



Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Copied to:

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Women and Equalities
Rt Hon Vincent Cable MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills
Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education
Rt Hon Andrew Lansley MP, Secretary of State for Health
Rt Hon Chris Huhne MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport
Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport
Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke QC MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
Maria Miller MP, Minister for Disabled People
Baroness Eaton, Chairman, Local Government Association

17 February 2011

Dear Prime Minister,

Bus cuts are damaging economic recovery

We are writing to express serious concern that reductions in local authority support for bus services as a result of funding cuts will have severe negative knock-on impacts for people, communities, the economy and the environment.

Campaign for Better Transport has been tracking the cuts and estimates that 70% of local authorities are already looking to buses as an area to make cuts, with some councils planning to lose all their supported bus services and 13 councils reducing support by more than £1 million. This trend is expected to continue and worsen. For example:

- Cambridgeshire has decided to phase out 100% of council-funded bus routes, and Northamptonshire and Hartlepool have made similar proposals.

- Areas including North Yorkshire and Buckinghamshire are looking to cut all council-funded evening and Sunday buses, and West Sussex has already decided to cut supported Sunday buses.
- Suffolk and The New Forest are among the councils proposing to axe their concessionary fare schemes for young people, and other authorities such as Somerset and Greater Manchester are also looking to cut back provision in this area.

These cuts, combined with the reduction in the fuel tax rebate for buses in 2012 (the Bus Service Operators' Grant) and changes to the way both operators and councils are reimbursed for the statutory concessionary fares scheme, could tip buses into a spiral of decline from which they will struggle to recover. Two thirds of public transport journeys are made by bus. Community transport is often talked about as a solution to bus cuts, but schemes of this nature are also being hit hard.

Cuts in bus services will affect government objectives and provision in a broad range of areas. It is for this reason that this letter has been copied to ministers with a range of portfolios, and it is signed by a broad spectrum of NGOs, charities and trade unions. Cuts will be contrary to the Government's stated aims in three key ways.

Firstly, cuts to bus services will hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest – contrary to the Government's message that the cuts will be socially fair. Poorer people are less likely to have a car. Young people need affordable bus services in order to give them a chance to take up opportunities in education and work, and to take the first steps to independence. One in five students has considered dropping out of further education because of financial cost, and transport is the greatest cost of participation. Older and disabled people have benefited from free bus travel, enabling mobility and associated economic activity; however bus cuts could mean that concessionary pass holders end up with no buses to get on. Disabled people use buses more often than non-disabled people, and are less likely to have the choice to take a car. Working age people with visual impairments, for example, could be particularly badly affected. Cutting bus services can mean the loss of people's only independent access to transport. Women are less likely to drive than men, and so they are more likely to be dependent on public transport. People in one of the above bus user groups who also live in the countryside are doubly disadvantaged, because poor bus provision already causes isolation and suffering in rural areas.

Secondly, bus cuts are a false economy, damaging economic recovery and adding to unemployment – contrary to Government commitments to restore the economy and get people working. Iain Duncan Smith has suggested that jobseekers should get on buses to access work in neighbouring areas. However, evidence shows that many people who want to work are unable to take jobs, or are forced on to benefits, because of insufficient and expensive bus provision. Surveys have shown that overall a third of jobseekers say poor transport options are the biggest barrier to finding work. Local businesses depend on customers getting to the shops and services on the bus. High streets up and down the country will be damaged if bus services are cut, causing unemployment and holding back economic recovery. Redundancies in the bus industry, and the associated negative social and economic impacts, will also be felt as a result of bus cuts.

Thirdly, bus cuts will result in more car journeys. People need good services and affordable fares to incentivise a modal shift away from cars. Bus cuts will only make the problem worse. Electric vehicles will be part of the mix of measures to reduce carbon, but their impact will not be felt for many years and reductions

in carbon emissions are needed now. Buses are an essential part of the strategy for reducing carbon as well as tackling congestion and social exclusion.

Although the cuts being made to bus services this year are mainly those funded by local authorities, central government has a share of the responsibility for this situation (which largely results from cuts to local authority funding) and can play a role in avoiding the worst impacts of these cuts.

We are therefore asking you to ask Government Departments to examine their own role in supporting people's travel options, for example through their support for school transport, rural transport options or help for those out of work to access transport. Finding ways to pool budgets at a national and local level will be essential in ensuring that we can mitigate the worst impacts of cuts. Further, when changes are made to policy and to public service provision, accessibility and transport issues must be given due attention.

We also ask you to bring together Government Departments, local authority leaders and commercial and community transport operators to identify ways for local authorities to support bus services in this time of reduced budgets, for instance through better contracting of services and pooling budgets across local council departments to more effectively deliver the bus services that people need.

Finally, we ask you to consider reviewing the proposed cut to the fuel tax rebate for buses (BSOG) in 2012. The proposed 20% reduction, hard on the heels of the current cuts, will deal a severe blow to bus services and as a consequence to bus users.

The Government should not in its haste to make savings, lose sight of the fact that buses enable economic activity and self sufficiency, and are a vital part of the journey we all need to make towards a low-carbon future. It is time that buses moved further up everyone's agenda.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Joseph O.B.E.
Chief Executive

Campaign for Better Transport



Liam Preston
Chair

British Youth Council



Sylvia Brown
Chief Executive

Action with Communities in Rural England



Gavin Booth
Chairman

Bus Users UK



Michelle Mitchell
Charity Director

AgeUK



Shaun Spiers
Chief Executive

Campaign to Protect Rural England



Mike Benner
Chief Executive
Campaign for Real Ale



Keith Halstead
Chief Executive
Community Transport Association UK



Ruth Chambers
Deputy Chief Executive
Campaign for National Parks



Gillian Guy
Chief Executive
Citizens Advice



Andy Atkins
Executive Director
Friends of the Earth



Sue Sharp
Head of Public Policy and Campaigns
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association



John Sauven
Executive Director
Greenpeace



Tony Armstrong
Chief Executive
Living Streets



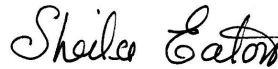
Barbara Hearn OBE
Deputy Chief Executive
National Children's Bureau



Ruth Bond
Chair
National Federation of Women's Institutes



Frank Cooper
President
National Pensioners Convention



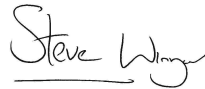
Seila Eaton
President
National Council of Women of Great Britain



Amy Aeron-Thomas
Executive Director
Road Peace



Bob Crow
General Secretary
RMT



Steve Winyard
Head of Policy and Campaigns
Royal National Institute of Blind People



Malcolm Shepherd
Chief Executive
Sustrans



Tom Franklin
Chief Executive

The Ramblers Association



Brendan Barber
General Secretary

Trades Union Congress



Gerry Doherty
General Secretary

Transport Salaried Staffs' Association



Alex Farrow
Co-director

UK Youth Climate Coalition



Graham Stevenson
National Organiser – Transport Sector

UNITE



Dave Prentis
General Secretary

UNISON