



Consultation Response

Inquiry into integrated public transport

October 2012

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Inquiry into integrated public transport. Public transport can play a vital role in helping older people to maintain their independence and wellbeing as well as access services, facilities and amenities in their communities. Two-thirds of single pensioners in Wales do not have a car¹ and half of all households without a car consist of individuals aged 60 and over.² Reliable local transport networks become increasingly significant as people get older, with journeys for essential items and social activities sometimes becoming more difficult.³

Our response is based on the views and experiences of older and disabled people expressed at consultation events and in direct response to the consultation, in addition to the results of our own research. As part of our *Towards Common Ground* campaign, we produced the Community Calculator™, a tool which allowed older people to 'age proof' their community according to ten key components which older people have told us make a community age friendly. One of the components concerned public transport⁴ and 649 older people in Wales responded on this issue.

The Community Calculator provides older people's first-hand appraisals of public transport provision across Wales. We are able to identify evidence of good and poor provisions, to

¹ [Wales: Services: Access to transport](#), The Poverty Site, 2009 (accessed 29th June 2011).

² Living Longer Living Better: Report of an advisory group on the Strategy for Older People in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007.

³ [Age of Opportunity: transforming the lives of older people in poverty](#), Centre for Social Justice, 2011.

⁴ Respondents were asked: "How good is the choice and quality of public transport including community transport and the provision of routes in your community?"

identify what works well and what requires improvement, and to assess whether realistic transport options across all communities in Wales. Key findings are explored below.

How well is Welsh public transport integrated, particularly in relation to bus, rail and community transport services, and what factors limit integration?

Integration with services

Among households without a car, around 40 per cent feel that their local bus service fails to meet their travelling needs to the local town or shops, while around 65 per cent believe it is inadequate for travel to their local hospital.⁵ One in four people in Wales feel that the local hospital is one of the most difficult locations to access via local bus services⁶.

Across comments left by Community Calculator respondents public transport was repeatedly evaluated on its ability to take people to the places where they need to go, particularly hospitals. Some responses were positive, others more critical; however the merits of public transport provision were demonstrated to be judged on its integration with key community services.

“A bus direct to the hospital, Heath or Llandough would be useful” (Cardiff)

“Not enough buses per hour and not one to the hospital. If going to the hospital it means catching two buses” (Carmarthenshire)

“No transport to hospital from seaside” (Carmarthenshire)

“Public transport is excellent for Rhuddlan, especially to Glan Clwyd Hospital. There is a bus around every 10 minutes” (Denbighshire)

“Some areas of town not covered. No town – railway station link. Station on outskirts, lack of direct bus link to Abergavenny – Newport” (Monmouthshire)

“More integrated transport is needed” (Powys)

“Difficult using public transport to local hospital” (Vale of Glamorgan)

Age Cymru welcomed the Griffiths Review on non-emergency patient transport in Wales (2010), and the recognition by the Welsh Government that urgent improvements are needed in patient transport services in Wales. We support the Review’s findings that the current system is fragmented, could be better managed and does not offer a patient-led service, and do not feel that significant progress has been made on this issue since the Review was published.

⁵ A Statistical Focus on Age in Wales: 2009 edition, Welsh Assembly Government, 2009.

⁶ People Without Cars, Welsh Consumer Council, 2004

Older people across Wales frequently express their frustrations over the lack of co-ordination between public transport and hospital appointments, particularly in rural areas. Older people in areas such as Maesteg and Haverfordwest have told us that they have been unable to attend hospital appointments because of a lack of connecting public transport. Additionally Age Cymru Ceredigion regularly receives complaints from older people in their area about the lack of flexibility in transport to hospital appointments, for example, with services only allowing two drop off times a day. A question frequently asked by older people in Wales is why hospital appointments cannot be more closely linked to patient transport availability and vice versa.

All older people, regardless of their income and physical ability, must have equitable access to the services and facilities that many of us take for granted. Decisions about the location of services must take older people's needs into account, and there should be stronger integration between transport and key services

Infrastructure

Responses from the Community Calculator showed that there is inequitable provision across Wales and some older people have no access to realistic public transport options. 37.9% of respondents scored their provision between 0-6, which indicates unacceptable to poor provision.

Generally speaking, public transport infrastructure appears to be stronger in more densely populated areas, such as South East Wales, rather than more rural communities.

“One bus a week on a Thursday” (Carmarthenshire)

“Rural location. No public transport” (Ceredigion)

“We are not served by a bus – expect a school bus 8.30am and return around 3.30pm. I can only live here while I can drive” (Gwynedd)

“To and from town once a day with limited time there. Impossible for longer trips e.g. dentist” (Gwynedd)

“Bus every 20 mins” (Newport)

“10 minute max wait for bus” (Torfaen)

As seen from the range of comments above, the standards of public transport are disparate across Wales and some communities are left without any realistic transport options. Local authorities should ensure that integrated transport systems, including rail, buses, and community transport, are accessible to all communities as without a basic level of service older people are at risk of increased isolation and unable to access basic essential services.

Age Cymru is concerned that provision of regular and reliable bus services are under pressure due to public sector spending cuts and commercial considerations of bus operators.

Decisions by transport operators to restructure services and to withdraw some routes have led to widespread concern amongst older people that bus services will be substantially reduced due to the current financial climate.

What steps can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales?

Bus services

Without effective transport, older people are more likely to be exposed to loneliness and isolation, particularly those living in rural areas. Where assistance is given to older people to access transport, it has a dramatic effect on improving their quality of life. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales⁷ found that the Concessionary Bus Pass has been invaluable in helping older people in Wales to retain their independence and remain active:

- 81% of respondents believed that without the pass, their quality of life would suffer.
- 78% believed they would be lonelier without it.
- 92% of respondents said that the bus pass allowed them to be independent.

A number of bus services in Wales are made sustainable by the income received by companies from the concessionary travel scheme, adding important service reasons why the Welsh Government must continue to support the policy. We are concerned, however, that local bus services may still be vulnerable to spending cuts. We believe that Welsh Government should work with local authorities and transport operators to ensure that a sustainable network of bus services across Wales is supported, and to develop contingency plans in the case of threats to the operation of existing services arising.

However, despite the success of the concessionary travel policy many barriers still exist for older people wishing to access public transport. A lack of appropriate provision and problems with accessibility in many areas means that older people struggle to access safe, frequent and reliable public transport.

Community transport

Many Community Calculator™ respondents praised the vital role community transport plays in helping them to access their communities and essential services. There were concerns across the board over whether community transport would be maintained under current funding restrictions.

Community transport services (such as the WRVS Community Cars scheme in Pembrokeshire) are rated extremely highly by users in terms of their positive social impact.⁸ Furthermore, research⁹ suggests that community transport services offer a positive social return on investment.

⁷ Concessionary Bus Pass Research, Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 2010

⁸ The Real Difference WRVS makes to People's lives: WRVS social impact report 2008, WRVS, 2008

⁹ Social Return on Investment: report for WRVS, Frontier Economics, 2011

“Public transport is poor – but community transport excellent, including dial a ride and car services and local bus service feeder but capacity issues” (Neath & Port Talbot)

Community transport can play a crucial role in helping people to access essential services by providing services where public transport cannot or does not, and on a door-to-door basis for people with specific mobility needs. These schemes provide an essential lifeline for many older people and we would like to see increased provision across the whole of Wales. We believe there would be particular benefit to ensuring that community transport services can fill the gaps in rural areas where public transport services may not be accessible for everyone. Good practice models of community transport provision should be replicated and strongly supported by the public sector to ensure their sustainability.

There is also an existing anomaly whereby people entitled to concessionary travel in Wales are not charged for using buses but are charged for using community transport. The relevant Minister has said that there are no current plans to address this inconsistency¹⁰. We believe that options should be explored, when affordable, for extending the concessionary scheme to cover rail and community transport on a national basis to improve the transport opportunities for older people who are unable to access bus services.

Rail services

Older people tend to be lesser users of rail services than of buses, in some cases it is because stations or trains are inaccessible or because of a lack of modal transfer between bus routes and railway stations.

We have heard worrying accounts from disabled people, such as reports that disabled facilities on trains are often used as storage areas and made inaccessible; and that when trains are cancelled and replacement buses are used, wheelchairs often cannot get onto them. This is clearly not acceptable. Poorly maintained pavements and surfaces in and around stations can also be a barrier and give rise to fear of, and actual, falls. Respondents to the Community Calculator identified significant concerns for older persons' who use wheelchairs or mobility scooters, and those who experience sight loss.

Cost of rail services is another barrier for some older people. We welcomed the Welsh Government's pilot concessionary fares rail scheme which allows people to use their bus passes on several rail lines in Wales, and know many older people value this option. We would like this to be rolled out across Wales and are also keen to see pilot schemes that would extend concessions to community transport. Local transport planners also need to take steps to make sure that bus services link to stations.

We were pleased that Welsh Government has also confirmed that it intends to continue the policy of discounted travel on coach journeys in Wales, despite it coming to an end in England.

Key calls:

¹⁰ Carl Sargeant AM, [written answer](#) to Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (WAQ57363), 23rd May 2011.

- A fully integrated strategy for public transport including rail, buses and community transport should be developed by the Welsh Government to particularly address the needs of those individuals without access to a car.
- Alternative provision to the free concessionary travel on local bus services should be considered by the Welsh Government for older people who cannot access bus services due to geography or disability. In particular, the current anomaly whereby people entitled to concessionary travel in Wales are not charged for using buses but are charged for using community transport should be addressed.
- The Welsh Government and local authorities should work with transport companies to improve their services with regard to safety and physical accessibility through Regional Transport Plans.
- Decisions about the location of services must take older people's needs into account and the Welsh Government should impose a requirement on bus companies in Wales to carry out an impact assessment into the effect on older people of any changes to bus services.
- Good practice models of community transport provision should be replicated and strongly supported in their development by the public sector, with financial support where required.
- Building upon the Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative the Government must clarify its long term plans for concessionary fares on community transport.

Conclusion

We hope this evidence is useful for the Committee in consideration of this important issue. We would be more than happy to provide further information if required.