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Time for radical bus rethink

ONE of the subjects that has dominated the correspondence I have received recently has been local bus services, where there have been changes to some local routes.

You have heard me talk about jobs and support for businesses, and rural transportation plays a big part in economic growth.

Many local people believe that some of the changes to bus services are to the detriment of public service provision, could lead to fewer people using the bus, more traffic and congestion, and reduce the ability of older and disabled residents to maintain their independence in accessing town centres and shops.

There are currently two ways of running bus services, commercially and by subsidy. Both have flaws. Subsidised services are used when it is not economically viable for a commercial operator to run a local service that Wiltshire Council believes is needed.

There is no obligation on a



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council to subsidise the service and it is right that these subsidised services are regularly reviewed to ensure value for taxpayer funds – some of these services are run at huge cost.

In commercial services a bus operator can charge what they like, run when they like and taxpayer funding is limited to paying for those with a concessionary pass. If a service starts to fall below the company's profit benchmark there is an almost instant gap in the service and local residents are left without a bus service.

So, what would I suggest as an alternative?

I have been speaking to local transport experts and colleagues from other areas of the country and believe we need a radical rethink.

Quality Bus Contracts

work very well in London and Cornwall and are coming to Manchester soon.

Under this scheme, buses are still run by commercial operators but they are expected to run services to the specifications laid down by the Local Transport Board.

The hugely profitable elements of the service simply subsidise the less profitable routes. The commercial company will still be able to make a profit, but it would mean that local people would have more of a say in local bus routes.

I believe that a Quality Bus Contract is a win/win. It reduces the need for bus subsidy, it means a more thought through service, involves the community and has simple, affordable prices and helps encourage the use of public transport.

I believe it's a 'no brainer' but hope to encourage others to agree.

What do you think? Let me know on michelle.donelan.mp@parliament.uk or write to me at 61 New Road, Chippenham, SN15 1ES.