

Date: 19 August 2022



Doug Claringbold
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First Bus, West of England

North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

Sent via email

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Dear Doug,

Stopping cuts to buses in North Somerset

Since I wrote to you a few weeks ago urging you to reconsider the decision to cut several buses First Bus and North Somerset Council has announced the welcome news that the X5 will be partially saved. I'm pleased the concerns of those communities have been listened to and I know that there is work in progress to ensure part of the ward I represent – Locking Castle – still has access to buses following the X5 now stopping at Worle.

However, plans to withdraw the 126 still remain and this will be devastating for these communities who will be left **stranded with no access to public transport.**

On Friday the Government u-turned and announced that it will continue to provide bus companies with funding which had previously been planned to end in September. One of the public reasons First Bus gave for the decision to make these cuts was the lack of funding from October. This issue has now been resolved and **I'm urging First Bus to now do the right thing and publicly commit to continuing the 126.**

The 126 serves many of North Somerset's rural communities – connecting them with Weston-super-Mare – and for many residents this is their only access to public transport. Over 180 residents have contacted me sharing their stories about how the cuts will impact them. Every single one of these stories highlights why First Bus must continue with this route.

I have attached all their comments to this letter to demonstrate why the decision to withdraw from these buses will be disastrous. I've read every single comment, and I hope you and your team make the effort to do so to. You'd have to be soulless to not feel empathy and deep concern for how the lives of these communities will be turned upside down if these plans go ahead.

These comments confirm that some residents will lose their jobs, children will have to walk hours to school or college, and some residents won't be able to get to their health appointments. **How can it be right that now the Government has confirmed funding First Bus cuts off communities.**

I understand the situation in North Somerset is exacerbated by a shortfall in bus drivers, however, when you met to discuss the situation with councillors last week I offered you what I feel is a credible solution. I suggested that First Bus could temporarily reduce its capacity slightly across its full footprint whilst more drivers are recruited and continue to deliver some form of 126. Instead First Bus is deciding to put all the pain of the vacancies solely on the 126 by simply withdrawing the service altogether.

Your answer was that this isn't something you'd consider. Therefore I can only conclude that First Bus is not doing everything in its power to avoid the cuts and is using vacancies as a smokescreen for increasing profit margins.

Time is now running out and communities remain concerned for their jobs and livelihoods.
First Bus has the power to change your mind and Government is now committing extended funding – I urge you to keep the 126.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards



Cllr. Ciaran Cronnelly
North Somerset Councillor for Winterstoke Ward