

Learner Travel Summit Report

Learner Travel Summit

9 May 2025

Transport for Wales, Cardiff

Welsh Government

Executive Summary

The Learner Travel Summit was convened by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales and the Cabinet Secretary for Education on 9 May 2025. The aim was to bring together delivery partners and stakeholders in this format for the first time to discuss key challenges and discuss practical solutions for improving learner travel in Wales.

The Summit highlighted various issues related to learner transport, with a focus on rising costs and inconsistencies of transport provision provided by local authorities leading to an equity divide within schools and Further Education (FE) colleges. The discussion emphasised the need for equitable transport policies and suggested innovations, such as use of technology and data; staggered school times; and integration with local bus services to enhance provision and accessibility. Improving collaboration, resources and intelligence across local authorities and other related bodies such as the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and Transport for Wales (TfW), was a key underlying theme of the Summit.

Introduction

The Summit was an opportunity to bring together key decision makers and delivery partners to provide strategic leadership on learner travel in Wales – delegates were able to collectively consider the current financial, legislative and policy context; discuss the practicalities, and the challenges of this context and reflect on interventions and areas for improving learner travel across Wales. The overarching objectives of the Summit were to:

- Discuss different perspectives on a shared problem
- Create actionable solutions and frameworks
- Create an engaged community of professionals
- Form relationships / partnerships with fellow delivery partners
- Follow up soon after the summit with a set of specific actions

Summit Overview

The agenda (see annex 1) included context setting, perspectives from children and young people, panel and plenary discussion on the challenges associated with learner travel, followed by a session to share best practice and discuss possible interventions based on the innovative solutions showcased.

A copy of the agenda is available at annex 1 and a full list of organisations represented at annex 2.

Key Sessions & Highlights

Voices from Children & Young People

The Welsh Youth Parliament, NUS Cymru and the Children's Commissioner provided insights from children and young people.

- Costs of transport are a barrier to accessing education
- Public transport networks are not going to the right places to support accessing education
- Public transport can be too busy
- Lack of confidence using public transport
- Transport should be affordable for all learners – welcome the £1/ £3 flat fare announcement but would like to see it extended (below 16 and/or free for all)

Perspectives on the challenges with learner transport

Panel members: Transport and Education WLGA spokespersons, representative from CABAC (SME bus operators) and Medr (tertiary education).

Panel members provided short reflections on key challenges from their relevant perspectives followed by a plenary discussion enabling all participants to contribute.

Key challenges highlighted include:

- Financial challenges - inflation in transportation costs alongside limited resources of local authorities and FE institutions; increasing bus and taxi contract costs (reference to taxi in this document includes private hire vehicles)
- Taxis and minibus deliver a disproportionate share of the market for learner travel; there is currently not enough competition within the taxi market which is contributing to the increase in costs (this is especially relevant for costs associated with transporting learners with ALN)
- Capacity on public bus services is a concern in some places
- Parental concerns over using service buses – safety, capability
- Increase in demand and complexities for transport for ALN learners
- Same school start times – increase costs (staggered times would mean the same bus could deliver more children)
- Inconsistent contractual terms and conditions for transport operators across the local authorities
- Costs of transport are impacting on student choices for post-16 study – survey results show that transport is main barrier to accessing education for 16-24 year olds
- Lack of consistency of policy across local authorities – learners in schools / FEI from different authorities have different entitlements – resulting in inequities across different settings
- School admissions policies are driving demand for transport - some learners are not able to get into schools which are closest to them and therefore local authorities are having to transport them to schools further away
- The requirement to undertake DBS checks for each local authority duplicates effort and resources for transport operators
- Costs of travel have a disproportionate impact on asylum seekers and refugees
- Disproportionate impact of mileage thresholds on accessing Welsh medium education
- Local authorities are not working together to ensure learners are going to schools that are closest to them
- Congestion on roads impact reliability of services and costs
- £1/ £3 fare causes issues for those younger than 16; also lack of consistency with rail provision and fares.

Opportunities - doing more with what we have

This session provided a forum to explore 3 best practice case studies.

Powys County Council outlined the benefits of introducing a bespoke piece of software for use on their school buses; including improved safeguarding mechanisms for learners and their families as well as operational benefits by using the data intelligence to inform contract renewal resulting in financial savings for the authority and procurement of more efficient services.

CPT presented an overview of the award-winning case study from Nottinghamshire which resulted in more flexible and affordable bus services to FE colleges and universities. CPT outlined that partnership working between the colleges, council and bus operators led to an introduction of a multi-operator student ticket scheme alongside new and improved bus routes resulting in more learners using public bus services to access places of learning as well as increase in social and leisure trips improving the local economy.

Swansea Council outlined how the introduction of taxi restricted driver's licences across the authority has increased the numbers of drivers available to bid for school transport contracts.

Action and Interventions

The final session was an opportunity for all participants to contribute to ideas that they are either currently delivering, considering introducing or aspirations that participants believed could help contribute to improving the learner travel offer.

There were a range of contributions covering:

- Improved offer for the young person's fare – help improve modal shift
 - £1/£3 to 11-21 or all under 21
 - Free transport for all young people
 - Integration with rail
 - Hardship funds managed by schools to help support with the costs of travel
- Staggering school start times – give efficiency across fleets

- Use of breakfast/ after-school clubs can help support this outcome
- Provide learners/ parents with confidence and capability to use service buses more
 - Need to promote that safety and accessibility on buses is excellent
 - Travel training to assist with addressing parental/ learner fears as well as skills around travelling independently on public transport
 - Be bold and brave with interventions to help with bus congestion (eg: bus priority measures)
- Encourage learners to consider active travel and public transport to travel to school
- Opportunities around integration on public transport
 - Colegau Cymru suggests using the Nottinghamshire example as a footprint to work with colleges to explore options for FE students
 - Franchising model provides opportunity to ensure schools/ colleges are included in network design
- Strengthen guidance on parental responsibility, timings for learners to walk to a meeting point
- Consistent transport contracts across local authorities – provides more stability within the market
- Encourage consistency of approach with ALN learners – e.g.: they use minibuses for school trips so can they use them for travelling to school too?
- Increased ALN education provision/hubs so not needing to transport learners as far
- Transport representatives on ALN panels across all local authorities
- Increasing the understanding of the challenges between education and transport departments within local authorities; recognising that changes in education policy impact on transport demands

Outcomes

It was agreed that bringing together Ministers, delivery partners and stakeholders for the first time at the Summit was a significant step forward itself, providing opportunities to collectively understand the challenges and share ideas for delivering an improved learner travel provision within the current legislative and financial frameworks.

The Welsh Government committed to developing a series of workstreams to address some of the challenges raised and explore opportunities around the solutions presented taking account of the wide range of perspectives shared during the Summit.

It was agreed that a further engagement event should be held to review progress within 6-9 months.

Next Steps

At the Summit, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport & North Wales committed to establishing a series of workstreams to take forward some of the priorities highlighted during the Summit. The workstreams below have been developed to take forward some of the practical and pragmatic suggestions. Children and young people are key to ensuring that policies, processes and practices are developed to meet their needs. It is our expectation that the lead delivery partners of the workstreams will use existing consultation and collaboration structures such as Transport for Wales and the Children's Commissioner's Forums to engage with children and young people to ensure their voices, opinions and rights are heard, listened to and respected.

Workstream 1 – Guidance documentation

Lead Delivery Partner(s): Welsh Government

A number of the suggested solutions can and will be integrated into updated guidance documents (specifically the Learner travel operational guidance and the All-Wales travel behaviour code guidance) including highlighting the importance of parental responsibility and the positive impact that children and young people choosing active travel to their place of learning has on decarbonisation and air quality, physical and mental health and social connectedness; and the benefits of integrating learners on public transport routes where appropriate.

The Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing guidance will also be updated to reflect the learning from Swansea City Council on introducing Restricted Licenses

Workstream 2 – Driving consistency of delivery, efficiency and enhancing governance

Lead Delivery Partner(s): WLGA (including ATCO/ADEW)/ TfW

The Summit reaffirmed the need to develop a more consistent policy approach across local authorities to deliver a more equitable learner travel provision; it also called for better collaboration between education and transport officials at a local authority level and increased collaboration across local authorities at a regional level to overcome a number of barriers.

This area could involve exploring initiatives to share best practice and increase consistency of delivery including:

- Exploring how DBS checks can be recognised across local authorities
- Developing standardised learner transport contracts for operators
- Developing a toolkit to support local authorities introducing restricted licensing
- Creating an online resource for sharing information, policies and templates

- Explore the role of CJs in developing a regional approach to learner travel
- Consider introducing consistent specialist training and development for local authority transport coordinators
- Consider how data already held by Transport for Wales and DataCymru can be used by local authorities/ CJs to be able to support the efficient delivery of learner transport provision

Workstream 3 – Specific Local Authority/ CJC interventions

Lead Delivery Partner(s): WLGA, Welsh Government

Some specific interventions proposed at the Summit could deliver benefits for local authorities in increasing competition across transport operators, decreasing costs and being able to offer more learner travel to increased numbers of learners:

This workstream could involve developing cost benefit analysis for the roll out of a range of initiatives either at a regional, or national level including:

- Staggered school start times
- (Independent) travel training
- Taxi reforms

Workstream 4 - Improving planning and delivery processes for post-16 provision

Lead Delivery Partner(s): Transport for Wales / Colegau Cymru/ CPT/ CABAC

It was recognised that the ongoing work to inform the bus reform programme, the introduction of the young person's fares, and the lessons learnt from the Nottinghamshire example presented at the summit provides a framework for this workstream to consider

- How/ whether transport timetables could be adapted to increase the numbers of learners being able to access public transport networks to access FE colleges.

- The opportunities presented by CJC footprint to deliver integrated regional transport solutions that benefit post 16 provision.
- An integrated ticketing offer for bus and rail.
- The data available to understand learner demand and travel patterns.
- The development of traveline.cymru to provide individual journey planning capabilities to FE colleges.

Workstream 5 – Discounted fares for young people

Lead Delivery Partner(s): Welsh Government/ Transport for Wales

The cost of travelling was raised as a barrier to accessing education throughout the summit; the discounted fares for young people initiative was warmly welcomed. This pilot project provides an opportunity to review and refresh the offering for young people. The workstream leads should consider

- Ensuring the key messages emanating from the summit relating to the 16-21 scheme are fed into the pilot scheme being developed by TfW on behalf of the Welsh Government.
- Consider expanding the communication campaign to cover the benefits of public transport for young people – including key messages on safety and inclusivity.
- How/ whether TfW programmes to support young people to travel independently can be developed/ expanded.

Annex 1 - Agenda

1100-1115	Arrival of guests	
1115-1125	Housekeeping, introductions and overview of the session	Peter McDonald Director, Transport & Digital Connectivity, Welsh Government (Chair)
1125-1135	Context setting – financial, legislative, transport/ education interventions	James Burgess Head of Bus & Community Transport, Welsh Government
1135-1140	Cabinet Secretary opening remarks	Ken Skates MS, Cabinet Secretary Transport and North Wales
1140-1155	Voices from Children & Young People	Morgan Peters Welsh Youth Parliament Deio Owen NUS Cymru
1155-1245	Perspectives on the challenges with learner transport – panel and plenary	Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader and Transport spokesperson, WLGA Cllr Lis Burnett Education spokesperson, WLGA Scott Pearson, CABAC Simon Pirotte, Medr
1245-1315	Lunch	
1315-1415	Opportunities - doing more with what we have. To include a focus on:	Innovation – Sarah Leyland-Morgan, Powys County Council

	• Innovation • Integration • Reforming	Integration Aaron Hill, CPT Reforming – Yvonne Lewis, Swansea City Council Plenary discussions
1415-1450	Action and Interventions –discussions on possible interventions/ actions to inform further consideration for a wider programme of work.	All
1450-1500	Final reflections & Chair's closing remarks	Peter McDonald

Annex 2 - List of attendees

The following organisations and representative bodies attended the Learner Travel Summit.

ATCO Cymru (Association of Transport Coordinators)
CABAC (Coach and Bus Association Cymru)
Cardiff and Vale College Student's Union
Careers Wales
Catholic Education
Children's Commissioner for Wales
Coleg Cambria
Colegau Cymru
Estyn
Institute of Licensing Wales
Learning and Work Institute
Licensed Private Hire Car Association
Medr
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
NUS Cymru
Plaid Cymru
Powys County Council
Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG)
Swansea Council
Transport for Wales
TUC Cymru
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Welsh Government
Welsh Local Government Association
Welsh Youth Parliament