



## Supported Transport (Subsidised Buses and Dial-a-Ride) Proposals

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. How much does the council have to save across all departments and by when?

On-going cuts in central government funding mean Oxfordshire County Council has to make savings. The council is currently in the process of making approximately £290 million of savings. Those savings began in 2010 and run until 2018. On top of those savings, the council currently believes it may need to save a further £60 million. Its calculations are based the Government's broad savings targets across the public sector for the new parliament. We have already made £204 million in savings since 2010 and are continuing to work hard to hold down costs and find new ways of working as the money we get from the government is reduced, whilst demand for our services increases.

The council will learn more specifics about how much local government in general and Oxfordshire County Council in particular will need to save following the Chancellor's July budget, the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the local government settlement in late 2015.

#### 2. How much money is spent by the council on supported transport in total?

The council spends about £30 million per year on range of 'supported transport' services in Oxfordshire.

#### 3. What are the supported transport services that the county council provides and/or funds?

- Home to school transport (special educational needs and mainstream)
- Subsidised bus services
- Adult social care transport (older people, learning disabled, mental health)
- Children's social care transport
- Community transport support
- Concessionary fares

- Dial-a-Ride

#### **4. How much do the Council plan to cut from Supported Transport services?**

As part of the council's budget setting process in February 2015, councillors reduced the overall supported transport budget by a fifth (£6.3 million). At this meeting the minimum amount of savings needed from non-statutory service change proposals was set at £2.6 million.

As far as possible, we are trying to make savings in supported transport by running services more efficiently. We have identified that we can achieve nearly £3.7 million in savings by bringing together all the supported transport services we operate and fund. However, this is not enough. The council needs to find a minimum of £2.6 million in additional savings and this means looking at supported transport services which the council is not required to provide by law. This will inevitably impact some people in the county.

#### **5. What savings have you already made?**

By bringing all the services we operate and fund together, we have already set out savings opportunities of nearly £3.7 million which would still allow us to maintain an adequate service for most users, including school children, and older and disabled people. We can make these savings of nearly £3.7 million by providing transport more efficiency. This will drastically reduce the amount that needs to be taken from other supported transport services. By pooling our transport budgets, we can get larger contracts and get a better deal from commercial service providers. We have also started to provide services for different users at the same time, so for instance transporting primary and secondary students together. We also intend to support students with learning difficulties to use public bus services, thus reducing costs and increasing their independence.

#### **6. Are the council's supported transport efficiencies on track?**

£630,000 of these savings already made through better allocation of home to school transport. After one year of the Route Efficiency Programme we are on track to deliver the target of £3.7 million savings from efficiencies by the end of 2017-18.

#### **7. What is the Route Efficiency Programme?**

The route efficiency programme is an on-going process of route-by-route assessment of home to school transport. This process has already delivered £630k of savings against our £6.3m savings target. Examples of route efficiency include merging overlapping taxi routes into a single route delivered by the Council's in-house fleet, using bigger buses to transport school children and moving non-entitled sixth form students off dedicated coaches and onto public transport.

#### **8. How much does the county council spend on home to school taxis?**

The council spent £9.48 million last year on home to school taxis journeys. This paid for 481 separate return journeys are currently per day. A total of 1302 students use taxis for home to school transport

#### **9. Does the council have an amount that it wants to reduce home to school taxis spending by?**

There is currently no agreed or published target for where we are aiming to get to in terms of taxi expenditure / journeys. However it is the case that we are actively trying to minimise single/low occupancy taxi routes as these offer poor value for money.

#### **10. Which school children qualify for free home to school transport?**

Free transport is provided if a student aged under 8 lives more than 2 miles from their nearest suitable school, and to students aged 8-16 who live more than 3 miles from school. Details about exemptions / provisions for low income families, routes considered unsafe to walk, Special Education Needs students and availability of concessionary transport for post-16 students can be found at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/school-transport>

#### **11. What are subsidised bus services?**

Subsidised bus services are publically funded bus services operated by private bus companies under contract, serving areas where private operators have chosen not to provide a service because it is not commercially viable for them to do so.

Oxfordshire County Council invites bus companies to bid for contracts to operate subsidised bus services on routes that are not served commercially.

When a bus subsidy is provided, it can be for a number of different reasons:

- To provide an entire service
- To add extra stops on an existing service
- To add extra times or days on an existing service

Not all bus subsidies are provided by the county council. Some are paid for by private developers as part of an agreement with the council to help support the local bus network when a new housing development is built. These are known as Section 106 or S106 agreements. S106 agreements are 'one off subsidies' paid for a period of time prior to a route either becoming commercial or being discontinued if there is not enough demand for the service to warrant commercial involvement.

**12. What proportion of the Oxfordshire bus network is subsidised?**

Subsidised bus services in Oxfordshire make up around nine per cent of the bus network. This means the remaining 91% is provided without any public subsidy whatsoever.

**13. How many bus services currently receive some level of subsidy in Oxfordshire and which of these are subsidised by Oxfordshire County Council?**

115 subsidised bus services currently operate in Oxfordshire made up of:

<b>Contract Type</b>	<b>Type Description</b>	<b>Number of Services</b>	<b>In scope for withdrawal?</b>
Full	OCC funded entire service (not including CT or ITU)	56	Yes
Partial	OCC funded partial service	12	Yes
Shared	Shared contract with neighbouring county	12	Yes
Fully S106	Completely Section 106	4	No
Part Bus Subsidy Budget, Part Section 106	Partially S106 and Partially OCC funded	7	Yes
CT	Community Transport	10	Yes
Oxfordshire County	OCC ITU Fleet	12	Yes

Council ITU Vehicles			
Misc	Misc: County Connect	1	Yes
Misc	Misc: Swindon Shopper Bus	1	Yes
		<b>Total: 115</b>	

**14. How much does the council spend on bus subsidies?**

Less Section 106 income paid for by private developers, the Council spends approximately £3.7 million on bus subsidies.

**15. What is Oxfordshire County Council’s legal duty on the subsidising of ‘non-statutory’ commercial bus services?**

The council’s legal duty is outlined in the Transport Act 1985, Section 63(1)(a), which explains that local transport authorities must:

*“secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose.”*

This means that the council must identify public transport requirements which would not otherwise be met and then once identified, secure what is appropriate. As part of this process, councils are entitled to take into account the funds that are available to them.

**What this means for Oxfordshire?:** While the law places a duty on the council to identify unmet transport needs and consider whether they should be met through subsidy, it largely remains for the council to decide what it is ‘appropriate’ to subsidise in the context of available funding.

Given that we are now in a position where the available budget for non-statutory supported transport services needs to reduce by a minimum of £2.6million, deciding what it is

'appropriate' to subsidise means determining which bus services we should prioritise and why.

**16. What is the council's proposal for subsidised bus services and why are you proposing this?**

Oxfordshire County Council's decision-making Cabinet has asked for the consultation to explore two proposed options and these are explained below.

**Option 1: withdraw all bus subsidies** - This proposal will affect 100 bus services across Oxfordshire, approximately 9% of the Oxfordshire bus network. The changes to each subsidised bus service will vary and in some cases this could simply mean one or two stops are removed and in other cases a greater impact would be felt. If this option is agreed, subsidies would be withdrawn from April 2016. See Annex X at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation)) for more information.

**Option 2: reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m** (as demanded by current savings targets) - This proposal would affect only a proportion of the 100 bus services across Oxfordshire supported in some way by a council bus subsidy. Again, changes to each subsidised bus service will vary and in some cases this could simply mean one or two stops are removed and in other cases a greater impact would be felt. Overall, the impact of this proposal would be less than in option 1. see Annex Y at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation)) for more information. If this option is agreed, the proposed changes would come into effect from April 2016.

**17. If Option 2 is chosen as the 'preferred option' by the Cabinet, how will you decide which services to subsidise?**

We considered three different ways we could prioritise bus services and reduce funding, and these are:

1. Fund services that are most likely to be used by older and disabled people
2. Prioritise bus services running at 'peak' hours during weekdays (06:30-09:30 in the morning, and 16:00-19:00 in the evening)
3. Prioritise bus services running in the evening and at the weekend (which are commonly used by people to access leisure activities)

## **18. Which of these three approaches do the Council favour?**

If a decision is made by the Cabinet to choose Option 2 (to reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m) the council's preferred proposal is to use any remaining subsidised bus budget to fund services that are most likely to be used by older and disabled people with free bus passes to travel off-peak. We are proposing this approach because it:

**Provides a safety net** - While all our subsidies support bus services which are important to the communities they serve, the council's first duty is to protect our most vulnerable public transport users. This is part of our overall corporate commitment to provide a 'safety net' of support and resources for our most vulnerable residents.

**Makes your money go further** - Off-peak services are less likely to be run commercially by operators, given the relatively low number of people that use them. However, they are also often cheaper to subsidise than other services, as they run at times when operators have spare vehicles available.

**Protects more services** - Prioritising off-peak services protects more services than some of the other options we've considered in the two alternative approaches below. This is because their lower costs mean that more services/service enhancements can be retained with the same amount of funding (see below for more details).

**We therefore propose to adopt the principle of, as far as possible, protecting the off-peak services which tend to be used by older people and people with disabilities when reducing bus subsidies by £2.3m.**

## **19. How do I check if this proposal affects me?**

You can find out if a bus service on a route you use may be affected using the online map [here](#) or download the full table of routes in Annex X at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation).

## **20. How did you prioritise which services to subsidise?**

The consultation document provides a short summary of the approach taken when prioritising bus subsidies and full details of this methodology can be found in Annex W to this document. This is available on the county council website at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation)

## **21. Why are off-peak buses typically cheaper to subsidise?**

The commercial bus companies operating in Oxfordshire have a limited pool of resources available (buses, drivers etc.). During peak times, the vast majority of resources are engaged running commercially viable routes. Oxfordshire County Council therefore has less supply available from the operators, which means it is more expensive to subsidise.

Conversely, during off-peak times, there are more free physical buses and drivers available, which in turn make them generally cheaper to subsidise.

## **22. Does your model consider bus frequency?**

Yes, the ranking does reflect frequency. This is because bus frequency is incorporated into subsidy cost, with higher cost services typically running more frequently. In order to rank highly and get the best value for money, a service running frequently must serve many unique addresses. If it does not, the model states that it is preferable to run many infrequent, cheaper services serving smaller communities (than one frequent service serving few addresses).

## **23. Why were addresses used rather than some other measure? And why are all addresses treated equally?**

We considered other measures such as population prior to starting the analysis. It was decided however that other measures were inadequate for this purpose as we do not hold individual data about each house hold to enable us to weigh up more detailed information.

## **24. Have you explored the potential impact of the subsidised bus service proposals?**

The council has undertaken a draft Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) to understand how the changes we have proposed for will affect different groups of people in the community. The SCIA will be reviewed following the proposed consultation.

Supporting information and the draft SCIA is available on the county council's website

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation)



**25. What will the council do if my bus service is withdrawn?**

The council is planning to work with bus companies to encourage them to continue operating these services without a subsidy. The council is also engaging with the 62 'community transport' voluntary sector schemes who deliver transport services across Oxfordshire to support and encourage them to address potential service gaps if they are in a position to do so.

**26. Will these proposals affect the council's delivery of its statutory supported transport obligations?**

No, the council will continue to deliver all its statutory supported transport obligations as required by law and will work to deliver as efficient non-statutory supported transport service as is possible under current financial constraints.

**27. Will all services you stop subsidising just discontinue immediately?**

No bus routes will be affected at all until at least April 2016. Over the next 9 months we plan to work with the bus companies to ensure as many services as possible can continue without public money. We will also support community-based transport initiatives run by volunteers, which already run successfully in many parts of the county.

We are already working hard to encourage bus operators to deliver a normal commercial service on affected routes and we are supporting a variety of community focused transport initiatives which are designed to protect transport users as we deliver these savings; including supporting volunteer community transport schemes with start-up funding.

**28. What will happen to the bus service that takes our children to school and back every day?**

If it is less expensive to provide home to school transport by subsidising a bus service than paying for alternative transport services - we are likely to continue to subsidise that service during the relevant time periods.

**29. What groups of bus users will you try to protect through your proposals and how will you do this?**

Our first priority is to protect services that are valued by service users such as older and disabled people who may have no alternative – particularly in the county’s rural communities.

To reduce bus subsidies in a way that is least likely to impact vulnerable people who rely on public transport, we have analysed subsidised bus services across the County. Based on this analysis our favoured approach is to reduce those services which are least effective at meeting the County’s transport needs. We will prioritise services used during off peak times, when older and disabled people can travel using free bus passes.

**30. Are you talking to commercial bus operators?**

Conversations have already begun with commercial bus operators. This in no way indicates that the council has already decided whether or not to proceed with its proposal. We do however need to ensure operators are aware of what is being considered.

**31. Can’t you just insist commercial bus operators to provide these services?**

The council is planning to work collaboratively with bus companies to encourage them to consider operating a proportion of these services on a purely commercial basis i.e. without receiving any public funding.

**32. Do you recognise the vital role that transport plays in rural communities?**

We do recognise that transport plays an important role in Oxfordshire, particularly in rural areas, which is why the county council is, and will continue to actively encourage and support voluntary services to deliver these services.

**33. Are you cutting “Community transport”?**

No – we are actively working with the community transport sector to boost their capacity.

**34. How do you work with the Community Transport Sector?**

The council communicates both informally and formally with the Community Transport Sector on a regular basis. The Council’s employs a Community Transport Officer who circulates the Oxfordshire Community Transport Directory and represents the Council on the Community Transport Action Group, hosted by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC). In addition, the council funds a dedicated community transport staff member at the ORCC who is tasked with working closely with the Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) on Community Transport issues. Information about community transport services, how to volunteer and how to apply for funding can also be found on the Council’s website <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/community-transport>

**35. What is the ‘Dial-a-Ride’ service?**

Dial-a-Ride is a door-to-door service for those who are mobility impaired and are unable to use, or do not have access to, conventional public transport. It is non-statutory supported transport service provided by the council’s Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) fleet service, which uses specialist vehicles and trained drivers.

**36. How many people in Oxfordshire use Dial-A-Ride?**

Number of Dial-A-Ride Users with regularly scheduled journeys, who live within/outside 400 metres of a commercial bus stop

District	Outside		Total
	400m	Within 400m	
Cherwell	29	79	108
Oxford City	4	46	50
South Oxfordshire	17	11	28
Vale of White Horse	3	17	20
West Oxfordshire	9	23	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>238</b>

Number of Dial-A-Ride Users with regularly scheduled journeys, who live within 400 metres of a commercial bus stop, broken down by whether they are classified as a "walker" or require a wheelchair.

District	Outside 400m		Within 400m		Total
	Walker	Wheelchair	Walker	Wheelchair	
Cherwell	27	2	76	3	108
Oxford City	3	1	41	5	50
South Oxfordshire	16	1	8	3	28
Vale of White Horse	3		15	2	20
West Oxfordshire	6	3	20	3	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>238</b>

Dial-a-Ride members (residents who have paid £5 a year and are registered as DAR users)

DAR Depot	Number of registered users
Oxford	83
Wallingford	42
Witney	45
Abingdon	31
Banbury	125
Bicester	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>439</b>

### **37. What does Dial-a-Ride cost to use?**

Dial-a-Ride users pay an annual subscription fee of just £5. This contrasts with people going to council day centres, who have to pay £5 per journey.

### **38. What are the council's proposals for Dial-a-Ride?**

Our proposal for the Dial-a-Ride service is to work with community transport groups across the county, offering support to develop schemes which can meet similar needs to those which dial a ride currently serves.

The county council will no longer be in a position to afford to fund Dial-a-Ride as a council provided service.

**39. Have you explored the potential impact of the Dial-a-Ride proposal?**

The council has undertaken a draft Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) to understand how the change we have proposed for will affect different groups of people in the community. The SCIA will be reviewed following the proposed consultation.

Supporting information and the draft SCIA is available on the county council's website [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation)

**40. If the council stops subsidising Dial-A-Ride, will it just stop?**

The county council will no longer be able to afford to fund Dial-a-Ride as a council provided service from the end of this financial year. However the council will work with voluntary groups to encourage voluntary sector involvement in running Dial-a-Ride services (with initial start-up support from the council).

**41. How do you know this can work and will voluntary groups be interested in delivering the Dial-a-Ride service?**

In Oxford, Aspire, an award-winning charity and social enterprise was earlier this year given a start-up grant to deliver Dial-a-Ride in the city. Oxfordshire County Council supported the organisation to get the service up and running to ensure a smooth and seamless transition for customers, with a view to Aspire making it a sustainable long-term service in the future.

**42. What kind of transport service will Dial-A-Ride users be able to use in the future?**

We do recognise that transport plays an important role in Oxfordshire, particularly in rural areas, which is why the county council is, and will continue to; actively encourage voluntary services to deliver this service. We're working with community transport groups across the County to try and develop schemes which can meet similar needs to those which Dial-a-Ride currently serves, and have had success in some parts of Oxfordshire.

#### **43. Is the “Concessionary Fares” budget remaining untouched?**

Yes the concessionary fares budget is ring-fenced and will not be cut.

#### **44. Will the budget for the integrated transport Unit remain untouched?**

Yes, there are no concrete plans yet to reduce this budget, but we are looking at how best to run our fleet as efficiently as possible in the future.

#### **45. Where can I access the consultation document on supported transport (subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride) and feed my responses back to the Council?**

The consultation document at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stconsultation) sets out our proposal, including the proposed impact on each subsidised bus route. You can read a copy of the consultation document and supporting materials online or read a copy at an Oxfordshire County Council library.

#### **46. How else can I have my say?**

Come to a public meeting to hear more about our proposals and tell us what you think. Meetings are open to everyone and are being held on:

- Mon 6 July in Banbury Town Hall, Banbury - 10.30am-12.00pm
- Mon 6 July in Didcot Civic Hall, Didcot - 16.00pm-17.30pm
- Tues 7 July in Witney Methodist Church, Witney - 10.30am-12.00pm
- Weds 8 July in Abingdon Guildhall, Abingdon - 16.00pm-17.30pm
- Weds 8 July in OCC County Hall, Oxford - 19.00pm-20.30pm

#### **47. Who makes the decisions about these proposals?**

Oxfordshire County Council’s Cabinet will make the decisions. Councillors will weigh the views expressed in the consultation against a wide number of other factors when making decisions including statutory requirements, government guidance, cost, risk, demography and other issues captured as part of the council's service and community impact assessment

process. In light of all the evidence presented to them, Cabinet will decide whether or not to take the proposed changes forward

**48. Is there a contradiction between the subsidised bus and Dial-a-Ride proposals and the Council's aims as set out in the Local Transport Plan?**

The Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) promotes greater use of public transport services, which include all bus routes currently subsidised by the council as well as all bus routes delivered commercially across the county. Whilst the council continues to work to enable and promote the use of public transport, this does not mean that the council can continue to fund public transport services to the extent that it has done to date.

The Council has been successful in delivering on our Local Transport Plan 4 by securing infrastructure investment which ensures that bus services can continue to be commercially deliverable across Oxfordshire, as the population of the County grows. This infrastructure investment is financed by capital funding, which is generally secured as a one off payment from central government.

In contrast, bus subsidies and Dial-a-Ride services are funded from the Council's revenue budget. This means that on-going costs associated with delivering subsidised bus services and the Dial-a-Ride service must be paid for every financial year, from our own operating budget via local revenue sources (local tax/government grants etc). This operating budget has been radically reduced in recent years.

The [Local Transport Plan](#) provides more detail on proposals to address issues in different parts of the county.