

House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee and the Economic Development and Transport Committee, National Assembly of Wales

Draft Transport (Wales) Bill

Evidence of the Traffic Commissioner for the Welsh Traffic Area

1. I am one of seven Traffic Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport to administer operator licensing and other matters throughout Great Britain. Each of us is responsible for one or more Traffic Areas, in my case the Welsh and West Midland Traffic Areas. The Welsh Traffic Area was created in 1999 and, like its Scottish equivalent, covers the whole country. (The Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area has no responsibilities in England).
2. The sections of the Draft Bill which may directly affect my jurisdiction are s3-6 (local transport functions). I have no involvement, other than as a passenger or prospective passenger, with rail or air services. I do however support the principle that the Assembly should take greater responsibility for transport policy (including safety) within its borders, in being given a general transport duty and being required to establish a transport strategy – s1-2. (I would be pleased to be consulted about this: s2(5) of the Draft Bill). I believe that most transport decisions are better taken in the country or region concerned than in London.
3. My involvement with the Welsh unitary authorities is largely through my responsibility for registration and punctual operation of local bus services under the Transport Act 1985 (as amended), and as a consultee on passenger information strategies and other things under the Transport Act 2000. The unitary authorities have relatively small populations and employ few staff to deal with transport matters. The extent of my contact with each of them therefore depends on the individuals they employ, their degree of interest in bus matters, their knowledge and experience of transport, and their capabilities. My staff and I meet regularly with many of them through ATCO Wales (Association of Transport Coordinating Officers) to discuss things of mutual interest.
4. Some councils have done excellent work with new initiatives to serve local people. But as a whole their achievements are less than they might have been had they been grouped, with more staff and

covering much larger populations, to provide a more comprehensive transport regime.

5. The informal groupings of some unitary authorities have proved useful. I support the proposals for joint discharge of functions and joint transport authorities, with the same or different participants, as the way forward. Specialist staff would thus be able to deal with transport issues for a number of authorities. Cross-border issues, while not eliminated, would be far fewer.
6. Both the Assembly and the Welsh Affairs Select Committee have in the past expressed interest in having a Traffic Commissioner based in Wales. There is no reference to this in the draft Bill, but as I believe it may be raised by the Committees, it may be helpful if I make mention of it.
7. Traffic Commissioner's activities are not devolved, so it is for U.K. Ministers to decide on matters such as this. Since being appointed as the (first) Traffic Commissioner for Wales, I have spent much of my time in Wales, and have sought always to be available in Wales whenever my presence is desired. Dedicated teams in my office deal with licence applications and compliance issues for Welsh operators. Employees of the Welsh area of the Vehicle & Operator Services Agency, with main offices in Llantrisant, Ammanford and Wrexham, monitor Welsh operators "on the ground" and provide advice when needed. Public Inquiries for Welsh operators are almost always held in Wales. The vast majority of licensing administration etc is dealt with by post, telephone, fax or email, and the location of the office is thus immaterial to most licence holders and others. I am not aware of any practical difficulties resulting from my being based in England, but can appreciate that a Traffic Commissioner based closer to the Welsh Assembly Government might play a more active role in Welsh transport affairs.

David Dixon
Traffic Commissioner
The Welsh Traffic Area

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