

# P-06-1372 Save our fflecsi bwcabws service

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 27 November 2023  
Petitions Committee | 27 Tachwedd 2023

Reference: SR23/7092-5

Petition Number: P-06-1372

Petition title: Save our fflecsi bwcabus service

**Text of petition:** Fflecsi Bwcabus is a fully accessible local bus service, which operates within specific areas in Wales, providing a mixture of both fixed route services and bookable journeys. Fflecsi Bwcabus is designed to help people make local journeys and connections to main line bus services. A bus picks you up at your request, changing its route so that all passengers can get to where they need to go.

Fflecsi Bwcabus was created to replace local community bus services. People in rural communities rely on this service to get them to doctors' appointments, work places, for shopping and to meet up with friends. This service is a vital part of our rural communities and for a lot of people it is their only means of getting out and about and many elderly people would be isolated if this service does not continue.



# 1. Background

Bwcabus, now Fflecsi Bwcabus, is a demand responsive bus service which connects rural communities to mainline bus services in Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The scheme has been funded from a range of sources including the Welsh Government, local authorities, and the European Regional Development Fund.

The service was set up with input from Professor Stuart Cole in 2009. A number of other demand responsive bus services have since been developed – collectively known as the Fflecsi service.

In September it was announced that the Fflecsi Bwcabus service would be withdrawn on 31 October due to a lack of funding. This prompted concerns from regular passengers who say they rely on the service.

In announcing the service would end, Ceredigion County Council stated this was a result of the Welsh Government no longer being able to provide funding. It had previously been funded through a European Regional Development Programme (RDP) grant, however the Welsh Government has been fully funding the service since the RDP funding ended in July 2023.

Following the announcement the service would end, in response to topical questions during Plenary, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change said:

I was very sorry to hear that the Bwcabus service will be coming to an end...the UK Government has failed to replace funding for rural transport schemes previously supported by the EU. We're therefore unable to continue supporting Bwcabus, but we are working with Transport for Wales and the local authorities to explore alternative options...

...I need no persuading of its merits. All I need is cash to keep it going, and...I'm afraid I don't have any.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October it was announced that Pembrokeshire County Council had been able to procure a replacement service for Pembrokeshire from its own budget. This service will run until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, however the longer term future of the service is unknown.

## Wider bus funding and reform

More generally, the Welsh Government has been providing emergency support to the bus industry following the collapse in passenger numbers as a result of the pandemic. Most recently it announced £46m to support services to March 2024. The statement announcing this funding also referred to developing “a longer-term sustainable funding model [for bus services] that bridges the gap to franchising”. The Welsh Government is expected to introduce a Wales-wide system of franchising through a new Bus Services Bill this Senedd term (i.e. 2023-24).

## 2. Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair the Deputy Minister outlines that Transport for Wales has evaluated the scheme, included its operational costs and passenger demand. He states:

...passenger demand for the service remains very low - typically only one passenger carried per hour per vehicle. This combined with the fact the service contracts for Bwcabus are due end imminently, the anticipated cost of replacing these on a 'like for like' basis also look prohibitively expensive

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

The situation regarding the fflecsi Bwcabus service was referenced by several Members during a Plaid Cymru debate on bus services on 4 October. Neither the motion tabled by Plaid Cymru, which included a call for the Welsh Government to reinstate the service, nor the Government's amendment was agreed.

On 13 October, Andrew R.T. Davies MS tabled a written question asking if the Welsh Government intends to repurpose any funding to ensure the service can still operate. At the time of preparing this brief a response to the question had not been provided.

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.

