



Department
for Transport

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By email to:
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From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps

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Our Ref: MC/306534
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3 September 2020

Dear Mr Dixon,

Thank you for your letter, on behalf of the Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum committee, of Saturday 11 July 2020, regarding the National Bus Strategy and rural transport in the Sevenoaks area.

The Government recognises the importance that public transport has for the sustainability and independence of communities, especially those in rural areas such as those in Kent, and the role that public transport plays in combatting social isolation. The Department for Transport wants to build partnerships with transport providers and community groups to enhance the role of transport and ensure that our rural communities are a great place to live and work, tackle loneliness, and give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.

It is worth noting however that the bus market outside London is deregulated and decisions regarding service provision are primarily a commercial matter for bus operators. Local authorities are free to make their own decisions about the areas under their care, provided they take account of the relevant legislation. Local councils, such as Kent County Council, are encouraged to utilise the tools in the Bus Services Act 2017, to help improve rural bus services and increase passenger numbers.

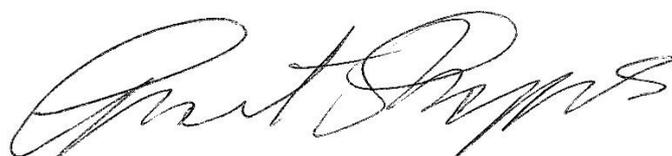
Regarding the National Bus Strategy and £5 billion funding package for buses and cycling, the Government wants to ensure that in the long-term buses will continue to have a significant role to play in connecting people, helping the economy meet our net-zero ambitions, and improving air quality. It will be important to account for all of this in the long-term National Bus Strategy

which we are currently developing. The strategy will focus on the needs of passengers so that more people want to use the bus and set out how national and local government and the private sector will come together to meet the needs of local communities. We are currently considering our approach to this with further details to be announced in due course. The £5 billion of additional investment to overhaul bus and cycle links that you mention will boost bus services by including higher frequency services, create new priority schemes to make routes more efficient and allow for more affordable, simpler, fares and include at least 4,000 new Zero-Emission Buses. This may be able to help support rural communities in your area. The details of these programmes, including how funding will be distributed, will be announced alongside the Spending Review.

Your letter makes mention of the Go-Coach bookable service that operates in Sevenoaks and the wider area as a successful way of meeting your rural transport objectives. The 'Better Deal for Bus Users' package announced on September 2019 by the Chancellor provides new funding to transform bus services around the country. Included in this package is a £20 million Rural Mobility Fund which is intended to trial on-demand services in rural and suburban areas, much like the current Go-Coach service. Demand responsive transport services have been used for some time to replace infrequent, traditional services which do not meet a local community's specific needs, with ones which can get closer to where people live, at a time convenient for them. The deadline for this fund was 4 June and we received a large number of bids, including one from Kent County Council. We will announce the winning bids in due course.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me and I look forward to announcing further details of our schemes soon.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT