

P-05-934 Public Transport in Blaenau Gwent, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 28.01.20

Our Situation

Due to the decline in footfall which was a direct result of the Public Transport cuts we have decided to cease trading in Ebbw Vale Town Centre on the 31st March 2020.

We are looking to setup Online and are also in discussion with another local authority who are supportive and helpful.

We are very disappointed with the response from our local council (Blaenau Gwent), the Welsh Assembly Government, Our local MP Nick Smith and AM Alun Davies.

Previous Information

I have attached my previous response “**Email response to request for more information Public Transport**” as a reference.

The past 40 Years (Nothing Has Changed) (Welsh Assembly Government Failure)

I have read previous Reports, Consultation documents and Strategies commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Local Authority dating back to the 1980s, 1990s, 2000 and 2010 all of which state that Infrastructure (Transport Links) are one of the fundamental building blocks for Economic Regeneration.

Some of these documents are now 40 years old but we are still in the same situation nothing has improved!

Please see below my response to Ken Skates AM Minister for Economy and Transport.

Our initial grievance is in respect of the poor Bus Public Transport System.

We are moving forward with our ambitious vision to reshape public transport infrastructure and services in Blaenau Gwent, including local bus services, the very popular Ebbw Vale rail line, active travel, and through the additional powers proposed under the Buses (Wales) Bill.

As highlighted above “The Past 40 Years” there have been a number of Strategies Visions Plans none of which have improved the public transport system in Blaenau Gwent.

I find Active Travel an amusing concept dreamed up by someone in the Bay who has no idea of the Geography of Blaenau Gwent. I would challenge anyone to use a bike to visit all the towns in Blaenau Gwent not only would it require them to be very fit it would also be dangerous given the poor road conditions.

As of 15 December, passengers on the Ebbw Vale line are now travelling in more modern four-carriage modern Class 170 trains. These trains provide a better customer experience, including electronic passenger information, air conditioning, power sockets and increased capacity. From 2022 Transport for Wales (TfW) will be introducing brand new trains to Blaenau Gwent as part of an £800 million investment.

The improvements to the Rail Service are most welcome the problem arises when trying to access the 3 Stations in Blaenau Gwent. If you do not have access to your own Transport there

are limited bus links and no synchronisation between Bus and Train timetables.

TfW have undertaken a study of the Ebbw Vale Line on behalf of the Welsh Government, focusing on increasing the frequency of services and delivering a new service between Ebbw Vale and Newport. The study is being undertaken in conjunction with Network Rail, who manage the infrastructure of the line. The study aims to understand the opportunities and barriers to running up to four trains per hour on this line, as well as what work is required to allow this. More details of future plans for the line will be announced soon.

There is a need for a Integrated Transport Policy to enable the Bus and Train Timetables to be Synchronised.

Blaenau Gwent Council is currently undertaking a WelTAG Stage 1 study on the Abertillery area using Welsh Government funding from the Local Transport Fund. This study is considering the key issues and opportunities in the valley and identifying potential transport interventions to address these and meet our well-being objectives.

Haven't there been enough of Consultations, Studies and Plans done in the past. It seems to be the standard delaying practice to call for a Consultation. As far as Blaenau Gwent goes a good starting point would be a Clockwise and anti Clockwise service visiting all the Towns and Train Stations.

With regard to bus services since 2013 the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with £25m a year via our discretionary Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) to help them subsidise bus and community transport services. A notable achievement given continuing challenging financial settlements from the UK Government. Each local authority determines which services to support, based upon its assessment of local circumstances and priorities.

Are there any checks or monitoring on how this money is spent and are the residents of Blaenau Gwent receiving value for money. At present the policy seems to be give the money to Stagecoach and let them run the services they want. I have no confidence in Blaenau Gwent Council to be able to run or administer a Bus Public Transport System.

We will also introduce the Buses (Wales) Bill in this Assembly term, building on the proposals in the 'Improving Public Transport' White Paper. The Bill includes provisions relating to improved partnership working arrangements between bus operators and local authorities; franchising; and local authority run bus services. The Bill will also put in place new information management and sharing arrangements, so that information to the public will be more accessible and reliable, and local authorities will be in a better position to make arrangements to address changes in service provision. The changes proposed in the Bill will seek to address some of the negative impacts of de-regulation on users, operators and authorities, by creating a number of tools which would enable local authorities to intervene should they chose to do so.

As stated previously I have no faith in Blaenau Gwent Council they have not the skills and courage to take advantage of this new Bill if and when it becomes active. In the time it has taken for this white paper to be discussed and acted on the Towns in Blaenau Gwent are dying. Out of the 5 Towns: Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr, Tredegar and Ebbw Vale only Ebbw Vale has a resemblance of a retail infrastructure left all the others have in my opinion have past the point of being saved.

As part of this programme of bus reform, it is also our intention to initiate four live trials to shape development of the Integrated Responsive Travel (IRT) proposals which TfW are managing in collaboration with local authorities and operators. The funding is part of the £24m Local Transport Fund. One of these trials will be in the Blaenau Gwent area. The trials will test different models of demand for bus services and where appropriate, build on existing delivery models. The results of the trials will be analysed and will help inform the development of demand responsive travel over the next few years. Depending on their success, a decision will be taken on initiating a permanent arrangement.

This initiative was announced last year as of yet we have seen no action or movement. Is there an update on when IRT (Integrated Responsive Travel) will be active.

We also support local authorities with Welsh Government Transport Grants. Applications can be submitted for support through the Local Transport Fund, Local Transport Network Fund, Active Travel Fund, Road Safety and Safe Routes in Communities Grants. We have awarded £850,000 to Blaenau Gwent Council in 2019-20 for active travel schemes, safe routes to schools and bus stop infrastructure enhancements

As Blaenau Gwent have refused to meet to discuss Public Transport and Economic Regeneration (Town Centres) could you update me on how they have spent this money.

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It is not Bus Stop Infrastructure Enhancements we require it is Bus Services we require!

Finally it would be interesting to know who is ultimately responsible for Public Transport in Blaenau Gwent?

As I have stated earlier I have no confidence in Blaenau Gwent's Members and Officers being able to deliver a Public Transport System for Blaenau Gwent.