

Sevenoaks District

Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

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Grant Shapps M.P.
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Dear Secretary of State

Rural Transport in the Sevenoaks District Council Area

The focus of the Government over recent months has rightly been on measures needed to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and the past months have been particularly challenging ones for public transport, resulting in a reduction in usage. We are all now embarking on the 'new normal' so we thought it was timely to write to you to ascertain when the Bus Strategy will be published. The Prime Minister made a pledge of £5 billion over the next 5 years, for England & Wales (excluding London) to improve early, late and weekend bus services in rural areas and the need for better transport is one of the main issues raised from our 1,170 members and other older people across Kent.

On March 11th the Chancellor also stated that further details would be given in the July Comprehensive Spending Review, alongside a National Bus Strategy, but as this review has not yet taken place we are keen to ascertain when we might expect details of the strategy.

Your sound bites on expenditure to improve cycling and walking have been noted, but these do not address the bigger transport issues posed by the geography and rural nature of many parts of our county as many seniors are unable to consider taking these up due to health and mobility constraints.

In August 2017 the Kent County Council report "Growth without Gridlock" stated an aim to provide affordable and connected transport for all to jobs, education, health and other services. In January 2020 Sevenoaks District Council announced their aim to become Carbon Zero by 2030. To achieve both of these aspirations will require a vast reduction in car dependency.

For Kent and the Sevenoaks District no detailed strategy has emerged as to how these objectives will be met, but things have happened as a result of Kent County Council's 'Big Conversation' on Rural Transport in 2018. In particular our local bus company "GO- Coach", in conjunction with the Town and District councils, started a bookable bus service which serves as a good starting point to meet some of these objectives, but more needs to be done. Assuming that some monies will be allocated to improving rural transport can you tell us how it will be allocated, and could the fact that Sevenoaks, whilst adjacent to London, is 93% Green Belt and 60% AONB, the third highest percentage in England, be taken into consideration?

Alan Dixon
On behalf of the Committee

cc: Laura Trott M.P.
Tom Tugendhat M.P.