

Cllr Jones
Convener of the Bus Services Scrutiny
Working Group

(By email)

Please ask for: Councillor Mark Thomas
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Our Ref: MT/JG
Your Ref:
Date: 27 April 2022

Dear Councillor Jones,

**Re: - Convener's letter to Cabinet Member – Scrutiny Working Group Bus Services
14th March 2022**

Thank you for your feedback from the Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group on 14th March 2022. I note your recommendations and conclusions, and would provide the following comments in response to the six points that you have raised:

1. The Council will continue to support the reliability of bus services through Bus Priority Measures and Telematics initiatives. The bus companies also have a key role to play by ensuring that they have sufficient resources in place to provide the services that are advertised and by ensuring that their timetables are realistic. There is a nationwide shortage of bus drivers for various reasons and the Swansea area has not been immune to this. Bus companies are also still feeling the effects of drivers not being able to attend work due to Covid isolation requirements, and this continues to lead to short notice cancellations. On a positive note, two of the major bus companies operating in Swansea are now using agency drivers to improve their staffing levels. There are also signs that some of the bus service frequency reductions introduced by the major bus operator last Autumn in the light of driver shortages are starting to be reversed on the busiest services as passenger demand increases again.
2. There are a number of areas for making bus services more attractive to non-bus users that need consideration. These include simplifying the bus network itself, simplifying ticketing arrangements, speeding up journey times through infrastructure and telematics initiatives, ensuring confidence that timetables remain stable, and ensuring that buses turn up, operate reasonably punctually and when people need them. Unfortunately, bus services have been through a difficult period in the past couple of years due to short notice Covid-lockdowns, frequent timetable change, roadside publicity not being kept updated, passengers having to observe social distancing when travelling and perhaps a general unease amongst some that bus travel is now no longer as safe a mode of transport as prior to the pandemic. The Council has a role to play in restoring

public confidence, and the Free Travel Initiatives during the school holidays are hopefully helping towards this. However, in reality, in view of the commercial freedoms that bus companies have in operating their services, the greater responsibility in building up businesses and restoring customer confidence again must lie with the bus operators themselves. A good example initiated by the bus operators is the move towards contactless payment systems, which have seen a steady rise in popularity, particularly over the last couple of years when cash payments were actively discouraged.

3. The situation that you are describing stems from the Transport Act 1985, which led to local bus service deregulation in England (outside London), Wales and Scotland in 1986. However, the Welsh Government is planning for the whole of Wales to switch to a franchising model, and is currently inviting views on its “One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket” White Paper. Please see the link below:

[One network, one timetable, one ticket, Welsh Government sets out plans to change the way we travel | GOV.WALES](#)

In terms of municipal bus companies, the legislation would remove the restrictions on the creation of new municipal bus companies. Councils would be able to run bus services ‘in house’ or via an arms-length company as part of a franchised network, and Councils would also be able to invest in or acquire existing bus companies.

In terms of ticketing, a One Ticket system is proposed, which would see simple area-wide fares, valid across all bus routes and on all modes of public transport.

In terms of accountability, officers are currently able to hold bus companies to account for the services that operate under contract, though I recognise that the Council’s powers do not extend to the commercial service network, and this falls to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner and Bus Users Cymru. However, indications are that with a franchised network in place, there would be far greater accountability on the part of the bus operators for all the services that they would operate.

4. Your recommendation has merit and I would suggest that in view of the availability of the various parties that would be involved, a structured approach is taken. I would also encourage Local Members to continue to channel comments or concerns about bus services through officers so that they can be taken up with the management of the companies concerned. In the meantime, officers will continue to issue periodic Bus Bulletins to Local Members as services change.
5. The new company that owns the bus shelters fitted with advertising panels is responsible for cleaning them. This leaves approximately 350 shelters throughout the County that are in the Council’s ownership. The Bus Shelters Budget is small and predominantly covers structural and vandalism repairs, though it also funds about £3.5k for a contractor to undertake an annual power wash of each shelter. However, £100k has recently been awarded through the Economic Recovery Fund towards a bus shelter replacement programme. This will replace about 20 shelters, and it is hoped that any economies of scale that can be achieved by replacing old for new can then be channelled towards the further upkeep measures of the Council’s shelter stock, including cleaning.

6. Left luggage lockers are already available at Swansea Mobility Hire, which is located just off the southern end of the Bus Station passenger concourse. Opening hours are 0900 to 1700 Mondays to Saturdays. Please refer to the following link for further information on the number and size of lockers available, and the charges:

www.swansea.gov.uk/bagstorage

Yours sincerely



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