

WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE P-05-710 Ensure Disabled People can Access Public Transport As and When They Need it

The petition submitted by Whizz Kidz seeking action to ensure that disabled people can access public transport when they need it brought into sharp focus the barriers faced by disabled people when using the public transport network in Wales. The video evidence submitted to the committee in support of the petition is a powerful illustration of the difficulties that disabled people encounter when accessing services that many of us simply take for granted.

Disabled access to public transport is a matter reserved to the UK Government. Since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came into force, significant improvements have been made in improving access to bus and rail services across Great Britain. We are now witnessing the widespread introduction of local bus services provided by public service vehicles constructed with lower floor access and better seating arrangements enabling wheelchairs to be carried more easily. Whilst not a statutory requirement, advice provided by the Confederation of Public Transport in Wales estimates that there are approximately 227 buses fitted with audio visual next stop announcement systems on board enabling older people, blind people and people with sight loss to use public transport with confidence.

In relation to access to railway services, provisions introduced under the Disability Discrimination Act, now the Equality Act 2010, will improve access to railways in Wales as all railway vehicles must be compliant with accessibility regulations by the end of December 2019. More recently, the UK Government has this year commenced provisions contained within the Equality Act about the publication of information about the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis.

Whilst these improvements are welcome, it has taken more than 20 years to achieve them and the fact remains, as this petition clearly illustrates, too many disabled people continue to encounter barriers to our public transport network. This is simply not acceptable in the 21st Century and I am keen that the Welsh Government will do more to try and remove some of these barriers that persist to frustrate our ambitions to build a united and connected society.

On that basis and on behalf of the Welsh Government I welcome these recommendations and look forward to working with the public transport sector, our local authorities and most importantly, disabled and older people to renew our efforts to transform our public transport into an inclusive and accessible network that is fit for the 21st century.

Ken Skates AM/AC

WELSH GOVERNMENT DETAILED RESPONSE

P-05-710 Ensure Disabled People can Access Public Transport As and When They Need it

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government should progress the rollout of an ‘Orange Wallet’ style assistance scheme for all bus and rail services across Wales and examine the feasibility of supporting its use in taxis and private hire vehicles.

Response: Accept

The ‘Orange Wallet’ is one of a range of collaborative regional projects that has been funded by the Welsh Government as part of the ‘All Wales ASD strategy’. It is intended to help people, especially those on the Autistic Spectrum, to cope more easily with public transport. A number of public transport companies in Wales, including Arriva Trains Wales and a number of our local bus companies, have adopted the “orange wallet” scheme and have trained their staff to understand that holders of the “orange wallet” need additional support. The Welsh Government will continue to encourage public transport operators to adopt the “orange wallet” scheme and in the longer term, further consideration will be given to how we can further improve awareness of the scheme as part of our proposals for improving access to public transport being developed by the Accessible Transport Panel.

Financial implications- There are no additional financial implications as transport providers are encouraged to adopt the “orange wallet” as part of funding provided to meet public service obligations.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government should press Network Rail and the UK Government to deliver physical improvements to stations in Wales which are inaccessible to people with disabilities, and use its own powers to continue to invest in accessible infrastructure as budgets allow.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has provided additional investment as part of the National Station Improvement Programme to improve railway station accessibility and station improvements delivered as part of the south east Wales Metro programme. These improvements will provide a blueprint for station improvements across the railway network in Wales. We will continue to work with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee and the Welsh Government’s Accessible Transport Panel to encourage Network Rail and the Department for Transport to ensure that the appropriate level of investment in the Welsh railway network is maintained by the UK Government and Network Rail.

Financial Implications – There are no financial implications to the Welsh Government as funding of the railway network in Wales is non-devolved.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government should work with all train operating companies delivering services in Wales to raise awareness of support available to disabled passengers, in particular the possibility of providing suitable alternative transport to the nearest accessible station for disabled passengers unable to access services at the station of their choice.

Response – Accept

Four train operating companies provide local and long distance rail services to passengers living in Wales. All train operating companies are required to publish and implement disabled passenger protection policies, approved by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to maintain their operator licence. We will continue to work with the ORR to ensure passenger support is improved.

Financial Implications - There are no financial implications to the Welsh Government as funding the licence requirement imposed on train operating companies is a matter of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR)

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales must ensure that the final specification for the next Wales and Borders rail franchise and future Metro developments includes a requirement for significant improvements in the accessibility of train services and Metro infrastructure across all aspects of service provision. It should consider including improved accessibility as a core contractual obligation on the successful operator and development partner.

Response: Accepted

Companies shortlisted as part of the bidding process for the next Wales and Borders Franchise, have been advised of the accessibility expectations to be achieved during the term of the next franchise agreement. In preparing their bids, companies were invited to seek the advice of equality groups represented on the Welsh Government's Accessible Transport Panel. It must be noted however, that responsibility for rail franchising for Wales only services is not yet devolved.

Financial Implications – The cost of any improvements being delivered following the award of the next Wales and Borders Franchise will be set out in the franchise agreement awarded early in 2018.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should consider how accessibility can be included as a performance measure in the performance management regime of the next Wales and Borders franchise with appropriate incentives and penalties.

Response : Accepted

Companies shortlisted as part of the bidding process for the next Wales and Borders Franchise have been advised of the accessibility expectations to be achieved during the term of the next franchise agreement. In preparing their bids, companies were invited to seek the advice of equality groups represented on the Welsh Government's Accessible Transport Panel. We expect that the partnership approach being encouraged as part of the current bidding process will be developed and implemented when the new franchise agreement is awarded. This new agreement should enable performance data to be shared with stakeholders and interest groups for performance monitoring. It must be noted however, that responsibility for rail franchising for Wales only services is not yet devolved.

Financial Implications – The cost of any improvements being delivered following the award of the next Wales and Borders Franchise will be set out in the franchise agreement awarded early in 2018.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should consider the inclusion of a core requirement for mandatory disability awareness training for customer facing staff under the new Wales and Borders Franchise, and how it can encourage operators in Wales to ensure staff undertake detailed specific training as appropriate and support disabled passengers to be able to 'turn up and go' whenever possible.

Response: Accepted

The Disabled Passengers' Transport Advisory Committee commissioned research to the quality of disability awareness training available to train operating and bus companies. Lack of appropriate training of front line staff in the transport sector is often cited by equality groups as a barrier to accessing the public transport network in Wales. Developing accessibility awareness training for staff will be included in the Welsh Government's accessible transport objectives, which we expect to publish by the end of December 2017. We will be working with interest groups and operators to develop training and our aim is that disabled people being able to "turn up and go" on railway services in Wales will be delivered as part of the next franchise.

Financial Implications – The cost of providing this training will be met as part of the next Wales and Borders Franchise.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should develop and introduce a Welsh disability awareness module, as previously recommended by the Bus Policy Advisory Group, that encompasses both physical and mental disabilities, and explore making this a mandatory element of the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (DCPC) for bus drivers working in Wales.

Response: Accept

Driver Certificate of Professional Competence is a matter reserved to the UK Government as part of the Public Service Vehicle Operator Regime. Developing accessibility awareness training for staff will be included in the Welsh Government's accessible transport objectives, which we expect to publish by the end of December. To maintain their eligibility to receive grant payments from the Welsh Government's Bus Services Support Grant, bus operators will be required to ensure that drivers undertake accessible transport awareness training as part of the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard.

Financial Implications – The Welsh Government will work with local operators and share the cost of developing a training package in collaboration with disability groups through funding made available through the Bus Services Support Grant.

Recommendation 8

We support the Welsh Government's proposals for statutory guidance on service quality, infrastructure and passenger information expectations for bus services in Wales. The Welsh Government should ensure that the needs of disabled people are reflected in any such guidance. This could include a strengthened requirement for the provision of audio and visual information on all operators.

Response: Accept

The petition committee's endorsement of the Welsh Government's proposals to introduce statutory guidance in relation to the quality expectations to be achieved by bus operators and by local authorities in relation to bus infrastructure and passenger information is welcomed. The Welsh Government was the first government in Britain to require operators to install audio visual next stop announcements as part of the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standards and it is expected that this requirement will be maintained if statutory guidance is introduced for local bus services and bus infrastructure (information at bus stops). Our intention is to bring forward detailed proposals about how this can be achieved early in 2018.

Financial Implications – The cost of installing audio visual announcement systems on board public service vehicles is estimated to be in the region of £4,000 for each vehicle. An assessment is being undertaken in relation to the potential costs that may be incurred if statutory guidance is introduced as part of the package of measures for reforming the planning and delivery of local bus services.

Recommendation 9

We recommend the Welsh Government presses ahead with the development of common national standards for all taxi and private hire vehicles and drivers when it acquires the powers to do so, taking into account the views expressed through the recent public consultation.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government welcomes the petition committee's endorsement of the need to introduce national standards as part of the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing regime in Wales. Detailed proposals for reform of licensing will be published for further public consultation in the spring of 2018.

Financial Implications – The cost of any changes to the arrangements for licensing taxis and private hire vehicles will be presented for consultation in 2018.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government should consider whether it is desirable to introduce requirements or incentives for large private hire operators to retain a set quota of wheelchair accessible vehicles within their fleet, and for local authorities to ensure a reasonable proportion of licensed taxis in their area are wheelchair accessible.

Response: Accept

Detailed proposals for reform of licensing will be published for further public consultation in the spring of 2018. Whilst requirements imposed on taxi and private hire vehicle operators by the Equality Act 2010 are matters reserved to the UK Government, local licensing authorities have been reminded that they are required to exercise their functions in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty introduced by section 149 of the 2010 Act.

Financial implications - The cost of any changes to the arrangements for licensing taxis and private hire vehicles will be presented for consultation in 2018.

Recommendation 11

The common national standards to be developed by the Welsh Government should include a requirement for all drivers in Wales to complete general disability awareness training and specific training related to the type of vehicle they drive.

Response: Accept

Detailed proposals for reform of licensing will be published for further public consultation in the spring of 2018. Developing accessibility awareness training for staff will be included in the Welsh Government's accessible transport objectives, which we expect to publish by the end of December. It is expected that local licensing authorities will ensure that all drivers operating in their areas will undertake training issued by the Welsh Government.

Financial Implications - The cost of any changes to the arrangements for licensing taxis and private hire vehicles will be presented for consultation in 2018.

Recommendation 12

Licensing authorities, with the support of the Welsh Government as required, should uphold the duty in the Equality Act 2010 for no additional charges to be made for carrying passengers in wheelchairs. When made aware of situations where drivers leave meters running whilst assisting passengers in wheelchairs to board vehicles or secure equipment, appropriate action should be taken.

Response: Accept

Charging increased fares for the carriage of disabled people is unlawful discrimination and local licensing authorities are required to ensure that the practice, where there is evidence that overcharging of disabled passengers persists, is eradicated. Local licensing authorities have been reminded of their duties.

Financial Implications – Costs associated with enforcement of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing is met by local authorities and income generated from fees paid by licencees.