

Economic Development and Transport Committee

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Economic Inactivity in Wales
Briefing note prepared for the Economic Development and Transport Committee
by
The Community Transport Association Wales

The Community Transport Association –Wales is grateful to the Welsh Assembly for this opportunity to comment fully and frankly on our perspective of Economic Inactivity within Wales. In this paper, we hope to explore the potential for the Community Transport Sector to assist in appropriate transport development to provide innovative transport solutions.

Our research into this subject, in order to prepare this paper has led us to understand that there is some evidence to suggest that the level of incapacity in Wales, (South Wales Valley's/West Wales), is probably no greater than that of men of the same age in other parts of the UK but for any given incapacity in Wales, there is a tendency to be registered as permanently sick, (claiming incapacity benefit), rather than being in work. We understand that this is probably due, in part, to lack of suitable jobs and training. The reality of the above is that a significant group of the population, -unskilled, middle-aged, in poor health and predominantly male have become detached from the labour market. Long-term action is needed to tackle the root of the problem. The prevalence of ill health has far reaching consequences for the economy, social structure and well being of communities.

Transport is a fundamental part of everyday life.

The WAG's Transport Framework for Wales proposes measures to increase walking and cycling for short journeys, especially travel to school or work or in conjunction with other forms of transport. Also we are part way through the five year capital funding programme which was launched in 2001 to support local authority projects which ensure integrated transport provision, including investment to improve bus and rail services, provide cycling facilities and improve the pedestrian environment.

In the United Kingdom, the links between transport and health have become increasingly important. At the World Health Organisation (WHO) conference on Environment and Health, held in London in June 1999, a declaration was signed by all 51 nations of the WHO European region. The declaration (see www.who.dk/london99/welcomeE.htm) commits governments to promote health in transport policies.

(Health Impact Assessments HIA's should include both qualitative and quantitative data, and should impact on decision-making).

It is our strongly held view that an overarching policy for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), should be to ensure the equality of travel opportunity for all. Transport provides people with access to everyday activities such as shopping, and life opportunities, training or job prospects and to health facilities and social agencies such as housing or benefit offices. Communities have a wide and disparate range of needs and demands for transport, early engagement with the community can help to ensure that such demands can be properly examined and realistic aspirations established within the prevailing constraints. Many studies have proven that people with the lowest incomes suffer from transport poverty, which in turn creates social exclusion.

In its broadest definition 'Transport' should include walking and cycling as well as the use of private vehicles, public and community transport and goods vehicles. Transport can have both positive and negative effects on health. Positive effects include; recreation, exercise, and access to employment, education, shops, social support networks, health services and the countryside. Negative effects include: pollution, traffic jams, noise, stress, and anxiety; danger; land loss; planning blight and community severance.

The Community Transport Association Wales (CTAW), is concerned about all of the foregoing issues but of particular concern to us as an organisation are access and mobility issues. Access to education, work, shops, healthcare and social networks almost always require transport. Those without a car have reduced access generally, and specifically to facilities were designed assuming car use, such some hospitals and out of town supermarkets, obviously for residents of rural areas, such as those of much of Wales, these problems are exacerbated. However even in car owning households, the elderly, children and women are less likely to have access to car use. People with disabilities, are particularly disadvantaged by both financial and physical barriers to mobility. Public, community and innovative transport clearly have a role to play in assisting modal shift from cars. Some people's economic opportunities and lifestyles are threatened because of society's overall dependence on the car. Job opportunities are increasingly available in dispersed locations, often with 24-hour shift working. Transport corridors and transport services where they do exist are often becoming less frequent, less reliable and less affordable as overall demand falls. At the same time many local shops and other facilities such as post offices are closed, adding further demands to travel that can impose real barriers to the very people who are most dependent. Transport poverty is created, as is spatial social exclusion.

In the West Wales and the Valleys Objective 1 area there are high levels of social deprivation, 82 of the 100 most deprived wards in Wales are in this particular geographical region, (Welsh Office Index of Socio-Economic Conditions (www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/welshoff/)). It is our understanding that it is this particular geographical area that presents the WAG with the most difficult transport/economic inactivity issues.

One of the most positive signs for the potential for community transport development in this area

however is the strong tradition of voluntary activity, mutuality, and self help. The same Welsh Office document identified that at the time of publication there were over 11,000 voluntary and community organisations classified in this area, working at the local authority or more local level as well as larger organisations operating on a regional or national basis. Such organisations, reflecting the diversity of people and interests, are responding to social need and economic disadvantage. They represent a powerful resource in promoting social inclusion and restructuring economic and social well being. However as CTAW have endeavoured to state in a number of responses to recent WAG documents, in the more Rural areas sparsity of population makes the delivery of effective and comprehensive voluntary sector services harder to achieve than in the more densely populated urban areas. This is an issue on which we all -statutory voluntary and other bodies need to work together in order to establish a meaningful constructive way forward.

Effects of social exclusion/isolation in Wales are hard to quantify, but elsewhere research has shown that some people save up trips to incur less travel cost. Access for these people to good quality fresh food and cheap food is limited. Unexpected trips to health care or the pharmacy may prove too expensive. Travel horizons to search for jobs or training may be severely restricted because of lack of good travel information or lack of life experience beyond the immediate environment, these issues added to lack of motivation and possible health problems can lead us to understand why some individuals lack the motivation to seek work. If they can be given the confidence to travel by the development of community owned and based transport schemes their confidence to travel is likely to both develop and increase. Again research has proven that a lack of confidence is a barrier to travel

Although the core road and rail infrastructure in Wales is in place it is constrained by the topography of large areas of rural Wales. CTAW is committed to working at grass roots level to ensure that it will not always be the case that in the most peripheral, rural and sparsely populated parts of Wales, car ownership is the only option.

Transport does not exist in its own right. It provides the circulation system around which social and economic life can flow. To be truly effective it has to be at the centre of a community's demands and aspirations, meeting their needs in the most effective and sustainable manner.

There must be a commitment by the WAG to genuine engagement with communities to understand their needs and requirements. Needs assessment with individual communities needs to be undertaken. However as we have remarked upon in previous correspondence with the WAG getting information to and information from those people we most need to help (and who most need our help), is fundamental to understanding individual areas problems, needs and aspirations. Again we would stress the difficulties involved with communicating with people who firstly are not accustomed to communicating and secondly those who are not aware that they are excluded or disadvantaged. Again we will stress our view that the WAG needs to be more proactive in seeking comments/views and opinions from those residents of Wales who are the silent majority but whose needs are most likely the greatest, with regard to being able to undertake a journey, (for any of the reasons given above), independently.

New approaches to transport provision will be necessary in order to have a real impact on addressing social exclusion and other issues relating to a lack of available transport within Wales. Because of the complexity of individual requirements and the length of the journeys that need to be undertaken, smaller scale community-based innovative transport projects and schemes are likely to be the best way forward. Bespoke schemes for individual communities are likely to be necessary. The immediate problem however, is as stated, to identify the best way of communicating with those people within these communities who are in the most need. Working at this local level will allow us to identify and encourage the development of local 'community' transport services based on each community's demands/requirements. The main theme that this committee would like to see addressed is of course the issue of getting people who are out of work or those with poor employment records back into employment. We made the point earlier in the paper, if such individuals have the confidence to travel it is likely that their self-confidence and self-motivation will increase and hopefully eventually enable independent travel.

If the WAG feel that this is the way forward for this particular transport issue then it will need to be aware that there is likely to be some cost associated with the provision of the service if the schemes are to have as part of their core proposal, the provision of transport to enable access to job opportunities which are likely to be away from the immediate area of the scheme. This requirement would need to be built into the initial proposals (if it were felt necessary, or identified as a need by the community, or was a necessary requirement of the WAG, in order to obtain funding). In order to establish confidence in such services then funding, (which would need to be for both capital and revenue expenditure), would need to be relatively long term say 5-7 years this would provide a sustainable planning tool if linked in with the contract duration for the local bus service network in the area of provision. This would enable better planning of area wide transport 'networks' throughout Wales. CTAW are not suggesting that the services should be in anyway tied in to the local authority in which they operate, but it is our experience that if service changes are planned and all services are reviewed at the same time it leads to increased ability to achieve sustainable planning and ultimately to less potential for confusion/more confidence, for the travelling public.

CTAW are of the opinion that in some areas an enhanced provision of the existing Country Car schemes would assist in providing some transport for socially excluded individuals. In many rural areas these schemes are up and running but they could be developed to provide more journeys and regular journeys for people who had no alternative. One vehicle could provide three individuals with a journey to and from work for example. We are aware that the schemes as they currently exist do not have much flexibility, but they do have huge potential to fill a hole in the transport network at large. Some of the more isolated communities may never have sufficient demand for say conventional 16-seat community bus; in these areas a community/social car scheme is therefore more likely to succeed. It should be an aim of the WAG to have some accessible vehicles available in each of the current schemes operating areas even if a generic improvement to the service they currently provide is not supported.

There is very robust evidence of the benefits of access to employment on the health of individuals, families and communities. In the United Kingdom, car travel accounts for more than 60% of journeys to work, over four times as many as rail and bus combined. However, 55% of economically inactive people

live in households without a car, and unskilled manual workers are 10 times as likely as professional and managerial staff to lack access to a car. In the absence of good public transport networks, this greatly reduces the ability for longer term unemployed people to return to work and means that unskilled workers are much more vulnerable to large scale job losses. (www.who.dk/eprise/main)

For solutions to transport problems in Wales to be viable there needs to be effective collaboration between all those with an interest in transport, the potential for these partnerships extends to everyone with an interest in/commitment to transport; government departments, local authorities, the health sector, planners, education, schools colleges, employers, recreation providers, voluntary organisations etc. The prerequisite for effective partnership working includes a shared understanding (common goals), an approach that generates interest and shares resources among the collaborative partners, the concept of combined planning of initiatives, and linkages to the community as fundamental to the collaborative process.

CTAW believe that Improved transport provision especially for rural Wales should be placed higher on the WAG's agenda. Transport needs within Wales need to be addressed at a Strategic level, CTAW have commented previously that Transport should have been highlighted within the draft WAG Sustainable Development plan, and a framework for action should have been included.

In a recent research undertaken by Mind (www.mind.org.uk), highlighted that there may be cost implications in making mental health services fit rural communities. They state that research has shown that the unit cost of providing services in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, due to a number of factors

- The relatively few people needing particular services works against the economies of scale
- Long distances between people and services mean that travel and telephone costs are higher.
- It can take longer for a rural service to establish in a community.

The report states that the government has begun to recognise that the needs of those living in rural communities have been overlooked, or given a lower priority than urban interests.

Entitled Rural Proofing a process has been defined whereby, as policy is developed and implemented, policy makers:

- Think about whether there will be any significant impact on rural areas
- If there is an impact, assess what it might be
- Consider what adjustments/compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances

In England the National Service Framework for Mental Health (NSFMH), began in 1999, it came about because standards of care for people with mental health problems varied greatly depending on which geographical area they lived.

Issues, which have been raised as the process has gathered momentum, include the fact that many people in rural areas have expressed concern that more insight is, needed into how to tailor the NSFMMH to meet the circumstances of rural users in particular issues such as:

- The low capacity of existing services
- The increased cost of providing services to a dispersed population
- The need to balance access and choice how to reach small and isolated communities
- How to tackle the effects of isolation and stigma which can prevent people accessing support

The NSFMMH is subjected to rural proofing and it is the CTAW's view that a similar review of needs should be undertaken on behalf of individuals living in rural Wales, who are suffering from social exclusion due to the lack of any available transport at this time,

There is a separate NSFMMH for Wales but the WAG has not initiated a rural proofing, (although this would be welcomed by Mind), some form of rural proofing with regard to transport provision in Wales would be welcomed by CTAW to enable guidance to be drafted in order to support further policy formation, development and implementation regarding future transport provision in rural Wales.

Demand for transport will increase with growth in economic activity. The average Gross Domestic Product per capita in Wales is about 20% lower than the rest of the United Kingdom, (Office for National Statistics). The important task for the WAG is to increase employment rates and to reduce economic inactivity in the Welsh population; this is likely to increase travel demand. As the WAG are already aware it is likely that a significant proportion of those individuals not in work would have better opportunities to take up further education, training or employment if access to an improved transport service is provided. CTAW agree that the challenge will be to maintain economic growth alongside a sustainable transport system.

The difficulties facing the WAG are not underestimated we are aware that the populous of Wales use Public Transport (Buses and Trains) less than other areas of the UK and that their reliance on the car is higher, and that the car is the preferred means of travel to work, (www.wales.gov.uk/subitransport). The last available statistics have this percentage at over 80%, (same source as above), and this may not adequately represent the current situation, there is some evidence to suggest that in the rural areas of Wales this figure can be increased to nearly 90%. The document quoted above states that the viability of scheduled bus services in rural areas is generally lower, and that if accessibility for people in these areas is to be increased, more flexible solutions will have to be considered and that these solutions are likely to be road based.

The WAG need to work with independent bodies such as ourselves to achieve mass participation in the development of truly sustainable transport networks particularly for the sparsely populated rurally isolated areas. The WAG need to develop and establish communications programmes which target those most in need of transport initiatives. Although ICT is one solution it is not the solution to communicating with isolated groups and individuals. Often people are not aware of what is already

available, a number of initiatives need to be developed establish contact. Methods, which have been successful, include talking to Women's Institute groups, and targeting people who visit local pubs, and village halls. CTA Wales as part of CTA Wales week (2003) took a minibus on tour for a day to local schools, doctors surgeries and supermarkets, in an endeavour to let people know that community transport can provide alternative transport to car travel and can open up new opportunities to marginalized groups, including the long term unemployed. The day was successful, and lessons can be learnt from this one small exercise. What became very apparent was that information about existing transport services country cars and local busses is not getting to the majority of people, a very small percentage of people spoken to on that day were well informed about alternatives, (existing and potential) to their cars. There is a fundamental need to educate the majority of Welsh people that the car is not the only way to travel, even basic transport such as walking and cycling needs to be remarketed and 'sold' to the vast majority of individuals in Wales.

CTAW put forward the following suggested ways forward:

- Promotional and media campaigns, (such as; Bike 2 Work Week, Walk to School week, CT Wales Week). Intensive marketing of potential for travel and travel choice. For example commence Wales only, National leave your car at home day, Bus it to work day, etc
- Promotions in towns/shops for people who do not use their cars
- Rewards (where appropriate) at school for children who have undertaken at least a part of their journey to/from school on foot/cycle. Continued development of the 'safe routes to school' programme
- Taxi buses
- Shared Hire Cars
- Car schemes
- Re-establishing Post buses
- Developing/enhancing Country Cars
- Wheels to work schemes -open to people of all ages
- Flexibly routed services
- Flexibly scheduled services
- Pre-booked services
- Services which only operate 'as required'
- School buses required to undertake elements of stage carriage/local bus/innovative work as part of the contract agreement
- Local Authority fleets opened up in their availability for group hire
- Secure realistic funding for Community transport initiatives
- Develop incentives for people to travel by other means than their cars
- Non-stigmatising ticketing schemes for people re-entering employment/entering employment
- Dial a ride services for rural residents
- Driver training
- Invest in innovative/bespoke transport schemes aimed at marginalized groups in rural areas, ensuring participation of the community
- Work with organisations such as ourselves to overcome real and perceived barriers to travel

(especially for those for whom independent travel has been impossible for all reasons stated in this note).

- Development of, but not reliance on ICT initiatives in transport provision
- Partnership working between commercial, and non-commercial transport providers
- Promotion of wholly integrated transport provision
- Provision of realistic funding for long term experimental transport services
- Continued, and on-going financial support for the development of the Community Transport sector and CTA within Wales
- Increase funding for research and development within Wales, (possibly from European sources)
- Develop community Rail services/initiatives
- Create ‘community resources’ out of virtually redundant rail stations, especially in rural areas
- Fund feasibility studies
- Start to work directly with those providing the ‘support packages’ aimed at getting individuals back to work, New Deal/Working Links/Pathways to Work, etc. To see how new community transport initiatives might be best developed
- Recognition of the increased cost of basic necessities in Rural areas

The WAG are already aware of the need to acknowledge the differences between urban and rural areas, and that if improvements to public and community transport are not sustainable they will not achieve the social aim to meet the needs of those who do not or cannot have a car. CTAW are in full agreement with the WAG that in attempting to achieve their goals as outlined in their transport framework, that further inequalities are not created within Wales. Some issues will need to be dealt with by central government, some at the all-Wales level, and some at local level.

The WAG need to encourage active community participation, which will serve to strengthen social cohesion, develop community networks and build the ability of a community to be enterprising. We need to find local solutions to local needs and issues and be able and willing to adapt to change, this is a fundamental requirement for community regeneration and CTAW feel that it is the only way forward for the development of sustainable transport solutions in Wales. As we have endeavoured to highlight it is of paramount importance that strategies are developed with a clear focus on the particular needs of the individuals and families in the groups and places that are the most affected.

We wish to work with the WAG to build on the capacity of people and communities to fully participate in the necessary process, to establish and develop their own transport schemes, by developing ownership and responsibility of their own scheme.

Our measure of success would be the integration of previously socially excluded people into working, public and community life, -quantifiable by the availability of journey's to them, after any proposed scheme had been implemented. Where transport has previously been available, better and more appropriate, integrated services available.

We need to work together to:

- Improve the transport network to support community development/regeneration
- Extend transport links to improve access to employment
- Improve rail stations, especially those in rural areas; encourage their integration into the community they are located in. Develop them as sites where a variety of transport modes can link, safe places to wait and interchange between modes
- Develop transport 'interchanges' in all areas, towns and villages
- Develop and implement all forms of community transport and related awareness schemes
- Promote the use of existing passenger/public transport
- Endeavour to keep the cost of travelling realistic
- Pay particular attention to the transport requirements of physically and economically isolated communities and groups
- Develop local transport provision schemes with local employers
- Develop flexible working to fit in with availability of transport, especially for those re-entering/entering employment

Ensure that all of the above are effective, efficient, accessible, affordable and sustainable.

What has become clear during the research undertaken to enable the drafting of this paper is that tackling economic activity is about breaking down the barriers to work and providing individuals with tailored transitions back to employment. People are likely to require a wide range of social and personal support to enable them to take up any available opportunities. As we hope we have made clear, CTAW are prepared to work with the WAG, and other partners, in order to develop transport initiatives, which will aid individuals in this transition. Economic activity is a complicated issue, which can only be tackled successfully by a multi-agency all-Wales approach.

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