
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes

National Assembly for Wales
Enterprise and Business Committee

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Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 15	BCT 15
John Davies	John Davies

Consultation questions

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

I am more familiar with the bus sector than the community transport sector so will confine my comments to the former.

The current condition of the bus sector appears to be actually quite good, particularly in my area of Swansea Bay where the principal operators have invested in new vehicles and some improved services. However, supported services continue to show a decline with service withdrawals and frequency reductions continuing; also, some 'commercial' services have had damaging cutbacks in frequency which will impact negatively on passenger numbers – AGAIN!

A major area of concern is provision of evening and Sunday services which in some areas are almost non-existent. In my business of promoting buses to visitors to the area, the loss of Sunday services is particularly serious and if continued, could impact adversely on the numbers of visitors to Wales

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

It is mainly down to funding or at least the continuing reductions in funding. The bus industry has suffered disproportionately in the expenditure cuts. As well as the (to be) expected cutbacks in transport grant, buses have suffered in the heavy reductions in BSOG which has put operators at a disadvantage with the car as their costs have risen due to factors outside their control (and consequently fares have had to rise). The reduction in reimbursement for Cerdyn Cymru has again impacted severely on operators' costs rendering more services uneconomic and therefore withdrawn. In that scenario, if concessionary pass holders can't travel (no service) then passenger numbers decline.

In the Swansea Bay area, I would put some of the decline at the door

of the principal operator First Cymru for poor service provision/quality until recently (happily that charge will no longer stick as service has transformed since 2013)

My biggest criticism is that Welsh Government doesn't appear to appreciate how important buses are and their negative attitudes towards private sector operators simply reinforces that view. The decline in bus passengers has consequences for decline in high street footfall and consequently expenditure.

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

Social – people without their own personal transport cannot get out and about as much as they would like. Older people are excluded from mainstream life when their only means of transport disappears. Young people unable to afford personal transport have been restricted in their ability to seek work

Economic – as stated above, the bus is a major contributor to the health of town and city centres as shopping and leisure destinations, so reductions in service have had an adverse impact on the economic health of the area

Employers have had a smaller area from which to draw potential labour as buses have been cut back altogether or restricted early and late in the day (a lot of low earning employment is in the evenings) With increasing numbers of overseas visitors coming to Wales without a car, buses and trains are of increasing importance to the visitor economy

Environmental – the Welsh Assembly has a statutory obligation to pursue green policies. Public transport is reckoned to be a greener form of travel than cars yet their fuel duty rebate gets cut by over 20% whilst petrol gets cheaper in real terms.

Whilst England and Scotland continue to provide substantial capital

grants for purchase of low emission buses, Wales has done and continues to do nothing of this kind. Such grants reduce operators costs leading to stable or lower fares which encourage more travellers and fewer car miles!!

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

1. Get a fair settlement for Cerdyn Cymru so that bus operators can afford to reinstate services; if this involves a small charge to pass holders, so be it
2. Restore fuel duty rebates to again encourage cheaper operation leading to more services leading to more passengers
3. Make capital grants available to bus operators to achieve more environmentally sustainable transport and reduced emissions
4. Encourage and promote greater cooperation between operators and public transport modes in the interests of more seamless travel for the public transport user
5. Ring fence grants to local authorities to be used on public transport and not raided for other purposes
6. Only seek fundamental change to current arrangements (e.g. re-regulation, franchising) from evidence based research rather than political motivation. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

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

First and foremost, they need more money. In some cases, there is insufficient funding to support buses at all, leaving provision solely to profitable routes which would leave many marginal communities isolated.

They need to better appreciate the value of local buses to the economic health of their high streets

Local members need to talk up and support buses rather than branding the companies purely interested in profits for shareholders

Active measures to make buses operation more fluid and reliable by positive traffic light control, bus lanes and better enforcement of illegal parking

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

Insofar as the current situation is far from ideal, I would favour devolvement of powers provided that the WG uses these new powers in a way which will improve service for customers. Experience in other European countries where, by and large, buses are regulated, services in large conurbations with heavy travel volumes, monopoly suppliers can be seen to thrive though the lack of focus on marketing is noticeable. My experience is of resource- rather than market- driven bus networks and a much higher cost/income ratio than is evident in the UK. I therefore urge caution in making major structural changes that could increase costs at a time when funding is constantly tightening.

Use evidence based research to inform your decisions!

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

I think further powers are required to allow Wales to choose transport services more appropriate to its needs. However, I would not support these being used to create stifling regulation for some of the reasons outlined above.

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

Ask the passengers what they want
Ask non-users what would persuade them to change
Draw on the experience of seasoned public transport operators, who, contrary to public perception, know their business pretty well
Fund to a level that can achieve the principal aspirations of customers and end users
Partnership with operators to ensure good public service and a decent living for operators
Encourage more co-operation and co-ordination between trains and buses
Extend the Traws Cymru concept to more bus routes that complement train services

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

Just to reinforce: move forward on the basis of evidence rather than
prejudice