

WHO DO BUS SERVICES IN TYNE & WEAR ACTUALLY SERVE?

You reported on the 25th January that bus companies were facing a major funding crisis and your readers should expect severe cuts in services, with entire routes disappearing. Your report claimed that the crisis was caused by a fall in passengers over the last two years and the end of the government's 'emergency Covid bailout' (due at the end of March). This taxpayers money was given to the private corporations who own the bus companies in this region (Stagecoach, Arriva, Go North East), who have made vast profits for their shareholders over the last decade.

Your reporter Dan Holland revealed that local council leaders are furious on behalf of local people, who rely on the bus services to transport them to work, schools, health services and pleasure. Council leaders have appealed for government to continue giving more cash to the private bus corporations and also made a plea to local bus company managers to work with them in mitigating the drastic effects this will have on local people. But there's the rub, eh?!

Buses haven't been run by the councils for over 30 years, since 1986, when Thatcher de-regulated our buses and gave them to the privateers. Large national corporations own and run the bus services in this region and, unfortunately, local managers have little leverage in their boardrooms where the main focus will **not** be on the social needs of people but on profits. This has been going on for the last 30 years without much complaint by the people who rely on them.

I'm sure local bus managers, particularly Mr Gilbert from NEBus, will be liaising with Nexus and council leaders to mitigate the impact of any cuts but nothing will change. As Mr Holland reported, the government has already given around £1.5 billion to these corporations in the last 18 months while their buses have been running around half empty, and a further £226.5 million is due to them from the 'Bus Recovery Grant'.

Since 1986 Bus services in this region have never been truly commercial since they rely on (approximately) a third of their annual income from taxpayers' money. You not only pay for the fare at the door but also through your rates and taxes, whether you use buses or not. What say do you have? None: not what service they provide, where they operate, frequency or what they charge and cut.

In the current situation, profits for shareholders of the private companies will determine what service the passengers will receive if any. The real crisis with bus services is the lack of accountability of the corporations who own them, particularly given the need to tackle climate change and air pollution. We've already seen a hike in car use (particularly the second hand market) after the pandemic, but reversing this trend will be difficult when profit is the motive, not the planet.

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