

PRESS STATEMENT: FUTURE OF WIGGLYBUS

Now that Government money has dried up Wiltshire County Council has reviewed Wigglybus to fit with a more stringent budget

In recognition of the essential service that Wigglybus provides, WCC is funding 3 out of 4 buses with new vehicles. Making the best possible use of available resources and minimum disruption was the main item debated at a meeting last week between the community organisation promoting Wigglybus, the Pewsey Vale (Wigglybus) Marketing Group (PVMG) (NOTE 1) and Wiltshire's Public Transport Unit (PTU).

The PVMG were anxious not to forego the environmental aims or service standards that had been achieved over the last seven years. They feared that use (which is at present running between 6000 and 7000 customers per month) might dwindle if the future services were reduced or unable to overcome some weaknesses, which their market research had shown appeared to prevent many people from using Wigglybus. This means taking stock and exploring a range of a range of possibilities, a process which cannot be rushed.

"The more people that can be attracted to the service the better the service that can be enjoyed by everyone, especially those with few transport choices," said Kate Freeman, Chair of Kennet Passengers (NOTE 2). She went on to say that "extensive market research had shown that the next generation of Wigglybuses needed to be developed further to make better connections and fit with people's lifestyles."

Although WCC were sympathetic they wished to start the new contract as soon as possible and could not delay the tendering process to appoint new operators, thus leaving inadequate time to complete the community's mission. The PVMG was clear that given time to complete its review with Kennet Passengers they could come up with a viable proposal to serve people in the Pewsey Vale better.

The joint meeting in Alton Barnes agreed an evolutionary approach which would include the following action:

- 1 The new tender will be done in such a way that the community will be able to influence the new timetable, although it is expected to broadly follow current patterns of service.
- 2 The community will monitor the services closely so that Kennet Passengers can complete its investigations.
- 3 The PTU will fund up to £5,000 to research ways of expanding the market working with community transport and taxi operators.
- 4 The PVMG will discuss proposals with the community of users and potential users prior to submitting a proposal for improvements one year later.

"This is very good news," said John Brewin (from the Pewsey Vale Transport Appraisal Group - PVTAG) (NOTE 3) and chairs the PVMG. "The time is right for Wigglybus to evolve. We never expected a mass transit system for our rural communities but we need to make very sure that Wigglybus does not become a

service of last resort. It was designed to give people from the whole of the Pewsey Vale real choice. With this arrangement I believe we are getting there, and we agree with most of Wiltshire's proposals – but not all of them!"

One sticking point was the transition of the name "Wigglybus" to "Connect 2 Wiltshire". Kennet Passengers' research had revealed 100% brand recognition. Members were amazed by the decision to let go such a valuable asset. John Brewin told the meeting that "Wigglybus is well-known and represents over eight years of investment by the community." He went on to say that "Arguably, Wigglybus is the best known and loved brand name in the Vale of Pewsey, and Trowbridge needs to celebrate what has been accomplished in the Pewsey Vale and be sensitive to what local people want, rather than throw it away to satisfy a pedantic adherence to a strategic marketing concept." He added "Re-branding costs money - and money is a scarce resource that could be far better spent on other elements of the Wigglybus service".

Whilst the important matter is to ensure that Wigglybus meets the needs of as many people as possible to a high standard, the Group would like Wiltshire to accommodate their request to find a way of commemorating their historic brand.

NOTES

1. The Pewsey Vale (Wigglybus) Marketing Group (PVMG) was formed in 2005 to carry out comprehensive community marketing of Wigglybus in the Vale of Pewsey and work in partnership with Wiltshire County Council.
2. Kennet Passengers is a user organisation and members of the PVMG that spear headed extensive market research with WCC
3. The Pewsey Vale Transport Appraisal Group (PVTAG) is the community group set up 10 years ago to find solutions to transport needs in the Pewsey Vale. PVTAG commissioned the original research which led to Wigglybus and encouraged Wiltshire County Council to bid for the first tranche of money from central government to set up the Wigglybus service in 1998.

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