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OXFORD BUS COMPANY TO WITHDRAW PICKMEUP SERVICE FOLLOWING TWO YEAR PILOT SCHEME

Oxford Bus Company will be withdrawing the PickMeUp service after operation on Saturday 20th June, it confirmed today.

The decision was not taken lightly and comes at the end of a two-year pilot scheme of the innovative ride sharing service. Oxford Bus Company worked hard to establish the service and has exhausted all external funding avenues to make it viable.

PickMeUp was launched in June 2018 as the largest service of its kind in the UK to improve connectivity in the eastern arc of Oxford by complementing traditional bus routes. It enabled passengers in eastern Oxford to summon buses to pick them up on a street corner of their choice, to go to a bespoke destination. More than 38,000 people downloaded the app and more than 300,000 journeys were made on the service. However, the service did not reach the commercial milestones required to make it sustainable beyond the two-year pilot, even though not all demand could be met.

Oxford Bus Company required third party support from local authorities and the business community to make PickMeUp viable as a three-way partnership. Unfortunately, local authority support was not made available and passenger numbers could not reach required targets as congestion slowed buses down to 9mph just at the time demand was at its greatest. Whilst some businesses have been very supportive of the service, others decided not to support it as they did not see it as their responsibility to do so for the greater good of Oxford. Oxford Bus Company announced a review of the service and a customer survey six months ago and further explored all funding options but could not find a solution.

The company will be doing everything possible to minimise the impact on customers and colleagues. Any unused credit on customer accounts will be refunded after 20th June. PickMeUp employs 25 people and Oxford Bus Company are actively seeking to redeploy them to other areas of the business where possible.

Phil Southall, Oxford Bus Company Managing Director said: “Unfortunately despite exploring every funding avenue available we have been not able to secure the financial support required to maintain the service.

“We would like to thank everyone who has travelled with the PickMeUp service and our superb colleagues who have worked with us throughout the pilot scheme. It is no reflection on their hard work that we have had to finish operating the service. We are also grateful to everyone who has travelled on the service. I’d also like to thank our corporate partner The Oxford Science Park for its steadfast financial and promotional support, and Horspath Parish Council.

“We are aware that we have many loyal customers who will be inconvenienced, and we are sorry it has not been possible to maintain the

service. PickMeUp was a great innovation by Oxford Bus Company, but unfortunately, we were left with no choice but to withdraw the service due to unsustainable losses and not enough support coming forward. We feel that we have played our part in trying to provide an innovative solution for the City and launched PickMeUp in response to requests from local authorities and the business community to improve connectivity in eastern Oxford. However, regrettably the service did not receive the backing required to make it work long-term.

“We have taken a lot of learnings from PickMeUp and our parent company Go Ahead Group are looking to introduce the service in other areas of the country where it could prove to be more viable. We believe with the right support a ride sharing service can be part of the solution to reducing congestion, but at this stage it has not been successful in Oxford. This may change in the future if congestion management measures are introduced and a Workplace Parking Levy could top up the funding required to make it work and reduce congestion so that more demand can be satisfied. Greater public sector support will be required if this is to come about.”

The Oxford Bus Company has kept the people of Oxford moving since 1881. Our services now span the width and breadth of Oxford and also take passengers to Heathrow and Gatwick Airports. In addition, our City Sightseeing Oxford hop-on, hop-off open topped bus company provides enjoyable tours of Oxford. And our sister companies, Thames Travel and Carousel Buses provide convenient travel services across South Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire respectively.

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