

# **BUS SERVICES POLICY DISCUSSION**

## **Improving local bus services in Wales**

### **Consultation response form**

#### **QUESTION 1**

Under current arrangements, local authorities are required to prepare and publish local transport plans. Do you agree that local transport plans should set out how local authorities are going to deliver local bus services in their areas? If you do not agree, please explain why.

We welcome the increased priority for local transport plans but have reservations relating to the financial capacity of local authorities "to ensure that communities in their areas are provided with .... local bus services".

We would also welcome clarity on the definition of communities and the funding available to enable local authorities to put arrangements in place. Providing bus services in rural areas is particularly challenging given the remoteness of settlements and numbers of potential passengers.

#### **QUESTION 2**

Under current arrangements, bus operators are required to give not less than 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioner before bus routes are added, varied or removed. Should the period of 56 days be lengthened, shortened or remain the same?

No comment

#### **QUESTION 3**

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Do you agree that local bus operators be required to consult with local authorities before applications to the Traffic Commissioner are submitted to remove, vary or add bus routes?

We welcome this proposal as it will provide local authorities with a longer time period to address, if desired, the change to the service. However, we have reservations on the action that local authorities can currently take if key routes are to be removed, as faced with unprecedented financial pressures, a number of local authorities have cut bus subsidies and many other LAs have significantly reduced the level of bus subsidy.

#### QUESTION 4

Integrated ticketing arrangements enabling passengers to travel by bus or by rail in any area in Wales will help deliver our metro programmes and improve transport accessibility. Should local authorities and the Welsh Government have the power to set up regional and national ticketing schemes?

Integrated ticketing has been introduced in many areas in the UK and is considered a key feature to improve the attractiveness of public transport. WG and local authorities should work together to set up ticketing schemes. However, there is a cost in doing so and clarity is required as to how integrated ticketing arrangements will be funded.

#### QUESTION 5

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Do you agree that the development and delivery of the TrawsCymru® longer distance bus network should be brought under the control of the Welsh Government under franchise agreements? If you do not agree, please explain why?

LAs should be fully involved in the business plan for the development and management of the TrawsCymru network. Its development must not be at the expense of, or be allowed to destabilise the commercial network. Would it be possible for the new Rail Franchise operators to integrate the TrawsCymru routes into the rail network or at the very least, to align their times more closely to maximise onward connections?

## QUESTION 6

Do you agree that local authorities should be allowed to set up bus franchising schemes in their areas and if so, what safeguards should be in place to ensure that the benefits of a competitive bus industry is not lost? If you do not agree, please explain why?

The WLGA has concerns that there is not the strategic capacity in local authorities to pull together the evidence to plan a franchised network, nor the funding available to fund one.

If funding was available, local authorities could enter 'Bus Improvement Partnership' type arrangements now. However, there is not sufficient capacity in local authorities nor the funding for capital improvements to allow this happen. Clarification would be welcome on the level of future funding?

## QUESTION 7

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Do you agree that the Welsh Ministers should establish the quality of local bus services to be met by operators by issuing statutory guidance after consultation with stakeholders? If you do not agree, please explain why.

We agree with driving up of standards but this should not be at the detriment of small operators which mainly operate in our rural areas. Support mechanisms need to be put in place to help these smaller operators improve the quality of their service.

Welsh Ministers should be encouraging the use of 'green' buses through financial incentives.

#### QUESTION 8

Do you agree that the Welsh Ministers should issue statutory guidance after consultation to establish the quality expectations for infrastructure (bus stops and bus shelters) and the display of accessible passenger information? If you do not agree, please explain why.

Clarity is required as to whether the guidance would apply to new bus shelters/stops or applied retrospectively and whether WG will be making more funding available for these 'improved' infrastructure standards

#### QUESTION 9

Do you agree that local authorities should be allowed to set up bus companies to operate local bus services? What requirements should be met before a local authority can set up its own bus company?

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If you do not agree that local authorities should be allowed to set up their own bus companies, please explain why.

At the deregulation of bus services in 1986, there were seven local authority operated wholly owned arms-length companies. With limited funds available for investment, only two survive – Cardiff Bus and Newport Transport. The WLGA welcomes the proposal to remove the restriction which offers another potential solution to improving bus services in Wales should local authorities wish to pursue this course of action but recognises that the gap in funding remains unlikely to make this a viable option for many.

#### Question 10

Do you have any further observations that you would like to make known in relation to the proposals put forward for the reform of local bus services in Wales?

There is little to no reference to how these long term proposals will be funded. It is not clear if it's the view of WG that the current pot of money can be used differently. In Plenary on 28<sup>th</sup> February, the Cabinet Secretary gave a statement on his vision for bus services and referred to the use of Local Transport Fund to strengthen the bus network. This is currently a competitive fund of £19.8m per annum and one of the few options a local authority has to fund active travel infrastructure. It is not considered appropriate that long term improvements to bus infrastructure is competitive and based on the capacity of local authorities to submit quality funding applications.

It is fair to say that over recent years, local authorities have experienced a decrease in the capacity of local government to focus on bus network planning and bus infrastructure improvements. This has resulted in a limited strategic bus planning capacity in local authorities and this will need to be addressed if Wales is to have an improved bus service. A number of the proposals have additional resource implications. Local authorities would be expected to prepare the case for Bus Improvement Partnerships and franchising, therefore further discussions would be required with Welsh Government on how the limited capacity and skills within local government can be addressed.

Although we welcome the increased recognition of the importance of bus services to communities throughout Wales, we remain to be persuaded whether new legislation is required to solve the problems facing the sector. Increased and refocused funding together with an increased capacity in local authorities would go a long way to addressing many of the issues raised in the WG consultation paper.

**Your name/organisation and postal/email address**

<p><b>Jane Lee</b> <b>Welsh Local Government Association</b></p>
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**Please tell us which group you are responding on behalf of? (tick one)**

Central Government		Public Transport User Groups	
Local Authority (Wales)	x	Environmental Groups	
Local Authority (England)		Disability Groups	
Rail Industry		Community Groups	
Commissioners / Ombudsman		Freight Operators / Users	
Advisory Groups		Bus Industry / Operators	
Media		Air Industry / Operators	
Emergency Services		Sea Industry / Operators	
Health Sector		Trade Unions	
Other (Please state)			