

This week just gone was designated Catch the Bus Week, an initiative from Greener Journeys to encourage us all to switch from car to bus.

While I applaud the initiative and agree wholeheartedly with the principle behind the initiative it is so difficult to do when our bus services locally are often pretty appalling. It was therefore hardly a surprise that over the weekend I read a news article that highlighted a decline in the number of bus passenger journeys. It is sad but I think many local users would think it predictable. I get a surprising number of complaints about bus provision from a whole variety of users, ranging from parents highlighting failures in the school services through to elderly people stranded at rural bus stops waiting for the bus that never turns up. I understand that bus operators are commercial entities but I also believe that when a company has a major, and as it happens near monopoly, public service contract that should be a moral obligation to cross-subsidise some of the less profitable routes.

Unfortunately that doesn't happen and sadly it is often the rural services and those that are therefore deprived of alternative public transport solutions who end up being most disadvantaged. My colleague Tom and I have spoken about this with Arriva, our local bus provider, and I fear not much has changed but really what we need is not small changes but a bit of a rethink into how services are provided.

Until we have routes that work for local residents, a modern fleet that operates on time, a communication system that provides enough information when there is a problem and an affordable and flexible ticket pricing system then alas, despite all of my support for environmentally friendly and sustainable campaigns, we will struggle to encourage people out of their simple and convenient alternative, their car.