



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair, Senedd Petitions Committee
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[By Email only]

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30 October 2023

Dear Jack,

Petition P-06-1338 Extend the Bus Emergency Scheme and develop national bus recovery plan

Thank you for your letter of 2 October 2023 seeking my comments on the issues raised in Petition P-06-1338 – to extend the Bus Emergency Scheme and develop a national bus recovery plan.

I am very concerned about the reduction in the numbers of older people using the concessionary bus pass and the impact this has on health, wellbeing and everyday activities. Earlier this year, CPT Cymru estimated that use of concessionary passes was only 40-50 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. There is a risk that additional cuts to bus services will reduce this level even further as the services that older people need will simply not exist.

The issue of public transport and specifically buses is often raised with me and my Advice and Assistance Service by older people. This includes concerns about cuts to bus routes, reduced timetables and cancellations with little or no notice. Older people often describe public and community transport as 'lifelines', enabling access to local amenities, being able to volunteer, and keep in contact with families and friends. The availability and reliability of public and community transport have been significant and long-running issues for older people, particularly when attending medical appointments. In one recent case, an older person faced a two hour wait for a bus to return home from a hospital appointment for what was a relatively short journey, as a result of earlier scheduled bus services not running.

Regular bus journeys can also build personal connections with drivers and other passengers. The Friends of the 65 Bus group in Monmouthshire have described how

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

sometimes the absence of regulars is noted by the drivers who alert other passengers. In one case, this led to finding out that someone had experienced a fall and the group organised help with tasks until the person was well enough to return to using the bus and do their shopping again.

The Welsh Government's Bus Emergency Scheme has already come to an end and been replaced by the Bus Transition Fund. The impact of this change is now being felt as bus operators make cuts to services. The petition calls for a national bus recovery plan co-produced with bus operators, passengers, local authorities and others, in order to build more comprehensive, sustainable bus services. I understand from the Joint Statement on the new Bus Transition Fund (16 June 2023) that the Bus Transition Fund was developed collaboratively by Local Authorities, Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and the industry. This goes some way to addressing the action called for in the petition of a national bus recovery plan but the petition specifically requests co-production with passengers, something that was not mentioned in the Joint Statement in June 2023.

I am concerned that the voice of older people and passengers more broadly is not only heard but acted upon in future decisions about bus funding and bus routes. While it may not be possible to maintain every bus service at its current level, older people must be able to access buses in order to visit friends and family, work, volunteer, attend healthcare appointments and other services and generally do the things that matter to us all.

Reduced bus services will make it harder for some older people to stay in work or take part in volunteering activities. A significant number of older people continue to work (in Wales, 9.2% of people over 65 are in employment) while almost a third of people aged over 65 volunteer in some capacity. Both the paid employment and voluntary activity undertaken by older people make a significant contribution to Wales's economy (volunteering by older people was valued at £483M in a 2018 report by Bangor University and expected to rise). Unpaid carers who rely on bus services will also be adversely affected: around 55% of carers in Wales are over the age of 55 and unpaid carers are more likely to be female, older and living in deprived communities. Future bus services should not be restricted to standard office hours and weekdays, leaving older people unable to get around in the evenings and weekends.

Bus services also play a key role in tackling loneliness and isolation and are a vital aspect of Age Friendly Communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) define Age Friendly Communities as being places in which older people, communities, policies, services, settings and structures work together in partnership to support and enable us all to age well. The WHO identify eight essential features of Age-Friendly communities, known as the 'eight domains', which are: Outdoor spaces and buildings; Transport; Housing; Social participation; Respect and social inclusion; Civic participation and employment; Communication and information; Community support and health services. (For more information, see: [What are Age-friendly communities? - Older People's Commissioner for Wales.](#))

The development of Age Friendly Communities is supported by the Welsh Government as demonstrated in 'Age friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society'. Transport and

connectivity are essential parts of making communities more age friendly for all citizens. The Welsh Government's strategy recognises the role that transport plays in creating Age Friendly Communities and improving bus services is one of the strategy's three priority areas for transport. In order to be meaningful, the strategy needs to be taken into account in Welsh Government action on bus services.

I have followed with interest discussions in the Senedd about a potential campaign to encourage people to use bus services. Any transport campaign needs to understand the reasons why some older people have not returned to using the concessionary pass. These include loss of confidence post-pandemic, the move away from printed or paper timetables and towards online-only information, issues around quality of service, reliability and driver training/behaviour. Further research is needed in order for any campaign to stand the greatest chance of success.


While commercial passenger numbers have struggled to return to pre-pandemic levels, community transport demand has resumed at its previous level. Community transport has a history of providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs. It is sometimes the only means of transport for many people. However, community transport provision is not available in all areas where it would benefit older people and requires more secure and sustainable funding.

The proposed Welsh Government Bus Bill is intended to address some of the issues around provision of bus services and I look forward to engaging with the legislative proposals in due course. Nevertheless, the impact of cuts to bus services is impacting older people now and action to address this cannot be put off until legislation is passed and implemented.

The Welsh public sector is currently facing a very challenging time in terms of financial settlements and spending pressures. However, there is a risk that older people bear a disproportionate burden from cuts to services. The combined impact of cuts to different types of services needs to be assessed. For example, cuts to bus services should not be viewed in isolation from cuts to other services used and valued by older people. Effective Equality Impact Assessments should be undertaken to understand the impact of proposed changes on groups with protected characteristics, including older people. These Assessments should also be published in order to aid scrutiny of decision making.

I hope you find these comments useful in your consideration of Petition P-06-1338.

Yours sincerely,



Heléna Herklots CBE

Older People's Commissioner for Wales