



Bus service reductions

– the impact on passengers

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Foreword

Bus service reductions – the impact on passengers

The Comprehensive Spending Review reduced the budgets available for local councils and as a consequence also for local transport authorities. To meet the budgetary challenges, publicly-supported bus services (i.e. those not operated on a full commercial basis) were removed, reduced, or the network altered.

It is not the role of Passenger Focus to take a position between changes/reductions in publicly-supported bus services as opposed to any other publicly-supported service, and recognise that such decisions are not easily taken. Passenger Focus is looking to ensure the best outcome is achieved for passengers as a result of such decisions. Passenger Focus commissioned this research to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the passenger impacts from services that were withdrawn, reduced, or altered.

The research shows the majority of passenger impacts were 'below the water line' rather than headline making, but nonetheless cumulatively they became substantive. The impacts are subtle, diffuse in nature, and often not directly financial; but common to most is a reduction in the quality of life.

The research indicates that impacts could be ameliorated if any change in supported bus service provision is considered

within the context of local transport options as a whole, and the role the transport-planning authority can play in developing, or facilitating those options. For example: encouraging/incentivising the community transport sector; using the authority's central role/leverage to bring private services to passengers more cheaply e.g. discounted taxi services; or, supporting the infrastructure for car share schemes, etc.

Passenger Focus has also developed a Consultation Toolkit as requested by the Transport Select Committee (August 2011) that local transport authorities can choose to use if they have made the decision to change/reduce publicly-supported bus services.

We urge local transport authorities to embrace the Consultation Toolkit, recognise the passenger impacts detailed in this report, and to actively minimise the passenger impacts from any publicly-supported bus service changes.



Management summary

Passenger Focus wants to ensure the best outcome is achieved for passengers following such decisions. We commissioned this research to provide an evidence base of the impacts passengers experienced from changes/ reductions to publicly-supported bus services they used. The objectives were to:

- I Evaluate the passenger impact to loss of services e.g. changes to lifestyle, requirement to use other people's time/services, cost impact; and
- II Passengers' views on how well they were consulted about service changes.

SPA Future Thinking Ltd (the supporting market research agency) conducted 'semi-depth' interviews with around 350 passengers from within four local transport authority areas (Derbyshire, Suffolk, Somerset, and West Sussex County Councils). These areas were chosen because they were geographically spread, and had made reasonably substantial changes/reductions to services. The research found there were four main types of impact:

1 Passengers could not travel like they used to: passengers made less discretionary trips e.g. not going out for an evening meal, or to a theatre, or simply for a drink, because now they cannot get home (late return service cut); fewer trips to visit family because Sunday bus services have been cut, which is often when family members were most available; not being able to take children out for the day; passengers who still made trips found they were now inconvenient – the window either too long or too short at destinations, restrictions on organising health appointments, or travel patterns/routines established for many years were changed – bringing consternation and uncertainty. Some passengers who had been driving less as they got older find they now had to drive more again, which they did not always feel comfortable doing.

2 Dependency on others increased: first, passengers having to overcome the awkwardness to ask for lifts; and second their plans are now being contingent on others plans. Most passengers did ask, but felt a level of discomfort that was not there before; it may feel acceptable to ask for a lift to a medical appointment or to go shopping, but for a leisure trip this often felt difficult. Teenagers were becoming more reliant on parents for lifts.

3 Sometimes the passenger paid instead: passengers bore some of the costs by using taxis or other paid means of transport. Generally they travelled less, but accepted that every now and again they would suffer a financial impact. This compared to free travel enjoyed before, as many travelled on concessionary passes. For a good number this cost was significant. Passengers also found they increasingly had to shop at local, smaller retailers which often were more expensive.

4 Lack of spontaneity: fewer services on fewer days reduced the opportunity to decide on the day to go out (if the weather was nice for example). Journeys had to be planned further in advance.

In regard to consultation, most passengers felt they were not consulted with, and that they had little or no ability to impact the decisions. Some felt the decisions were driven by passenger numbers and revenues on individual services; some questioned how much free bus passes played a role in deciding the services that were removed, as those used predominantly by senior citizens did not generate revenues.

Another finding was that many passengers feared there would be further changes/reductions and this would exacerbate the effects already felt from the wave of service changes already undertaken.

The research shows the majority of passengers' impacts were 'below the water line' rather than headline making, but nonetheless cumulatively they became substantive. The impacts are more subtle, diffuse in nature, and often not directly financial; but common to most is a reduction in the quality of life.

Introduction to SPA Future Thi

Research objectives

There were two main objectives to this research:

- 1 Impact on passengers' lives from changes/reductions in publicly-supported bus services; and
- 2 How passengers considered they were consulted on the changes to those services.

It was important when looking at the impact of the changes to fully understand who this was affecting and how (including what, if any, alternatives were available). Therefore, there was also the requirement to put the impacts into context by type of bus user, e.g. age/gender; frequency of use; ownership of car/ access to being driven; level of dependency on affected bus services for specific journeys; etc. The more detailed objectives included an examination of the following aspects:

A On impact the service changes have had:

- Usage of bus services before and after changes
- Lifestyle changes that have been made as a direct result
- How need to call on other people's time/ services has changed
- How need to call on other Council services has changed
- Whether there have been financial impacts.

B On consultation

- Amount of notice provided
- The information provided concerning the change
- Whether role usage/ need levels were a part of the consultation
- How open Local Authorities appeared (did they 'want' to hear)
- How well Local Authorities communicated with users
- How the Local Authority responded to any ideas/objections raised
- Rating of the final justification for making changes

Methodology

The target audience for this research was passengers directly affected by the removal of the supported bus services. These people are difficult to find as there are no user lists or databases to consult and the catchment area for potential bus users is substantial.

A good number of local transport authorities have made service reductions/changes to varying degrees. However, in terms of logistics it would not have been feasible to plan a research study that covered every authority, given the methodology required. It was therefore decided to conduct research within four reasonably spread local transport authority areas and target 100 passengers per local transport authority.

This approach was considered sufficient to gain the vast majority of views on how the service changes/reductions had affected people's lives. By using four areas, the report would

Thinking's detailed findings

not be dominated by any particular issue in one area, nor by seeking around 400 views, risk limiting the range of experiences covered. The local transport authority areas chosen were West Sussex; Suffolk; Derbyshire; and Somerset County Councils.

A pilot study was conducted in Suffolk February 2012 to examine three potential methodologies to locate and contact people affected by the service changes:

1 A central location event was conducted in Ipswich, with recruiters looking to find bus users who had been affected at Ipswich Market. Those affected were invited into a 'hall' where two executives from SPA Future Thinking conducted the depth interviews there and then.

2 Parish Councils were contacted in areas where it was known that there had been service removals. These Councils were asked to publicise that an 'interviewer' would be present in the village at a set location on a specified date for at least 1 hour (this was done via a poster on the local notice board and also word of mouth publicity). Names and contact telephone numbers of those willing to participate were collected, to be called later for telephone depth interviews.

3 Experienced research recruiters were sent to specific villages which were identified to be on routes where services had been changed. They knocked on doors to try and find people affected. After a short recruitment discussion, individuals who were willing to participate had their details noted down to be telephoned later for their depth interview.

In addition, once a person who was impacted by the service changes was found, they were asked if they knew of any others passengers impacted; the recruiter then went on to visit them to see if they would be willing to participate. This method was a mix of 'free-find' and 'snowballing' recruitment.

All three methodologies did generate participants, but it was clear that option 3 was the most efficient method to achieve the required number of depth interviews for this study.

In total 554 individuals consented at the first stage to participate. These individuals were then phoned to try and complete the second stage: the depth discussion. In total, 344 telephone interviews were completed; the numbers achieved for each area were: West Sussex 102; Suffolk 101; Derbyshire 62; and Somerset 79.

Passenger Focus asked SPA Future Thinking to use a 'thematic approach' to reporting the impacts experienced, with an emphasis on using passengers' own words to evidence the experiences. This approach was agreed as the best way of communicating the subject matter.

SPA Future Thinking has significant experience conducting research on public transport services (including Bus passengers) and also of resident consultation research for Local Authorities. SPA Future Thinking is an MRS Company Partner and ISO20252 registered. SPA Future Thinking conducts research in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Introduction to the themes

The analysis of interviews identified four main types of impact, or 'themes'. It is important to note that individuals can, and often do, experience more than one type of impact.

The research also examined the passengers' views on the way they have been consulted. This is reported after covering the types of impact experienced.

The majority of service alterations experienced by respondents we interviewed were service reductions in either frequency, evening cancellations or truncated/withdrawn weekend services.

SPA Future Thinking's detailed

Theme 1

I cannot go out like I did before

In the majority of cases passengers are still able to access at least some bus services; their concerns are over the need to change aspects of their behaviour. Whilst not losing their independence or self reliance, they do have to make changes about how they access the bus services (walking further to get to the bus etc.) or now have to travel to different destinations.

This is not, however, to underestimate the negative feelings caused by being 'forced' to change behaviour, particularly amongst some of the older respondents who had long established habitual travel patterns that are now being disrupted.

The change in bus timings also meant that people find that they have either more or less time at their destination than they did in the past. This either leads to them finding it difficult to have the time to do everything they used to do or having to wait around longer to get their bus home. In some cases there is negativity caused by route changes which have led to a longer time spent on the bus.

Instances where sacrifices had to be made to day trips and outings, socialising or evenings out etc. were recorded, and a few reports of people being unable to leave home at all.

It takes more effort to get somewhere and timings are inconvenient

Changes in routes and timing of services has impacted on bus users' ability to visit certain destinations. A number of people commented that they could no longer shop in the same stores as before (mostly this is just a reduction in choice although, as mentioned in Theme 3, for some there are financial implications where they now have to shop in more expensive stores etc.). Additionally, many rural villages do not have a Post Office, a bank, or sufficient shops and residents relied on a bus service to reach these amenities.

"Instead of shopping in Thetford, I've got to go to Bury"

"We now have to come home early on Saturday because the Sunday has been cut. We went for leisure activities and to see a friend. Visits have reduced by half. And I can't go shopping with the children on Sunday now in Glastonbury. Now the children are bored and we can't go anywhere. We don't do things anymore. We can't save the money I used to now because I have to shop in more expensive areas"

"They've got a Post Office in Bramford but we haven't got one here, so I'd pop off [prior to service changes] and go to the post office or the Co-Op and then come back for dinnertime"

"My argument is that years ago, these villages were self-contained, before we had public transport, these villages had every shop possible. Now we have no shop in our village I've got to get to Badwell Ash or Hounslow to get to a shop"

Changes to bus timings also impact on the amount of time people have at their destination. For some, the amount of time has been reduced, meaning they cannot do everything they used to do or have to rush. Often this is older respondents looking to do their shopping or use other services. However, it does also impact on less routine reasons for travel. Conversely, others said that they now had 'too long' at their destination. Parents mentioned restrictions on being able to take their children for a day out, specifically in needing to get back to catch the last bus which is now early evening, meaning they have less time at their destination (seaside etc.).

"It is longer in Stowmarket at the moment. It is two and a half hours which is a long time. You cannot really spend two hours walking around Stowmarket. When I get home I'm tired. It is a long time to hang around"

"I haven't used the bus the last 2 or 3 months. It goes in at quarter to 10 and it doesn't bring you back until half 2. There's nothing to do. It's too long a gap. That's why a lot of people don't use it. There's nothing to do in town for three and a half hours"

ed findings

“It has made it a bit of a nuisance. You don’t want to be somewhere 3 hours before you come back. You’re just killing time”

“I don’t use the bus anymore. I’d have to get the 9.45am and do whatever I have to do fairly quickly in time for the bus back. I’d have to get the bus at lunchtime or wait until teatime, which is no good”

“Could go to the dentist’s on the bus, but wouldn’t get one back, may be waiting an hour or more”

“When I go in [to Bakewell] on the 11:50am, the time to catch the 12:35pm is too short for me to do anything useful. The time to the 2:35pm is too long. I have to hang around a lot. If I miss it, I can’t get home that afternoon”

“Instead of catching it at 10.00am or 11.00am, I get the bus 09.00am. It’s amazing how much it affects you. If you want to be somewhere for half an hour, you now can’t. It’s now an hour or 2 hour journey by the time you’ve got there and waited and come back. It takes up a lot more of your time unnecessarily”

Changes to routes (or the combining of services into new routes) has led to some passengers having to spend more time on the bus itself and thus seeing an increase in the overall length of time it takes for them to get ‘into town’.

“The bus I catch takes about 60 minutes to get into Bury because it goes around the villages, whereas it used to take 30 minutes. I wish it did that now, it’s very inconvenient for me when I use it to go to the doctor’s”

“I get there at half-past one and the next one I can catch is four o’clock, but, I’ve got to go all round the villages, which takes another hour. If I leave at four I’m not getting home until gone five”

“There used to be two buses, the 218 and the 65. The 218 was more direct, but they got rid of that. The 65 is less direct. It is now a longer journey and more expensive.... With some buses I have had to stand for an hour and forty five minutes”

Concerns were also raised about buses now becoming overcrowded with the same number of passengers trying to use fewer services (some mentioned that restrictions on the use of bus passes before 9.30 has led to empty early buses and everyone being forced to travel on the later morning services).

“Another point is on that bus, it is so crowded so it is impossible to take a shopping trolley and at my age you can’t carry heavy bags.”

Simply having to walk further, either to access different bus routes or in order to reach their eventual destination, was a further consideration mentioned as a consequence for some.

“It’s not changed how often I use it, but just have further to walk on a Saturday. I still get it same time of day”

“It’s a big nuisance. Not only because I’m 83 now, I’m walking with a stick. I’m determined to do it, but this has had an impact since they rerouted the 293 that went for years and years the same route. I have 15 minutes to walk when I get off the bus in Sheffield. This isn’t on. It’s uphill too”

“It was stressful for me. It was further to walk and I have walking difficulties. For my husband, the same, because he had a knee operation.”

The changes have disrupted my leisure, family and social life

The survey also heard from people who were saddened at having to curtail certain activities because of service restrictions.

“I used to get out 7 days a week. I miss the Sunday bus most as they took it off. I used the bus for leisure activities or hospital visits”

“We can’t go out for Sunday meals. Because my grandson works in Taunton, I can’t see him. We can’t go anywhere on a Sunday. We’re stuck here”

“The only one I miss is the Sunday one, especially when the weather’s nice. It’s nice to go over to the other side of town. I can’t walk very far anymore because I got knocked off my bike and hurt my back. That’s why I catch the bus more now than I did when I was working”

“It might sound silly, but my little boy has learning difficulties and if he wants to go somewhere nice at the weekend it upsets him that he can’t on a Sunday.”

“I am unable to make the journeys as before the cuts. From here to Bakewell, I used to go in more often. I’m inhibited by the times now. [I am] more confined to the house than I used to be. If I forget something on my Wednesday shopping, I can’t pop in the next day, it’s too awkward”

“We used to like going every week and as I said we don’t go much now. We don’t always like to drive so the bus would be useful. Now we have to just not go anywhere or drive”

Visiting friends or relatives has also become more difficult, impacting on family relationships.

“I have one daughter who is disabled. They have cut her bus on a Sunday and in the evenings, so I can’t go and see her on a Sunday now”

“Can’t see elderly parents in the evening and care for them as much when they probably need it the most. Can’t afford a taxi because not working at the moment and relied on the bus”

“I can’t see dad [in a nursing home] on a Sunday because there is no bus”

“Other people still want to get into hospital, but this one goes in a huge circular route, it is heavily used by people getting off with crutches and flowers to visit the hospital. They’re penalising the people in hospital as well because people can’t get in to visit them”

“When my son goes to see his girlfriend, he struggles more, he goes on his bike instead of taking the bus now”

“I used to look forward to going out and about and meeting people. Far better off as pensioners going out on the buses than sitting in your doctor’s surgery! It keeps people on the move, keeps people fit”.

[Interviewer: How has your lifestyle changed?]

“I feel restricted”

“I’ve got a daughter who lives in Dorset. I can’t get down to see her on a Sunday if I want to and she can’t get here to see me”

The loss of evening services demonstrates how changes to a bus service can affect all age groups. There has been an impact on teenagers’ ability to socialise or adults ability to go for an evening out which is a cause of some disappointment.

“There isn’t an evening bus service. If my children want to go to the cinema with friends in the evening they can’t, because they have to get a 6.30pm bus”

“Nearly every Saturday night we used to go over [to Chichester]. We can’t do that now because we can’t get back. We’d go out to eat or have a drink. It would allow both of us to go out for a meal and have a drink without having to use a car, or park the car”

“Now if I go out, I have to find a place to stay in Chi [Chichester] or find a lift back. I can’t catch the late bus back anymore. I’d be going out at 7pm and then I’d catch the late bus at 11.30pm. Now I can’t do that anymore”

“They do cut off very early. You can find yourself stranded. You have to cut your leisure evenings very quick. If you’re going to see a film or to the theatre, you might have to leave early or not see that film”

“It was a bit sad when that one at teatime came off, because it means we can’t go for a meal”

“We don’t go out anymore at the weekends because it means we have to drive and can’t have a drink. It costs more in parking and petrol and everything. We don’t have as much of a social life”

“Yes, especially in the evenings when you have to double check you can get home and bother other people for lifts or to get a taxi.”

Although many have been inconvenienced by the changes, there are occasional instances where people are completely unable to get to places they used to which in turn affects their quality of life.

“I don’t go anywhere. I can’t. I can’t think, ‘I’ll go into town today,’ because I can’t. There are no buses. I’m stuck here”

“You feel imprisoned in your local area. You can’t get out for the day”

“My wife doesn’t drive. It’s made us prisoners of the home. If I can’t drive, neither can my wife, we can’t get out”

“Most weekends if my daughters are busy, I’m here. I just can’t get out.”

“Every Saturday I’m marooned”

“At the minute our car is not going. We can’t get down to Stowmarket now”.

[Interviewer: how has that made you feel?]

“Terrible”.

“I have to go and take the car down a few extra mornings, now the weather’s alright we’re okay, but during the winter we were stuck because I didn’t dare use the roads. Sometimes you maybe have to get a lift with someone else, but it’s not always convenient”

For some of the older passengers, the bus journey itself was a social occasion, a chance to meet friends and catch up on local gossip!

“I was quite new to the village, I got to meet people on that bus. I wouldn’t have got to know anybody otherwise. They all know each other from the other villages as well. They chat on the bus. It’s a very important part of their life”

It isn’t great now but is it going to get worse?

There are concerns raised throughout that the current changes/reductions are just the start and, whilst it is possible to adapt to restrictions in bus use, the fear is that future changes/reductions will remove more/all travel options for them.

“I intend to get to the adult education centre in Fairfield but it is always difficult to get the bus because they keep cutting back....They keep telling us to travel on the bus but keep cutting the buses back”

“You feel like you’re going back in time. It should be improving, not getting worse!”

“Just please don’t cut any more. Living out in Derbyshire, we do rely on the buses”

Others fear that the current restrictions will have a greater affect on them over time, e.g. whilst they can walk into town or to another bus stop now, as they get older this will get more difficult.

“You can’t go out, you can’t shop without difficulty and asking someone. I am 75, I’m lucky that at the moment I have my faculties, but I dread to think that if I live into my 80s, how I am going to cope.”

Conclusion

Although disrupted, most people are still able to go about their daily and personal business. However, there is a sense that people are having to make greater efforts to travel or sacrifice certain activities altogether.

Alterations to a bus service impacts on people’s time and curtailments of social and leisure activities elicit a certain dismay at not having suitable transport when and where needed. This affects all ages from teenagers to the elderly.

Theme 2

I am now dependent on others

An impact that clearly came through was an increased reliance of some individuals on others to assist them in getting to/ from places. This has practical and emotional implications. In particular the reliance on other people to assist them can make individuals consider that they are imposing on others, reducing the frequency of travel and leading to a feeling that they have lost their independence. Whilst individuals could choose before when and where to travel, now in some instances they need to fit in with the plans of others.

These 'lifts' can come from individuals within their own household (particularly for teenagers, but also for one driver households), or from others within the local community, or family members who live some distance away. There are also a few mentions of community groups or charitable/religious organisations assisting with travel.

[Interviewer: What it is you feel that you've actually lost?] **"My independence!"**

"I was a soldier and I was partially paralysed. Buses are essential to people like me. I have to get someone to give me a lift, or get a taxi, which is very expensive. I don't use buses at all now. I can't drive. I've lost social contact with a society that is predicated on everyone having a car. That's a wrong assumption."

"If I didn't have anybody I could ask, I wouldn't be able to get about"

The need to accept lifts and a loss of freedom is evident across a number of groups, whether it is teenagers relying on their parents...

"We've had to say 'no' [to the kids] more often because of the petrol going up. We can't run them around."

"I use them [buses] less. I can go somewhere but I have to use my parents to come back."

[Interviewer: What alternatives are there to using later buses?]

"Normally bribing my parents. They've made things a bit more awkward. My freedom has gone a bit."

"There aren't as many now. If my daughters go out at night they can't get back, we have to pick them up, and take them as well because the bus service isn't good enough to use, really"

...or older people relying on their children....

"I have to rely on my daughter and her husband who live on the other side of town. If we were going to go anywhere they have to come all the way over to me.... The impact is on the family, because they spend more to pick me up"

"I only go into town now once. My daughter takes me shopping once every 3 weeks. A neighbour takes me in now and again, that's all. I didn't go into town last week at all and I haven't been into town this week so far"

or non-drivers relying on others in the community/ household.

"If I need to get to the Dentist, I have to wait until my husband is on holiday to get there"

"I get lifts from the neighbours. People are very kind. It's more of an irritation than anything"

"I used to get the Sunday bus to go shopping and I got someone to look after the kids. I can no longer do this. I have to get lifts from the kids' grandparents"

"I used to catch the bus every Wednesday. To go to my mother-in-law and do some cleaning for her. I can't get there, so she can't get her shopping. I've gone to her every Wednesday for the last three or four years."

"It's not fair. If you've got a car, it's alright, if you haven't, you're left stranded. Especially older people in the village. Probably asking for a lift once a fortnight"

Whilst many respondents have found people willing to help them out this does still represent a major change for some. Particularly amongst older residents, who are used to being independent, but now find themselves relying on the generosity of others and are worried about being a burden.

“Got to rely on people to go shopping, that’s a lifestyle change to rely on other people”

“I won’t be able to go shopping at all. I’ll have to rely on my sister.”

[Interviewer: how does that make you feel?]

“Very angry and upset.”

Some of the respondents were the people actually being called upon to provide the ‘lifts’ for non-drivers. Whilst most didn’t complain about this, some did note that it impacted on their activities. For parents, there was some evidence that they felt almost obliged to provide lifts to their children and this impacted on other aspects of their lives.

“I have to give [my son] lifts. This affects my work and stress levels and time”

“I’ve been affected quite a lot. I have to rely on my husband to take me in the car, and he doesn’t like driving a lot. He’s the same age as me....He has an allotment and whatnot, and he poodles about. I’ve got to stop him doing what he wants to do, to take me out every time.”

“It is the picking her up at lunchtime where I have to present myself at the bus stop 2.5 miles away to meet the bus. She can’t get the community bus to bring her down. If I have to go out or I am doing something, then it is an inconvenience.”

Some are reliant on relatives travelling substantial distances in order to help them out.

“My mum comes down to take me to the doctor or the dentist, she comes down from an hour’s drive away to pick me up, take me to my appointment, then go home”

Whilst some are comfortable asking for/receiving help for important appointments or even main shopping trips, they are

less likely to do this for what could be seen as more frivolous/ social events.

“Have asked a friend if I need to go to hospital, but it’s not fair to scrounge a lift for pleasure”

A few of the older respondents still drove their own car. However, although they did not provide explicit reasons as to why they would give up their car in future, some were clearly thinking ahead to a time when driving was no longer an option for them.

“Once we’re unable to drive, if the routes aren’t there then we’ll be more or less housebound”

“At the moment, we haven’t used it, [the bus] we’ve used the car. I’m 75, there’ll be a limit for me”

“At the moment, I drive to Stowmarket, but days are numbered now for that”

Conclusion

Although people are often still able to get around, the consequences of a removed/ reduced bus service can have a knock-on effect that encroaches on an individual’s family or social circle. A loss of personal independence means having to rely on other people to assist them. In cases where the changes to the bus service have been more severe, the research found some individuals who felt they would be stranded at home were it not for the compassion of others willing to help and provide transport.

The research reveals instances of people feeling that they are inconveniencing others and discomfort when needing to ask for help. Elsewhere, restrictions of having to fit in with someone else’s schedule means missing out on social activities or arranging appointments.

Theme 3

I'm paying instead!

Some passengers are forced to look at alternatives that lead them needing to spend more money as a result. For pensioners, prior to the changes to the bus service they were travelling on the buses for free, therefore any modal change for this group has often led to an increase in the costs of their travel.

For others, there is a need to pay for more expensive alternative modes of transport (taxis mainly) or, in some extreme cases, buying some form of transport for them to use themselves. Those who have to make more journeys to provide lifts to others (and in particular parents) or those who would prefer not to drive on particular journeys but feel they are forced into doing so by a lack of alternatives also noted the increase costs incurred in fuel etc.

Some have had to change where or how they shop and this can be felt (where they have needed to shop in more local outlets) to have led to an increase in the cost of their shopping.

There were also a few instances of people who have seen a financial impact due to changes they have had to make in their behaviour (changes in their ability to work or access childcare etc.).

"My neighbours, they agree. Some of them are on unemployment benefits. It's costing a fortune to get to the Jobcentre and interviews, spending their living allowance on travelling instead of living"

For some the financial increase comes through needing to use the car more frequently.

"I'm driving, I drive everywhere and the cost of petrol makes you wonder if it's cheaper to go by bus"

"It costs me more money because I use my car. Financially it does impact on me"

"I had to buy a second hand car to go to work five days a week"

"I had to buy a car a couple of months ago. I managed to go to work in Chesterfield, but I couldn't come back because the last bus comes from Chesterfield at 5.30 and sometimes"

"I had to work until 6pm, so I couldn't manage...."

Others are having to pay more money to travel on trains or, more commonly, using taxis.

"I had to have a taxi to get to my husband when he had a heart attack, and it cost me £10 from Lancing to Worthing hospital. One way. People who are trying to visit their relatives in hospital and don't drive on a weekend, they've had it. They can't get there at all on a Sunday."

"I don't go out so much and when I do it costs me a fortune in taxis. The bus service has been removed completely"

"I wasn't aware [of changes]. I ended up having to get a taxi home on the Sunday and that cost me £42"

"It's cost me a lot more money in taxis, about £7 each way, £14 for the whole fare. It's a big difference from £2.70 or £3. I have a disability so I have a bus pass anyway"

"The best thing about the bus was that it was a lot cheaper. Trains are three times as much"

"I don't go out so much and when I do it costs me a fortune in taxis. The bus service has been removed completely"

In addition to paying more to use their cars, some individuals commented that car usage was at odds with government messages they were being given about using the car less.

"If we're looking at trying to reduce car use in society.... I think it's ludicrous that people in rural areas have limited access to public transport. It's counterproductive"

"They're trying to get cars off the road"

"The government are telling us to use more public transport, yet they're taking away the services....We've had to have two cars because I need to go to work and the bus services aren't reliable enough for me to use them. They say one thing and take away with the other"

There were a number of individuals who noted that the impact of the changes to bus timings was magnified by a more rigid

enforcement of when free bus passes could be used, and in particular, on not allowing their usage before 9.30am. This had two main consequences: the reductions in daytime (free pass applicable) services had diminished so they suffered increased costs by being forced to travel before 9.30am and pay for bus journeys; or, that with reduced daytime services, off-peak buses were, in some instances, becoming more crowded (whilst the earlier 'peak' buses were not as busy).

"It's restrictive. Two things came into effect. The first thing is that they started the charge before 9.30am, and now we have to pay, when we go on the 521, for instance, to Halesworth, because the only way I can get there is the 9am [caused by timetable change]"

"I've got an appointment at the hospital at 9:00am for my eyes. I can't get the bus, otherwise I pay £2.20. I'd have to get another bus from Bury, but I can't do that because I've got to pay. That little trip would cost £4. I don't know what time I'll leave the hospital. If I miss the 12:30pm back then the next one is 4:30pm. I'm 75 for crying out loud"

Some people have found that it impacts on their ability to work, either needing to change hours, the method they get to work or how they organise their childcare.

"My daughter uses it to get to work. Since the cuts, she has to lose 30 minutes of work each day to catch the 5:40pm bus, because she has a 30 minute walk, or she has to wait until 6:45pm for the next bus"

"I couldn't get to work. I had to give up that job. It took me an hour and a half to walk there"

"My daughter's a single parent, if she works then I can't look after the boys. It costs her more money"
[Interviewer: how has that affected your lifestyle?]
"It's affected my daughter's. She does different shifts. If she works a teatime shift, I can't go and look after the boys"

"I don't take jobs in Hyde anymore. It's just too difficult to get there. It's prevented me from taking work on"

Passengers suspected that the role of free bus passes and their relationship to the reduction in bus services is often a key one.

For some, they see the free passes as a direct casual factor in services being removed. The fact that there were users on these buses, but that they were not paying (and there was a feeling that the companies were not fully refunded for these journeys) led to them being unprofitable. Some respondents even commented that they would have been happy to pay a small surcharge over and above the free bus pass if it had meant that the bus services had not needed to change.

"The problem is that, with a bus pass, it's not paying its way"

"[There was a] rumour that not enough people were using them, or too many elderly people with bus passes, so they weren't getting enough paying"

"Lots of people complaining about pensioners on those bus passes....that's all you hear, but people have worked for those bus passes"

"Rather than lose the buses, I'd willingly pay half fare"

"[The buses] They didn't pay. It was subsidised by the Council. It left Hadleigh about 9.00am, so it only had retired people on it using bus passes"

Conclusion

There is clearly a greater financial burden on people who have been forced to become less reliant on a bus service. Dependence on a car has impacted people's budgets especially with increased fuel prices. In some instances, people have had to purchase a vehicle to enable them to get to and from work. Other modes of transport are discarded as being prohibitively expensive to be regularly relied upon. Taxis, but occasionally trains, are mooted as being the only other alternatives, but remain out of reach for people's regular budgets.

Stricter enforcement of when free bus passes are valid coinciding with bus service changes magnifies the sense of constriction. There is some suspicion that numbers of passengers travelling on free bus passes has been a contributing factor in the removal of some services.



Theme 4

I have to decide yesterday what I will do today

Where frequency of service is reduced, passengers have needed more often to plan when they are going to travel. This not only increases their need to plan ahead to ensure they travel when buses are running, but it also means that they need to plan ahead when making appointments to ensure that these also fit in with bus times. This can cause particular problems when hospital or doctors appointments are required at short notice.

In some areas, dial-a-ride style services have replaced the timetabled buses. This also needs more planning to ring up in advance in order to book the service. Whilst not an issue examined in detail by this research, there was some suggestion that people pre-booking dial-a-ride in advance on a consistent basis had led to it almost running to a timetable and not providing the flexibility for other users to arrange to use it when appropriate for them.

As previously mentioned, there is also a lack of spontaneity where individuals need to arrange lifts with other people and fit in around their plans and availability.

“You can’t just go and catch a bus, you have to think about it. If my daughter goes out we have to think about how she will get home, she can’t get on a bus”

“I have to plan more carefully. I can’t decide to go out at the last minute”

“We need to think more ahead. Thank God for internet shopping. If we’re going out, to the doctors for example, you’ve got to be designer ill”

“The times of the bus service buses are not necessarily times that meet up with your appointment. If I wanted to go to the dentist or optician, I have to say I can’t go at that time because the bus won’t get me there”

“I’ve been catching the 17 for about 3 and a half years. I’ve had to adjust to the system. It is quite difficult. You’re limited to the time you need to get to the bus stop. If you miss it, you’re screwed. You can’t do anything else. There are no other buses running through”

“They don’t go to Saxmundham when we’ve got a doctor’s appointment. If you have a doctor’s or hospital appointment, the buses don’t run when you need them to”

The change in the frequency of services, and in particular the decrease in regularity of the service, has led some users to be confused about when buses are actually running.

“The 6a has been removed and the 6 has been reduced to nearly every hour and a quarter, which is very hard to remember because it’s not regular. It’s roughly an hour and a quarter service”

“I don’t know when the times are. It is so bad that we never use it. The young ones have to get a taxi home because the last bus is about 17:00”

The reduced number of services also magnifies the impact of ‘missing a bus’.

“If they were more frequent I would use them more often. I am always watching the clock...I pick my granddaughter up from school. I’m always on edge on a day when I’m picking her up that I’ve got to get that bus or I won’t be there in time to pick her up. It’s a nuisance. It’s a poor service for the 21st Century”

In some instances dial-a-ride style services have been put in place of regularly timetabled buses. Whilst these services

are appreciated, they do increase the amount of planning ahead that is required in order to ensure that they are able to have access to the service when they need it.

A dial-a-ride service is seen as very convenient for some, in particular those with the greatest mobility issues who appreciate the door-to-door service, and the drivers on these buses received praise for their attitude and helpfulness. However, there were concerns over them being ‘all booked up’ in advance and also, to a lesser extent, over what to do if your plans change/ you are ill and you have booked the service. Where dial-a-ride services take you to connect to another bus service (rather than to the actual required destination) there was some concern over connection times and also the provision of adequate waiting facilities to make this connection.

“You have to work things out and book in advance. I asked the driver if they have been busy and he said they are solidly booked, too busy to take bookings”

“It’s not very satisfactory. One thing is, you can’t suddenly think on Friday, ‘It would be nice if I went to Bury tomorrow.’ It’s probably too late then to book your place.It’s not terribly convenient. It does also mean people have to wait, sometimes in the cold, 15 minutes or something for the connection”

Conclusion

A reduced bus service lessens spontaneity as individuals are forced into more advanced planning of their activities. A reservation request a day or two in advance still might not provide a guarantee of a place on a dial-a-ride service.

There is increased pressure for some people to make their one bus home, or the reduced frequency of services means that a seemingly sporadic bus service is always in the back of their mind when trying to get home or honour a pre-arranged engagement.

Appointments (e.g. with a doctor or dentist) must be made cautiously to ensure that they fit with a bus schedule.

Communication and consultation

Only a few respondents had any direct awareness of the relevant Councils conducting consultation prior to the changes. There were a number of people who signed petitions organised by others and a few instances where people were aware of some consultation via their Parish Councils rather than the County Council being seen to be making an effort to consult directly with bus users.

People found out about the changes in a number of ways, predominantly:

- On the buses themselves (posters or being told by the driver)
- In the local media
- Word of mouth from someone they know

Those who didn't find out until they actually tried to access the services risked spending time waiting for services that weren't going to come or, and this was raised in one instance, almost missing the last bus home and being stranded at their destination.

"I was waiting one day and the bus never turned up"

"This is the unfortunate thing. If I were a daily traveller on the buses I suppose it would have been brought to my attention, but the time of the 43 changed without my knowledge, and it was only by chance I'd gone early to the bus stop. I realised there'd been a change, and ended up catching the 43 back from town, and somebody said, 'the 293 doesn't run anymore.'"

"Word gets around. I do a voluntary thing in Midhurst, making tea and coffee, and word gets around there. I think we got a leaflet"

On the whole passengers felt they would have little or no ability to impact on the decisions. They thought these were simply driven by passenger numbers and revenues on individual services. There were a few instances where people had complained after the changes had been announced. Whilst most received some response, this was usually just to provide an apology or justification for the changes as the decisions had already been made.

"I am spearheading a campaign because villages have been cut off. Residents are reliant on health services let alone their shopping"



[Interviewer: were you aware of any consultations prior to the changes?] “I don’t think there were any. I seem to remember reading something about how more pensioners with bus passes were using it than paying passengers, and this had an impact on the Council because they had to pay the bus company, and they’re not too happy about that!”

“We did sign a petition. I don’t know who the person was, but she was up at Memorial Hall, where we catch the buses. We did sign her petition, and I do believe she collected quite a few names.”

“I filled out the petition, because there was talk about the bus into Chichester going, but we saved that.”

“I did sign a petition beforehand. There might have been a meeting, I don’t know.”

“We weren’t even asked. Locally, here, we all have an opinion on how it could have been rectified, but we were never given the opportunity”

“I certainly wasn’t consulted, no. We just get told that the bus services are changing, and no one takes notice of the general public”

As previously mentioned, there was some feeling that free bus passes lay behind the need to remove services and that

those services used predominantly by senior citizens were most at risk as they didn’t generate revenues.

“I know my brother complained about it in March. He did get a reply, more or less saying that the money wasn’t there to fund the buses and so therefore they felt they had to do something.”

There was also concern expressed that the service changes which had taken place to date were only the start and that more extensive and impactful changes were likely over the next few years.

“I think it’s a similar case across lots of public services. They let it run to rack and ruin until no one uses it, and then they’ve got an excuse to get rid of it.”

“We used to pay half fare, then it went free. The government made it free all the time, but now we’ve got a bus pass to go free travelling, but we can’t use it because there’s no buses. It’s ridiculous. I wouldn’t mind paying half fare”.

There was no clear indication from the research that any form of consultation had worked particularly well. Whilst it was clear that those who found out at least two weeks before the changes happened were more able to adapt to the changes.

There is no clear preferred communication method. Frequent users were happy to find out on the buses themselves, but less frequent users had to rely on media or word of mouth.

Overall conclusions

Overall, the research has highlighted the variety of ways in which individuals have been impacted by the changes/reductions to their local bus services.

This report has categorised impacts into four main themes. However, it is important to note that individuals can, and often do, fall into more than one category.

The level of detriment experienced by an individual is based on a number of factors and individuals using the same service can be affected by its removal in very different ways. Those who are more mobile, have a larger support network around them, or are better off financially, are less likely to suffer the levels of detriment experienced by those with health issues, limited finances or fewer people to call on within the local area.

However, it is not even clear that the impact can be understood simply by looking at hard 'facts' such as these. Attitudinally, some respondents seem to have a more emotional reaction to service removal than others. Either this is an indication of more ingrained habitual behaviour or a stronger belief that society 'owes' them a bus service. The attitude and personality of individual respondents can lead to different perceptions of a change that on the surface impacts two individuals in the same way.

Equally, whilst individuals may be making similar journeys in terms of their origin and destination, the 'reasons' for these journeys can lead to very different levels of detriment if

removed. Visiting friends and relatives tends to elicit a stronger emotional response, particularly if these visits are to hospitals/ care homes etc. Parents who feel they are restricted on taking their children out for the day (either by not being able to go at all or by having to return earlier than they would like and, therefore, limiting what they are able to do) also have a strong emotional reaction.

Looking at the individual themes, the most commonly mentioned issues were no longer being able to travel for leisure purposes in the evening or at weekends, reflecting the nature of the changes made. Having to rely on lifts from other people for some or all journeys was also frequently mentioned.

Not being able to travel at all was only very rarely mentioned but did have the highest level of detriment where it was applicable. There was also significant levels of concern expressed amongst people that the current reductions/changes were only the start of a process which would have much greater impact on them in the future.

A number of groups were impacted by the reductions/changes, and those more impacted can be summarised as older people, less affluent households, those with health related issues, or households containing teenagers.

Appendix – Discussion guide

Introduction

Introductions and reassurance...

- Welcome and thank for agreeing to take part in the research
- Introduction to SPA Future Thinking – Member of the MRS and adhere to the ethical code of conduct
- There are no right or wrong answers
- This discussion will remain confidential and you will not be named in any output resulting from this study
- This is your chance to share your opinions on the recent bus cuts and how it has impacted on you and your family
- The discussion will be recorded so that I can listen back later – difficult for me to have a conversation with you whilst writing what you say

Warm up

Firstly, I would like to find out a bit about you: name; family composition; car ownership.

Usage of bus service

- I would now like to find out about how you and your family used the local bus service before the recent changes were implemented:
 - How frequently did you use the local bus service prior to the recent timetable changes?
 - Which routes did you use and at what times of the day?
 - What was the purpose(s) of the journey(s)? For example, work/ study, leisure activities, visiting friends/ family, hospital/ dentist appointments etc.
 - PROBE ABOUT SELF & FAMILY MEMBERS

Awareness of changes

- Now thinking about the changes to the bus service....
 - How and when did you first become aware of the changes?
 - What changes have been implemented?
 - Do you know why these changes were made?

Impact of changes (key priority)

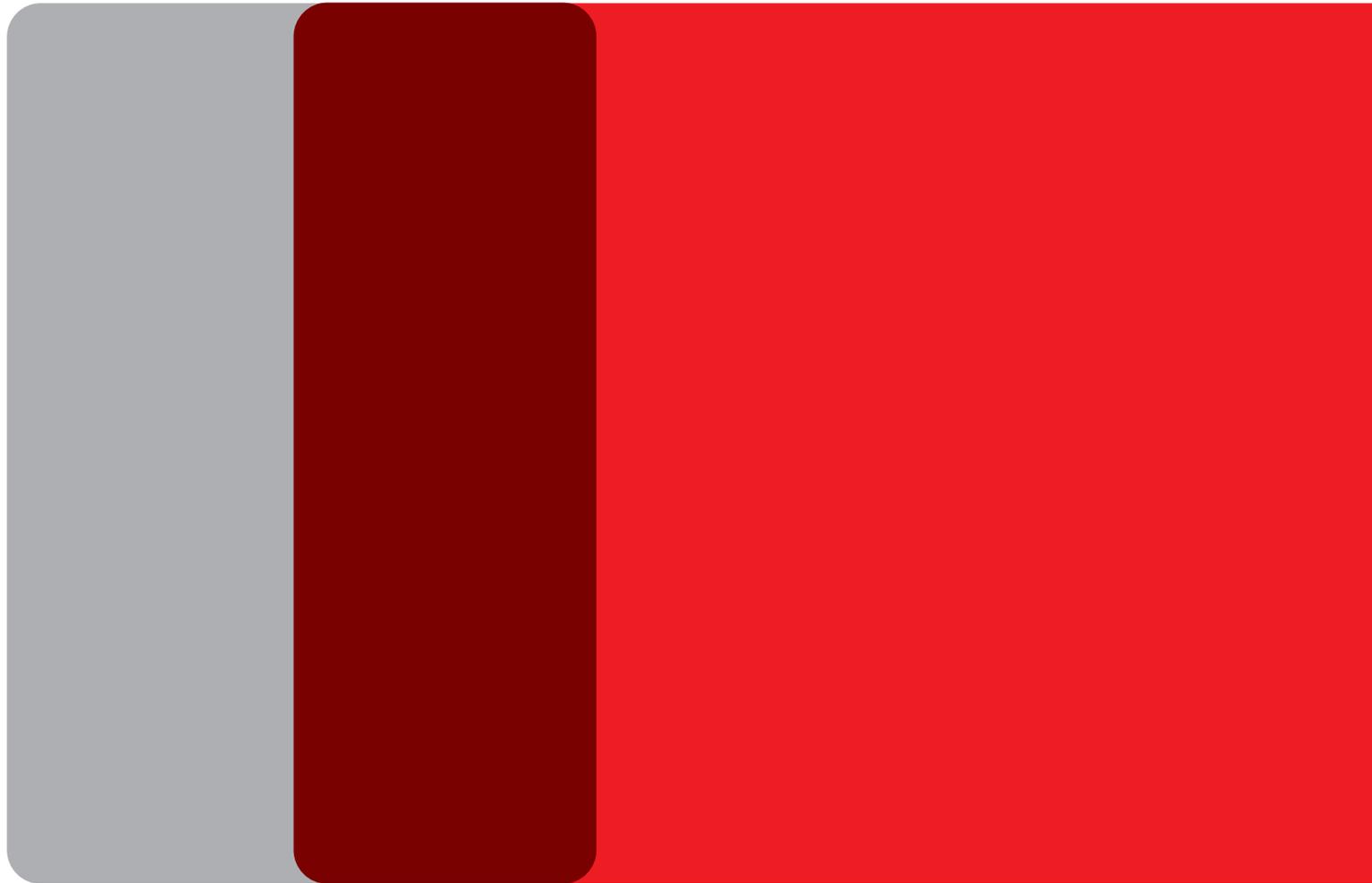
- How do you/ does your family use the bus service now that the changes have been implemented? PROBE FULLY:
 - Frequency?
 - Routes/ times of the day?
 - Purpose of the journey(s)?
 - Alternatives now used? – What?
- Have the changes impacted on your life in anyway?
- IF YES – In what ways? PROBE FULLY:
 - Have there been any lifestyle changes?
 - Has it changed the need to call upon other people's time/ other Council services etc.?
 - EXPLORE/ DISCUSS THE FULL RANGE OF IMPACTS (DIRECT & IN-DIRECT)
 - Have you contacted the Council regarding the changes and the impact it has had on you and your family?
 - If YES : How did you do this? How was the contact dealt with?

Consultation

- Were you aware of any consultation being conducted prior to the changes? If yes:
 - Did you participate in the consultation?
 - Why?/ Why not?
 - How did you participate?
 - What did it involve?
 - What do you think about how the consultation was conducted?
 - Why do you say that?

Final comments

- Any other thoughts on what we have discussed today?
- Thanks and close.



Contact us

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