

Integrated, accessible and sustainable transport, that works for everyone

The Community Transport Association (CTA) works alongside more than 100 Community Transport (CT) operators across Wales and champions accessible, inclusive and sustainable transport for all. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee's call for views on bus and rail reform in Wales.

The key points of our submission are:

- Welsh Government should continue to work in partnership with CTA and the CT sector to develop services that are accessible, inclusive, connected, and address transport poverty, due to our community-led knowledge and expertise which can directly influence the delivery of transport as a true public service.
- Community transport offers substantial added value to passengers, and this should be recognised when designing or commissioning new delivery models, contracts or franchise agreements.
- The CT sector in Wales has significant untapped potential, and appetite to deliver a wider range of zero emission transport services that will facilitate modal shift by helping citizens connect with their communities in new ways.
- The CT sector must be included in the national investment programme to deliver a net zero public transport system for Wales.

We support the Welsh Government's ambition, enshrined in Llwybr Newydd, of encouraging people to walk and cycle more, and to use shared and public transport options over private transport modes to address the climate emergency, provide equality of access, and help improve the health of the nation. We especially welcome the growing recognition that transport is a social justice issue, as accessible and affordable transport can have a significant positive impact on people's lives and life-chances, enabling them to access education, employment, health services, social and leisure opportunities.

As things stand at present, right now in Wales we have a disconnected, expensive and often inaccessible public transport network, leading to:

- Transport poverty
- Loneliness and isolation
- Access and inclusion barriers.

The community transport sector already makes a substantial contribution to tackling these issues, offering innovative shared transport options that affordably meet a wide range of passenger needs, embracing new technology and showcasing different ownership models to enable citizens to shift away from private vehicles. CTA members and the wider community transport operator network in Wales have welcomed the opportunity to work alongside Welsh Government Ministers and officials to deliver a better, more affordable, more integrated local passenger transport network that can meet the needs of **all** passengers and be the first and best choice for making a journey. This will have positive benefits for citizens, our communities and our environment.

Llandysul a Phont Tyweli Ymlaen Cyf is a registered charity providing affordable and accessible transport to individuals, organisations and groups within the counties of Carmarthen and Ceredigion. They encourage a grass-roots approach to developing transport solutions which help communities feel less isolated, better connected and with improved access to local services, facilities and opportunities. It recently pressed on with plans to expand the use of electric vehicles – seeing this as a great way to bring down costs for passengers.

‘Just as an example,’ Rod Bowen, Community Transport Development Officer, says, ‘a passenger previously might have had to pay £86 for a taxi to Cardigan. Through capital funding from the Welsh Government (ULEV Transformation Fund) to buy electric vehicles, we’ve been able to get the cost of the same journey down to £13. As well as reducing the operational cost, those vehicles will be an asset that resides in the local community or at a community hub, for a decade.

‘Over the last 12 months we have put 6 electric vehicles into different areas – demand is growing by over 100% on a weekly basis because people haven’t been able to access bus services. Using electric vehicles makes journeys much more affordable for passengers as we are able to pass on the operational cost savings – helping to address transport poverty. Our communities are crying out for these types of services.’

1. Access & Inclusion

If we want everybody to be able to access an integrated and sustainable public transport network and facilitate modal shift, we need to see every passenger or prospective passenger as someone of value. Whatever the reasons for their journey, their mobility support needs, their preferred journey time, or their income bracket, they need to see the public transport network as a viable and accessible option.

One of **Green Dragon’s** regular passengers, who lives on the border of Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire and has mobility support needs and a guide dog, has a sister living in Shrewsbury. She’s confident the community transport provider will be able to pick her up at home and take her to the train station, but she’s afraid that when she gets to the station the member of staff supposed to meet her to help her get on the train won’t be there, and that she won’t get the support she needs to disembark when she arrives at her destination. She told us that she has experienced these barriers often when trying to use the train, and now she is older and less confident after so long shielding at home, that she is avoiding visiting her sister at all, leaving them both more isolated and disconnected.

Disabled people in the UK make 38% fewer journeys every year than non-disabled people due to inaccessible transport. Investing in accessible, inclusive services delivered by community transport which can then integrate with the wider public transport network will ensure disabled people are not left behind in the transition to net zero. Similarly, with nearly a third of the Welsh population aged over 60, investing in an integrated, accessible and supportive transport network will make a substantial contribution to making Wales the best place in the world to grow older.

The infrastructure and vehicle fleet involved in delivering transport services – including any new stations, interchanges, vehicles, or multi-modal transport hubs – need to be designed and delivered to the highest standards of accessibility. Transport for Wales, Network Rail and Welsh Government should seek out the expert advice of third sector support agencies such as Disability Wales, RNIB, and Transport for All, and directly from those with lived expertise, to ensure an ambitious timetable of access improvements is developed and implemented. This should also include a review and upgrade of how information is provided, in partnership with organisations such as Learning Disability Wales and RNID.

We should ensure that everyone involved in developing and delivering public transport services has a basic level of disability equality training – delivered by disabled people – so that operators understand what it takes to support someone with dignity and safety, to use the public transport system in a way that works for them. If public transport is truly to return to being a Welsh public service and become the first and best choice for making a journey, then as per Llwybr Newydd's Equalities pathway **every passenger's value needs to be recognised** and access barriers removed.

A key strength of the community transport sector is its ground up approach to the provision of transport. It has deep roots in the local community and provides people-led services that address a wide range of needs. Any Action Plan or policy measures considering the need for long-term systemic and structural changes required for a fairer, more equitable society, should include capacity-building support for local communities to develop their own needs-led and community-owned accessible transport solutions. The CTA would be a fully supportive and proactive partner in any such capacity-building, and this work has already started through our role as lead partner for delivery of the Third Sector Mini Plan in Llwybr Newydd.

2. Transport Poverty

A lack of transport, or poor quality and inaccessible transport, can impact negatively on an individual's quality of life, their economic and social opportunities, and the type of activities they can engage in. To this end, transport poverty can reinforce exclusion from mainstream society, across a whole range of areas – employment, education, health, and social and cultural activities.

Reliable, high quality, affordable and accessible transport services are an integral part of the essential 'gateway infrastructure' that underpins social inclusion¹. The introduction of the Wales Transport Strategy Llwybr Newydd, by the Welsh Government in 2021, is a key milestone as it enshrines the principle that 'equality is integrated into transport planning at the highest level rather than seen as a separate issue.'

CTA fully supports Welsh Government's aspirations to streamline and integrate ticketing across transport modes, as we believe this will be easier for passengers to navigate, increase the attractiveness of public transport, and result in cost savings for passengers using the network. Tackling transport poverty requires a much wider range of measures however, and we welcome the opportunity to work alongside Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and commercial operators to develop opportunities that align with the Equalities and Rural pathways of Llwybr Newydd as well as those emerging through the development of the Third Sector Mini Plan.

Fair access to work was a significant theme within Welsh Government's recent Cost of Living summit² and, together with the Welsh Government's recent announcement of a Basic Income pilot for care leavers across Wales, highlights the need for community transport options that support people, including younger people who do not have the financial means to purchase a vehicle, to get to places of employment that may not be well served by bus routes or where the timetabling of bus services does not match shift patterns.

Transport is undoubtedly a key factor in shaping people's experiences of poverty as, without access to transport, people report diminished job opportunities or constraints on their job search horizons. The community transport sector can, and does, assist people to access employment through its demand responsive transport services, specifically funded employment services, and schemes such as 'Wheels to Work'. The CT sector is also an attractive field for those seeking work or volunteering opportunities, and a green recovery could be further enhanced by this being developed through supported work placements, funded traineeships and investment in connected fields such as vehicle maintenance to support the green CT fleet of cars, minibuses, mopeds and electric bikes.

Inclusivity is the central and most fundamental value within the community transport sector – it is based on the underlying principle that no-one within a community should be excluded from access to services or amenities because of a lack of appropriate transport and is also why Community Transport remains distinctive from commercial operators. It is a values-driven, needs-based, community-led approach to service planning and delivery, and should therefore be viewed as a lynchpin of a transport infrastructure aiming to be socially equitable, and of any policies and measures aimed at addressing transport poverty.

¹Campaign to End Loneliness [https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Promising Approaches Revisited FULL REPORT.pdf](https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Promising_Approaches_Revisited_FULL_REPORT.pdf)

² <https://gov.wales/written-statement-cost-living-summit>

3. Sustainable Integration & Connectivity

Our members welcome the opportunity to work alongside Welsh Government and Transport for Wales in the plans to develop a network of bus services that are integrated, accessible, affordable, flexible, and low carbon, as set out in the white paper consultation ‘One network, one timetable, one ticket’³. The community transport sector has continued to grow at a time when conventional public transport has contracted, and has found innovative solutions to community problems during the pandemic which continue to enhance communities as we move into the recovery phase. Moreover, these community-focused services directly improve the wellbeing of people who use this form of passenger transport, making community transport integral to the conversation about Wales’ future passenger transport.

We welcome the proposed creation of more innovative and flexible services, particularly in geographic ‘hotspots’ where commercial transport options have retracted or been withdrawn, leaving individuals and communities disconnected. Community transport operators need to be considered as potential partners for new flexible and other demand-responsive services, and supported to deliver these services to their full potential. The value people place on their journey with a community transport service is very different to the value placed on public transport journeys. It is important to consider the added social benefit, value, and wraparound support provided when community transport operators run flexible or community bus services, and this should be considered as part of the cost/quality matrix used to award any new franchise or contract agreements.

The CT sector in Wales has significant untapped potential, and appetite to deliver a wider range of transport services that will help citizens meet their needs and connect with their communities. In order to deliver on Welsh Government’s aspirations for fully integrated transport options, the sector will need additional support around investment in real time information, journey planning, and mobility as a service (MaaS), if they are to achieve parity with commercial operators and funded pilot schemes.

There is also a significant opportunity for the community transport sector to shape, influence and potentially deliver a wider range of shared transport options, in partnership with communities, local councils, housing associations, and other third sector organisations, and tapping into opportunities to generate, store and use community owned renewable energy to power sustainable vehicles. These shared car, bike, and e-cargo bike schemes could be delivered/supported by the CT network in Wales, to integrate with other transport modes and open up opportunities for modal shift for local residents and tourists visiting different parts of Wales.

Having access to a network of accessible ‘lifeline’ provision which is consistent across Wales, bringing citizens from outlying towns and villages to multimodal transport hubs, will improve connections and eliminate the postcode lottery for both public and community transport. There are significant opportunities presented by the proposed franchising model to ensure CT operators with local knowledge and expertise and a passion for delivering community-led innovation to be an active

³ <https://gov.wales/one-network-one-timetable-one-ticket-planning-buses-public-service-wales>

partner in delivering many of these services, with agile demand-responsive services that interface with more commercial routes, active travel modes and shared transport such as community car clubs.

The community transport sector must be included in the national investment programme to convert the passenger transport fleet to zero emission. The sector has been struggling to update fleets due to insecurity of funding (for example, the one-year Bus Service Support Grant, which has been static for nearly a decade and is now split among more operators than ever before) and lack of organisational reserves for capital purchases, which have been further decimated due to Covid-19. It is not unusual for operators to have vehicles over 10 years old, with over 200,000 miles on the clock, and whilst they are committed to transitioning to electric vehicles, the higher capital costs of such vehicles hinders the move to low carbon transport. The recognition by Welsh Government of the need to invest in its communities is welcomed, as this growing passenger transport sector requires support to fund the conversion to zero emission vehicles.

EV charging infrastructure needs to consider community transport operators delivering key services including S22 services or school transport and provide access to the network of rapid EVCPs. Converting the community transport fleet to a zero emission fleet, and ensuring the EV charging infrastructure supports this transition and is accessible to the CT sector, will require a partnership approach between Welsh Government, the community transport sector and other organisations.

The **Western Valleys Transport Pilot** has been funded through Welsh Government's Household Support Fund to support people to access employment, education, training, support and leisure opportunities through a range of sustainable and active travel modes, while improving cross-valley connectivity through the development and improvement of community owned energy generation and non-commercial and accessible EV infrastructure.

This project will be coproduced by CT operators and the communities they serve to connect and integrate with existing schemes, the mainstream public transport network and key sites across south Wales, including employers, schools, social housing, leisure facilities and community centres. Community-owned assets including energy generation and storage, minibuses, bikes, and accessible cars will be based in the heart of communities typically excluded from such high-profile projects, to facilitate transport connections that eliminate access barriers and bring people together. The project is planned to launch in June 2022 and will provide invaluable learning to support the ongoing transformation of the public transport network in Wales.

6. Conclusion

It's a really exciting time for the transport sector in Wales, and CTA, our members and the wider CT network have a clear vision of what we want to achieve. We want to see sustainable funding going into public and community transport which also considers how active travel can be integrated for those able to use it. A decarbonised fleet, connected with communities who own the energy that

powers a range of vehicles, and are part of a Wales-wide network of operators who collaborate to share their learning and expertise. We want to see members of the community shape the services they use, through employment in the network, volunteering on the ground, coproducing new services and as part of trustee boards, so those services can adapt and evolve to ensure they continue to meet the needs of their community. And we want to see recognition from across the public sector that accessible transport can be a key enabler for success, and consider it when commissioning services, establishing franchises, and planning all forthcoming projects such as new health centres, city centre redevelopments, and regeneration schemes.

Overall, our vision is for a community transport sector that has been supported to achieve its full potential, and is properly valued and recognised as an essential part of an integrated and sustainable transport network. We believe that this can be instrumental in supporting a just and green recovery as we navigate a 'post-Covid' world, both now and for future generations.

Contact

Please contact: Gemma Lelliott, Director for Wales

gemma@ctauk.org