



North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 47	BCT 47
Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro	North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum

National Assembly Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into Bus and Community Transport in Wales

North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Response

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

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum's response relates to conditions in the North Pembrokeshire region.

- The operators of bus and community transport services and the Local Authority passenger transport officers continue to struggle to provide services that meet the needs of passengers. Their task is made ever more difficult due to changes in funding arrangements, changes to concessionary fare reimbursement levels, reductions in the revenue settlement grant and reduced levels of subsidy from the Welsh Government.
- The community transport sector finds it extremely hard to meet growing demand because of funding issues, a shortage of volunteers, problems connected to procurement and commissioning, concessionary travel and community transport regulation.
- Bus and community transport services provide an effective part of the transport mix and should integrate seamlessly with rail services. This is proving to be more and more difficult to achieve, due to the withdrawal of evening services, and the lack of Sunday and Bank Holiday services.

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

In North Pembrokeshire, the reasons include (in no particular order):

- Poor integration between bus and train services
- Withdrawal of evening services
- Lack of services on Sundays and Bank Holidays
- The growing number of older people with serious health conditions unable to travel by bus and relying on more personalised community transport instead
- Services not reaching the more remote areas
- Growth of the use of digital media for online shopping, etc. from home
- Inadequate information and lack of marketing about bus services

In its Inquiry response CTA Wales notes that:

- Demand for most community transport services is growing not declining (except for group hire services)
- Resources and funding is a limiting factor in responding to growing demand.

The response from the Older Persons Commissioner for Wales notes that:

- The reduction in Welsh Government funding for concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people has had a detrimental impact that is affecting the lives of older people across Wales.
- Maintaining free concessionary travel on local bus services for older people must remain a Welsh Government commitment.

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

In a rural area such as North Pembrokeshire, a large part of which is characterised by very small isolated communities with few amenities, ill thought out changes in the provision of bus and CT service levels make it more difficult to:

- Ensure people can access medical, shopping, leisure and social facilities/activities (negative health and social impacts)
- Support access to jobs and training and allow people access local services and facilities (negative economic impacts)
- Lack of adequate or appropriate bus and CT service provision leads to continued use of the car instead of public transport (negative environmental impact)

In its response Bus Users Cymru notes that 'there have also been cases of hardship particularly for disabled people where services have changed suddenly without consultation'.

In its response CTA Wales notes that 'community transport supports the more marginalised and disadvantaged in society. Reductions in commercial services often leads to increasing demands on community transport. Cuts to community transport therefore has a significantly greater socio-economic impact'.

The Older Persons Commissioner for Wales states emphatically that 'the Welsh Government must address the social, economic and environmental impact of reducing bus and community transport levels in Wales in order to address the objectives set out in the Strategy for Older People 2013-2023 as well as the seven national wellbeing goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act'.

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

To meet the needs of North Pembrokeshire passengers, the Welsh Government needs to:

- Create and maintain stable, long-term, effectively integrated bus and community transport systems with sustained and consistent levels of investment
- Develop integrated ticketing
- Improve information provision and marketing of transport systems and services

The Forum supports the call by Bus Users Cymru to:

- Re-establish separate body(ies) focusing on public transport to enable organisational

stability

As well as the call by CTA Wales for:

- Development of a National Community Transport strategy
- Review of the concessionary fare reimbursement rates for community transport
- Review of the BSSG and a move towards a more stable, longer term funding arrangement
- Put transport planning at the centre of all major developments and ensure that community transport is considered early on as part of an integrated transport provision.

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

- The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum has worked closely with Pembrokeshire County Council transport officers since the Forum was set up in 2000 and continues to observe their high level of professionalism and determination to meet the transport needs of passengers (and potential passengers) throughout the county.
- We wish to put on record our gratitude for the tremendous efforts they continue to make to keep as many bus and community transport services as possible operating in spite of changes to and/or reduction in funding support.
- In its Inquiry response Bus Users Cymru notes that 'the current financial environment makes it extremely difficult for local authorities to dramatically improve performance'.
- In its response the Regional Transport Forum for South West Wales notes that 'rural areas will require greater levels of financial support due to the challenges of topography and population dispersal if public and community transport is to grow in these areas'.
- The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum gives its full support to these statements.

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

In their Inquiry responses, the Regional Transport Forum for South West Wales and Traveline Cymru make convincing arguments in favour of the devolution of bus registration powers to Wales and Traveline Wales. To quote Traveline Cymru, in order to:

- Speed up the time taken to process registrations - with benefits to bus users and operators
- Offer a bi-lingual service to operators
- Reduce duplication of effort, i.e. two different organisations handling the same information, saving overall cost
- Keep the fees paid by operators in Wales (£60 per registration)
- Ensure the very best level of accuracy and up to date information is available to bus passengers in Wales

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

The Regional Transport Forum for South West Wales does not feel that Wales needs more or better regulation to manage an increase (not a decline) in bus patronage. Points made in support of this view include:

- Stability and a consistent and long term approach to improving the bus 'offer' is needed
- Although Wales already has the ability to establish Quality Partnerships or Contracts that provide more regulation than the existing free market conditions do, most Local Authorities are reluctant to enter into either agreement without longer term certainty that any financial commitments (whether for new structures or maintenance) can be met beyond the current financial year
- The key point should be to avoid over complicating or changing radically a funding mechanism which has changed every year for the last four years, which flies against the main call for long term planning and stability.
- The Forum supports these points.

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

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum endorses calls for:

- Long term (3-5 year) spending streams for bus and community transport services
- Specific funding pots to encourage vehicle replacement/greening of fleets and innovative transport projects
- Clarification of the role/status of groups such as the Bus Policy Advisory Group/Bus Users Cymru/Community Transport Association/Public Transport Users Group
- Multi journey/operator ticketing.

Concluding remarks

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum is an independent voluntary group that works for the provision of an effective integrated transport system to, from and within North Pembrokeshire, promotes the benefits of public transport and works towards the greater use of public transport systems.

The Forum supports strategic objectives that:

- Provide for greater integration and smooth interchange between different modes of transport
- Put in place transport services that meet the needs of individuals and communities, and
- Promote economic development and social inclusion (making services available to all members of the public) through the further development of an affordable, accessible transport system which meets user needs and works to remove access and mobility barriers for all transport users.