



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 3 SEPTEMBER 2026

During our 15th year of operations we faced a number of challenges, including reduced passenger numbers, down to 4,039 passenger journeys from a high of 6,098 in 2022, inflated costs due to the high price of diesel fuel, vehicle maintenance and the sharp increase in employment costs, and a challenge from WECA to our operating licence which led to us having to run our services free of charge for a short period.

The drop in passenger numbers was caused in part by the loss of the afternoon KES run as the school decided to provide its own minibus service to Wellow and surrounding villages.

We had been operating our service under a 'Section 19' permit from Bath & North East Somerset Council which allowed us to provide transport to Wellow parishioners, however the transfer of the responsibility for Community Transport to the West of England Combined Authority led to the need to operate under a 'Section 22' permit. This allows us in addition to provide transport to 'the general public' and not just members of a group or society. Our new permit was granted in January 2026.

Thanks to a generous grant from Wellow Parish Council we are able to offer free transport to older parishioners who hold a Diamond Bus Pass. It is important to stress that we are not just a 'school bus' and that there are seats available for commuters and shoppers on both morning and afternoon runs to the Odd Down P&R and into Bath.

One area of improvement last year was the increase in group bookings for parishioners to use the bus for their trips and functions with volunteer drivers donating their time so that we maximise the income from hires. Prakriti is our contact for booking the bus for your group.

Our original business model was dependent partly on subsidies from commercial sponsorships and local authority grants to fund approximately half our income. Unfortunately nowadays commercial sponsors are like hens' teeth and our annual WECA subsidy has remained in the region of £5,000 for around 10 years with no recent adjustments for inflation. This situation needs constantly addressing if we are to maintain the financial sustainability of our operations as our parents and passengers will be unwilling or unable to meet the full cost of the service via their season tickets.

Our strategy since starting the Community Bus in 2010 has always been to keep our prices as low as possible as a 'non profit making' service to the community. At the same time we have always recognised the need to make a small surplus every year in order to build up sufficient cash reserves to enable the eventual purchase of a replacement vehicle. Unfortunately the extraordinary drain of our reserves caused by firstly by Covid when we had to endure long periods of up to 5 months with no income, and then by successive major engine repair and replacement bills meant that our cash reserves have been reduced to a level which threatens our short and long term sustainability.

As a consequence we took the decision to suspend our 5.30pm service into Bath which was poorly utilised, generating savings in excess of £2,000

The maintenance of our minibus and the safety of our passengers is our highest priority with regular safety checks carried out by Arleen in Peasedown, servicing and repairs by Dave Cornish in Wellow and the annual MOT carried out by the B&NES workshops at their Keynsham depot. The 16 seater minibus purchased in August 2024 thanks to a grant from WECA has some sensitive systems to allow it to operate in Clean Air Zones. The Ad-blue emission control and the exhaust filter cleaner caused some initial teething troubles but are now working satisfactorily

Our scheduled services were driven during the year mainly by our professional driver Michael Ball, with our team of volunteers providing important holiday and sickness cover and our thanks go to all for their driving skills, reliability and friendly treatment of our passengers

We would like to thank all our volunteer drivers, principally Dave, Tom and Andy (who like Mike and Geoff has renewed his D1 driving licence status), for being available to drive group hires and to provide cover for our professional driver during holidays or illness

I would like to express our gratitude to our sponsors and supporters: Bath Audi and The Fox & Badger. Our financial structure also depends upon the grants we receive from Wellow Parish Council and the WECA regional authority. Without their support we would not be able to provide this important service to our community. In the first half of 2026 we also received additional donations from the Parish Council and our B&NES local councillors Fiona Gourlay and Matt McCabe for which we are especially grateful

A special thank you is due to Matt Small of Berkeley Hall Marshall who provides our statutory accounts free of charge for submission to Companies House, HMRC and the Charities Commission.

My thanks go to the trustees and committee members who served during this year, to Christina who manages the school season ticket reservations, to Prakriti who manages group bookings, to Treasurer Geoff who manages to keep our accounts in order, often from a distance of 2,000 miles in Malta and to Lucy, Graham and Tom who provide strong support.

Most importantly we would like to thank our loyal passengers and parents for patronising our Community Bus, we trust that our service to the village is appreciated and can continue for many more years

Finally, I have served as Chairman of our Community Bus charity since 2013 and I feel that it is not ideal for an organization to continue for 13 years without a change at the top, therefore I will take a leaf out of the politician's handbook and announce my 'intention to stand down' ... not immediately but at some time in the next 12 months when a successor can be persuaded to take over the role of Chairman. Applications will be gratefully received!

Mike Clarkson
Chairman

3 September 2026