Employment, or Training”
10  Ibid
Up and down the country public money is spent on projects aimed at engaging disadvantaged young people, but without affordable public transport, some of the poorest and most socially excluded children will not be able to access projects and services designed for them.

Older people

“The free bus pass is a godsend to a lot of my older friends. It means they can get out and about without having to pay a fortune in fares. It gives them a better social life and is better than being stuck in the house. Whenever I go on the bus . . . it has elderly people on the bus saying it’s wonderful to be able to get out and about shopping in nearby towns and visiting relatives that they wouldn’t be able to see if they had to pay fares.”

Response from a pensioner participating in polling of older people

Free bus travel was brought in by the government in recognition of how important buses are for older people. Since the introduction of free concessionary travel, the number of over-60s who have taken up concessionary bus fares has risen from 49% in 1998/1999 to 76% in 2009. The proportion of people aged 60 and over who said they use a local bus at least once a week increased from 28% in 2005 to 35% in 2008. However, cuts to bus funding could mean that older people with free bus passes no longer have buses to travel on.

Research by the Centre for Social Justice explored the way mobility and transport issues affect older people, and showed that the free bus pass scheme has been very successful.

“Undoubtedly this (the introduction of statutory concessionary fares) had an enormously positive impact on the lives of the poorest older people. Bus travel provides a vital lifeline for many of the poorest older people who would otherwise be unable to leave their homes.”

However, research conducted by Ipsos Mori on behalf of Age UK shows that politicians are out of touch on this issue. Delegates and the general public were polled during the 2010 party conferences and their answers to questions about the Comprehensive Spending Review were compared. When over-65s were asked which services used by older people should not be cut in the Spending Review, the concessionary bus pass received more support than the winter fuel payment, care for frail and disabled people and post offices. Only the state pension and the NHS were considered more precious. In contrast when delegates from the three main parties were asked the same question at the party conferences, free bus travel came third from the bottom of the list of priorities. It appears that politicians have still not fully understood the importance of bus travel to older people.

The poorest and most vulnerable older people are most dependent on bus services. People who are already isolated and who do not have friends and family to help with transport or who cannot afford taxis face particular hardship when bus services are withdrawn.

14 DfT, National Travel Survey 2010 (http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/databespublications/nts/age-concessionary/nts0619.xls)
15 DfT, National Travel Survey 2008
16 Ibid
17 Ipsos Mori for Age UK, 2010, Live Polling Results: Are We Prepared For An Ageing Society
18 Ibid
“Poor access to transport can have a detrimental impact on the lives of the poorest and more vulnerable older people. It can often mean they are at an increased risk of serious social isolation – as getting to the shops or visiting friends can become near impossible. As part of its pioneering work on ageing and wellbeing the WHO highlighted the importance of transport. Its report on age-friendly cities found: ‘13 per cent of people living in rural areas in their later years report poor access to a range of basic services, including GPs, dentists, hospitals, post offices and local shops. Those on low income and those aged over 80 are significantly more likely to report poor access.”19

In many rural areas, where bus provision is already often very poor, the few buses that do run are absolutely invaluable for the passengers who rely on them. There are rarely alternative transport options for elderly people who are not able to walk or cycle and who do not own a car. The loss of a local rural bus service can make life for an elderly person insufferable.

Albert’s story

Albert lives on his own in a rural area approximately three miles from his nearest village and approximately 1.5 miles from his nearest pub. Albert used to own a car but due to rapidly deteriorating eyesight his licence was withdrawn. The nearest bus route to him is 1.5 miles away, and the bus stop even further away. The taxis in his area are expensive and few in number. Without the goodwill of fellow members of the village and neighbours he is rendered stuck in his own home and utterly isolated.20

As Albert’s story illustrates, elderly people in rural areas are often already suffering. Rural taxis and community transport schemes are often cited as solutions to the rural transport problem. But, as Albert’s story shows, taxis are simply too expensive for many people. Rural journeys are usually much longer than urban journeys, so although a taxi back from the supermarket might be a viable option for a retired person in London, for many it will be far too expensive in a remote rural area.

People on low incomes

Funding cuts to buses are a classic example of cuts that hit the poorest in society hardest. Half of households in the bottom income bracket do not own a car, compared to a national average of 25% (and only 10% of the top income bracket)21. This figure is even higher for individuals on benefits: nearly two-thirds of people claiming income support or jobseeker’s allowance (the main benefit for unemployed people seeking work) do not have access to a car or a licence to drive it22. So it’s not surprising that people in the lowest income bracket make three times more journeys by bus than people in the highest income bracket.23

The findings from a Department for Transport report on transport and social exclusion show that poor public transport services undermine the Government’s efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

“The problems have an impact on the individuals concerned, for example by cutting them off from jobs, education and training. This in turn prevents them from breaking out of the cycle of social exclusion. The problems have costs for communities, which may be left isolated or unable to attract investment. They also undermine Government objectives that are essential to combat poverty and social exclusion like welfare to work, raising educational participation and attainment, narrowing health inequalities, and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.”24

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20 Ibid
22 Ibid
Research by the Passenger Transport Executive Group (pteg) shows that the minimum income required for an acceptable standard of living has risen steeply compared to general inflation because of “significant rises in the price of certain commodities that are heavily represented in a minimum budget, such as food and public transport.”25 “Given that many families on the minimum wage or on basic out of work benefits would be unable to bring in enough money to meet the MIS [Minimum Income Standard], these findings suggest that low income families are already struggling to keep pace with rapidly rising bus fares. More fare hikes could push these families still further away from what their peers consider to be a minimum acceptable living standard.”26 Thus more children from low income families are at risk from poverty if affordable public transport is not available.

The research by pteg shows that high fares are causing families to restrict the journeys that their children make, particularly for those activities falling outside of school. The following concerns of low income parents illustrate the problem.

“It’s reduced the activities she can participate in over weekends and evenings after school.”27

“I have had to refuse some activities because I just can’t afford the cost and also pay for travel to school.”28

Jobseekers

“Social mobility and, in particular, moving people off welfare and into work, often depends on transport infrastructure. If people on isolated and deprived estates cannot get a bus or a train to the nearest city or town, they may be stranded without work and without hope.”

Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Transport29

Buses are vital to get people to work and back every day, and poor bus services mean that many people are unable to take up jobs. Fare rises increase the cost of getting to work, in some cases making work less profitable than benefits. In October 2010 the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, suggested that jobseekers in the Welsh town of Merthyr should use the bus to travel to Cardiff to find employment30. If jobseekers are expected to travel by bus to find job opportunities, there must be affordable bus services for them to use.

Statistics published by the Social Exclusion Unit serve to illustrate how poor public transport is a significant barrier for people trying to find work:

- Almost 40 per cent of jobseekers say that their job search has been limited because of the costs involved. For 63 per cent of them, this results from the cost of travelling to interviews.
- 14 per cent of unemployed lone parents say they can’t afford the cost of transport to work.
- 13 per cent of people say they have not applied for a particular job in the last 12 months because of transport problems. This rises to 18 per cent for people living in low income areas.

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26 PTEG, Report on the Effect of Bus fare Increases on Low Income Families, 2010
27 Ibid
28 Ibid
Five per cent of people say they have been offered a job but turned it down in the last 12 months because of transport problems. This proportion doubles to 10 per cent for people living in low income areas.  

The research also found that new jobs are increasingly being created in locations which are inaccessible without a car and which are “not always close to where unemployed people live”.  

“Transport has become more of an issue over time partly because of the growth of employment in places and at times that are not served by public transport, and which are not always close to where unemployed people live. Many of the new jobs created in recent years have been in out-of-town or suburban locations, which can be hard to reach without a car. More jobs also require evening and weekend work, when public transport services are poorer.”  

Based on a series of case studies from Citizens Advice Bureaux, a joint report by Campaign for Better Transport and Citizens Advice Bureau makes the case that poor bus provision is adding to the problem of unemployment in the UK. For a third of jobseekers the biggest obstacle is not a willingness to have a job, or the financial reward of doing so. Instead, poor transport options make it very difficult for jobseekers to get to work and back. The following case study illustrates this point.  

“Ms A lives in a village served by one bus service a day. She was unemployed and had been asked by the Jobcentre to attend a training course in a town 15 miles away. However, to get there, Ms A would have to book the bus a day in advance, get the 8.30 am bus to the nearest town with a train station, and then get the train to her destination, getting there at 9.30 am. She would have to leave the course early to catch the bus home again. When the Jobcentre was told of Ms A’s travel difficulties, they threatened to impose a sanction on her claim for jobseeker’s allowance, saying “we’re not interested in buses.”  

Case study from a Dorset Citizens Advice Bureau, November 2009  

Moreover, the research showed that for people in low paid employment, high fares and cuts in bus services can force them out of work. In some cases the expense of bus travel can make the difference between being better off on benefits or better off by continuing to work. The case studies below illustrate the problems.  

“Mr D is a married man with three children. He lived in a village eight miles from his place of work and was finding it difficult to get there as his old car was about to break down. He could not afford to get it repaired, and he would not be able to take out a loan to buy a new one as he had a poor credit record. As he started work at 6 am, there were no buses at that time of the morning. It would be difficult for him to cycle as the route to work was along busy streets with no cycle path. He could not afford to rent a house in the village where he worked, as rents were higher there. Mr D wanted to work, but felt that it was not cost effective for him to do so, and was considering claiming benefits instead.”  

Case study from a Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau, June 2010  

“Mr E has learning difficulties and was finding it difficult to get to work due to cuts in bus services. His place of work was five miles from his home and he worked shifts – one week starting at 6am and then the following week finishing at 10pm. As there were no

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31 Social Exclusion Unit, Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion, 2003
32 Ibid
33 Ibid
34 Campaign for Better Transport and Citizens Advice, Transport, social equality and welfare to work, 2010
bus services early in the morning or late in the evening, he had to get home by taxi. He could not afford the fares, and consequently was facing debt and housing problems.”

Case study from a Hampshire Citizens Advice Bureau, May 2010

The research shows that affordable bus services that link people to employment are vital if the Government is serious about making sure work is always more lucrative than claiming benefits.

Local businesses
Buses are vital for local economies. Research on the value of buses for the economy was published in 2010 by the Confederation of Passenger Transport. It looked at value in terms of the economic benefit of employment in the industry, the revenue generated for suppliers and the retail spend by bus passengers. It showed that per year £3,630 to £4,545 is spent by the average bus user on shopping trips taken by bus.

High streets will lose out if services are withdrawn and fares go up. Research by the Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) shows that town centres are more often visited by bus patrons than shopping centres at the edge of and outside towns. This is not surprising because town centres have much better public transport links. The research also showed that the way shoppers travel has a smaller than expected effect on how much they spend, so that bus patrons are no less important to local businesses than customers who drive to the shops.

The impact on tourism and associated business, particularly in rural areas, is also important. In the Yorkshire Dales campaigners are concerned that local authority cuts to bus services have not taken into account the impact on tourism, and the associated revenue and jobs.

“The council has to make severe budget cuts and what they’ve said is they’re going to concentrate on preserving journeys to work and scrapping evening and Sunday services in rural areas. Sunday is the busiest day for most rural businesses and there are people who work on Sunday. We have approximately 60,000 people a year travelling into the area, spending a lot of money. If all that was stopped businesses would suffer dramatically.”

Mr Wilkes, from community interest operator Dales Bus in North Yorkshire

Bus companies are often themselves local businesses and redundancies in both small firms and in the large groups will impact local economies, increasing unemployment, putting further pressure on welfare and reducing spending power. There are around 123,000 employees in the bus industry, they spend £2.1bn per year in the economy and contribute £0.67bn in income tax and national insurance.

Disabled people
Public transport is a major concern for many disabled people. Some disabilities, such as visual impairments, mean that people do not have the option of driving. For this reason RNIB runs a campaign for bus concessions for disabled passengers over and above the statutory minimum. Unfortunately, in the context of massive reductions to local authority budgets, the provision of concessionary fares for disabled people outside the off peak minimum is likely to contract rather than increase.

RNIB research shows that blind people are active bus users, with 41% of blind and partially sighted people currently using bus transport.

36 Ibid
38 Ibid
39 Ibid
40 Mr Wilkes, 2010 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-11642108)
41 Confederation of Passenger Transport, 2010, The Value of Buses to the Economy
42 Royal National Institute for Blind People (http://www.rnib.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/gettingaround/Pages/bus_passes.aspx)
“What means of transport these people would use if bus services were cut, given they aren’t able to drive, cycle or walk long distances, is going to become a moot point as cuts bite. As these groups are statistically on low incomes too, purchasing private taxis is not a realistic alternative. More than that, with the Coalition’s objective to get more disabled people back to work, the question of how these people travel to work and to job interviews / training is something we are seriously looking at.”
Hugh Huddy from the RNIB campaigns team

Findings from a 2009 poll commissioned by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee showed clearly that disabled people are more dependent on buses than non-disabled people. Disabled people are more likely to mention transport as a local concern than non-disabled people (48% compared with 39%). Sixty per cent of disabled people have no car in the household and they use buses around 20% more frequently on average than non-disabled people.

The research shows that physically and visually impaired people use buses more often, and are less likely to have the choice to take a car. Therefore they will be disproportionately negatively affected by declining bus services.

**Rural communities**
Public transport is a serious concern for people in rural areas. Campaign for Better Transport produced a report in 2007 which explained that rural buses are vitally important, for three main reasons:

- They are essential to combat social exclusion . . . buses enable non-drivers to access jobs, shops, education, training and services, all of which have been centralised and rural facilities closed.

- They can bring in visitors and tourists. If the countryside is to avoid becoming a ghetto, lived in and visited only by the rich, then it must be made accessible to a wide range of people and income groups, including people without cars. Rural buses are also important for the economy. Many small businesses set up in the countryside or market towns, and need good public transport for employees.

- They can help to combat the significant rise in rural traffic. Country lanes are ill-placed to cope with this rise, and in areas like National Parks, traffic damages and devalues the very countryside that people are coming to see. Traffic also causes a vicious cycle of increasing car use by making rural buses less reliable. Good rural bus services can offer an alternative to car use, cutting both traffic and carbon emissions.

However, bus provision in rural areas tends to be very infrequent, often expensive, and in some areas is non-existent. In 2008 CfIT published research describing how infrequent and badly connected public transport provision in rural areas causes isolation and hardship.

“Many rural communities have public transport services that are infrequent, finish early in the evening and do not run at all at weekends. Connections between buses and trains are erratic, and examples of integrated ticketing are the exception rather than the rule.

“This problem affects large numbers of people - a fifth of the English population (9.5 million people) live in rural areas. It causes significant hardship, with the evidence

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43 Hugh Huddy, RNIB Campaigns Team, 2010
45 Campaign for Better Transport, Rural Buses Report, 2007
46 Ibid
suggesting that low-income rural households are often forced into buying and running a car when they cannot really afford to do so. Rising fuel prices make it even more important to offer a better alternative to car use for these rural households.”

Transport obviously becomes more important for people the further away they live from the amenities they rely on, and this has cost implications. Research by the Centre for Social Justice shows that people who live in rural areas “can spend between 20 and 30 per cent more on transport (including motoring costs, public transport and taxis) than those in urban households”\(^49\). For those in the “lowest income quintile their weekly expenditure on transport in a village or hamlet is £50, for those in rural towns it is £32 and for people living in urban areas it is £28”\(^50\).

A review of rural public services published by the Rural Service Network showed that there is widespread recognition among rural community level organisations and service providers of the importance of public transport as a means of accessing a range of services and opportunities. Public transport also features as a priority in 27 of the most recent rural Local Authority Agreements\(^51\). But despite the recognition of the importance of rural public transport, bus provision remains very poor. Government cuts to funding to buses will only make this problem worse.

Local authority funding for public transport is being cut by 28%, putting local authorities in a very difficult position. The loss of ring fencing gives local authorities more flexibility, but it also means that vital public transport services are competing for funding with other essential public services.

For example, Somerset County Council predicts that the significant funding reduction they have agreed will result in cuts to council bus provision of 50%\(^52\). Somerset’s Head of Highways and Passenger Transport, Ioan Rees, has said that “the tendered bus service budget in the county would be cut from about £4.5m to about £2.2m over three years”. The report, in Local Transport Today, goes on to explain that Ioan Rees “estimated that all but 15-20 of the county’s 250 or so bus routes were subsidised in some form”\(^53\). As the case of Somerset shows, in rural areas, where often the vast majority of bus services are funded by the local authority, services could be left in tatters.

**Climate change and carbon emissions**

“Transport policy has no choice but to respond to the challenge of climate change, for both environmental and economic reasons. Transport policies must fully reflect environmental externalities, and transport planning must take account of likely carbon prices.”

The Eddington Transport Study 2006\(^54\)

Buses can make a major contribution to delivering on the Government’s carbon reduction targets through modal shift from the car. A 2009 study by the Department for Transport showed that greenhouse gas emissions from domestic transport are still rising, amounting to 21% of all UK domestic emissions\(^55\). Bus and coaches are a very carbon efficient mode of transport, as the figures overleaf bear out.

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48 Ibid
50 Ibid
52 (Somerset, Medium term financial plan, 2010 http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/board3c/2010%20November%202011%20Item%204%20(i)%20MTFP%202011-12%20and%20%20Capital%20Investment%20Programme%202010-11%20Appendix%20A.pdf)
53 Local Transport Today, Somerset councillors approve singeing cuts to transport spend, 26/11/10 (http://www.transportxtra.com/magazines/local_transport_today/news/?id=24879)
The CO2 per car passenger kilometre is 130g CO2, per bus/coach passenger kilometre it is 69g CO2.\textsuperscript{56}

In a city, a journey by bus can result in half the CO2 emissions per passenger compared to the car. This differential would become much greater with modal shift\textsuperscript{57}.

If car drivers switched from car to bus or coach for just one journey in 25 it would mean one billion less car journeys on our roads and a reduction of 2 Million Tonnes of CO2\textsuperscript{58}.

Clearly, a modal shift out of cars and onto buses needs to be accompanied by other measures in the bus industry, such as fuel efficient driving, improved efficiency and renewable energy use at bus depots, and cleaner vehicles using low carbon technologies. Buses and coaches run on existing infrastructure, and therefore they are flexible, and can deliver additional capacity very quickly with minimal additional costs. All the indications are that modal shift from cars to buses could make a real impact to emissions reduction from the UK. However, if in practice services decline and fares go up, people who have the option to are more likely to choose the car over the bus. Unless buses are properly supported by governments we will miss this very important opportunity to put the UK on the road to a low carbon future.

A recent YouGov survey indicates that the overwhelming majority of people support greater investment in public transport and would put taking public transport second after recycling as a realistic measure to help the environment\textsuperscript{59}. However positive change for buses cannot happen without political will and financial support.

**Conclusion**

In the short term support for buses can appear to decision-makers to be an area where quick and easy savings can be made. But research shows that the long term consequences of poor bus provision will put greater pressure on the public purse down the line.

The multiple funding cuts facing buses put the future of bus services in many parts of the country in jeopardy. Already bus provision in many areas is not fit for purpose. In particular rural county councils, who provide a larger proportion of bus routes than urban authorities, are cutting large swathes of lifeline countryside services. Cuts to rural buses will impact the character and demographic of the British countryside. Vulnerable people across the UK who rely on buses for essential journeys could be left stranded.

We applaud innovative approaches to passenger transport provision and local authorities need to be looking to the range of powers at their disposal, including quality partnerships and regulation through quality contracts, in order to find solutions that meet the needs of their localities. We await with interest the outcome of a report by the Competition Commission on the bus industry, but it is already clear that all options for reform of the industry need to be examined, including whether there is a greater role for municipal ownership and not for profit services. But transport schemes of any nature cannot work properly without proper funding and if the cost is passed on to the passenger then schemes will only be a service of last resort for those who have no other transport options, rather than a positive alternative to car use.

Bus use, if cultivated, promises to be a key part of the transition to a low carbon economy. Decision makers need to have the courage and vision to make decisions to encourage a modal shift if we are to tackle climate change, even if this means spending more in the short term.

\textsuperscript{56} NAEI, Carbon Pathways Analysis, cited by Greener Journeys, The Road to a Carbon Efficient Britain (http://www.greenerjourneys.com/themes/site_themes/gj/doc/The_Road_to_a_Carbon_Efficient_Britain6.pdf)
\textsuperscript{57} Disabled persons Transport Advisory Committee, 2009 (http://dptac.independent.gov.uk/pubs/research/apt/pdf/apt.pdf)
\textsuperscript{58} Greener Journeys, The Road to a Carbon Efficient Britain (http://www.greenerjourneys.com/themes/site_themes/gj/doc/The_Road_to_a_Carbon_Efficient_Britain6.pdf)
The recovery of the economy to a large extent depends upon the resilience and fortitude of ordinary people to rise above difficulties in their day to day lives and to generate growth. Buses enable people to be self sufficient and economically active. By damaging bus provision the government is not only clipping the wings of bus users, but they are also clipping the wings of recovery itself.

Politicians appear to be out of touch on this issue and do not appreciate the social value of buses. Buses matter and must be attributed the political importance and funding that they deserve.

Sophie Allain,

Buses Campaign

Campaign for Better Transport

(January 2011)

Campaign for Better Transport’s Save Our Buses campaign
Defending the country’s ‘get up and go’.

Campaign for Better Transport is the leading transport NGO. Our compelling arguments and ideas have won us the support of national decision-makers and local activists, enabling us to secure transport policies and programmes that improve people’s lives and reduce environmental impact.