

Enterprise and Business Committee
IPT19.

Inquiry into Integrated Public Transport

Evidence from Older People's
Commissioner for Wales



Submission to the Inquiry into Integrated Transport

November 2012

Context

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales in an independent voice and champion for older people, standing up for their rights, and making representations on their behalf to policy makers in Wales. Everything we do is rooted in the experiences of older people, and what they tell us is important to them.

This submission to the Enterprise and Business Committee reflects the importance the Commission places on transport as a means to improve older people's wellbeing. It is based on the experiences of older people as public transport users, as reported to the Commission.

Transport was the third most popular topic raised by enquirers contacting the Older People's Commission in 2011-12, it is also a topic that comes up regularly at events attended by the Commissioner and her staff. Older people tell us that transport is vital to staying socially included, accessing shops and services – including the most vital services like hospitals.

The Commission is aware that a much higher proportion of pensioner households do not have access to a car than all households¹ – almost half of pensioner households (48%) do not have a car compared to 26% of all households.² Older people in rural areas are also more likely to lack access to a car. Respondents to a survey in 2004, aged 65 or over, were twice as likely as younger people to have no access to a car.³ People aged over 60 are much more likely to have used the bus in the last seven days than other age groups.⁴ Older people on low incomes (less than £11,440 a year) were especially reliant on buses, with 41% using them in the last seven days compared with just 27% of those earning £11,440 - £39,999 a year and 17% of those earning in excess of £40,000 per year.⁵

Section 7 of the 2006 Transport (Wales) Act specifically states that the Welsh Government is required 'to have regard to...the transport needs of the elderly or disabled'.

An effective approach to integrated transport should focus on the following outcomes for older people (which will also benefit all users) in order to give them confidence to get out and about:

- Enabling seamless journey planning, and making sure no key destinations are inaccessible
- Using a joined-up approach to ticketing to allow older people to transfer between different modes of transport on a single journey; i.e. from bus to train
- Encouraging other users to respect the priority seating allocated for older people and other users who need it.
- Improving facilities on board and at key interchanges, such as toilets, and adaptations for accessibility
- Incorporating the growing demand for short but complex journeys involving one or more changes

¹ 2001 Census of Population

² Welsh Assembly Government (2003) 'Car or Van Availability', Statistical Bulletin, 71/2003

³ White, S.D., Walkley, C., Radcliffe J., and Edwards, B. (2007) 'Coping with Access to Services'. Wales Rural Observatory Research Report No. 12

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government (2008) 'Bus usage and concessionary fares in Wales, 2005-2006', Statistical Bulletin, 26/2008

⁵ *ibid.*

We welcome moves by the Welsh Government towards placing service users at the heart of public transport by linking meeting their needs to the awarding of the Bus Service Operators Grant. Pensioners using their bus passes are already a major revenue source for bus operators across Wales, they keep many routes viable that otherwise would not be. It is only right that this contribution is reflected in the commitment to maintaining non-profitable routes wherever possible.

Case Studies

The following cases brought to the Commission's attention emphasise the importance of integrated transport to older people.

1. Mrs B lives in a rural location and relies on public transport to reach larger population centres. These visits are often social; shopping or visiting family and friends, but Mrs B also relies on the bus service to take her to her hospital appointments for essential treatment. However, Mrs B first has to travel to a nearby town to access connecting services to these places. These connections are poorly timed, and Mrs B often finds herself waiting for over an hour at the midway point of her journey.

Recently, the frequency of buses running between Mrs B's village and the nearby town has been cut and the service no longer operates much later than 4pm. As a result, Mrs B is restricted to a limited timeframe in which to make these visits, always having to make certain that she leaves early enough to make the return journey.

As her hospital appointments do not necessarily fall within this limited window of time, Mrs B frequently encounters problems. If the appointment is too early then she might not be able to arrive in time, and if it's too late then she risks being stranded without a means of returning home.

2. Mrs O relies on heavily on public and community transport. She has been informed that one of her local services will no longer run on Sundays and Bank Holidays, whilst evening busses would run on a reduced timetable. As a direct result of cuts in service she can no longer visit her friends, go to church, or attend social events in the town centre.

Mrs O has difficulty walking even short distances and she is no longer able to drive for medical reasons. Her nearest alternative transport option involves walking half a mile to the next bus stop.

3. Mrs Y and her friends have for a number of years used a minibus service to visit nearby supermarkets. The service collects Mrs Y

from her home, allows her enough time to complete her shopping and then take lunch at the supermarket's cafe, before returning her home. The driver helps carry the passengers' shopping bags to their homes.

Mrs Y has a number of health issues and relies on this service to maintain her independence and to carry out day-to-day chores. The service has also allowed Mrs Y to strike up friendships with others provided her the opportunity to engage in a number of social events with other service users.

Mrs Y is concerned that Government cuts will lead to a reduction or a removal of this service, leaving her isolated. She states that should this take place, it would break her heart.

Questions asked by the Inquiry

1.0 How well is Welsh public transport integrated, particularly in relation to bus, rail, and community transport services, and what factors limit integration?

1.1 Significant progress has been made in Wales relating to integrated travel and securing input from users, and potential users. Good progress has been made in some parts of Wales on the co-location of transport interchanges e.g. Caerphilly and Rhyl. There are also examples of improvements in places where rail and bus stations continue to be located apart.

1.2 However, there remains room for improvement, and the separation of interchanges continues to pose a problem elsewhere.

2.0 How successful are legal, policy, and administrative / delivery arrangements in Wales in supporting effective integrated public transport services that meet the needs of Welsh travellers?

2.1 Integrated transport services are vital both to the wellbeing of certain individual users and those they support. The opportunities that older people have to remain active, learning, working and

engaged are currently too limited. This has a direct impact on the mental and physical health of older people, undermining their individual wellbeing and independence and placing an unnecessary cost on services. Transport has a clear role to play in keeping people active.

- 2.2 Free bus travel and concessionary rail travel is a key component of any integrated transport system. Many older people live on a small, fixed income. Free public transport offers them a wider choice of places to shop, and potential savings. In some rural areas shops no longer exist, so many older people have to travel to nearby villages to buy the basics. Even travelling a few miles can be expensive.
- 2.3 The free bus pass also allows older people to visit their families and friends, involve themselves in community activities and keep fit and active. Older people do not just use free bus travel to benefit themselves – they often use it to travel to places where they give many hours of voluntary and community service each week.
- 2.4 Research undertaken for the Commission⁶ highlights how the introduction of the concessionary bus pass has provided a lifeline to older people in Wales. Although most journeys they make are return single vehicle trips to nearby towns and city centres, the pass enables the user to make multi-vehicle journeys enabling them to stop off at a hospital, an out of town shopping outlet, or simply visit a friend or family member.
- 2.5 Many older people willingly care for frail or disabled relatives, and it is very important that carers are able to maintain their own physical and mental well-being. Since care-giving can restrict a family's ability to earn, many older people in this situation have a very small income. Free bus travel can enable carers to go out to see friends, and have important respite from their caring duties.
- 2.6 The revenue from bus pass holders is also key to maintaining a sufficient number of users to keep some routes viable. Without

⁶ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/news/news/11-02-17/Concessionary_Bus_Pass_Research.aspx

older people using their concessionary passes, some routes would simply not be available to other users.

- 2.7 Traveline Cymru's journey planning service is a good example of providing a 'whole journey' approach involving buses, trains, and walking. We outline further improvements that can be made to the service in the next section.
- 2.8 There has been some improvement in access to railway and bus stations in the light of the 2010 Equality Act and related legislation. Changes include tackling difficult environments such as overcoming island platforms. An increasing number of councils now provide electronic displays at railway stations and at bus stops in towns and cities. In many instances, vehicle based bus destination names and numbers are bolder. We would hope to see this become the standard for accessible travel information across Wales.
- 2.9 Improvements have also been made to some bus fleets to improve accessibility through the introduction of low-floor buses. Priority seating is clearly displayed for older and disabled passengers, albeit its allocation is not always respected by fellow passengers and not consistently policed by drivers. This places the responsibility on older people with mobility problems to ask others to vacate a seat, which they do not always feel comfortable doing.

3.0 What steps can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales?

- 3.1 Traveline Cymru's travel planning function could be more widely promoted, emphasising both the telephone and website service. Although we appreciate that plans are now in place to address accessibility shortfalls in certain stations, it is unacceptable that these problems have not been addressed sooner. A more consistent approach would also be advisable when new services are developed, such as when bus stations are being designed.
- 3.2 The location of bus shelters is also an area where a more consistent approach is required to ensure that key stops and points of interchange provide settings where passengers can remain safe

and comfortable. Significant work has been undertaken at Salford University to consider age friendly designs for street environments. The work favours the use of see-through shelters to promote passenger safety, although some designs are less effective at protecting people from the elements.

- 3.3 Many older people are unaware of the cost savings possible from different ticketing options, such as 'splitting' journeys (buying multiple tickets for different sections of the journey). However some passengers who use this option can find it confusing to have to carry double the amount of tickets. Train staff should be made aware of, and encouraged to promote, concessionary ticketing options for older people. Older people tell us that they sometimes have to challenge staff directly to secure their entitlement.
- 3.4 A more consistent approach to station announcements on trains is needed, especially on commuter lines where announcements remain poor or non-existent. Station announcements could also usefully provide details of the location of rail-link bus services. Information should be provided in both audio and visual formats. Intercom systems need to be effective and information communicated clearly. Information on offer in stations should be reviewed based on feedback from passengers, particularly those who have accessibility requirements.
- 3.5 Whilst appreciating the limitations of the terms of reference of this enquiry, the failure to provide cross-border recognition of concessionary travel pass is a regular topic raised with the Commission. The lack of portability cross border prompts disappointment and often disbelief amongst older passengers. We appreciate that reciprocal arrangements are in place in some areas to enable those bordering England to use their concessionary passes, but cross-border pass recognition would do away with this complexity and uncertainty.
- 3.6 Adequate time and support should be provided to ensure that older people are able to make inter and intra-modal connections. If trains and buses run late, then extra effort is needed to enable passengers to reach their connecting service quickly through prior

announcements of departing platform, or by providing assistance with carrying luggage and trolleys over and above any assistance which had been pre-booked.

- 3.7 The availability of toilet facilities at key transport interchanges is of vital importance to many older travellers, and an absence of them can prevent people being willing to risk making a journey. Such facilities should be supervised and maintained, and kept open for the majority of the time when the interchange is functioning.