

BSIP Funding proposal for 2 new bus routes in the Chew Valley

Background

Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group (CVAF C&NEWG) formed in October 2020 with the intention of finding practical ways to lower the carbon footprint of the Chew Valley across a range of areas. CVAF C&NEWG Sustainable Transport Sub-Group have been working in partnership with B&NES and WECA since April 2021, when we published a cross valley survey showing present habits and future desires for transport in the Chew Valley (400 households)¹. This indicated a desire for increasing bus travel finding new services that would be reliable, regular and provide connectivity for work and leisure. Our group has since collected local data to feed back into B&NES and WECA's planning bus processes with decarbonisation as a central theme.

As part of recent discussions about the opportunities offered by BSIP, we agreed to put together a proposed NEW circular bus route for the Chew Valley for a small 20 seater bus or a minibus. Although we only had 3 days to put this idea together we were able to draw on our detailed local knowledge from our research across 18 months of considering the sustainable transport needs of the Chew Valley.

Unique factors within the Chew Valley

1. Unlike many rural areas the Chew Valley does not have a key centre point town and is not close to one particular town or city. Our survey² shows that people travel for work and leisure within the Chew Valley and to a range of destinations beyond the Chew Valley, most commonly Bristol, but also Bath, Wells, Midsomer Norton and Keynsham and London. This means routing buses is complex.
2. Existing services are infrequent, have insufficient trips and on insufficient days for most people to rely on them for commuting purposes.
3. Whilst there are regular bus services on the A38 and A39/A37 corridors, there are not services to link the villages of the Chew Valley to these main routes
4. Walking and cycling to the main routes on the road is not feasible for most walkers or cyclists, as this would be along narrow winding country lanes with no lighting.
5. There is no comprehensive network of off road paths or cycle paths that would allow people to reach the main corridors.
6. Chew Valley Secondary School is mainly fed by a network of village primary schools, and pupils are bused to school for free from villages up until the end of year 11. Once they move into the 6th form this provision is no longer available, with only a small number of 'spare' places being offered for a fee to sixth formers. There is no public transport provision available for teachers or 6th form students to get to the site.
7. Young people in the Chew Valley rely on car lifts or on driving themselves to access social lives and clubs and societies within the Chew Valley, and as the villages circle

¹ 'Have Your Say: Sustainable Transport in the Chew Valley' Available on request

² ibid

around the school, friends can be living all over the Chew Valley. Some young people may be driven to bus stops to use what transport there is in the corridors, but there is nowhere at these stops to leave a bike or car.

8. Village communities have a range of behaviours in relation to shopping. There are a good number of local food businesses, small spar/co-ops within villages, farm shops and some not for profit community ventures that are well used to. Our proposed circular route (Route 1)³ takes these shopping habits into account but doesn't factor in a big supermarket shop. Our rationale is that few would carry a big weekly shop on the bus, many shop online and get deliveries from larger supermarkets. Tesco at Old Mill, is the closest large supermarket for many, but people also use the range of supermarkets - Sainsburys in Paulton and Aldi, Lidl, Tesco and Waitrose in Wells which they can link to from the A37/39 bus services. This circular bus route takes people to smaller local outlets such as farm shops and mini-supermarkets, meaning there is also a win-win for the viability of local outlets and greater consumption of local food with its accompanying lower carbon footprint.
9. Although generally seen as a more affluent area there is a more granular variation with a mixture of owned and rented housing, with many low income salaries and restricted choices about employment, in part because of the poor transport network. 'Local' job centres are either in Bristol or in Wells, and most people living in the Chew Valley cannot meet appointments via bus travel. In terms of areas of deprivation, rural areas never feature in the overall indices of multiple deprivation because the calculation is not sufficiently granular to hit target levels. However, if you look at the indices of deprivation sub-category, 'barriers to housing and services', rural areas always come out worse. Also, anecdotally, the work of West of England Rural Network's Village Agents, reveals that there are people living in poverty within each of the communities in the Chew Valley.

An overview of the Proposal

Through our sub-group discussions we realised we could not provide a perfect solution to all issues in a single route, and clearly Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport is also needed to be able to offer a more comprehensive reduction and/or replacement of car journeys with bus and active travel. However, we feel a significant improvement could be delivered with the introduction of 2 new bus routes: one a circular route around a range of key places within the valley that is repeated in forward and back arcs across the day and one which offers a shuttle service forward and back across the Chew Valley from Pensford to Bristol Airport.

The first route is given in detail on a Google spreadsheet with timings to match with the connecting services into Bristol, Bath and Wells showing the amenities available at each stop and the rationale for certain timings (e.g. to coincide with Chew Valley School -Secondary and 6th Form school run timings). It is also shown across 2 google route plans (couldn't do all on one as they limit the stops!) so that the bigger picture of the route can be seen.

³ See detail below

As the second route grew out of identifying some limitations within the first route, it is not fleshed out in any detail but we do provide the route overview via x2 Google maps (again too many stops for one map). With time we could offer the same granular detail with amenities and timings, but at this stage would just say that they seem to be logical stop points to consider.

Please see these two route proposals as best attempts to come up with significant improvements rather than final versions, as they have only been tested within our group and with our children/YP etc across the span of a weekend. They would need to be properly explored for feasibility by yourselves and WECA, attempting the routes in a small 20 seater bus or minibus, with proper consultations in the local communities.

What they do have (and the first route in particular) is granular detail based on local knowledge, of why the services are proposed for going where they go, at the times they go, and connecting to other services, and an attempt at realistic route times (google maps by car plus 2 minutes per stop). Again I am sure a bus company would have their own metrics for working all this out.

Route 1 also links with key leisure businesses in the area, who might be approached to consider sponsorship, given that the route would bring people from Bath, Bristol and Wells as well as from the Chew Valley directly to their door.

Route 1: Circular route

This route is designed to:

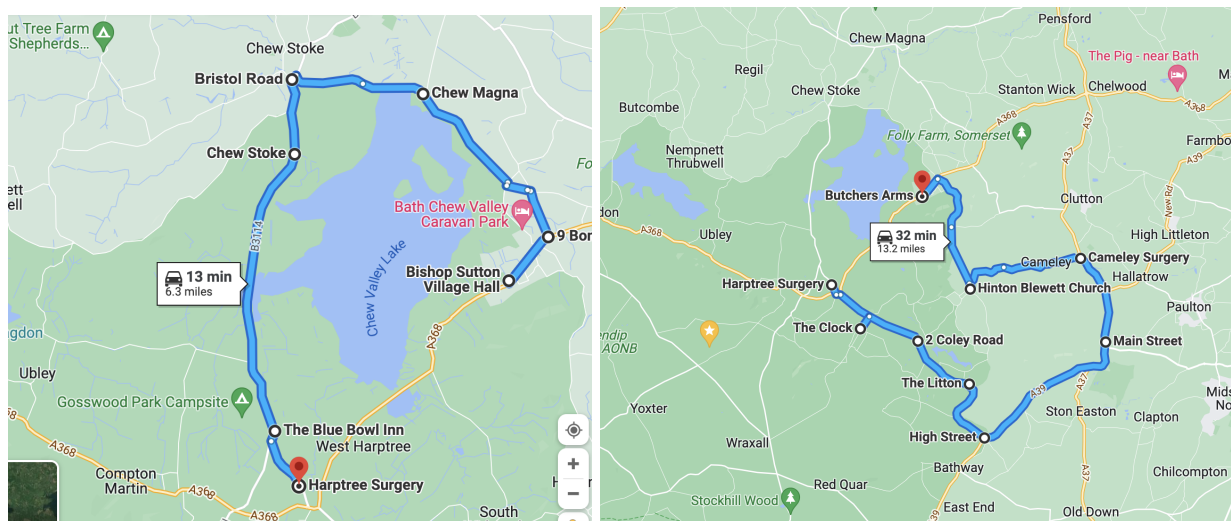
- allow people to commute and travel for leisure to Bath, Bristol and Wells, (connecting with the 376 service on A39/A37)
- allow people in the Chew Valley to get to key destinations: secondary school/GP surgeries/ shops and leisure locations at the times this is needed (to match the secondary school school run & after clubs for instance)
- allow tourism to flourish in the Chew Valley by taking people to popular spots for food, pubs or leisure pursuits daytime and evening,
- service local businesses who may therefore help to finance it.
- not replicate or duplicate existing routes within the Chew Valley (672)
- be as quick as possible in doing a round trip to allow a good frequency
- show precise timings and driver hours and include breaks & loo stop and turning place
- mean that your 'average' person could walk or cycle/e-cycle to a bus stop within a *relatively* short time (the idea being it would have cycle racks available)
- complement and not undermine a Dynamic Demand Responsive Transport bid
- appeal to young people
- resolve travel to and from school issues for Chew Valley School 6th form for many areas, including provision for a bus to link with after school activities (helping the school meet its decarbonisation aims)

This route begins and ends at Woodford Lodge; a site owned by Bristol Water on the edge of Chew Valley Lake. It is the start of the new Cycle Path round part of the lake, an access point for fishing and sailing, where there is an outdoor cafe and a lakeside restaurant <https://thewoodfordatchew.co.uk/> with a car park to service these amenities. Just outside the entrance to the property there is a layby that could serve as a turning circle. We felt, given the advantages to the amenities of a route beginning and ending here, these businesses might consider sponsorship and also might find ways to ensure drivers had access parking for their travel to the route start, to parking the bus for longer breaks, and for refreshments and toilets. There are very few places within the Chew Valley where this cluster of facilities can be achieved.

Perhaps controversially, it doesn't take in Chew Magna as one of its destination points. There are a range of reasons for this:

- People who live outside the Chew Valley assume Chew Magna is its central location. People who live within the valley (with the exception of those who live in Chew Magna) do not see it this way. In fact each village is a unique community of its own, intersecting with other communities for a variety of reasons.
- Chew Magna High Street is notoriously congested (and this is a worsening picture as it serves as a 'rat run' to Bristol Airport, which currently plans to expand.) Traffic often gets snarled up here making it a less reliable place for 2 new free flowing, frequent bus routes that are seeking to keep moving across a day.
- By contrast Walley Lane, a well surfaced route which passes the Chew Valley Lake and the Community farm, is a free flowing route which is less used and taking one route this way will lessen the congestion impact.

Here is the Circular route (seen across 2 maps)



We have detailed the route timings and direction, and the options for 2 or 3 driver shifts in a spreadsheet which also outlines amenities, interconnectedness and driver hours. The spreadsheet offers 3 versions of this route shown on different sheets..

Version 1 We favour the version of this route which, beginning at Woodford Lodge travels south bound and anti-clockwise before returning to Woodford and then turns round in the layby in order to travel northwards and clockwise around the route returning to Woodford Lodge, and then repeats in this way (anticlockwise/clockwise) across the day. This affords the greatest efficiency and connectivity in the circular route. When reading version 1 on the spreadsheet you need to travel down the timings for Trip 1, up the timings for Trip 2 and down for Trip 3 and so on.

However, we are unsure whether all of the roads would be accessible both ways and thought would need to be given to this. If it were not practicable then Version 2, with 2 drivers or Version 3 with 3 drivers (offering circular anticlockwise routes) could be considered. The timetable for Version 2 & 3 can be read from top to bottom for each trip

The spreadsheet also shows where the route connects to existing bus stops and where new bus stops or slight repositioning of an existing bus stop would be needed.

The spreadsheet can be accessed here

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ifOiEv6esQC_g7mU8tk8ih2NUMnIGK8TikPT4Fr1Sds/edit#gid=505321457

Business benefit and sponsorship

The following businesses (not necessarily a comprehensive list) are within easy walking distance of bus stops on this route and are likely to benefit from its introduction in terms of improved access, raised profile and footfall, and decreased carbon footprint for staff & customer journeys to and from their business. They might, therefore, be interested in publicising, utilising and/or helping to fund this new route:

Stop		Business
Woodford Lodge	Woodford Lodge :cafe and restaurant	https://thewoodfordatchew.co.uk/
	Bristol Water Fisheries: fishing club	https://www.bristolwaterfisheries.com/lakes/chew-valley-lake
	Chew Valley Sailing Club	https://www.chewvalleysailing.org.uk
The Blue Bowl	The Blue Bowl: pub with accommodation, restaurant and entertainment nights.	https://www.thebluebowl.co.uk/

	Gosswood Park Campsite	https://gosswoodpark.co.uk/
West Harptree	West Harptree Stores	https://www.facebook.com/SPAR-651864915224725/
	White Rose Beauty salon	http://www.whiterosebeauty.co.uk/
	The Crown: pub with food and entertainment nights	https://digthevalley.co.uk/listings/the-crown-west-harptree
East Harptree	The Waldegrave Arms: pub with food (including Takeaway) & entertainment	https://www.facebook.com/groups/1614332898629328/user/100083455774267/
	Solo Hairdressers	https://www.yell.com/biz/solo-hairdressing-within-harptree-village-hall-bridol-166814/
	The Community Shop East Harptree	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqN9EQioKLC
Coley	Knowle Angling Club	http://knowleangling.co.uk/
The Litton	The Litton Pub with accommodation and restaurant	https://thelitton.co.uk/
Chewton Mendip	Mendip Pantry: cafe & shop	https://www.facebook.com/MendipPantry
	The Waldegrave Arms: pub with food & events	https://www.facebook.com/TheWaldegraveArms/
Farrington Gurney	The Farrington: pub with food	http://www.thefarringtoninn.co.uk/
	Farrington Gurney Farm shop: with cafe and children's play area, fish & chip takeaway & shopping village	https://www.farringtons.co.uk/
	Farrington Park: golf club & leisure centre	https://www.farringtonpark.co.uk/
Cameley Surgery	The Temple Inn: pub with accomodation, food(& events	https://www.thetempleinn.com/

	Hong Kong Chef: Chinese Takeaway	01761 453632
Hinton Blewett	The Ring of Bells: pub with food (including takeaway) and accomodation	https://www.ringobellshinton.co.uk/
New Manor Farm	New Manor Farm Shop: farm shop, dairy & restaurant	http://newmanorfarmshop.co.uk/
Bishop Sutton	Westway business park	http://www.westwaycommercialproperty.co.uk/
	Yoga Chew Valley: 7 day a week yoga studio	https://yogachewvalley.co.uk/
	Arthur David: food wholesale company offering deliveries throughout the Chew Valley	https://arthurdavid.co.uk/
	Spar	https://www.facebook.com/sparchewvalley/
	Bath Chew Valley Caravan site	https://www.bathchewvalley.co.uk/contactus.asp
	Chew Valley Library	https://chewvalleylibrary.org.uk/
	The Red Lion: pub with food and entertainment	https://www.facebook.com/theredlionbishopsutton
Salt & Malt	Bristol Water: water company & landowners of Chew Valley Lake	https://www.bristolwater.co.uk/chewvalleylake
	Salt & Malt: fish restaurant and takeaway	https://saltandmalt.co.uk/chew-valley/
	The Community Farm: not for Profit organisation offering veg boxes and sales at the gate. Charitable aims include supporting food poverty and hosting mental health wellbeing services & volunteering opportunities	https://www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk/

The following GP practices would potentially be enabled to reduce their carbon footprint and improve patient health for journeys to and from the surgery. These are the only GP medical practices within the Chew Valley :

Harptree Surgery (West Harptree)

Chew Valley School: in particular sixth form students and staff

Cameley Surgery

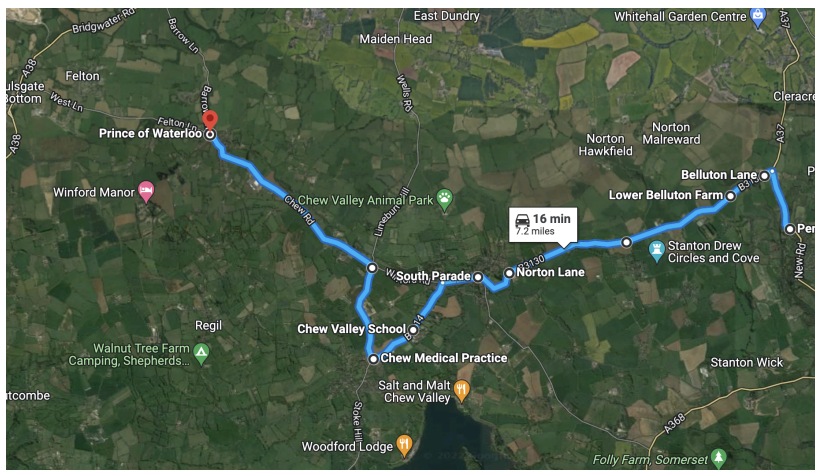
This route increases access to the Chew Valley and the surrounding areas for the following Parishes, who might therefore be willing to help publicise and fund the service: Chew Stoke, Compton Martin, East Harptree, Hinton Blewett, Stowey Sutton, Temple Cloud West Harptree.

Route 2: Cross Valley Route

In testing out the strengths and weaknesses of Route 1, we identified a significant difficulty in accessing the advantages of this route for people travelling from Pensford (A37) or from villages on the west of the area (such as Winford) and for those wishing to travel to Bristol along the A38. It was also felt that there might be a negative reaction from those living in Chew Magna and this route 2 would ensure they could be linked into the circular route 1.

One solution to this would be to run a shuttle bus across the valley, going backwards and forwards from Pensford to Bristol Airport via Chew Magna and Winford, and building in a direct stop at Chew Valley School, Chew Magna GP surgery and the Chew Stoke (Stoke Inn) stop being proposed in route 1.

This is the overview of Route 2 (again seen across 2 maps)



It is the 'V' in the route that enables it to link with Route 1: circular route and take in the school and the GP surgery, without clogging up Chew Magna.

Reactions so far

In such a tight timescale we have barely had time to react to the routes ourselves, let alone test them against local demographics.

Anecdotally we have had positive reactions from young people who think services that get them into Bristol more quickly and allow them to travel back to the valley late at night is the primarily important factor. However, being able to spend time at leisure locations such as the lake, and the local pubs, as well at friends' houses, and the ability to get a bus back after after-school activities would be a big improvement.

Being able to travel independently from parents, and not having the financial burden of needing to run a car in order to have a social life would be appreciated, but it was felt that a really good youth-oriented campaign would be needed to break the habit of learning to drive and getting a car. One person remembered that when the 672 ran later services it was popular with young people because most of those travelling at night were young people, and thus later services could be 'sold' as a social activity in itself.

This plan was also liked by the small scope of parents we consulted as it would ease the burden for being Mum or Dad's 'taxi'. Our previous research ⁴ has indicated that an older demographic would like more daytime options for travelling between villages within the valley and to Wells, and that for commuters it was the link to A39/A37 that was available from early in the day and until later at night that would be the 'game changer for bus travel to work to be considered.

However, these 2 routes are offered as a starting point for consideration and would need to be tested pragmatically and against public opinion. Connectivity calculations in the spreadsheet are made against existing timetables from First Bus and we are aware that these are subject to change.

CVAF C&NEWG (Sustainable Transport)
16/8/22

⁴ see footnote 1.