

Petition P-05-737: Save our bus

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 14 Chwefror 2017

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-737

Petition title: Save our bus

Petition text: Just learned today the bus I use regularly from Gilfach Goch-Pontypridd is being "wiped out". In Jan 2016 the Welsh Government said it was committed to improving the quality + accessibility of local bus services. In Gilfach Goch we have older + poorer people + people with disabilities who use this bus, which can be the difference between getting around or feeling trapped. So please save the 150 to PONTY!!!!

Background

Deregulation of local bus services

Local bus services in Great Britain, with the exception of London, were deregulated by the *Transport Act 1985* (as amended) ('the Act'). The policy of the Act is that local bus services will normally be provided on a commercial basis, without local authority subsidy. As such most services in Wales are commercial and may be registered (or deregistered / varied) by the bus operator, normally with 56 days' notice to the Traffic Commissioner.

Section 63(1) of the Act imposes a duty on county councils to secure services (emphasis added below):

- (1) In each non-metropolitan county of England and Wales it shall be the duty of the county council –
 - (a) to secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county **which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose.**

These "socially necessary" services are procured by local authorities via tender.

The duty is qualified in England and Wales by section 63(5)(a) which says that their powers to enter into an agreement to subsidise services “shall be exercisable only where the service in question would not be provided, **or would not be provided to a particular standard**, without subsidy” (emphasis added).

Changes to the service 150 (Pontypridd to Gilfach Goch)

Stagecoach operated the 150 service on a 15 minute frequency between Gilfach Goch and Porth extending twice per hour from Porth to Pontypridd. The company notified the Traffic Commissioner of its intention to make changes to the service in October 2016. Notice of the change appeared on the UK Government website, published in the Traffic Commissioner’s [notices and proceedings for 20 October 2016 \(PDF 370KB\)](#), as an application to vary an existing service. The change took effect from 4 December 2016.

Stagecoach has provided the Research Service with details of the alterations to the service and its rationale for the changes. It indicates that these were as a result of reductions in passengers and revenue and followed a review of the service which, it commented, provided “a strong background for adjusting resources to better suit the market and retention of this bus service for the future” including removal of duplication on the section of the route between Porth and Pontypridd which is also served by the 120, 130 and 132 services. Stagecoach describes the change as follows:

no service has been withdrawn, rather the frequency [from Gilfach Goch] has been reduced from every 15mins to every 20mins and the service curtailed at Porth rather than Pontypridd with other services [the 120, 130 and 132] offering 11 journeys per hour between Porth and Pontypridd. Customers changing buses in Porth for Pontypridd do so at the same bus stop with through fares.

The 150 service is delivered without local authority subsidy. The Cabinet Secretary’s letter to the Chair regarding this petition highlights the fact that, unless in receipt of subsidy, service decisions are a commercial matter for the bus operator. It continues:

In this case it would be a matter for Rhondda Cynon Taff Council to consider whether it wishes to publicly fund the retention of the Pontypridd extension and the former 15 minute frequency.

Welsh Government action

Bus policy

The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government, [Taking Wales Forward 2016–2021](#), contains a commitment to “deliver a more effective network of bus services once powers have been devolved” by the Wales Bill.

Additionally, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates AM, [issued a written statement](#) on 15 September indicating that he was keen to deliver a stable or growing bus network in Wales, and setting out a five–point plan to support the sustainability of the bus industry. This comprised:

- Offering all Welsh bus companies assistance through Business Wales and Finance Wales;
- Working with local authorities to identify vulnerable bus services and put in place strategies to respond to planned withdrawals of bus services;
- Working with Cardiff and Newport local authorities and their municipal bus companies to “gather intelligence on how sustainable bus networks can be operated whilst maintaining the social dividend”;
- Funding two bus co-ordinator posts in north and south Wales; and
- Holding a bus summit (subsequently held on 23 January 2017).

Funding

As the Cabinet Secretary’s letter indicates, the Welsh Government provides funding to Welsh local authorities to support bus services through the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG). The BSSG, and its predecessor the Regional Transport Services Grant, have remained frozen at £25 million since 2013–14, representing a cut in real terms.

Welsh Government BSSG guidance for 2016–17 describes the purpose of the grant as being “to support local authorities’ expenditure in exercise of their powers under the relevant legislation”, including “to support and maintain the core strategic bus network in their area to improve connectivity”. In addition to BSSG, local authorities are able to support “socially necessary” bus services through their core revenue funding.

National Assembly for Wales action

This issue has not yet been considered by the Assembly.

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.