

Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog promoting the interests of rail users throughout Great Britain; bus, coach and tram users across England, outside London; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. Our subsidiary Transport Focus Wales was set up to give focus and energy to representing Welsh transport users. We have a Board Member for Wales, appointed by Welsh Ministers.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's priority setting process. Our response is informed by our evidence base and insight gathered across our work in Wales.

Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months

These priorities go together well, in terms of addressing the overall climate change and carbon reduction agendas.

Our research on sustainable travel¹ shows that change feels beyond people's control and expect change to come from above and that governments are felt to have a major responsibility for tackling sustainability issues. They want to see more sustainable choices being made cheaper and more readily available than alternatives.

However, we do feel that transport has been significantly under-represented. Transport is an enabler for wider economic growth and should be positioned as the sustainable choice giving people access to education, work and leisure opportunities across Wales. Currently, our research shows people feel that making changes would have a highly negative impact on them and don't accept other options are feasible. Challenging these perceptions should be a higher priority in order to promote changing to sustainable public transport to a wider audience.

The Wales Transport Strategy sets ambitious plans for modal shift and active travel. These commitments now need to be turned into reality, with all partners focused on delivering sustainable and inclusive transport. The Committee has a key role in ensuring transport remains a high priority for Welsh Government.

Further priority areas

Getting passengers back on board

Research² shows the car-led recovery has been much stronger than public transport. The industry will need to be proactive in attracting people back, ensuring that public transport is

¹ [The journey towards sustainable travel](#), Transport Focus 2021

² [Travel during Covid-19 survey](#), Transport Focus 2021

genuinely appealing given that discretionary travellers may have a choice about which mode to use. Our work on returning to rail³ and getting passengers back on buses⁴ shows there is a distinct disparity between those who have used public transport and those who have not used public transport recently – the latter are much more concerned about using transport again. A cohesive message needs to be supported from the top to show transport is clean and safe and ready to use and targeted through channels to reach and give confidence to those who have not been travelling. Pre-pandemic priorities are still just as important, with investment needed to improve punctuality, reliability, value for money fares, flexible tickets and customer-facing staff particularly to provide support during disruption.

Williams-Shapps review and transition to Great British Railways

The rail industry must be more cohesive in the way it speaks and acts towards passengers. Confusion and complexity is not new to rail passengers. But our research⁵ showed that Covid has really highlighted this issue. People using the train during the pandemic told us that they experienced inconsistency in the way that the industry has dealt with the virus, in the requirements for passengers, and in communications. This has been most apparent with differing restrictions and pace of changes in England and Wales.

This highlights the need for more joined up working across the industry, and for a stronger sense of overall accountability for decisions and service delivery, that is visible to passengers. The Williams-Shapps plan for rail and the establishment of Great British Railways provide an opportunity to embed more joined up working and a stronger sense of overall accountability as the rail industry welcomes back its customers. Passengers value the concept of a national network, with interaction, connectivity and a seamless delivery of service, with good standards of information to ‘hold their hand’ and give them confidence in the ability to make joined-up journeys. It is essential that implementation across both sides of the border is scrutinised and harmonised.

Planning for Network Rail control period 7

Our research⁶ shows visible investment was seen as a must by passengers, especially commuters, moving forwards. The move towards improved technology, information provision, cleaning processes and new and refurbished stations and trains is seen as a positive step. Passengers need reassurance that the rail sector will continue investment in these areas.

The planning process for Network Rail’s Control Period 7 is currently in progress, working towards identifying investment priorities for rail in Wales between 2024 and 2029. Transport Focus is already participating; chairing the Wales and Western challenge group and delivering research with passengers on their priorities for CP7. Scrutiny of emerging

³ [Return to rail: what do passengers want](#), Transport Focus 2021

⁴ [The route ahead: getting passengers back on buses](#), Transport Focus 2021

⁵ See note 3

⁶ [Return to rail: what do passengers want – Qualitative report](#), Transport Focus 2021

investment priorities will be important in underpinning future service capability and encouraging growth.

Bus strategy and future Bill

Planning work towards the Bws Cymru strategy is beginning. It is essential that plans are aligned with key priorities for improvement identified by both passengers and non-users. Our research shows top priorities are buses running more often, going to more places and being on time. There is a vital need for the strategy to set out measures that both regain the confidence of lapsed passengers and improve services to attract new passengers and effect modal shift. Fundamentally, key barriers to travel need to be addressed:

- **Cost:** value for money in return for the price of the ticket, availability of discounts and flexible tickets, comparison of the expense when considering an alternative, especially when a group is travelling together
- **Convenience:** including availability of the network, ability to make door-to-door journeys, time taken, potential to work or relax and familiarity of always travelling a particular way or not knowing how to do it another way. Smart ticketing needs to be a convenient option that is easy to use and makes passengers' lives easier
- **Complexity:** lack of familiarity with journey planning, especially factoring in connections, difficulties with timetables, interchange or access, availability of facilities and uncertainties undermining confidence to travel.

Alongside these is the need to underpin recovery with investment in services. Following announcement of the UK Government's National Bus Strategy, transport authorities in England are planning to implement enhanced partnerships and are preparing bus service improvement plans. Transport Focus is engaged in supporting this with a series of guides and toolkits⁷, drawing from our extensive experience and insight. This represents one potential approach that could be considered. However there is a clear need to underpin recovery and improvement with effective funding, including longer timescales to support long term decisions and investment.

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⁷ [National Bus Strategy guidance](#), Transport Focus 2021