

Cllr. Jones,
Convener of the Bus Services Scrutiny
Working Group

(By email)

Please ask for: Councillor Mark Thomas
Direct Line: 01792 63 6926
E-Mail: cllr.mark.thomas@swansea.gov.uk
Our Ref: MT/JG
Your Ref:
Date: 17 August 2021

Dear Cllr Jones,

**Re: - Convener's letter to Cabinet Member - Scrutiny Working Group Bus Services
7 July 2021.**

Thank you for your feedback from the Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group on 7 July 2021. I note your recommendations and conclusions and would provide the following comments in response to the points raised.

1. Thank you for recognising the efforts of drivers and personnel, with which we agree and we will be sure to pass that on.

2. First Cymru outlined their intention to be a clean air operator by 2035. The Welsh Government has a target of 2050 for net zero carbon emissions and in the New Wales Transport Strategy (2021) they set out their plans to achieve this which include reducing the need to travel by encouraging home working and the provision of local services, making public transport more attractive and promoting active travel. They also intend to roll out the technology and infrastructure to deliver ultra-low emission buses and to work with bus providers to help deliver these priorities.

As part of First Group, First Cymru's move to low emission vehicles will be part of a wider programme which will be determined by priority decisions made by the Group. However, the Welsh Government has indicated that it intends to work with the bus groups to encourage investment in their Welsh services, with longer-term funding horizons.

Swansea Council submitted a bid to the Welsh Government this year for Local Transport Funding to investigate the possibility of improving a strategic bus corridor as part of the S W Wales Metro programme. This bid was successful and feasibility studies are underway which include the possibility of introducing alternative fuelled vehicles as part of this scheme in conjunction with First Cymru.

The Council is also working with Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government on a scheme which could see the introduction of hydrogen buses on a network of key services in the Swansea Bay area.

3. The current legislation under which bus services operate puts the primary decisions on when and where bus services are provided with the commercial bus companies. Their decisions are primarily based on how profitable they feel the services will be. The Council's role is to identify where there are gaps in the services provided commercially and if it is felt that there is a social need for a service, then it can fund something to meet that need.

Swansea Council funds numerous bus and community transport services and has shown continued commitment to supporting public transport by maintaining its own revenue support of bus routes at £1.1 million over several years, in addition to the £0.5 million contribution from the Welsh Government in Bus Services Support Grant. Due to budget pressures, a number of other local authorities have reduced or removed their revenue support as it is not a statutory duty for Councils to fund these services.

4. The Council has signed a Quality Partnership Agreement with First Cymru which sets out the actions that both parties propose to improve bus services and make them more attractive and reliable in the Swansea area.

The Quality Partnership Board meets quarterly and comprises of Senior Officers from the Council and First Cymru together with the Cabinet Member and other Councillors who have a specific interest in public transport. The QPB considers bus service matters at a strategic level and receives regular updates from Transport for Wales on changes proposed to the national and regional bus service network.

Where bus companies propose significant changes to services locally, officers from the Transport Team ensure that the local ward Councillors are made aware of these. Regular Public Transport Bulletins have been produced throughout the period of the Covid 19 Pandemic and issued electronically to all Councillors to ensure that all are informed of the frequent, short notice changes that have been taking place to bus services in the past year.

5. / 6. / 7. The current legislation puts the Council in a position where it reacts to changes and decisions about bus services that are made by commercial operators and severely restricts the control that the Council has over bus services in the area. The Welsh Government has recognised this and alongside the new Wales Transport Strategy (2021) is intending to bring forward legislation which will give the public sector more control over local bus services. In future it is intended that much of the strategic transport planning of bus services will be undertaken through CJsCs who will prepare Regional Transport plans. In the meantime Council officers are working with Transport for Wales to develop Regional Bus Networks which will form the basis of the bus services that the Welsh Government will recognise and support in future.

8. Where bus services are funded by the Council, we try wherever possible to provide connections with rail and other bus services. In some cases this is not possible where bus routes are for multiple purposes, for example carry school / college pupils and commuters, and therefore need to arrive at these points at fixed times which may not fit with train times. Train operators set their timetables up well in advance but do not consult with commercial bus operators as a part of this process. The integration of bus

and rail services is one of the aspects that TfW and Welsh Government are looking at as part of the Bus Service Reform and Metro development process.

9. The Welsh Government is keen to develop an all Wales ticketing scheme for bus services which will make it easier and more attractive for customers. Transport for Wales and local authorities are looking at possible ways that this can be taken forward so that interchange between services becomes easier and tickets are accepted across the Country by multiple operators.

Locally operators have their own ticket schemes and promotions but there is no ticket inter availability between different bus companies.

10. The Council has been successful in obtaining funding for bus priority improvements on key corridors in the past and constructed a number of bus lanes. Bus priority is also provided at traffic signals. More recently the Council is implementing Latebus technology at busy signalised road junctions which detects whether a bus service is running late and if it is, gives it priority. If the bus is on time, no adjustment is necessary. This avoids the expense of building dedicated bus lanes and provides a more efficient use of road space.

11. The scrutiny report you refer to was presented to Cabinet on November 12th 2013 and put forward 13 recommendations. Having reviewed the report and Action Plan, I do not accept that no action was taken then, and indeed I believe that all of those recommendations which we could influence were positively addressed, and solutions were achieved.

12. I note that a follow up meeting of the Working Group is proposed in 6 months' time and I will be happy to provide an update as and when required.

Yours sincerely



Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Mark Thomas
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Gwella'r Amgylchedd a Rheoli Isadeiledd/
Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management