

Integrated public transport

Sustrans Cymru submission to Enterprise and Business Committee inquiry

Summary

1. Sustrans is the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and our environment. Our mission is to influence practice and shape policy so everyone can travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. Sustrans Cymru welcomes this enquiry and the opportunity to respond. We would be pleased to provide further oral or written evidence to the committee.
2. People use cars because they perceive them to be the quickest and most convenient way to get about. Cutting car use will require more sustainable forms of transport to be seen as the quickest and most convenient way to make everyday journeys. Closer integration between different forms of public transport – and with walking and cycling – is key to achieving that change. A more integrated transport system will require investment, and stronger integration of policy, governance and delivery arrangements.
3. As well as examining the constraints presented by the regulation and ownership of public transport, we suggest that the committee reflect on the balance of spending on public transport versus road building since the National Assembly was established. Welsh transport policy has prioritised the free flow of road traffic and the reduction of journey times for car drivers in investment decisions. This has not only denied investment to sustainable forms of transport but it has also increased the convenience and attractiveness of car use compared to public transport. In turn, this has created a self-fulfilling spiral of decline in public transport use and investment
4. In recent decades, transport policy has deepened car dependency. This has knock on consequences for the Welsh economy, public health and the environment. Carbon emissions, obesity levels and the price of oil are all on the rise; and all will have serious implications for

our future lifestyles and economy unless we radically change our approach to transport. Better integration has the potential to address a number of these issues; ensuring public transport is a more attractive, more convenient, and more affordable alternative.

5. A key role of transport is to connect people to opportunities to work, shop, play and learn, as well as to meet family, friends and access wider social networks. A more integrated transport network also offers opportunities to achieve a wide variety of policy goals from tackling obesity to increasing employment, from helping people retain their independence to supporting children to achieve their full potential. Bringing these agendas together, and enabling people to reach the opportunities they need regardless of where they live, their income, age, ability or level of confidence, will require a shift in policy and investment away from roads and towards the integration of public transport, walking and cycling.

How well is Welsh public transport integrated, particularly in relation to bus, rail and community transport services, and what factors limit integration?

6. Sustrans has undertaken considerable work to highlight the issue of ‘transport poverty’ in Wales. The cost of buying and maintaining a car is prohibitive to many families; and as fuel prices are pushed higher and become more volatile people are increasingly being priced out of car ownership or forced into debt.¹
7. The inadequacy of our public transport system is leaving more and more people excluded and isolated, unable to access opportunities, from jobs to healthcare, that many take for granted. Sustrans recently revealed statistics that indicate more than half of the Welsh population is at considerable risk of ‘transport poverty’. The statistics used three indicators (household income; access to essential services; and distance to the nearest bus stop or train station) to assess the extent to which people in Wales were struggling to get around. More than 1.5 million people in Wales were found to be at serious risk of being cut off; indicating that Wales’ current public transport system is failing to meet basic transport needs, with knock-on implications for wider social, environmental and health goals.²
8. Communities at particular risk are those in more rural areas; however this issue is faced in more urban communities too. Sustrans Cymru’s Personalised Travel Planning project (funded by the Welsh Government) found that more than half of all trips undertaken in Cardiff did not have a viable public transport alternative (although many could potentially be undertaken by walking and cycling).³

¹ Sustrans, 2012 Access Denied: Transport poverty in Wales

² For more information please visit: <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sustrans-near-you/wales/policy-in-wales>

³ Socialdata, 2011 Travel Behaviour Research in Cardiff and Penarth: Baseline Survey 2011

9. Many of the issues faced by users can be explained by examining the development of public transport systems in Wales (and further afield). As the transport system has grown and developed over time, specialisation has occurred within specific networks and modes of transport. From the supply perspective, the concept of the whole journey is often forgotten as each operator focuses on their specific link in the journey. This is in direct contrast to customers, whose priority is to find the best means of travelling from A to B considering all the elements that are involved. Moreover, from the individual's perspective, the most difficult part of the journey is often outside the main mode used.⁴
10. At an operational level, much more focus needs to be given to the door-to-door journey. This not only emphasises the importance of this inquiry in examining how best to integrate public transport provision, it also highlights how important it is for this inquiry to consider journeys to and from bus stops, train stations and community transport hubs – specifically those undertaken on foot and by bike. Indeed, contrary to providers' priorities, one of the main deterrents to using public transport is the difficulty faced in getting to and from the public transport system. Any strategy to better integrate our public transport network must therefore examine the whole journey concept more thoroughly (including the potential for walking and cycling).
11. Aside from addressing operational issues, true integration will also require a shift in transport policy development. The distinction between transport integration and policy integration is important; and understanding and progressing both is essential to the improvement of the transport system and services it provides.
12. For example, whilst it is true that Wales' rural nature and the dispersed population pose specific challenges in developing a more integrated public transport system, these challenges have been further exacerbated by decades of planning policy assuming universal car ownership. As a result, the location of essential services such as schools, hospitals, employment opportunities, retail outlets and leisure and recreation opportunities have often been planned on the assumption that everyone has access to personal transport, leading to further social exclusion, higher levels of pollution and poorer health outcomes. Access to public services is the subject of an ongoing select committee enquiry in England.⁵
13. To achieve a fully integrated public transport system, integrated transport policy will be essential, and the role of transport in achieving certain goals must be understood and accounted for. However, all too often transport is dismissed as a technical issue and its true impact on a range of policy agendas is at best underestimated and, at worst, ignored. Some steps have been made to address this in Wales, for example a number of government departments and

⁴ Givoni and Bannister, 2010 Integrated transport: From policy to practice

⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/transport-and-the-accessibility-of-public-services/>

external agencies were named as delivery partners in the Walking and Cycling Action Plan 2009 – 2013.⁶

14. The failure of the Action Plan to secure this collaborative approach, along with a host of other factors, has meant many of its ambitious targets have not been achieved, testament to the lack of priority awarded to this important agenda. Stronger integration at the policy level would not only support the more efficient transportation of people and goods, it will also be a means of achieving broader economic, social, environmental and public health goals.
15. In our response to the following two questions we have identified a number of solutions that will address these operational and strategic needs. Specifically, our response to question two identifies policy measures and legislative levers which could be used to ensure a more joined-up approach. In addition, outlined in our response to question three are a number of practical approaches already underway, both in Wales and further afield, that demonstrate how these challenges can be addressed in a cost-effective manner.

How successful are legal, policy and administrative / delivery arrangements in Wales in supporting effective, integrated public transport services that meet the needs of Welsh travellers?

Policy

16. Most actions related to integrated transport take place at the local level, while policy, and often the financial resources required to achieve integrated transport, are decided and allocated at much higher levels. To a certain extent, the establishment of Regional Transport Consortia has facilitated the vertical integration between Welsh Government priorities and local delivery. However, the necessary horizontal integration both between transport providers and across different policy agendas still requires considerable work.
17. From a policy perspective, transport should not be considered a closed system. Rather, transport policy needs to be integrated across sectors and departments of government, so that decisions with respect to environmental, economic and social agendas take full account of necessary transport considerations (and the transport implications). Transport also needs to be placed within wider debates on climate change, energy futures, sustainable development and social cohesion – with thought given to how changes in transport policy could help meet these wider agendas. Whilst the groundwork is increasingly being laid to foster cross-sector approaches to tackling complex issues such as obesity and unemployment in Wales, the task ahead is still daunting, requiring the breaking down of long established, and deeply entrenched, policy silos.

⁶ Welsh Government, 2009 A Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales 2009 – 2013

18. At a national level, transport needs to be considered in a number of overarching strategies, including the Tackling Poverty Strategy, as well as those focussing on positive health outcomes and children and young people's development.
19. At a local level, specific strategic partners should be identified and named as transport delivery partners, including (amongst others) Local Directors of Public Health, Local Education Authorities and Jobcentre Plus. As well as bringing wider local actors into transport decision making, Local Transport Authorities also need to be represented in wider decision making groups.
20. Indeed, in light of these considerations, careful thought needs to be given to how the existing Regional Transport Consortia and the (potential) future Joint Transport Authorities can help to facilitate this horizontal integration of transport considerations, or whether these agencies would further preclude this integration from taking place (particularly within local authorities).
21. The large number of individual grants, and poorly aligned objectives of similar services across different policy areas can also limit the ability of delivery organisations to join up services around users. Welsh Government should consider how moving away from ring-fencing local authority grants and streamlining policy priorities could remove further obstacles to collaboration.

Delivery

22. Many issues can deter users – for example the quality of information and supply chain complexities, service quality and the comfort and transfers between different transport modes. Features of an integrated public transport system include integrated ticketing, harmonised timetables and easily-navigable connections between operators. Therefore an essential component of strategic transport planning should be a general public transport plan dealing with all public transport modes as a basis for network integration. This should include walking and cycling routes.
23. From a delivery perspective, the efficiency of our public transport systems could be significantly improved. In developing Regional Transport Plans, Regional Transport Consortia should undertake a strategic analysis of public transport demand in their area and work with providers to integrate services for passengers travelling by rail, bus, bike or on foot to make more complicated journeys easier.
24. In addition, pooling local authority vehicles across social, health, education and public transport departments could prevent vehicle fleets sitting unused for large chunks of the day whilst travel needs go un-met. Indeed, a number of examples are available where local authorities have used procurement powers and logistical planning to better cater for unmet transport demand,

including Transport for Greater Manchester's Integrated Social Needs Transport Project ⁷ and Oxfordshire County Council's planned 'place-based public transport procurement' scheme.⁸

Governance.

25. The establishment of Joint Transport Authorities in Wales poses an opportunity to integrate further the provision of public transport services in Wales, following the positive examples and models set by Passenger Transport Executives in England (the most effective of which also take responsibility for walking and cycling), whose governance arrangements and structures have created stronger incentives and powers to integrate public transport in their areas. They could also help to ensure better cross-boundary integration of services; particularly important in areas where, due to the post-industrial makeup of the economy in parts of Wales, many are forced to travel outside of their communities to find work.
26. As in Oxfordshire, Quality Partnerships may also be a useful tool in ensuring not just that specific services are provided, but that they are provided to the frequency and capacity needed to encourage modal shift. Equally the High Level Output Specification and Statement of Funds Available processes offer greater authority to the Minister to specify levels of reliability, safety and capacity (of particular importance in Wales). This will hopefully help to overcome some of the constraints being experienced in the current rail franchise agreement.⁹
27. Similarly, a 'not for dividend' model for the Wales rail franchise could deliver real improvements across Wales' rail network. However, given the significant capital investment that will be required and the lack of ready examples from elsewhere in the UK, the feasibility of such an agreement and the likelihood of securing a suitable partner are difficult to estimate.

Investment

28. At a time when access to employment and other services should be a priority, transport budgets are being cut. As a result, transport authorities will tend to focus their efforts on meeting their statutory responsibilities (the National Concessionary Travel Scheme, capital repayments and pensions) before looking at what level of discretionary services they can provide, including level of support for jobseekers, socially necessary bus routes and ring-and-ride services for the less mobile. These cuts are not only predicted to lead to a significant contraction in network coverage in some areas in Wales, but also to an increase in fares that people on a low income can ill afford. Considerable attention should be given to the true impact these cuts will

⁷ <http://www.transportforgreatermanchestercommittee.gov.uk/>

⁸ <http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=4417>

⁹ According to figures from the Office for Rail Regulation, Arriva Trains Wales receives one of the highest levels of public subsidy per passenger mile of any franchise across the UK and severe overcrowding on some routes on the line is creating a poor travelling experience and limiting modal shift opportunities for passengers.

have and mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the most vulnerable are not hardest hit.

29. It is also crucial that existing transport subsidies are targeted to ensure best possible outcomes. For example, the Bus Services Operators Grant, which offsets the cost of the duty that operators pay when purchasing their fuel, has rewarded operators on distance-covered as opposed to the number of passengers served. We welcome the decision of the Welsh Government to consider how this £19 million annual grant could be much better targeted to provide integrated and socially necessary routes.¹⁰ In addition, the £1.5 million annual cost of maintaining the Cardiff–Ynys Mon air-link could be refocused on sustainable transport provision that supports the achievement of wider social and environmental goals.

30. Funding for the Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative is also uncertain, with potentially very serious consequences for lifeline services in Wales.¹¹

31. Crucially, the division of transport budgets into capital and revenue funding streams is dictated centrally by Whitehall. One funding stream cannot be spent on initiatives deemed to fall into the other; as a result, it can be easier to find the money to build roads than to fund many of the projects that would support the better integration of public transport services. To truly address the issue of public transport integration, the Welsh Government should seek the power to define transport budget ratios in Wales.

Legislative opportunities

32. There are a number of pieces of legislation currently underway that pose significant opportunities to the integrated public transport agenda, including the Planning Bill and the Active Travel (Wales) Bill.

33. The Active Travel (Wales) Bill poses an opportunity to require local authorities to link train stations and bus stops with community services and residential areas, via safe and appropriate walking and cycling routes. To achieve this, the Bill should explicitly require local authorities to assess how best walking and cycling routes can be incorporated into existing transport networks in order to open up access.

What steps can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales?

34. Many different approaches can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales. In this section we have highlighted a number of good practice case studies for the Committee to

¹⁰ Figure obtained from Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 23 October 2012 (<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-business-fourth-assembly-written-questions.htm?act=dis&id=239891&ds=10/2012>)

¹¹ Carl Sargeant, Minister for Local Government and Communities, 2012 Written Statement – Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative

consider. Since we have already made the case for walking and cycling to be considered as part of this inquiry, we have also included a number of ways to best achieve this.

Changes to our transport planning and fare structures

35. Planning for a more integrated public transport system will require an understanding of the social reality of communities and how people lead their everyday lives.¹² More participatory methods of involving transport users may enable a better understanding of travel needs, patterns and behaviour and thus sensitise transport to social exclusion issues.

36. In addition, simplified fares structures (small number of charging zones or fare bands) with a common approach across operators, can make ticketing and fares much easier to understand.¹³ The provision of multi-operator tickets (day and season) priced such that they are attractive to significant parts of the market, consistent with revenue/funding requirements, should be considered by Regional Transport Consortia.

Demand Responsive Services

37. Due to dispersed population, low density and difficult terrain, providing effective public transport in rural areas has often been seen as too expensive and too difficult. And the problems associated with rural public transport such as infrequent services, cost of fares, complex routes and inconvenient timetabling have led users to switch to car use. On the supply side commercial operators have withdrawn after finding it difficult to operate a conventional profitable service.¹⁴

38. To tackle the challenges of rural transport, some farsighted local authorities and community groups have challenged conventional public transport structures. Instead, they have developed flexible services operated by both the commercial and voluntary sector which cater for the differing needs and requirements of older people, young people, families, working people and disabled people.

39. Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a more flexible form of bus travel that is tailored to the needs of the passengers by operating in response to pre-booked journey requests. Already well-developed in parts of Europe including Germany and Switzerland it has been successfully implemented by Monmouthshire County Council via its not-for-profit Grass Routes Community Local Bus Service for several years. Over 35,000 passenger journeys are currently undertaken throughout the county per annum on the pre-bookable service, which draws on the services of both paid and volunteer drivers. Passenger numbers are increasing year on year in response to

¹² Booth and Richardson, 2001 Placing the public in integrated transport planning

¹³ PTEG, 2009 The Benefits of Simplified and Integrated Ticketing in Public Transport

¹⁴ Sustrans 2011 Making sustainable transport easier for rural communities

the development of a service which better meets their needs. As a result, the Authority has noted over £80,000 of cost savings through the withdrawal of previously under-utilised routes in favour of their more popular demand-responsive service.¹⁵

40. In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has prioritised providing a flexible transport offer to their more rural communities. In South Ayrshire a ‘menu’ of complementary and subsidised transport services, where existing transport is unavailable, including door to door subsidised taxis, has enabled residents in local villages to access employment, training, education and health related services and opportunities.¹⁶ In Angus, the economic benefits as a result of this more flexible transport offer have included an increase in tourism, generating more trade for crafts and other local cottage industries.¹⁷ Other benefits resulting from the improved access created by the project include increased efficiencies through transport companies pooling resources in service delivery and greater levels of social inclusion.
41. This evidence demonstrates the clear case for any integrated public transport strategy to include demand-responsive transport schemes, particularly for more rural communities. In Wales, a more secure and longer term funding programme for community and demand-responsive transport schemes would enable schemes to improve and gain more visibility in communities.

Information provision

42. In some circumstances adequate public transport connections already exist and the barriers to using these modes of transport are subjective. Indeed, evidence has shown that a lack of information is a major factor preventing use of public transport. This represents significant potential for increased levels of public transport use which could be achieved by better information, improving perceptions of the system, and motivating well-informed people to make changes to public transport. Analysis undertaken by Sustrans in Cardiff found that this could be true for over a quarter (28%) of non-public transport trips³.
43. A number of methods can be used for improving remote and face-to-face access to information about available services. New technology provides means by which real-time information can be used to make better use of existing capacity and has great potential to improve the quality of service, specifically for multimodal transport. Traveline Cymru offers an excellent example of how this can be achieved and offers a highly useful ‘one-stop-shop’ for public transport users. However, the figures from Cardiff demonstrate that knowledge of this service is still not widespread. In addition, more proactive, face-to-face measures have been demonstrated to be more effective in overcoming negative perceptions of public transport.

¹⁵ <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk>

¹⁶ <http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk>

¹⁷ **Social Research 2006** Service priority, accessibility and quality in rural Scotland

44. Sustrans has coordinated a number of Personalised Travel Planning projects that offer people the tailor-made information and support they need to choose to walk, cycle and use public transport more often. Since its early pilots, Personalised Travel Planning projects have increased levels of walking, cycling and public transport use and have reduced car use by an average of 11% simply by making information easily available.¹⁸

Walking and cycling access to ‘hub’ towns

45. A relatively large number of people in rural areas live close to market towns. Smaller communities may only be a few miles from a town centre but there is often little incentive or facilities for individuals to walk or cycle. For example, pedestrians and cyclists have to compete with motor vehicles on busy roads and the experience can be unpleasant and dangerous – particularly for older people and families with children¹⁴. Traffic-free paths from outlying communities to the ‘hub’ town and other measures, such as traffic calming and lower speed limits, can create a safe and attractive route for everyone including the most vulnerable users. Indeed, these paths can make walking and cycling faster, more convenient and cheaper ways of travelling than car travel.

46. An example of where a new walking and cycling path has made an impact on the lives of a rural community is the village Llanyre in mid Wales. Despite being only two and a half miles from the busy market town of Llandrindod Wells in Powys, the only alternative to car use for the residents of Llanyre was to walk or cycle along a very busy main road. Thanks to a grant from the Welsh Government Safer Routes scheme, a new traffic free path is now used frequently by the whole community. At peak times in the morning and evening, the route is occupied by people walking and cycling to school, work or for leisure. The path also links up to the National Cycle Network, linking the town to communities and attractions further afield.

47. Suitably resourced, the Active Travel (Wales) Bill has the potential to open up access for residents in smaller villages, linking these communities to larger towns via traffic-free and on-road routes.

Walking and cycling as part of an integrated public transport system

48. Evidence indicates that by improving walking and cycling facilities and access, thousands of station car trips every day could be replaced, reducing congestion and pollution¹⁹. Indeed, there are potentially enormous benefits to passengers, public transport operators and the wider economy through increasing access to stations for people who walk and cycle. As well as the

¹⁸ Sustrans 2009 TravelSmart Project Review

¹⁹ Passenger Focus 2010 National Rail Station Improvement Programme Final Report

wider social benefits of improved health, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and reduced traffic congestion associated with sustainable transport, the local economy can benefit too²⁰.

49. Moreover, safe walking and cycling routes to bus stops and train stations not only encourage greater take-up of services by local residents, they can also expand the catchment areas of existing services. This is particularly true for the provision of cycling routes to railway stations, where improving access can result in passenger catchments up to four times their original size without the land-take and management issues associated with car travel.²¹
50. In addition, increased levels of walking and cycling substantially improve overall journey time reliability – a major factor in instigating modal shift⁴. There is also strong evidence that improvements to walking, cycling and the local environment are effective in making pleasant places to live, work and shop, attracting business investment²⁰. Indeed, evidence suggests that investment in improving access for existing cyclists and attracting new users delivers better value for money and more rapid returns in comparison to car parking.
51. Despite these clear benefits, vast differences remain in the levels of provision for passengers, pedestrians and cyclists between the different interchanges in Wales²². SWWITCH recently undertook an audit of cycling provision at its major railway stations, which could then be used to inform an action plan that would improve regional consistency. The audit found varying levels of provision and recommended a standardised approach be adopted at each station, to include the following: a station map, area map, a list of key attractions and services (including local cycle parking facilities) and a consistent system of signage. Community engagement was also strongly recommended, recognised as being valuable in gaining local support and in ensuring that the proposals were fit for purpose.
52. Sustrans recently worked with the Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG) to assess value for money of improving cycle access to stations. Our analysis identified a wide range of benefits arising from improving access and parking at railways stations and encouraging modal shift away from car use, including substantial economic benefits through decongestion and carbon reductions. The estimated benefit to cost ratio was 8.8:1. And when health benefits were included the ratio was found to increase to 12:1. To achieve these shifts better storage provision, segregated or traffic-calmed cycle routes, well-lit walking environments and better signing and road traffic management will be needed.²³

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²⁰ Bristol City Council 2011 Essential Evidence on a page: No 68: Spend on high streets according to travel mode

²¹ Department for Transport 2010 Cycling and public transport

²² SWWITCH 2011 SWWITCH Interchange walking, cycling and signage audit

²³ Sustrans 2011 Cycling in the city regions