

# P-06-1346 Provide free and accessible public transport for under 18s in Wales to lower carbon emissions and boost growth

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Reference: SR23/6132-2

**Petition Number:** P-06-1346

**Petition title:** Provide free and accessible public transport for under 18s in Wales to lower carbon emissions and boost growth

**Text of petition:** Public transport plays a pivotal role in linking Welsh children to educational, social and work opportunities.

However, in light of the cost of living crisis, as well as the climate crisis, it is imperative that the Welsh Government incentivises public transport in order to lower carbon emissions and improve economic growth.

The ENYA conference in 2022, at which 2 young Welsh representatives were present, called on the Welsh Government to 'provide reliable and affordable public transport'.



# 1. Background

According to the [RAC foundation](#) UK rail fares are 35% higher, and coach and bus fares about 54% higher, than a decade ago while average wages have grown by just under 40%. It also indicates that the cost of motoring is about 43% higher.

A 2022 report from [Sustrans Cymru](#) found that the increasing costs of bus travel disproportionately affect young people, who are more reliant on public transport for accessing education, training, and employment opportunities.

In [2021 15% of Welsh greenhouse emissions](#) were from transport. The Welsh Government's second [Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget](#) aims to reduce this by 22% by 2025. It also aims increase the proportion of journeys made by public transport from approximately 5% to 13% by 2040.

Accordingly, the [2021 Transport Strategy](#) focuses on encouraging public transport uptake by improving infrastructure, reliability and traveller experience. However, the importance of affordability is also acknowledged. The Welsh Government's [National Transport Delivery Plan 2022-2027](#) commits to explore public transport concessionary schemes for young people, whilst its [2021-2026 programme for government](#) stated it would:

Explore extensions of the MyTravelPass for reduced-cost travel for young people.

The [16-21 MyTravelPass](#) gives holders a 30% discount on buses in Wales. For rail, TfW offers [free off-peak train travel for under 16s](#) accompanied by a paying adult, which extends to anytime travel for under 11s. Young people's rail discounts available across Great Britain include National Rail's [16-17 Saver](#) and [railcards](#), which offer 50% and 33% discounts respectively.

A range of other schemes are in place across Great Britain offering free or discounted travel for young people. These include TfL offering [free bus and tram travel for under 18s](#) living in London and free rail travel for under 10s. Notably, Scotland introduced [free bus travel for 5 to 21-year-olds](#) on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022. [According to Transport Scotland](#), in May 2023 uptake was around two thirds of eligible users, and additional patronage has allowed some bus companies to increase service provision. However, some [media reports](#) blamed the scheme for increasing disorder on buses.

Means-tested help with education-related transport costs for under 16s is also available in England and Wales from local education authorities, whilst 16-18 years olds can apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

## 2. Welsh Government action

In a letter to the Petitions Committee Chair on 25 May 2023, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, acknowledged low bus fares can encourage more bus travel. He cited recent discounted travel initiatives such as a March 2022 free bus trial in Newport and the summer free bus scheme in Swansea. He also outlined measures being considered to make public transport more affordable in Wales, including:

...capped single fares, zonal fares, integrated bus and rail ticketing and enhanced young person's ticketing.

The Deputy Minister also pointed to proposed bus reforms. The Welsh Government's 'One network, one timetable, one ticket' white paper and accompanying 2022 Bus Strategy include proposals for franchising which, it says, could improve affordability by making transport operators:

... put people before profit and make buses as easy and attractive to use as we can.

Plans also included proposals to simplify the bus network and fares, so:

... all buses run on the same ticketing system, and people's tickets are based on their journey rather than the operator on whose route they happen to be.

The Deputy Minister stated that whilst the Welsh Government was keen to improve bus fare initiatives, funding is being prioritised for maintaining essential community bus services.

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

Following its 2022 inquiry into bus and rail transport, the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee's October 2022 report cited concerns from Professor Mark Barry that current bus concessions were not fair for young people. He advocated:

...providing a bit more support for younger people in a very uncertain work environment where travel costs make up a disproportionately high proportion of what people actually earn.

As a result, the report recommended that:

The Welsh Government should bring forward proposals as soon as possible to address transport poverty in Wales arising from the cost-of-living crisis, including subsidised fare pricing and other financial support.

The Welsh Government's response accepted this recommendation in principle. It reiterated its interest in building on the MyTravelPass scheme, but cited budget constraints as a limiting factor.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.