

P-06-1439 Improve vital late night public transport infrastructure in South and South West Wales

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Petition title: Improve vital late night public transport infrastructure in South and South West Wales

Text of petition: Grassroots music venues operate within shoestring budgets despite providing vital platforms for emerging talent. Music Venue Trust has warned that approximately 10% of GMVs will close by the end of 2023.

Due to a lack of vital late night travel links, audiences are being stopped from attending venues that they would otherwise actively support.

Welsh Government must act to improve vital late night travel links and ensure that grassroots culture is accessible and protected for years to come.

Open letter to Welsh Government - <http://www.swansea-arena.co.uk/an-open-letter-to-welsh-government>



Welsh Government Analysis of 10 Questions that form the basis of "Welcome to Wales: Priorities for the visitor economy 2020 to 2025: summary" - https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/sites/tourism/files/documents/10-Questions_Response-Analysis-Report_2020-01-22_English.pdf

1. Background, Welsh Government and Welsh Parliament action

In an open letter to the Welsh Government, Swansea Arena, and a number of other venues, suggest a lack of late night public transport is preventing audiences from attending events.

Responding to this petition, in his letter to the Chair, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS says he is “aware that late night transport is often raised as a particular challenge for venues”.

The Cabinet Secretary suggests addressing the challenge will require integration across the transport system. He highlights the role of Regional Transport Plans (RTPs) which are being developed by Corporate Joint Committees. Final RTPs are due to be submitted to the Welsh Government by the end of March 2025.

1.1. Rail services

In relation to late night rail services, the Cabinet Secretary’s letter suggests “there are a number of constraints that exist which affect our ability to operate later rail services”. He says this is “primarily a reserved matter” and so appears to be referring to infrastructure constraints. Rail infrastructure, and the infrastructure planning and delivery process, are reserved to the UK Government - with the exception of the Core Valley Lines, which transferred into Welsh Government ownership in 2020. Executive powers to procure the Welsh rail franchise operated by Transport for Wales (TfW) are devolved, but the rail system as a whole is reserved and wider rail franchises operating in Wales, such as Great Western Railway services to Swansea, are the responsibility of the UK Government.

The issue of late night rail services was raised during the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee's (CCEI) 2023 scrutiny of TfW and rail inquiry. The Committee raised concerns over the timing of the last trains to leave Cardiff following international football matches. In response, ahead of a set of fixtures that took place in March 2024, TfW provided later services and worked with Network Rail to rearrange scheduled engineering works to allow for later services.

The issue of late night rail services was also raised in Plenary in June. The Cabinet Secretary suggested there was a need to increase farebox revenue from other services to enable later services (which potentially need more subsidy) to run. He said:

The whole point of the metro within the south-east Wales area is that we'll be providing more services...which will generate a higher farebox, which will then enable us to use the subsidy in other areas of Wales and, indeed, later into the evening and potentially earlier into the morning.

1.2. Bus franchising

The Cabinet Secretary's letter suggests the introduction of bus franchising will enable a network and timetable to be designed to "best support the economy of Swansea and its surrounding area".

In 2022 the Welsh Government published a White Paper which proposed legislation requiring bus franchising throughout Wales. It would mean responsibility for planning most bus services would pass from local authorities to TfW and the Welsh Ministers. A Bus Bill is expected to be introduced by spring 2025.

The Welsh Government's 2024 roadmap to bus reform sets out how franchising will be implemented using a gross-cost model. Operators will be paid a fee to run specified services (with incentives in place) while TfW will receive fare revenue – and therefore carry the risk if passenger targets aren't met.

In Manchester, where bus franchising has already been rolled out, a night bus pilot scheme has recently begun - with buses running at least every hour, 24/7 on two busy routes.

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