Foreword

Stephen Joseph
Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport

This report has been produced to give a clear picture of what is actually happening to supported bus services across England and Wales. Over the course of two months we contacted all Local Transport Authorities in England and Wales using the Freedom of Information Law and we have some interesting, but troubling, findings.

Buses are not given the political importance they deserve. With more people commuting to work by bus than any other mode of public transport combined politicians, both central and local, need to fully understand the social, economic and environmental importance of buses and reflect that in the decisions they make.

Cuts to bus services can have a profound effect on people and we often hear first person stories about the impacts of these cuts, from young people unable to access their place of education or training, to older people who are left in isolation after their lifeline to the outside world has been cut. It is often the most vulnerable in our society who are affected the most by cuts to public services. This report aims to highlight the extent of these cuts whilst looking to what will happen to funding for supported buses in 2014-15.

What is clear is that the situation on the ground is increasingly bleak as local authorities struggle to find savings across the board. This report is not about shaming local authorities who have made cuts but simply to highlight the realities of what is happening across England and Wales. We have discovered some examples of good practice from local authorities but also stories of hardship from real people affected by cuts to their bus services.

What we do know now is where the worst of these cuts are happening and with a General Election on the horizon in 2015 we will be doing all we can in these areas to highlight the crisis of bus provision in England and Wales to key decision makers and put buses at the forefront of our campaigning.

We are fully aware that central and local governments are facing a very difficult financial situation but we are concerned that politicians might not completely understand the impacts that cutting funding for buses is having. The economic case for funding buses is clear and it is a false economy to make short term savings as the longer term impacts can be devastating.
Executive summary

This is the third year Campaign for Better Transport has conducted research into supported bus provision across England; this year we have also looked at the situation in Wales, following major changes in bus funding there.

Supported buses are services that are subsidised by local authorities because they are not provided by commercial bus companies. They serve communities where no alternative route exists, meaning that any cut or alteration can often have a huge impact on residents and local economies. They also provide services in evenings and at weekends when otherwise services would cease. These subsidised or supported services represent 22 per cent of bus provision in England. This percentage varies considerably across the country, ranging from just 5 per cent in some urban areas to almost 100 per cent in some rural areas.

On average, 78 per cent of bus services outside London are run on a commercial basis. If a bus company wants to cancel a commercial service or change its timetable or route, it has to give 56 days’ notice to their local Traffic Commissioner and provide a copy of this notice to the local transport authority. As commercial businesses, operators are not required to run a public consultation on bus service changes, though many do, sometimes in partnership with local authorities.

Buses are looked at as a local issue – they rarely make national headlines. Yet they are important: two-thirds of public transport journeys are made by bus, making buses the most frequently used mode of public transport. They support local economies by getting people to work, schools, training, shops and public services. This is why we have been looking at what has been happening to buses across the country. We are confident that this is the most comprehensive report into local authority spending on supported bus services conducted since the recession in 2008 and despite seeing the ‘green shoots’ of an economic recovery the situation for supported bus services is getting increasingly bleak.

The key finding of our research is that since last year £17.5 million has been cut from local authority budgets for supported bus services in England, but a £7.5 million increase in spending by some local authorities meant that the net reduction in funding for bus services was £10 million in 2013-14. This £10m represents a 3.6 per cent cut in local authorities’ spending overall. 46 per cent of local authorities have cut spending on their supported bus services whilst 36 per cent have cut or removed services. As a result of these reductions, 147 services have been cut or withdrawn completely across the country.

The total spend by local authorities on supported bus services for 2013-14 was £260 million, down from £270 million in 2012-13 and down from £279 million in 2011-12, meaning that in just three years £19 million has been cut overall from supported bus budgets across England.

www.bettertransport.org.uk
The £10 million being cut from budgets in this year alone has resulted in 147 services being cut or withdrawn. In total 155 services have been withdrawn altogether since 2011 across English regions.

South East England has seen the highest number of cuts to bus services with 46 services cut or withdrawn in 2013-14, meaning that since 2011 a total of 160 services in the region have been cut or withdrawn. By getting information on budgets and using information from the Office of National Statistics we have worked out the total spend per person on supported bus services per year. In every region except the North West there have been significant cuts in spending.

Local authorities cutting the most bus services

When comparing the budgets in the metropolitan areas covered by Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) and non-PTE area budgets since 2011 there are some interesting results: since 2011 non-PTE areas have cut in total 10 per cent from their supported bus budgets whilst overall PTE areas have cut just 1 per cent.

In Wales responsibility for bus services is devolved to the Welsh Assembly. The total Welsh budget for supported bus services in 2013-14 was £17.4 million and this is distributed to the 22 local authorities. At the time of publishing we still had not received all data on budgets since 2011 but we do know that in 2013-14 there were 25 service withdrawals or alterations, made up of 13 reductions or alterations and 12 entire service removals.

Spend per person 2011 vs 2013 (pence)
Methodology

The information about budgets for supported buses (2013-14) and withdrawn routes has been collected by contacting all 82 local transport authorities in England as well as the six PTEs responsible for public transport within large urban areas. We also contacted all 22 single tier authorities in Wales.

Freedom of Information requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 were issued to all local authorities in England and Wales and all PTEs. The information requested this year was the same as in 2011-12 and 2012-13, to provide continuity and accuracy of data.

Buses in crisis?

As noted already, commercial operators have no legal requirement to run loss-making services. Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify transport needs and to provide services where these needs would not otherwise be met, meaning that if the local authority considers a bus service is socially necessary and that this service would not be provided without subsidy, it can pay a bus operator to run it. However, these duties are weaker than those relating to other local authority services, making bus service funding vulnerable when local authority funding is under pressure.

In fact public funding for buses has been cut in various ways. As part of the Coalition Government’s Spending Review in 2010 it was announced that government funding to local authorities for transport would be cut by 28 per cent; and that the Bus Service Operators’ Grant (BSOG) – which provides direct support for all bus services – would be cut by 20 per cent from 2012-13. In addition, the Department for Transport (DfT) changed the formula for funding local authorities for the statutory free travel scheme for older people and those with disabilities. The effect of this formula change has been a cut of around £60m for local authorities. This under-funding of the concessionary fares scheme means that less funding is available for supported services.

With such reductions it is unsurprising that councils are making cuts to services. Delivering the same level of bus services, and responding to increased demand for some services, while nearly 30 per cent of funding has been taken out of budgets represents a huge challenge for local authorities, a challenge that inevitably many find impossible to meet. As a result, pensioners in some areas have bus passes but no buses on which to use them.
June 2013 saw the Government’s Spending Round and Campaign for Better Transport with others campaigned to protect the central Government funding (BSOG) from any further cuts, following the 20 per cent cut in 2010. While this campaigning was successful, and BSOG has been maintained and is now ring-fenced until 2016, the Spending Round saw local authority funding reduced by a further 10 per cent with immediate effect, meaning that supported bus services are under more pressure than ever. Other funding may go to buses – for example, the DfT will have Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) resource funding in 2015-16 – but this will not make up for these reductions.

However, the performance of local authorities in dealing with the cuts in funding is a mixed picture. In some cases there have been cuts to services even though budgets for supported services have increased slightly, in other cases local authorities have managed to protect supported bus services despite a cut in budget.

On top of this, cuts to council budgets are not affecting everywhere equally. A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation called *Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities* found that cuts in spending power and budgeted spend are greater in more deprived local authorities than in more affluent ones, with a difference of around £100 per head. Cuts are also generally greater in the North and Midlands than in the south of England.

Our research has found similarities to the Joseph Rowntree report with the North East and West Midlands seeing the highest overall percentage of cuts to bus subsidy at 13 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of supported bus spending</th>
<th>Share of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>South West</strong></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South East</strong></td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East of England</strong></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Midlands</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Midlands</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</strong></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North West</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>North East</strong></td>
<td>5%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>South West</strong></td>
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<td><strong>South East</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East of England</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Midlands</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East Midlands</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North West</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North East</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Buses in crisis - the numbers**

The following tables aim to provide a clear picture of spending on supported bus services across England and Wales in 2013-14 and the previous two fiscal years.

The table below shows the local authorities who have reported cuts in spending, with the percentage of the cuts levied in 2013-14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage cut 2013-2014</th>
<th>North East</th>
<th>South East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middlesborough</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bracknell Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>West Berkshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyne and Wear NEXUS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Windsor and Maidenhead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wokingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrington</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Milton Keynes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn with Darwen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire East</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Southampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire West</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Isle of Wight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Riding of Yorkshire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York City Council</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Surrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Yorkshire</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>West Sussex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Yorkshire ITA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derbyshire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Gloucestershire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Torbay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Swindon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Cornwall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands ITA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wiltshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dorset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luton</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hertfordshire</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Neath Port Talbot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Swansea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gwynedd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ceredigion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following table shows the spending on supported bus services by region since 2011. Every region apart from the North West has seen a cut in spending over this time. The North West’s performance is due to a significant increase in spending by Merseytravel Integrated Transport Authority in 2012-13.

### Supported Bus Budgets (£)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>17,119,429</td>
<td>17,035,900</td>
<td>14,813,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>58,610,164</td>
<td>62,204,153</td>
<td>62,813,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>41,666,252</td>
<td>39,077,865</td>
<td>37,299,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>21,842,663</td>
<td>18,632,940</td>
<td>19,529,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>23,564,170</td>
<td>23,366,000</td>
<td>21,420,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>28,772,016</td>
<td>25,777,636</td>
<td>23,212,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>47,810,883</td>
<td>46,730,680</td>
<td>43,298,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>35,614,108</td>
<td>33,982,413</td>
<td>33,045,555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have also identified which regions and local authorities are cutting or withdrawing bus services. The South East and the East of England were the regions suffering the worst of the cuts in this financial year; Luton Borough Council, Southampton City Council, Leicester and Hertfordshire all saw significant cuts or withdrawals of services. There is a chance some of the buses which have had their support cut by the council will continue to run on a commercial basis. Local authorities have powers to support buses only when they are not commercially viable, however there are instances where support has been removed and operators have taken the decision to continue running the bus or a similar bus. Commercial operators are not subject to FOI requests and so this data is not consistently available.

The total regional cuts to budgets in 2013-14 are shown in the following table with the exact amounts cut within each region. The North West and East Midlands are showing zero as they actually increased spending in this financial year.
The percentage cuts to spending between 2011 and 2013 can be seen in the following table – East of England cut the most with a 19 per cent cut in spending, followed by the North East and East Midlands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Cuts 2011-13</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The local authorities spending the least on supported bus services can be seen in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councils Spending the Least on Supported Buses</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Hartlepool</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Southend</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Darlington</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Stoke-On-Trent</td>
<td>94,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Torbay</td>
<td>106,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Middlesbrough</td>
<td>123,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Derby</td>
<td>147,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 North East Lincolnshire</td>
<td>184,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Blackpool</td>
<td>206,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Luton</td>
<td>236,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This Map shows the number of bus services cut in each English Region and overall in Wales.
Why this matters - those affected by bus cuts

Campaign for Better Transport’s report, Buses Matter\(^6\) sets out clear evidence of the economic, social, and environmental benefits that buses bring. Cuts in services threaten these benefits generally – but a third of UK households have no access to a car and it is people in these households, and often the most vulnerable groups in our society, that are most affected by cuts to supported bus services.

Older people, young people, those in education or training, people on low incomes or job seekers and disabled people all suffer disproportionately and are more likely to experience transport isolation.

Older people

Poor access to bus services has a negative impact on the lives of older people, exposing them to an increased risk of serious social isolation. 36 per cent of journeys outside London are concessionary; this is mostly free travel by older and disabled people.\(^6\)

There are approximately 9.7 million older and disabled people with concessionary bus passes in England. Concessionary travel has led to an overall increase in bus patronage since 2006 but, as noted already, cuts to bus funding could mean that older people and those with free bus passes no longer have buses to travel on.

“Access to regular buses services is a lifeline for many older people who would be isolated and otherwise unable to travel independently. Further cuts to services will hit the poorest and most vulnerable who rely on buses to get around to their GP, the local hospital, do their shopping and to visit friends and family. This report is further evidence that cuts are leaving bus services in some areas at a critical level without alternatives being provided leaving many older people stranded. The government must recognise the benefits of accessible public transport for older people and the cost of problems caused by a lack of access to it.”

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK

Young people and those in part or full time education

A recent report by Campaign for Better Transport and the Intergenerational Foundation called No Entry! Transport Barriers Facing Young People\(^7\) noted that young people are under huge pressure, socially and financially. At the end of 2012 nearly a million, or one in five, 16 – 24 year olds were unemployed and more than a million young people are not in any employment, education or training.

Young people are almost three times as likely to be jobless as older adults. Those in higher education are burdened by levels of debt that are increasing as the cost of tuition rises. Students who started university in England in 2012-13 will graduate with an average student loan debt of over £40,000.

The incomes of young people in employment have to be stretched further as income levels stagnate and living costs rise. Over two million young people come from low income households.

“It’s really concerning to see further cuts to bus services for the third year in a row as NUS believe that transport can be a pivotal part to a student’s ability to partake in education. Transport that is
expensive, inadequate or non-existent can be really harmful to access to education. If there are barriers to even getting to the college gates we cannot expect to see education reaching those who would perhaps most benefit from it. It’s very clear that investment in good transport links and services is beneficial to the whole community.”

*Colum McGuire, Vice President NUS (Welfare)*

**People on low incomes and job seekers**

A report by the Institute of Transport Studies at the University of Leeds has found that the UK labour market is reliant on buses, with more people commuting to work by bus than all other modes of public transport combined. Two out of five job seekers say lack of transport is a barrier to getting a job, whilst the increasing cost of bus fares can also be extremely problematic.

A Campaign for Better Transport report entitled *Transport barriers to getting a job* sought evidence from users of Citizens Advice Bureaux and found a number of barriers faced by people who are actively seeking work including: accessing job centres away from public transport, living in isolated or rural areas without access to a car, living in affordable housing in areas that are more difficult to access by public transport and lack of weekend and evening bus services. It is these services which are often funded by local authorities and which are the most vulnerable to cuts.

**Disabled People**

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 per cent compared with 39 per cent). 60 per cent of disabled people have no car in the household and they use buses around 20 per cent more frequently on average than non-disabled people.

**Qualitative research**

As well as providing quantitative research, this report has also looked to provide a cross-section of qualitative commentary on the current situation for supported bus services by asking for views from those in the bus industry, local authority officials, grassroots campaigners and third sector or non-governmental organisations.

**A view from the bus industry**

“Local bus services are simply the lifeblood of communities up and down the country, and account for over 60 per cent of all public transport journeys. As well as access to work and leisure activities, the bus is often the only way for people to reach vital public services such as health and education. And the benefits of a vibrant, healthy bus industry don’t stop there. Buses make a significant contribution of more than £2 billion to the economy, and provide 124,000 direct jobs whilst supporting many more through the supply chain.

The difficult economic climate has taken its toll on the local bus market. The industry continues to foster partnership working with local authorities believing that this is the key to delivering the very best services for the local area.

However it is a fact of life that the commercial sector simply cannot provide a bus service to every corner of the country. It is very regrettable therefore that local authority budgets have been squeezed to the point where support for some socially necessary bus services has to be cut or withdrawn altogether.

The benefits of a full network of bus services are there for all to see. The publication of this report is timely in making the case for continued Government support for local authorities at a level that will allow bus services to keep the country moving and our economy recovering.”

*Simon Posner, Chief Executive, CPT*
“Buses are the most important mode of public transport in Britain. They have a key role in generating economic growth, supporting our high streets and connecting our communities. It is vital that the private and public sector work together in partnership to deliver on their shared responsibility to improve services for local people.

Significantly less public investment already goes into buses compared with other transport modes. There is also no question that continued pressure on local government budgets has hit services. In the past three years, bus mileage we operate on behalf of local authorities has fallen by more than 11 per cent in stark contrast to the trend in our core commercial networks which are growing as a result of our ongoing programme of investment.

One of the most effective ways to make a real difference is through a significant expansion of bus lanes, park and ride and other priority measures.

It can improve journey times for bus passengers and help reduce travel delays for other road users. Research by Greener Journeys shows that investment in bus priority more than pays for itself and brings huge economic and labour market benefits. It is time we got serious about the wider value of the bus and work together to get Britain back on board.”

Robert Montgomery, Managing Director, Stagecoach UK Bus

Rural areas

One in five people in England live in rural areas – if bus services continue to be cut back, or made more expensive, this will increase barriers for people in those areas to get into employment, to stay in education or training, and to access healthcare.

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. 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.

“Provision for public transport is in most rural places grossly inadequate. It would benefit country-dwellers and town-dwellers alike if there were reliable public transport in rural communities. The frequency, imaginativeness, reliability and readily-accessible up-to-date and accurate information about services are the key to persuading people to use public transport in favour of cars.

It would also complement the experience of rural walking by getting cars off the roads and by providing recreational walkers with a ‘real’ destination as opposed to the place they began, i.e., where they left their car. And it would encourage more people to walk and reap the health-benefits, including some members of the 25 per cent of carless households, thus reducing the nation’s health-bill and boosting the rural economy. The case for frequent, reliable, imaginative, accessible and affordable rural passenger transport is clear.”

Eugene Suggett, Senior Policy Officer, The Ramblers

mileage is made using a car in the most rural areas – 58 per cent compared to 49 per cent in urban areas. The DFT’s data on ‘households with good transport access to key services or work’ found the number of households in villages with good transport access had declined from 57 per cent in 2007 to 27 per cent in 2011.

In many rural areas commercial transport solutions are not always feasible, leaving residents car dependent and councils and communities needing to find other solutions. On the one hand, commercial operators do not have a high volume of passengers on more rural routes and subsidies available from local authorities remain under threat. On the other hand community, voluntary and charitable sectors play a key role in transport provision – although they too are affected by reductions in local government funding and the falling incomes of users.

The challenges are immense but the issue is vital for rural communities”

Graham Biggs, Chief Executive, Rural Services Network

“Buses, trains, and bicycles are a crucial part of everyday life – whether it’s commuting for work, getting to school, visiting friends and family or attending an appointment. Yet in many parts of rural England transport is not working, making it difficult for people to reach jobs, schools/training, shops and services.

The DFT’s National Transport Survey reveals that people living in the most rural areas travel 45 per cent further each year than those in England as a whole (and 53 per cent further than those living in urban areas). A greater percentage of total annual
Urban areas
A recent report by the Passenger Transport Executive Group (pteg), *Making the Case for the Urban Bus,* found that buses are the backbone of public transport in our regional cities, yet are largely ignored in the national policy debate.

The report found that local government expenditure to support non-commercial bus services can generate benefits in excess of £3 for every £1 of public money spent. Most of these benefits accrue to bus users who would not otherwise have been able to access employment opportunities or public services, or who would have seen a steep increase in their transport expenditure.

“The latest findings in this report are very worrying, particularly when you consider that a quarter of households have no access to a car. Buses provide essential and affordable access to jobs, education, retail and leisure, without which key sections of the economy would quite simply stall.

Buses are the lifeblood of the UK economy. There isn’t a single area of our daily lives that doesn’t in some way depend on bus services. We need buses for a thriving job market. More people commute by bus than all other public transport combined, and those commuters create goods and services with a value of £64 billion. Buses are also crucial to the vitality of our towns and city centres, with more people accessing our high streets by bus than by any other mode. Bus users make 1.4 billion shopping trips every year with an estimated retail spend of £27 billion.

Young people are more reliant than any other group on bus services. For 80 per cent of young unemployed people, buses are their only means of access. We must support buses if we are serious about helping our young people access work and training opportunities. And buses are key to sustainable economic growth. Buses reduce congestion and carbon emissions and offer an immediate and low cost solution to the serious environmental challenges we face.”

Claire Haigh, Greener Journeys

A view from local authorities
Local authorities have been set the challenge of trying to do more with less. Here three local authority officers give us their views on the current economic situation and what they feel is the way forward for central and local government.

“As the local government funding envelope shrinks under the Spending Review towards that required for statutory services only, non-statutory services will be cut regardless of local political recognition of their importance – such as bus support.

And yet the bus services that local authorities fund are vital to many rural and isolated communities. The continuation of these services is vital to key local and national aims:

- the local economy – enabling people to get to work, often in rural areas where few job opportunities exist, and enabling rural businesses access to the local workforce
- the ‘prevention’ agenda – facilitating people away from dependency on benefits and into employment and independence at all ages; the very people that ‘prevention’ is most aimed at are those who are most dependent upon the bus
- youth opportunities – the Youth Parliament identified bus access as their prime concern
- sustainable communities – that are accessible to all in the local community without which their sustainability would be ephemeral
- health improvement – providing access to healthcare and healthy and active lives including through the opportunities that travel outside a community provides
- equality – of opportunity regardless of where someone lives or whether they have a car/ can drive.

Claire Haigh, Greener Journeys
There is now overwhelming national evidence of these benefits. With many councils spending much more on the national concessionary travel scheme than on support for bus services, the national free pass is in danger of becoming a ticket to nowhere unless there is a rebalancing of funding from the free pass to local services. In the meantime deep and lasting damage will result in rural and isolated areas as their bus services have to be cut.”

Bruce Thompson, Association of Transport Coordinating Officers

“As the picture for investment in buses starts to unfold for 2014 onwards, it is becoming increasingly clear that non-statutory services are likely to be subject to further cuts regardless of local political recognition of the importance of these services.

The consequences include destabilising public transport networks and lost passenger confidence through reduced access and connectivity. These all undermine sustainable growth, impact on public health, education and skills and inhibit economic development.

Despite all efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of a vibrant public transport network, it still seems that investment in local transport solutions is undervalued and misunderstood. I do fear that the erosion of networks built over many years will take a long time to recover, if ever.

There are great examples of innovation and partnering around the country between transport providers and councils and of customers getting involved to champion grass root sustainable solutions. The worry is that we have now pretty much exhausted these opportunities and, as we approach further cuts, there is no magic bullet.”

Tracy Jessop, Assistant Director Environment, Transport & Development, Norfolk County Council

“Nottingham currently has an excellent, punctual bus network with high levels of accessibility, modern low floor buses and good value fare levels. It has well managed innovative local bus companies and consistently strong council support for a range of complementary measures that promote bus use. Around 88 per cent of the bus network is operated commercially, with the remainder run under contract to the city council in series of partnerships with key stakeholders such as colleges and the health trusts.

Like all other local authorities, the City Council is faced with stringent budgetary constraints, requiring it to save nearly 20 per cent off its current net spend over the next three years.

Bus travel is seen as essential for many to access work and training opportunities. It is also essential for retail growth – with over 50 per cent of shoppers and 95 per cent of shop workers travelling by bus. For this reason, rather than look to cut supported services and capital investment, the council has committed to a series of measures which should enable it to retain its current support for bus services over the next three years.

These include the conversion of its contracted fleet to fully electric buses, the joining up of service provision across boundaries and partners, and the replacement of specialist taxi movements through adaptations to the mainstream network. It also includes the innovative use and investment in smartcard and electronic information systems to drive out fraud and reduce ongoing costs of information and retail provision.”

Andy Gibbons, Head of Public Transport, Nottingham City Council
Social exclusion and buses

The role of public transport in preventing social exclusion has long been identified but has not really been linked to mainstream social policy. In 2003 the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit published a report, *Making the Connections*, which came closest to making this link and has been recognised internationally as leading the way in terms of government-promoted research.

Apart from that report, bus policy and its related impacts on exclusion are relatively poorly researched, frequently appearing as an addendum, for example to work on transport and health, or on the economic benefits of public transport. The most relevant definition of social exclusion for transport is:

“The lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.”

The National Travel Survey notes that of the lowest quintile of households by income in the UK, under 50 per cent have a car, as opposed to 85 per cent for the country as a whole, and they make far fewer trips overall. Although income is only one aspect of transport poverty, this indicates the reliance that many place on public transport systems, a finding backed up by past Campaign for Better Transport research.

The most frequent complaint when bus services are withdrawn or cut back is that communities will be ‘cut off’ and this illustrates neatly how the removal of services links directly to increased exclusion from participating in the activities that make up daily life. Once services are withdrawn then it is challenging to restart them, further condemning whole areas to an inexorable increase in lack of access and associated impacts.

The multitude of new transport and planning processes over the last decade, such as Local Area Agreements, the Localism Act and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), has lessened any focus on social exclusion that was building in the wake of *Making the Connections*. While authorities must consider accessibility in preparing Local Transport Plans, this is not always evenly applied and may not filter to LEPs, many of whom are more keen on road building than improving bus services.

Local authorities are further hamstrung in their ability to provide adequate bus services by a lack of any clear statutory requirement to provide and maintain minimum standards of accessibility. As this report has shown, when budgets are cut so dramatically, services with limited statutory duties and without ring-fenced funding are the easiest to cut, even when this is to the long term detriment of the area. If there were a statutory requirement or greater guidance on maintaining bus services to deprived areas then we would see a lower level of cuts and greater innovation about the delivery of services. We return to this later.
Supported bus services provide the linchpin that holds many deprived communities together and yet these benefits are poorly researched and recognised. Even small investment in bus services now will, in the long term, provide a far greater benefit to the local authority in terms of saving money on health and social services and dealing with the effects of social isolation. The provision of good public transport joins the dots between improved physical health, mental health, employment and a greater sense of place and community. Investment in public transport services can ultimately save money for both local and national governments and meet a wide range of policy objectives.

A view from local campaigners

Local campaigners

“We heard about the proposed cuts to supported bus services in Dorset and were shocked at the scale of the plans by the county council. Whole areas of Dorset would be effectively cut off meaning that the vital lifeline of a reliable and regular bus service for thousands of people would be lost. We spoke to Campaign for Better Transport who told us the proposals by the council were some of the worst they had seen.”
We quickly decided to campaign against these cuts and used local radio and press, and gathered signatures for our petition in Swanage, Lyme Regis and Weymouth whilst setting up an online petition on West and South Dorset Green Party website. The public support against these plans meant the council consultation was bombarded with responses. Almost 1,300 people responded and as a result the council are now looking again at their proposals.

The campaign is not over and we will continue to make the case for buses across Dorset.”

Jane Burnet, Dorset Green Party and local bus campaigner

“We work with all three local transport authorities in the area, particularly Leicester City and Leicestershire County Councils, plus major bus operators and a range of other interested parties in the voluntary, statutory and business sectors. We believe partnership working is essential, whatever our differences of opinion.

This approach has led to some successes. Out of 45 services threatened by funding cuts by Leicestershire Council in 2010-11, 25 were saved, at least partially. And largely, we suspect, as a result of our campaigning. Leicester County Council have radically toned down their current proposals for further cuts to their supported services and have listened to some of the comments they received during the last consultation process.

We feel it is our duty to hold the local authorities to account. There is so much that can be achieved at little or no cost with a little forthright planning and attention to detail. Despite all the frustrations, though when something you’ve planned and worked hard for comes off it gives a great deal of satisfaction. And this work helps local communities too.”

Terry Kirby, local campaigner and Chair of Campaign for Better Transport Leicestershire

“I work for a music publisher in Ampleforth, North Yorkshire, and use the 31x bus service to get to and from work. It has been a lifeline and a godsend for me and others who need to access work or get to school. It is also essential for accessing local amenities and health appointments as well as allowing both locals and visitors to the area to get to local attractions and, particularly for the elderly and disabled, just to get out of the house.

North Yorkshire County Council’s proposal for service 31x is to ‘consolidate’ runs. This would effectively cut off Easingwold and York from Helmsley and Ampleforth, and would cut out altogether my forward and return journeys to work.

I pay on average £99 a month for my journeys, which works out considerably cheaper than running a car. Not having this service leaves me stranded, both physically and financially, at a time when we are all facing soaring costs.

I felt so strongly about this matter that I set up both an online and paper petition to make others aware of what is going on. Buses are a safe environment for adults and children alike and all of us should have the right to access rural towns and villages as well as big cities, for whatever reason.”

Tracy Battensby, local bus campaigner, North Yorkshire

“Buses are an important part of Bristol’s infrastructure and are highly relied upon by many people, including elderly and disabled people. Cutting the subsidies for some routes will mean many of these vulnerable bus users being unable to go out to town at certain times such as evenings and weekends and they would therefore have to rely on others to help them, although some people might not be lucky enough to have that option.”

Josh Kility, Bristol Bus Users
Forward look – worse is to come

This report has found some significant cuts to supported bus services happening in 2013-14; when added to the figures since 2011 from previous research it provides a clear picture of cuts over the course of the past three years.

During the course of our research, we have also found proposals from many local authorities across England and Wales to cut funding for supported bus services in 2014-15.

Many local authorities are being asked to do more with less as budgets have been cut by central Government; however, there are some examples of innovation by local authorities such as Northamptonshire County Council who, since 2010, have had their budget for supported bus services cut from £3.5 million to £1.3m. Northamptonshire have managed to minimise the need to cut or withdraw services by renegotiating contracts with commercial bus operators and essentially starting again, managing to maintain a service practically equivalent to that experienced before any cuts to budgets. Whether this approach can and should be replicated elsewhere is open to discussion and there are obvious limits to the scope for making such efficiency savings without them having an impact on bus users.

It is clear that 2014-15 will be a very difficult year for bus services, as many local authorities will have deferred any cuts to the next financial year to allow for the legal process of public consultations to be carried out. There are many reports of local authorities proposing to cut all, or the majority, of their supported bus services with little indication of what might replace these services. Examples include:
• Worcestershire County Council is currently consulting on cutting its entire £3 million budget for supported bus services meaning that 88 supported services on 43 routes around Worcestershire are under severe threat of being lost completely16

• Cumbria County Council is proposing to cut up to £1.9 million from its supported bus budget. Currently the overall budget for supported bus services in Cumbria is £1.6 million so this is another county proposing to cut its entire budget for supported bus services17

• Oxfordshire County Council has been consulting on cutting supported bus services from areas of Oxfordshire with significant cuts proposed in the Prime Minister’s constituency of Witney. In total seven services are under threat of being withdrawn completely, whilst 17 are under threat of having services significantly cut. There is little indication of how much this would save in council spending if this proposal is taken forward18

• North Yorkshire County Council has been consulting on cutting £1.1 million from its supported bus service budget per year. This would be around 20 per cent of their supported budget19

• Dorset County Council conducted a public consultation into cutting £850,000 from its supported bus budget which would have affected 80 services across the county. A total of 1,200 people responded to the consultation which has led to the council rethinking the level of cuts to be made20

• Essex County Council is consulting on proposals to cut £2.5 million from its supported bus budgets by 2015. This would represent 30 per cent of its overall budget for supported bus services and would result in many routes being reduced or withdrawn completely21

• Nottinghamshire County Council has announced proposals to cut £1.8m from supported bus budgets from August 2014. There is no indication yet as to which services might be affected22

• The West Midlands transport authority (Centro) is proposing to cut 25 per cent of its discretionary budget by 2015. This equates to an overall £14m reduction in spending with an unconfirmed amount cut from its supported bus budgets23

• Transport for London (TfL) has drawn up contingency plans for proposals to cut 20 per cent from London bus subsidy by 2016-17, potentially around £65m. The proposals might mean reductions in at least 230 bus routes, saving £34 million, with an additional £31 million being cut from off peak routes24

• In Wales, the Welsh Government is proposing to reduce the concessionary fare reimbursement for bus operators from 74 per cent of the average fare to 46 per cent from 1 April 2014. This shortfall in concessionary funding may lead to significant cuts in services across Wales with some operators claiming that a 30 per cent service reduction is possible25

These are just proposals; many will change through the process of public consultation and local authority decision making, but if even partly carried through and mirrored in other areas they suggest that there will be significant reductions in bus services across much of the country during 2014-15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Bus cuts</th>
<th>Services to be affected</th>
<th>Proposed cuts (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worcestershire</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Yorkshire</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorset</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Yorkshire</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRO</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>~2,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nottinghamshire</td>
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<td>~1,800,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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</table>
Conclusion

The context of the report is one of severe bus cuts and the continued managed decline of funding for supported bus services. There is the prospect of even worse to come next year, with many areas, urban as well as rural, consulting on drastic cuts in funding and services.

There are some examples of good practice and innovative partnership working between operators and local authorities found in places such as Nottingham, Sheffield, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire, which have enabled bus services to be maintained despite budgetary constraints. This shows that, with careful planning, solutions can be found but in many cases these solutions can only extend so far and will not survive continued year-on-year funding cuts.

As we have said, buses tend to be treated as a local issue, left to local authorities. But the trends we have found matter nationally and the governments in London and Cardiff should be concerned – further cuts in bus funding and services will undermine core Government policies to promote growth, reduce unemployment and tackle welfare dependency. As our research has shown, if bus services continue to be cut many people currently unemployed will simply be unable to access jobs, education or training, and many older people will suffer social isolation.

This suggests that a new approach is needed to supporting buses and local public transport. Campaign for Better Transport has been developing ideas for this new approach, in discussion with many people in and around the bus industry, including operators, local authorities, passenger groups researchers and others. The main lines of the approach we are suggesting include:

• **Focus on access:** Any bus policy needs to take as its starting point the importance of access to key facilities and services – areas of employment, colleges, health facilities, tourism and leisure destinations etc. This is after all what the Government needs to ensure to meet its core objectives. An agreed minimum standard of access could be set down by central government and implemented by local government through access plans. This would essentially give a ‘travel assurance’, for regular and occasional bus users alike, that that key facilities and services could be accessed. In some rural areas this might be by means other than ordinary buses and include community and demand responsive transport. This overarching focus on access should be linked to the local land use planning process with public transport access plans supporting this. The existing quality partnership and quality contract powers should be framed as means to support these access plans.

• **Pooled and ring-fenced funding:** Funding for minimum standards of access to employment areas and key facilities and services should be paid for by pooling funding from across government, especially from the government departments that most benefit from having good bus services – the Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and the Department for Education. This access funding would then be ring-fenced and distributed to local transport authorities, as is now planned for BSOG, for supported services.
• **‘Total transport’ pilots:** In many areas there are bespoke transport services commissioned by different public bodies – for example inter-hospital link services, social services transport to take older people to day centres, transport for taking staff to and from prisons, and transport for children with special needs to and between schools. Universities and colleges also commission or run services. Such separate commissioning wastes significant funding, and also management time within these services – it also abstracts funding and passengers from mainstream bus services. There are already moves in many areas to bring commissioning together but Government needs to actively promote this through pilots in particular areas, as part of the move towards access funding suggested above, and by ensuring that every government department and agency is incentivised to work with others to bring services together and support and develop rather than undermine mainstream buses.

• **Long term investment plan:** Having a five year investment plan for buses would give the industry and local authorities certainty and help plan investment in vehicles and infrastructure – it would mirror the ‘control periods’ existing for the railways and now being introduced for the English strategic road network. Government funding and local authority plans could be linked together into this long term settlement, which could be independently monitored by a regulator having a leading role in ensuring that the use of funding is efficient and targeted properly. Funding within this investment plan could consist of the access funding and other capital and revenue funding, and could also cover outcomes similar to the Green Bus Fund. The Welsh Government should introduce a similar long term investment plan for local public transport in Wales – this would help overcome the uncertainty from recent and planned changes in bus funding in Wales.

• **Targeted concessions:** As noted above, part of the problem facing the bus industry is that the concessionary pass scheme for older people is underfunded by the Government. The Government should fully fund the scheme, recognising the benefits it brings for reducing social isolation. At the same time it should look at ways of standardising and enhancing concessionary travel schemes for younger people, especially those in education, on apprenticeships or out of work. We and Greener Journeys have also suggested introducing a bus bonus scheme which would give a tax break on the cost of a bus season ticket for those in work or apprenticeships – this would cut the cost of bus travel and would encourage more people to travel by bus, widening labour markets and increasing patronage and economic output as a result.

This new approach would need to be linked to a long term vision for public transport, which will be crucial in securing services for the many people who rely upon them every day.

We are still developing these ideas, but believe that the direction we are suggesting is the right one. In any event, a review of bus funding and bus policies is now essential. This report has found that with the current funding regime many local authorities’ supported bus services will be reduced or cease to exist entirely within a few years, leaving thousands of people isolated and unable to get to the key facilities and services they need. These are often the most vulnerable in our society. This isolation won’t just harm the people it affects – it will undermine core Government policies. Buses are not as politically sexy as big transport projects – but they are important to the economy, society and the environment. The Government should recognise the importance of buses and look at ways to fund them properly, so as to avoid the problems we have identified and keep the country moving.
Campaign for Better Transport’s vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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