

BSWB 16 - Evidence from: Green Dragon Community Transport

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Bil Gwasanaethau Bysiau (Cymru) | Bus Services (Wales) Bill

1. What are your views on the general principles of the Bill, and is there a need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention?

Green Dragon Community Transport - GDCT - are on the whole supportive of the Bill.

I think legislation is the way to go forward. It would be good to make sure that our passengers and potential future passengers have access to services on which they feel safe, can access and are operated by those that they have built up a trust with over the years. Community Transport needs to be involved at all levels.

2. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?**▪ Part 1 - Key concepts and general objectives (sections 1 to 4)**

We want to make sure that Community Transport is taken seriously in what it provides currently to the many, many people across Wales many of whom are pretty isolated living in very rural places and in town settings where services are provided to a high standard with virtually no support. The services we currently operate provide a lifeline to many of them giving them access to services, including health (GP's, hospital appointments, other health related appointments, shopping, social events, etc..) We need services to be flexible and accessible to be able to deliver what we do successfully and easily.

Over the last 12 months we have carried in excess of 15,000 passengers travelling in the region of 25,000 miles. No mean feat when you consider 2 part time office staff, 6 part time drivers and several volunteers with fleet of 6 minibuses and 2 accessible cars.

3. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

- Part 2 - Functions of the Welsh Ministers relating to local bus services (sections 5 to 20)**

Welsh Ministers must always work for the country as a whole and not just prioritise their own specific areas they were voted in for. Favouritism must not be encountered. I'm not sure they would have the capacity or the expertise to draw up the Network Plan so must consult with TfW, CJC's and LA officers and importantly together with CTO's (Community Transport Organisations) as they work on the ground every day and deal with the public directly. CTO's understand the complexity of peoples travel needs as they age and encounter various health issues.

Talking, liaising, listening to and with the public is essential and CTO's need to be used to engage with those that others cannot reach.

Funding will be a major issue.

With regards to permits – not sure what relevance there is to this as the Traffic Commissioner has to approve the Section 22 permits and the routes submitted to use on those permits. They have the knowledge needed in order to do this including knowing what routes, etc. exist. Are any plans being made to bring the TC's back to Wales as currently the office is in Leeds?

We are concerned for the future of our services and are worried about any potential upset of current services offered by CT for our passengers.

4. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

- Part 3 - Restriction on providing local bus services (sections 21 to 24)**

Currently GDCT provides 20 demand responsive services each week and we welcome and hope that these should and will not be franchised. They were put out to tender by our LA last year – no one else tendered for these services – they

are our services that we started over the last 23 years and so have nurtured them so that they operate efficiently and successfully. The areas these services operate in are mainly where they cannot access the Network. Some of our services are used by passengers to access the Network but we have to be mindful of the health, age and needs of our passengers to make sure they are supported to do this easily. An example of this is getting folk to the 460 bus service from Cardigan to Camarthen – this bus stops right outside Glangwili Hospital and is very useful for passengers but obviously not all those with appointments are able to use that service. Saves a lot on hospital transport and parking issues. CT needs to be able to continue to respond to communities needs and be involved in a continuous evolving network.

5. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

- Part 4 - Information and data (sections 25 to 31)**

It is important to make sure that the data that will be required to be collected is done so taking into account that many CTO's have very limited funding, IT skills, staff hours, etc. What sort of time scale will operators be expected to comply with in gathering and returning this data? Would there be any funding to help with this? Data collecting can be time consuming but we understand the need to do so and its importance.

Last year we carried in excess of 13,000 passengers covering some 25,000 miles and with 2 part time office staff dealing with all the bookings, scheduling, general enquiries, etc. it can be a juggling act.

We experienced issues with this sort of thing with the BEF so are wary and want it to be right.

Would there be training, funding, support to enable CTO's to comply.

It is important to note that all our services are bookable in advance. Each service goes out with a schedule specific to that journey so data is available. GDCT is proud of its achievements with regards to data. Also each CTO tends to have their own bespoke booking/data collection systems. There is no one size fits all in booking/scheduling/data collection and any systems off the shelf are usually prohibitively expensive.

6. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

- **Part 5 – Local authority powers and duties (sections 32 to 34)**

We hope that GDCT will still receive funding from our LO as they have contracted us to deliver the services. This funding is very important as it makes up a little for the fact that we cannot claim back a full 100% of a concessionary fare. We can only claim back approx. 69.18% of each fare. We are not allowed to charge the passenger a top up fare. Under a Section 22 permit we can claim back concessionary fares. The concessionary fare rate is always determined well into the new financial year and then any increase claimed in retrospect. The support and help we get from Pembrokeshire County Council is excellent. They have a huge wealth of knowledge of Community Transport and support us as much as they can.

7. What are your views on the Bill's provisions (set out according to Parts below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

- **Part 6 – Miscellaneous and general (sections 35 to 44)**

no comment

8. What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and how does the Bill take account of them?

We would like to see everyone have the opportunity to access transport. The powers that be need to engage with CTO's as they work on the ground every day with many transport options from Dial a ride services, town riders, accessible cars, hospital and health transport, etc and they have not been asked or encouraged to take part in any community events regarding future network development – in fact the whole of mid and north Pembrokeshire and south Ceredigion has been excluded from any such events. They all took place in the south of the county with insufficient advertising to enable people to get to them.

As a Community Transport operator we are not in the same financial or operational league as commercial businesses by any stretch of the imagination. We are not for profit so have no shareholders or paid directors. We have to apply for grants on a regular basis to help booster funds for vehicle replacement, upgrade, etc. Using electric vehicles would be prohibitively expensive and the area we operate in does not have the infrastructure. The WG needs to be looking at other alternatives as electric is not the be all and end all.

With the income we have coming in we have a full understanding of what we can and cant do. Sometimes the thought of having to bid for contracts is just one step too far – we just want to help the passenger at the end of the day. When we do find that we do need to bid for services/funding, etc. the CTA provide that help should but there is only so much they can do too with the funds they have.

We need to make sure that we have the same opportunities as the private companies to play an active role in delivering the future bus network even though we are not-for-profit and community led.

9. How appropriate are the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the Explanatory Memorandum)

10. Are any unintended consequences likely to arise from the Bill?

To get a section 22 permit takes over 8 weeks, once you are successful in getting that permit (the form is horrendous) you then have to apply for the route/area and that takes a further 8 weeks minimum. We need to make sure that these time scales are reduced to enable faster start up of new services.

We are worried for our passengers that all existing contracts will need to be retendered following implementation of the Bill. If we have to stop providing our services they will not cope at all. We are a lifeline to many of our passengers some of whom are the most senior of age – many from 65 up to and including late 90's and some even 100+. They are truly amazing. They don't want to spend all day in their homes staring at the same 4 walls – look what happened during the pandemic – we don't want a repeat of the traumas they experienced. For many of them our services are the only time they meet people, they make new friends, they look forward to going out. They look out for one another, want to remain independent for as long as possible and do things where they don't have to rely

on their neighbours, family, etc. We are also obviously concerned about the potential knock on to our finances.

All our drivers are MiDAS trained to a high standard and we wish this to continue and other training to be accessible with regard to Disability issues etc. When using CT transport all passengers are warmly welcomed and dealt with in such a way that by using CT they gain confidence needed to enable them to go on to use public transport. A bus buddy system and it works amazingly well.

11. What are your views on the Welsh Government's assessment of the financial implications of the Bill as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

It all sounds expensive and will require substantial long term investment.

12. Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum or any related matters?

Many of our passengers raise the issues that they are scared to go on normal public transport especially if they are wheelchair users. Space on board cannot be guaranteed. On our services the passengers book in advance by calling our office (not a call centre) so they always get the same person. Explanations are given to them on how the service works so they are fully aware and understand. A challenge when people may have onset dementia, etc. We also make sure that wheelchair assessments are completed for those using them to make sure they are safe to be transported on a vehicle. This is currently all provided free to the passenger and but it then gives them the confidence to travel.

Please do not rely on just using digital ways of getting information out to people. Many of our passengers do not have mobile phones, internet, etc - with the cost of living crisis they cant afford such thinks and don't want them. A lot of work needs to be done in person and this can be done easily using the networks that many CTO's have in the areas they operate in.

We need to make sure that it meets the needs of everyone across the Country now and in the future. GDCT is pleased to have the opportunity to give its thoughts. Thank you. We look forward to a good outcome.