



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal
The Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

**Mawrth, 9 Tachwedd 2010
Tuesday, 9 November 2010**

Cynnwys
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Inquiry into the Impact of Welsh Government Policy on the Accessibility of
Transport Services for Disabled People in Wales—Oral Evidence

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Veronica German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Janet Ryder	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Mary Allan	Monmouth People First Monmouth People First
Gary Costas	Mencap Cymru Mencap Cymru
James Crowe	Anabledd Dysgu Cymru Learning Disability Wales
Martin Griffiths	Deafblind Cymru Deafblind Cymru
Dawn Gullis	Mencap Cymru Mencap Cymru
Sheryl Holley	Dehonglydd BSL BSL Interpreter
Paul Hunt	Mencap Cymru Mencap Cymru
Suzanne Jones	Scope Cymru Scope Cymru
Charlotte Moore	Monmouth People First Monmouth People First
Pablo Rees Mortby	Fforwm Anabledd Abertawe Swansea Disability Forum
Simon Stranks	Mencap Cymru Mencap Cymru

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Catherine Hunt	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerc
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Robin Wilkinson	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.16 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.16 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning everyone, and welcome to this meeting of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. I remind Members to turn off their mobile phones and pagers. Please ensure that BlackBerrys are also switched off, as they affect the sound. I remind everyone that we operate bilingually, and that simultaneous translation is available on channel 1 of the headsets; amplification of the floor language is on channel 0. We are not expecting the fire alarm to sound this morning, so, if it does, we will wait for instructions from the ushers. I normally say that you can follow me, because I will be one of the first out of the building. However, as I said, we should wait for instructions from the ushers. Do any Members wish to declare an interest? I see that no-one does.

9.17 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Effaith Polisi Llywodraeth Cymru ar Hygyrchedd Gwasanaethau Trafnidiaeth ar gyfer Pobl Anabl yng Nghymru—Tystiolaeth Lafar Inquiry into the Impact of Welsh Government Policy on the Accessibility of Transport Services for Disabled People in Wales—Oral Evidence

[2] **Ann Jones:** I am delighted that we have a panel of people to give us evidence this morning. We are waiting for Mr Crowe to arrive, but we will carry on, and he will join us later. We are delighted to welcome Paul Hunt, Gary Costas and Dawn Gullis from Mencap Cymru; I believe that Dawn has been here a few times. We also welcome Mary Allan and Charlotte Moore from Monmouth People First. This is our first evidence session on this issue. We are aiming to do a fairly short report, so that we can make some recommendations, and, hopefully, improve systems. I have agreed that Mencap can make a short presentation to begin with.

[3] **Ms Gullis:** Members of Mencap Cymru travelled on buses around Wales. We started in Cardiff, and then went on to Tenby, Caernarfon, and St Asaph.

[4] **Ann Jones:** I met you in St Asaph.

[5] **Ms Gullis:** We then went back down to Cardiff. There is no transport at all between Cardiff and Wrexham.

[6] **Ann Jones:** No bus transport, do you mean?

[7] **Ms Gullis:** Yes. We undertook this journey to raise awareness about public transport, and to ensure that there is easy access for people with a learning disability.

[8] **Ann Jones:** Thank you for that. I remember you taking that journey—well done to you all. It is bad enough for those of us who travel by other means from north to south Wales every week, rather than travelling on the bus. We will now move on to questions, unless the representatives of Monmouth People First wish to make some opening remarks. I see that you do not. Mohammad has the first set of questions.

[9] **Mohammad Asghar:** My question is to Mencap. To what extent do you feel that people with learning disabilities face specific barriers to accessing transport in Wales? Could you summarise what you believe the key barriers are?

[10] **Ms Gullis:** Bullying, and, sometimes, the bus drivers do not accept them for who

they are.

9.20 a.m.

[11] **Mr Hunt:** Bus drivers are not trained properly to deal with people with learning disabilities.

[12] I have another two points, and the second one is that there is a range of adjustments that we feel are not being made to services, such as timetables not being made available in easy-to-read formats. I know that Dawn has particular trouble with timetables.

[13] **Ms Gullis:** Yes, definitely. They still stick to the 24-hour clock, which is difficult for people with learning difficulties to understand.

[14] **Mr Hunt:** Gary, do you feel safe on the bus?

[15] **Mr Costas:** Yes.

[16] **Ann Jones:** What about Monmouth People First? What are your views on barriers?

[17] **Ms Allan:** We have not talked as much about public transport, because it does not affect our members so much.

[18] **Ms Moore:** I can think of two things that have affected our members. First, not many of our members can access public transport due to the area in which we live. There is less public transport; it is a small town, and it is quite rural. The buses are not useful enough. There are one or two buses a day, so that does not really fit in with what our members need. I know of one woman who refuses to use the bus now, as she does not feel safe because it does not have seat belts. Those are two of the issues that we have with public transport, but it is not really our area.

[19] **Mohammad Asghar:** What impact do barriers experienced in accessing transport in Wales have on people with learning disabilities?

[20] **Ms Moore:** For all transport?

[21] **Mohammad Asghar:** Yes.

[22] **Ms Allan:** I think that it prevents the people whom we represent from accessing education and social events and from being included in society, really. It is impossible for most of our members to do anything. There is GrassRoutes and Dial-a-Ride, but many people have had problems with it. On paper, it sounds fine but it does not seem to function as it should. We have just recently found out about Dial-a-Ride, which, I think, is a privately-run scheme in Monmouth. Finding out information is quite difficult. I do not think that there is enough publicity; people just do not know what is available. Taxis are very expensive and only one taxi firm has wheelchair space.

[23] **Mohammad Asghar:** What about Mencap?

[24] **Mr Costas:** I work in the cafe in Holyhead.

[25] **Mr Hunt:** How do you get to work?

[26] **Mr Costas:** On a service bus. They have changed the company around.

[27] **Mr Hunt:** So, if you could not catch the bus to work, would you be able to go to work?

[28] **Mr Costas:** No.

[29] **Mr Hunt:** I think that that is a similar story for everyone with a learning disability. If they are unable to access public transport, they will not be able to access health services, find employment or access further education.

[30] **Ann Jones:** Janet has a question.

[31] **Janet Ryder:** Yes, thank you, Chair. That is what I was going to ask you: could you give us examples of where people want to go to college or work, but because they cannot use the public transport—perhaps it does not run at the right time, or perhaps they cannot get on the public transport or do not find it accessible—they have not been able to take up those opportunities? Do you have any examples of that to give us?

[32] **Ms Gullis:** We have a few examples from some colleges that Paul and I visited before.

[33] **Mr Hunt:** Coleg Ceredigion was mentioned in the evidence that we submitted. We spoke to many students there on the Partners in Politics project. They did not feel confident using the trains in Aberystwyth to look for work or other opportunities, so we arranged for transport training. Had they not done that transport training, they might not have felt confident enough to use public transport in the future. What do you have to do to get a train at your local train station, Gary?

[34] **Mr Costas:** You have to get on the blue box to go on to the train, because the train step is too high.

[35] **Mr Hunt:** You have to stand on a wooden box, flag down the train and then use the box to get on to the train. That could be a barrier for many people.

[36] **Ann Jones:** Mr Crowe has arrived; I will just give him a minute to settle in.

[37] **Mr Crowe:** I beg your pardon. I had to walk across the barrage in the end, because of the traffic. Perhaps that is fitting given the subject of today's meeting.

[38] **Ann Jones:** Absolutely. We are on the first set of questions. I will summarise briefly. We are trying to find out to what extent people with learning disabilities face specific barriers and what the impacts are of any barriers that they face. Do you have anything to add in answer to that set of questions? We have heard how Gary could not get to work if could not access a bus service and Mary told us about how people cannot access education. Do you have anything to add to that? Sorry, I should have said that you do not have to touch the microphone; it comes on automatically.

[39] **Mr Crowe:** My apologies, again, for being late. I want to pick up on a few things from the point of view of individuals with a learning disability. It is clear that there are positive developments in transport for disabled people. Traveline Cymru has the basis of being a good and useful resource, but the information available for disabled people on its website is extremely poor. It is limited to one page, which is a great pity, given the investment that has been put into Traveline Cymru over the years. The Arriva Trains Wales guide for disabled people is a good start, but if you look at it you will see that it is still not a very user friendly document. It would not be particularly helpful for many people with learning disabilities. There is a lot of text in a small typeface and it is not very graphic. While it is a

good start, more could be done by Arriva Trains Wales to develop that guide. The assisted passenger reservation service provides a good basis of support for disabled people, but, as was picked up in one or two of the responses that you received, it would be good to see some monitoring of that service and to what extent it is increasing usage of the rail service by disabled people. So, those are a few points.

[40] **Ann Jones:** Oscar, are you happy with those answers to your questions? If so, we will move on to Joyce.

[41] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning. I am sure that you are feeling refreshed after your walk across the barrage. [*Laughter.*] My questions are on the national transport plan. Mencap Cymru welcomed

[42] ‘the comprehensive nature of the Regional Transport Plan Guidance document, specifically Chapter 11 Accessibility Planning.’

[43] To what extent do you think the Welsh Government’s national transport plan and the guidance issued in relation to the formulation of regional transport plans pay adequate attention to the needs of people with learning difficulties?

[44] **Ms Gullis:** Simon and I went to two planning committee meetings. Not many people turn up to those meetings. They are also not publicised properly so that people with learning difficulties can know to go to them. If they were publicised in the way that Mencap, Disability Wales or People First publicise their events, they would be publicised among groups to help them and in day centres.

[45] **Mr Hunt:** Was the national transport plan easy to read?

[46] **Ms Gullis:** No.

[47] **Mr Hunt:** So, you had difficulty reading the plan, did you?

[48] **Ms Gullis:** Yes.

[49] **Joyce Watson:** So, the language in which it was written was not accessible in the first place.

[50] **Ms Gullis:** No, it was not. The meeting was also not accessible for people to come and give their views, because it was not publicised sufficiently.

[51] **Joyce Watson:** So, are you saying that if more people had known about it, and more people had come, those views might have been listened to, but they have not been?

9.30 a.m.

[52] **Ms Gullis:** Yes.

[53] **Mr Hunt:** The wording of the plan could, perhaps, involve more people who may feel left out if they cannot understand the plan itself.

[54] **Joyce Watson:** How effective has the Welsh Government been in engaging with people? You said something about the lack of engagement with learning disability groups because of a lack of advertising. How could it improve that?

[55] **Ms Gullis:** Come to Mencap Cymru, Disability Wales or Monmouth People First, or

day centres, definitely.

[56] **Mr Hunt:** Advertise through day centres, local disability groups or other third sector channels.

[57] **Joyce Watson:** What you are really saying is that it did not engage with the people on the ground who might have given it some really useful information.

[58] **Ms Gullis:** Yes.

[59] **Mr Hunt:** The invitation for Mencap arrived at quite short notice; we would have liked more time to prepare.

[60] **Joyce Watson:** This next question is for Mencap. You say that some points raised in the equality impact assessment were not taken on board in the finalised plans. What points were not taken into account?

[61] **Ms Gullis:** We raised quite a few points, such as staff training for young people, schools and pupils and training for trainers.

[62] **Mr Hunt:** We felt that the importance of equality training for drivers is recognised, but there is an emphasis on delivering targets and the number of training opportunities, rather than on the content of the training. We want to ensure that there is more than just one afternoon of general equalities training and that the training is focused on specific disabilities.

[63] **Ann Jones:** I have a question for Monmouth People First. You gave two examples in your written evidence of two people and their different experiences. Do you think that the national transport plan does what it needs to do for these people?

[64] **Ms Moore:** It does not in our area, because we are very rural. We have so many people who live in rural areas that the buses would not get close enough for them to be able to use them, especially if they had severe or complex needs. The fact that a bus runs a mile away from you does not mean that it is accessible. Getting to a position to even access public transport would be a problem for many of our members who live rurally.

[65] **Ann Jones:** So, the national transport plan has not even touched the issue; it is another document that no-one will look at.

[66] **Ms Allan:** I would say that, up to this point, we were not even aware of it.

[67] **Ann Jones:** Does Learning Disability Wales have anything to add to those questions on the transport plan?

[68] **Mr Crowe:** The national travel plan is a strategic type of document, by definition. There is only one passing reference to disabled people in the document itself. It is a helpful document at a general level about how transport will be better co-ordinated in Wales, so it is welcome. However, when you dig down into the equality action plan, there is still an emphasis on improvements that will be made, perhaps to platforms or rolling stock, but not so much on what the outcomes will be for disabled people. What is the real driver to push up the proportion of disabled people who successfully use the transport services?

[69] **Janet Ryder:** This is a question to Jim Crowe. Mencap mentioned that one of the issues was bullying by inappropriately trained drivers. Should that be part of the plan and, in your view, is it part of the plan?

[70] **Mr Crowe:** Yes. Monmouth People First and Mencap would be very well placed to have heard of stories and anecdotes of very bad experiences by individuals with a learning disability. We would like those experiences not to happen at all; they do happen in other aspects of real life, and they happen in public transport settings. We would certainly like to see more training for transport staff. In looking at the responses that you have received, I noticed that you received a response from Newport Bus; it is one of the few bus companies that ensures that, in its certificate of proficiency for being a bus driver, all its drivers undertake modules on how to meet and respond to the needs of disabled people. That is an example of good practice that is really to be commended. If one bus company can do it, why cannot other public transport services do it? That would be one issue.

[71] The other point is that we have a large number of stations in Wales that are unstaffed. It would be nice if more of those stations could be staffed, and there would be benefits for the wider community, not just for disabled people. Very often, as we know, it is a sense of feeling insecure, as much as actual incidents, that can be unnerving and unsettling. Therefore, more staff being around would be enormously helpful. It would prevent lifts from being locked at night. We are to get a new lift at Wrexham General Railway Station, but it is an issue of when that will be open and when it will be closed.

[72] **Ann Jones:** Arriva Trains Wales promised, when representatives came here and sat where you are sitting, that the company is now operating its lifts 24/7. I do not know whether I would plan my journey around that; I think that I would also have a back-up system. The company is looking to try to do that. It is a valid point.

[73] **Janet Ryder:** We are looking at short journeys and bus journeys that people might use to access colleges or their place of work, and if drivers are not adequately trained to facilitate people using the buses or to manage situations that might arise, that would put fear in my mind, as someone who has not had to experience that, and stop me from using the transport. As you have said, to encourage more people to use the transport, we must look at the issue of adequate training.

[74] **Veronica German:** The Mencap Cymru evidence particularly mentioned different schemes that the Government uses, such as the blue badge scheme, the bus pass scheme and community transport. I have two questions about this. First, what are the good things? You can probably guess what the second question will be.

[75] **Ms Gullis:** I guess that it is: what are the bad things?

[76] The good thing about the disabled bus pass and the blue badge scheme is that anyone with a learning difficulty can use them. The plus one pass is also pretty good for people with learning difficulties; they can take their carer or a family member with them on their bus pass. We found it awkward when we did a bus trip; we were going to apply for the bus pass for the companion, but we could not do it, because the form was so hard to fill out.

[77] **Mr Hunt:** Gary, do you take a companion or someone to help you to travel on the bus when you go to work?

[78] **Mr Costas:** No.

[79] **Mr Hunt:** Do you go on your own?

[80] **Mr Costas:** Yes.

[81] **Mr Hunt:** So, if you wanted to go to Bangor or somewhere further away, would you need someone to travel on the bus with you?

[82] **Mr Costas:** No, I just have old ladies on the bus with me. Some are 90 years old and some are 80 years old.

[83] **Mr Hunt:** You might find it useful to have someone to support you on the bus.

[84] **Mr Costas:** No.

[85] **Veronica German:** What if you had to go somewhere different—somewhere that you are not used to going, perhaps? You might be going somewhere for a change, that is strange to you.

[86] **Mr Hunt:** Would you like me to come with you on one of those journeys?

[87] **Mr Costas:** Yes, only because you are the best.

9.40 a.m.

[88] **Mr Hunt:** During the trip, we found that, if Gary, for instance, was to have a companion added to his pass, some councils and bus drivers told us that he would not be able to travel to work alone. The guidance does not say that, but some drivers and councils are interpreting it that way—that Gary would not be able to travel alone.

[89] **Ann Jones:** So, you are saying that, although the Government was trying to give you a companion, recognising that that is a way in which people use public transport, there are problems with the way others are interpreting the guidance—thinking that, if a companion is listed on your bus pass, you could not travel without that companion.

[90] **Mr Hunt:** Short journeys could be made perfectly independently, but longer journeys would need a companion. We would not want to restrict people to having to travel with a companion all the time.

[91] The second point that we would like to make is about the application forms for bus passes. They are all different, depending on what county you live in, and some of them are asking people with a learning disability to tick a box saying:

[92] ‘I declare that I... am stricken by a learning disability that is a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence’.

[93] **Veronica German:** It is awful, is it not?

[94] **Ann Jones:** What you are asking for is one common bus pass form, so that it does not matter where you are, the form will be the same.

[95] **Mr Hunt:** Yes, and accessible, because some counties ask for evidence, and others say that they will find the evidence for you.

[96] **Veronica German:** Does anyone have any comments on those schemes? Community transport is perhaps more relevant to Monmouth People First.

[97] **Ms Allan:** We talk about public transport, but you cannot use it to go everywhere. Where community transport might be useful, there often seems to be a lack of MiDAS-qualified drivers. That is a hurdle that has to be overcome, so that people can use that kind of transport in the evenings, to go to evening classes and so on. There are quite a few buses from various sources that could be used, including resources from social services and so on, but it

is the lack of drivers that is the barrier. It stops these buses being used a lot; do you agree?

[98] **Ms Moore:** It is not the public transport side, but more the local authority and community transport side of it. I am not sure if that fits in.

[99] **Veronica German:** That is part of it—it is one of the issues.

[100] **Ms Moore:** There are instances, as Mary said, of buses sitting there all evening that could be used. There are buses unused during the day as well, because there is no volunteer driver available, or getting hold of the keys is a problem, and is not co-ordinated well. There is a lack of communication.

[101] **Ms Allan:** There needs to be better communication, and the services that they have could maybe be pulled together and used more efficiently.

[102] **Ann Jones:** Are you saying that, if you were to find volunteer drivers, you would find difficulty in accessing local authority buses? Do you see that as a barrier?

[103] **Ms Moore:** I used to work for the local authority, and when I left it became complicated to keep the MiDAS bus pass. It was difficult to keep the channel of communication open so that I could get hold of the keys when the buildings were not open. It is now a case of planning ahead constantly to be able to access these things, and trying to keep communication channels open at all times.

[104] **Veronica German:** Mencap's evidence stated that people are sometimes turned away from community transport because they are deemed not to need it as much as others who, perhaps, could not walk as well. Is that a common problem? Has that happened?

[105] **Mr Stranks:** It is a specific example. A group of people had arranged to go to Lesotho, and we decided to use community transport as a way of promoting the service among our membership. We were told the day before that we were not allowed to use community transport because another group with greater needs was asking to use the service.

[106] **Veronica German:** That seems bizarre. You have talked about the good and the bad on these issues. You mentioned travel information, and Dawn talked about the timetable being difficult to use. Goodness me—my husband loves timetables, but I hate them.

[107] **Ann Jones:** They are very useful, though.

[108] **Veronica German:** They are difficult for all but the most determined to use, I think. I do not know whether anyone else has any comments about accessibility of timetable information.

[109] **Ms Moore:** We are not even talking about being able to physically see information; just accessing it initially is difficult because of a lack of computers and broadband, and so on. The information might be out there, but even if you can see it, you might not be able to read it. However, in our experience, people often cannot even see it initially. That is a difficult one to deal with.

[110] **Veronica German:** So what is the solution? Do you have a solution? *[Laughter.]*

[111] **Mr Crowe:** I share your concern about the difficulties with timetables. As colleagues from Monmouth People First have said, if you do not have access to the web you have a serious problem, and many people still do not have such access. Even if you do have access to the web, or to paper copies of timetables, they still use rather obscure codes or symbols. For

example, 'SO' is used for 'Saturday only', and so on. A lot of tiny print underneath the timetable itself is used, too. They are not the most accessible things for any of us to get to grips with. The 24-hour clock can also present problems for many of us; I am not sure what the answer is to that. National Rail has a good initiative called 'Stations Made Easy', on its website. It states that it has 2,500 photographs of stations so that, if you are travelling a longer distance, perhaps to a strange station, you can see what the station looks like and be more reassured about where you need to go, if you have that ability. However, on a random sample, I could not find any photographs of Welsh stations among the 2,500, but they are supposedly there. There are many line drawings of stations there, but they have been drafted by engineers or architects, so they are not particularly user-friendly.

[112] **Janet Ryder:** You have already talked about the issue of safety being a barrier to people using public transport. Is there anything that you would like to add on that aspect, perhaps about how safe you do or do not feel when using any kind of public transport? What could we do to help you?

[113] **Ms Gullis:** I sometimes feel safe when using the bus, but I sometimes get bullied a lot on the bus by kids from school, and so on. I try to ignore it or speak to another person. I get off at the next stop after the bullies, or the stop before them; that is the only way that I can see around it.

[114] **Janet Ryder:** So you try to avoid them.

[115] **Ms Gullis:** Yes.

[116] **Janet Ryder:** Does that stop you from using the upstairs of buses? Do you feel safer downstairs where the driver is?

[117] **Ms Gullis:** I feel safer downstairs than upstairs. When I was a little girl, I fell down the stairs, so I stay downstairs now.

[118] **Janet Ryder:** You have already talked about your travel training and how that can help people. Could you tell us more about that?

[119] **Mr Hunt:** We mentioned in our evidence that students from Coleg Ceredigion took part in travel training. We believe that it would be useful for everyone who has a learning disability and is currently in school to receive that training. It would make them feel more independent and it would make them feel safer on buses and trains, knowing when to press the bell, when to get off the bus, and knowing the procedures for using public transport. That would be beneficial for all young people who have a learning disability.

[120] **Janet Ryder:** So, we could perhaps make that training more widely available. We have talked about training bus drivers, but is there any other kind of training that could be offered, for example, to people who can help you use public transport?

[121] **Ms Gullis:** With all the forms to fill in, it would be easier if the people who work for local travel lines could receive some training, because they do not always understand people who have a learning difficulty over the phone. If you mention one place, they ask what you are on about.

9.50 a.m.

[122] **Janet Ryder:** So, is arranging certain things over the phone still a particular problem?

[123] **Ms Gullis:** Sometimes, yes, because they do not understand what I am saying to them, and it is difficult to explain to them what I am saying. I have to ask one of my colleagues to explain to them. I have difficulty in saying, 'I want such and such a place.'

[124] **Janet Ryder:** When I phone up some of these services, you get about four different things to choose from, and by the time you have listened to them all you have forgotten what number you have to press. Does everyone get confused by that, or does that cause a particular problem for you?

[125] **Ms Gullis:** That causes a particular problem for me and for the person at the other end of the phone line. They do not understand what you are trying to say, or where in Cardiff or elsewhere in Wales you are trying to go.

[126] **Janet Ryder:** What would help that situation? For example, would having a person there instead of a telephone help?

[127] **Ms Gullis:** They need training, and they need to understand that people who have a learning disability need them to speak more slowly and more clearly.

[128] **Janet Ryder:** Thank you; you have answered my question.

[129] **Ann Jones:** Do you feel that taxi drivers understand people with disabilities?

[130] **Ms Gullis:** Some taxi drivers do in some parts of Wales. I know that they do in Cardiff and Newport, but other than that, I do not know.

[131] **Ann Jones:** If you are travelling and are going somewhere that you have not been before, where the taxi firm just runs from here to wherever, if the taxi drivers are not trained, is that a problem?

[132] **Mr Hunt:** Most of our experiences come from public transport. I know that Dawn has caught a taxi a few times.

[133] **Ms Gullis:** Yes.

[134] **Mr Crowe:** The mood these days is not for more regulation, is it? Many people, particularly in more rural areas, are very dependent on taxis. As you say, madam Chair, if you live in the locality, you have probably developed a relationship with taxi firms, and there will be drivers you can trust. However, if you go to another rural area or to another town, what do you do and who do you book? There could be a voluntary initiative or something to do with taxi licensing, because disabled people are customers; they are putting money into taxi firms' pockets. As I say, there could be a voluntary agreement whereby firms promote the fact that they are particularly disability-friendly, if that is an appropriate way of putting it, or they could be required as part of the taxi licensing regime to undertake some training or to demonstrate some awareness of the needs of disabled people. That would be a big step forward because, as we know, in large parts of Wales, there is no public transport.

[135] **Ann Jones:** I think that you talked about there being only one taxi firm in your area that has access.

[136] **Ms Allan:** Yes, there is only one in Monmouth. That is the one that is used most frequently. It is very expensive, but I do not know how that compares with other services.

[137] **Ann Jones:** How many taxi firms roughly are there in the area that you cover?

[138] **Ms Allan:** There are quite a lot, but there is only one—

[139] **Ms Moore:** Only one has vehicles with wheelchair access.

[140] **Ann Jones:** That speaks volumes, does it not?

[141] **Ms Allan:** It does, yes. I have heard of someone being charged extra for putting a walking frame in the vehicle. That was for a regular trip, and it was done for quite a while.

[142] **Ms Moore:** We have lots of anecdotal evidence about taxis. When I worked in the day services, there was a chap who needed to be picked up to go home at around 3 p.m., but because that did not fit in with the school run, which the taxi drivers were mainly concerned with, they either left him to be picked up really late or picked him up halfway through his day because that fitted in with them, rather than with him. However, he was still required to pay for that service.

[143] **Ms Allan:** They came second to the school run.

[144] **Ms Moore:** That is right. I have travelled with a person who needs wheelchair access, and I have had to repeatedly request for the clamps to be checked, because they were not safe, but that was seen as an inconvenience, despite the fact that the person and their wheelchair were moving about in the vehicle as it was travelling along. So, it is not a great service at all. I agree with the idea of training and awareness, because these people seem to be getting second-class treatment.

[145] **Ann Jones:** Given that local authorities are facing some pretty tight financial settlements, how could we limit the impact on transport accessibility for disabled people? How do we protect what we have, even though we have agreed today that it is not what it should be?

[146] **Ms Gullis:** Bus passes are needed, and so are blue badges for people with learning difficulties to park easily in town or wherever.

[147] **Mr Hunt:** Gary, how would you feel if your buss pass was taken away and you could not use it anymore?

[148] **Mr Costas:** I would be gutted.

[149] **Ann Jones:** That is a fair comment, because you would not be able to go to work, would you?

[150] **Mr Costas:** No.

[151] **Ann Jones:** You would then have to pay to go on the bus, which would not be worth your while, because you would be spending all your wages on the bus fare, would you not?

[152] **Mr Costas:** Yes.

[153] **Mr Hunt:** People are fearful that the concessionary passes are going to disappear, which would remove independence for a lot of people.

[154] **Ann Jones:** So, you would want us to try to protect those services.

[155] **Mr Hunt:** Yes.

[156] **Ann Jones:** Should we be looking to strengthen community transport? Are there ways that we can make it more efficient? You were talking about the fact that there are buses that are empty all day.

[157] **Ms Allan:** We gave you the example of someone who lived down a little track in a rural area who signed up for Grass Routes. The driver would not take the bus down the track, although he could have—he did not want to. The same journey for that person costs £50 return in a taxi, which cannot happen. So, she has had to give up the things that she likes doing, such as voluntary work, the social stuff that she did and going to an education class.

[158] **Ann Jones:** Jim, do you have anything to add?

[159] **Mr Crowe:** Yes, although it is not on a devolved matter. Many people and disability organisations are very concerned about the proposed withdrawal of the mobility elements of the disability living allowance, particularly for people in residential care.

[160] **Ms Allan:** The impact of that on the people you represent would be horrific.

[161] **Ms Moore:** As far as communities are concerned, there needs to be more communication between agencies and for local authorities to go out to voluntary groups to highlight that there are facilities available that are not being used. There needs to be some sort of agreement, and a central place where people can go to access facilities that would otherwise be wasted.

[162] **Ann Jones:** That would not take an awful lot of additional money, because it is just about ensuring that the services currently provided tie up.

[163] **Ms Allan:** There is just a lack of awareness, really, of how difficult it is.

[164] **Ann Jones:** Thank you very much. Do any committee members have any more questions?

[165] **Janet Ryder:** The threat to mobility allowances could undermine everything that we are trying to do in this report. Could you expand on that a little?

[166] **Mr Crowe:** I am no expert on benefits, but this issue is apparently to do with part of the disability living allowance. I suspect that some of my colleagues in Mencap might know quite a lot more about it than I do. It is said that the change will affect 58,000 people across the UK, which does not sound like many people, but as colleagues have said, it will physically stop people from leaving their homes, because they will not be able to pay for taxis, and local authorities will not pick up that need for cash. I wish that I could say more, Janet, but I am not a great expert on it. It is certainly the area that is of most concern to disability organisations, judging from the latest announcements.

10.00 a.m.

[167] **Janet Ryder:** Although this is a non-devolved issue, it would cause this committee concern if it were to restrict movement. If your organisations gave that any extra thought before we finished this report, we would be happy to receive anything that you would like to write to us about.

[168] **Ann Jones:** Thank you all for coming. As has been said, if there is any more information that you feel will help us with this report, we will accept that, but we will also try to find briefings about what that will mean. We are doing a piece of work here and we do not want it to be scuppered. It is an important piece of work, and we are highlighting the very

issues that you have told us about today. You will receive a copy of what we have said. Hopefully, it will be in a typeface that you can read. Perhaps it should be noted that we should provide it in 14 point for you and then you will be able to read it. We are all very good at preaching that, but perhaps we do not carry it out in our own work. So, we will try to provide it in a way that you can all understand. You will also get a copy of our report. Thank you very much for coming today. The committee will now break.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.01 a.m. ac 10.14 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.01 a.m. and 10.14 a.m.*

[169] **Ann Jones:** We now welcome to the table Pablo Rees Mortby, the co-opted secretary of Swansea Disability Forum, Suzanne Jones, the director of Scope Cymru, and Martin Griffiths, the project manager for Deafblind Cymru. Martin will be supported by Sheryll Holley, who will translate for us. I thank you all for coming and for your papers. If it is all right with you, we will move straight into questions. The first set is from Oscar.

[170] **Mohammad Asghar:** Good morning to you all. My question relates to the barriers facing those who have physical impairments and the impact that those barriers have. To what extent do you feel that people who have physical impairments face specific barriers to accessing transport in Wales? Can you summarise the key barriers?

[171] **Ms Jones:** One of the big barriers for someone who has a physical disability is not having all the information available, which is why they always have to make their journey arrangements well in advance of when they want to travel. They cannot say, 'I fancy going out today', as they have to make the arrangements well in advance. Planning the journey is critical. I will give you an example. One of our service users took the train to a Scope Cymru conference, and, after the conference, she went back to the train station to make her way back to her care home only to find that the train had been cancelled, and that there was a bus service in its place. This lady was in quite a big electric wheelchair, and there was no accommodation on that bus for her electric wheelchair. She had a speech impairment and no-one seemed to understand how they were going to make arrangements so that she could get back to her care home, and all they could advise was that she phone the care home, which was 30-odd miles away, to come and collect her. So, she was left at Welshpool train station. It was quite late at night by then, about 7 p.m., so she was feeling very vulnerable. Bear in mind that she had very little speech and did not know how she was going to get back. She had to wait there for a good hour until someone came to collect her. So, one issue is about making arrangements when a train is cancelled and taking on board the fact that there might be someone using that train who has a disability, and so, if the operator puts on buses or taxi services as a replacement service, they should be able to accommodate that person and their disability. That is just one issue.

[172] **Mr Mortby:** As Suzanne said, the lack of accessible information is an issue. It is about knowing in advance what is accessible out there, and how you can get from A to B in an easy and safe mode. Another is having to book in advance. Some areas have community transport, but it varies depending on the area in which you live. Sometimes, you have to book two to three weeks in advance to make sure that you can get on that form of transport. In areas such as Swansea, that sort of transport is not available after 5 p.m. or at weekends. That is a barrier denying a lot of disabled people and the elderly an aspect affecting their quality of life. Basically, your life stops at 5 p.m. Some people like to go to their local theatre or to local support groups, and not all of them run during the daytime; some run in the evenings and some run at weekends.

[173] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you for that serious information.

[174] **Ann Jones:** Do you have anything to add to that, Martin?

[175] **Mr Griffiths:** The question is about physical disability, and Deafblind Cymru is about sensory disability. The main issue is accessibility of information to plan and take a journey. Virtually every one of our members who uses public transport has at least one recent example of being unable to find out how to get from A to B, because those who can use a website find Traveline Cymru difficult to use, as it does not have in-built accessibility features, and they find it hard to access telephone information and that sort of thing. Most of our members are older persons. The majority are probably over 60 or 70 years old, so the combination of deafness and sight loss is added to by the issues affecting people who are ageing. So, a lot of people who welcome things such as the concessionary bus passes sometimes feel unable to take full advantage of them.

10.20 a.m.

[176] So it is about accessibility and finding out how to get from A to B, and being able to see where the bus is going. There is also an issue when you are on a journey and there is a change in circumstances. This often happens on trains, for example, when the train has to stop because of a technical problem and you have to get off and catch a bus. People cannot access information about what is actually happening. There is very rarely someone to speak to on a train. It is all done over the tannoy system. As to the extent of the problem, I would say that everybody who uses public transport has issues regarding the accessibility of printed and spoken information—it is very difficult.

[177] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you for your precise answers. What impact do barriers that are experienced in accessing transport in Wales have on people with physical impairments?

[178] **Mr Mortby:** As I mentioned earlier, it affects people's quality of life. Unfortunately, nine times out of 10, disabled people are treated differently. As Suzanne said, if a train is cancelled, sometimes they put on a taxi service for you, but the issue is the time that it takes for it to happen. They have to contact headquarters and it takes another hour and a half. Once, I was in Cardiff to attend the theatre. I was trying to catch a train at about 10.30 p.m. but, 10 minutes after leaving Cardiff station, it broke down. We had to wait for at least an hour before they decided to take us back to Cardiff. The bus to take everyone else was there within 10 to 15 minutes, but I had to wait another 45 minutes for them to arrange a taxi. That is the reality.

[179] On buses, there is a lack of wheelchair spaces. Some buses have a wheelchair space, but you do not always know which buses have them. On one occasion, at the local bus station in Swansea, I wanted to check whether the route that I wanted to take the next day would be accessible. I was not sure that the bus that I wanted at that particular time would be wheelchair-accessible. I went to the bus stop to catch the bus—it was the local bus—but it had no wheelchair space. Sometimes, on some routes out of Swansea towards the Mumbles area, they have a disabled symbol on the door, which indicates to me that it must be wheelchair-accessible, but you turn up and find that the ramp is fastened to the floor. It is screwed down. It defeats the object of having a built-in ramp, if you cannot use it.

[180] **Janet Ryder:** Quite often, we hear of trains being cancelled and alternative transport being put on. You have already mentioned the problem of that alternative transport not being available. How much of an issue is the lack of availability of accessible alternative transport?

[181] **Ms Jones:** I think that it is quite a big issue. We all know that trains get cancelled, particularly in the winter. It is a big issue for people who are trying to be independent. At Scope, we say that equality is the main thing: independence and receiving the same quality of services as your next door neighbour, or anybody else. However, if a train is cancelled and you do not receive the same quality of service, you have still paid for the same train ticket.

You should be getting the same standard of service as everyone else.

[182] One of the big problems that people with disabilities are always mentioning to me is the lack of lighting at stations. If you have a visual impairment, the lack of lighting is a problem. The lighting is so low that it is difficult to see your way around if you are on your own. That is quite an easy problem to overcome, but it is a big issue.

[183] The issue that I keep going back to is that if you have a disability, you always have to plan everything. If your friend rings up and asks you to go shopping with them, you cannot go because you have to plan. You have to say that you can go, but it will have to be next week because you do not know what trains will be running, but you might have spent your money by next week. So, it always about planning and no-one can do things on the spur of the moment. It is a fact of life; we all want to do things on the spur of the moment and we do not want to be forever planning. Much of our lives are planned out for us day to day, particularly our working week, so when we have our social life we do not want have it planned out. You do not want to say that you cannot do it this week because you have to wait until you get the information. It is about having the information available so that everyone can access it, whatever their disability. Also, the information needs to be at a level where you can read it, particularly at bus stations. Some of the bus station information is high up, so you have to get someone to read it for you and tell you when the next bus is coming. You do not want to do that. People often think that if you have a disability, you will always have someone with you. That is a fallacy; you do not always have someone with you. You have to be able to get that information and you should not have to rely on someone else to get it for you. That person is not always around.

[184] **Janet Ryder:** It sounds like you are saying that, many years after the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act, we have still failed to mainstream equalities and access to transport.

[185] **Ms Jones:** I think that we have. Go to Barcelona, they have got it.

[186] **Janet Ryder:** There we are, Chair. [*Laughter.*]

[187] **Ann Jones:** Barcelona in January; how does that sound? [*Laughter.*]

[188] **Ms Jones:** They know what they are doing with their transport. Accessibility there is fantastic if you have a disability, and I think that we can do it as well. It is not rocket science. We can do it; we just need a bit of forethought to be able to think of the issues. Scope is always here to assist with transport and making recommendations on how you can make transport a lot more accessible.

[189] **Veronica German:** I am particularly interested in what you said about information. Martin mentioned not knowing when there is a problem on the train. As that is a specific issue, what is the solution for people who have sensory impairments, such as deafblindness?

[190] **Mr Griffiths:** It cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. The problem that deafblind people have is that people who have a single sensory impairment usually use the other senses to compensate; we cannot do that. That said, very few deafblind people are totally deaf and blind; people usually have some residual sight or hearing. So, if you are on a train, for example, the main issue is being able to find a guard or someone who you can ask for information. If I need to get off at Dinas Rhondda station, I have to speak to a guard, because when you are on a Valley lines train, you would not have audio-visual information and you probably would not even have a tannoy announcement saying where the train will stop next. A lot of people who are deafblind cannot recognise that they have arrived at the station. As Suzanne said, people assume that we have this supply of people who will take us places, but

that does not really happen. Many of our deafblind members are elderly, have lost a partner and live alone, so they struggle with companions.

[191] Some people have said to us that they would benefit from audio-visual information, but if we are talking about a trailblazer on a train that says ‘the next station is such and such’, it would need to be at eye level so that someone could move in front of it and be able to see that information. If it was verbal information, it would need to be conveyed to them by a guard or a member of staff on the train. So, there are solutions, but we have to plan; we would probably have to go to speak to someone in advance to say that we were making the journey and would need some help. What people tell us is that the difficulty in travelling changes depending on the route that they take. If you are travelling from Cardiff to London on one of the mainline express trains, the availability of information is a little better than if you are travelling through rural Wales or the Valleys, when it becomes much more difficult.

10.30 a.m.

[192] **Ann Jones:** Are you content with that answer, Oscar? I see that you are. Janet is next.

[193] **Janet Ryder:** On the Welsh Government’s national transport plan and the guidance issued in relation to the formulation of regional transport plans, do you feel that they pay adequate regard to the needs of people with physical impairments?

[194] **Mr Griffiths:** Could you repeat the question?

[195] **Janet Ryder:** There is a thing called the Welsh Government national transport plan. From that, guidance has been issued on the formation of regional transport plans. Have you ever looked at any of these regional transport plans to see whether they pay full or adequate regard to the needs of people with any kind of physical or sensory impairment?

[196] **Mr Griffiths:** I must admit that I am not fully briefed on the regional transport plans; I have a member of staff who briefs me on these kinds of issues. The proof is in the pudding; at the moment, we do not have accessible transport for our deafblind members in Wales. Further than that, I cannot comment on your question.

[197] **Janet Ryder:** Going on the results that we have, would you surmise that regional transport plans pay little or no attention to those needs, or if they do pay attention to them, that it is lip service and not real attention?

[198] **Ms Jones:** I would say that it is lip service, not real attention, particularly when you are looking at rural areas. We all know how the geography of Wales is made up; there is a high percentage of rural areas and, therefore, a significant proportion of the population lives in very rural locations. The plans have to take that on board and take account of the little station that is in the middle of nowhere, or the bus that only comes twice a day, if you are lucky. A person’s disability is highlighted to an even greater degree if they are living in a rural area with a lack of accessible transport.

[199] **Janet Ryder:** I assume from your responses that you have not been included as consultees in any way in the formulation of these plans.

[200] **Ms Jones:** We have not.

[201] **Mr Morthby:** I would say that it is pot luck, depending on what area you are in, as some authorities are more involved with local disability groups than others. I have been in Swansea for 14 months and I am aware that, in the past, they had an access officer, but since that post has been cancelled it has been harder for disabled people to get their views across.

Having someone who specialises in that area of work—who knows who to involve and how to involve them, and who makes it accessible for those people to be involved—makes it easier to improve working in partnership. Without involving the people that an issue affects, there is no point.

[202] **Janet Ryder:** Whenever the Government or local government carries out consultation exercises, I think that the usual pattern is to write to groups to ask them whether they have anything to say. Sometimes, that letter is lost, or people do not have the ability to respond to it. Are there better ways that we could consult groups like yours to ensure that your views are taken on board?

[203] **Ms Jones:** The telephone—people do not use telephones as they should. I get many e-mails from the Assembly; they flash up, and I have staff who will draw my attention to certain issues that we are campaigning on at that time. It would be useful for someone to make a telephone call to say that an issue that is highly relevant to us is coming up, and for us to make a note of it. I get hundreds of e-mails, but some things are really relevant to us, so we need to be on board, to look at it and talk with our members about it. It is not just about me answering; it is about talking with everyone else about it and getting a clear, concise answer and helping WAG and the transport authorities. We are there to aid and help. We cannot do that unless people come to us and ask for our help.

[204] **Janet Ryder:** So, it is about how the question is asked.

[205] **Ms Jones:** Yes.

[206] **Mr Mortby:** To add to what Suzanne said, it is also about the actual timescale. Sometimes, people want a response as soon as possible, but some groups might only meet about once a month. So, if we are to involve the appropriate groups to respond to a piece of work that you are doing—and it is important to involve people—it is about having a timescale that allows people to read the information, take it on board to work out what you are trying to get across to them and allowing them to respond. In Swansea, we have a lot of support from the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service, and it keeps us up to date on what is happening out there across Wales.

[207] **Mr Griffiths:** We have a network of deafblind groups in north and south Wales. Our group is unique. It is very hard to get our members involved in consultation, and the only way to really do it is by going to the groups to speak to them direct. The problem that we always have is, if you have a north Wales consultation taking place in Wrexham, for example, how we get people from where they live to Wrexham. It is incredibly difficult and it takes a lot of planning and a lot of volunteer staff to support it, and so on. So, we have a unique clientele; they are probably among the most vulnerable members of Welsh society. The only way to communicate with them is to go to where they are supported by our staff and volunteers, and they will have plenty to tell you about their lives.

[208] **Janet Ryder:** I think that that speaks volumes, Chair. If you are having a consultation on a public transport scheme and the people you want to ask cannot get there because the public transport is so poor, that sums the situation up more than adequately.

[209] I will ask you now about the concessionary fare policy, community transport and the shared spaces scheme in which able bodied and disabled people use the same space. What aspects of those initiatives are most successful in terms of improving access to transport for people with a disability in Wales?

[210] **Ms Jones:** On the concessionary fare, we welcome that explicitly. It is a great scheme and the bus pass is brilliant. However, if you are receiving a high rate mobility

allowance under the disability living allowance, you are not going to get your bus pass until a year after you have been on that DLA, which does not make sense. To be able to get DLA you have to have a high level of non-mobility, but you cannot get your bus pass for a year. So, the two do not tally—you have your mobility allowance, but you cannot get your bus pass. That is one thing. However, we welcome the concessionary fare.

[211] Shared spaces are good for some people, but not for all. If you have a visual impairment, you will miss the kerbs, as there are not any. When you have a visual impairment, you go by the kerbs, but you will not have that. For someone in a wheelchair, it is great because you do not have the kerbs. You are not always going to meet everybody's requirements in one plan. However, we are in favour of looking at, and helping with, the design of towns and new shared spaces, looking at how the council can put in some indication that there is a difference in the street level, or otherwise, for someone with a visual impairment. I find the dropped kerb system really frustrating. There will be a dropped kerb on one side of the road, but there might not be a dropped kerb on the other side of the road. So, you then have to go down the dropped kerb and up in the middle of the road to find the dropped kerb on the other side. They do not tally. You can go for quite a long way without finding a dropped kerb, so you spend your time going around and around looking for a dropped kerb that is non-existent. Sometimes, the gradient on the dropped kerb can be so high on the other side that you have to wait for someone to push you up. We still have not managed to achieve the dropped kerb and how it works, and how the gradient can work. If you get the gradient right, you can go down one and come up the other without any effort. However, we have not managed to do that.

10.40 a.m.

[212] Having said that, one of our people who uses the Sully Skills Development Centre, which is always working with the local council, telephoned the Vale of Glamorgan Council to say that there were no dropped kerbs from the centre to the post office, which they often used. Without a moment's notice, council staff came out and put in the dropped kerbs. That is an example of the council working with the service user and the residents of that area, which is great. So, it can be done, and it did not take the council long; it took it a day just to come out and put in the dropped kerbs. That made such a difference, because it then meant that that person could go independently down to the post office without having to get a member of staff to go with them. Little things mean an enormous amount to someone's independence.

[213] **Janet Ryder:** Martin, I have been lobbied by a number of groups, particularly visually impaired groups, to suggest that shared spaces may not be a good idea for them.

[214] **Mr Griffiths:** First, with regard to concessionary bus passes, we are not negative about everything. That is one thing that we are positive about, as it has been a great help. However, shared space is one of the issues that have been brought up in all of our groups. When we have asked people what the issues are, we have found that it is the introduction of shared surfaces or spaces. For example, if you walk along Queen Street in Cardiff in the morning to attend the deafblind group, you feel as though you will be mown down by a delivery van coming onto the surface. People do not really know where the walkway ends and where vans are allowed to travel up and down. To me, it does not seem like rocket science. If you do not have traditional kerbs, perhaps it is matter of having different surfaces: you could have a rough, flat surface where people will not trip over anything against a smooth surface for vehicles, or vice versa. It is a matter of people knowing what the strategy is. However, something that all of our members have definitely raised is the issue of shared surfaces and how they will identify which is which.

[215] **Ann Jones:** Pablo, do you have anything to add?

[216] **Mr Mortby:** First, we support the bus pass 100 per cent because, when a route is accessible, it enables people to be more independent. If you live on an accessible bus route, it enables you to go and catch the bus at a time that suits you instead of having to rely on other types of transport—so, the bus pass is very positive. With regard to shared pavements, I am a great believer that pavements are for people, as I have noted in my written response to you. Just last week, a local authority representative came to our local forum meeting to get the views from both sides on the issue of shared pathways. They are there for a reason, not only for pedestrians but also for people who wish to cycle safely. The question that I put forward was: what happens in schools? Schools need to educate about the purpose of shared areas. If you start slightly earlier, when children are five or six years old, that is, in primary school, and you continue that awareness education, that will hopefully mean that shared places will become more accessible, provided that there is a separate area for people to walk and a separate area for cyclists, possibly with a raised strip so that blind and visually impaired people can identify the safer areas to walk. This is what Suzanne mentioned about dropped kerbs. Why have dropped kerbs when you can have raised crossings? Why make people do the hard work, so that a person in a wheelchair or with a mobility problem has to go down to road level? Why not bring the road up to the pavement level, and let the cars do the hard work? You would still have tactile paving; that is there for a reason, to help visually impaired and blind people. Why not let vehicles do the hard work and go over the humps? Hopefully, that will reduce the speed of the traffic.

[217] **Ann Jones:** Veronica, do you want to take your set of questions?

[218] **Veronica German:** You have all mentioned the shortage of accessible information. It seems to be a big issue generally. Martin talked about what you can do to overcome that. Others have talked about Traveline Cymru not having a dedicated accessibility section; would having one help? We have all realised that there is a huge problem here, but we need the answers now. We need to see what we can do to make it better.

[219] **Mr Griffiths:** An increasing number of deafblind people are learning how to access the internet using Braille keyboards and all sorts of things. The problem is that if you do not have in-built accessibility, if you complain that a website is not accessible, you are told to go to internet explorer and use the zoom facility to increase the page by 200 per cent. What that means is that a lot of information that you need disappears from the screen, and it is really hard to navigate. If you have in-built accessibility functions, then everything you want is viewable on the screen; that is one issue. Obviously, a lot of deafblind people cannot access the internet; perhaps they were not brought up in the internet age and find it difficult to start now. I get frustrated; I am deafblind myself, and when you go to a bus stop, for example, the information is usually in a place that is hard to see because there are loads of people sitting at the bus shelter, and the information is hidden behind them. Every time I see a poster with timetable information, I think, 'They could make this font at least twice the size'. They have taken up a lot of space advertising the fact that there is a bus every 10 minutes, which is never true, of course. I wish I could get in there and say, 'Give me the computer and I will design this for you and make better use of the space'.

[220] **Veronica German:** That is a good idea.

[221] **Mr Griffiths:** It is the same with pocket timetables. You open them out and the print is just far too small. People might say, 'Well, you have a low vision scheme in Wales; you have magnifiers', but even with magnifiers, that print is so small that it is hard to magnify to the right level. It is what I call social-model thinking. If you could make the information on these pocket timetables bigger, a lot more people would be able to use them without requiring other interventions.

[222] **Ann Jones:** Pablo, did you want to come in here?

[223] **Mr Mortby:** Information should be available to people from all walks of life, whether disabled or not. English and Welsh are not always people's first languages. Using plain language would help. Symbols, pictograms and logos could help. When you see the British Rail logo, you know what it is—it means a railway. When you see 'A&E', you know that it refers to an accident and emergency department at a hospital. If we used more symbols as logos, that would be a lot easier for everyone, hopefully, to understand.

10.50 a.m.

[224] For those who require it in Braille, it should be available in Braille as well. In Swansea, a new timetable was put up last week, on one of those big boards. The font looks smaller now than it did before. That is also true of bus timetables at bus stops. So, to support what Martin said, I am sure that the print has got smaller and is now much more compact, yet there is an enormous board there; why do they not spread it out to make it easier to use?

[225] **Ann Jones:** Do you have anything to add to that, Suzanne?

[226] **Ms Jones:** One of the main things that an organisation such as ours can help with is training, particularly the training of staff. That is vital. When staff deal with an individual, they need to deal with that person's individual needs. All disabilities are not the same, but that is what people tend to think. For example, a bus driver with a heart of gold may try to help you to get on the bus, but he might not talk to you first—he will just say, 'I will push you up', but you might not want to get on that bus. So, it is about training staff to talk to people and to find out how they can help appropriately. Training is vital, and we are always happy to help with that.

[227] **Veronica German:** Would it be a good idea for companies, when they are designing their timetables, to run them by several organisations, and to ask for suggestions on how to make them better? That would not cost them.

[228] **Ms Jones:** Yes. Why spend all that money on getting something out that no-one can use? Let us spend some money on talking to people so that we can get it right in the first place.

[229] **Veronica German:** It needs to be done right the first time.

[230] **Ms Jones:** Yes.

[231] **Mr Mortby:** To add to that, it is good practice to consider what has worked elsewhere, so that we can do it here as well. There are two bus stops at the bottom of my road; one has information at a low level and the other has information at a high level. It is the same information, noting where you need to be, or where you need to go, or at what time the buses will come, but one is at a perfect height and the other one is too high up.

[232] **Veronica German:** Another aspect that we have come across—I believe that Scope and Deafblind Cymru have mentioned this—is the feeling of vulnerability on public transport. How much of a barrier is that for people accessing public transport in Wales? That vulnerability might be perceived rather than actual—although it could be both—but it can stop people from using public transport. What can be done to overcome that fear?

[233] **Ms Jones:** I think that it is the fear of the unknown, which can affect you whether you have a disability or not. If you have a disability, you may feel vulnerable going on a journey for the first time, especially if you have lived at home with your parents or in a residential setting, and are now setting out independently. It is that vulnerable feeling of 'what

is going to happen?’ ‘What if I cannot answer someone?’ ‘What if I do not know where I am going?’ Again, it goes back to having the right information, in order to make you feel more confident at the beginning of your journey, and about training staff to have that rapport between you and the staff. So, it is about building confidence, and having the information that will overcome that vulnerability. Vulnerability at night goes back to lighting at stations, and there is also vulnerability of how the public will perceive you, whether you have someone with you or not. If someone has a disability, that is always part of their mindset—‘how will I be perceived by other people?’ That takes us back to training again.

[234] **Mr Griffiths:** The perception of danger is greater than the danger itself. I believe that people recognise that. The issue that people keep raising is that, if you get on a crowded train, for example, the guards rarely walk up and down, because they just shut themselves in, and maybe cannot be bothered to try to push their way through the crowd. For example, if people have been to a rugby match or a football match and then get on a train, there is a lot of boisterousness. In most cases it is just boisterousness, and nothing happens. However, you fear that something will happen, and think about how you will draw attention to it, if something does happen. That would be the same for non-disabled people. There was an article in the *South Wales Echo* recently about an incident where a woman stopped a train at Ystrad Mynach because she was fed up with the way in which people were behaving. It is all about the fact that, if you have a problem, you cannot speak to anyone about it, to be reassured that everything is fine. It is about the fact that there is no conductor or guard, or that they are not visible on a bus or train. I agree with what Suzanne was saying about feeling vulnerable at certain railway stations—not the main ones, but stations on the Valley lines, which are quite dark in the evenings.

[235] **Janet Ryder:** Everyone has mentioned lighting in train stations, but what about bus stations? Are you satisfied with those? Is there still a lot of work to be done to make bus stations more accessible?

[236] **Mr Mortby:** The main bus stations are better than the smaller ones. There is a lack of lighting at bus stops. Sometimes, where there is a bus stop, there might not be lighting or seating. There may just be a pole that has a ‘bus stop’ sign on it, but it does not tell you which buses stop there either. If someone has a bad experience, it puts them off completely. Martin, Suzanne and I may have had bad experiences, but we are able to fight back. Many people do not have that confidence to carry on and say, ‘I will try again. Last week I had a bad day, but hopefully next time it will be better.’ For some people, that can put them off using public transport completely.

[237] **Ann Jones:** I think that we have covered issues regarding transport providers and the need for training. Joyce, do you want to take the final set of questions?

[238] **Joyce Watson:** You have already said that people are adversely affected by the lack of flexibility in travel plans. I do not want you to run through that again, because we are running out of time, but could you give us some suggestions about how we might be able to overcome that difficulty? We are trying to solve the problem and make suggestions. Are there any other key interventions that you think might help people with physical impairments to access transport? So, I have two questions. First, how would you overcome the difficulty of inflexibility? Secondly, how would you help people with physical impairments, whatever they are, to access transport?

[239] **Ms Jones:** One way of overcoming the problem in the first part of your question would be to be fully engaged with local authorities. We are fully engaged with the Assembly, but we need to be fully engaged with local authorities, which sometimes see themselves as being separate. It is about being engaged with them locally and getting local people engaged with them. Disability organisations have lots of members out there, who live throughout

Wales. They can get involved in access groups and in issues in their local community. It is about utilising those more than we do.

[240] **Mr Griffiths:** I agree with Suzanne's point. One thing that I have not mentioned today is the fact that, given the way in which transport is scheduled, many people cannot attend hospital appointments or events in certain places. Transport provision is quite good between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or 6 p.m., but before or after that, and on Sundays in particular, people feel very isolated. So the answer is to provide transport at times that people want it to be provided. I know that the numbers are not there, but deafblind people do not have a choice. We are not able to hold a licence because of eyesight issues. So, we do not have a choice.

11.00 a.m.

[241] If you are lucky enough to be able to attend, for example, a concert in Cardiff on a Sunday night, you will not be able to find a bus home to towns like Caerphilly or Pontypridd, and taxi fares are too expensive. So, there is no equality there. If deafblind people want to go shopping in Cardiff—Christmas is coming up and then there will be the sales—but have no one to take them, there will be no trains or buses on Boxing Day or the day after. So, there is no equality there either. It is all about providing transport. If the shops are open, the transport needs to be there. It is that simple.

[242] **Mr Mortby:** I support what Suzanne and Martin said. I have experience of Sheffield and Manchester, which have metro or tram systems. I appreciate that they take a long time to build, but, once they are in place, they are the most inclusive public transport that we have in the UK. It is easy to get on and off, because you can do it yourself—you do not have to rely on the bus driver to help you get on and off, or a guard to get a ramp out to get you on and off. If they are built right, they can accommodate more than one wheelchair user; some of them can accommodate two or three. So, I would like to see Wales moving towards trams. I know that it will take time to build tram networks, but it would help to take away some of the pressure or the crowds on the trains.

[243] **Joyce Watson:** Finally, given the current climate of public sector cuts, what key messages would you like to give to the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities to limit the impact on the accessibility of transport for disabled people? We will have one key message from each of you.

[244] **Ms Jones:** For me, it would be to save the disability living allowance for people receiving residential services, because although you are in a residential service, you still want to get out. The DLA is what is used to allow people to go out to access the community. We all hear about the importance of being part of a community, so it should not be about going to the big old-fashioned building and staying there. Cutting the DLA would mean that those residents would not be able to access their own community, which is a major issue. A lot of people in England have pooled their DLA to buy a bus to take the residents out. Taking away that grant would mean taking away people's independence. The community is there, but these people would be separated from it.

[245] **Mr Mortby:** My key message is not to reduce the funding for areas that have community transport, whether that is called dial-a-bus or dial-a-ride—different areas call it by different names. If you take that funding away, more people with various disabilities will become a lot more isolated.

[246] **Mr Griffiths:** Our members have been saying that they are feeling quite vulnerable and are worried about losing the concessionary bus facility and possibly community transport being taken away. We rely heavily on community transport to get members to our deafblind groups. People feel that they are being targeted, although they are the most vulnerable

members of society. They are being targeted for the failures of the banking systems and so on. They feel that they are easy targets.

[247] **Ann Jones:** Thank you all for your evidence. We will send you a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, and you will also receive a copy of the committee's report. This is our first evidence session, so we are at the early stages of this inquiry. If there is anything else that you feel that you want to add, we could look at that. Thank you.

[248] I remind Members that our next meeting is on 23 November, when we will be scrutinising the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government on the Assembly's budget and on equalities. The meeting is now closed.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.05 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.05 a.m.