

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith / Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Teithio ar fysiau a'r rheilffordd yng Nghymru / Bus and rail transport in Wales

BRT07

Ymateb gan / Evidence from Transform Cymru



About Transform Cymru

Transform Cymru is a coalition of organisations passionate about connecting people and places across Wales in a sustainable and inclusive way.

Our vision is for a sustainable, affordable, inclusive and safe transport network for Wales which meets the needs of all passengers regardless of background or ability.

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Priorities for post covid recovery for Welsh bus and rail

Transform Cymru want to see Welsh bus and rail services that are accessible, affordable and integrated with other sustainable modes of transport. Transform Cymru is strongly supports a thriving and growing pattern of bus and rail usage in Wales and is concerned about the pattern of decline.

Covid-19 has had a seismic impact on public transport in Wales, rail and bus services have been reduced, particularly on rural routes which were already at risk. We have seen a 73% drop in bus journeys made in Wales between January and March 2021 compared to the previous year. We have also seen bus vehicle numbers fall by [17.8% since 2010](#). Similarly, rail passenger journeys dropped from 31.8 million in 2019/20 to 5 million in 2020-21, these are huge shifts. This has left, according to [Oxfam Cymru](#), 12% of people without any public transport links in their local area. Even when services are present, they are not always accessible; half of rail station in Wales are not fully accessible to disabled people, with [34% having no access for wheelchair users](#). Consequently, bus and rail services are not fit for purpose in Wales today.

We have seen the understandable disincentivization of public transport during Covid and whilst Welsh Government were more positive about public transport, the message has remained that this is for essential journeys only. This has impacted the financial sustainability of transport services and we have seen services reduced during Covid and the routes and services that were already struggling, may be lost permanently. Any reform of bus and rail must be aware of the impact of Covid on travel patterns, but importantly, must incentivize getting users back on their services. This requires commitment and investment in behavioural change.

The key priority for post covid recovery bus and rail services are that they should be local, regular and enable people to access the services they need to live happy, healthy lives. Individuals will be more likely to see public transport as a viable, convenient option if they live within a short walk of a station or stop, the waiting times at the nearest station or stops are short and that multiple services serve a variety of locations pass the nearest stations or stops. Currently, having a service doesn't guarantee access to the things people need; variation between weekday and weekend services, services that stop early in the evening, a lack of stops in key places meaning people have to be able to walk to their destination, failure to integrate effectively with other modes of travel, including active travel, a requirements to go through an urban centre to reach the other side, and lack of frequency of service can all form barriers to viable use. Travel should enable easy access to work, access to learning, access to healthcare and other services, access to shops, social, cultural and sporting activities.

We also think that services should prioritise personal safety. Personal safety issues are a significant barrier to women's full use of public space. An estimated 81% of women have experienced street harassment. It is also especially severe among women who do not work the traditional nine-to-five weekday pattern and are therefore more likely to travel in darkness. Personal safety is not just an issue for women and many other groups experience similar issues, especially disadvantaged or marginalised groups, for example children, disabled people, people from minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, older people and people living in deprivation or from multiple-deprived communities.

Bus and rail services must also prioritise on working for those that most need it. In Sustrans Cymru's recent report on the issue of transport poverty, [Making the Connection](#), highlights how living in a state of transport poverty is a widespread experience in Wales today. We must ensure that public transport services act to alleviate all wider societal inequalities. Without an explicit and strategic plan for how these services will tackle inequalities, they will fail to do so.

It is vital that we get passengers back on to public transport for social, environmental and economic reasons. To ensure that transport is available for those who need it the most, services must either be profitable or subsidised as a public service. The Government's target for modal shift is 45% by 2040. This is not a shift to electric cars but away from cars and towards active travel and public transport. Without fit-for-purpose bus and rail services, which complement active modes of travel, we will not come close to hitting these targets.

The action required to achieve Welsh Government targets for modal shift to these modes and behaviour change

We should first acknowledge that it is welcomed that Welsh Government have such ambitious targets on active travel and on modal shift particularly, pledging in Llwybr Newydd that “we have set a target of 45% of journeys to be made by public transport, walking and cycling by 2040,” an estimated increase of 13% on the current mode share of 32%.

In order to bring these ambitious targets to reality, we need to see serious, coordinated action to shift people from the car to active travel and public transport. This needs to involve both proactive incentives for travelling more sustainably, e.g. better active travel infrastructure, cheaper public transport, but also disincentives, mechanisms which make it harder to drive in comparison to more sustainable modes.

A significant weakness in the bus and rail sector in Wales is its lack of integration with other modes. Too many barriers are placed in the way of people looking to walk, wheel or cycle to and from rail and bus services as part of a multi-modal journey. We want to see services that encourage people to travel in the most sustainable way possible, yet, currently we disincentivize people from doing so by making it easier to travel to public transport services by private car. So, bus or rail services, which may take a user most of the way in their journey, must be integrated with safe, comfortable, accessible walking, wheeling and cycling provision at the bus stop or rail station. This means in practice; secure cycle storage, integration with bus and rail timetabling, reliable services that arrive on time, the ability to travel on bus or train with a cycle on board, an integrated ticketing approach. Without this serious commitment to integrating services, the most sustainable transport modes will not be attractive options for those that seek to use busses or trains as part of their journeys.

A by-product of the cost of living crisis is that we are seeing the costs of running a car significantly growing, in the last few months according to the [RAC](#), since January 2021 we have seen over a 20% rise in running a car. This is bringing it closer to the costs of travelling by rail or by bus and coach – however we have seen rail and bus fares far outstrip average wages over the past ten years. Bringing them closer to parity. Bus and rail need to be seen as affordable options and genuine, reliable alternatives for people across all incomes.

We also think it is important for there to be an analysis of what public transport links bring to local economies across Wales. The public only see the costs of putting services on, not what the wider economic impact of these services are. We think there needs to be a more thorough conception of the economic and wellbeing impact of public transport services, to better make the case to communities of their benefits and value. This would also help to make the case for the level of public sector spending that will be required to deliver public transport services that are attractive to all.

Views on proposals for bus and rail reform – including UK Government plans to reform the rail industry, and Welsh Governments plans for regulation of bus services / the Bus White Paper

Wales Bus reform

We strongly agree that change is required in the delivery of bus services to meet the needs of Wales's citizens and to respond to the climate emergency. We are also supportive of the vision of bus service which is a fully integrated network across Wales that put community need at the forefront. We are also supportive of the principle that Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and Local Government are in the best position to design services which meet the needs of communities across Wales. This franchising model in principle should act to ensure that bus services are aligned with Welsh Government's intentions to use the bus service as a means to promote modal shift, to tackle inequality and combat the climate emergency, all of which require wholesale and urgent reform.

Government support for bus services has declined by 19% in the decade up to 2019. Rather than being driven by profit, we believe that the maintenance and development of our transport system should be driven by its role as a public service.

We are delighted to see that the goals for the bus reform are to "boost social equity" and effectively "delivering the scale of modal shift required by the climate emergency". These are amicable goals that represent transport's key role in either perpetuating or alleviating wider societal inequalities. However, from current plans it is unclear how this will be achieved. There is no provision for data collection or efforts to understand who uses the buses and what for. Without having a clear set of targets and data to back this up, it is unclear how the bus reforms will result in use by the very people who need to use them, like people in low-income households for example.

We now need to see a clear, ambitious timetable for investing in bus services across Wales, with a sustainable financial investment required to go alongside the plans.

UK Rail reforms

We have seen decades of underfunding for Wales's rail network from the UK, as evidenced by [Wales Fiscal Analysis](#) (2021) which displayed how Wales disproportionately receiving less funding for its percentage of UK tracks. We therefore think that, broadly speaking, Wales requires its share of infrastructure spending to connect all parts of Wales by rail that is affordable, accessible and useable for all.

In Wales, we need to see action to increase its value for money and improve the performance, reliability and convenience of rail. One way to make rail travel better value for money is to enable more people to easily access the network by foot or by cycle, both of which are low cost and complimentary to active travel. The convenience of rail is also enhanced by making it easier for people to walk, wheel and cycle to a station. Practically this means, making safer routes to/within stations, increasing the availability of safe cycle storage, improving the space and ease of use of that space for taking a cycle on a train.