

Dear Dan,

**Re: Urgent Appeal for Strengthened Public Transportation in the West of England Region**

We, the Chief Executives of local Age UK in Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset, and North Somerset, pen this letter to express our collective concern and advocate for a more balanced approach to the provision of public transport within our region.

The Birthday Bus Pass scheme by WECA, alongside the recent introduction of the WestLink service, represents innovative steps toward boosting passenger numbers and enhancing connectivity in rural and remote areas. However, the initial challenges faced by the WestLink service, particularly the reported unavailability of minibuses and accessibility of the app, highlight the essential role that Supported Bus Routes and Community Transport play in our public transportation ecosystem.

Supported Bus Routes are indispensable, providing reliable access to healthcare, social engagements, and essential services for our older residents and those facing the greatest inequalities in our communities. They extend beyond mere transport services, acting as lifelines that foster inclusivity and enable fuller participation in community life.

Similarly, Community Transport epitomises community-driven approaches that cater to the unique transportation needs of different neighbourhoods, especially in rural and isolated areas. It presents a vast area for innovative solutions that could significantly enhance the transportation experience for our residents.

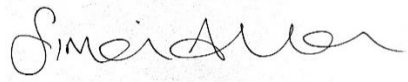
The Birthday Bus scheme, while catchy, may not adequately address the core transportation needs of many of our residents, especially when compared to the benefits derived from Supported Bus Routes and Community Transport initiatives. The essence of public transportation is to provide reliable, accessible, and inclusive services to all, particularly those facing the greatest barriers.

We urge WECA to prioritise and re-allocate adequate funding to Supported Bus Routes and Community Transport, alongside further exploration and refinement of innovative schemes like the WestLink service. A balanced, well-funded public transportation system comprising these elements is pivotal for fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and accessible community.


We are keen to talk about this constructively and would welcome the opportunity to explore with WECA, practical solutions that serve the requirements of our communities. Together, we can work towards creating a robust and sustainable public transportation system in the West of England region that enables people to age well in their community.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to a positive and proactive engagement.

Simon Allen



Kay Libby



Mark Flower



Phil Dolan

