



To:

**Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for Environment
Enhancement and Infrastructure
Management**

BY EMAIL

CC Cabinet Members

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Scrutiny

*Scrutiny Office
Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrochol:*

01792 637314

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

*Date
Dyddiad:*

08 April 2022

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 14 March 2022. It is about bus services in Swansea.

Dear Cllr Thomas

The Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group first 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. It was agreed to hold a follow up meeting in around 6 months to see what changes/improvements have been made and this meeting was held on 14 March 2022. This letter provides you with feedback from this follow up 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. The Working Group found the meeting informative and interesting.

We noted that Welsh Government is keen to introduce cleaner fuel buses and to move ahead with hydrogen buses and Transport for Wales is doing some investigation into bus travel. We felt there were exciting times ahead with the possible introduction of hydrogen buses. We were informed that the use of hydrogen buses would be a trial project in Swansea Bay area and Pembroke area. Welsh Government is leading on this project and there are many issues to consider including the cost of buses, where they would run, how often, who would own them, safety issues and depot facilities etc. We heard that there could potentially be 50 hydrogen buses in Swansea and that

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GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE

www.swansea.gov.uk / www.abertawe.gov.uk

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hydrogen buses are currently being used in Aberdeen. We noted that in terms of electric vehicles, they are not carbon free.

We felt that 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. We were informed that with regards to bus shelters, 112 are currently being removed and replaced but there may be a couple of weeks in between where a stop is left without one. We also heard that 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 - the Travel Line travel information system could not keep up with the changes to timetables and information at bus stops was not updated, and this issue is still continuing due to staffing issues. Officers stated that some bus stops have electronic scheduled timetable information but it is not in real time and other ways to provide real time information is being looked at, such as mobile phone apps. We heard that ideally all bus stops would have real time information but there are capital and ongoing costs, however, it is hoped high usage bus stops will have real time information displayed in the future.

We were 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 and queried how attitudes towards bus use could be changed. We heard that there are a number of reasons why people do not use buses and there are many perceptions that have to be got over but when the bus fleet becomes green this is a good opportunity to change perception. We were informed that the Authority has learnt from previous experience what attracts people to use buses and increase patronage – frequency of service, quality of service, information provided, ticketing, journey times. There is also a need to promote things people can do when they travel by bus such as use phones and laptops etc.

We stated that there are trials taking place in North Wales around cross-ticketing and it was something Swansea could be looking at. We heard that all trials are being carried out with full involvement of the 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 the Welsh Government would have to legislate to make it happen. We mentioned that cross-ticketing is already used in London with the Oyster card and Bristol is looking to have a similar scheme, so this model is already being used and it works. Officers confirmed this scheme works in London because services are franchised, and Welsh Government is looking at a franchising system under new legislation, control of the whole bus network would then be under public sector control. Welsh Government is also trialling 'tap on, tap off' contactless ticketing which has started to be used in London.

We queried if given the recent court ruling the Local Authority or Welsh Government had given any thought to authority run bus services. You said you believed change is coming, whether through the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales new approach on franchising or the Authority having its own bus services. We heard that municipal bus companies are being looked at as part of a legislation review. At the moment the 1985 Transport Act actively discourages the set up, but Welsh Government is very keen to encourage development of municipal bus companies with local authorities.

We 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.

We were informed that 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.

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

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.

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 29 April 2022.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES
CONVENER, BUS SERVICES SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP
CLLR.LYNDON.JONES@SWANSEA.GOV.UK