

Policy Review of Public Transport in Wales

A Submission by Age Concern Cymru

In 1994 Age Concern Cymru started campaigning for improved public transport services and concessionary fare schemes.

Participation in Planning

Older people are motorists, public transport passengers and pedestrians, therefore, their needs and opinions must be built into all aspects of transport policy. People can improve services through their involvement in decisions and planning. One of the recommendations made by the Millennium Debate of the Age, co-ordinated by Age Concern, was for the development of an integrated public transport system for Wales via consultation with users of all ages.

Concessionary Travel

Age Concern Cymru welcomes the reiteration by the National Assembly of its commitment to providing free bus passes and free bus travel for pensioners in Wales. However, the concession is available to people who have attained pensionable age and this means discrimination between men who reach this at age 65 and women who attain it at age 60. Age Concern would urge the assembly to amend the criteria to the qualifying ages of men and women to be the same age of 60 years.

Age Concern Cymru is seeking a lifetime bus pass for older people, rather than the annual pass.

Community transport should be included in concessionary travel.

Public Transport Services

There are clearly serious problems in accessing bus services in parts of Wales. Age Concern Cymru has made its position clear by publicly stating on several occasions that until there is an integrated rail and bus service across the whole country, with an improved strategy for continuous development, many older people will continue to remain isolated and socially excluded.

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Age Concern in Montgomeryshire is aware of the problems facing residents of the more rural villages. They are isolated, seldom drive and rely heavily on a sparse bus service where they have to adjust their routines to accommodate what should be a "user friendly" service.

Older people have told Age Concern in Carmarthenshire about infrequent services and changes to timetables and routes.

Age Concern Ceredigion point out that in the winter, outside of the main towns, there is only a skeleton transport service and in some places it stops altogether. Due to the sparse services, Age Concern believes that people should be given the value of the concessions by way of vouchers. These could be used for travelling with schemes such as Country Cars, Dial-a-Ride and taxis.

Accessing Transport Services

At bus stops current timetables should be provided and shelters with seating are needed because of the inclement weather conditions.

Low floor buses assist older people to overcome the problem of getting on and off buses. Age Concern Cymru hopes to see more widespread use of these vehicles which should be clearly recognisable.

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Appendix

To support the submission by Age Concern Cymru to the review of transport in Wales

An Ageing population

There are 585,300 people of pensionable age living in Wales (1) and 3 out of 5 live on or below the poverty line. (2)

Rural Communities

More than 21 per cent of the rural population of Wales is of pension age or over.

42 per cent of rural parishes in Wales have no permanent shops and 83 per cent have no GP. (3)

Rural areas have suffered from the closure of many essential local services – sub post offices, doctor’s surgeries and village shops – and more older people are having to travel out of their villages...(4)

Health

Older people in Wales consult their GP more than any other age groups. (5)

48 per cent of the 39 million prescription items dispensed in Wales during 1997 – 1998 were for people aged 60 or over. (6)

Car Ownership

91 per cent of older people living alone and 57 per cent of pensioner couples do not own a car. (7)

Citizenship & Health Maintenance

Participation in the life of the community, visiting friends and family near and far, doing the shopping, enjoying leisure activities and undertaking civic duties may all depend upon being able to afford to go to and fro. Those without the means to do so are excluded from such everyday expressions of citizenship. Further more, public transport has been seen as a fundamental component of community care in enabling older people to get those health and welfare services they require. (8)

References

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3 Statistics from the Institute of Rural Health in Gregynog, Wales.

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5 Health Statistics Wales 1998. Wales: Welsh Office.

6 Regional Trends 34 (1999) London: The Stationery Office.

7 Warnes, T. (1992) "**Homes and Travel: local life in the third age**"
Carnegie UK Trust.

8 Department of Health (1991) "**Care Management and Assessment: a practitioners guide**" DOH/SSI