

# ‘Wales has missed an opportunity to lead’

Ahead of this month’s Welsh bus summit, traffic commissioner Nick Jones laments decision not to devolve bus regulation. **Rhodri Clark** reports

## BUS POLICY

► The UK government’s decision not to devolve Welsh bus regulation is a missed opportunity for legislative changes in Wales - changes which England might eventually have adopted, according to the traffic commissioner for Wales.

*Writing for Buses in Wales 2017*, - produced by *Passenger Transport* and enclosed with this issue of the magazine - traffic commissioner Nick Jones expresses disappointment that regulation will remain a reserved subject, despite the UK government’s Commission on Devolution in Wales having anticipated devolution of bus regulation when it reported in 2014.

The publication coincides with the ground-breaking Welsh bus summit, to be held in Wrexham on January 23. Infrastructure minister Ken Skates will be the keynote speaker. In his foreword to the supplement, he writes: “Local scheduled bus services are, and will continue to be, the foundation of our public transport system.”

The Welsh Government has i developed the TrawsCymru long-distance services, which last year carried a record 1.5 million passengers, he notes. “But in looking to the future, I want to ensure that we get full value and proportionate outcomes for the huge public sector investment

that is put into our bus network. I want to work with providers to maintain bus routes throughout our communities.

“In some cases we will need to reshape the network and services to meet new challenges, such as our ambitions for the Metros in north and south Wales.”

**“I want to ensure that we get full value and proportionate outcomes for the huge public sector investment” Ken Skates AM**



This echoes views put forward by CPT Cymru chair Justin Davies on one the key reasons for the decline in Welsh bus passengers, namely the transformation of employment and retail patterns. Modern travel demand is not always easy to service by bus but the growth in car traffic is unsustainable, he argues. He also highlights instances where bus services are attracting growing passenger numbers as a result of being reshaped around modern requirements, such as serving a new university campus in Swansea.

Davies also highlights substantial cutbacks in local authority funding, while Jones suggests that councils should make better informed decisions when issuing contracts for various services. “Sometimes there are different local authority departments for private hire licensing, bus service

## WELSH BUS QPS SCHEMES BY 2021

### BUS POLICY

The Welsh Government expects key bus corridors to be covered by statutory bus Quality Partnership Schemes by spring 2021. It will provide £150,000 a year for local

authorities to employ two bus coordinators, one in north east and one in south east Wales, to work proactively with operators, | councils and bus passenger representatives to identify relevant routes and lead development of | the QPSs.

The funding covers salaries j and administrative costs, but the coordinators will not have access

to funds for capital schemes, such as provision of bus priority, or for revenue schemes, such as cleaning bus stops or provision of information at stops.

The posts are part of the Welsh Government’s plans to create “Metro” systems in both regions which will encompass buses and trains, possibly including light rail. One council in each region

will employ the bus coordinators, who will report at least every quarter to the Welsh Government and the Metro local authorities on activities undertaken in the preceding three months. They will be tasked with ensuring that the QPSs are operational by | March 31, 2021.

“The post-holders will not themselves have direct access to

# “The cheapest bid for a contract will not necessarily provide the best value for money” Nick Jones

registrations and procurement of school transport contracts,” he writes. “Occasionally matters come to light where it is clear that if one part of a local authority communicated effectively with another part of the same local authority better informed decisions might be made.

“The cheapest bid for a contract will not necessarily provide the best value for money either for the travelling public or the PSV industry I do not and will not get involved in decisions relating to individual contracts, however this does not prevent me from influencing and if necessary educating public bodies in Wales with a view to promoting consistency of approach and best practice.”

Local authorities in south east Wales have won plaudits for piloting bus quality standards linked to payments of Bus Services Support Grant, a scheme rolled out by the Welsh Government. Jones goes a step further and suggests withdrawing BSSG payments, with the money reallocated to the general BSSG pot, where there has been non-compliance in areas including quality safety fair competition and Welsh-language provision.

However, Bev Fowles, vice-chair of CPT Cymru, expresses concern that services in rural areas could suffer unintended consequences of

schemes linking BSSG payments to quality “In some areas any standard of service, within reason, is acceptable for the travelling public,” he says. “They’re quite happy for a 12- or 14-year-old vehicle to turn up as long as their village bus continues to run on Tuesdays and Saturdays.”

Nigel Winter, managing director of Stagecoach in South Wales, predicts that more effective cooperation between private and public organisations will be the way forward. “I believe we have a great opportunity to deliver more for bus passengers across Wales - better technology more modern vehicles, improved information and excellent customer service,” he says. “Focusing on practical solutions, delivered in partnership, will help make this a reality” ■

*Buses in Wales 2017 is enclosed with this edition of Passenger Transport*



funding. They will help to identify necessary investments and make recommendations to the Welsh Government, local authorities and the bus industry,” said a government spokesman.

On the question of monitoring delivery by the QPS partners, he said: “Subject to the timescale for making and implementing a statutory bus Quality Partnership

Scheme, the post-holders may help to monitor its delivery by bus operators and local authorities. The post-holders will not have enforcement powers.”

The bus coordinator posts are part of a five-point plan, announced by infrastructure minister Ken Skates in September, to reverse the declining fortunes of the Welsh bus industry. ■

# New tickets to shrink

## Arriva Trains Wales is conducting official industry pilot

### TICKETING

► Paper rail tickets to replace magnetic strip card tickets will be reduced in size, to take account of feedback received during their live pilot on Arriva Trains Wales.

The new tickets feature a barcode which can be read by scanners installed at gatelines for reading barcodes on mobile phones. The pilot employs tickets which are of an industry standard size but lack perforation between tickets, as found on SNCF tickets of similar dimensions, for example. A group of four people travelling together would therefore be presented with a continuous paper strip almost five feet (1.52 metres) in length.

There is anecdotal evidence that the unwieldy nature of group paper tickets could present some risk to revenue protection, with staff on busy gatelines or trains sometimes declining to inspect the longer strips of tickets.

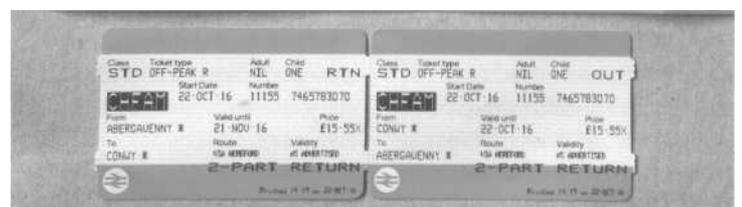
An ATW spokeswoman said:

“The size of the paper roll ticket is a regulated industry standard. In response to customer and staff feedback there is an initiative underway to reduce the size of the ticket by 30%. The regulatory and system changes to achieve that are due to be delivered in the first half of 2017.”

ATW is conducting the official industry pilot. Sister company Northern has tried the paper tickets in the Liverpool area.

The pilot tickets continue the established industry practice of outward and return tickets alternating, rather than being grouped by direction. To retain the outward portions when a group of four arrives at a gateline, staff would therefore need to tear or cut the tickets in seven places rather than one.

Although the tickets used for the trial have a relatively large surface area, front and back, they refer customers to the National Rail Enquiries website for information such as validity of off-peak tickets. A new addition on the paper tickets is a line of text relating to refunds. ■



One of the new tickets (top) with one end as torn by the conductor