

Written evidence: Bus Services Bill

March 2017

Why bus services matter to older people

1. Age UK believes that wherever they live older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease and that transport is vital to leading an active and independent life.
2. A lack access to transport can have a profound impact on the quality of life, health and wellbeing of those in later life. For those without access to a car, reliable public transport or community transport is essential, with a particular concern being the ability to travel to medical appointments.
3. Age UK is calling for all areas and means of transport to be 'age-friendly' so that older people can remain active for as long as possible, with national and local governments taking into account the needs and views of older people in all transport planning.
4. Older people themselves have told us how important services are to them: 'There's many a time we'd like to do something else but we can't because of times and buses. I think we've missed out on a lot of social life, more so now that we're retired ... we've done our bit, working all our lives.' - Male, 65+, with mobility difficulties, Durham

5. Facts and figures on bus services and older people

- 5.2 Approximately 35,000 people aged 65-84 in England have difficulty walking even a short distance, but are restricted to using public transport, making any journey difficult.
- 5.3 40% of people aged 60 or over use local bus services at least once a week..
- 5.4 Around 25% of bus journeys taken by people aged 65+ are for medical appointments.
- 5.5 1.45 million over 65s find it quite difficult or very difficult to travel to a hospital, whilst 630,000 over 65s find it difficult or very difficult to travel to their GP.
- 5.6 Among the over 80s less than 55% report finding it easy to travel to a hospital, a supermarket or a post office.
- 5.7 Among the over 65s who report that it is 'very difficult' for them to travel to see their GP, less than 30% are in good health.

Key points in the Bill

6. Accessibility of services – Clause 17 and New Clause 3

- 6.2** Age UK believes there should be improvements in the availability of age friendly transport information - particularly for local community transport services. As part of this, bus operators need to recognise that many older people do not have a smart phone and are not online.
- 6.3** All bus services should set targets for the deployment of audio visual displays on bus and at bus shelters.
- 6.4** There should be a consistent approach to offering assistance to older people with reduced mobility or a disability.
- 6.5** While we recognise the need for smaller providers to be able to adapt solutions to their resources, Age UK would like to see more detail on what information should be provided and how any requirements will be fulfilled.
- 6.6** Disability awareness training for bus drivers should also be a key Government priority for implementation as soon as possible.
- 6.7** Age UK would also like to see wider improvements in infrastructure planning so that bus stops and bus shelters are in the right locations with better access to public toilets. This should be taken as part of a wider approach to 'age friendly places'.

7. Extension of franchising powers to other local authorities – Amendments 5 and 7

- 7.2** We hope the Secretary of State will use their discretion to extend the benefits of the Bill to other local authorities, particularly when it can be shown that it would improve services for older people.
- 7.3** This would also be particularly beneficial to older people in rural areas, where we know they can face particular challenges with access to transport.

8. Powers of authorities – New Clause 1

- 8.2** Age UK believes that authorities should have the discretion and resources to tailor services in a way that is most likely to benefit older people - especially in rural places.

9. Franchising - Consulting older people

- 9.2** Franchising will require an audit of transport needs and consultation. We think any consultation should take into account the needs of older people:
 - 9.2.1** An audit of transport needs, required by the Bill, must include considering the older population and the way they use buses to get to key services.
 - 9.2.2** There should be a requirement to consult older people on any cuts or reductions to local bus services - as part of funding alternative transport solutions.
 - 9.2.3** We also think this should require an assessment of the social benefits of bus routes
- 9.3** We would like to see more detail on how consultation would work in practice and await the publication of further guidance.

General considerations

10. Gaps in services and integration

- 10.2** Gaps in services can exacerbate access to transport for older people, making it harder for them to reach vital services and participate in their communities, increasing their risk of isolation.
- 10.3** Local authorities should be obligated to address gaps in services that are likely to have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of older people, especially in rural places.
- 10.4** Older people need better connections between buses and other modes of local transport. This would facilitate the delivery of 'complete journeys' that take older people comfortably and conveniently from door to door.
- 10.5** Community transport should be an integral part of any franchise or partnership
- 10.6** More attention should be paid to improving accessible bus services to hospital treatment, as well as medical and dental appointments.
- 10.7** Local hospitals and health commissioners should be fully involved in planning improvements in public transport

11. Concessionary fares

- 11.2** Age UK is concerned that some services may not be allowing the use of concessionary bus passes.
- 11.3** A cost-benefit analysis on concessionary travel for older and disabled people showed that the scheme delivers excellent value for money with each £1 spent generating at least £2.87 in benefits.
- 11.4** Age UK believes bus services should continue to allow the bus pass without exception and that there should be concessionary travel for community transport services. This is particularly important when replacing a commercial bus service.
- 11.5** We would also stress the importance of free companion to many older people who need help when traveling, especially when using buses to and from hospital. We would like as many older people to be able to benefit from this as possible.
- 11.6** Previously the eligible age for concessionary travel was 60 years of age. However, since 6 April 2010, the age of eligibility for concessionary travel in England has been tied to the pensionable age for women. So, as the pensionable age for women gradually increases from 60 to 65 so too will the age of eligibility for concessionary travel increase for both men and women.

12. Wheelchair users

- 12.2** Bus operators should enforce designated spaces for wheelchair users and we think it is important to clarify the need for bus companies to give priority to wheelchair users.
- 12.3** In the longer term, targets should be set to increase the capacity of buses to take wheelchairs and scooters, including through improvements in bus design.

13. Pets on buses

- 13.2** For many older people, being able to take their pet on the bus is important. Most operators leave this to the discretion of the driver and we would encourage operators to allow pets as the default, while still retaining this discretion.