# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **COVID-19 - Bus Emergency Scheme**  |
| **DATE**  | **2 July 2020** |
| **BY** | **Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport** |

Buses are the most used form of public transport in Wales. They account for 3 out of 4 journeys made by public transport, allowing around 100 million passenger journeys a year. They have a key role in connecting communities, reducing emissions and supporting economic activity, but perhaps most crucially of all they provide a critical support system for some of the most deprived communities and individuals across Wales. As we move forward buses are central to our ambition for a high quality, multi modal, integrated and low carbon public transport system.

Following the unprecedentedly sharp and severe drop in bus passenger numbers (by around 90%) across services since lockdown and the loss of almost all ticket revenue, the Welsh Government continued funding for bus operators at pre-Covid demand levels to maintain a foundation timetable to allow key workers to get to work and those without a car to get to shops for essential food and medical supplies.

The Bus Hardship Fund will shortly come to an end but future revenues are likely to remain low for the foreseeable future as a result of social distancing requirements limiting capacity on public transport. Future COVID-19 funding for the bus industry is to be provided via the Bus Emergency Scheme (BES).

The Bus Emergency Scheme will be introduced in phases and will deliver a more integrated and flexible network to match supply to demand, flex services, and allocate any additional funding. This emergency funding, currently maintained at historic levels, will be for an initial period of three months and will provide financial assistance to the bus industry to keep buses moving across Wales.

BES will provide an operating subsidy in lieu of lost revenue due to COVID-19 and significantly reduced vehicle passenger carrying capacity due to social distancing. As well as addressing emergency short term needs, the agreement underpinning the BES is intended to signal the beginning of a lasting partnership between operators and public bodies to enable a reshaping of Wales’ bus network, supporting the management and interaction across transport modes including smart ticketing, unified routeing, and integrated timetabling.

Operators will work with local authorities and Transport for Wales to determine the initial routes and frequencies that operators should deliver within the available funding. In agreeing these bus service levels, it will be necessary to consider the following:

* how best to serve key workers (including but not limited to NHS staff);
* how best to support economic activity as the economy restarts;
* the capacity of the Operators’ buses considering reduced service patterns and compliance with social distancing guidelines; and
* accommodating any staff shortages Operators are facing.

Going forward, the Welsh Government, supported by Transport for Wales, will design a new funding scheme in collaboration with local authorities and bus operators which will include a fair and consistent approach to fares, building patronage, and agreement to the principles of an Economic Contract and a Social Charter. This approach will enable us to work in partnership to improve services for passengers, including cleanliness, reliability and safety and security, which will all be critical during the recovery period while we work together to secure an efficient, sustainable, and robust bus network for the future.