



To:

Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for Environment
Enhancement and Infrastructure
Management

BY EMAIL

CC Cabinet Members

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Date
Dyddiad:

09 August 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Bus Services Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management following the meeting of the Working Group on 07 July 2021. It is about bus services in Swansea.

Dear Cllr Thomas

The Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group met on 07 July 2021 to look at bus network coverage and levels of service, community transport provision and integration with other forms of transport etc.

This letter provides you with feedback from that meeting.

We would like to thank you, Stuart Davies and Cath Swain for attending to present the report and answer questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We would also like to thank Jane Reakes-Davies of First Cymru, Cllr Christopher Lay and Cllr Gavin Hill-John of Cardiff Bus for taking the time to attend the meeting and present to the Group. We are very grateful for their engagement and input.

Public Question Time

The following questions were received from members of the public:

QUESTION 1:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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In the 2011 Census, Swansea had the lowest proportion of short journeys made by public transport in the whole of the UK. We have a bus network that does little more than take people to a shopping mall that has increasingly few shops, which less and less want to go to. It costs £2 to park in the city centre all day yet costs £5 for 1 person to go there by bus. It costs £4 to park in Mumbles for 3 hrs, yet costs £5 for 1 person to go there by bus.

Most of the city does not have direct bus services to the train station or the Liberty Stadium on match days. We need direct bus services that link different parts of the city. We need to move away from the idea that all buses must go to the Quadrant.

Every year since 1978, the Netherlands has carried out a nation travel survey. Citizens are asked to record each journey they take, and this information is used to help ensure viable alternatives to travelling by car are provided.

Rather than focusing on the experience of bus users, the Council should switch its focus to the vast majority who are not bus users, and determine what changes are required for more people to choose public transport. We need the Council to conduct a study to assess what services residents actually need, and to commit to providing competitive alternatives to car travel, whilst setting out targets to increase the number of people using buses (and active travel) and targets to reduce the number of car journeys on our roads.

RESPONSE -

Cabinet Member:

“Bus services into city centre run on a commercial basis. They are not there just to take people into the shops. They are also used for getting to work etc.

The comparison of parking charges is a bit unfair as the prices quoted are because of offers on at the moment with car parking. This is a temporary measure to aid recovery. It is the same for the offer in Mumbles; it is a temporary measure. Therefore, it is not a true comparison to compare with bus journeys.

Buses to the Liberty Stadium – bus companies run buses predominantly where demand is as they are a commercial operation.

With regards the nationwide survey carried out in the Netherlands, I am not saying this is something we cannot or should not do. The current journeys carried out would give us a road map of the type of journeys that people want to make.

Focussing on bus users, we have probably got the most funding of any local authority in Wales, to improve and increase our active travel routes throughout and across Swansea for that very purpose. We need to make a modal shift from total reliance on cars into other forms of transport – active travel and bus services are included in that. It is something we intend to do despite opposition in some quarters. It will future proof us. In order to get people out of cars we need to find the alternative to that.

Eighty percent of bus services in Swansea are run by commercial companies. We as an Authority have continued to maintain a subsidy for bus services to subsidise routes that are not viable on a commercial basis.”

Managing Director, First Cymru:

“The cost in the illustration is not correct. Many incentives are provided. This is the worst case scenario.

Many services go across the City. For example, Service 25 Blaen Y Maes – City, stops at the train station and the Kingsway. Some stops can get congested so we cannot for example, run all buses through the train station.

It would be interesting to understand the concern more from the person who asked the question for specifics about where they are travelling from.

In terms of commuters, we carry a lot of retail workers as well as people in the caring industry. One main service is from Singleton Hospital to Morriston Hospital. There are a number of services that do not directly go into the Quadrant for shopping purposes.

We have very sophisticated software that shows the use of bus stops across the City. Happy to share with the working group more information about where people are travelling in the City, which may help you on that position.

Swansea is one of the most congested cities I have seen in Wales. Given the Welsh Government’s agenda on climate change, we do all need to take responsibility for trying to move people into public transport.

The one challenge we have as an industry, is that it has diminished. The number of people who are now travelling by bus has reduced dramatically. Every decade we see a diminishing market, particularly amongst the younger generation many of whom have their own vehicles.

To deal with the climate change agenda a modal shift is required. We do all we can to contribute by improving our vehicles, getting the most efficient vehicles and using technology on our vehicles to improve the climate agenda, but there is a huge risk in Wales as we haven’t had investment like other places. We need to move forward more progressively in my opinion.”

Head of Highways and Transportation:

“There is a lot of ongoing work as an Authority and regionally looking at the Metro with Welsh Government and Transport for Wales, and there is a strong commitment in terms of modal shift to high quality public transport. There is a lot of development going on to see how we can get proper integration between modes of transport, ticketing etc.

We work with First Cymru to look at challenges on the network on a regular basis.

In terms of active travel, the Authority has got an extremely strong commitment. It is important that everyone gets behind that sort of move. For example, the Pentre Road Bridge and Gowerton, we are trying to provide a safe place for everyone to use but

have had resistance to this. We need to change hearts and minds to get support behind schemes.”

QUESTION 2: (this question was raised by 4 members of the public)

Re Bishopston Bus Service. No14: Pennard to Swansea

This is our ONLY bus with direct link to Swansea.

It is important that it is regular and if late it does not miss coming through Bishopston and Murton. (I was waiting in Bishopston recently No bus appeared, but my friend was able to pick the bus up on the Mayals which was on time. Obviously driver decided NOT to take in the Bishopston loop).

We should have an hourly service which takes in the hospital on all journeys, is reliable and is as punctual as possible.

RESPONSE –

Managing Director, First Cymru:

“We have had a lot of feedback on this route. The basics that should be expected are that it should be on time and would not be expected to miss bits of routes out. Be interesting to have the full details on this question (regarding the bus missing out Bishopston) to fully investigate this concern.

It is one of the services that is not covering its costs of drivers’ time let alone cost of vehicle, fuel and maintenance. That is not even looking at the potential for profit. We either need to look at increasing patronage of the vehicle or look at how we can offer this service in a different way. There are many examples of us being innovative. We would like to look at this service in a little more detail and look at whether the service bus in its current guise is the best solution. We are committed to work with the Local Authority to look at alternative solutions to that particular proposition and see if we can improve the offering for the customer that meets the demand and cost implications to the company.”

Working Group Convener:

“Happy to meet with First Cymru about this outside of the meeting.”

Cabinet Member:

“This is a commercial route so it is not directly to do with us but we will try to meet with First Cymru and try to find a way forward.”

Councillor for Pennard:

“If there are any meetings about Number 14 can I be included.”

“Many people are giving up using the bus because the timetable is confusing. So whatever we use needs to be regular.”

Managing Director, First Cymru:

“We are currently carrying about 130 passengers per day on this service. Over the last 18 months the service has not been regular due to Covid.

We are determined we will improve communication to customers when we come out of this. Growing customer numbers on all our services is important to me.”

Following Public Question time, Jane Reakes-Davies presented an overview of First Cymru to the Working Group. Following this Cllr Christopher Lay and Cllr Gavin Hill-John similarly presented an overview of Cardiff Bus including Who they were, How it works, challenges, benefits and the future.

As the Cabinet Member, you presented the Bus Services Report and confirmed that the Local Authority is able to consider taking on a route through a subsidised method if a commercial operator is unable to. The Local Authority also supports community transport through subsidised methods. You also confirmed that currently the Local Authority is unable to run its own bus services.

Members of the Working Group raised a number of questions that First Cymru, Cardiff Bus, yourself and officers responded to.

The following main issues were discussed:

We stated the importance of getting a regular bus service to all areas to tackle residents' isolation. People who have given up driving need to be able to access public transport otherwise they become prisoners in their own home.

We felt funding for active travel has been used to make it easier for people to cycle or walk, but not everyone is able to do this and that accessibility has to be the main point, for the elderly etc.

We felt strongly that buses are an important service and that if we are going to have a modal change, public transport has to be the backbone of what we are going to do.

We felt that more dialogue is needed between councillors and bus companies, particularly First Cymru, to discuss where changes can be made for the benefit of residents of Swansea and also help bus companies to increase passenger numbers.

We also felt that there is a need to ask why people are not catching buses and why numbers are diminishing and equally and importantly there is a need to listen to local knowledge. We gave the example that if we are looking to support Council policy we should be looking to support local shopping district centres, for example in Sketty, the Service 29 bus does not go through the local shopping centre. Jane Reakes-Davies of First Cymru confirmed she is keen to talk to relevant councillors and officers about some services, particularly Service 14 and 29 and about growing patronage.

The Chairman of Cardiff Bus, Cllr Christopher Lay stated that we need to publicise to our customers what we are doing right with public transport in Swansea, for example, how quickly you can get into the City Centre by bus in peak times compared to a car.

You agreed that we do not publicise the benefits of taking the bus often enough and added that we also need to change the perceptions of the public.

We queried how First Cymru works out its price when tendering to the Council for open tender subsidised routes. First Cymru confirmed that when submitting a tender to the Local Authority they look at the cost of that particular service, based on the driver, the vehicle, number of driving hours, fuel and maintenance costs etc.

We queried how Cardiff Bus set their fares. It was confirmed that it is done on a commercial basis. They still have to be in the black and have to charge fairly. They look at their competitor's prices and look at their own internal costs and come up with a price. They are the dominant operator in Cardiff but not the only operator. They have a number of competitors who tend to operate on the more profitable routes and Cardiff Bus compares its prices to them.

We raised the issue of air quality. We were pleased to hear that First Cymru is committed to becoming a clean air operator by 2035 and to cease all diesel forms from 2025. We were also impressed to hear that Cardiff Bus has made a significant investment in electric buses and would like to see this in Swansea as soon as possible. First Cymru stated that some electric vehicles, in other parts of Wales, had been funded by a Department of Transport fund for areas defined as clean air zones (including Cardiff). However, there are not any of these areas within First Cymru's operating area, which means they have not been able to bid for such vehicles. Officers stated with regard to the Metro, the Authority is working closely with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to secure funding for a number of improvements, and that low emission vehicles (whether electric or hydrogen) is very high on the agenda.

We stated that in some places, like Exeter, buses switch off engines when stopping at red traffic lights until lights go green. We queried with First Cymru if this is something they have thought about and are prepared to introduce, as from an emissions point of view it would be a tremendous step in the right direction. First Cymru stated they have a number of vehicles that have stop-start technology, which reduces idling. In terms of switching engines off, they stated they would need to speak to engineering colleagues outside of the meeting, as it takes some time for buses to re-start, and would then provide members with a full response.

We asked First Cymru for examples of ticket incentives that they offer. First Cymru responded that for daily tickets, for example, if you buy five tickets in advance you get discount via a mobile app. They do not currently have off peak offers. We felt incentives should be available via other means not just via the app. First Cymru stated they are open minded to looking at ticketing offers.

We raised the issue of cross-ticketing and queried why tickets cannot be accepted by all operators. First Cymru responded that this is high up the agenda for Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. They stated that there are currently no clear systems that all operators use. Currently all ticket machines are very different so it is not possible to split out the revenue. We heard Transport for Wales are keen to

improve the offering for all bus companies to have consistent ticket machines and be able to have multi-operator and integrated transport ticketing between bus and rail. First Cymru believe this is something that will be introduced as part of bus reform.

We asked First Cymru if they will consider doing circular routes in Swansea. First Cymru responded saying they are keen to understand more about this and it would need to be discussed outside of the meeting. They stated they are happy to hear representations and look at how they can build this into the network if it will deliver an improved patronage.

We queried the difference in journey cost, for the same length of journey, in Cardiff and Swansea. We were informed this is difficult to answer as all areas offer different incentives. However, in terms of the daily ticketing offer, it is 60p cheaper in Swansea than Cardiff.

We felt there are a number of areas where the bus services provided can be maximised, for example patronage. We felt we had made such suggestions to First Cymru in the past but that nothing had been done about it. We also felt that there is no joined up thinking between bus and train times and asked if the Authority can examine where services can be coordinated, for example, transport hubs and cross-ticketing for rail-bus. First Cymru stated that this is a frustration of theirs and that they have worked with train companies to align services but then timetables have changed. They informed the Group that they have 60 buses that go past the main train station in High Street every hour and that many of the smaller stations do not have the infrastructure to turn buses safely. They added that where they had seen transport hubs introduced, for example Port Talbot it had not attracted the volume of people to board or alight the bus that they expected. You added that the Authority has received funding from the Welsh Government for feasibility studies to look at hubs in Pontarddulais and Gowerton to make it more accessible for buses to get down to the station.

First Cymru added that Transport for Wales is committed to having this integrated travel system and First Cymru will do everything it can to work with them on this agenda going forward. You and the Vice Chair of Cardiff Bus agreed that a holistic approach across Wales with Transport for Wales is the way forward and you are hopeful for change. Officers stated that integration is the cornerstone of what the Metro is trying to achieve, to have bikes and walking routes etc at the hubs and all these things will be progressed by the Metro.

Cllr Gavin Hill-John of Cardiff Bus suggested to us that if we really want to see a change to bus services in Swansea, we really need to encourage the Authority to work with First Cymru to move buses around the City as easily as possible and improve the infrastructure, as to grow patronage there is a need to increase reliability. Officers stated that Swansea does have a lane bus system, which is there to give priority through junctions at congestion hot spots and that a lot of money is being invested to improve reliability.

Working Group Members then discussed progress and made the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. We would like to give our thanks to all bus drivers and personnel who have carried on working through the pandemic carrying key workers to their jobs. They have played a vital role.
2. We wish to emphasise the importance of bus companies and public transport more generally contributing to carbon emission reduction. We are expecting our bus companies to move quickly and radically away from fossil fuels. We were told First Cymru would be a clean air operator by 2035. Can they try and move quicker and deliver this by 2030, so they are making a contribution in line with Swansea Council's commitment to being net zero by 2030.
3. We feel that there needs to be a regular bus services to all areas of Swansea. This is particularly important to reduce isolation and start a shift away from car use to using public transport.
4. We recommend that regular meetings are held between Members and First Cymru to raise and discuss issues such as changes to routes, timetables, increasing patronage etc and would ask that this is arranged.
5. If there is going to be a modal change, we feel elected Members need to be involved in discussions on how the Authority is going to do this. We would like your assurance on this.
6. We feel it is very important for the Authority and bus companies to listen to people who currently do not use buses in Swansea, as well as people who do, to help shape current and future bus services.
7. We would like to see bus companies offering more incentives for regular travel and offering incentives in a number of forms not just via mobile apps.
8. We feel that there is no joining up between bus and rail times, and ask that the Authority examine where services can be co-ordinated. We were pleased to hear that two feasibility studies are taking place to look at transport hubs in two areas of Swansea but a lot more needs to be done.
9. We wish to emphasise the importance of cross ticketing being introduced between bus operators and bus and rail for the convenience of the residents of Swansea and to increase patronage. We would like assurance that the Authority is doing all it can to move the travel reform agenda forward with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales as quickly as possible.
10. We agree with the suggestion by Cardiff Bus that the Authority and First Cymru work together to move buses around the City as easily as possible, to help improve reliability. As there are only a few ways in and out of Swansea,

congestion points are always going to be an issue. We feel to help overcome this that bus lanes will need to be improved.

11. We are concerned that a scrutiny committee produced a report around 2012/13 which went into many of the same problems and came up with the same conclusions as this Working Group but sadly no action was taken. We hope that the Authority will now listen to our concerns and work towards achieving solutions.

12. We will be recommending to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that a follow up meeting of this Working Group is held in six months, to see what changes/improvements have been made and following it decide if the Working Group need to meet again six months after that. We believe that it is vitally important that we see positive changes taking place to benefit Swansea residents.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised and would ask that you respond to the points in our conclusions by 30 August 2021.

Yours sincerely

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