

PET(4)-09-12 : Tuesday 29 May 2012

P-04-380 : Bring back our bus! Petition against the removal of scheduled bus services from east Lampeter, Cwmann & Pencarreg

Response from Sharon McNamara

The attached documents state, like most correspondence which I have been involved in and as is consistently reiterated at public meetings and within the media, that: Local Authority Councils were forced to allow the Commercial registration of Arriva, because of Welsh Assembly & Welsh Government transport policy. Conversely, Welsh Assembly and Welsh Government representatives insist that Local Authority has responsibility for local transport issues, "in the main". This argument is tautological and subsequently, devalued. Insofar as myself and others are concerned, it is an argument which appears to be a smokescreen, which prevents anyone taking responsibility for the disastrous outcome as regards adequate transport provision in rural areas like ours; the direct result of this transport policy implementation.

Given the Transport Acts 1985 & 2006 and the implications for rural area transport provision, the question may well be asked: Why did the Local Authorities & the Welsh Government collude in allowing the Commercial Registration and subsequent monopolization of an essential service, at all? In their response, the Committee might consider the fact that Arriva is a company which has proved consistently to be non-communicative over its service operations, proved itself unable to operate within its new contractual undertakings and which, in removing return-journey tickets and increasing fares, is pricing itself out of the market and putting prohibitive cost onto service dependents, like parents who now have to pay double to ensure that their children can fulfil their legal obligation to attend school.

Regarding the issue of restricted transport budget finances and the desire to end state funding via subsidy, the committee might consider the following: If people are unable to travel into their workplaces and they do not drive, they are likely to move home, or indeed, be forced to cease work. This means that their spending power is diminished, with less money injected into the local economies. It also has implications for house prices & demand. Cribyn has an increasing population, with many children; it also has a sizable older population. Both relied on the former scheduled service and have now been adversely affected by the implemented changes to transport service provision. It seems to me that the actual consequences of policy are being given little or no consideration. The elected representatives responsible for decision-making either drive, or live in areas where there is street lighting, pavements, cycle lanes and a regular bus and train service. They appear un-empathic regarding daily life in non-urban areas and, I believe, this renders them ultimately unqualified in determining policy, the impact of which is almost entirely negative. Rural areas like ours are a special case because of our inherent lack of infrastructure.

Bwcabus is regularly cited as the solution to the problems arising from the scheduled service cessation. As a service user however, I can confidently state that any new uptake in the use of this dial-a-ride service is the result of pure necessity; many other people are disregarding the service entirely. People dislike this form of 'monitored' travel whereby they need to have their demographic recorded in order to be able to access essential transport. They dislike having to live pre-booked lives, whereby every aspect of spontaneity and independence of travel is removed from them and, speaking for myself, I dislike having to spend hours at an unwanted destination prior to going to work, purely because Bwcabus cannot transport me at my required time, as a scheduled service could. Given that Bwcabus is a conception from the University of Glamorgan, it would seem pertinent to ask what U.G. is doing with the data gleaned from recorded Bwcabus passenger carriage. For example: is this being used as a barometer of demographic travel needs in rural areas, on which to base future transport policy? If so, then the picture it presents will be inherently flawed.

In a time of decreased availability of public money, there are concerns about the funding that the Bwcabus service has received. £1.5 million + is the figure stated on the promotional literature. For this

money, there are rented 4 buses from the 2 bus companies involved. There are the wages of the drivers and running costs of the vehicle. A high-tech communications system is lauded in the promotions but in point of fact: the drivers rely on their personal i-phones to receive information from the call center - which is non-locally based in north Wales - because they are regularly out of signal range for the bus GTS to work.

Regarding Bycabus efficiency, the buses regularly spend a sizable part of their day parked up and empty, waiting for their appointed bookers; my driver had his last solo passenger at 16.15 and then had to park up until my booking at 18.45, when I was, as usual, the sole passenger. Given that there were no bookings for the 1.75hrs in between these times, one wonders why 'availability' or to be more precise, the professed lack of, meant that I had to wait, post-shift, an hour before being transported home.

We are advised that the parties involved in the dial-a-ride bus franchise AKA Bycabus are: Carmarthen County Council, Ceredigion County Council and Glamorgan University and we would like therefore, to ask: who is actually receiving money from the transport grant funding and for what? This information should be made available and interests publicly declared.

It is noted that there is the intention to bring in a 'Service Quality Guide' to assess the transport provision in rural Wales; it would be hoped that relevant factors such as the sub-standard vehicles currently being used by Arriva, illegally high road speeds travelled at - in order to comply with unrealistic schedule targets - and a grossly inflated fare-pricing system, will be factors considered.

Thank You for allowing my comments & I hope that these and others provided prior to the hearing, will be given all due consideration.