

**WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF WELSH ASSEMBLY
GOVERNMENT POLICY ON THE ACCESSIBILITY OF TRANSPORT
SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN WALES BY IEUAN WYN JONES,
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR THE ECONOMY AND
TRANSPORT**

Executive summary

I am very grateful to the Equality of Opportunity Committee for their work and helpful recommendations on improving accessibility of transport services for disabled people in Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government is keen to promote the equality of opportunity for all people by improving access to all modes of transport and ensure all people have the opportunity to travel without barriers.

It is important to recognise that statutory responsibility for accessibility for public transport services resides with the UK Government, however, within the scope of our powers the Welsh Assembly Government remains committed to making accessibility improvements and investing substantially and sustainably in this agenda.

The National Transport Plan outlines the Assembly Government's priorities for developing a more integrated transport network in Wales and includes plans for improving accessibility to public transport services and equality of access to transport is a central part of this delivery plan.

In developing the National Transport Plan we undertook an Equality Impact Assessment. This assessment identified four critical issues in providing equality of access to transport, as well as gaps that need to be filled. The Transport Equality Impact Assessment is a dynamic document, continually evolving to encompass more stretching plans and learning from the projects that we undertake.

We are currently in the process of updating the plan to reflect our progress to date and some of our achievements are outlined in the Government's response to the Committee's recommendations below. We intend to put in place a more robust framework which will allow for greater structure in developing equality of opportunity for all who wish to use the public transport network. In addition, to enhance this work we are currently reviewing our Regional Transport Planning guidance and we will continue to discuss with local authorities how they plan to take forward their responsibilities for improving accessibility for disabled people in developing local transport services.

We therefore, welcome the Committee's report which will assist us greatly in developing our longer term plans for improving accessibility for disabled people in Wales.

Detailed responses

Detailed responses to the recommendations in the report are set out below.

Headline Recommendation 1: The Committee places the highest priority on ensuring that the implementation of the National Transport Plan takes into account the needs of disabled people, and recommends that the Welsh Government takes steps to ensure its engagement with disabled people's groups is further enhanced.

Response: Accept

In taking forward the review of our Equality Impact Assessment for the National Transport Plan and from discussions with stakeholders, we have identified four key themes which are critical to improving accessibility for disabled groups. The four themes concentrate on:

1. Improving the design of our projects to ensure, the needs of disabled people are considered, and where appropriate are implemented. To assist in taking this aim forward we are as part of our *Economic Renewal* policy preparing guidance notes on inclusive design and management although primarily aimed at building design, we will consider how the principles of this work can help to inform future decisions on the design of public transport infrastructure and recognises the importance of consulting with disabled groups.
2. Increasing safety and security on public transport is a key priority in the National Transport Plan. We are supporting a number of initiatives that improve the safety of public transport, both real and perceived as can be evidenced by the completion of the new Swansea High Street rail station. This is an exemplar model and will be used in taking forward future projects.
3. Accessible Information is key to improving accessibility to public transport. I have established a new Public Transport Users Committee and as part of their forward work programme they will be considering how to improve the information provision for everyone.
4. Training for service providers - I am fully committed to working with the industry to support them where practicable, in their training and development needs. To fulfil this aim, we are working closely with Go Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport Sector, who are responsible for providing training and development opportunities for people working in that sector.

The Committee's recommendations support our plans to develop these four key themes and we will continue to work with disabled groups as we take forward our implementation plans.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Headline Recommendation 2: The Committee believes that transport related dialogue between local authorities, transport providers and disability groups could be enhanced, and recommends that the Welsh Government ensures that such dialogue is further mainstreamed into service planning mechanisms.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government is fully committed to actively involving disabled people into its service planning mechanisms.

Under the current Station Improvement programme scheme (NSIP +) we seek to achieve exemplary accessibility in our station Improvements and seek to actively engage with disabled people and other stakeholders under the new Equality Act 2010, to ensure, where feasible that their needs are taken into account.

An example, of this in practice is the modernisation of Swansea High Street Station, where the design has been developed in consultation with local access groups. This model will be rolled out across Wales as part of the programmes development.

In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government is currently producing guidance on minimum accessibility requirements for buildings in which it is investing. In future we will require all recipients of grant funding for rail improvements to engage actively with disabled people.

Similarly, in respect of bus stations, we will continue to develop our improvement programme with accessibility as a core criteria. We have already completed the Swansea city 'Quadrant' bus station, which has been designed following engagement with representatives from local disabled groups. We have also put in place 'Rangers' who are available to ensure visitors feel safe and on hand to help passengers find the right bus or the right destination. We will continue to use this project as an exemplar in taking forward future station improvement works.

The flagship TrawsCambria Network of long distance bus services uses vehicles that are fully accessible and provides audio and visual announcements to passengers on their journey. We are currently considering plans for enhancing the Network of services and will continue to embed accessibility provision into the development of the services.

In working with the Regional Transport Consortia (RTC's) to develop and approve Regional Transport Plans we have ensured that their plans have taken account of and engaged with the Third Sector, and various access groups to embed accessibility into public transport services at a regional level. We shall continue to work with the Consortia in taking forward the delivery of individual plans ensuring accessibility issues are considered in local areas.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Headline Recommendation 3: The Committee recognises the costs involved in providing free bus travel for older and disabled people in Wales, but recommends that the Welsh Government continues to protect this highly important policy.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government fully recognises the importance of free bus travel to older and disabled people. The Deputy First Minister recently announced that there will be no change to the entitlements currently enjoyed by pass holders in Wales and that the scheme would be extended to seriously injured armed services personnel and war veterans.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Headline Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes representation to the UK Government to reconsider its decision to remove the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance for people in residential care.

Response: Accept

The Deputy Minister for Social Services responded to the recent UK Government consultation on Disability Living Allowance reform.

In that response she raised a concern in this particular area:

"...in Wales the care and mobility components of DLA are taken into account at a local authority's discretion in the assessment for charging for non-residential care, while the mobility component is automatically disregarded in the assessment of charging for residential care. Any change, therefore, in DLA and the make up and level of any replacement benefit could affect the funds service users have to meet their care costs and the funding local authorities have the ability to levy charges against. So, if the benefit is withdrawn from people receiving home care then they will be expected to pay any shortfall in care costs."

The Deputy Minister for Social Services was also clear that she expected to be consulted further regarding any changes that the UK Government proposes to make in this area.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications.

Recommendation 5: The Welsh Government revises its guidance to local authorities on concessionary bus travel to:

- **Include the introduction of a common application form for all local authorities, developed in consultation with learning disability groups, to ensure it is user friendly, uses appropriate language and is accessible to all;**
- **Clarify the criteria for use of companion bus passes**

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government will work with local authorities, Bus Users UK and representatives of disability/learning groups to produce a common application form. It is envisaged that this will be introduced by April 2012.

The criteria that applies to the use of companion bus passes is clearly set out in the local authority guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government. The revised guidance was developed in consultation with the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government considers options by which legislation could be used to enhance disabled people's accessibility to taxi services, and makes representations on a preferred option to the UK Government.

Response: Accept in principle

Responsibility for legislation and regulation on taxi services resides with the UK Government and is a non-devolved matter. However, the Welsh Assembly Government is keen to explore within the current regulatory framework what can be done to improve accessible taxi provision for all disabled groups.

In taking this issue forward, we work closely with the Department for Transport to explore the opportunities for improvement and last year we published a best practice guide on taxi licensing. The guidance sets out how local authorities can improve accessibility to taxi services through its local licensing arrangements and we will continue to work with local authorities and disabled groups to ensure improvements are made, where this is feasible in the existing legislative frameworks.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications.

Recommendation 7: The Welsh Government should work with the Community Transport Association to better understand the distribution of drivers and availability of physical equipment to ensure that use is made of those resources

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government will work with the Community Transport Association and the community transport sector to carry out a survey of drivers and vehicles and to will make recommendations on how these resources can be used more effectively.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ensures transport providers and local authorities work with disabled groups to get a better understanding of how the format and provision of information could be improved.

Response: Accept

One of the first tasks of the newly established Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales will be to review and evaluate the accessibility of information. In particular, the Committee will be looking at the accessibility of current information provided, its accessibility to different groups of people with protected characteristics and to identify what other information could be useful to different groups of people and to prioritise this.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications.

Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should include training on accessing transport in the curriculum for SEN students

Response: Reject

Personal and social education (PSE) forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils in maintained schools. The non-statutory *Personal and social education framework for 7 to 19-year-olds in Wales* provides opportunities for learners to develop the practical skills necessary for everyday life.

Current legislation does not prescribe the inclusion of training on accessing transport as part of the curriculum for any pupils. It would therefore require a fundamental change of approach for the Welsh Assembly Government to stipulate the content of PSE.

The delivery of the curriculum is delegated to schools and decisions on the precise content of a school's PSE programme lie with headteachers and their governing bodies. This gives schools flexibility to decide where the emphasis should be placed and to focus on issues that are particularly relevant to their learners.

However, the Welsh Assembly Government has funded, through an agreement with the Welsh Local Government Association, a project run by Cardiff City Council to develop the provision of independent travel training for SEN pupils. This project is one of several funded over financial years 2007-08 to 2010-11 to help local authorities improve home to school transport. All of the projects were presented to local authorities at an event held on Monday 21st March 2011. It will then be open to other authorities to adapt them for use in their own areas, should they wish to do so.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications.

Recommendation 10: When developing shared spaces and schemes involving dropped kerbs, the Welsh Government and local authorities should engage with disabled groups from the start of the planning process.

Response: Accept

Highway and planning authorities have a legal duty to comply with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which requires them, amongst other things to *“encourage participation by disabled persons in public life”*.

The Welsh Assembly Government has endorsed the policies outlined in Manual for Streets (MfS) 2007 which supports the principles of this recommendation. Specifically in relation to shared surfaces MfS states that *“It is important that any such shared surface arrangements are designed for blind or partially sighted people because conventional kerbs are commonly used to aid their navigation”* Furthermore, MfS specifically reinforces this recommendation by stating that *“Consultation with the community and users, particularly with disability groups and access officers, is essential when any shared surface scheme is developed”*

In 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government provided training for local highway and planning authority officers across Wales at four regionally based events specifically on the implementation of MfS and there is an expectation that this will be reflected in local decisions when shared surface schemes are being developed.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications.

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