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I'm writing to keep you informed of how we are maintaining local bus services during the current lockdown.

The latest letter from the Government to local authorities and bus companies outlines the principle of reducing services to eliminate empty capacity and to reflect the fall in passenger numbers which has inevitably occurred, whilst preserving links for schools, key workers and other essential travel such as shopping. The local bus will also be many people's way of getting to appointments for COVID vaccinations and the latest Government guidance stresses the need for access to vaccination centres.

Our aim is to preserve the current geographical network coverage. Many Devon services are infrequent and can not realistically be reduced without rendering them unattractive and undermining the requirement to continue catering for essential travel - bearing in mind the continuing need for social distancing, which limits permitted capacity. Operationally, where a vehicle and driver have been allocated for essential services, no substantial saving arises from a partial withdrawal. For these reasons, we are not at present implementing any reductions to County-supported services and we propose to continue this position for as long as sufficient Government funding remains in place.

We have suspended the school and college duplicate buses (funded through the Department for Education) because there is adequate capacity on the main services. There are also some schooltime alterations on some services to reflect the reduction in school travel whilst preserving the links which are still required. This situation will be continuously monitored.

There is also scope for reduced frequencies on the main commercial routes and in stages Stagecoach are implementing some changes in this category. The Government requires bus companies to discuss these changes with the local authority and in this context we are in continuous contact with Stagecoach. Changes so far include reduced frequencies on Service 12 (Newton Abbot - Torquay), Service A in Exeter on Saturdays, the UNI between Exeter City Centre and the University and the withdrawal of the Red Park & Ride. In all cases, travel is still possible along the routes concerned. Full details are available on the Stagecoach web site:

<https://www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/south-west/covid-19-timetables>

The ability of bus companies to maintain services may be subject to staff availability. Where this becomes an issue we will work with bus companies to ensure the best use of available staff.

The Travel Devon web site will also continue to provide advice to the public, including how to get to vaccination centres and, as and when information is available, the lateral flow testing sites:

<https://www.traveldevon.info/bus/>

<https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/travelling-to-hospitalhealth-appointments/travelling-to-your-c-19-vaccination-appointment/>

The community transport sector is largely continuing its range of services:

The Ring & Ride schemes are maintaining services for essential shopping journeys (with the exception of the Exeter and Okehampton schemes who are ensuring passengers have alternatives available). Each scheme can be contacted via their usual telephone numbers. Full details at : <https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/community-transport/ring-and-ride/>

In general, the Community Bus schemes are continuing to operate their regular scheduled timetables. The Coleridge Bus has made minor alterations to reduce waiting times for passengers in Kingsbridge whilst many local shops are closed, departing Peacocks at 1120 and Morrisons at 1130. The Tavistock Community Bus has temporarily suspended all services.

Voluntary Car Schemes are helping patients to attend medical appointments and a number of schemes are involved with helping people to reach vaccination centres. Details are being updated regularly at: <https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/travelling-to-hospitalhealth-appointments/travelling-to-your-c-19-vaccination-appointment/c-19-vaccinations-volunteer-transport/>

I hope this is useful. As always, please get in touch if any queries arise.

For public transport information in Devon, visit: new.devon.gov.uk/travel
Traveline: 0871 200 22 33 www.traveline.info

Concessionary Bus Travel: 01392 383688
nationalbuspass@devon.gov.uk www.devon.gov.uk/nationalbuspass