WinACC urges Hampshire County Council to make the most of government proposals for better buses

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Winchester Action on Climate Change (WinACC) is calling on Hampshire County Council – the Council responsible for transport in Hampshire - to take full advantage of the opportunities to improve bus services set out in the government proposals.

The local climate charity welcomed the government's new national bus strategy 'Bus Back Better'. By improving bus services, their frequency, their reliability and their cost, more people will be able to make the choice to travel by bus. This will make our roads safer, cleaner, and will cut the greenhouse gases which contribute to global heating and the climate emergency.

Bus Back Better radically changes the national debate about buses. A fundamental shift in tone from Government says that decisions must be based on what's best for passengers and for growth, not on what makes most profit for bus companies.

WinACC welcomed the government's insistence that the Council must have better, zero-carbon buses. But they also say that Hampshire County Council will have to work hard to ensure that they qualify for funds. The Council must make a major commitment to the Government before 1 July if it is to keep existing government funding for Hampshire bus services and take advantage of substantial future funding.

This means the Council will have to take a central role in planning and developing all bus services in Hampshire, with a close working relationship with all Hampshire bus companies, and working alongside neighbouring councils such as Southampton, Portsmouth and Wiltshire.

It needs to demonstrate to the government that it understands current bus services in Hampshire and knows how far they meet travel needs of everybody in the county.

In doing this, the Council is required to involve local communities and public transport users.

By the deadline of 31 October, the Council needs to set out its Bus Service Improvement Plan, giving central government its strategy for better bus services in Hampshire.

Phil Gagg, Chair of WinACC's Transport and Planning Action Group, has written to Councillors. "This is a tall order", he said. "There is a lot of room for improvement. It will require resources and determination to develop a bus improvement plan that meets the needs of Hampshire residents, and matches up to the high expectations of national government."

The government expects the plans to aim for improvements in fares and ticketing, including lower fares and through tickets. They expect improvement plans to provide more frequent and more punctual bus services which are faster, more direct, cover more of the county, and have better connections between buses and with trains.

To meet the needs of the whole community, the government is also telling Councils to provide better information and better waiting facilities.

On average people in Hampshire use buses only 20 times a year - well below the English average. In Brighton & Hove, for example, people use buses 157 times a year. Bus use in Hampshire is the 65th lowest level of the 89 English transport authorities.