

ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SKILLS COMMITTEE WRITTEN EVIDENCE – BUS CONGESTION

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide written evidence to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee on Bus Congestion.

Background

2. Congestion affects the economy, environment and health of people of Wales if left unchecked and we recognise that demand forecasts indicate that road use will continue to grow. That is why tackling congestion is a priority focus for Welsh Government. It is integral to the Wales Transport Strategy and the National Transport Finance Plan.
3. The National Transport Finance plan, published in July 2015, sets out an ambitious five-year rolling programme of transport interventions that we will take forward across Wales. It targets five key areas: economic growth; tackling poverty; sustainable travel and safety; and improving access to employment and to services. Setting out the measures we are taking to ensure that Wales is connected via a reliable, modern and integrated transport network.
4. We are taking a number of actions to alleviate congestion on the roads of Wales. This includes developing our suite of models so that we can better predict future demands and plan ahead.
5. We have also made available to local authorities powers to adopt civil enforcement against a range of road contraventions, including parking, bus lane and certain moving traffic offences.
6. Should it proceed through the current statutory process our proposals for the M4 Corridor around Newport would represent a significant investment in south Wales infrastructure working towards a sustainable, long-term solution to the serious congestion problems associated with this gateway to Wales. We are also investing over £40 million in the refurbishment of the Brynglas tunnels and Usk River Bridge.
7. We are also working with local partners to identify pinch point areas and deliver infrastructure improvements to smooth traffic flow. Recently we announced £24 million for pinch points on our trunk roads which will provide an opportunity for us to do more to tackle the junctions causing congestion and to look at improving overtaking opportunities on key routes from North to South.
8. In addition to this, another £15 million will be allocated through our local transport network fund, aimed at increasing safety, resilience, and movement along strategic bus corridors. This substantial funding forms part of an additional £83 million of Welsh Government capital funding to support road and transport schemes in Wales.
9. Active Travel infrastructure is a core component in modernising our transport network and delivering on an integrated transport system for Wales, helping to reduce vehicular emissions and helping to tackling congestion.

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10. We fund several behaviour change interventions, for example, through our support for travel plan coordinators and pedestrian and cycling training such as the Cymru Travel Challenge and the Active Journeys programme. We are also investing in systems that support active travel management such as the monitoring of network through our national traffic control centres.
11. We have already provided substantial support by commissioning an all-Wales walking and cycling infrastructure survey and have developed an active travel data mapping system that all local authorities are using for their maps.
12. We believe that improving our public transport system is critical to raising the quality of life for the people of Wales and we are promoting modal shift to public transport by investing in our public transport system through:
 - Supporting rail and bus services
 - Modernising the public transport offer in Wales
 - Developing integrated public transport networks such as Metro in north and south Wales.
13. We will continue to support rail and bus services and modernise the public transport offer in Wales, including the development of integrated public transport networks such as the Metro. The proposed South Wales Metro will comprise a multi-modal integrated, rapid transit network, including improved bus and rail services. It will provide faster, more frequent and joined-up services using trains, buses and light rail.
14. Enhancing connectivity is needed to support population growth and to tackle increasing road congestion and the Metro project will be a blueprint for integrated transport across the whole of Wales, transforming the country's economic and social prospects.

The Bus Industry

15. There is no doubt that traffic congestion impacts negatively on the reliability and punctuality of bus services, and that this in turn makes travel by bus less attractive.
16. We fund and action a number of interventions for congestion as outlined above and I remain committed to an integrated transport network which I believe will tackle the challenges such as traffic congestion and environmental pollution.
17. However we also need to encourage motorists to use the bus more often by making buses more attractive on price, through competitive and straightforward fares, through multi-operator ticketing schemes underpinned by transparent and fair revenue-sharing arrangements, and by publicising how good our bus network is already.
18. Building upon the Bus Summit I held in January, we are establishing a number of workgroups to undertake further work to consider how best we can:
 - improve the passenger experience at bus stops by providing improved facilities and consistent passenger information;

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- develop funding solutions that offer greater stability to the bus industry in Wales; and
- deliver an integrated transport system that provides improved accessibility and ticketing solutions fit for the 21st century.

19. I am also considering the responses from the recent consultation on local bus services in Wales. Part of a national dialogue and call for evidence following the success of the Bus summit, on the longer term direction for local bus services and proposals I believe which could make a significant improvements to services in Wales.