
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes

National Assembly for Wales
Enterprise and Business Committee

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Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 32	BCT 32
Bws Caerdydd	Cardiff Bus

Consultation questions

Question 1 – how would you describe the current condition of the bus and community transport sectors in Wales?

The bus industry is generally a successful one, with fairly high levels of customer satisfaction, continuing investment both in terms of cleaner, greener, more accessible buses and other innovations such as information and ticketing systems.

However, the industry is facing challenging trading conditions due to a downward trend of customer numbers across the country as well as reduced funding at both National and local level.

This decline is a reversal to the upward trend seen during the early 2000's. This can in part be linked directly to changes in the economic conditions during recent times. As outlined in the 2015 report 'The Economics of Bus Operation in Wales' by The TAS Partnership for the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) Wales, the primary reasons for bus travel relate to employment, retail and leisure – with the largest factor being retail. Generally, there has been a decline in retail footfall in the cities and towns across Wales.

Question 2 – why do you think the number of bus services and the number of bus passengers is declining in Wales?

As noted in the Background section of the Call for Evidence, the Department for Transport (DfT) bus statistics show that bus passenger journeys in Wales have declined by just over 14% from their peak in 2008-09 to 2013-14. During the early part of the 2000's bus usage increased from a low of 108 million journeys across Wales in 2001/02 to a high of 125 million journeys in 2008/09 dropping back to a more recent figure of 107 million in 2013/14.

There are a number of reasons for this decline including:

- Increased competition from other modes (including car and rail). Between 2008/09 and 2013/14 the number of licenced cars increased by 4% to 1.485 million and the number of rail passengers increased by 13.9% to 28.8 million following the opening of new railway lines and increased frequencies on existing lines;
- Reduction in both national and local authority funding of bus services in real terms which has resulted in either withdrawal of bus services or reduction in frequencies or hours / days of operation;
- Increased development of 'out of town' retail centres and new housing developments which are difficult to serve efficiently by bus services as well as growing use of online shopping option
- General economic downturn

Additionally, it should be noted that the reduction in bus patronage

has not been consistent throughout Wales. The TAS report noted the demand per capita in Wales falling by 13.6% between 2008 and 2013 but by region the reduction was 5.9% in South East Wales, 18.1% in South West Wales, 22.2% in North Wales and 18.6% in Mid Wales.

As a result of the reduction in patronage and funding, changes to bus services have been made to ensure the continued sustainability of the industry, and this has resulted in a reduction in mileage operated across Wales. This has a further negative impact on the proposition of bus networks and the journeys that can be made.

Question 3 – what do you think is the social, economic and environmental impact of recent changes in bus and community transport service levels?

The reduction in the bus network overall, be that provided commercially or those bus services with local authority support, has undoubtedly had a negative impact on these factors. The reliance on alternative modes may increase further journeys made by car. This will add to environmental concerns and further increase areas of the country where traffic congestion is impinging on cities and towns to function efficiently, both in terms of economic performance and traffic movement.

Some areas have lost provision at extreme ends of the day which could have a negative impact on the ability to gain and / or maintain employment and any form of loss or service reduction will be felt by the community in which the network operates.

Question 4 – what do you think the Welsh Government should do to support bus and community transport in Wales?

Over the past six years there has been a reduction in funding of the bus industry by the Welsh Government in real terms, through reductions in the funding of the All-Wales Concessionary Fares scheme and the combined reduction of Local Transport Support Grant (LTSG) and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) funding, with introduction of Regional Transport Service Grant (RTSG) and latterly bus Service Support Grant (BSSG). Whilst we are aware of the austere times at the moment, probably the biggest single support that the Welsh Government can provide is the stability of funding and governance in the mid-term, possibly on a rolling three-year basis. The funding can be linked to Quality Standards to help encourage improved standards of bus services in Wales, as has occurred in South East Wales in respect of BSSG payments.

Other areas where the Welsh Government can support bus transport include:

- make 'kick-start' funding available to provide short-term support for the pilot of new commercial services or enhancing

existing ones;

- take full account of the importance of reliable bus services when investing in infrastructure and road improvements;
- ensure that bus-based solutions, such as Bus Rapid Transit, are fully considered when looking at proposed transport projects, taking into consideration that nearly four times as many people in Wales are carried on bus services than rail services, thus bus based, rather than rail based solutions, will often lead to more benefit to local communities, and are generally easier, more flexible and more cost effective to deliver;
- following the dissolution of the Regional Consortia ensure that transport infrastructure can be developed on a corridor basis rather than local authority boundary basis, so that benefits to users can be maximised.

Question 5 – what do you think Welsh local authorities should do to support bus and community transport services?

Local authorities should seek to ensure that buses are integrated into the local communities which they serve. When, for example, considering any town or city developments they should ensure buses are able to penetrate the retail and employment cores easier than the private car. Additionally, they should ensure residential developments are designed to give easy access to bus services, rather than require circuitous routings to serve new developments. Powers over local traffic management should be invoked to give bus services higher priority, where congestion exists, such changes will make bus journeys more reliable and improve their attractiveness to users.

Full consideration should be given to bus stop infrastructure, with regular maintenance and also ensuring they are adequately protected both from traffic contraventions and general wear.

Local authorities could consider introducing 'Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIP's). Working collaboratively with the aim to reduce journey times and speed up bus movements generally whilst achieving stable journey times. Where both parties work to achieve this it will start to help to reverse the decline seen and help to maintain sustainable bus networks for the future and reducing the reliance on any tender support. Operators would be able to grasp this change to invest in their own futures, for example, with ongoing vehicle investment, service provision/network growth and the employment needed for this.

Question 6 – what do you think about proposals to devolve bus registration powers to Wales? How should these be used?

The creation of an administrative function based within Wales could assist the current registration process and potentially result in significant improvement both in terms of data accuracy and speed.

Question 7 – please tell us whether you think further powers to regulate the bus industry in Wales are required and why?

The existing powers are sufficient and the focus should be to help improve services and grow bus patronage through a partnership approach, without the need for more powers or re-regulation. A partnership involving operators, Welsh Government and local authorities would reap wider benefits as all parties work collaboratively, with the shared interest to deliver the best possible bus service for passengers.

Question 8 – what other action can be taken to ensure that bus and community transport services meet the needs of people in Wales?

The continued support of Traveline Cymru and Bus Users UK Cymru to deliver public transport information via a range of media, providing unbiased travel plan assistance and represent the views of customers.

Please tell us anything else you would like to mention this topic, thank you for contributing to our inquiry.

Within the current regulatory system provide a strategy to assist the provision of bus networks that meet the needs of the local communities socially, environmentally and financially over the long term.