

Key points

- The Welsh Government should address the anomaly whereby people entitled to concessionary travel in Wales are not charged for using buses but are charged for using community transport.
- The Welsh Government should impose a requirement on bus companies in Wales to carry out an impact assessment into the effect on older people of any changes to bus services.
- The Welsh Government, local authorities and bus companies need to work in partnership to improve bus services with regard to safety and physical accessibility.
- Good practice models of community transport provision should be replicated and strongly supported by the public sector to ensure their sustainability

Research

Effective transport is key to improving wellbeing amongst older people. Reliable local transport networks become increasingly significant as people get older, with journeys for essential items and social activities sometimes becoming more of a challenge¹. Without effective transport, older people are more likely to be exposed to loneliness and isolation; this lack of social interaction has been linked with the onset of conditions such as Alzheimer's, and is also closely associated with depression².

In Wales, 22% of men and 44% of women aged over 65 live alone; isolated older people are more likely to require services such as home helps or meals-on-wheels³. 66% of Welsh single pensioners do not have a car⁴; half of all households without a car consist of individuals aged over the age of 60⁵. Among households without a car, around 40% feel that their local bus service fails to meet their travelling needs to the local town or shops, while around 65% believe it is inadequate for travel to their local hospital⁶.

Where assistance is given to older people to access transport, it has a dramatic effect on improving their quality of life. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales⁷ found that the Concessionary Bus Pass in Wales has been invaluable in helping older people to retain their independence and remain active:

- 81% of respondents believed that without the pass, their quality of life would suffer.
- 78% believed they would be lonelier without it.
- 92% of respondents said that the bus pass allowed them to be independent.

Age Cymru's [Community Calculator](#) looked at the choice and quality of public transport (including community transport) in Wales. 37.9% of respondents rated their local transport as either Fair or Poor, indicating unacceptable levels of provision. Local authorities in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Ceredigion and Neath & Port Talbot all scored below average. Infrastructure, accessibility, stops, non-peak provision and links to other services were all key concerns. Anecdotally, comments from users suggested a wide range of criticisms of existing transport services:

- "We are not served by a bus – except the school bus. I can only live here while I can drive"

¹ Centre for Social Justice (2011) [Age of Opportunity: transforming the lives of older people in poverty](#), London: CSJ, p18/19.

² Campaign to End Loneliness (2011) [The Health Impacts of Loneliness](#), Campaign to End Loneliness: p1.

³ National Public Health Service (2007) [A Profile of the Health of Older Persons in Wales](#), Wales: NPHS – p45.

⁴ The Poverty Site (2009) [Wales: Services: Access to transport](#) (accessed 29th June 2011).

⁵ Welsh Assembly Government (2007) [Living Longer Living Better: report of an advisory group on the Strategy for Older People in Wales](#), Wales: WAG.

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government (2009) [A Statistical Focus on Age in Wales: 2009 edition](#), Wales: WAG / ONS.

⁷ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2010) [Concessionary Bus Pass Research](#), Cardiff: OPCW.

- “Could do with more buses being disabled friendly”
- “Bus stop 15 mins walk down hill, longer walk uphill on return”
- “Bus station could do with more shelters and seating”

Community transport was generally viewed much more positively than regular public transport, with older people praising the vital role community transport has in helping people to access their communities and essential services. There were, however, concerns over whether community transport would be maintained under current funding restrictions.

Community transport services (such as the WRVS Community Cars scheme in Pembrokeshire) are rated extremely highly by users in terms of their positive social impact⁸. Furthermore, research⁹ suggests that community transport services offer a positive social return on investment.

Our position

We believe that further options should be explored for extending the concessionary scheme to cover local rail services and provide taxi and community transport tokens on a national basis to improve the transport opportunities for older people who are unable to access bus services.

We are concerned by the difference in the standard of transport services available across local authorities, leading to inconsistent levels of provision and standards of services available for older people in Wales.

Community transport can play a crucial role in helping people to access essential services by providing services where public transport cannot or does not, and on a door-to-door basis for people with specific mobility needs. These services provide an essential lifeline for many older people and we would like to see increased provision across the whole of Wales. Good practice models of community transport provision should be replicated and strongly supported by the public sector to ensure their sustainability.

We are particularly concerned about the existing anomaly whereby people entitled to concessionary travel in Wales are not charged for using buses but are charged for using community transport. The relevant Minister has said that there are no current plans to address this inconsistency¹⁰.

Questions which AMs may wish to raise

- What would be the cost of addressing the anomaly whereby people entitled to concessionary travel in Wales are not charged for using buses but are charged for using community transport?
- Under the new Equality Act, what plans does the Welsh Government have to “age-proof” transport services by ensuring that any service changes only take place after an impact assessment has been carried out with older service users?
- Will the Minister look at ‘loaning’ unused or idle local authority vehicles to community transport schemes in order to maximise resources?

For more information, contact:

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⁸ WRVS (2009) *The Real Difference WRVS makes to People's lives: WRVS social impact report 2008*, WRVS.

⁹ Frontier Economics (2011) *Social Return on Investment: report for WRVS*, London: Frontier Economics – p3

¹⁰ Carl Sargeant AM, [written answer](#) to Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (WAQ57363), 23rd May 2011.