

PET(4)-14-12 : Tuesday 16 October 2012

P-04-380 : Bring back our bus! Petition against the removal of scheduled bus services from east Lampeter, Cwmann & Pencarreg

Response from : Robert Ellis, Case Investigation Officer, Older People's Commission for Wales/Comisiwn Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Re: Bring Back Our Bus! Petition

I am writing in response to William Powell AM's email request for a Commission response to the above named petition.

The Commissioner's position is as follows:

The views and needs of older people should be properly considered in transport planning. Transport is a policy area which can have a significant impact on older people and their ability to access services such as hospital/GP appointments, their freedom to undertake social and volunteering opportunities and to maintain their independence and wellbeing. Access to public transport in particular, enables older people to meet others and make new friends, reducing their isolation and loneliness which in turn improves their quality of life and physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Whilst the Commission would not comment on the detail of proposed changes to specific bus services, as a matter of principle we encourage local authorities and the Welsh Government to involve older people in decisions on transport links. Where appropriate we would also encourage government to use financial incentives to support essential but lesser used services, and bus companies to consult openly and transparently with their users about proposed changes.

Older people themselves regularly contact the Commission in relation to the vital role that public transport plays and we have heard from many older people, especially those who live in more rural and isolated areas, who tell us that public transport offers them not only a crucial link to essential services but also the opportunity to remain integrated in society; the impact of transport on the lives of older people therefore cannot be overstated.

The Commission undertook research on the use of the bus pass by older people in Wales which showed that non car owners were more likely to be older, female, disabled and from low income households and that changes to bus services would therefore have a greater impact on more vulnerable groups in society. For your consideration, I have attached a copy of the research report.

The results of this research clearly showed that the bus pass has far wider benefits for older people than simply providing free travel. A significant

majority of respondents felt that a bus pass improved their quality of life and helped prevent them becoming lonely and housebound. However, the bus pass is only able to deliver these benefits if bus routes and timetables meet the needs of older people who wish to access them. Consideration of alternative provision, including community transport schemes, should accompany any decisions related to bus service changes.

I hope that this information is of use to you; however, should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Case Investigation Officer
Older People's Commission for Wales/Comisiwn Pobl Hŷn Cymru