

Report on Bus Services in Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney

May 2022



DAWN BOWDEN MS
Standing up for Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney

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01 Introduction

Reliable bus services are vital for many constituents in order to go about their daily business – shopping, medical appointments, travel to work, education and leisure trips.

As was stated by the Welsh Government in 2021 in “Llwybr newydd -the Wales Transport Strategy”:

“Our transport system is one of the most important national assets we have. It connects people to one another, binds communities together and enables businesses to grow and expand. It’s one of the most powerful and dynamic tools for community cohesion, social justice and inclusive economic growth that we possess.

“We need an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system. This means one that is good for people and communities, good for the environment, good for the economy and places and supports a thriving Welsh language and culture”.

We know that in Merthyr Tydfil we have benefitted from a new bus station as a part of this strategy. The Metro improvements are making steady progress. The key is to have a reliable network of buses to help link this all together.

The Strategy also states :

“We recognise the vital role that local authorities in Wales play in transport. We will support local authorities in planning for, and delivering, transport services and networks in their local areas, including improving bus services, supporting active travel, COVID-19 recovery and community transport initiatives”.

In relation to buses the Strategy states the aim is:

“A stable and coherent network of bus services that are fully integrated with other modes of public transport that are reliable, affordable, flexible, easy to use, low carbon and encourage more people to use the bus rather than their cars”.

My survey shows there is much more to do in order to realise this ambition in the Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney constituency. I will work with all relevant partners to help secure improvements for users of our local bus network.

Ambitious Plans

02

The Welsh Government is delivering ambitious plans to improve public transport. This is happening through investment in the Metro system that involves new trains, better co-ordination with bus services and improved infrastructure for passengers.

Investment in Transport Support Grant enables local councils to invest in and co-ordinate local services, however a decade of Tory cuts and austerity saw the funding support for local buses put under great pressure.

The aim is however to make public transport a far more attractive travel option that can meet far wider objectives relating to the need to tackle climate change and ensure carbon reduction across our communities.

In setting the Welsh Budget for 2022/23 it was stated that:

“The purposes for bus support differ slightly. While demand was still below pre-pandemic levels, the Welsh Government reports the objective of the funding was to: “...support the bus industry maintain and improve levels of service provision to meet evolving passenger demand and enable operators and passengers to use the network safely through the transitional period as the country recovers from the pandemic.”

Source: Welsh Government Bus Services Consultation Document (<https://bit.ly/3iHv6eB>)

On 31st March 2022, the Welsh Government published its Bus White Paper. This marks a key step towards a new model for running buses in Wales and a chance for us look at what Wales needs from its public transport services.

The Welsh Government will now work closely with local government, the bus industry and passengers on a proposed franchising model that aims to eventually deliver one network, one timetable and one ticket.

As part of this work, a 12 week public consultation is now open for people across Wales to have their say on how the new system is designed. You can take part here:

<https://bit.ly/3KnK1qJ>

Ahead of this legislative reform, ‘Bus Cymru’ sets out a detailed route map for how we want to improve all aspects of bus service provision for passengers. This includes infrastructure, road allocation, accessibility, integration with other public transport modes, and, more widely, how we can bring about positive change by working with our partners in local government and the bus industry.

03

Transport For Wales (TfW)

TfW was set up in 2016 to oversee the improvements to our rail and transport system. In the initial phase TfW set out to improve the facilities used by passengers and to ensure the transfer of the rail franchise from the former Arriva services to TfW happened smoothly.



In March 2020, TfW “took ownership of the Aberdare, Coryton, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Treherbert lines, as well as the City line between Cardiff and Radyr from Network Rail”.

In February 2021, during the Coronavirus pandemic, “Transport for Wales group” was created as a wholly owned not-for-profit company by the Welsh Labour Government.

As part of the TfW group - Transport for Wales Rail (Itd) was set up to take over the running of the Wales and Borders rail network from KeolisAmey.

This has secured the future of services and the ongoing investment plans.

The investment will include the ambitious multi-million-pound project South Wales Metro project. The South Wales Metro will be an integrated network of bus, rail and active travel (walking and cycling) that will improve connectivity and make sustainable travel easier across South Wales.

TfW is investing more than £730m to transform the valley lines to Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Coryton, electrifying 172 km of track and upgrading infrastructure to enable improved journey times and more trains every hour.



By December 2023, TfW are going to run an extra 285 (29%) more services every weekday, including improvements on the Ebbw Vale, Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines

All these improvements will help to achieve the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – driving prosperity, improving the cohesion of Welsh and Border communities and contributing to a healthier and more equal Wales”.

See appendix one for more information on TfW investment and improvements.

Local Councils 04

Our local councils carry an important responsibility for bus services. Within their Budgets they also have some flexibility for the services they will subsidise.

Local authorities are able to:

- ✓ Secure the provision of such public transport services as they consider appropriate to meet any public transport requirements which would not otherwise be met.
- ✓ Enter into an agreement providing for service subsidies where the service in question would not be provided, or would not be provided to a particular standard, without subsidy.
- ✓ Establish a Quality Partnership Scheme and a Quality Contract Scheme, subject to the commencement of the relevant legislation.
- ✓ Make ticketing schemes.
- ✓ Reimburse bus operators for providing concessionary travel when the passenger is issued with a concessionary travel permit (as required by the Transport Act 2000).
- ✓ Determine what local bus information should be made available to the public and the way in which it should be made available”.

Source: Senedd Finance Committee - Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Second Supplementary Budget 2021-22 (<https://bit.ly/3iDHHJv>)

05 The Pandemic

Prior to the pandemic over 100 million passenger journeys were made by bus in Wales, more than on trains.



The recent pandemic had a major impact on all bus services and the Welsh Government had to intervene to ensure that essential bus journeys could be maintained, even if subject to restrictions on passenger numbers due to public health concerns.

In many ways the pandemic exposed, and is an important reminder, about the number of people who depend upon reliable bus services and the huge inconvenience caused when they services are disrupted or lost.

06 Constituents Concerns

It became increasingly clear from the casework in my constituency office that a “drill down” was required in order to provide constituents with an opportunity to let me know their views and opinions about bus services in the Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney constituency.



Over the last few months, hundreds of constituents took part in my bus passengers survey and others joined Gerald Jones MP and myself to share your concerns in person.

It is clear that there is a growing sense of resentment and dissatisfaction at the way our services are being run in both Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. Whilst the survey has now ended, my campaign continues.

The response to this survey suggests to me that the findings are robust, especially when considered alongside other more anecdotal evidence from conversations with constituents.

I also thank Bus Users UK for visiting Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney in late March to hear directly about the experience of local bus services. Read more about the work of Bus Users UK [here](#).

This is what you told me:

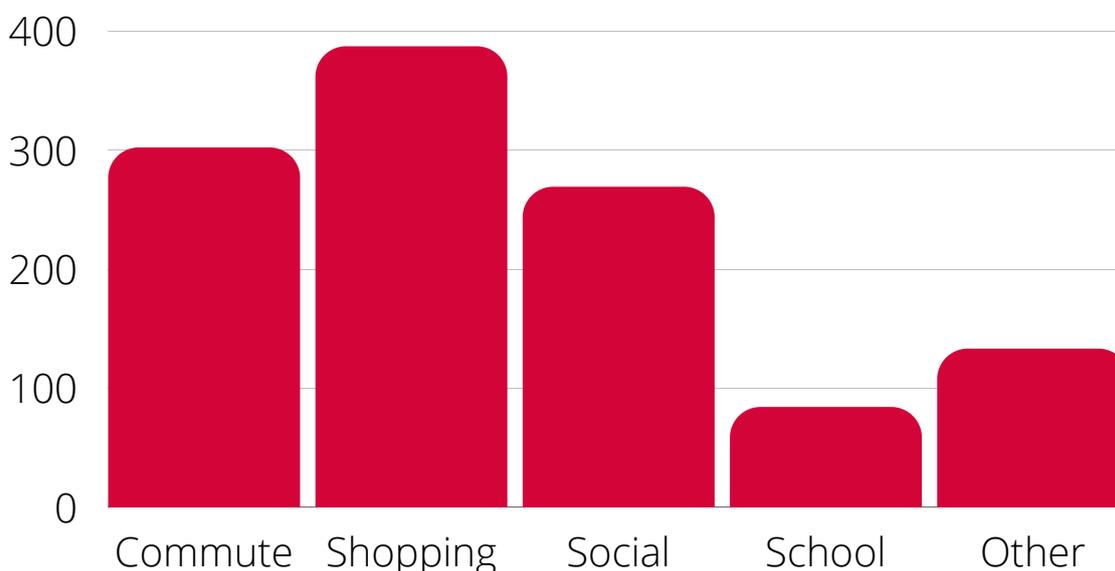
741

**RESIDENTS
TOOK PART**

688

**HAVE SEEN NO
IMPROVEMENTS
IN BUS SERVICES**

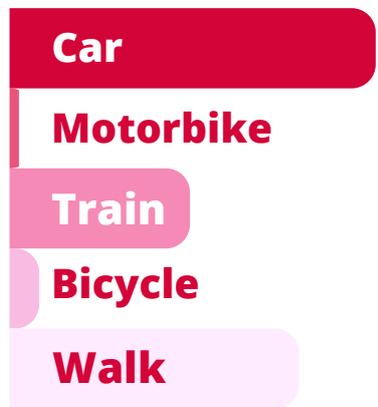
For what Purpose do Residents use buses?



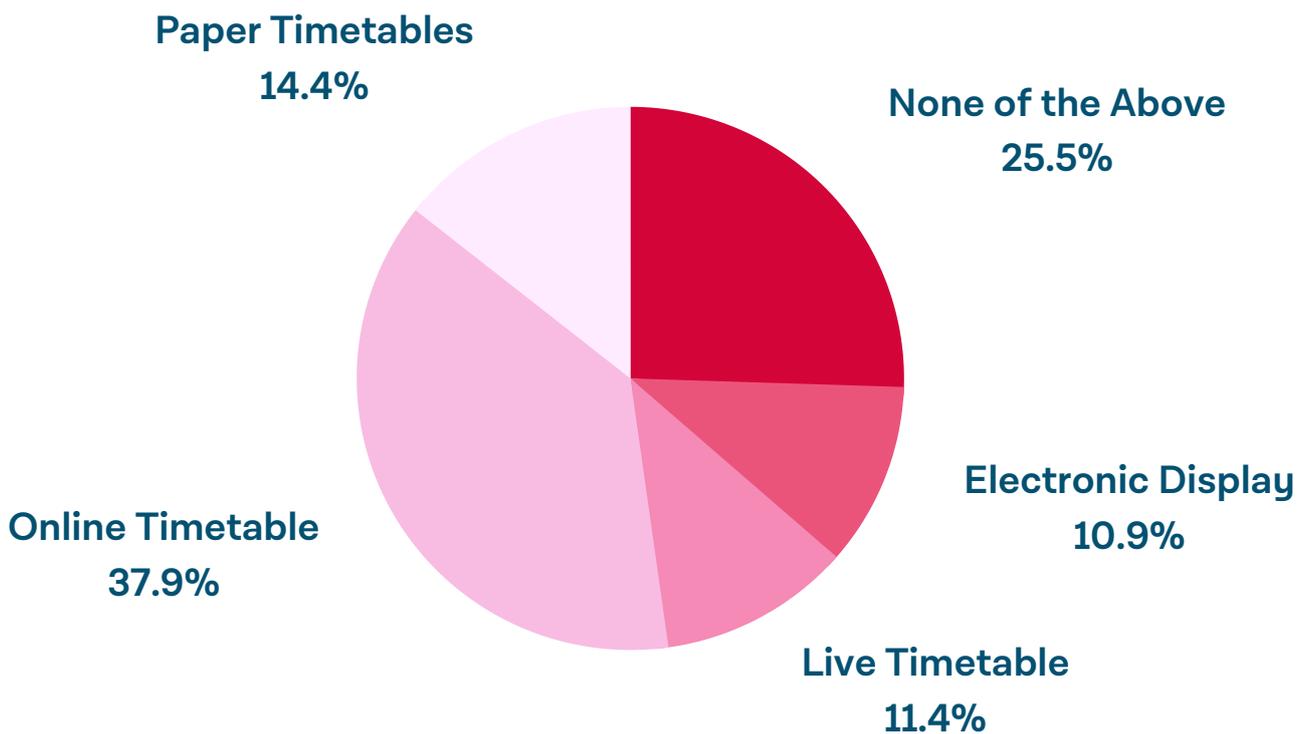
Residents that use other forms of transport



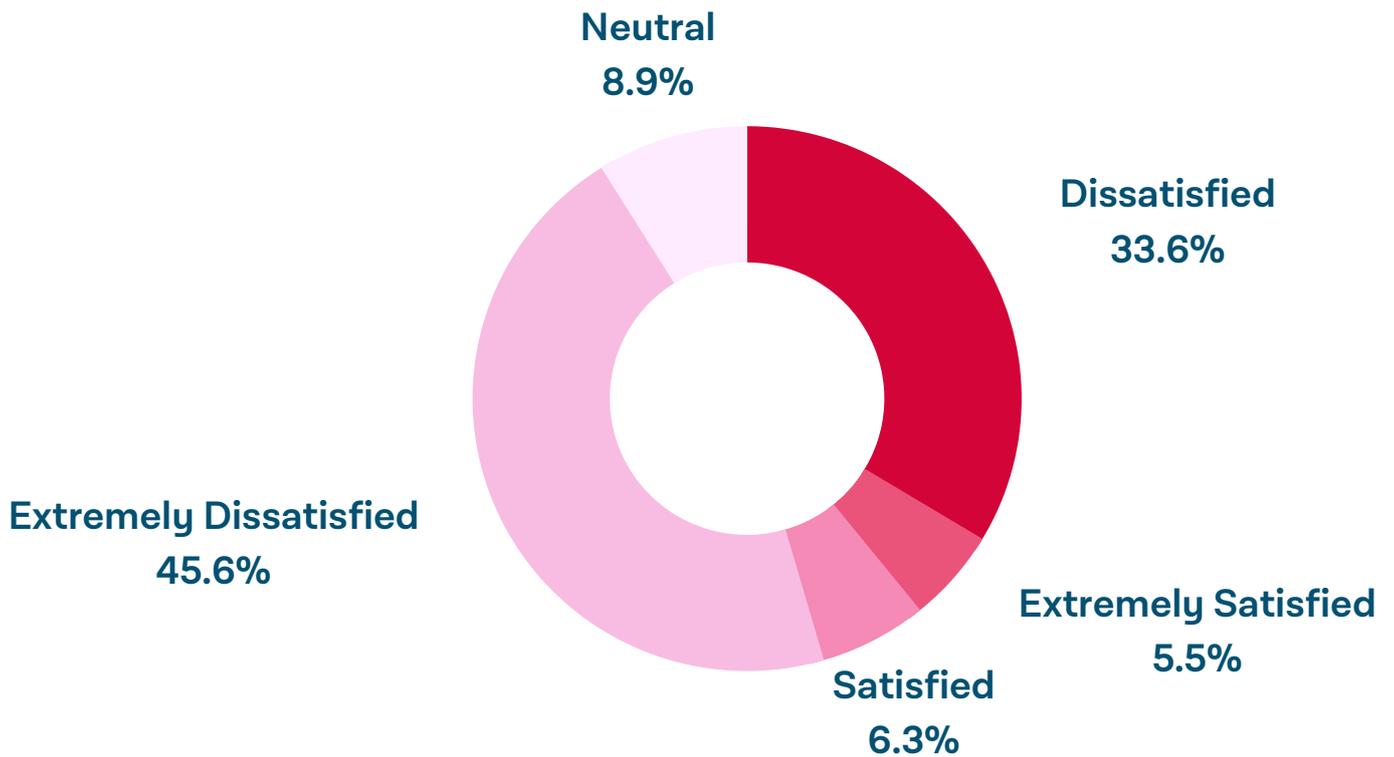
Alternative transport available



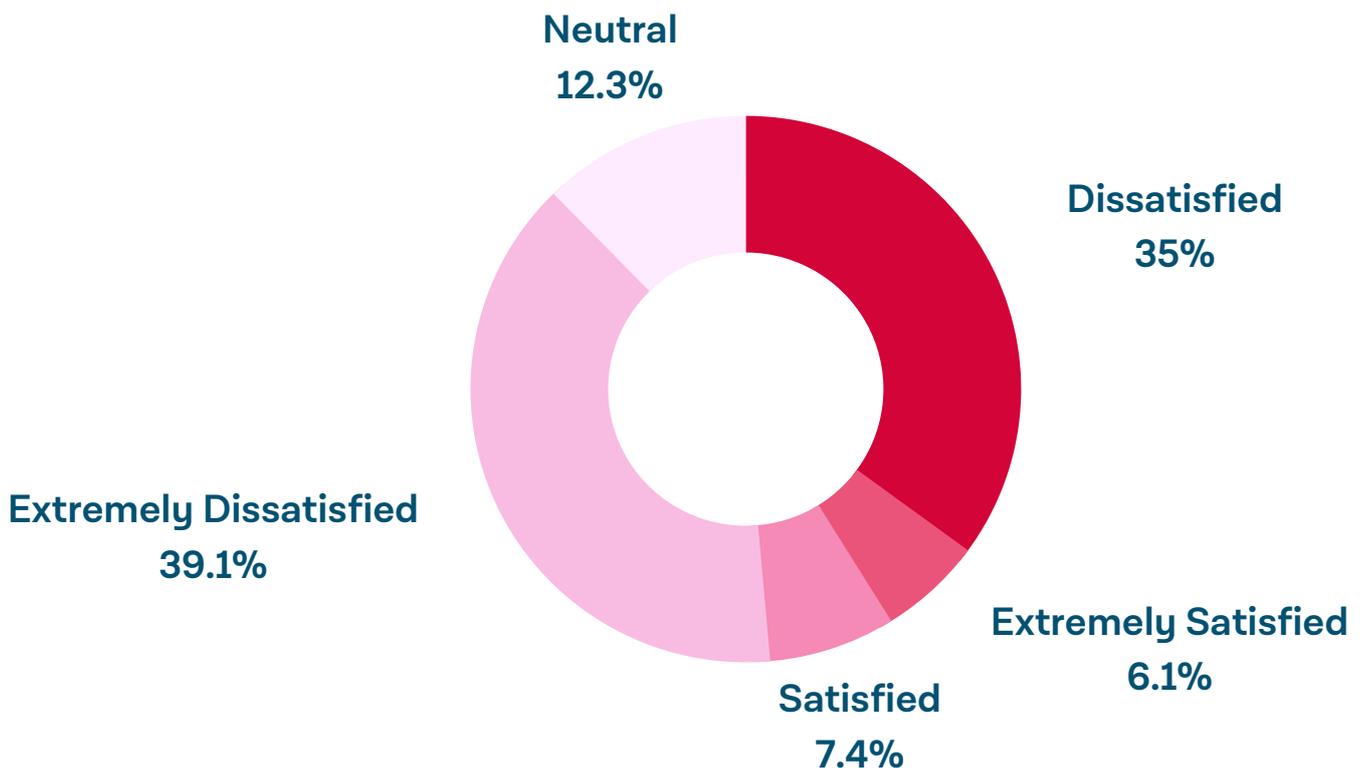
Resources at Bus Stops



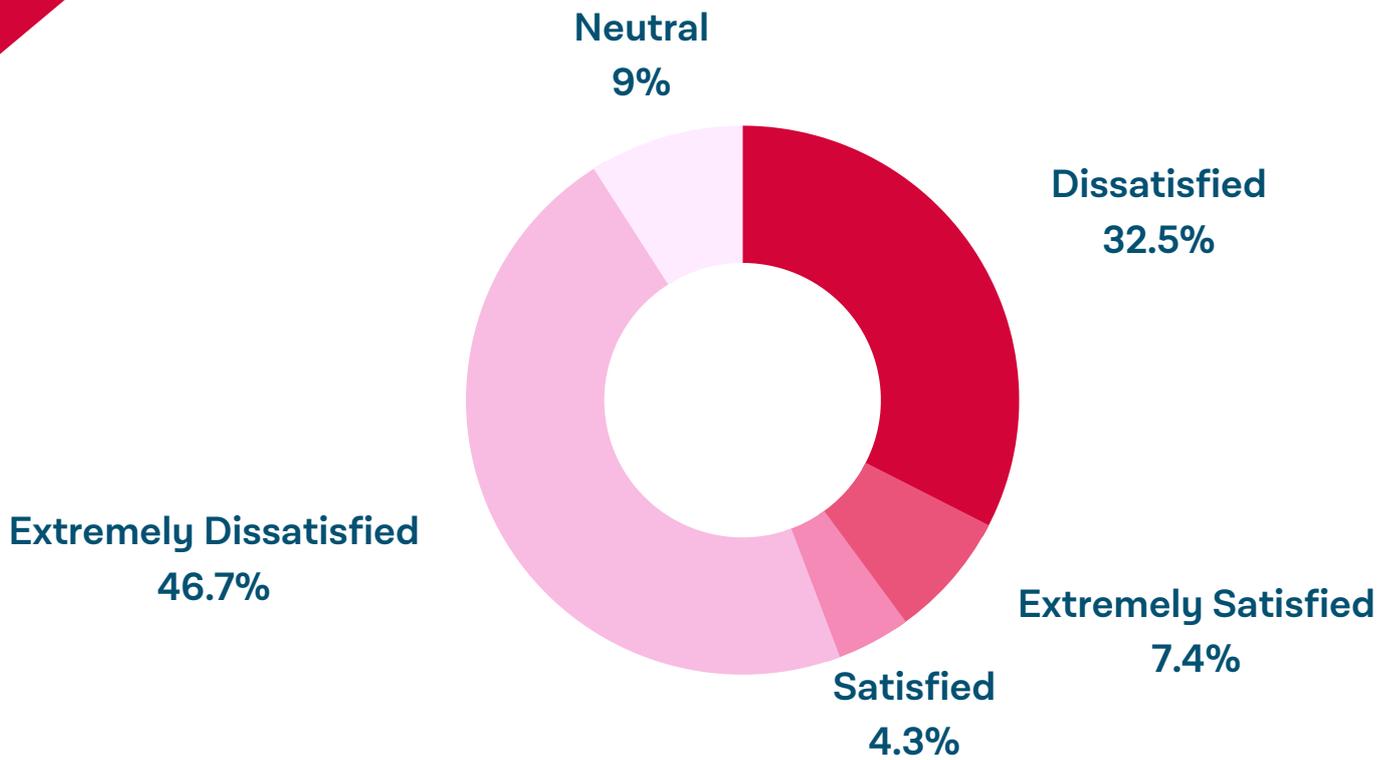
Regularity of Bus Services



Punctuality of Bus Services



Availability of Bus Services



Conclusions 07

The results of this survey reinforce the anecdotal evidence, my office and I have received over the last few months. Following a overwhelming response from residents in Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney, it is clear that there is widespread dissatisfaction with services.

I am deeply disappointed that despite assurances that services would improve following the recruitment of more drivers in November 2021, 92% of respondents have not witnessed any improvements. This is unacceptable.

Although, more than half of the respondents have access to an alternative mode of transport, 46.2% rely solely on Bus services to get around. The reliability and punctuality of services is vital for these residents who use Buses for essential travel purposes. Delayed and cancelled services can have a detrimental effect on those travelling to work, school or hospital appointments. This is a widespread issue across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and is reflected in the dreadful satisfaction rates highlighted by this survey.

While, solving the issues with Bus services will not be a quick fix, it will be essential to implement urgent solutions for issues that can be solved easily. Communication between Stagecoach and residents is essential. Residents should have access to live bus times, as well as paper timetables provided at stops. To ensure our services are accessible to all, shelters and seating should be provided at stops. This will not solve the issue with reliability but will ensure residents are informed of issues in advance.

I will continue to work with all relevant partners to help secure both short and long-term improvements for users of our local bus network.

Appendix I – Transport For Wales

What's Happening?

A revitalised network that will see new services and rolling stock, innovative solutions, and a massive programme of station investment.

- ✓ We're investing £738m to transform the valley lines to Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Coryton, electrifying 172 km of track and upgrading infrastructure to enable improved journey times and more trains every hour
- ✓ From 2023, an £800m investment will ensure that 95% of journeys are on new trains. More than half the trains will be assembled in Wales.
- ✓ By December 2023, we are going to run an extra 285 (29%) more services every weekday, including improvements on the Ebbw Vale, Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines and the North Wales Metro (Wrexham-Bidston). A new service will link Cardiff and Liverpool via Wrexham.
- ✓ On Sundays, more services will run across Wales
- ✓ We're creating more than 600 new jobs, including 200 new on-train customer service staff, and add 30 apprenticeships per year.
- ✓ We're investing £194m in station improvements and building at least five new stations. A £15m fund will make stations more accessible and are launching a new app allowing customers requiring assistance to 'turn up and go' from April 2020.
- ✓ At least 1,500 new car parking spaces will be created.
- ✓ We're transforming the availability and quality of ticketing facilities by 2023, and also introducing Delay Repay for delays of above 15 minutes from January 2019.
- ✓ Stations and overhead wires will be powered by 100% renewable energy, with at least 50% sourced in Wales.
- ✓ Free end-to-end internet access will be available on 85% of journeys by 2024.
- ✓ We're introducing seven new Community Rail Partnerships, employing 30 Community and Customer Ambassadors and investing more than £1.25m per year in community activity. Disused station spaces will be transformed to meet local needs.

- ✔ Smart ticketing will be rolled out across Wales and the Borders. Validators on the South Wales Metro will enable pay-as-you-go flexible ticketing. Elsewhere, customers will be able to use mobile tickets to ensure they always pay the lowest fare.
- ✔ Free travel for under 5s extended to under 11s. Half-price fares extended to 16 – 18 year-olds. Under 16s go free off peak when accompanied by a fare-paying adult.
- ✔ We're installing more than 700 new customer information screens across the network and in other locations including colleges, hospitals and workplaces.
- ✔ We're investing in more than 200 new ticket machines and providing ticket sales through local convenience stores to improve access.
- ✔ To support an integrated network, we are ensuring that there is appropriate signage at all stations to promote onward travel by public transport
- ✔ We also fund and support all staff who want to learn Welsh

All these improvements will help to achieve the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – driving prosperity, improving the cohesion of Welsh and Border communities and contributing to a healthier and more equal Wales”.

Source: What's happening - TfW (<https://bit.ly/3j7DUdK>)

Appendix II – Wales Transport Strategy

Wales Transport Strategy

Over the next five years we will:

- ✔ support quality, affordable, regular, reliable and punctual bus services in partnership with local authorities, the commercial and third sectors
- ✔ address congestion hotspots and invest in bus stations and stops to speed up journeys and improve passenger experiences
- ✔ extend the reach of bus services in Wales
- ✔ set standards so passengers know what they can expect from bus services in Wales
- ✔ work with partners to ensure that services and infrastructure are physically accessible to wheelchair users

- ✓ continue to improve bus services for education including Welsh medium education
- ✓ keep drivers and passengers safe by ensuring access to contactless payment technology, screens and other measures required to maintain public health
- ✓ manage post-COVID-19 adaptations to bus services to reflect the changing needs of the travelling public
- ✓ deliver innovative, more flexible bus services, in partnership with local authorities, the commercial and third sectors
- ✓ roll out the technology and infrastructure to deliver ultra-low emissions buses
- ✓ progress our new bus legislation that gives the public sector more control over local bus services
- ✓ improve working conditions and attractiveness of the industry to bus drivers
- ✓ ensure there is training in place to ensure that drivers make everybody feel welcome and safe, and keep that training up to date
- ✓ support the Traffic Commissioner in implementing an effective enforcement regime that helps to improve reliability and journey times for passengers
- ✓ prepare Welsh language standards for those who provide bus services in Wales
- ✓ work with bus providers to help deliver these priorities and to attract bus group company investment in their Welsh services, with longer term funding horizons.

Source: Llwybr Newydd - A New Wales Transport Strategy 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3J8uNUK>)

Appendix III - Welsh Government commitments

The Welsh Government has committed to legislation to re-regulate the bus network in Wales. This will transform the way local bus services are planned and delivered.

- ✓ Using the new powers we have gained in the Wales Act 2017, we can reshape the public transport network in a way that supports our ambition to increase the number of people using public transport and encourage travellers to switch from private car use; reducing pollution and congestion.

-  There is currently a lack of coordination between bus operators, and bus services are not well-coordinated with rail services and Active Travel. Some communities have little or no public transport provision, and passenger information is often inconsistent and poorly presented across different providers.
-  The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commits to introducing a far-reaching Bus Bill in this Senedd term to make it easier to integrate the timetables of buses and trains. It will also provide local authorities with the option to run bus services.
-  Bus operators have said that the main barrier to increasing patronage is reliability and journey times, so the Welsh Government will take action to give buses greater priority on our roads.
-  The Welsh Labour Government has also recently introduced a new demand responsive bus service pilot – Fflecsi – in Newport alongside other trials in Rhondda, Prestatyn, Denbigh, Blaenau Gwent, Conwy, Pembrokeshire and Cardiff North. More fflecsi services are planned if the evaluation of the pilot is positive.