

National Assembly for Wales Inquiry into loneliness and isolation ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

15 February 2017

1. Campaign for Better Transport welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Assembly's inquiry. Established for over 40 years, we are a national charity working in England and Wales to promote more sustainable transport. Through research and campaigning, we advocate policy and public investment decisions that support better bus and rail services and alternatives to major road building. Our comments, below, are organised around the main points from the inquiry announcement.

Evidence of the scale of loneliness including factors such as housing, transport, community facilities, health and wellbeing services

2. There have been significant cuts to buses in the last ten years in Wales. The total Welsh spend on supported buses declined by £4.2million from £20.7 in 2010-11 to £16.4 in 2015-16. Overall, this is a reduction of more than 20 percent. See our report:

[http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Buses In Crisis Report 2015.pdf](http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Buses%20In%20Crisis%20Report%202015.pdf)

3. In 2015-16, all but five of the 22 Welsh local authorities made cuts to bus funding. 32 bus services have been reduced or altered and 21 were withdrawn altogether. In addition, some private bus companies have collapsed, leaving people without a bus service – e.g. <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/gha-coaches-two-hundred-buses-11766724>

4. When a bus service is withdrawn, or even when it reduces in frequency (e.g. no longer running on Sundays, or no longer running in the evenings), it prevents people travelling not only to social and health services but to see friends and family and remain independently mobile. This is particularly true in rural areas of Wales.

5. Many older people rely completely on the bus for their daily lives, and are less likely to have a car than other age groups. Buses are especially important to older women and older people on low incomes (see <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/121023sb982012en.pdf>)

6. The link between cuts to buses and loneliness is well documented – e.g. <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Buses-a-lifeline-for-older-people.pdf>

Ways of addressing problems of loneliness and isolation in older people, including interventions to specifically address the problems and other projects with wider aims.

7. We believe that the solution to loneliness lies in enabling people to remain active and independent for as long as possible, continuing to make their own trips to see family and friends and to participate in community life. This necessitates provision of reliable public transport.

8. We are sceptical that demand responsive transport can fully replace timetabled public transport, as the hurdle of booking trips deters users and makes spontaneous travel impossible (see <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/demand-responsive-transport-users-views-pre-booked-community-buses-shared-taxi-2/>)

9. The Wales Bill will give local authorities new powers to plan their local bus networks, including through franchising and new forms of partnership schemes. This provides new opportunities to increase passenger numbers, and the viability of bus services, through measures including linking bus and rail; through multi operator and multi modal ticketing; through better use of data to improve bus information; and more ambitiously through franchise or concession models which could cross-subsidise rural services from the operation of profitable urban routes. In Jersey, bus franchising made savings of £800k / year while improving frequency on some routes and introducing five new routes (see <http://hctgroup.org/uploaded/Practical%20bus%20franchising%20-%20the%20Jersey%20model.pdf>)
10. We urge the Welsh Government, and local authorities, to protect funding for buses; to recognise their social value in reducing isolation, loneliness and their health impacts; and to ensure that the social and health impacts of buses are taken into account in transport valuation methodologies.
11. In addition, the Welsh Government should consider the potential of commission mainstream public transport together with services such as patient transport; social service transport; and school and college transport, in order to make better use of public money and make more services viable. This approach (known as Total Transport in England and Fully Integrated Transport in Scotland) is in early stages but looks a promising way to allocate and coordinate resources more efficiently leading to better outcomes for passengers, especially in rural areas.

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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