

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 34	BCT 34
Cymdeithas Mudiadau Gwirfoddol Powys	Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO)

Consultation questions

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

PAVO is a membership organisation which supports the third sector, part of that sector is those organisations delivering community transport (CT). In Powys we continue to have the largest CT sector in Wales supporting eighteen organisations to deliver more than 30 services including section 19 & 22 minibus services, community car volunteer driver schemes, taxi card & group hire schemes. Many of the services operated in Powys have been there for more than 30 years showing their resilience and ability to adapt to change as well as realising the need within each community. The sector is also governed by different legislation under section 19 & section 22 with a view to not making a profit, thus enabling the services to be operated without the need for a PSV operators' licence.

In the year 2014-15 we provided 104,413 passenger journeys to 7,694 members, many of whom have no other means of accessing basic services such as their GP, shopping or social events. These individuals often state how different their lives would be without the door to door provision offered by the CT sector.

Bus services in Powys are being further reduced following financial pressures for the LA to spend less, there is an expectation that the CT sector may fill the gaps, however, Powys consistently receives far less funding from Welsh Government for the delivery of transport than most other counties despite there being greater costs involved (less people to transport over longer distances, greater cost per passenger), therefore, BSSG to the sector provides only a fraction of

the required costs to cover the services being delivered. It would appear far more sensible for the LA to work with the sector in **planning** the most appropriate services for those communities rather than looking to them all too often as a last resort.

The CT sector is often looked to as a cheap alternative, however, most of our minibus schemes operate using paid drivers, the type of passengers being transported i.e. wheelchair users reduce the loading capacity of the vehicles making the transport more expensive.

Volunteer drivers in our community car schemes are a fantastic asset, however, there is a limit to their capacity and we have also heard concerns expressed as to the number of volunteers likely to be available in the future. Most schemes in Powys report they are currently in a reasonable position regarding the recruitment and retention of volunteers, however, they believe as people remain working later in life and pensions are not accessible until later, there will be less incentive to volunteer.

The sector has experienced many changes over the years, with a drive by LA's to provide more contracted services and also a move away from grants for both capital and revenue support. Providing school contract work can have an effect on the original purpose of the scheme i.e. providing a service for those who do not have access to other forms of suitable transport.

Funding streams fluctuate for the sector and a consistent and longer term approach would be welcomed. In Powys we were for many years in receipt of the Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative (CTCFI) funding which lasted almost eight years and then stopped, we had LTSG, followed by RTSG, followed by BSSG, we had capital funding for vehicle replacement, which lasted one year then returned two years later only to be stopped. This approach makes the planning and delivery of services more challenging, made worse when we hear nothing until the financial year has already begun.

We have seen a reduction in the number of trusts etc. willing to support transport services, however, we have also seen how resilient many of our groups are in either, offering additional services, tendering successfully or raising money from recycling services, charity shops etc.

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

In recent years we have on the whole seen an increase in the number of passenger journeys carried out by the CT sector. However, our more recent audit showed a slight decrease for 2014/15 compared to the previous year. However, overall mileage has increased which would reflect the longer distances required for those accessing hospital appointments which are often now further afield. We have also established a SLA with Wales Ambulance Service Trust (WAST) for the delivery of 'On Request Non-emergency Patient Transport' (NEPT), this has also led to more longer distance journeys and slightly less passengers carried.

Community Transport schemes are more and more being expected to deliver contracted services which in turn mean their core activity; providing transport for those in greatest need can be affected.

With the cuts in LA budgets and less bus services available to meet the needs of the public it would surely make sense that the call upon CT will increase! Unfortunately with cuts also made in the financial support to CT, the capacity to deal with additional journeys may not be there.

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

There is an increased need for demand responsive transport services within our most rural communities. Traditional bus services are proven to be too costly, however, rather than look at alternative solutions they are simply removed. People feel more isolated within their communities and with expensive or unreliable services are not able to access healthcare, jobs or social activities without use of a car, thus exacerbating the environmental impact.

Many older people particularly those who are wheelchair users are often solely reliant upon the support provided by CT in order to leave their homes. Community transport is often the most significant factor in keeping someone at home, thus alleviating pressure upon LA care homes and services.

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

The development of an all-wales strategy on community transport would assist in delivery of consistent services across Wales. We would like Welsh Government to consider carefully the cost of providing services in our most rural counties, ensuring funding is provided to support the delivery of those services in an equitable and sustainable manner. The reduction in BSSG support from 10% minimum to 5% was devastating to Mid-Wales where we have the greatest need, the most CT, and the least funding. We need to address this issue and ensure fair and equitable service delivery is provided across the whole country and not simply where the population is greatest.

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

In terms of community transport services LA's need to engage better with the CT sector, particularly in planning the delivery of appropriate services. With reference to the provision of CT in Powys we feel there is a need to put into practice the discourse and theory around commissioning transport services in Powys, our experience over more than 30 years surely indicates an ability to adapt to the needs of those within our communities, as well as fluctuations within funding. We need not to be considered as a final or last solution, but an equal partner in the support and delivery of high quality transport services. LA's should also stop hiding behind their '*statutory*' duties to excuse the poor provision of public transport and consider the impact on the local economy.

In recent years our experience in engaging with our Local Health Board and WAST have provided both service users and CT schemes

with a positive experience, being treated with respect and as an equal partner. As our LA and Health Board work more toward Co-production of services we would hope that our relationship could be strengthened and not lost.

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

The CT Sector in Powys overall supports proposals to devolve bus registration powers to Wales.

We feel this will enable decisions to be made more quickly and hopefully at a more local level, and in addition exercising the Welsh language commissioner’s duty upon organisations.

We would hope to see a Traffic Commissioner based in Wales, with all the appropriate legislative powers.

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

If further powers regulating the bus industry in Wales benefitted the CT sector and communities particularly in the most rural parts of Wales, then we would support any additional changes. The voice of the citizen needs to be heard and minority groups should not be adversely affected by unnecessary or unfair decision making.

We must however, consider EU regulations, National, Regional and local needs. One size does not fit all.

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

Better commissioning at LA level to include appropriate engagement with the CT sector, supported by clear strategic direction provided by Welsh Government.

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