



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Working Group - Bus Services**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 14 March 2022 at 11.30 am

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C A Holley
P Lloyd

Councillor(s)

L James
T M White

Councillor(s)

P K Jones

Other Attendees

Mark Thomas

Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Officer(s)

Stuart Davies
Liz Jordan
Cath Swain

Head of Highways & Transportation
Scrutiny Officer
Integrated Transport Unit Manager

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): P Downing, D W Helliwell and G J Tanner

1 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Paul Lloyd declared a personal interest.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made.

3 Public Question Time

No questions were received.

4 Bus Services Report

Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management attended for this item, together with relevant officers to provide a brief update on what has happened since the last meeting in July 2021 and to answer Members questions.

The following main issues were discussed:

- Welsh Government is keen to introduce cleaner fuel buses. Hydrogen buses will be a trial project in Swansea Bay area and Pembroke area led by Welsh Government. There could potentially be 50 hydrogen buses in Swansea.
- Members felt there were issues with bus services in Swansea that need to be resolved in order to increase bus usage ie buses are totally unreliable, bus shelters are not weatherproof and more bus stops with real time information are needed. Members were informed 112 bus shelters are currently being removed and replaced and a funding bid has been submitted through the ERF Board to fund repair and replacement of the remaining bus shelters. Officers confirmed bus services have been very unreliable as there were many problems during covid. Some bus stops have electronic scheduled timetable information but it is not in real time. It is hoped high usage bus stops will have real time information displayed in the future.
- Working Group stated it was interested in why people do not use buses and felt it was a problem of attitude towards bus use and the culture of acquiring a car. Members heard there are a number of reasons why people do not use buses and there are many perceptions that have to be got over. When the bus fleet becomes green this is a good opportunity to change perception.
- Working Group stated that there are trials taking place in North Wales around cross-ticketing and it was something Swansea could be looking at. Informed all trials are being carried out with full involvement of Welsh Government and Transport for Wales and an integrated ticketing system is something that could be done relatively quickly as the technological systems are in place already, but Welsh Government would have to legislate to make it happen.
- Working Group queried if given the recent court ruling the Local Authority or Welsh Government had given any thought to authority run bus services. Cabinet Member believes change is coming, whether through Welsh Government and Transport for Wales new approach on franchising or the Authority having its own bus services.
- Working Group queried what will happen when the Bus Emergency Scheme comes to an end in July 2022 and how transition will be achieved. Officers confirmed that financial support to bus companies will now go beyond July 2022 but no details are available yet.
- Currently network coverage is 80% what it was in 2020; Passenger numbers are 60% what they were in 2020; concessionary numbers are 50% what they were in 2020 and a lot less students are travelling by bus than before.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The Working Group discussed progress and made the following conclusions:

1. We were pleased to hear there are lots of projects and improvements planned for the future. However, despite the Public Transport Scrutiny Inquiry 8 years ago there has not been much improvement in reliability and service that the public want. Reliability is key to encourage more people to use buses.
2. We felt bus usage needs to be made more attractive for current non-users of the service. It is not just the practical problems of bus use, there is the wider issue of public attitude to bus use. With the climate crisis this issue of public perception needs to be addressed.

3. We were concerned that bus companies have a monopoly and will only go after profitable routes, leaving local authorities to tender services on unprofitable routes. Bus operators have got to provide a good service first before anything else can change. Welsh Government needs to change legislation and introduce regulations to be able to hold bus operators to account for provision of services, amongst other things. We encourage the Authority to continue to do all it can to progress changes in legislation to be able to hold bus operators to account, to make the setting up of municipal bus companies easier and to enable cross-ticketing.
4. We felt regular meetings within wards between councillors and bus operators is very important. This was previously recommended and there is a need to ensure this happens.
5. We welcome the replacement and repair of bus shelters. However, we would also like to see regular cleaning of bus shelters, bus stops and signposts.
6. We feel it would be useful to have a system of lockers readily available at bus stations to store shopping etc, so people do not have to carry everything around with them all day and hope that you will give this some consideration.

Following on from this meeting:

A letter will be written from the Convener of the Working Group to the Cabinet Member, summarising the discussion and outlining the Working Group's thoughts and recommendations.

6 For Information: Letters from Previous Meeting

The Working Group considered the letters from the previous meeting and noted the previous recommendations and the Cabinet Member's response.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm