

# P-06-1423 Reinstate the 552 Cardi Bach coastal bus service in South Ceredigion!”.

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Mai 2024  
Petitions Committee | 13 May 2024

Reference: SR24/8458-13

Petition Number: P-06-1423

**Petition title:** Reinstate the 552 Cardi Bach coastal bus service in South Ceredigion!

**Text of petition:**

Recently it was announced by Deputy Minister for Climate Change Lee Waters that the Cardi Bach service was to continue. Then, as a bolt from the blue, came the news that the service is to be scrapped. The reason, so we are told, is that ‘European funding has not been replaced as promised.’ This is very bad news indeed for local residents who don’t have access to a car, as well as for the tourist industry.

The Welsh Government is working to reestablish a service as part of the new contract for the T5 service. It is vital that this happens as soon as possible to ensure that communities along the route are not isolated for a moment longer than necessary.

Launching the Year of Trails 2023, Economy Minister, Vaughan Gething, stated: ‘This year is all about finding forgotten treasures, embracing journeys



of the senses and making memories along pathways around attractions, activities, landscapes and coastlines. We're starting 2023 with a new campaign to make sure Wales is visible and look forward to encouraging visitors to different corners of the country throughout the year ahead.'

The visitor economy is a key contributor and driver of the economy in Wales. It has been hard hit by Covid. Services such as the Cardi Bach are absolutely vital to help restore that damage!

## 1. Background

The Cardi Bach bus service was established in 2015-16 and operated between Cardigan and Newquay. The service was part of the wider Bwcabus scheme.

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

The service was set up following an idea put forward by 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In September 2023 it was announced that the Bwcabus service would be withdrawn in its current form on 31 October due to a lack of funding. This prompted concerns from regular passengers who 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 the European Regional Development Programme (RDP) grant, however the Welsh Government had 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 former Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS 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...

In the same exchange, the former Deputy Minister said:

... we've worked very hard with the bus industry and with local authorities over the summer to try and safeguard as many services as possible... for example, funding for the Cardi Bach in Ceredigion will continue as part of the Transport for Wales T5 procurement.

However the latest correspondence from the Welsh Government on the issue (see Welsh Government action below) makes no reference to this.

## 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 £39m in the form of the Bus Network Grant (BNG) for local authorities to “secure bus services that they deem socially necessary that the commercial market will not provide”. The statement says the BNG will “act as a bridge from the emergency funding that has been provided to bus franchising”. The Welsh Government is expected to introduce a Wales-wide system of franchising through a new Bus Services Bill this year.

## 2. Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair dated 19 April, the Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport, Ken Skates MS says that although Transport for Wales (TfW) has invited bids for operators to run the Cardi Bach service, none came forward.

The Cabinet Secretary states he has asked Welsh Government officials to meet with TfW and Ceredigion County Council to discuss alternative options.

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

The situation regarding the Bwcabus service was referenced by several Members during a Plaid Cymru debate on bus services on 4 October 2023. 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 2023, 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. In response the Welsh Government highlighted funding issues referred to earlier in this briefing.

In November 2023 you considered a petition calling for the Bwcabus service to be saved. You agreed to keep the petition open and keep watch on the issue.

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.