

Passenger Focus Reception 13 November

As Chair of the National Assembly's Enterprise and Business Committee, I am delighted to say a few words to open this evening's reception.

My Committee has the remit of examining legislation and holding the Welsh Government to account in the areas of economic development, transport and higher education and skills.

During the last year we have published a report on Integrated Public Transport in Wales and our current inquiry is into the Future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise.

Our vision is for passengers in Wales to experience an easy, seamless and comfortable public transport system: a system that links rail, bus and community transport services across the country, and a system that is understood and trusted by all our citizens.

It's too soon to divulge to you the findings and conclusions of our current inquiry, but we have already put on record that we regard transport as a "lifeline" - not only for sustaining communities but also for enabling Wales to compete for inward investment and business with other parts of the UK.

For both our inquiries we have tried hard to engage with public transport *users*. Some of you in this room may have taken part in the 'world café' event we hosted at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea last autumn, or in the round-table discussions that we held this September with rail user groups in the Pierhead in Cardiff Bay. We were very grateful to Passenger Focus - David Beer in particular - for helping us invite participants to that event.

In both inquiries, we were keen to hear from you what public transport services and standards you want to see delivered in Wales, and I hope our reports and recommendations properly reflect your views.

One of the key findings of our public transport inquiry, and an emerging theme from our current inquiry, is that Wales's ambition to achieve a fully integrated public transport system is being compromised by a lack of powers.

Several witnesses have praised the more devolved structure of Network Rail in Wales, but a strong case was and is being made for putting its relationship with the Welsh Government on a statutory footing.

I think we are pushing at an open door on this one with the Welsh Government, and I am sure that we will be looking to the second report of the Silk Commission to argue that the devolution of rail franchising powers and

funding would be significant and extremely helpful in shaping the future of integrated transport in Wales.

Public transport integration is not all about the accumulation of extra powers, however. One of our other campaigns is to see stronger strategic leadership and integration skills embedded within the Welsh Government.

I think this is particularly important in the area of accessibility of public transport.

The Minister for Economy, Science and Transport responded quite positively to the recommendations in our integrated public transport report, particularly on community transport, but this is an area that we have continued to scrutinise, most recently in our report on the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2014-15.

I should like to highlight a few areas where we believe the Welsh Government needs to focus its energy:

- First, the Welsh Government should continue to work with the UK Government to establish a statutory relationship between the Welsh Government and Network Rail, and develop a clear, enhanced role for the Welsh Ministers in the rail franchising process as it affects Wales.
- The Welsh Government should continue to lobby the UK Government for bus regulation and registration powers to be devolved to Wales; for the Traffic Commissioner to be accountable to Welsh Ministers; and to strengthen regional transport structures, including an evaluation of a Passenger Transport Executive model.
- It should use all the powers at its disposal to drive public transport integration, and ensure staff at all levels of Government have the skills and tools to deliver effective public transport policy.
- It should press transport operators to work together and with relevant stakeholders to implement best practice in coordinating timetables, connecting services and publishing real time information to provide seamless links between bus, rail and community transport networks.
- The Welsh Government should also seek to strengthen the planning system so that all major developments include adequate public transport provision and actively promote sustainable integrated public transport, and also that transport planning agencies should be consulted at an early stage. I believe the Government is reluctant to act in this area, but should continue to be pressed.

To conclude

I really liked the quote from a previous witness who told us that integrated transport is a “seductive notion and a simple idea”, but that it is “a devilishly complicated thing to achieve”.

We agree.

Integrated public transport demands an integrated set of measures: further transfer of powers to Cardiff; integration of transport with other policies; and a step change in imagination and drive among all those responsible for its delivery.

Above all, the views of users are essential to the development and delivery of transport services, and I hope that we shall be able to reinforce that point when we report on the future of the Wales and Borders Franchise. Please keep an eye on our website for more news, or feel free to contact our clerking team in the Assembly.

Thank you for listening and enjoy the rest of your evening.

ENDS/