



Buses for People not Profit

Background information



In Flintshire, over the last few years we have seen bus companies collapse or cut routes that they deem no longer commercially viable, this has increased greatly over the last year. **One bus operator made 14 changes to their services in one year**, and we were unable to keep up with the all these in order to update all the bus stops, which then impacts on passengers confidence in using the bus transport. Another pulled out of a core network route and **when we offered to double the subsidy we were told that we wouldn't be able to afford what was required and to go out to tender. When we did they asked for a six figure sum which was over ten times the subsidy we were previously paying and a third of our budget for the whole of public bus transport subsidies in Flintshire.** They were

the only ones who put in a price for the route and it ended up being terminated. Being a core route it impacted greatly on many residents wanting to access the rail network, employment, education and medical appointments. It was difficult for us to understand why it was not commercially viable and it highlighted that **there is a lack of operators to create a market.**

Residents have been rightly upset, angry and frustrated. They sent in petitions to the Council and demanded we attend community meetings which were very traumatic.

With limited funds, staff resources and powers we have been limited in where we can help.

However, we continued to consult to find out what service would best suit residents and where they need to travel from and to, and for what purpose. We listened to their views regarding timetables, discussed the merits of scheduled services and demand responsive and asked them to fill in questionnaires.

We have tried to fill gaps in services wherever possible and directed them to other services where available but they didn't like having to connect to an onward journey.



In one instance we put together a new timetable around the hours best suited to residents to ensure a full bus, **and no operator bided for the service**. We had to hire a taxi minibus and a taxi so the residents were not isolated. This caused issues for a disabled resident who needed step on step off access and sometimes there were not enough seats for everyone. We also soon learned that many residents bring shopping trolleys and have slight mobility problems regarding hips and knees **so level access was really important**.

We were very grateful when an operator offered to step in with one of the Welsh Government grant funded buses used for Deeside Industrial Park utilising it at off peak times and swapping it for one of the mini buses.



At the consultation events we attended **most of the people were sixty plus, the majority did not use the internet and wanted a scheduled service**, not demand responsive. They were worried about social isolation, not being able to get to medical appointments, or able to go shopping, they wanted stability. **Some people were in tears and it was heartbreaking**.

Providing a bus service helps people stay physically and mentally fit and independent in their own homes longer.



At the meetings we explained that although the **Council kept £500k in the budget** for subsidising public bus transport **to match fund the £500k from Welsh Government (via the BSSG)**, it wasn't enough to replace all the routes that were being cut. A bus route can cost between £200k and £300k, this shocked and surprised them. Time and time again the social, health and well being impact was raised.

I know that funding comes from the Environment service area regarding access to employment, education and social activities. However, the impact on health is a huge part of providing a public bus service and residents wanted to do something to help me raise this with Welsh Government.



It is because of this that I set up the petition not only to Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport but also to the Minister for Health and social services Vaughan Gething.

“The petition calls up Welsh Government to regulate commercial bus service operators and give powers and funding to Local Authorities to run services that best suit the needs of local people. As well as providing access to employment and education, public transport is a social, health and wellbeing issue which is growing as bus services are being rapidly reduced, affecting the mental and physical health and well being of many residents who will become socially isolated and unable to get to basic services.”



In Flintshire, three years ago, we knew there was an issue regarding the sustainability of the public bus service and we could not keep increasing subsidies while also having to deliver efficiencies as a result of decreasing Council funding so developed a strategy. We held a wide consultation with Councillors, Town and Community Councils and residents. The plan was to have a core network and feed into it with Local Travel Arrangements adapted to meet the needs of the local communities. Questionnaires were completed and analysed and new timetables put together, it was very time consuming and extensive.

Following this, we started a now very popular medical appointments transport initiative and some local transport arrangements.

However, the goalposts changed when operators started pulling out of the core network and we were unable to continue and cover all the extra routes, we just did not have enough financial or officer resources.

During the consultation, it was revealed that many residents prefer to travel to town in the morning on a scheduled service. This would be viable because of peak numbers at peak times, then a demand responsive service could be offered around hours in the afternoon and help those travelling to and from work.

(We use Community Benefit to help with the provision of the Medical Appoints transport service. Taxi and bus operators who bid for school transport give some miles as Community Benefit. Residents pay an annual £10 administration fee and 50p per mile which is subsidised.)



Community Ring & Ride Service

Providing assistance in travelling to
GP Appointments, Hospital Appointments
and other Health related Appointments



I also met with the **youth council** who highlighted that **not all young people have a smart phone** and the prospect of learning to drive or owning a car is a distant dream. I told them about the **young person's saver concessionary pass which they were unaware of**. I also learned that some people **with mobility issues** did not realise they could apply for a concessionary pass, **they thought they were just for older people**.

We need to have **integrated ticketing** so that one ticket can be used between different operators and also that services should integrate with the rail network. In many places across Europe and the world, it is possible to plan a journey smoothly and seamlessly using various modes of transport with easily available online information.

I am aware that the Welsh Government is moving towards Improving Public Transport and has introduced a public transport bill; I hope this petition supports their aims.

However, funding needs to back up legislation and one solution does not fit all there has to be a pick and mix solution between Enhanced Quality Partnerships along the Core network, Franchising with guaranteed long term investment of at least 5 years and contract bundles with some social benefit to less commercially viable routes. Plus local authorities should also be able to bid for funding to operate in areas for social and health benefit but not profit related.

Local Authorities have been cut to the bone over the last 10 years. In Flintshire we have restructured and made efficiencies, we also work in collaboration across Authorities sharing resources. Staff have been cut by 40%, but demands on services, especially social health care has increased. One of our Waste & Recycling Manager helped out with the bus consultation and review! In Flintshire, since being a Cabinet member, I have fought hard to keep £500k for bus subsidies in place, I have set bus transport as a priority in our Council plan, but I know other Authorities have cut them and they will find it hard to put the funds back in the budget with further unfunded legislation and inflation forecast.

Twenty five percent of the population in Wales are totally dependant on public transport as their only means of transport and would be isolated without it.

Most elderly people at the events suggested paying a nominal fee.

I hope you find this information useful and if you require any more, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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