

## Annex 1: Independent Assessment Report on Additional Bus Usage Data

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### 1. Summary

- 1.1 The County Council has commissioned Community First Oxfordshire (formerly ORCC) to assess whether the additional bus usage data that had come to light since the consultation in 2015 would have influenced the recommendations proposed in the report on the consultation, had the data been available.
- 1.2 The County Council's chosen methodology to analyse the "value for money" of each subsidised bus route, was based on the "cost per address served uniquely by a subsidised bus". The methodology chosen was thought to be the fairest means to analyse the value of each subsidised bus service and did not include an assessment of usage data.
- 1.3 Furthermore, the updated bus usage data is incomplete – almost 40% of routes have little or no data - and therefore does not offer a full picture of bus patronage. The data does, however, give a better sense of bus usage for some bus routes, which may help inform the bus user, parish and town councils and community groups who are holding exploratory discussions with bus operators on possible responses to loss of subsidy.
- 1.4 Finally, the Council decided to remove all subsidies. Therefore, for these three reasons – the exclusion of usage data in the "value for money" methodology, the poor quality of that data in terms of coverage and quality and the decision to remove all subsidies – we conclude that the additional bus usage data would not have influenced a different outcome had it been available.

### 2. Introduction

- 2.1 In June 2015, the County Council carried out a public consultation on subsidised bus services and dial a ride services. The consultation document put forward two options for subsidised bus services: (1) to withdraw all subsidies or (2) to withdraw £2.3m of subsidies. The public consultation received a high number of responses (just under 3,000). Because of financial pressures, the Cabinet decided to withdraw all bus subsidies on 20 July 2016.
- 2.2 The Cabinet also agreed to prioritise bus services by focusing on the number of households which are served only by a subsidised bus service (i.e. the number of households within a 400m radius to a subsidised bus route stop) rather than current patronage. This prioritisation would only come into effect if the County Council identified an alternative source of funds to continue bus service subsidies.

- 2.3 During the consultation a number of individuals asked for bus usage data. Although not used in the methodology, the limited patronage data available was shared with the public as Annex Xb.
- 2.4 In March 2016, the County Council became aware of the existence of additional bus usage data of which it was unaware during the consultation period. It is this data on which the County Council are now seeking comments from the public. The online consultation on the new data runs from 14 March 2016 to 18 April 2016. All relevant documents, including the full spreadsheet of bus usage data are publically available through the consultation portal.
- 2.5 The County Council commissioned Community First Oxfordshire (formerly ORCC) to undertake an independent assessment of whether this additional bus usage data would have influenced the recommendations proposed in the report on the subsidised bus service and dial a ride public consultation. As well as this assessment, Community First Oxfordshire will provide a separate report based on the response to the current online consultation on bus usage data.

### 3. Analysis of additional bus usage data and chosen methodology

#### Was the new data analysed in an appropriate way?

- 3.1 The original methodology (set out in Annex W of the consultation papers) was to rank potential demand for bus services based on number of households within a 400 metre radius of a bus stop served only by subsidised services, excluding those served by a commercial service. The analysis was repeated for 3 different time-periods when the service would be needed by different categories of people (peak, off peak, evening/weekend). The services were then ranked by cost per potential user of a subsidised bus service. Bus usage data was not used in the original methodology. The cost ranking was used to place services into high risk of closure, medium or low risk.
- 3.2 Following the consultation, the County Council collated the available bus usage data over 2 years (October 2013 to September 2015). The council sets out a number of caveats about the quality, consistency, measurement methods, and completeness of the available data in their explanatory annex *Available Patronage Data*. These caveats raise major questions about the utility of this data. The council also assumes *‘that the data provided by the operators is complete and correct.’*
- 3.3 The table below summarises the patronage data for the 118 subsidised bus services from the full spreadsheet of additional data that was made available to the public on the council’s website:  
<https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/Subbusae/consultationHome>.  
 Not all bus services provided data for each time period, and in some cases no data was provided.

Table 1

Time period	Yes (Num of Routes)	No (Num of Routes)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Apr15-Sep15 Data	89	29	75.4	24.6
Oct14-Mar15 Data	69	49	58.5	41.5

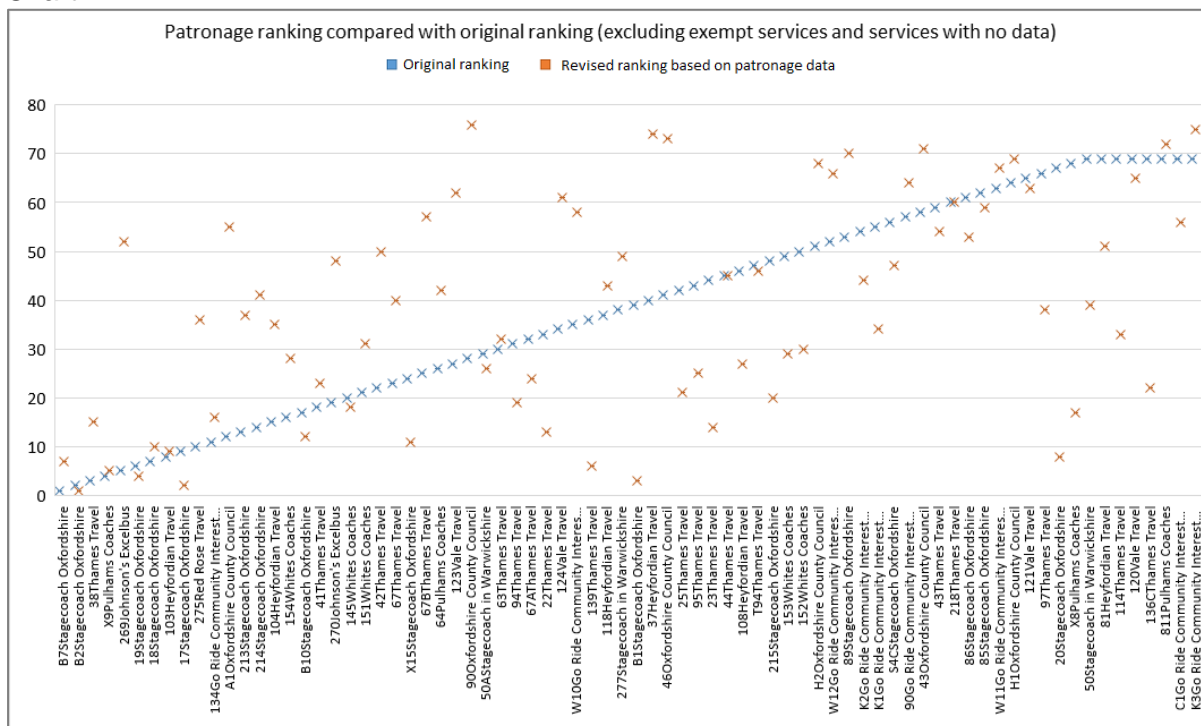
Apr14-Sep14 Data	71	47	60.2	39.8
Oct13-Mar14 Data	59	59	50	50
<b>Total for Oct13-Sep15</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>39</b>

- 3.4 The method described in the *Available Patronage Data* is clear and appropriate to the task. The full spreadsheet is also clear and well-constructed for analysing data availability, patronage and cost data.

**Would the new data make a difference to (a) the methodology used and (b) the recommendations put forward?**

- 3.5 The data processing method used for the available patronage data is set out on the last page of the explanatory annex *Available Patronage Data*. The method deals with incomplete and inconsistent data as well as possible and follows a logical and clear approach.
- 3.6 The council reports that “*The table indicates that for the services listed, the ranking based on patronage is considerably different from the original consultation ranking*”. The charts below (based on the patronage data on the Council’s website) show that the ranking based on subsidised passenger usage is very different from the ranking based on the original method for many services. The orange crosses in chart 1 show the ranking based on patronage alone compared with the original ranking shown by blue crosses.

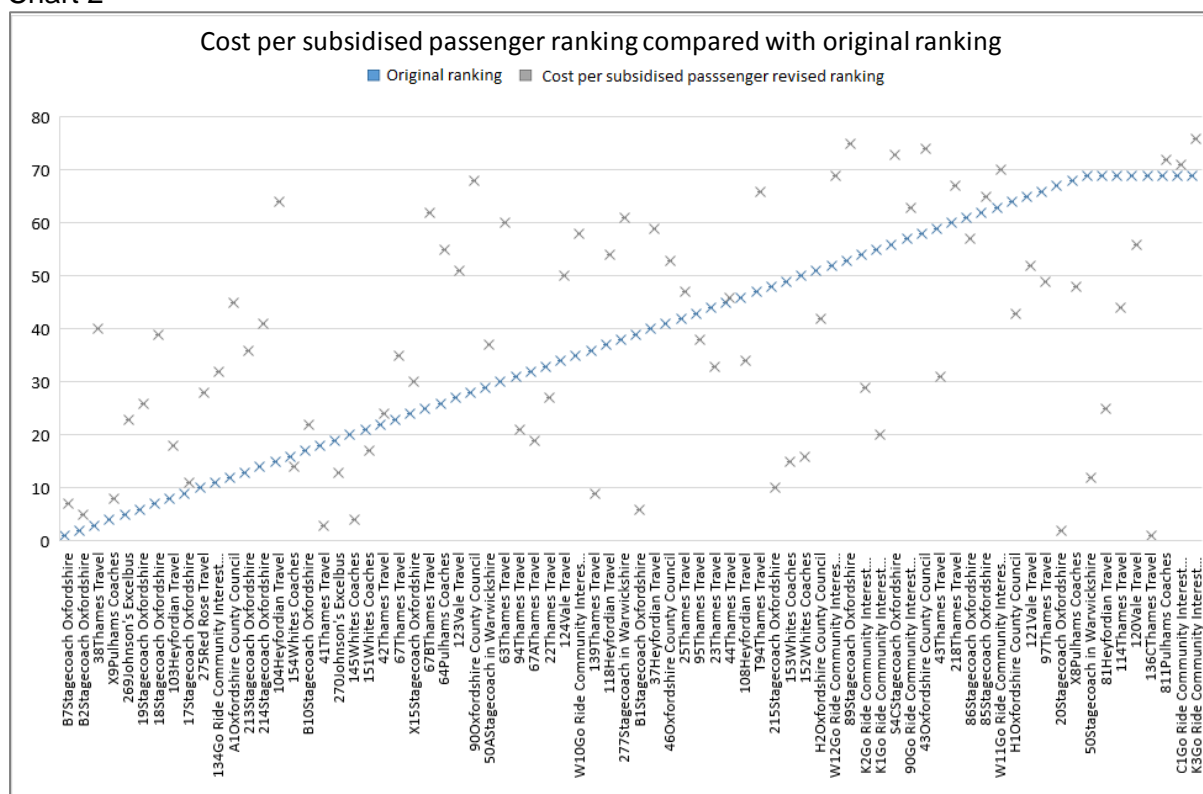
Chart 1



- 3.7 The grey crosses in chart 2 show the ranking based on cost per subsidised passenger compared with the original ranking shown by blue crosses. The charts

show that 38% of the 76 services for which there is data would rank more than 20 points higher or lower based on the patronage data. 18 services (24%) would rank better than the original ranking, and 22 services (29%) would rank worse than the original ranking. This is also set out in a table in the Council's explanatory annex detailing the impact on each service for which there is data.

Chart 2



- 3.8 The poor quality of the patronage data, the many caveats on its use and the assumptions made in order to analyse it, raise questions about the feasibility of using the data as a basis for prioritising services. Community First Oxfordshire spot-checked the original data files and agrees with the caveats on use of the data in the council's explanatory note regarding incomplete and inconsistent data, data merged across services, and questions about different measurement methods.

## 4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Given the poor quality of the bus patronage data, the Council could not have incorporated it in its methodology and its availability would not have made a difference to the recommendations put forward under Option 2 (where some subsidies were removed to prioritise services). Furthermore, in the end, the Council decided to cut all bus subsidies, a decision that would not have been influenced by the availability of this additional bus patronage data.

Community First Oxfordshire April 2016