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Bookings now being taken for on-demand rural bus service

Cheshire West and Chester Council is to launch an on-demand rural bus service – to help improve connectivity in some of the more remote parts of the borough.

The new 'itravel' pilot scheme will cover a wide area including Helsby, Frodsham, Delamere and Acton Bridge, as well as some other villages, where no commercial services are available.

The bus service can be booked online, using a mobile phone app, or phone call, which allows a resident, or group of residents, to request a bus for a specific journey.

The service is not tied to a fixed route, allowing for quick and efficient shared trips without lengthy detours or fixed schedules, however it will link to train stations to further enhance connectivity for these areas.

Two branded 16-seater 'mini' buses will be available between 7am and 7pm, Monday to Friday, with low-floor access.

If the pilot service is successful, feedback will be used in revisions of the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan to roll the scheme out to other parts of the borough.

The Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Highways, Councillor Karen Shore said: "This is a really exciting and innovative pilot scheme with bookings being taken from Monday 24 July and the service launching on 31 July.

"The council continues to support the fixed-route bus network provided by commercial operators but unfortunately, commercial services are not always able to make some rural routes cost-effective. This is an area the council would like to see improve.

"This demand-responsive solution will help enable people of all ages to attend medical appointments, access further education and training or go shopping.

“The new bus service will help make more remote areas of our borough more accessible, reduce car dependency, connect communities and reduce transport related social isolation, as well as contribute to the council’s own low-carbon aspirations.

“We will be monitoring this pilot carefully, as we are optimistic it could offer a way forward for the future of rural bus services in west Cheshire.”

This £1.075m, three-year pilot service has been funded by the Department for Transport’s Rural Mobility Fund.

The ‘itravel’ service will launch at 7am on Monday 31 July with an introductory single £2 flat fare to mirror the Government’s national scheme. People aged 19 and under can travel half fare.

Information on how to book the service can be found on the Council’s website at <https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/itravel>.

Alternatively, ring 0330 678 1545, between 7am and 7pm, Monday to Friday.

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