



Sustaining accessibility across rural Wales

1. Context

1.1 Promoting sustainable approaches to development and well being, is a cross cutting theme in all current Assembly Government policy. This approach therefore means that these guiding principles should apply to **all** parts of Wales and permeate through **all** aspects of life.

1.2 It is therefore not unreasonable for those living in rural areas to expect reasonable parity with those living in urban areas in terms of the provision of services and certainly not be disadvantaged nor discriminated against simply because the communities in which they live are more isolated, less sparsely populated, or the provision of services is either problematic or expensive. Overcoming the difficulties of accessibility and mobility in rural areas are classic examples of the need to find innovative and cost effective solutions to these challenges rather than assuming that their resolution are too difficult. Accessibility is a key requirement for anyone living or working in rural Wales and taking the easy option of reducing or downscaling provision, should never be considered the preferred solution.

1.3 CPRW believes that people in sparsely populated rural areas of Wales, no matter what their age or background should have reasonable access to a range of cost-effective alternatives to the private motor cars to meet their travel needs. We believe there is no justification for rural public transport to be inefficient, infrequent or unpopular, when cost effective and innovative alternatives can be provided. If the establishment of Sustainable Transport Towns is a key aim for the current Assembly Government, **A Sustainable Rural Transport Network** should be the challenge for the next!

1.4 CPRW therefore encourages the Welsh Assembly Government, public service providers and Local Authorities to all work together to roll out new approaches to the provision of public transport in the rural areas of Wales. **“On-demand”** local and community transport services tailored to the needs of passengers, delivering them to local towns, villages or hubs along a main bus service route provide the key to this step change in rural transport provision. The range of existing rural community transport services and in particular the innovative Bwcabus¹ Transport Project in the Teifi Valley, are all exemplars of ways of providing a practical means of access and mobility to people living in rural areas .

¹ The Bwcabus concept has been developed by the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan. The delivery of this project has been a model for successful partnership between the WTRC, Carmarthenshire County Council, Ceredigion County Council, Traveline Cymru and private bus operator Richards Brothers.

2. CPRW therefore advocates that your Party

2.1 Promotes and realistically supports programmes of quality, cost effective and innovative community based transport services in rural areas.

2.2 At a time when rural patronage of conventional bus services is generally in decline and when there are tough financial public spending pressures, we believe that cost-effective services that meet the needs of an area are crucial from an both an economic and social point of view. Sustainable Rural Transport services such the range of community transport schemes and in particular the Bwcabus network illustrate the way in which essential service can be provided while relieving the burden on the public purse.

2.2 Launched in August 2009, Bwcabus now provides

- An on-demand local bus service tailored to the needs of rural villages in the Teifi Valley, delivering them to local towns, villages or hubs along the corridor between Carmarthen and Cardigan.
- A money saving alternative to traditional services, with vehicles going only where they are needed and where passengers are waiting²
- An environmentally friendly and cost effective alternative to car travel, reducing the costs of travel typically to 16p per mile, compared to comparable car journey costs of 50p per mile.
- Seamlessly integrated daily travel options to people who once had to rely on sporadic services³
- A 45% Increase in passenger demand for travel by public transport.

2.3 The innovation that Bwcabus provides is not just high technology but a different approach to service provision, including new vehicles, guaranteed connections and greater choice of travel times. Similarly the implementation of this scheme has shown how industry, government and academia can work together to implement radical ideas and workable solutions to sustainable transport in rural Wales. CPRW believes that the next Welsh Assembly Government, using European Convergence Funds, should roll out and expand Bwcabus 2 in partnership with relevant County Councils, into other areas of Rural Wales.

2.4. CPRW also recognises that this model has potential to provide a sustainable transport alternative to the private car in popular tourist areas. If developed in this way and in conjunction with other community transport services, the funds from these services could help underwrite each other and hence provide opportunities for the provision of a network of cost effective year round rural transport services.

² Under the scheme, if passengers want to be picked up for a morning journey they phone a bilingual call centre by 8pm the evening before. Journeys can be booked up to 28 days in advance.

³ The project has won Best Partnership category at the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport Awards 2010 and won the Most Innovative Transport Project category at the National Transport Times Awards in August 2010.