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Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-934
Ein cyf/Our ref LW/00129/21

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair Petitions Committee

09 February 2021

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 5 August regarding Petition P-05-934 Public Transport in Blaenau Gwent and subsequent email of 6 January. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I welcome the opportunity to feed into the Committee's work on this petition. Please find below, updates on the issues you requested.

Progress on the work undertaken by the Valleys Task Force

Blaenau Gwent Integrated Responsive Transport pilot

The IRT scheme in Blaenau Gwent continues to be led by Transport for Wales (TfW) in collaboration with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

Good progress has been made with the project, vehicles have been procured with grant funding made available by Welsh Government and those vehicles are equipped and branded in line with other fflecsi projects. The planning and design phase of the scheme is complete and finalised along with the proposed service patterns. TfW are in the process of building the required website pages, producing marketing materials and carrying out the procurement activities to select an operator to run the service.

The current pandemic has impacted implementation of the project and decisions about when to start the fflecsi service need to be made in line with current guidelines and restrictions regarding travel on public transport. In the meantime we continue background activities so that when circumstances allow we are ready to roll out the Blaenau Gwent fflecsi service as quickly as possible.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Strategic Hubs and A465

Local authorities in each of the Valleys taskforce strategic hub areas have been progressing a range of priority projects – all with different funding packages, delivery models and timescales which the taskforce are closely working with.

The majority of projects have already secured multiple funding sources (including match funding from local authorities) and are delivered through a partnership approach with private, public or third sector.

A thematic approach is being taken to spending the £25m originally allocated to the Strategic hubs. This will ensure we use the £25m to scale up and spread good quality projects and initiatives designed in the Valleys is more in keeping with what we're trying to achieve with the Taskforce, rather than a top down bid into a fund that will not go very far split amongst 7 hubs.

Through our ongoing work with local authorities on the Strategic Hubs, we have provided Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf with £600k of additional revenue funding to commission feasibility and design studies to develop some ambitious integrated transport hubs across the Valleys.

Where appropriate, the transport hubs will replace existing rail and bus interchanges and improve infrastructure, accessibility, safety and connectivity, incorporating key metro development sites. The designs will take into account the wider regeneration ambitions for the areas providing a masterplan and initial investment programme, allowing local authorities to take forward the next phases of physical regeneration and place making.

The implementation of the delivery plan and what plans the Welsh Government have to update their Strategy for Public Transport for the short, medium and long term in light of Covid-19.

Bus reform

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government has continued to fund bus services, firstly through maintaining a skeleton network to support essential journeys, and more recently additional funding to ramp up services to support the re-opening of schools and the wider economy. This is in addition to wider transport measures including support for rail services and additional active travel measures.

On 24 September we announced that the Welsh Government is making available an additional £84.6m of funding to maintain and develop these enhanced levels of service for the rest of the financial year, while reduced demand and capacities significantly affect ticket revenues. This will bring our total support for bus services this year to £140m. A new agreement has been created to manage this funding to maximise value for money and positive outcomes in return for the public sector's increased funding. We are grateful to local authorities and bus operators for their support and flexibility during these challenging times.

The announcement will deliver some longer-term stability for the industry and allow us to continue to work in partnership to move towards the integrated public transport that we all wish to see.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with local authorities, bus operators and other stakeholders to achieve long term reform of bus services in Wales, and it is our intention that a Bus Strategy setting out short, medium and long term proposals will be available later this year.

Cross Valleys link

To complement the Core Valleys Lines rail modernisation programme, and to help realise our vision to provide a fully integrated public transport network as part of the South East Wales Metro, we are working with local authorities, transport providers and Transport for Wales to look for opportunities to provide improved cross valleys bus links. As part of this work we are actively looking at bringing forward proposals to provide new direct east to west bus links across the south Wales Valleys region linking Rhonda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Newport. These new services will be carefully complement and integrate with existing local bus services, Valley Line train services and Fflecsi services at key hubs

Update on Valleys Transport Pilot

The Valleys Transport pilot is a two year flexible pilot run in partnership with Village and Valleys Transport Association, Welsh Government and DWP. Currently in its second year, the out of hours mini bus service runs two minibuses in the Rhondda Fach community to get people to and from work in time for their shifts. The pilot is designed to ascertain what works best for those looking for better public transport access to work opportunities, particularly when they are working shift patterns.

The Welsh Government continues to work with the DWP, through Jobcentre Plus in Wales, and with employers and communities in the Valleys, to test whether shift-focused, flexible, small scale transport options would encourage a greater uptake of jobs.

We have acted swiftly to put measures in place on the vehicles to mitigate Covid-19, allowing the service to continue transporting individuals during lockdown, including key workers to their employment, whilst also ensuring their safety is at the forefront.

I trust that you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely,



Lee Waters AS/MS

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