

REPORT OF THE BUS POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

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SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

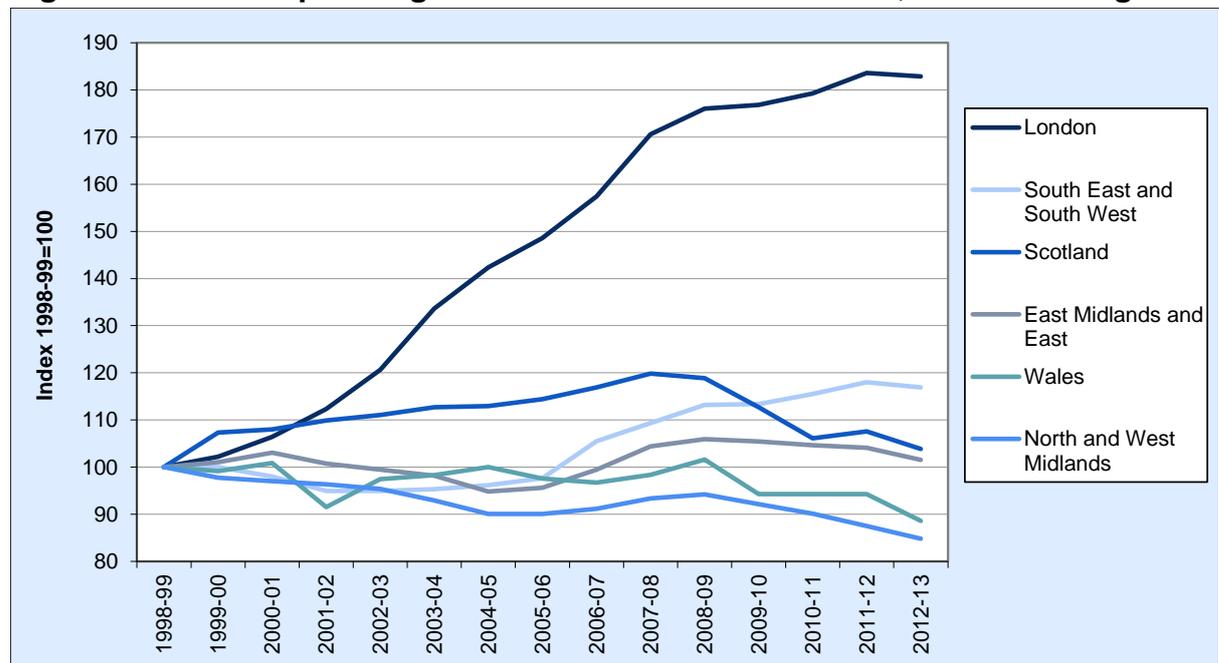
The availability of good quality, commercially-sustainable services is essential to the economic and social sustainability of Wales. This report sets out the unanimous recommendations of the advisory group – these are the key proposals.

- **Stability** should be ensured by funding and governance arrangements having a life of at least three years.
- **A consistent, pan-Wales approach** to policy, standards and cross-boundary and cross-operator issues should be established.
- **Network partnerships should be established**, comprising local authorities, bus operators, bus users and key trip generators (e.g. retailers, health care providers) to review and develop services (within competition rules). They should be based on transport corridors and be focused on practical action to improve services, including infrastructure, marketing and network improvements.
- **Kick-start funding** should be available to provide short-term support for the pilot phases of new commercial services, new fares initiatives and other innovations. Bus operators should be able to access business development support for other commercial investments.
- **Investment in infrastructure** and road improvements should take full account of the importance of reliability of bus services.
- **A Fair Fares** initiative should develop an **All Wales ticket** and other fare-related projects.
- An **information task group** should be established to implement practical ways of improving information provision, including use of digital technology.
- A **Welsh Bus Standard** be established, building on that developed in south east Wales. Operators should be incentivised and rewarded for compliance with the standard through grant payments. Those that do not reach a minimum should not receive public funding.
- **Co-ordination** of health and education-related transport with commercial and subsidised services should be encouraged, including two pilot projects to identify good practice.
- A working group should further develop a **youth concessionary fares policy**, including a review of the barriers faced by young people and assessing existing youth concessionary schemes.
- An **orange-wallet** type scheme and a Welsh module for the **Driver Certificate of Competence** should be introduced to improve services for disabled people.

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1. Bus services in Wales face considerable challenges. The number of fare paying passengers, overall, has declined in recent years (see Fig. 1). At the same time, public expenditure on public transport is being squeezed, with reductions in financial support for services and the rate of reimbursement for concessionary fares.

Figure 1 Trends in passenger numbers 1998-99 to 2012-13, Wales and regions



Source: Welsh Government Transport Statistics

- 1.2. Bus services are a vital part of Welsh economic and social life. Every day, 63,000 people rely on the bus to get to work,¹ and about 350,000 trips are made every day to get to hospital appointments, visit friends, go shopping or access leisure.² Buses are particularly important for young people and older people, for women and disabled people, and for people on low incomes, but they have potential to offer people of all ages and from all walks of life a reliable, flexible, affordable and green way of travelling.
- 1.3. The Bus Policy Advisory Group has brought together bus operators, local authorities, a health board representative and bus users to identify what action could be taken in the short-, medium- and long-term to create a network of bus services that are economically viable and meet the needs of passengers. A list of

¹ 2011 Census of Population Table QS701EW - Method of travel to work

² In 2012/13, 109 million bus journeys were made in Wales (Department for Transport Bus Statistics Table BUS0108) – divided by 6 days a week for 52 weeks a year = 349,936 trips per day.

members is at Annex 1. The Group's terms of reference were:

- ❖ *Identifying action needed to attract and retain fare-paying passengers.*
- ❖ *Making proposals to achieve measurable improvements in service quality for bus users, including arrangements for ticketing, information and infrastructure (e.g. bus stations).*
- ❖ *Reviewing the costs and benefits of different types of concessionary travel schemes for young people.*
- ❖ *Identifying ways of coordinating commercial, subsidised and service-related (e.g. health and education) bus services as well as non-emergency patient transport services.*
- ❖ *Identifying priorities for future expenditure, including service infrastructure improvements.*
- ❖ *Identifying ways to increase partnership between public authorities and bus operators (within competition rules).*

1.4. We were also asked to consider the question of a charter for disabled passengers.

1.5. Small working groups were established to identify a limited number of actions that could be taken forward in the short- to medium-term in respect of each issue that the group was asked to consider. The group had a very short time in which to undertake this work, and the proposals therefore need varying degrees of further work before they can be fully implemented.

1.6. **Nevertheless, it is unanimously agreed that this set of proposals offers a coherent package of actions that will, relatively quickly, improve the quality and sustainability of bus services across Wales.**

1.7. The rest of the report sets out the conclusions and recommendations of the group, organised around its terms of reference.

2. BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CHANGE

2.1. The group agreed that Wales will not succeed in having a thriving bus network unless there are solid foundations to the system. We agreed that there are three key aspects that need to be in place:

Stability

2.2. Arrangements for supporting bus services have been changed three times in three years, destabilising services and generating uncertainty. The group was

unanimous that any new arrangements need to be stable, so that operators and local authorities have the confidence to be able to take medium-term decisions. Stability also gives confidence to passengers and operators of key destinations that bus services are a viable and credible option. **We therefore ask that any changes made by Welsh Government following this report should be in place for a minimum of three years.**

Governance

- 2.3. There needs to be leadership and good governance at all-Wales, regional and local levels. We warmly welcome the Minister's initiative in establishing the bus policy advisory group, and urge that arrangements for high-level, solution-focused liaison between Welsh Government, operators, local government and key destinations continue.
- 2.4. We consider that action is needed at all-Wales level to strengthen standards and deal with cross-boundary and cross-operator issues such as ticketing, provision of information and so on. We note the considerable success which the consumer group Travel Watch South West combined with bus operators and local authorities have had in driving up patronage and quality through consistent, partnership-based approach.
- 2.5. Most members of the group therefore supported an integrated, national approach to bus policy. The work of Transport Scotland, an agency of the Scottish Government which provides consistency in rail and bus operations (including policy, concessionary fares and ticketing), was identified as an example. **Such an integrated, all-Wales approach needs to be explored in more detail.**
- 2.6. At local level, we recommend that dialogue and action should take place through **Network Partnerships** which would bring together local authorities, bus operators, bus users and key trip generators (e.g. retailers, health care providers). In both rural and urban areas, they should be based on transport corridors which must not be constrained by local authority boundaries.
- 2.7. Partnerships should be focused on practical action to improve services, in particular improving punctuality, but also infrastructure, marketing and network improvements. They must be more than talking shops – they need some 'teeth' if they are to make a difference. They would operate within competition rules.

Funding

- 2.8. Public spending on different aspects of bus services (concessionary fares, Bus Services Support Grant, kilometre support (formerly fuel duty rebate and BSOG) as well as local authorities' own resources) is extremely important. This funding, as a

whole, not only supports subsidised services but is vital to the viability of most commercial services throughout Wales.

- 2.9. The group was very mindful of the severe constraints on public expenditure, and is concerned that reductions in financial support for bus will inevitably affect services of all kinds. If there are to be changes in financial arrangements, it is essential that the impact on services is forecast so that users, operators and local authorities can mitigate the effect. We see our proposed governance arrangements enabling operators and public bodies to work together. Where we have suggested investment, e.g. kick-start funding, we are firmly of the view that it should be additional to existing resources.
- 2.10. Some members of the group suggested that there were also areas in which efficiencies could be achieved, such as the arrangements for the reimbursement of concessionary fares. It may be that an integrated national approach could achieve some savings, the potential for which should be included in the further investigation proposed in paragraph 2.5.

3. ATTRACTING FARE-PAYING PASSENGERS AND IMPROVING QUALITY

- 3.1. Although we considered the questions of attracting fare-paying passengers and improving quality separately, they are combined here because improved quality is fundamental to attracting fare-paying passengers.
- 3.2. We recommend that action be taken in respect of the following areas:
- Network review and development
 - Fares
 - Information
 - Quality
 - Reliability

Network Review and Development

- 3.3. Although mileage and patronage of bus services overall are in decline in Wales, many individual services can, if planned and implemented in ways that meet passenger needs, enjoy significant growth. There are many examples from around the UK of bus operations attracting more customers and being commercially sustainable (see figure 2)

Figure 2 Lloyds Coaches X28 service

In 2011, Lloyds Coaches introduced the X28 Coastliner hourly service between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth, serving Bronglais Hospital, Ysgol Penglais Comprehensive, and extending to the Welsh Government's and Ceredigion County Council's offices and Morrisons supermarket.

The service was based on:

- liaison with stakeholders and the public
- easy to understand timetables, maximising travel at peak times
- integration with local authority education transport
- use of modern, clean, easily accessible vehicles with on board tracking
- reliable, punctual and frequent service
- professional staff employed including company ambassadors
- affordable fares including weekly tickets and half fare travel for 5-16 year olds
- easy access to service via infrastructure provided from all points along the route
- effective planning to maximise destinations served
- development of an information strategy using phone, online, bus stop, on-bus and paper information
- integration with other modes of transport at key points and hubs along the route, including some integrated ticketing with rail and demand-responsive transport.
- Active marketing including strong service branding and regular media releases
- Active management of information about disruption using a variety of media.

Between June 2012 and June 2013, passengers increased by 23% and revenue increased by 23%, whereas patronage on a comparable route, which used old vehicles and saw fares increase twice, fell by 20% and revenue fell by 11%.

- 3.4. Bus operators said that the networks with the greatest potential for growth are those that are simple to understand, reliable and punctual, frequent, direct and stable. Crucially, successful services meet the current travel needs of relatively large numbers of passengers, not historical patterns of service or local whims. The group noted the success of the recent review of subsidised services in Caerphilly (see Annex 2). We consider that a thorough review of local networks, including identifying potential for new services as well as looking at existing services, is a useful way forward.
- 3.5. Viable networks also need changes in road infrastructure to improve service reliability, not solely through the creation of bus priority lanes, but through general

improvements at junctions and other works to improve punctuality. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's improvements to the Cardiff-Pontypridd corridor are a good example of such interdependent interventions (see Fig. 3). Stricter enforcement of parking restrictions and mis-use of bus lanes are also important. Network partnerships should identify key pinch-points for bus reliability and ensure that solutions are integrated into wider highway improvements.

Figure 3 Cardiff-Pontypridd Punctuality Improvements

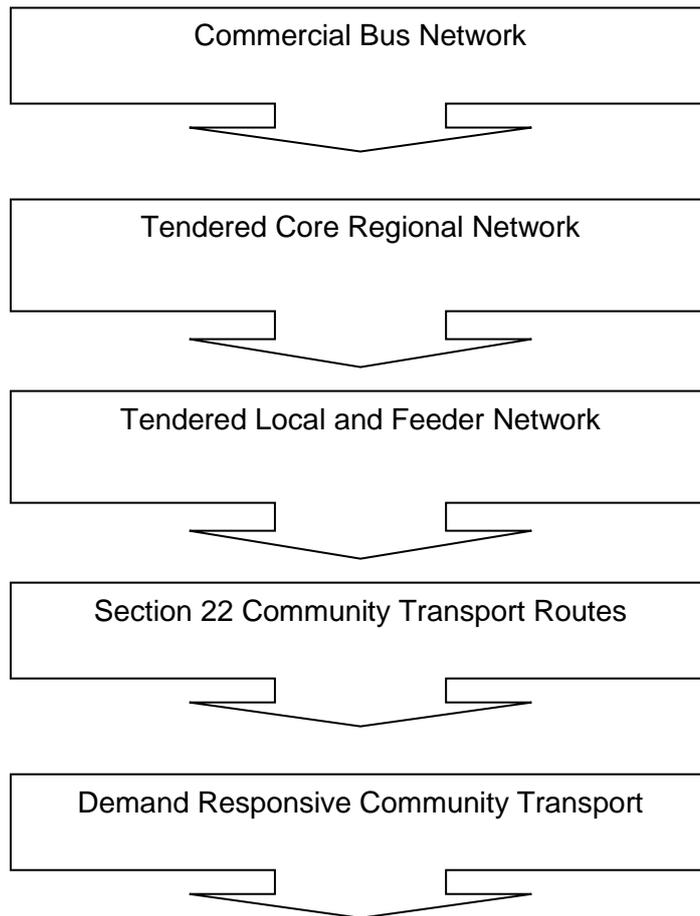
The Cardiff to Pontypridd transport corridor is one of the most important corridors in south Wales, with typically 10 buses per hour running between Pontypridd and Cardiff using the A470 and parallel local roads.

A study identified six areas where the main delays occurred, and in response Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council introduced a mix of junction improvements, bus lanes and priority measures, road widening, changes to traffic lights and bus stop improvements at key points.

The impact to date is to reduce journey times and increase patronage. For example reduction in journey times through Pontypridd bus station (used by more than 90 vehicles per hour) have decreased by 41 seconds, while those in Cardiff through Whitchurch village have fallen by 36 seconds at peak times. The X4 and 26 services have seen increases in patronage of 4.5% and 9.7% respectively.

- 3.6. The group considered the potential for community transport as part of a wider network. It was recognised that there were many parts of Wales with limited or no bus services available, where community transport could play a vital role in improving accessibility for residents. Options could include regular services provided under s22 and demand responsive services where no other option is available. We consider it essential however that community transport is a coherent part of the wider bus network and should not compete with or undermine commercial bus services. A graphic showing how an integrated network could be developed is shown in Fig. 4.

Figure 4 Model of Community Transport's relationship with other public transport



3.7. Such models exist in other places, notably in the Netherlands where the Buurtbus model has been applied successfully in many rural and peripheral areas, as gateway or feeder services to main transport corridors. We consider that such networks could provide feeder services to bus hubs on principal routes, boosting overall passenger usage and providing accessibility to communities that would otherwise not have passenger transport services. We recommend that some pilot proposals be developed to demonstrate how community transport can be integrated into bus networks to increase accessibility be developed.

3.8. **We recommend that:**

- **All local authorities, bus operators, passengers and representatives of key destinations should review their local bus networks to strengthen commercial services. The reviews should be clearly based on what passengers want (not what providers assume they want), for commercial and subsidised services alike.**

- **Consideration should be given to payment of Welsh Government funding for bus services to local authorities being conditional on effective network reviews being undertaken.**
- **Network partnerships should identify key pinch-points for bus reliability and punctuality, and ensure that solutions are integrated into wider highway improvements.**
- **Tendered services should allow operators flexibility to maximise efficient use of their fleet, e.g. they should avoid specifying service timings and focus on frequency, start and end times and any integration required.**
- **Networks should include integrating community transport services to increase accessibility.**
- **Pump-priming investment – a route development fund or kick-start grant – should be available to support the development of new bus networks and services. This could include integrating commercial services with community transport or demand-responsive services.**

Fares

- 3.9. Bus operators said that many fares are historical rather than rational, so that both passengers and drivers often face complex fare tables with many potential fare options. Operators and passengers agreed that simple fare structures that are well-publicised – and affordable - seem to attract more customers.
- 3.10. In terms of development, fares need to be competitive with other modes (e.g. train fares or petrol plus parking) but must also reflect operating costs - simply cutting bus fares is not a long-term, commercially-viable solution. Equally, raising fares to the point at which patronage drops off is not a solution either.
- 3.11. The group recognised that a stable system of public sector support was essential, and that legislation on competition limited collaboration between operators and the role of the public sector. Experience in London and Sheffield shows that fare reductions can increase patronage. Operators felt that experiments or pilot projects to lower fares with the aim of increasing patronage would require underwriting by the public sector to mitigate the risk of commercial losses in the early stages.
- 3.12. **We recommend that further work – under the provisionally-entitled the ‘Fair Fares’ project - be undertaken to determine the action needed to:**
- **encourage operators to streamline and rationalise their fare structures and local authorities to simplify and co-ordinate local schemes;**
 - **establish an all-Wales ticketing system (including the possibility of a smart card) with inter-availability between bus operators and with rail network;**

- **explore the links between patronage and pricing – including the potential for a pilot project on lower fares;**
- **develop digital information and ticketing systems, including enhancing Traveline Cymru’s fares database, the need for investment in ticketing equipment and back-office functions.**

Information

- 3.13. Lack of or incorrect information is one of the most common complaints made by bus users, and it is hard to understand why some operators do not inform their customers more effectively about their services. Passengers need simple, easy to understand information – even if information is available, many people are not familiar with or able to read standard timetables. Information needs to be available in multiple formats, including a various digital platforms as well as paper and telephone.
- 3.14. The group recognised that a more sophisticated approach to the provision of information is needed. For example, the quantity and format of information may need to vary with the type of stop – the most comprehensive information would be available at bus stations, whilst only basic information would be offered at little-used bus stops. The group considered that the ideal of all buses being equipped with real-time information was unrealistic and too expensive whereas a goal of all buses being wifi-enabled could enable passengers to access ‘actual time’ delays, revised journey options and more via their own smartphone/tablet device. The group also considered the potential of new generation ticket machines, based on GPRS technology, which integrate with real time information systems. These allow journeys to be monitored in ‘real time’ and, if rolled out to an agreed protocol, would enable Traveline to offer real time travel information.
- 3.15. The group felt that there is considerable potential to build on Traveline Cymru's role and expertise, and to develop the delivery of information digitally. We noted the successful use of live bus departure boards in Withybush and Bangor Hospitals (see Figure 5), the growing popularity of the Traveline Apps and mobile website over the traditional use of ‘phone calls to a call centre, and the availability of a Traveline Cymru widget for third party websites enabling more widespread access to journey planning. We felt these initiatives could be easily rolled out more widely and take-up encouraged further. Nevertheless the phone will continue to be important for visually-impaired passengers.

Figure 5 Integrated Transport Planning in Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire County Council and Hywel Dda Health Board have been working closely to improve public transport links to hospital sites. Real-time information displays have been installed into Withybush and South Pembrokeshire Hospitals and a new bus shelter erected outside Tenby Cottage Hospital. As part of the new Renal Unit Development at Withybush Hospital a new on-site bus stop with shelter and real-time information provides public transport access four times an hour direct to the hospital door. There have also been improvements to the bus corridors from the North and West of Pembrokeshire which serve Withybush Hospital. These included new bus shelters, improved disabled access facilities and real-time information.

- 3.16. We recognised the potential of Traveline Cymru and local authorities to work with key trip originators / destinations in a network corridor. This could not only include assistance to develop local personal travel plans, but could also provide face-to-face advice. A proposed pilot at Deeside Industrial Park is at Fig. 6. We were also grateful for Hywel Dda Health Board's offer to pilot such an approach for staff and patients at its facilities as part of its ongoing engagement with this agenda.

Figure 6 Deeside Industrial Park

Deeside Industrial Park is a major industrial and business site located in Flintshire, close to the border with England. The site is home to some major international employers including Toyota, Iceland, Tata Steel, BASF, and ConvaTec. Approximately 9,000 people are employed at the Park on a mixture of shift patterns. The site has recently been designated part of the Deeside Enterprise Zone which will stimulate further growth, with a further 650 acres to be developed.

The park is close to several major residential areas, some with high levels of deprivation, but separated from them by the River Dee. It is currently poorly served by commercial bus services, despite there being a thriving network linking communities in Flintshire with Chester and other destinations. Some tendered services serve the park, including the Deeside Shuttle, a demand responsive service tendered by Flintshire County Council. Patronage is increasing by about 3,000 trips annually with over 66,000 passenger journeys last year. It is however expensive to operate, despite costs being reduced as a result of a recent re-tender of the service.

A pilot project would understand why commercial service provision onto the site have not developed and how commercial fare paying passenger numbers can be increased.

3.17. We also recognised that simply providing information is of little help if there are no bus services to meet needs. Outreach activities could gather valuable market intelligence on why people do not currently use bus services, and to stimulate latent demand. New services could then be supported with pump-priming or kick-start funding.

3.18. We recommend that an information task group be established comprising Traveline Cymru, bus operators, local authorities and passenger representatives to undertake further work to improve the availability of information. This would include:

- **establishing the feasibility and cost of equipping all buses in Wales with wi-fi as a cheaper alternative to real time or ‘talking bus’ systems**
- **exploring the feasibility of establishing a hierarchy of bus stops / interchanges with different levels of information provision; providing wifi at key stops.**
- **pilot the proactive provision of information, travel planning and market research at a minimum of one major destination.**

Quality

3.19. Passengers' experience of bus transport is not just about time and cost - quality is crucial. It includes issues such as cleanliness, driver training, product knowledge, and customer feedback, as well as the standards of passenger infrastructure such as bus stations. Other aspects of quality include features such as Wifi, CCTV and next bus stopping signs. It has been said that these are ‘bells and whistles’³ but they are facilities that travellers using other modes often take for granted and are crucial if buses are to appeal to a wider market. One member of the group pointed out that a diner's experience of a restaurant is only partly about the food - cleanliness, atmosphere and the courtesy of waiting staff all shape the enjoyment of a meal out and the likelihood of returning. So too with a bus service.

3.20. We noted the work carried out under the aegis of SEWTA (the South East Wales Transport Alliance) on a quality standard for operators in its area, with different levels (gold, silver and bronze) reflecting different standards (see Annex 3). As well as bus quality, the standard also promotes good practice other aspects e.g. the provision of information, timetable revisions etc. Operators are incentivised and rewarded for higher quality with higher grant payments.

3.21. We considered that there was great potential to adapt the south east Wales Quality standards into an All Wales Bus Quality Standard. It should include provision for

³ Review of Traws Cymru report

the quality of bus stops and bus stations. Operators would be incentivised to increase the standard of their services, and passengers would benefit. There may be potential for kick-start funding to support any significant investment required.

3.22. Operators that do not meet a minimum standard should not receive public funding of any kind, including kilometre support.

3.23. We recommend that:

- **early consultation takes place on the creation of an All Wales Bus Quality Standard based on the south east Wales standard for implementation from 2015/16.**
- **Kick-start investment is available to help bus operators, local authorities and operators of major trip origins / destinations achieve the necessary standards.**

4. CONCESSIONARY FARES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

4.1. The group was asked to review the costs and benefits of different types of concessionary travel schemes for young people. This is a significant exercise that we were unable to do in depth in the time available, but nevertheless we are able to make some recommendations about the next steps.

4.2. We discussed the case for some form of concessionary scheme for young people, not only to encourage their participation in learning, leisure and employment, particularly for young people living in low income households but also to develop a 'bus-habit' that might be retained in later life. There are a number of concessionary schemes for young people that exist in other countries, and these merit further investigation in order to understand the impact an equivalent scheme might have in Wales. There is some evidence, however, that the impact on social inclusion and on overall patronage can be limited.

4.3. The group discussed at some length the different rationales for introducing a young persons' concessionary fare, as the purpose shapes the concessionary fare offer. A scheme focused on, say, those undertaking post-16 learning might look very different to one focused on opening up job opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training. It is essential that any scheme should be clear about what it hopes to achieve and sets out clear measures of success.

4.4. The cost and availability of bus services has been highlighted by young people themselves as a significant concern. The recent Wales-wide youth engagement

consultation carried out by the National Assembly for Wales Commission, for example, featured transport issues prominently. Nearly 3,000 respondents aged 11-25 were asked about the areas of policy in which they wished to be more closely engaged. After education, transport was the most common response, and bus fares were raised specifically. Barriers to accessing public transport have also been highlighted by the Grand Council of Funky Dragon, the Children's Commissioner, and by young people themselves in recent Welsh Government consultations on a wide range of subjects, including on the children's rights measure (2011), youth justice (2012), and learner travel (2013). A concessionary fare scheme would be a hugely significant policy, and it is vital that the views of children and young people are sought in order to guide its development and implementation.

- 4.5. We were concerned that the provision of a youth concessionary fare on the same basis as that for older people would be extremely costly. In addition, free travel would increase the proportion of non-fare paying passengers from an already high level of approximately 40%, contrary to the Minister's ambition to increase paying passengers.
- 4.6. The group agreed that fares for young people are sometimes outdated, reflecting historical patterns of education and working. We noted that some bus operators (such as Newport Bus, First Cymru and most recently Stagecoach) already provided youth concessionary fares on a commercial basis. These schemes typically extend the concession available for children (usually half or 2/3 adult fare) to those aged 16-18 years. Some operators have also simplified child and youth fares at the same time, e.g. rounding the fare down to £3. One operator reported that after an initial drop in revenue, fare income then increased, despite the price cut. Two pilot schemes in Ceredigion and Vale of Glamorgan are also underway.
- 4.7. However other operators do not have youth concessionary schemes, so that 16-year olds must pay the adult fare even when travelling to school or college. We were particularly concerned that the withdrawal of home-school transport in some areas means that 16-18 year old school-children and learners in non-school settings face adult fares. The position for 18-plus age groups is more complicated. The group could see considerable benefits in offering concessionary fares for 18-21 year olds (or even 18-24 year olds) or for specific sub-groups of young people such as students or apprentices, for the same reasons as 16-18 year olds. Developing a scheme for young workers and apprentices which paralleled the 'cycle to work' scheme was explored. The questions of cost, administration and enforcement are even more complex however.
- 4.8. This group would support, in principle, the introduction of a concessionary fares scheme for young people. However, we do have some reservations and would strongly recommend that the policy be developed further before a specific course is decided upon. This should include engaging children and young people directly,

and examining in more detail the experience of other schemes in Wales and internationally. It could also include some intermediate measures, such as further pilots to encourage the development of innovative means of increasing patronage amongst young people, and overcoming the barriers that some young people can face.

- 4.9. We considered a number of different ways of achieving a concessionary scheme, which would be simple to administer and enforce, cost-effective, appealing to young people and, crucially, which did not use scarce public funds to pay for existing, commercially-viable operator-led schemes.
- 4.10. We noted that the south east Wales bus quality standard included the provision of youth concessions, incentivising and rewarding operators which had such schemes along with other quality measures. However this does not create an entitlement for young people which some of the group considered was required.
- 4.11. Ideas considered included:
- provision of a 'youth card' to prove entitlement – this could be linked to other schemes such as discounted leisure or money-off goods;
 - an annual, subsidised youth season ticket;
 - provision of free transport for under-18s in school holidays;
 - targeting the provision in Communities First areas.

Clarification of the purpose of the scheme and how it might be implemented is needed as a matter of urgency.

4.12. We recommend that

- **A working group be tasked with further developing a concessionary fares policy. Their remit should include:**
 - **Informing a national consultation process to understand the barriers young people face in accessing public transport, relating to cost and other factors.**
 - **Studying the impact that existing concessionary schemes have had in Wales and in an international context. This could be extended to exploring other, innovative means of promoting access to public transport, and increasing patronage, amongst young people.**

5. CO-ORDINATING COMMERCIAL, SUBSIDISED AND SERVICE-RELATED BUS SERVICES

- 5.1. The group recognised that there are considerable potential gains to be made by co-ordinating school transport, non-emergency patient transport and social services provision. Effective co-ordination can help the sustainability of commercial services, can utilise down-time efficiently and improves people's ability to get to essential services. The reconfiguration of health services, cuts to social care provision and the reduction in home-school transport make action urgent.
- 5.2. We identified the following areas where short-term gains can be made, some of which overlap with proposals to improve quality and attract fare-paying passengers.

Network planning

- 5.3. We see real benefits from the effective planning and development of bus networks, with the input of local authorities, operators and health care and education providers (and other trip generators). A collaborative approach will identify where commercial services can meet needs, reducing reliance on subsidised or contracted services. This work is pivotal to the successful reconfiguration of health services and should be an integral part of health boards' work on equality. We suggest that individual health boards are explicitly requested to ensure that public transport issues are considered. **We see the network reviews and network boards ensuring effective planning.**
- 5.4. We noted that sometimes subsidised or contracted services are provided by default even though bus operators may be able to provide or amend services commercially. Dialogue, coupled with investment to pump-prime new services, is essential to avoid this occurring.

Management and delivery

- 5.5. Integrated service planning and delivery means that discrete service needs are co-ordinated by one team. This enables, for example, public transport networks to take into account home-school transport needs or local authority social care and community transport providers to offer non-emergency patient transport. It also enables integration of infrastructure planning, traffic management and parking provision so that pinch points can be addressed.

5.6. We considered that as a first step, local authorities should place transport planning, management and coordination within a single directorate, ideally under one manager, which would be responsible for public transport, school transport, community transport, and social care transport. This approach avoids duplication, increases integration, reduces costs and a single point of contact is easier for operators. As a second step, health-related transport (including non-emergency patient transport) and post-16 education-related transport should be located within the team – this may require pooled budgets in due course. Hywel Dda Health Board for example, intends to establish an integrated transport unit. We recognised that sometimes investment will be required to pump-prime new services.

5.7. We recommend that:

- **Reviews and development of networks recommended earlier specifically take into account health and education-related transport.**
- **Pump-priming investment recommended earlier is available to support new services.**
- **Local authorities be encouraged to locate their transport functions in a single directorate.**
- **Health boards and education and training providers be encouraged to integrate their commissioning of transport services with those of the relevant local authority.**

6. A CHARTER FOR DISABLED PASSENGERS

6.1. The group considered the draft charter for disabled passengers and felt it provided a useful starting point for addressing the challenges faced by disabled people. We also heard from Guide Dogs for the Blind, representing visually-impaired passengers. Bus operators pointed out that they welcomed action to improve services for disabled people, not only for the benefit of passengers but to improve health and safety. We identified several practical steps that could be taken in the short- to medium term.

Additional Needs

6.2. We learned that the 'orange wallet' scheme enables a disabled person to indicate to the driver whether he or she has additional needs, for example if they need time to reach their seat or is deaf. It is simple and appears to meet disabled people's and bus drivers' needs. It can also be used to help visually-impaired people to hail buses. It could also be issued at the same time as disabled people's concessionary passes, although arrangements would need to be made for disabled people who do not qualify for a concessionary pass and for older disabled people.

We concluded there appeared to be considerable merits in rolling out the 'orange wallet' subject to the views of disabled people and operators.

Driver training and awareness

- 6.3. We considered practical ways of ensuring that drivers are aware of the needs of disabled passengers. Drivers are already required to maintain their Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (DCPC) which includes some disability awareness, either provided in-house or externally procured. This advantage is that there is 100% participation and regular updating. There is potential for a Welsh module to be developed which would ensure consistency across Wales and reflect disabled people's concerns.

Information and assistance

- 6.4. We also looked at the potential of newer digital technology to assist disabled people (and other vulnerable groups), such as Traveline Cymru's App in development which has a 'get off now' feature supporting those with sensory loss. There is scope not only to use digital to improve services for disabled people but to support innovation and technological development. The impact would be in the medium- rather than short-term but we concluded that action should be taken now to support development.

6.5. We recommend:

- **The introduction of an all Wales standard 'orange wallet'-type scheme as soon as practicable, capturing existing best practice in smaller schemes around Wales.**
- **Further work to introduce a Welsh DCPC module on disability awareness be undertaken.**
- **A project to explore increased use of low cost digital technology to assist disabled people's use of public transport be established.**

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. The group has had an extremely limited amount of time in which to undertake this task and most of our recommendations require further work to get them to the point of implementation. Our recommendations are as follows.

Building Blocks for Change

7.2. Stable, appropriate policies, funding and governance are essential pre-requisites for improving bus services. **We recommend:**

- **Stability** should be ensured by funding and governance arrangements having a life of at least three years.
- **A consistent, all-Wales approach to bus policy should be established.**
- **Network partnership boards should be established**, comprising local authorities, bus operators, bus users and key trip generators (e.g. retailers, health care providers), based on transport corridors not administrative boundaries.

Attracting Fare Paying Passengers and Improving Quality

7.3. Attracting passengers requires the development of networks, affordable fares, good information and quality. We recommend:

Network Development

- **Networks of commercial and subsidised services should be reviewed** to ensure they provide what passengers want for commercial and subsidised services alike. There should be incentives to undertake such reviews.
- **Network partnerships should identify key pinch-points for bus reliability and punctuality**, and ensure that solutions are integrated into wider highway improvements.
- **Tendered services should allow operators flexibility to maximise efficient use of their fleet**, e.g. they should avoid specifying service timings and focus on frequency, start and end times and any integration required.
- **Networks should include integrating community transport services to increase accessibility.**
- **Kick-start funding** should be available to provide short-term support for the pilot phases of new commercial services, new fares initiatives and other innovations.
- **Investment in infrastructure** and road improvements should take full account of the importance of reliability of bus services.

Fares

7.4. Further work – under the provisionally-entitled the ‘Fair Fares’ project – should be undertaken to determine the action needed to:

- encourage operators to streamline and rationalise their fare structures and local authorities to simplify and co-ordinate local schemes;
- establish an all-Wales ticketing system (including the possibility of a smart card) with inter-availability between bus operators and with rail network;
- explore the links between patronage and pricing – including the potential for a pilot project on lower fares;
- develop digital information and ticketing systems, including enhancing Traveline Cymru’s fares database, the need for investment in ticketing equipment and back-office functions.

Information

7.5. We recommend that an information task group be established comprising Traveline Cymru, bus operators, local authorities and passenger representatives to undertake further work to improve the availability of information. This would include:

- establishing the feasibility and cost of equipping all buses in Wales with wi-fi as a cheaper alternative to real time or ‘talking bus’ systems
- exploring the feasibility of establishing a hierarchy of bus stops / interchanges with different levels of information provision; providing wifi at key stops.
- pilot the proactive provision of information, travel planning and market research at at least one major destination.

Quality

7.6. To improve the quality of bus services, we recommend that:

- early consultation takes place on the creation of an All Wales Bus Quality Standard based on the south east Wales standard for implementation from 2015/16.
- Operators should be incentivised and rewarded for compliance with the standard through grant payments. Those that do not reach a minimum should not receive public funding.
- Kick-start investment is available to help bus operators, local authorities and operators of major trip origins / destinations achieve the necessary standards.

Youth Concessionary Fares

7.7. We recommend that

- A working group be tasked with further developing a concessionary fares policy. Its remit should include:
 - Informing a national consultation process to understand the barriers young people face in accessing public transport, relating to cost and other factors.
 - Studying the impact that existing concessionary schemes have had in Wales and in an international context. This could be extended to exploring other, innovative means of promoting access to public transport, and increasing patronage, amongst young people.

Integration

7.8. We recommend that:

- Reviews and development of networks recommended earlier specifically take into account health and education-related transport.
- Pump-priming investment recommended earlier is available to support new services.
- Local authorities be encouraged to locate their transport functions in a single directorate.
- Health boards and education and training providers be encouraged to integrate their commissioning of transport services with those of the relevant local authority.
- Co-ordination of health and education-related transport with commercial and subsidised services should be encouraged, including two pilot projects to identify good practice.

Disability

7.9. We recommend:

- The introduction of an all Wales standard 'orange wallet'-type scheme as soon as practicable, capturing existing best practice in smaller schemes around Wales.
- Further work to introduce a Welsh DCPC module on disability awareness be undertaken.
- A project to explore increased use of low cost digital technology to assist disabled people's use of public transport be established.
- Operators and groups representing disabled passengers have regular dialogue.

Annex 1 Group Members

Victoria Winckler	Bevan Foundation
Jeff Collins	Welsh Government
Chris Martin	Chairman, Hywel Dda University Health Board
Dan Butler	Former member of PTUC
Rod Jenkins	Powys County Council
Hubert Mathias	Pembrokeshire County Council
Iwan Prys Jones	Flintshire County Council
Huw Morgan	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Scott Pearson	Newport Transport
Justin Davies	First Cymru
Richard Jones	Express Motors
Margaret Everson	Bus Users' UK in Wales
Graham Walter	Traveline Cymru

The secretariat was provided by officials of the Welsh Government.

Annex 2 Caerphilly's Review of Services

In July 2011, Caerphilly County Borough Council's tendered bus services came up for renewal after a five-year period. It is a challenge for most local authorities to maintain service levels enhance where possible and keep within ever-uncertain budget levels and Caerphilly CBC was no different.

The Sunday network across the county borough was one area in need of attention. As well as a few town services in Caerphilly itself, the coverage was based largely on key routes connecting the major settlements that has changed little since deregulation. Bus services mainly started after lunchtime and operated until late evening. Various diversions and extensions had been added over the years, often with little similarity to the weekday service. Timetables offered few convenient connections with gaps added to provide driver breaks. In order to revitalise the network a whole-scale review was needed.

There were four guiding principles to the tendering process:

Keep it simple; Make convenient connections; Timetables suitable for contemporary Sunday lifestyles; Package work suitably to achieve efficiencies

Using the four principles described above, council officers analysed ticket machine data for every Sunday journey on each route. It became very clear that late evening journeys were very poorly used but there was high patronage on the first journey of the day (often after lunch). This was evidence that a large number of people were waiting all morning the first bus of the day in order to go out

Not wanting to rely purely on ticket machine data, an officer travelled on a number of routes to better understand where and when people were using the bus and it also allowed for some ad-hoc questioning of passengers. Bus divers were very forthcoming with information particularly where timings were too tight and where the network could be improved. The conclusion was that most people wanted earlier buses to shop, work or for leisure. Timetables based on previous Sunday traffic conditions needed revising, particularly on inward journeys to Cardiff.

With all the information analysed the council drew up several drafts of the Sunday network with each version offering benefits and challenges. The final proposal was one that focused on the key settlements and attractors e.g. Cardiff, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly. Timetables were moved earlier with most buses starting at 0900 or 1000 with a little reduction in the late evening. There were some alternative options for some tenders to ensure best value was achieved. To benchmark the costs of the new network against the previous tendered Sunday network, options of service levels were invited, including one based on the status quo.

Buses operating from the northern Rhymney Valley connected at Bargoed with those to/from the south. At Caerphilly times were co-ordinated to allow connections to/from Cardiff. Finally, routes 26 & 151 linked at Blackwood to allow travel from the eastern side of the county borough to the new hospital at Ystrad Mynach.

With such a large-scale change, it was important that the public were informed that their bus service would be changing and perhaps more importantly the reasons why. A customer may complain that a bus timetable is often randomly altered to run 10 minutes early, but an explanation as to why it has changed (perhaps because there was now an ability to connect with other services for example), the change becomes acceptable - even advantageous.

Conscious that there would still be those who did not know the network was changing or

understand the benefits of the changes the council produced a concise but informative booklet detailing changes and benefits for each route in an easy to read format. 5000 were produced and were available on buses and distributed to local councilors, community councils and various outlets in the county borough. A bright pink cover attracted attention - as one bus driver remarked, "you can't miss those". Generic on-bus posters were produced directing passengers to the guide.

With the 31st July fast approaching the Council also updated over 500 bus stop timetable displays and together with a team of inspectors from Stagecoach, installed them on the evening of Saturday 30 July and early morning on Sunday 31st July resulting in every bus stop having correct information at the time of change. The opportunity was taken to include adverts promoting some of the enhancements.

After Week 5 the council analysed every trip on each route and discovered that whilst some of the existing passenger loadings spread out over the morning, there was a definite increase in ridership across the day. Officers now record all Sunday usage to monitor trends.

A review was undertaken at the end of January 2012 (six months after the changes). Increases on individual routes vary but all have achieved growth. Due to routes being separated or combined at the retendering, some results are shown as groups in Figure 6. More encouraging is the growth of fare paying passengers. Total revenue, sampled on the first Sunday in September over three successive years in 2011 to 2013 (i.e. after the new network was introduced) shows a 37% increase between 2011 and 2012 and a 42% increase between 2011 and 2013.

Route or group of routes	Total Usage July 2010 to January 2011	Total Usage July 2011 to January 2012	Actual increase	% increase
56, 151, X16/X17, R1, N1	13244	14158	914	7%
1, 3, 4	2222	4423	2201	99%
2, 50	7300	9123	1823	25%
26	6318	6946	628	10%
A	4612	5537	925	20%
B	7437	9701	2264	30%
C	390	1097	707	181%
C16	1430	1495	65	5%
All routes	42953	52480	9527	22%

Conclusion

The principle of providing a simple, convenient bus network has delivered real growth and provided opportunities on Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays for employment, leisure and tourism. Such opportunities benefit the local economy, reduce car usage and improve social inclusion.

This has been achieved within the existing budget allocation, without the need for significant additional resources and illustrates what can be achieved working in partnership with stakeholders and developing an understanding of passenger needs and aspirations

Annex 3 SEWTA Standards

In 2013/14 Sewta developed a Regional Network Strategy in accordance with Welsh Government requirements at the time. Also from 2013/14, Sewta took over the administration of the former BSOG payments, formally managed by the Department for Transport that financially supported local bus services registered in the south east Wales area, by paying a grant to bus operators based on actual kilometres operated.

The grant assists in maintaining the existing network of bus services. From 2014/15, in line with the aspirations contained in Regional Network Strategy, an appropriate proportion of RTSG bus services kilometre support funding will be set aside to be shared by those operators that achieve a certain quality standard only. In addition to some basic (bronze) requirements that are expected from all operators, there should be silver and gold levels, with each level allocated 15% of the total funding that has been set aside. Operators that achieve these higher levels would receive a higher reimbursement per kilometre operated, thus providing an incentive for operators to improve service / quality.

The following bronze standards are expected from all operators wishing to participate in the scheme. Any operator not fulfilling one or more of these standards will not be eligible for funding. It is planned that the standards that need to be achieved for bronze level will increase in future years.

- All vehicles must be fitted with an operational and approved ITSO compliant Smartcard enabled Electronic Ticket Machine.
- A written customer complaint procedure must be in place.
- All drivers to have valid Public Service Vehicle (PSV) driving licence and Driver Qualification Card (DQC).
- All drivers must be issued with uniform, and be required to wear it.
- The operator must participate in PlusBus schemes where applicable.

It is envisaged that the development of a national public transport Charter for disabled passengers, which may be extended to cover all passengers. Once this is completed it is expected it could become a prerequisite for kilometre support eligibility.

To achieve, silver and gold level, operators must achieve a number of points. Table 1 sets out the standards, and the points that can be earned with each. Table 2 sets out the points required for each standard. It is planned that the number of points required to achieve silver and gold level will increase over time. Similarly, the number of standards with which points can be earned may increase over time, thereby ensuring continuing improvement.

Whilst the intention behind this system is to encourage the improvement of bus services, there is a risk their implementation could jeopardise marginal services, with unintended consequences of service withdrawals. It was therefore noted that further modelling work was required to ascertain the full impact. Accordingly the scoring system is subject to further work.

Table 1: Quality standards for enhanced levels**Standard Points available**

Bus product - average age of fleet in years	<6yrs= 30 ; <9yrs= 20 , <12yrs= 10
Bus product - proportion of vehicles achieving EURO III standard	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8
Bus product - proportion of vehicles achieving EURO IV standard	>90%= 18 ; >60%= 12 ; >30%= 6
Bus product - Proportion of vehicles achieving EURO V standard	>90%= 12 ; >60%= 8 ; >30%= 4
Bus product - Proportion of vehicles fitted with CCTV	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8
Bus product - Proportion of vehicles using of alternative fuels	>90%= 12 ; >60%= 8 ; >30%= 4
Bus product - Proportion of vehicles with comfort/efficiency equipment (e.g. Greenroad)	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8
Bus Product - Proportion of vehicles fitted with destination blinds:	>90%= 18 ; >60%= 12 ; >30%= 6
Information - Provision of unscheduled service changes information to passengers (on website, Twitter, Facebook, Traveline Cymru or equivalent)	= 30
Information - Proportion of vehicles fitted with next stop information	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8
Ticketing - Availability of reduced fares for young persons over 16	= 24
Ticketing - Participation in Daily Network Rider scheme	= 30
Ticketing - Participation in Weekly Network Rider scheme	= 24
Training - Proportion of drivers having completed Disability Awareness CPC module	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8
Training - Proportion of drivers completing safe and fuel efficient driving Awareness CPC module	>90%= 24 ; >60%= 16 ; >30%= 8

Table 2: Points required for enhanced levels

Maximum available: **342**
 Minimum required for silver level: **140**
 Minimum required for gold level: **228**

Sewta considered whether some of the kilometre support for bus services should be allocated on a bus service hours operated basis (as opposed to kilometres operated) as many of the costs of bus services are dependent on hours of operation, not service distance.

There is an increased administrative burden associated with the use of a time based; therefore at the initial stage, it was proposed that the kilometre support grant will retain its distance based criteria to enable the scheme to fully bed in and enable trend analysis to be undertaken.

Sewta also noted it would review whether the new generation of electronic ticket machines enable the efficient monitoring of punctuality and reliability. This may enable the addition of a relevant standard in future years.

In addition to raising the quality of service provision, it is also intended to utilise the Kilometre support as a mechanism to incentivise the extension of service operation into the evenings and on Sundays. It was noted that this creates an additional administrative

burden that may not be recouped; therefore in the first instance Sewta proposed paying an increased rate of kilometre support for services commencing operating on Sundays and review opportunities to incentivise evening operation to reflect potential levels of demand.