

## Parish Transport Representative Report based on that given at the Annual Parish Meeting, updated

The main interest in public transport in this village is in our bus, its schedule, its route and above all the question of its continuation. Since privatisation of bus transport in Britain, different companies have, over the years, run our bus. and this has even meant our bus having different numbers. There have briefly been a bus to Woodstock and later a bus to Kidlington centre, but neither survived more than a few months due to lack of use. Over the years we have found a difference in punctuality and reliability between different companies, but I hear (*and I have*) only praise for the Grayline service and their friendly drivers of our current bus **24**, and this has been despite what these drivers have had to deal with over recent months due to road works!

The change to the 2-hourly schedule was disappointing and that tempted some faithful bus users back to their cars. Also, it was inconvenient for the two or three commuter-time travellers to/fro Bicester to have to change to an **S5** at Gosford to get to/fro work, with two bus fares each way. Yet, their travel by bus was at least possible. In the bus-funding situation of then and still today, we must remember to be so grateful that one of the few **BSIP** grants from central government was directed by OCC so that our bus **24** runs at all. If none of you have yet taken the bus in the Bicester direction, I recommend it, as it is an attractive route just for the journey, but also, using it, you can reach all those different shopping areas south of Bicester, whether Tesco or Boots and M&S, or Bicester Avenue, or Bicester Village... as well as Bicester itself of course.

Having said that, our current grant runs only to the end of March 2025 and I have been in touch with our OCC transport officer, Dave Harrison, who wrote that "Oxfordshire County Council has no desire to see bus services decline and will consider all available options to secure continuation of the current **BSIP**-funded services beyond next March." That includes us, ... but who knows? Dave also mentioned that our bus route is considered a "socially and economically necessary service" for which **BSIP** support is defended. At the OCC PTRs' meeting this month I understood that OCC hope to know about their **BSIP** grants by early November. I also learned that OCC Transport Dept. is looking to the future with studies of innovative ideas; e.g., already they are launching one-day and one-week County-wide run-around bus tickets. For another study I shall be reporting on our village bus stops. I hope to be able to update you on new initiatives in the next *Village News*.

Meanwhile, there has been a change of government and already the new Transport Secretary, Louise Haigh, has promised to deliver "the biggest overhaul to transport in a generation." In her first address to the Department for Transport staff on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, she set out her strategic priorities, including:-

- improving performance on the railways and driving forward rail reform
- improving bus services and growing usage across the country
- transforming infrastructure to work for the whole country, promoting social mobility and tackling regional inequality
- delivering greener transport
- better integrating transport networks

see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-secretary-sets-out-5-key-priorities-to-deliver-the-biggest-overhaul-to-transport-in-a-generation>

Yet, for us in Kirtlington, the bottom line for bus-route funding remains "**USE IT OR LOSE IT**". The current system is that **BSIP** funding is only *towards the costs* to private bus companies. So, bus-user numbers matter! Car drivers, even where parking is available, please do **think** whether your journey can be achieved using the bus – whether to help save the bus for our non-driver villagers who depend on it or simply (*and I say urgently*) for the environment, causing just one less car journey on the road.

Other than about the bus, I should also mention discussions between OCC and the rail network representatives for a new **OxRail2040: Plan for Rail strategy** to consider more local route options. Of course, for us that means getting to a station first. Still, the progress of the East West Rail is perhaps of interest to some, with trains for Milton Keynes and Bletchley planned to be running by the end of 2025.

Helen Macbeth  
Kirtlington Parish Transport Representative