

TGWU response to National Assembly's Policy Review of Public Transport

The Transport and General Workers Union is delighted to make a formal response to the Consultation Report on the National Assembly's Policy Review of Public Transport. The TGWU is the largest Transport Union in Wales representing thousands of people working within Wales public transport systems. We also represent transport workers outside of public transport including those employed within Road Haulage, Civil Air Transport and Docks and Waterways.

Our response focuses on the 14 recommendations contained within the report and is outlined below.

Recommendation 1: that a quality kite mark be developed as part of the work being undertaken on quality partnerships and contracts, initially covering bus services, and extended to include community transport, rail, and other modes.

We welcome the development of quality partnerships in Wales, and the recommendation of the Consultation Report of the possibility of developing a quality standard or kite mark. However, we believe that in the rest of the UK there will be a move towards introducing quality contracts in the next few years as in Scotland. We therefore believe that it would be more beneficial to introduce quality contracts now rather than introducing quality standards or kite marks.

Recommendation 2: that the National Assembly, local authorities and transport operators should address historic levels of under investment in public transport.

We agree that it is important that the historic levels of under investment are addressed. However, it is also important to recognise that there has also been massive under investment in the education and training of the employees who work in the industry. Also since deregulation of the industry the 'real' earnings of employees has declined, and unless this is redressed there will not be the required number or quality of employees and the proposed improvements will not be achieved.

Recommendation 3: that the National Assembly and local authorities working together with operators, passengers and other stakeholders take forward these priorities as funding allows.

We are in general agreement with the key items highlighted for future priority, as funding allows, and we would support the call by the Welsh Consumer Council for an all Wales group to represent bus users. However, we could only support this proposal, along with any establishment of an overarching group to cover all modes of public transport, if all the relevant trade unions were represented on these bodies. The omission of any reference to employees and their representatives when discussing other stakeholders in this section of the Consultation Report is a matter of grave concern to us. The success of these priorities will be dependent to a large extent on the effectiveness of the consultation and involvement of the people who work in the industry, and their representatives.

Recommendation 4: that local authorities prepare regional public transport strategies by April 2003 reflecting bus strategies (which are a statutory requirement) and including developments on rail and community transport. These should be prepared on a regional basis to reflect travel patterns insofar as possible.

At our last Biannual Delegate Conference we supported the involvement of our members both as employees and also those involved in local politics to actively engage in the development of Local Transport plans. The integration of all types of all modes of transport will be needed to ensure the needs of different communities are serviced. In rural areas especially we do believe that accessibility will be a key issue along with affordability.

We welcome the growing trend of public accountability and ownership in state and local state supported bus services, and to re-establish public control over local public transport. We therefore would be supportive of integration of services across local authority boundaries, and that all-regional consortium should follow this path of action.

Recommendation 5: that regional transport strategies should guide decisions on funding made by the National Assembly and such investment should be targeted alongside local authorities' own investment to achieve maximum effect. Additional expenditure on transport would be justified only on this basis and where results can be monitored and evaluated.

We agree that it should be the role of the National Assembly to set the overall vision for and provide leadership for public transport in Wales. That the regional transport strategies should guide decisions on funding made by the National Assembly. However, we believe that investment on buses provided by the National Assembly should be linked, if possible, to the introduction of quality contracts, rather than quality partnerships.

Recommendation 6: that each consortium agrees with partners, including the National Assembly, how objectives in the regional public transport strategies will be delivered, taking into account linkages with Local Transport Plans including cross-border travel patterns) and the availability of funding.

We agree that the development of improved public transport ultimately rests with the local authorities in their role as transport authorities, and that they cannot work in isolation to ensure that a comprehensive transport system is provided.

The existing voluntary regional consortia initiatives are supported but we believe it is time to establish these on a formal basis, ensuring that they have adequate resources to carry out their role.

Recommendation 7: that local authorities consider how they would establish more robust regional consortia building on existing arrangements so that the National Assembly's vision and regional public transport strategies can be implemented, taking account of local needs and the availability of resources.

The suggestion that “compacts” be drawn up between local authorities within the consortia and National Assembly is generally welcomed. However, the Consultation Report states that these agreements would need to cover the role of all partners (including bus and railway companies) and the decision making and accountability roles of local authorities within the consortia. We would want to assured that any such mechanism would enshrine meaningful involvement and consultations of employees.

Recommendation 8: that as part of this consideration local authorities and the National Assembly Cabinet should consider how individual authorities under relevant legislation, e.g. Best Value, would be affected and whether there is the possibility of using existing legislation to place consortia on a statutory basis.

We would welcome putting consortia on a statutory basis, subject to the reservations in the previous response.

Recommendation 9: that the National Assembly Cabinet considers with local authorities how it should be represented on each consortium and agree the remit of its representatives.

We agree with this recommendation but would like to see employee representatives sit on these consortia as a right.

Recommendation 10: that the consortia raise their profile amongst passengers by developing their own “branding” linked to quality services.

Experience from other areas of the country has taught us that if we are to get people out of cars and onto buses then reliability and the safety of all stages of the journey undertaken by public transport, is a key factor. This requires having properly trained and motivated staffs that will be able to provide that service and make passengers feel safe and secure. We feel there is no point in improving the branding of public transport until theses issue are addressed.

Recommendation 11: that the National Assembly and local authorities agree on evaluation framework for measuring the benefits of targeted public transport investment at national, regional and local levels, focused on delivering improvements and avoiding future mistakes.

We agree that it is essential that all investment in public transport policies and programmes are monitored effectively. But monitoring should also take place to ensure that all the transport operators make an reasonable economic contribution to delivering improvements, the main costs should not fall on the local authorities

Recommendation 12: that evaluation results of public transport policies, programmes and individual schemes across Wales be collected as a body of evidence of ‘what works in Wales’ over time, providing a base for future policy development.

We agree with this proposal provided the 'evidence' is publicly available.

Recommendation 13: that passengers be involved in drawing up the evaluation frameworks, and involved early on in evaluating individual public transport schemes.

Passengers, are users of the service, and therefore have an import part to play in the evaluation framework. But the people who work in the industry have an important contribution to make to the evaluation framework. We would therefore want to see employees formally involved in the evaluation of public transport schemes.

Recommendation 14: that all those involved in planning and implementing public transport policy in Wales should learn about what does and doesn't work elsewhere, and consider how we can learn from this in developing more effective public service in Wales.

We would agree with this recommendation provided that employees are fully involved in obtaining and assessing any public transport policy.

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