



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Scrutiny Working Group – Bus Services

14 March 2022

BUS SERVICES UPDATE

Purpose	To provide Councillors with an update on issues raised in the previous meeting of the Working Group in July 2021.
Content	This report includes updates on the issues raised by Councillors in the previous meeting of the Working Group
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider the information provided• Make recommendations to Cabinet Member as necessary
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management
Lead Officer(s)	Martin Nicholls, Director of Place
Report Author	Catherine Swain, Integrated Transport Unit Manager

1.0 Background

1.1 The Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group met on 7 July 2021. Following this meeting the Convener wrote to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management providing feedback, outlining the Group's conclusions and making a number of recommendations. The Cabinet Member responded to these in a letter dated 17 August 2021.

- 1.2 One of the recommendations to the Scrutiny Programme Committee was that a follow up meeting of the Working Group be held in six months to see what changes / improvements had been made.

2.0 Updates

2.1 Cleaner fuel buses

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

The Welsh Government are investigating the possibility of implementing a network of hydrogen fuelled buses to operate services on strategic corridors. Swansea Council is working with the Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and other local authorities in the S W Wales region to investigate the feasibility of a hydrogen bus pilot scheme in the Swansea Bay area. Things currently being considered include the routes, type of vehicles, procurement and ownership of vehicles, infrastructure, source and type of hydrogen and depot location.

2.2 Bus service network

Under the current legislative framework, the decisions as to when, where and how often bus services operate are made by bus companies. Decisions are made based on the commercial viability of a route or journey. This means that bus services tend to be more frequent in urban areas in the daytime and less frequent or non-existent in the early mornings, evenings and on Sundays particularly in rural areas. Local authorities can fund services to supplement those provided commercially to fill gaps and provide links that it considers are socially necessary. These subsidised services are procured through an open tendering process and are subject to the Council having funding available to support them.

The funding and management of bus services is complex with bus companies receiving support from a number of sources. In addition to payments for subsidised socially necessary services that Councils fund from their revenue allocations, commercial services also receive support from the Welsh Government/ local authorities for journeys made by concessionary bus pass holders and also from Live Kilometre

Support Grant whereby operators claim a fixed rate per kilometre operated on passenger carrying routes.

During the period of the Covid pandemic, the Welsh Government has stepped in to support the Bus Industry by providing additional financial support to allow essential services to continue to operate and to make up the shortfall in income bus operators have received due to the lack of fare box takings and reduced passenger capacity on vehicles due to social distancing. In exchange for this support bus companies have signed up to a contract with the Welsh Government whereby they have agreed to provide significant information about their services – costs of operation, income and passenger numbers - and have had to commit to operating an agreed package of bus services that has been determined with the local authorities in each Region of Wales. This funding package (Bus Emergency Support 2) is due to end in July 2022. Indications are that continued funding will be required after this date to prevent significant reductions in the bus network. First Cymru have recently advised that passenger numbers are only around 60% of those in the same period in 2020 whilst around 80% of the bus mileage is now running. Many regular bus users will need a lot of encouragement to return to public transport and regain confidence in using bus services after the Pandemic.

To meet the Welsh Government's aim of providing a modern public transport system which is accessible, affordable and integrated across Wales, providing choice and a viable alternative to the private car, this complex system of funding and management needs to be simplified. New legislation is proposed which will move the control and decision making within the bus sector from bus companies to the public sector in Wales. Current indications are that this will be achieved through a process of franchising and making it easier to set up municipal bus companies. The Welsh Government, through Transport for Wales have commissioned a review of all bus services across Wales and are preparing plans for a future national bus network which will be simplified and operate on the basis of 'one network, one timetable, one ticket'.

The recently formed Corporate Joint Committees will be required to produce Regional Transport Plans for their areas and funding for future bus services will come from the Welsh Government and local authorities to enable the implementation of the agreed regional bus network.

2.3 Bus and Rail links

Studies have been commissioned by the Council to look at the development of transport hubs providing improved bus and rail interchange at Pontarddulais and Gowerton . Funding bids have been submitted to Welsh Government for further work on these schemes in 2022/23.

The emerging proposals for the S W Wales Metro led by Transport for Wales and the review of the bus network also by Transport for Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government, provide significant opportunities to coordinate services and provide for improved connections between bus and rail services.

2.4 Ticketing

As part of the bus reform agenda, the Welsh Government are funding a pilot project with First Cymru Buses in Swansea trialling tap on/ tap off ticketing technology. If this is successful, then the facility could be rolled out across other bus services. This mechanism will ultimately mean that customers will automatically be charged the most beneficial rate for their travel. There has been a significant shift towards the use of contactless payments on buses in the Swansea area. This was particularly promoted during the Covid Pandemic for safety reasons.

First Cymru have advised that around 60% of their customers now use contactless payment compared to 20% in 2020.

2.5 Bus Priority measures

The Council has implemented Latebus technology at busy signalised road junctions which detect whether a bus service is operating late and if it is, then it gives the bus priority over other traffic at the junction. If the bus is operating on time then no adjustment is necessary. This avoids the expense of building dedicated bus lanes and allows a more efficient use of limited road space.

3.0 Legal Implications

3.1 There are no legal implications from this report

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications from this report.