

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR40
Ymateb gan Bus Users UK / Evidence from Bus Users UK



Public transport has a vital role to play in the fight against climate change by providing clean, green and sustainable transport options for the people of Wales.

Without specific reference to transport in the title of this Committee, we are concerned that it may be overlooked and that any gains made by the previous Committee in this regard will be lost.

We would like to see the Committee retain its focus on transport and prioritise the following areas.

Bus Cymru – The 5-year plan for Wales. The previous assembly term saw the publication of the White Paper on Improving Public Transport. We responded to the consultation to say that whilst passengers generally have no interest in which regulatory framework bus services operate under, we support enhanced partnership working to deliver a sustainable bus network that meets the needs and aspirations of passengers. We consider the best way to achieve this is through co-operation between bus operators, councils and passengers to deliver a transport/bus network that works for all parties and connects people and communities with the places they need to access.

The bus industry in Wales is a mix of everything from SMEs to municipally-owned operators and large PLCs. The pandemic has highlighted the fragile nature of many networks and it is important that any changes recognise the need to maintain a healthy industry that can deliver the services passengers need.

While the White Paper did not move forward in the last term, Welsh Government officials are hosting a series of workshops to assist with plans for the next five years and it would seem appropriate for the Committee to ensure that any new proposals meet the needs of passengers and communities alike.

Discourage car usage – There is a very real danger that, post-Covid, we will see a car-led recovery. UK Government demonised public transport in the early stages of the health crisis and actively encouraged people to travel by car. There needs to be greater promotion of the benefit of sustainable transport options such as bus and rail, backed by a Welsh Government campaign encouraging people back onto public transport.

We have seen local authorities attempt to encourage people back into town centres through free parking schemes but this sends entirely the wrong message. Local authorities should follow the example of Swansea Council and offer free bus travel on weekends to encourage more sustainable travel, reduce congestion and improve air quality for all.

The reallocation of road space during the pandemic in favour of pedestrians and cyclists was generally welcomed, although there were issues particularly for blind and visually impaired people. While some schemes remain, many others have been reversed and it would be interesting to examine how effective these schemes have been in reducing car use or improving air quality. Meaningful engagement with accessibility groups would help prevent any future schemes from restricting access to anyone.

Llwybr Newydd: Wales transport strategy and the SE Wales Transport Commission report suggests tackling congestion through a road pricing strategy. Previously any suggestion of road pricing has been met with strong opposition and the Committee may wish to establish an inquiry into road pricing to develop a more balanced debate into the issue, highlighting the benefits to air quality that such a policy will achieve.

Driver training – Recent press coverage highlights the shortage of bus drivers which is having an effect on passengers in terms of service cancellations. The historically poor pay rates offered to bus drivers has led to them moving to supermarkets and courier companies, with others retraining to become HGV drivers. The situation will not improve overnight, and the shortage will negatively impact Welsh Government’s plans to provide passengers with the level of bus services that passengers need to make modal shift changes. This is an area we would urge the Committee to explore. The opportunity exists for a Welsh Government-led apprenticeship scheme for bus drivers, offering a clear pathway to a practical and customer service qualification backed by a reward package covering at least the living wage. This will enhance the role of the bus driver, address the current driver shortage and maintain service levels going forward. There may also be an opportunity to make adjustments to the timescale involved in the testing regime for PSV drivers.

Public transport and the challenges of decarbonisation of rural areas – There is a clear disparity between bus services in rural areas and those in more urban areas, particularly in terms of how they are used and the benefits they bring to society and local communities.

In larger, urban areas, buses work alongside rail as systems of mass transit that boost local economies. They are also increasingly seen as fundamental to clear air and Net Zero policies. In rural areas, buses carry fewer people but make a vital contribution to the communities they serve. They are a lifeline, providing access to work, training, education, shops, leisure facilities and health services. Evidence shows that improving transport for rural communities reduces social isolation and improves mental health, particularly among young adults.

Rural transport needs to be considered as a special case as, without reform, it will no longer be socially and commercially viable, rural authorities will struggle to achieve their Net Zero legal requirements, and the cost to the public purse of social exclusion, rural isolation, loneliness and poor mental health will be considerable.

Holding Transport for Wales (TfW) to account – Transport for Wales is the delivery arm of Welsh Government and previous Committees have done a good job in challenging TfW and holding it to account. We hope the new Committee will continue this vital work.

Bus Users will assist in any way we can to ensure that bus services are inclusive, accessible and meet the needs of the communities they serve.

About Bus Users

Bus Users campaigns for inclusive, accessible transport. We are the only approved Alternative

Dispute Resolution Body for the bus and coach industry and the designated body for handling complaints under the Passenger Rights in Bus and Coach Legislation. We are also part of a Sustainable Transport Alliance of organisations working to promote the benefits of public, shared and active travel.

Alongside our complaints work we investigate and monitor services and work with operators and transport providers to improve services for everyone. We run events, carry out research, respond to consultations, speak at government select committees and take part in industry events to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard.

Bus Users UK Charitable Trust Ltd is a registered charity (1178677 and SC049144) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (04635458).

Bus Users UK

22 Greencoat Place

London SW1 1PR Tel:

03000 111 0001

enquiries@bususers.org

www.bususers.org