

Monday 5th August 2013

Dear ShropshireLink user.

We are writing to you to inform you of a decision made on 24th July 2013 by Shropshire Council to cease operating the Shropshire Link service in its current format with effect from 5th October 2013.

The reasons for this difficult decision are:

- The number of people using the service has fallen over the past year, and current figures show that across the county less than an average of six people are now typically using each Shropshire Link bus each day, which means the fleet of nine buses is being used to just 17% of its capacity.
- That means the average cost to subsidise each trip is over £19 for every passenger using the Shropshire Link and this amounts to a subsidy every day of over £2,000.
- Based on this information, a cross-party group of councillors looked at the service in great detail as part of a Task and Finish Group throughout 2012 and recommended that it could not be sustained in its current format.

Councillor Claire Wild, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways and Cabinet Member has said:

“The Task and Finish Group did a lot of really good work and ultimately concluded that Shropshire Link was not sustainable. So we have presented a report on public transport to Cabinet on 24 July which recommended that the Shropshire Link service is redesigned to meet customer needs at a lower cost. This will of course require talking to users and of the service before any further decisions are made. This letter is part of that consultation process on future service provision.”

Despite having to make this difficult decision, Shropshire Council continues its commitment to ensuring that travel arrangements can be made by rural residents who don't have access to any other means of transport. The most effective way to do so should be more locally based and focussed, and may also involve much closer working with the existing Community Transport operators in the County.

A range of options are now being drawn up and we are writing to you to explain further what this could mean for you as a passenger. Future services will aim to continue to offer transport to those looking to access essential services in their closest market town, but there are current trips and destinations that may not be available in the future. Due to the considerable pressures on the available budget for the provision of supported bus services, the following changes to the nature of any future service may be necessary, although this will be explored further as part of service redesign:

Days of availability in the week

Unlike the current service operating on 2 days a week or more, for most users the service will be available on one day a week only

Days of the week of service

Wherever possible, future services will replicate the busiest day of the current service in the week. In many cases this will mean running as at present into the closest market town on market day. There may be passengers who will have to change their current day of travel within a week however.

Times of travel

Any future service will continue to be available “subject to availability” in terms of times of travel. There may be the need for some passengers to change their current times of arrival and return based on this future availability.

Routes

Any future service will concentrate on offering access to a rural resident’s closest market town only. For passengers looking to travel further beyond that point, connections with other fixed route services will be required.

Fares and concessionary travel

For those that currently travel for free on the Shropshire Link due to holding a current bus pass, they will continue to be able to travel free on any replacement service from launch. Fare paying passengers will continue to pay to travel and the flat rate (one fare only) fare table will be confirmed in due course

Membership

As with the Shropshire Link, users will be expected to register with any future operator of the service. It is hoped that current membership details will be shared with any new operator to make this transition as simple as possible for users. There will be no charge for registering for current ShropshireLink users for the first 12 months from launch of any replacement service.

Booking a trip

As with the Shropshire Link, any future service will continue to operate on a pre-booked basis only. Details of the booking line service and the terms and conditions of booking will be made available to users in advance of any changes to the service.

Operator

There will be a change of operator and there may be a number of local operators working together in order to provide any future service.

Vehicles

It is expected that the current Shropshire Link vehicles will not be used as part of any future service, but Shropshire Council will ensure that the vehicles operating any future service will offer full access for those with mobility issues where required. A future service may also be provided on occasion through smaller vehicles and cars as necessary when passenger numbers do not justify the use of a bus.

We trust that the above information shows Shropshire Councils’ on-going commitment to the provision of subsidised rural transport for those with no other means of travel. Although there may be differences in the future service in terms of the times and days of available travel, and also in the operator of any service, we trust that you appreciate the need to make these changes in order to continue to provide affordable bus connections to essential services.

If you have any comments on the above proposals at this stage, please feel free to contact us at (if doing so, it would be helpful if you could include your post code and current Shropshire Link zone number in any correspondence.):

Email - customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk

Via our website – www.shropshire.gov.uk

Post – Customer Support and Assets, Complaints Team, Shropshire Council, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 8HQ

Telephone - 0345 678 9068

We look forward to contacting you in writing again shortly with more detailed information on the range of services operating following the redesign process.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Wild.

Claire Wild - Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways