

## Villagers living just eight miles from Bristol 'isolated' if First Bus service axed

The Y5 is the only service linking Pucklechurch to Broadmead



West of England metro mayor Dan Norris talks with residents, including South Gloucestershire Council opposition Lib Dem group leader Cllr Claire Young, at the Big Choices On Buses meeting at Yate parish hall on Monday, August 1 (Image: WECA)

Hundreds of villagers will be left “completely isolated” if an under-threat, lifeline bus route is axed, residents fear. Scores of people packed a public meeting held by metro mayor Dan Norris in Yate on Monday night (August 1), including many from Pucklechurch campaigning to save their only service to Bristol, the Y5.

Mr Norris, who heads the [West of England Combined Authority](#) (Weca), which is responsible for the region’s strategic transport, announced on his website on July 18 that First planned to cut the route, along with the No 5, from Downend to Bristol, and the Y4 and Y5 between Yate and the city. The operator has called this “speculation” ahead of a network review being completed, but the firm’s boss told a South Gloucestershire Council meeting last month that some services would have to be withdrawn from October when the Government’s covid funding ends amid a driver shortage crisis and spiralling costs.

This week’s meeting at [Yate](#) parish hall was the first in a series of two-hour brainstorming workshops called Big Choices on Buses where residents are invited to help the Labour Weca mayor thrash out ideas to save vital routes. Several residents who live in the town said they did not want to travel just to Bristol city centre but that recent cuts meant they could not get to places like Fishponds, Downend, Southmead and Kingswood.

Others said parts of north Yate were effectively cut off despite more homes in the pipeline. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service at the meeting, Pucklechurch Parish Council chairwoman Gail Boyle said: “If the Y5 is cut, the only bus through the village will be the one to Bath, the 620.

“Before the pandemic our bus service ran once an hour but since then it has reduced to once every two hours and quite a few of those do not turn up. This means that if you’ve gone to Bristol or you’re a student at college, you can be stranded for four hours if it doesn’t arrive.

“A lot of residents tell me that what they fear most is being isolated from their families, and this could happen with the loss of the service. Funding for buses is concentrated in urban areas and we just want our fair share for rural communities.



Metro mayor Dan Norris at the meeting on Monday night (Image: Adam Postans)

“If you don’t service rural areas, they become unsustainable – they are suddenly places you cannot develop and where people just go to die. Why would young people move to a rural area without services?”

She said unreliability was the main reason stopping people taking the bus. “We understand there is a driver shortage but people have been pushed back into their cars,” Ms Boyle said.

“Kids have been getting late notices from school because the bus hasn’t been on time. It’s a catch 22 – they want us to use the buses so they are profitable but they are so unreliable that you can’t use the bus if you want to do anything realistic with your life.”

She said the solution would be a community minibus on a circular route around the local villages to get people to transport hubs at Yate or Lyde Green where buses would then take passengers on to their destinations. “This would be regular, reliable and simple,” she added.

### **'Unreliable' service**

The meeting involved residents grouped around tables for an hour to discuss the main problems and suggest solutions, with the metro mayor going around each before asking them in turn to share their ideas with the room. Speaking at the meeting, one woman said: “Pucklechurch will be completely isolated without the Y5.

“There are about 3,000 people in the village, about half of whom won’t be able to get anywhere without the bus. A shuttle bus to Emersons Green would be helpful.”

A Yate resident said: “The main problems are the unreliability and not knowing if the bus is going to come. The service is good when it does run but you can’t rely on it.”

Mr Norris said afterwards: “Many people told me on Monday night how important their bus services are to them, especially to get to work and the shops. That matters to people in Yate and the rural and semi-rural communities surrounding the town.



**Dan Norris speaks to residents at the meeting in Yate (Image: Adam Postans)**

“Services like the Y5 are run commercially. Unfortunately when a bus company decides to stop a service there is not much that can be done. However what was very encouraging about the Big Choices meeting was how open people were to change.

“There was a lot of support for the idea of smaller minibuses and shuttle buses getting people onto a main route. All this is important information that will feed into the review of buses across the area.”

Asked about concerns over the Y5, which goes from Chipping Sodbury to Bristol via Yate, Westerleigh, Pucklechurch, Staple Hill and Fishponds, a First West of England spokesperson said: “As a condition of transitional funding arrangements, bus operators must undertake full network reviews to assess the viability of all routes once funding ends in the autumn. This is currently taking place in West of England but we must stress no decisions have been made and it would be inappropriate to comment on speculation at this stage.

“Like all other bus operators in the UK, we must adapt our networks to match the post-pandemic demand for services.”