
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 36	BCT 36
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru	Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Consultation questions

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

I warmly welcome this much-needed Inquiry by the Committee. As part of my Engagement Roadshow, I regularly talk with older people across Wales, and Bus and Community Transport Services is a key issue for many older people, with real concerns about their local services that are often seen as ‘priceless’, a ‘lifeline’ and ‘indispensable’.

The current condition of these sectors is a matter of great concern. As a result of the current funding situation, it is estimated that across Wales 10% of all buses on the road could be taken out of service¹. A Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) report in 2013 found that 17% of older people in Wales have seen a reduction in the number of public transport services in their area². The situation across Wales is variable with different issues and funding pressures facing local bus operators. For some older people, their local bus services have already disappeared, which is having hugely detrimental impacts on their lives and their physical and mental health and wellbeing. For others, they have expressed real concerns about the future of their local bus routes, and their ability to access GP surgeries, hospitals, key amenities and visit friends and relatives.

These concerns apply to older people living in both urban and rural areas in Wales. With front-line public services budgets under considerable pressures this Inquiry is very timely and an opportunity to highlight the needs and concerns of older people around transport services across Wales.

Bus and community transport services are important for a number of reasons:

- To enable older people to continue to make a contribution and to undertake activities that have economic benefit
- To prevent frailty and maintenance of health, independence and wellbeing of older people

¹ <http://www.bususers.org/news-events/news/funding-cuts-affect-bus-users-across-wales/>

² <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Wales%20transport%20report.pdf>

- To deliver key policy priorities and statutory services cost containment

This Inquiry follows on from my 2014 work on community services, particularly my report on 'The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales'³ (my transport section can be found in Annex A), my 'Best Practice Guidance for Engagement and Consultation with Older People on Changes to Community Services in Wales'⁴, and my 'Effective Engagement with Local Authorities: Toolkit for Older People'⁵. I am clear that if we are to alleviate significant pressures on health and social care services and reduce public health risks such as loneliness and isolation, then we need to keep older people active, part of our communities and out and about through smart, innovative and cost-effective transport services.

Older people are often the greatest users of bus and community transport services, and the closure of these services is having a disproportionate impact on older people across Wales. A 2013 report by Age Cymru highlights that the impact of poor bus services on older people is greater because of the prevalence of disability and impairments among older age groups⁶. Every day, 63,000 people rely on the bus to get to work, and about 350,000 trips are made every day to get to hospital appointments or access leisure opportunities⁷. Despite being regular users, the 'experts by experience', older people often have little opportunity to voice their concerns through robust and meaningful engagement and consultation.

I have been clear that older people are our greatest asset, worth over £1bn net to the Welsh economy annually, and in order to provide sustainable support to the health and social care sectors, prevent the cycle of frailty and dependence and improve the resilience of individuals, we need to invest in older people and keep them connected to local communities.

"I have a friend who lives in Penparcau and she used to get the bus, but now that

³ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-02-25/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.aspx

⁴ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-07-01/Canllawiau_ymarfer_gorau_ar_gyfer_ymgysylltu_ac_ymgynghori_%c3%a2_phobl_h%c5%b7n_ar_newidiad_au_i_wasanaethau_cymunedol_yng_Nghymru.aspx

⁵ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-07-01/Effective_Engagement_with_Local_Authorities_Toolkit_for_Older_People.aspx

⁶ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/37166/Buses%20-%20a%20lifeline%20for%20older%20people.pdf?dtrk=true>

⁷ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/report/140717-review-bus-policy-advisory-group.pdf>

bus route has stopped altogether. She can't walk to the next stop because she has cancer, and I'm not available all the time...She's housebound because of this and it's so sad" (Gwen, Ceredigion)

Ensuring that older people can get to the places that matter to them is crucial to their health, independence and wellbeing. The uncertain future of bus and community transport services in Wales needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency, particularly with continued reductions in public services budgets expected over the coming years and the need to address the challenges and opportunities that come with demographic change. I note the findings of the Bus Policy Advisory Group in 2014 and I particularly welcome their key proposals to provide stability via longer-term funding and governance arrangements, a consistent pan-Wales approach to policy, standards and cross-boundary and cross-operator issues, and, in the absence of regional transport consortia after April 2014, the establishment of network partnerships to ensure that key partners are working together to provide effective services for older people and others⁸.

"We live in the back of beyond, there are only four houses in our postcode...what's going to happen if both of us can't drive anymore? We'd become reliant on buses. From 9am until about 7pm, our nearest bus goes every hour. For us to catch that bus it's a 2.5 mile walk...there's virtually no night transport, so if you visited someone at Withybush Hospital you'd have a devil of a problem getting back" (Henry, Pembrokeshire)

With bus operators unable to continue with many bus routes across Wales due to funding pressures i.e. the Welsh Government decision to reduce the percentage of reimbursement rates to operators from April 2014, resulting in up to 30% in reduced services, the need for community transport is greater than ever. There are some excellent community transport schemes across Wales, making a real difference in the lives of older people and enabling them to remain part of their communities and do the things that matter to them⁹. A Community Transport Association (CTA) Wales report found that 94% of community transport organisations reported that

⁸ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/report/140717-review-bus-policy-advisory-group.pdf>

⁹ Good Practice: Grass Routes (Monmouthshire), Green Dragon (Pembrokeshire), Neath Port Talbot CT & DANSA (Western Valleys), 'Bws Bro' (Ceredigion), ACT & Connect2 (South Wales), 'Bwcabus' (Carmarthenshire)

their service users included older people¹⁰. A 2013 report by the RVS found that community transport schemes are of vital importance where the public transport system does not fully serve the needs of older people in the area¹¹.

As recognised in the Welsh Government Strategy for Older People 2013-23, community transport return on investment is estimated at £3 for every £1 spent¹². However, funding for the community transport sector in Wales is coming under greater pressure with short-term funding arrangements preventing operators from taking long-term, sustainable schemes that could be hugely impactful for older people and others. The end of the Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative (CTCFI), which ceased in April 2013 after eight years, is still having an impact on the sector. The CTCFI provided stability to the sector and CTA Wales submitted a petition, with nearly 5k signatories, to the National Assembly in 2012 for its continuation¹³.

“Neath Port Talbot community transport is excellent, the system is in place and works well, and there are voluntary drivers” (George, Neath)

“Community transport is a logistical nightmare to organise, and the people who do it do a fantastic job” (Harold, Wrexham)

In January 2014, the Welsh Government introduced the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) for Local Authorities to administer. Despite a recommendation to allocate 10% of the Grant to community transport, the Welsh Government reduced the minimum threshold to 5%, meaning that fewer community transport schemes are operating across Wales at a time when demand far outweighs supply. This is particularly a concern in rural areas where schemes must address ‘dead mileage’ i.e. greater distances before passenger pick-up and when some Local Authorities base the BSSG on live mileage, meaning fewer sustainable schemes¹⁴.

Whether it be through public bus services or community transport, we cannot afford

¹⁰ <http://www.ctauk.org/Userfiles/PDFFlipper/State-Of-The-Sector-Wales-English/#/13>

¹¹ <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Wales%20transport%20report.pdf>

¹² <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=3292&Opt=0>

¹⁴ <http://www.ctauk.org/Userfiles/PDFFlipper/State-Of-The-Sector-Wales-English/#/23>

not to keep older people part of our communities and accessing core services. The future of these 'lifeline' services is very uncertain and I am very concerned about the follow-on impact on older people, exposing them to the dangers of loneliness and social isolation and a whole range of physical and mental health issues.

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

The key issue is the funding settlement for bus services in Wales. The reduction in Welsh Government funding for concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people has had a detrimental impact that is affecting the lives of older people across Wales. Bus passenger journeys may have declined by around 18% from 2008/09 to early 2015¹⁵, but the importance of bus services to older people has not diminished. The high importance of public transport for older people is reflected in the Wales Audit Office 2015 report on supporting the independence of older people¹⁶.

Since 2002, the introduction of the Welsh Government concessionary bus pass for older people has made a real difference. This innovative and outcomes-focussed scheme has enabled those 60 years old and over to get out and about and remain part of their communities via free unlimited bus travel. In 2012/13, it is estimated that 77% of eligible older people had concessionary passes¹⁷. In the same year, older and disabled people represented 44% of all bus journeys in Wales (48 million)¹⁸ with many older people benefiting from local services¹⁹.

Maintaining free concessionary travel on local bus services for older people must remain a Welsh Government commitment. A 2014 report suggests that for every £1 of government expenditure on concessionary travel for older and disabled people, £2-87 is generated in benefits²⁰. This is important to consider in the context of an ageing population and that by 2037, one million people will eligible for

¹⁵ <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/tag/funding/>

¹⁶ <http://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/Independence-Older-People-2015-English.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.bususers.org/news-events/news/funding-cuts-affect-bus-users-across-wales/>

²⁰ <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>

concessionary travel in Wales²¹. However, with the future of many public bus routes uncertain, a free bus pass is worth little without a bus, and I am very concerned about the progressive reduction in both cash and real terms in reimbursing bus operators for concessionary travel over the next three years (total funding of £189m reducing from £65m in 2014/15 to £61m in 2016/17²²).

Bus routes where older people make up the majority of users are susceptible to closure as operators look to prioritise those routes that generate more income. I have been contacted by many older people regarding their 'lifeline' routes and I am concerned that due to the revenue loss as a result of the concessionary fares scheme, older people are being disproportionately affected by closures and are experiencing discrimination.

"On the last day our subsidised bus ran before it was cut, there were six passengers...It was a lifeline. I can't go out now" (Pat, Cardiff)

With fewer bus services, it is no surprise that there are fewer bus passengers. In villages, towns and cities across Wales, older people often depend on public bus services as they do not have access to private cars and/or are no longer able to drive due to a range of issues e.g. sensory loss or the onset of dementia, cannot afford taxi fares and are unable to access community transport schemes. Although rail travel may be an option, older people often prefer bus services to rail services (more broadly, 109 million bus journeys were made in Wales in 2013 compared with 28 million rail journeys²³), and in any case bus services to connect them with railway stations vary in frequency and access.

Furthermore, although public bus services may continue on some routes, the reduced provision means that older people may have to travel to their destination at inconvenient times and return home very late in the day, and often after daylight hours in the winter. The reduced provision and the possibility of having to return home in the evening and remain in a town centre or hospital for hours on end means that older people lose confidence and have concerns regarding their safety,

²¹ <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>

²² <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/funding-for-bus-services/>

²³ <http://www.bususers.org/news-events/news/funding-cuts-affect-bus-users-across-wales/>

making them less likely to use these services.

“We’re afraid that people won’t attend their appointments at these hospitals because they’ve got no way of getting there” (Doreen, Powys)

With alternative options unavailable, many older people have no choice but to remain housebound, prevented from getting to the places that are important to them and more likely to be affected by loneliness and social isolation.

I am very aware of the financial pressures facing public services in Wales, and planning ahead to reduce the impact on older people is crucial. I agree with the Bus Policy Advisory Group report that the that the impact on services is forecast as much as possible so that users, operators and Local Authorities can mitigate the effect, and that bus operators are encouraged to access business development support to retain services²⁴.

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

The **social impact** of reducing bus and community transport services is devastating for older people across Wales. As I have previously mentioned, the reduction of these crucial services will leave older people more susceptible to loneliness and social isolation, and a range of physical and mental health problems, including cardiac arrest, stroke, diabetes, anxiety and depression. Getting to the bus stop safely is an important physical activity for many older people, and the social contact and connecting with local communities is essential for their mental health.

I am clear that reducing bus and community transport services will place greater pressures on health and social care services already under huge challenges, leading to a greater number of older people requiring access to GP surgeries and hospitals, admissions to residential care and the need for costly statutory packages of health and social care. In the medium to long-term, it is more cost-effective to fund bus and community transport services to maintain the health, independence and wellbeing of older people.

²⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/report/140717-review-bus-policy-advisory-group.pdf>

The **economic impact** is also devastating. As I previously highlighted, older people make a huge contribution to the Welsh economy, over £1bn net annually. Through contributions such as volunteering and unpaid care, Wales' public services would simply grind to a halt without the significant contribution of older people. Reducing these transport services prevents older people from carrying out these contributions, and for other older people who rely on public buses to get to work, the local bus is an essential component in connecting the individual with employment.

These transport services are often the 'bridge' for older people for a number of reasons, and the accumulative effect of reducing these services prevents older people from contributing to local economies and communities. An asset-based approach looks at how best to increase the economic contribution of older people to the Welsh economy i.e. how to reach a £2bn contribution, and the cost of providing public bus services is minimal in comparison with the significant return.

The **environmental impact** of reducing bus and community transport services is significant. With fewer public transport options older people and others have no choice but to seek private transport, if available. This results in more one or two-passenger car journeys with increased traffic, poorer local air quality and increased car emissions as a result. The provision of bus and community transport services helps reduce environmental impacts and more must be done to maintain this provision for older people and encourage people of all ages to use public transport.

The Welsh Government must address the social, economic and environmental impact of reducing bus and community transport levels in Wales in order to address the objectives set out in the Strategy for Older People 2013-2023 as well as the seven national wellbeing goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. This approach also complements the long-term outcomes as identified in the draft National Transport Plan, for example improving access to healthcare (social), improving access to employment (economic), and reducing the contribution of transport to air pollution and other harmful emissions (environmental)²⁵.

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

²⁵ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/consultation/ntp/141210-ntp-draft-en.pdf>

I am clear that the Welsh Government needs to prioritise bus and community transport services in Wales. As I have previously outlined, Wales' public services cannot afford not to keep older people active, independent and part of their communities. An ageing population brings with it challenges as well as opportunities, and I call on the Welsh Government to take an asset-based and outcomes-focussed approach and provide older people with the opportunities to contribute to local economies and increase their £1bn annual contribution to the Welsh economy. Demographic change also means that older people will need to work for longer, and for those who do not have access to private transport, bus and community transport services are once again indispensable in connecting them with employment opportunities (62k people rely on the bus to get to work every day²⁶).

My first priority in my Framework for Action 2013-17 is 'Embedding the wellbeing of older people at the heart of public services'²⁷. A joined-up approach is now required more than ever, and I am clear that the needs of older people are relevant to all Welsh Government departments and Ministerial portfolios. Transport has a crucial role to play in maintaining the health, independence and wellbeing of older people and contributing to older people's quality of life as laid out in my Quality of Life model²⁸, and the preventative, outcome-focussed approach that the Welsh Government has laid out in the Social Services National Outcomes Framework and Wellbeing statement²⁹. This is an issue that I have raised as part of the Welsh Government's Public Transport Users Advisory Panel and reflected in my response to the draft National Transport Plan³⁰.

Taking an asset-based approach and focusing on the outcomes for the individual i.e. being able to get to the places that matter via bus and community transport services is also reflected in the Ageing Well in Wales Programme³¹. The five year Programme, launched in October 2014, aims to improve the wellbeing of people aged 50+ in Wales and includes the Welsh Government as a key partner. Transport has a crucial role to play across the five priority areas, and particularly in

²⁶ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/policy/150722-ntfp15-en.pdf>

²⁷ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/13-05-23/Framework_for_Action.aspx

²⁸ Framework for Action 2013-17: Quality of Life model: I feel safe and listened to, valued and respected; I can do the things that matter to me; I can get the help that I need; I live in a place that suits me and my life

²⁹ <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/140814nofen.pdf>

³⁰ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/consultation/ntp/141210-ntp-draft-en.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home>

establishing age-friendly communities and dementia supportive communities.

I am disappointed that at a time when public bus routes are disappearing across Wales, the funding for community transport schemes to fill in the 'gaps' is not seen as a priority. I have already highlighted the crucial role of community transport schemes, highly valued by older people and often tailored to meet their needs. At a time when private bus operators are reviewing many bus routes, I urge the Welsh Government to work with CTA Wales to discuss how best to support community transport in the future.

I fully understand the funding pressures and budget restrictions placed upon the Welsh Government, however I am also clear that public bus and community transport services must be prioritised. The Welsh Government National Transport Finance Plan 2015 commits to develop options for targeted funding for bus and community transport services focused on rural services, access to health facilities, and access to employment sites³². These are important commitments and looking ahead to the National Assembly 2016 elections, I look forward to working with both current and future Welsh Governments to protect and improve these 'lifeline' services, address the national wellbeing goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, and build on the Welsh Government's commitment to ensure that older people can access affordable and appropriate transport which assists them to play a full part in family, social and community life, as reflected in its Strategy for Older People 2013-23³³.

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

For the reasons that I have previously outlined for the Welsh Government, Local Authorities in Wales should also prioritise bus and community transport services in Wales. I fully understand the financial pressures on local government, however I have been clear that older people need to get from one place to another to maintain their independence and improve their resilience, and Local Authorities must do all that they can to provide these indispensable transport services and reduce health

³² <http://gov.wales/docs/det/policy/150722-ntfp15-en.pdf>

³³ <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

and social care costs in the process. Local Authorities need to embrace innovation and deliver smart and cost-effective transport services, and learn from good practice e.g. Denbighshire Council' 'Night Rider' scheme has used Local Authority vehicles in their 'down time' to keep older people out and about³⁴.

Local Authorities are key partners within the Ageing Well in Wales Programme, and all 22 Local Authorities are signatories of the Dublin Declaration, a commitment to establish age-friendly communities locally. Transportation is one of the eight domains identified by the World Health Organisation to establish age-friendly places³⁵ and I expect that the forthcoming local Ageing Well Plans, outlining key actions in each Local Authority, will prioritise transport provision for older people.

It must be recognised that providing bus and community transport services for older people is not enough: bus stops for example must be safe and accessible places, with shelter from the elements and accessible information for those with sensory loss. Bus vehicles must be accessible for older people to get on and off safely, with adequate seating and spacing for those with wheelchairs and walking aids. Better training for bus drivers is also important in order to provide older people with more time to reach their seat, and recognise the signs of those living with dementia.

As the Age UK/ILC-UK 2015 report on 'The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society' highlights, people living with dementia tend to stop driving within three years of their first symptoms, and are therefore more reliant on public transport. The reduced provision of bus services can significantly impact on the lives of people living with dementia and their carers, with their ability to travel around restricted by the cancellation of services³⁶. For those who are able to access public transport, using public buses for example may present a range of challenges, including difficulty with routes, dealing with money, and interacting with the bus driver and other passengers³⁷. It is therefore crucial to up-skill bus drivers so that they are able and feel confident to offer reassurance and support to people who are living with dementia and may have memory and/or spatial awareness issues. Educating employees in the transport sector and other sectors is crucial in providing better

³⁴ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/older-people1/denbighshire-county-council-2-1>

³⁵ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/AWFinalEnglish.pdf>

³⁶ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmtran/116/116we07.htm>

³⁷ http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/older-adults/ilcuk/174858The_Future_of_Transport_in_an_Ageing_Society_FINAL.pdf

support, understanding and empathy for people living with dementia and their carers. Regrettably, the Welsh Government's National Dementia Vision for Wales (2011) does not address transport issues³⁸, and therefore this approach should be reflected in renewed Welsh Government commitments to work towards a dementia friendly nation³⁹.

All of these elements are crucial in establishing age-friendly and dementia supportive communities across Wales, and the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Health Boards should work together to ensure that the Local Transport Fund helps develop such communities. Furthermore, I expect that Local Transport Plans complement the Wellbeing Plans produced by the new statutory Public Services Boards and fully address the needs and circumstances of older people.

A key concern for older people is their ability to voice their concerns regarding changes to their 'lifeline' bus services. I often hear that older people have been given little or no opportunity to voice their concerns, and that the consultation process is seen as 'tokenistic' with those responsible for providing these services not taking into account the views of local people. I am regularly contacted by older people who tell me that decisions are made to them rather than with them, and that their bus service has effectively 'disappeared' overnight, preventing them from reaching their village, town or city centre.

"If there is a consultation, it's for their benefit...if they were owned by me (bus services), I'd never let them get away with cutting services" (Lynda, Vale of Glamorgan)

"There's never a consultation or a review which doesn't lead to a closure" (Louise, Gwynedd)

As a result, I am keen to ensure that older people are given every opportunity to voice their concerns and that the engagement and consultation process is full, thorough and meaningful. As a result, I will publish new Good Practice Guidance for Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments and Scrutiny on Changes to

³⁸ <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/110302dementiaen.pdf>

³⁹ <http://gov.wales/topics/health/nhswales/healthservice/mental-health-services/dementia/?lang=en>

Community Services in Wales in the New Year, and I have also worked with CTA Wales, Guide Dogs Cymru, Disability Wales and Bus Users Cymru on a new publication for the Transport Minister, entitled 'Getting There Together: Toolkit for Local Authorities: Inclusivity and Accessibility of the Consultation Process on Changes to Transport Services in Wales'.

A key concern is that most bus companies in Wales are privately owned and are not required to run a public consultation on changes to purely commercial routes as they are not subject to the Public Sector Equality Duties. In Wales, only Cardiff and Newport City Councils provide local bus services as municipal bus companies. This means that although these Councils are required to carry out full consultation and impact assessments with older people and others, other operators are not obliged to do so.

The result is local bus routes closing down without older people having had any opportunity to voice their concerns and challenge proposals. The Welsh Government must do all it can to address this key issue. For example, engagement and consultation with older people and others should be a condition in the awarding of the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) to Local Authorities, as well as ring-fencing at least 10% of the BSSG funding for community transport⁴⁰. I also expect that the aforementioned toolkit for the Transport Minister is a key driver for change. Furthermore, I am prepared, as recommended in an Age Cymru report, to meet regularly with principal bus operators and the Welsh Local Government Association to discuss the needs of older people⁴¹.

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

I would welcome further details on the proposals to devolve the bus registration powers to the Welsh Government. In principle I support the proposal in order for the Welsh Government to be able to regulate and address Wales-specific issues in the bus industry. Decisions need to be quicker and more impactful and in line with the subsidiarity principle, decisions on bus registration issues should be taken at a more

⁴⁰ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/professional-resources/blogs/the-future-of-bus-services-in-wales/>

⁴¹ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/37166/Buses%20-%20a%20lifeline%20for%20older%20people.pdf?dtrk=true>

local level i.e. with the Welsh Government.

I therefore welcome the UK Government's support to devolve these powers as enabling the National Assembly to decide the regulatory framework in Wales would complement existing devolved powers over transport policies⁴². It is a logical step and would help drive forward key legislation in Wales such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, as well as provide the Welsh Government with greater autonomy to develop the forthcoming National Transport Plan. It could also help develop an integrated approach between local bus services and major transport infrastructure projects e.g. the proposed Cardiff Capital Region Metro and rail electrification in North and South Wales.

Furthermore, I welcome the opportunity for further discussions on establishing a Traffic Commissioner for Wales to regulate lorry, bus and coach services. I support the proposal should it lead to better, safer and more effective services and regulation for older people and others in Wales.

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

Devolution of wider bus regulation powers has not been proposed to date, although I support discussions between the Welsh and UK Governments to ensure that decisions over bus and community transport services are clear, effective and made without lengthy delays. My focus is on better quality and accessible transport services for older people across Wales, and for the reasons outlined in Question 6, devolving related powers in this sector could help the Welsh Government address Wales-specific issues and allow greater autonomy, flexibility and a clearer framework to drive forward the National Transport Plan and its links with relevant policies, strategies and legislation.

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

In my meetings with Governments and service deliverers at all levels I am clear that

⁴²https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408587/47683_CM9020_E_NGLISH.pdf

we need a better strategic and joined-up approach to older people in Wales. Wales is a nation of older people and this is something we should be proud of. Older people are currently an under-used and under-valued asset, and we must do all we can, via the integration and prevention agendas, to break the cycle of frailty and dependence and keep older people active, independent and with lives that have value, meaning and purpose. I also expect that transport services are developed with, rather than to older people. Older people have a wealth of knowledge and experience and are best placed to help shape and deliver these much-needed services.

The needs of older people are not confined to health and social care, and transport has a crucial role to play in moving towards an asset-based and outcome-focussed approach. As the RVS report on public transport in Wales emphasises, the key to social connectedness and an active life is accessible transport to help people get out and about as they grow older⁴³. Public bus and community transport services are the ‘bridge’ that older people want and need for a number of reasons, and I look forward to working with the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and key players in the transport sector to ensure that older people can continue to access these ‘lifeline’ services and in turn maintain their health, independence and wellbeing. The cost of not taking this approach is too great for Wales’ public services to contemplate.

I trust that the Committee will find my comments to be useful and I look forward to working further with the Committee on this important Inquiry.

⁴³<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/Wales%20transport%20report.pdf>

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

Annex A: 'The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales' (2014)⁴⁴

Transport

Public transport is vital to reduce physical and mental health problems among older people. Transport is often seen as a lifeline to being able to access key services and amenities, especially for those living in rural communities. With the population of those aged 75 and over predicted to increase by 60% by 2035, the need for adequate public transport becomes ever greater.

Without appropriate services and infrastructure and a practical means of getting around, older people can become isolated from their community and society, unable to access essential services, participate in activities or visit friends and family. Public transport is crucial to the maintenance of public health, inclusion in society and the prevention agenda; active transport use amongst older people can help reduce the effects of obesity and cardiovascular risk.

Reliable local transport becomes increasingly significant as people get older, with essential journeys becoming more of a challenge. In Wales, two-thirds of single older people have no car, whilst one in four people in Wales feel that the local hospital is one of the most difficult locations to access via local bus services.

Whilst Wales is likely to see an increased growth in rail passenger numbers of 38% between 2005 and 2026, older people often tell the Commissioner that they feel more comfortable using buses than trains. Concessionary rail fares for older people are important in areas where bus services are limited, but older people still require bus services to get to and from the train station. Older people who can and want to use trains require reliable rail travel supported by adequate infrastructure, such as seating and accessible toilet facilities in stations, as well as age-friendly trains, which include audio visual announcements and sufficient grab-handles to cater for their needs.

The loss of public transport services is a key concern for older people, particularly the future of local bus services. Older people have told the Commissioner that the uncertainty regarding public transport creates real anxiety and fears about their independence. Reduced bus services affect the poor, older people and most vulnerable more than other groups in society. Four times as many journeys are made with the bus than the train, yet Welsh Government expenditure on bus

⁴⁴http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.sflb.ashx

services in 2013/14 was estimated at £105m, compared with £225m on rail services.

Royal Voluntary Service Research last year found that 17 per cent of older people in Wales have seen a reduction in the number of public transport services in their area. Public transport is often not very accessible to people with impairments or disability and nearly 11 per cent of older people said that public transport was not accessible for their disabilities.

The study found that lack of suitable transport had a devastating effect on wellbeing; 4% of older people felt lonely because they were unable to get out and about and 4% felt depressed.

In her discussions with older people, the Commissioner has heard some really distressing stories about the devastating impact on older people's lives when local buses are cut or re-routed, leaving them effectively housebound in the absence of an accessible local bus route. The word that came up time and time again, was 'lifeline'; good dependable public transport is seen as a link not just to get to the shops, Post Office or visit friends and family, but also as a link to the wider world and to independence.

Research suggests that more than 18,000 older people over 75 years old feel trapped or isolated in their own home due to the lack of suitable public transport. A reduction of public transport services is very likely to cause this figure to increase, with wide-ranging implications for the physical and mental wellbeing of older people.

As identified in the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People, a lack of transport contributes to higher levels of social isolation. Withdrawing bus services therefore risks leaving older people isolated, lonely and disconnected from society, leading to a need for support from the state that is much more costly in the long-term than subsidising a local bus.

Changes are happening today that are significantly affecting the day-to-day lives of older people. Across England and Wales, 46% of local authorities reduced their support for buses in 2013/14. In Wales, there were 25 service withdrawals or alterations (13 reductions or alterations, 12 entire service removals) during the same period. Some areas are facing the prospect of losing all funding for subsidised bus services. With bus services disappearing and no railway stops nearby, there are real fears that communities, and older people in particular, will become increasingly isolated and marginalised.

Older people require age-friendly buses e.g. low floors for easier access, audio-visual announcements, wider corridors and sufficient grab-handles, and also

adequate bus infrastructure. Older people need safe bus stops that are easy to access, have adequate seating, shelter them from the elements, and provide clear and visible travel information with alternatives, such as 'talking bus stops' for those who are visually impaired.

Free bus travel

Older people make up a disproportionately high number of bus users in Wales, with over-50s amongst the highest users of bus services. Many older people are entirely reliant on these buses, as they cannot drive and do not have access to private transport.

Since 2002, the introduction of free bus travel for older people in Wales has been a real success and has made a huge difference to their lives, with an estimated 400 million journeys having been made since its launch, and local authorities managing in excess of 650,000 passes annually. As outlined in the National Transport Plan, maintaining free concessionary travel on local bus services for older people remains a Welsh Government commitment.

Free travel through the concessionary bus travel scheme is an indispensable part of the lives of many older people. The Commissioner's own research shows that 80% of older people believe their quality of life would suffer and they would be more lonely and housebound without the free bus pass. Our research also shows that the scheme "offers people the opportunity to remain integrated in society, improving their quality of life...brings wider benefits in terms of relieving pressure on health and social services transport budgets".

Many public transport routes across Wales are, however, under threat and a free bus pass is worth little to older people should certain bus routes disappear or if they are unable to get to the bus stop. The impact of reduced public transport services is already being seen; bus use in Wales fell by 6.9% in 2012, more than twice the fall in England or Scotland. At the same time, bus fares in Wales increased by 6.9%, more than twice the rate of general inflation and outstripping fare increases in England and Scotland.

A reduction in bus services often disproportionately affects older people and, all too often, older people's voices are not heard when changes to services and routes are considered. The Commissioner has heard real concerns about the concessionary bus travel reimbursements to operators for 2014-15 and in December 2013 the Commissioner raised her concerns to the Transport Minister about the proposals to reduce the percentage of reimbursement rates to operators from 1 April 2014, which could result in up to 30% in reduced services.

These proposals will have huge implications for older people across Wales, creating

a greater demand for community transport services that is unlikely to be met without significant extra resource allocation. Whilst the number of older and disabled concessionary passenger journeys in Wales remained broadly constant between 2009/10 and 2012/13 at 48 million journeys a year, any reductions in reimbursement rates to bus operators will affect service provision and reduce the availability of much-needed public transport.

Rural transport

Reductions to bus services are a real concern in rural areas. In these parts of Wales, the population is generally much older than in urban areas. In Wales, people are also less likely to be able to access bus routes than the UK population: 83% of Welsh households are within 13 minutes' walk of a bus stop with a service at least once an hour, compared with 90% for the UK as a whole.

The need for effective rural connectivity has been heightened by the closure of local banks, shops and other services, meaning older people have to travel further to access these services and other vital amenities. Lower levels of car ownership and car use amongst older people can also lead to them becoming marginalised and unable to access community services in rural areas, leading to significant impacts on their wellbeing.

Key concerns for older people in rural areas are getting to and from hospitals for appointments, how to cope with emergency admissions and the difficulties of visiting close family at hospitals far away. With specialist units concentrated in fewer hospitals proposed as part of NHS health care reorganisation in Wales, the need for effective transport planning with adequate public transport networks becomes ever more important.

Another key concern is that rural areas may be losing out on funding for community transport. Following changes made by the Welsh Government in 2012, the total funding for community transport in Wales was £2.5m in 2013/14. Although this is a significant figure, its distribution across Wales was not equitable. The money was allocated to the four regional transport consortia (whose futures are currently uncertain) on the basis of population and existing public transport networks, and not on need.

As a result, the mid-Wales region, with its low population density and sparse public transport levels, received the smallest allocation for an area that has one of the largest number of community transport schemes. The loss of revenue has resulted in a real impact on older people living in mid-Wales, restricting, for example, their ability to access key services.

While older people in rural areas rely on these bus services, they are also crucially

important for other people as well, helping Wales' tourist industry, for example, and the drive towards better connectivity.

The loss of public transport routes can be just as damaging in urban areas. Reduced mobility and inaccessible transport infrastructure can mean that older people are left isolated and cut off from society in towns and cities, severely impacting on their physical and mental health.

When older people across Wales tried to highlight their concerns to the bus companies or local authorities, they often felt that they were not being taken seriously, or were not consulted in a meaningful way.

Community transport

Local authorities, bus operators and other key partners must now find new and innovative ways of providing essential public transport services. For some older people, taxi services are too expensive and can be difficult to access for those with hearing or visual impairments.

Community transport has a larger role to play and is highly praised by older people. Community transport services plug gaps in the public transport network and are particularly important for older people and those living in isolated communities in rural areas. Many services use specialist vehicles that are essential for older people with mobility issues. Despite the praise, community transport is viewed as the 'neglected link' and must be better supported and integrated with other modes to fully address the needs of older people.

Community transport in Wales is viewed much more positively than regular public transport, with older people praising the vital role it plays in helping them to access their communities and essential services. Community transport also provides excellent value for money, worth £3 for every £1 spent on it. Whilst community transport provides much-needed support for older people, it cannot meet their needs entirely and must be sufficiently supported by public transport.

Despite the importance of initiatives to support community transport services in Wales, the Welsh Government Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative (CTCFI) for 15 transport schemes in Wales ceased in April 2013 after 8 years as a result of funding restrictions.

Some participant operators have indicated that the cessation of the CTCFI is having a negative impact on older people, particularly those in their 80s or 90s, and severely disabled people who used it. Since 2004/05, over 1.4 million passenger journeys were provided to some of the most vulnerable members of the community through the CTCFI scheme. The cessation of the initiative has left service users

who previously enjoyed concessionary transport now being asked to pay, leading to a reduction in the number of people using these services in some areas.

It is not yet clear whether the Welsh Government's new Bus Services Support Grant and Local Transport Fund, succeeding the Regional Transport Services Grant and the Regional Transport Consortia Grant, will adequately address the public transport needs of older people. Whilst the new structure could provide an opportunity to improve, increase and integrate bus services, there is cause for concern regarding the significant reduction in public subsidy for public transport, with the combined value of the two previous funding streams falling by 22% between 2011/12 and 2013/14.

In her discussions with older people, the Commissioner has heard some positive stories about transport services, with some respondents stating they had very good access to public transport, helping them with their independence, health and wellbeing. These comments were, however, very much in the minority. A consistent message was older people's sense of powerlessness over transport issues, coupled with the sense of inevitability that they would continue to lose out on access to transport.