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Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 38	BCT 38
Y Blaid Gydweithredol	The Co-operative Party

the co-operative party

politics for people

Consultation Response – Bus and Community Transport in Wales

The Co-operative Party

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The Co-operative Party is pleased to be able to respond to this consultation. The Co-operative Party is a registered political party with an individual membership across Wales, which stands candidates and is represented at all levels within Welsh government. The Co-operative Party is the political Party of the co-operative movement. It works to promote co-operative and mutual forms of economic activity and community organisation across the economy and communities of Wales.

The Co-operative Party - working with colleagues within the Trades Union movement - looked at not for profit rail services in Wales in 2011 in the report 'Rail Cymru'. This report suggested that the best way of delivering transport services in Wales was through not for profit mutual endeavour, which brings the service much closer to the community and employees.

Bus services in Wales must be seen as a community asset, which would be greatly improved through a Welsh Government public transport policy that promotes - and seeks to establish more - not-for-profit bus operators and encourages support for community transport schemes.

Whilst other public transport organisations will be better placed to comment on certain parts of the consultation, the Co-operative Party has sought to cover the all the identified areas of interest for the Committee.

- **The current condition of the bus and community transport sector in Wales, including the reasons for the recent decline in both registered bus services and bus passenger numbers.**

As the Committee points out in its call for evidence, Wales suffers from a decline in bus services and decline in passenger numbers. Whilst this is not a unique situation across the United Kingdom it is clearly something the Welsh Government must seek to reverse.

Whilst PTEG is a grouping that represents English Integrated Transport Authorities, it succinctly captures the motivating factors for people to use bus services. They state that bus services must be 'available' and 'accessible' i.e there are buses to get on that go to the places people want to access and they are able to get on the bus close to where they work or live without unreasonable difficulty. In this respect it is noticeable that StatsWales, in their 2014 'Public Service Vehicles' statistical release points out that Wales lags behind the rest of the UK in relation to the percentage of the population who live within 13 minutes' walk of an at least hourly bus service.

PTEG then assert that buses need to remain affordable. Within a largely unregulated private network it is increasingly hard for local authorities in Wales to influence bus ticket prices and it is the operator that effectively sets its own profit margin. Again StatsWales highlights the steady rise in bus ticket prices, even accounting low levels of inflation, since 2005.

Finally the PTEG analysis suggests that bus services must be 'acceptable'. This relates to journey experience i.e. the comfort of the journey.

Whilst the commercial industry bodies will point to 80+% passenger satisfaction with bus journeys in Wales it should be pointed out that this is 80% of a declining number of people who use the bus, and does not account for those who would use the bus if there was adequate service for them to access.

- **The social, environmental and economic impact of the recent decline in bus services and passenger numbers.**

Whilst this is an area for data driven specialist research, the weight of evidence shows the economic and social benefit of bus use is significant and therefore a fall in bus use and a reduction in service frequency and routes would necessarily lead to a fall-off in economic activity.

Statistics that the House of Commons Transport Select Committee published within their 'Passenger Transport in Isolated Communities' Report 2014 are telling in relation to the social need and the economic benefit, especially for vulnerable groups in society.

Like older people, younger people use cars less and travel by passenger transport more than the middle-aged. Young people make significantly fewer car journeys than in the past. Across the UK in the mid-1990s, the average young person took almost 600 car journeys each year. That figure decreased to 377 trips in 2011. Some 48% of 17 to 20-year-olds held a driving licence in the early 1990s; today, 38% of 17 to 20-year-olds hold a driving licence. This reliance on passenger transport, of which bus use makes up the overwhelming majority of journeys, is stark. It points towards an economic and social reliance on the bus, and without adequate services, trips that generate economic activity such as shopping and work simply aren't able to happen. The important social ties, whether family or leisure, are equally jeopardised without these important services.

The Co-operative Party believes that passenger transport is essential for unemployed people, because it allows them both to sign on at a jobcentre and to look for work. That is a particular concern in urban areas, because some 77% of jobseekers in British cities outside London do not have regular access to a car, van or motorbike. More widely, two out of five jobseekers cited lack of transport as a barrier to finding work. A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study found that while 70% to 90% of unfilled low-skilled job vacancies were easily accessible by car, only 35% to 55% could be reached within 30 minutes by public transport. These statistics, given in written evidence to the Commons Select Committee, underline underscore the economic deficit that can be felt through a lack of adequate bus services.

- **The potential benefits or otherwise of devolution of bus registration powers, proposed in the UK Government's Command Paper – ['Powers for a Purpose: Towards a Lasting Devolution Settlement \[Opens in a new browser window\]'](#) in February 2015, and whether further powers to regulate the bus industry are desirable.**

The Co-operative Party believes that the 1980's deregulation of the bus industry was a mistake and severely undermined the irrefutable truth that local bus services are a community asset not a play thing of a small number of large private businesses.

The failure of on road competition and the resulting consolidation of the bus industry in Wales and elsewhere has meant that local monopolies have been created where bus companies have the upper hand on communities and local authorities alike. Wales suffers in the same way that city and county regions do across the UK. Bus services are withdrawn, routes shortened and prices increased without proper regulation and negotiating power.

Bus services in Wales like elsewhere do require subsidy. There are routes and parts of Wales that deliver more return to the private companies, but passenger transport campaigning groups point out that many of the vital routes to prevent social and financial exclusion are not deemed to be 'commercially viable' by operators. These are 'commercially viable' by the operators' own measurements. In times of severely constrained public spending it is likely that bus subsidy will receive even further reductions. Local Authorities face a dilemma to try and get the same service for less - which in a largely unregulated market is not likely - or seek others to fundamentally re-balance the industry so that profit margins are more in line with other methods of transport and the community gets more say over the service that is delivered to them.

Wales rightly deserves to have more regulatory power in this market. Through extra regulation comes the ability to better dictate the type of bus service that communities across Wales require. The current proposals within 'Power for a Purpose' are welcomed by the Co-operative Party but we feel further regulatory powers would benefit Welsh bus passengers. Powers such as the franchise proposals under consideration for City and County Regions would better provide authorities the means to protect isolated community services and even start to better ensure smarter ticketing and that through journeys are available for new and existing bus passengers. It seems to be an anomaly that city regions seem to be on the brink of achieving these powers when they are arguable more needed in Wales.

A regulated franchising approach would give Welsh local authorities much greater procuring power in the market - procuring power that would only benefit the people of Wales. A system by which profitable routes can be more effectively used to cross subsidise important but less profitable routes. This could be particularly important in times of constrained public spending and potential decrease in available bus subsidy.

The Co-operative Party believes that it would be in the interests of Welsh Communities for bus services to be seen as community assets and perhaps protected as such, rather than simply as a commercial market. This would send a positive signal to public transport networks throughout Wales.

- **The steps which should be taken to ensure bus and community transport services meet the needs of Wales.**

The Co-operative Party is a strong supporter of public transport and in particular not for profit delivery of community buses. For too long not for profit delivery of services has quietly delivered vital services throughout our communities. As the bus markets are changing it is now critical to harness community transport's success and expand not-for-profit transport to bus services.

'Community transport' is often seen and described as passenger transport schemes owned and operated by local community groups. Community transport is provided on a not-for-profit basis and is run by volunteers. Community transport schemes serve people who do not have access to conventional public transport or who are unable to use it. This is of course fantastic but the Co-operative Party believes that this should not be seen as the limit of the model. Often the London bus market is looked on with a degree of envy from Wales and elsewhere and it is important to note that increasing numbers of London red buses are delivered by a social enterprise where profits are

reinvested back in to the service. Indeed London Mayoral candidates now look to Transport for London to be the place that fosters and supports further not-for-profit bids for bus services. The same approach should be taken by the proposed Welsh Government's own not-for-profit transport body.

A supportive public policy environment for not-for-profit services will be critical for Wales to develop the sort of bus services that will be at the fore front of local service delivery and will drive bus usage and ultimately add to the success of the Welsh economy.

Equally Welsh bus services will also benefit from a change in mind set away from the need for a large traditional bus to deliver services. Many other countries who possess and understand strong local public transport networks understand the need for availability, affordable and frequency. If large buses used by traditional providers are not deemed commercially viable good public policy would dictate more innovative thinking around vehicle type for service delivery. Again this would lend itself initially to local community based.

Briefly looking at the routes and services that Community transport often encompasses reveals the importance a range of transport services through differing vehicle type:

- Voluntary car schemes. An organised form of lift giving where volunteer drivers use their own cars to provide door to door journeys for people without transport. Passengers are charged a rate per mile for their journeys to cover drivers' costs.
- Community bus services. Minibuses operated by volunteers serve regular routes to a published timetable. They are available to all members of the general public.
- Minibus hire. Vehicles owned by community groups are made available to other local organisations for low-cost hire. This service can be useful for a number of different purposes, including leisure, education and sport. Some vehicles are wheelchair accessible.
- Dial a ride. This service provides door-to-door journeys for people who are unable to use conventional public transport. Potential passengers need to register as members to use the service. Journey bookings are usually made in advance.

The services described above are important to binding communities together and driving economic and social cohesion. They are by their nature more personal and reflective of community needs. This model of employee and passenger engagement is an important theme which can and should be extend to the wider bus network. This engagement and involvement would help ensure Wales has the service which meets its needs.

Community and not for profit transport has an important role to play in all isolated communities and the potential to play an even greater one. The Welsh Government should extend its financial support for community transport to all isolated communities rather than only supporting such services in rural areas.

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