

Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales – input from a passenger perspective

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Transport Focus welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales. [NB. Passenger Focus became Transport Focus on 30 March 2015. In addition to representing rail, bus, coach and tram passengers, Transport Focus now represents users of the Strategic Roads Network (SRN) in England.]
- 1.2 Although our strict remit in Wales is to represent rail passengers, we believe our experience and research with bus passengers in England and Scotland is directly relevant. We can also draw from the Bus Passenger Survey carried out in Wales in 2010.
- 1.3 Accordingly, we have approached this as a more general response, based on the evidence of our passenger research. Headings are arranged in line with the consultation terms of reference:
 - Condition of bus services in Wales
 - Impact of bus service reduction
 - Devolution of bus registration powers
 - Meeting passenger needs

2. Condition of bus services in Wales

- 2.1 Our starting point is to focus on outputs to passengers. Passengers want their services to be accountable, with published data to 'keep the industry honest'. A consistent and benchmarked approach, such as delivered by the Bus Passenger Survey, focuses industry attention on key areas for improvement, alongside intelligence on drivers of satisfaction. The acid test then, is whether this focus will improve the delivery of services to passengers.
- 2.2 The Welsh Government undertook a [Bus Passenger Survey](#) across Wales in 2010, working closely with Transport Focus and based closely on the methodology we had established in English Transport Authority Areas. This survey was designed to be representative of the bus passenger journeys at Welsh Regional level and an extract of passenger satisfaction levels is shown below for key factors, the bus stop, on board and the bus driver; across Wales as a whole and for each region.

Bus Passenger Survey for Wales 2010

Satisfaction factor	All Wales	North Wales	Mid Wales	SE Wales	SW Wales
Overall satisfaction	88%	91%	92%	87%	88%
Value for money	71%	72%	77%	71%	67%
Waiting time	75%	76%	81%	74%	75%
Punctuality	76%	75%	83%	76%	74%
Overall rating of the bus stop	63%	65%	62%	62%	63%
Personal safety at bus stop	75%	78%	77%	74%	74%
Space to sit or stand on board	87%	89%	94%	87%	84%
Personal safety on board	84%	88%	89%	82%	85%
Bus cleanliness - outside	80%	81%	85%	80%	80%
Bus cleanliness - inside	80%	80%	85%	79%	82%
Ease of getting on and off	92%	94%	96%	90%	93%
Driver helpfulness/attitude	87%	87%	90%	86%	89%
Smoothness of driving	82%	85%	88%	80%	82%

2.3 These figures show that value for money and the overall rating of the bus stop are scoring well below other factors for passengers and that satisfaction in South East Wales is lower than other regions. However, in order to understand this in context with current service provision, we recommend repeating the survey and for a regular commitment to measuring passenger satisfaction in the future, both at national and regional level.

3. Impact of bus service reduction

- 3.1 Research with passengers in England on [Bus Service Reductions – the impact on passengers](#) (September 2012) found that the effects of service reductions impacted on passengers' quality of life in a number of ways:
- Passengers could not travel like they used to, with fewer discretionary trips due to evening and Sunday service cuts
 - Dependency on others increased, with difficulties of having to ask for lifts to appointments or to go shopping
 - Increased costs of paying for alternatives, using taxis or paying for fares having to travel before concessionary passes are valid
 - Lack of spontaneity with fewer travel options, arrangements taking more effort and planning in advance.
- 3.2 Passengers need to be assured of the security of funding; firstly to retain services, then to improve them. Also to support connectivity and passenger trust in the ability to make journeys *and return again*. We welcome the commitment in the National Transport Finance Plan 2015 to provide funding to support socially necessary services. However, how and where this funding is to be applied will be crucial for passengers, who view buses as providing a vital local service which fulfils many day-to-day travel needs. Ring-fenced transport funding must also be retained in order to

continue to deliver against passenger priorities. Without any ring-fencing, there is the potential for councils deciding to spend the money on services other than buses.

- 3.3 We further welcome the National Transport Finance Plan's commitment to develop options for targeted funding for bus and community transport services, focused on rural services and access to health and employment facilities. Passengers feel it is crucial that their views are considered when decisions are being made about their services. [Giving Passengers a Voice in Bus Services](#) (October 2013) however, found that they currently perceive no involvement for themselves in influencing the provision of bus services. Transparent and effective decision-making policies should be in place that inform passengers when a change is coming and invite their views on a tangible proposition. Passengers should also be informed what has been decided, including the impact of cuts and feedback about the services should be encouraged on an on-going basis.
- 3.4 Local authority criteria and policy objectives for local bus services should be geared towards building service provision on passenger priorities, rather than on cost alone and authorities would be expected to be monitoring the effectiveness of their spending in delivering their policy objectives and meeting passengers' needs. A good example is Lancashire County Council's consultation on criteria that score services on journey purpose and access for the local community to opportunities for work, education, health, shopping and leisure; as well as whether alternative public transport is available to those facilities.

4. Devolution of bus registration powers

- 4.1 We note that the Silk Commission's recommendation to devolve the power to regulate buses is being taken forward in the Command Paper: Towards a lasting Devolution Settlement for Wales. Also, from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport's recent update statement on the National Transport Finance Plan, that 'bus regulation is needed to get proper integration'¹.
- 4.2 Passengers are less concerned about the mechanism of governance than they are about the quality of service being delivered as a result. However, passengers will want to see the details of what is being proposed and as noted above, will want their views to be considered.

5. Meeting passenger needs

- 5.1 In designing proposals for bus services, it is important that these will support delivery of improvements to services that passengers want to see. [Bus Passenger Priorities for Improvement](#) (March 2010) shows passengers' views on the relative importance of these improvements.
- 5.2 The number one priority for all passenger types is improved punctuality. However breaking down the results gives insight into differences in metropolitan, urban and

¹ Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, Statement: Update on National Transport Finance Plan 2015, National Assembly for Wales, 22 September 2015

rural areas; particularly those ranked in the top five, shown in the table below.

- 5.3 Passengers in better-served metropolitan and urban areas want improvements to service frequency, whilst those in rural areas are concerned with the basics of having a service at all, with higher priorities for a wider range of destinations being served and shelters at all stops. The latter also being shared by urban passengers. All three sets see getting a seat and helpful, positive bus drivers as important. Passengers in metropolitan and urban areas also give higher priority to the introduction of multi-operator ticketing.

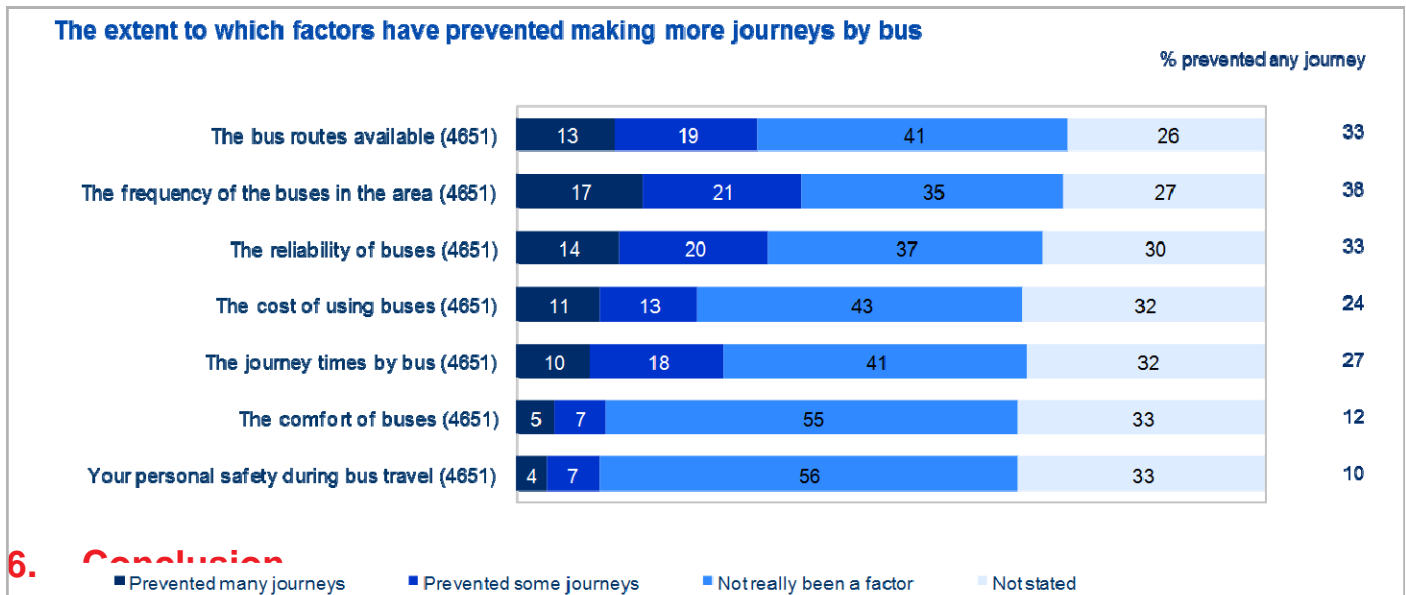
Improvement	All	Met	Urban	Rural
More buses on time or within five minutes of scheduled arrival	1	1	1	1
Buses run more frequently at times when you want to use the bus	2	3	2	7
All passengers able to get a seat for the duration of the journey	3	2	4	2
Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all buses in your local area, not just those run by a specific bus company	4	6	6	12
Buses go to a wider range of destinations in your local area	5	5	7	3
Bus fares, tickets and passes offer better value for money	6	7	12	19
All bus drivers are helpful and have a positive attitude	7	4	3	4
Accurate timetable and route information is available at all bus stops	8	11	8	9
Tickets and passes are available that entitle you to travel on all types of public transport in your local area, not just buses	9	14	11	8
All bus stops have a well maintained shelter	10	10	5	5

- 5.4 Improved punctuality and performance, supported by automatic vehicle location (AVL) gives focus on monitoring, but must have transparent and published data to be held to account.
- 5.5 Our research report: [What Bus Passengers Think About Punctuality](#) (January 2014) shows passengers feel that punctuality data, independently audited, should be published and made available to regulatory bodies as an essential part of monitoring and management. This should go hand-in-hand with route-specific targets, informed by evidence of actual performance. Passengers should have a right to complain to the operator, the local authority and the traffic commissioner about late-running services and where these are regularly delayed, the problem should be put right and passengers should receive compensation.

- 5.6 Research into [Bus Passengers' Experience of Delays and Disruption](#) (April 2013) found a need for accurate, timely and relevant information to tackle the powerlessness currently felt. Passengers want to know that their bus is just around the corner – or to make an informed decision about what they do if it is not.
- 5.7 Transport Focus recommends that it becomes a specific Government objective to establish the 'back of house' infrastructure that will allow real-time bus departures information to be provided in all parts of Wales for all services. Also, that there should be a long-term programme to extend real-time departure displays, which are currently provided in some urban areas, to as many individual bus stops as possible. In addition, that the opportunities through smartphone and tablet applications (apps) to provide real-time departures information in passengers' pockets before they get to the bus stop should be exploited to the full, with key abilities to 'push' information that is specific to an individual's journey.
- 5.8 Our report [Bus Passenger Views on Value for Money](#) (October 2013) recommends a central, amalgamated pre-journey information source where passengers can find out more about fares, ticket types and bus route information across different bus operators in an area. The Traveline Cymru service is a vital resource, which provides passengers with the tools and knowledge needed to make accurate decisions regarding their bus travel and reassurance that they have made the right travel choices.
- 5.9 This also needs to be supported by multi-operator ticketing; ranked as the fourth overall priority for improvement. The [Smart Ticketing: Oxford SmartZone](#) (September 2013) case study showed three-quarters of passengers agreed that being able to use different operators' services with the same ticket was a big improvement. A similar number agreed that SmartZone products saved money and 28 per cent claim to be using buses more since getting a smartcard, which may have contributed to why smartcard users rated value for money of bus services in Oxford higher than non-card users.
- 5.10 Younger passengers are some of the hardest to please and this market is important for bus companies, particularly in encouraging future travel habits. Our Value for Money research shows they have very distinct needs. They rely on buses, need more flexibility (to balance work, education and seeing friends) and often take journeys spontaneously. However, the key sticking point for many younger passengers is fares; specifically, being classed as an adult when neither their circumstances nor their incomes reflect this. Some local authorities and bus companies offer discounts to the 16-18 age group and these are welcome – but there is a need to incentivise and take a more standardised approach to youth fares.
- 5.11 One of the key barriers to encouraging more journeys is the ability to reach destinations by bus. This is reflected in the passenger priority for buses going to a wider range of destinations ranking fifth overall and third in rural areas. Government funding has an important role in supporting services that wouldn't otherwise run. It is also vital to incentivise development of service networks, across a range of provision (including community transport) with properly planned connections and good standards of information, to give passengers the ability and confidence to make



joined-up journeys. The Bus Passenger Survey for Wales showed the extent to which factors have prevented making more journeys by bus, which is shown below.



6.1 **Passengers' priorities need to be placed at the heart of decisions about bus services**

in Wales and the system needs to support the best outcome for passengers being achieved. It is important that the overall delivery of service and effectiveness of the system monitors passenger benefit with robust measurement that allows comparability across areas, to ensure that satisfaction levels remain high both for new and existing passengers and there is an increase of quality and satisfaction.

6.2 Passengers want their services to be accountable, with published data to 'keep the industry honest'. The National Rail Passenger Survey plays an important role in formal and independent measurement of rail service delivery and is now providing the means for writing this accountability into new franchise specifications. We believe that in a similar way, a consistent and benchmarked approach, such as delivered by the Bus Passenger Survey, focuses industry attention on key areas for improvement, alongside intelligence on drivers of satisfaction. This would also provide a robust basis for securing continued improvements and the published accountability that passengers seek.

6.3 We welcome the scrutiny of bus and community transport services in Wales. Both mainstream and supporting schemes need to work together in a way that is complementary, creating a network of service choice for passengers; with passenger information and ticketing products across modes, operators and services that will create attractive and simple integration opportunities for passengers.

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