

## Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 39	BCT 39
Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru	Welsh Local Government Association

### Consultation questions

**Question 1** –How would you describe the current condition of the bus and community transport sectors in Wales?

- The bus and community transport sectors in Wales are under strain and not fulfilling their potential. The service is patchy. In urban areas, generally the routes are commercially viable and therefore a more comprehensive bus network is available. In rural areas, services are usually subsidised and these services are under greatest threat. The reduction in rural services impact disproportionately on specific age groups such as pensioners.
- There is a lack of consistency with regards to service and quality across Wales and the future financial picture for local authorities is likely to result in a further cut to local authority funding for bus services in Wales. A number of local authorities such as Wrexham and Neath Port Talbot have ended their subsidies to local bus operators and a number of other local authorities have reduced the level of subsidy and are consulting on further reductions. For example, Rhondda Cynon Taff cut its local bus support budget by £400k in 2015/16 and is looking to reduce a further £100k in 2016/17. Without subsidy, bus operators will be forced to make the decision as to whether they can afford to continue to offer the level of service which may result in axing of the route or a reduction in the frequency of service. This makes the service less attractive as a means of transport.
- Bus services are delivered by a number of operators across Wales from the large operator with a large fleet such as Stagecoach through to local operators with a small number of vehicles. As a result investment in the fleet varies resulting in a different user experience across Wales.
- Fares also differ across Wales, with some operators increasing fares above inflation but in others operators such as Stagecoach have frozen their fares (last increased in April 2014 but held throughout 2015).

**Question 2** – why do you think the number of bus services and the number of bus passengers is declining in Wales?

- Reduced WG and local authority funding has led to less resources being allocated to provide ongoing support to non-commercial services that are vital to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Wales.
- Bus services and the vital service they perform for many people in terms of access to services, social networks etc are not in many instances, given due consideration when decisions are made regarding for example location of services, closure of services etc.
- In many areas, the bus is not seen as a viable alternative to the car. Travelling by bus does not offer the flexibility, immediacy and convenience that today's commuters/passengers demand.

**Question 3** – what do you think is the social, economic and environmental impact of recent changes in bus and community transport service levels?

- In many areas of Wales, bus transport is not a viable alternative to the car. As a result, there is an over reliance on cars with the associated environmental impacts.
- In rural areas, the lack of an alternative to the car can result in higher than expected car ownership levels. Running more than one car per household becomes a necessity rather than a luxury and the expense of more than one car directly impacts on the amount of personal disposable income available in the household for other expenses.
- The scrapping of routes or changes to the frequency will have impacted disproportionately on specific sectors of society namely older people and young parents without access to a second car. A report by Age Cymru in 2013, highlights how many older people rely on bus transport not only to access vital services but for social interaction. Without services, many older people choose not to travel. This can have a huge impact on their wellbeing.
- In the larger more urban areas of Wales the bus network is more comprehensive which enables people to use the buses to access places of employment. However, in those areas less well served by a frequent bus service it becomes increasingly difficult to use bus transport to access employment opportunities. The cost of fares can also be prohibitive and disproportionately impacts on those in poverty or on a low income.

**Question 4** –what do you think the Welsh Government should do to support bus and community transport in Wales?

- The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act should improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Decisions regarding the bus and community transport sector should be considered against the sustainable development principles. One of these principles is collaboration and the WLGA would welcome greater collaboration across WG portfolios as an improved bus and community transport sector has benefits for social services, health, climate change and economic development. Integrated ticketing has been piloted in the past but has not been progressed.
- There is a lack of strategic direction from WG. The National Transport Finance Plan makes reference to bus and community transport together with a number of schemes listed in the delivery schedule. There is little detail on the schemes including who will be involved in delivering, funding available etc with statements such as “Provide funding to support socially necessary services”. There also appears to be little integration between bus services and rail and active travel – different modes of transport which should complement each other.
- We would like to see greater investment in bus and community transport, both capital and revenue funding and for this funding to be on a stable basis over a number of years to encourage the necessary investment in infrastructure, fleet and network.
- Continued multi-year support for Traveline Cymru would be welcomed, enabling the organisation to invest to improving the service they offer to public and ensure that they can keep up to date with the latest information technologies.
- Currently, in England a Green Bus Fund helps bus companies and local authorities in England to buy new low carbon buses. Its main purpose is to support and speed up the introduction of hundreds of low carbon buses across England. There is no equivalent in Wales and if the Welsh Government is committed to climate change targets then such a fund should be considered.
- We would welcome a closer working relationship with WG on all aspects of support to bus and community transport in Wales as WG share the same aspirations as local government to improve bus and community transport in Wales. Specifically, local government has a key role to play in the delivery of the Metro for south east Wales and further developments regarding the City Region/City Deal for the same area. Given this role, it is clear that closer dialogue with WG would be advantageous for both parties.
- Improvements to the bus network infrastructure such as bus shelters/bus lanes/bus stations could be considered as part of WG regeneration funding.

**Question 5** –what do you think Welsh local authorities should do to support bus and community transport services?

- Local authorities play an important role in supporting bus and community transport services in Wales, from administering the Concessionary Fares Scheme to implementing bus infrastructure. However, in the future individual local authority involvement in supporting bus services will be subject to the availability of resources, both financial and human.
- Local authorities are also subject to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The Act establishes Public Service Boards for each local authority area and these PSBs could have a role in discussing proposals to cut funding to bus services so that all service providers can assess the impact and if appropriate consider funding specific routes. For example, reduction in funding may lead to the axing of a service to a hospital; therefore the Primary Care Trust may consider it necessary to provide funding for the route. That said, PSBs will need prioritise the issues for consideration as there are many issues such as bus funding which could advocate a PSB involvement.
- If given sufficient notice, local authorities could explore more fully alternatives if bus services are to be cut such as services provided by the CT sector or in a small number of cases, there may be active travel alternatives to bus services.
- Improvements to the bus network infrastructure such as bus shelters/bus lanes/bus stations could be considered as part of development planning or regeneration funding.
- In the current financial climate, it will be extremely difficult for councils to find additional funding for bus services. Local government could have a role in raising awareness of wider social, environmental and economic benefits of bus transport with partner organisations and to work with partners to identify solutions to potential reductions in the network.
- Local authorities in the south east have introduced an outcome based quality standard in order to push up standards and this approach is being considered by other areas in Wales. However as the impact of the other cuts in funding have hit the pence per kilometre payments are actually lower in 2015/16 (with the highest quality outcomes being met) than was the case in 2014/15. With this scenario there is clearly a lack of incentive on behalf of the operators to drive up standards. The standard of service varies across Wales.
- A number of local authorities operate Integrated Passenger Transport Units which co-ordinate the transport operated by local authorities across a number of service areas such as education and social services. Subject to resources, there may be opportunities for further consideration of such units in local authorities or across local authorities.

**Question 6** - what do you think about proposals to devolve bus registration powers to Wales? How should these be used?

- We understand that the Traffic Commissioners Office is in agreement with a Traffic Commissioners Wales Office, however we would stress that any changes to current arrangements need to ensure that the service is comparable if not better than the service currently received.

**Question 7** - please tell us whether you think further powers to regulate the bus industry in Wales are required and why?

- Regulation on its own will not necessarily bring about an improved bus industry in Wales. It also requires stable funding and long term commitment and investment by all parties as referenced in the response to Q4.
- Regulatory powers will offer an additional option that could be used. We would advocate that regulation should be considered in partnership with WG, councils and operators working together. There is not a one size fits all; approaches need to be tailored to the differing requirements across Wales

**Question 8** - what other action can be taken to ensure that bus and community transport services meet the needs of people in Wales?

Please tell us anything else you would like to mention this topic, thank you for contributing to our inquiry.