

Letter sent regarding the Bus Recovery Grant Funding

Dear Rushi Sunak and Dame Vere of Norbiton,

I'm writing to express my concern about the threat to the future funding of our bus services.

Buses are vital to many people for getting to places of education, to work, shops and doctors' surgeries and hospitals or simply for a night out, for leisure and to see friends and family. Here in the rural community of Ashwick, in Somerset, we are keenly aware of this fact, as our existing bus services are already few and far between. Without them, many of us would be entirely cut off.

Buses play a crucial role in reducing traffic and our carbon emissions.

In Somerset, transport accounts for 46.1% of overall carbon emissions. We need to be encouraging a move away from single occupancy cars onto public transport. Buses are a key component in the Government's Green Agenda.

The Bus Recovery Grant funding is currently enabling our bus services in Somerset to operate despite most of our bus routes are only operating at 60% of pre Covid levels. If the Covid-19 Bus Recovery Grant funding is not extended into April and beyond, we will see our bus services slashed by between 20% to 40%. Somerset is a large, rural county and such cuts would adversely impact on already disadvantaged communities and aggravate the rural isolation many experiences.

I am asking you to keep this Bus Recovery Grant funding going until passenger numbers have recovered substantially or at least given the recovery in the use of bus services more time.

The long-term economic and social costs of a reduced bus network will be much greater than the short-term costs of maintaining funding for buses.

Government messaging is an important part of this - to cut bus recovery funding seems totally counter to the Government's Bus Back Better, Levelling Up and Green agendas. The Government should be promoting the use of buses.

How about a photo opportunity where you - and Cabinet colleagues - are seen travelling by bus?

Our buses have never been under greater threat.

Please don't cut recovery funding for buses next month.

And please make a clear statement about this urgently because operators need to provide a ten-week notice before changing a bus service, so they are having to make decisions right now about cutting our bus services.

Thank you!

Councillor Jessica Elliott, Ashwick Parish Council