



Craig Whittaker MP

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Response to A Bus Services Bill that works for passengers (campaign) – March 2017

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns about the Bus Services Bill.

You are correct that the Bill as envisaged by the Government when it was introduced aimed to provide local authorities with the means to improve local bus services, through allowing them to set required standards of service with providers, including ticketing and the frequencies of services.

The powers have been designed for use across England. Rural buses play a vital role, and I am confident that the Bill provides significant opportunities for rural areas. The Department for Transport has published specific guidance which sets out these opportunities. While access to franchising powers has been promised to a number of places through devolution deals, these are not just urban areas, and include some predominantly rural areas such as Lincolnshire, Cornwall and the East of England (East Anglia-Cambridge).

Many commercial bus operators deliver an excellent service. The reason for initially restricting which authorities can access franchising powers is to provide the industry with as much certainty as possible about the future of the bus market in a given area, so they can continue to invest and innovate to deliver good services. This does not mean that no other types of area will in future be able to access franchising powers.

Partnership arrangements are, however, available for any area to take up, and the advanced quality partnership and enhanced partnership provisions in the Bill enable local authorities and bus operators to work together to set out and deliver improvements to local bus services in the area.

On funding strategies, I am pleased that the last Spending Review included a commitment to protect the Bus Service Operator's Grant and concessionary travel funding is also committed through this Parliament.

I note your other suggestions and Parliament will be able to debate these and other points during the passage of the Bill.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP