



north wales economic ambition board  
bwrdd uchelgais economaidd gogledd cymru

**REPORT TO TRANSPORT DELIVERY SUB-GROUP**

**DATE: 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

**Title:** *Regional Bus Update*

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**1. Purpose of the Report**

To update Members on recent developments in relation to the proposals for a Regional Bus Network and with the Bus Emergency Scheme continuation funding in relation to the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic.

**2. Decision Sought**

Members are invited to note the update and proposed further work planned.

Members are also asked to note that further discussion in relation to the management of the BES 2 funding scheme and delivery of projects on a regional basis will be required.

**3. Reasons supporting the need for a decision.**

The report is largely for information, to advise members of developments with developing infrastructure and project to support low and zero carbon transport.

No formal decision is required as a result of the report, however some of the emerging proposals may require further consideration of regional governance arrangements.

#### **4 Background and Relevant Considerations**

Members have received reports at recent meetings regarding proposed changes to bus network management and funding, primarily relating to the impacts of reduced bus usage as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. In order to sustain bus services as far as possible, Welsh Government have been making significant emergency payment to cover the reduced bus usage and loss of income by operators. The first Bus Emergency Scheme (BES) fund was successfully managed by local authority passenger transport teams working with Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and operators. As the current situation continues however and bus usage has not required to a level to make commercial services viable, a further funding package is needed to prevent a further significant reduction in services.

Members will also recall that Welsh Government have long wished to be able to better exert some control over the quality of bus networks and service provision. Legislation was planned in the current term of Senedd, but due to the pandemic it has not proven possible to complete the legal work and so the proposed Bus Bill has been deferred to the next term. As a result, Welsh Government working through Transport for Wales are seeking to secure some of the proposed changes to bus networks and services through contractual arrangements, linked to the BES 2 funding package. Detail discussions have been held with local authorities through ATCO and similar discussions regarding the terms of the proposed funding package are underway with bus operators. It is hoped that the discussions will reach agreement over a funding package and contractual arrangement by the end of the current calendar year.

In addition, Welsh Government and TfW have also commissioned ARUP to prepare an All Wales Bus Network programme, which will include further work on the delivery of a Regional Bus Network. The time scales attributable to the work are tight given the need for this to be developed alongside the funding arrangements for BES 2.

The work will be based on the establishment of some key network principles, that will be applied on an all Wales basis, but that can take account of local circumstances. In essence this will be a plan that seeks to manage a unified network where services are coordinated with each other and will link to rail and other modes, to provide a properly integrated passenger transport network. Strategic bus corridors and local networks will be identified, infrastructure will be improved, investment in clean modern and efficient vehicles will, be supported fares, ticketing and information will all be reviewed to deliver a seamless and consistent network.

A key component of the proposed changes will be to consider governance and funding arrangements which will deliver an efficient and agile approach to managing networks. Some of the key issues the approach is seeking to change will be to provide greater clarity over long term capital and revenue funding, reduce the complexity of current funding mechanisms and approaches and to provide clear leadership to deliver the vision, whilst maintaining the ability of local communities to shape their networks.

An update on progress with both the BES 2 scheme and also the bus network work will be given at the meeting.

## **5. Considerations**

The pandemic has led to significant challenges for the bus industry as a result of reduced usage and social distancing. Without significant additional funding through Welsh Government, many bus services would be stopped and it's likely that operators would have faced significant financial problems. At the current time, there is little indication what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be on bus usage and it's not clear whether bus usage will increase to previous levels.

The current situation does however offer an opportunity to review and change the previous status quo, making alterations that could deliver long term service improvements, if managed effectively. The Welsh Government have provided additional funding to support the industry during the current difficulties but are exploring mechanisms to secure long term change to bus networks and operating approaches, in support of achieving better integrated transport networks.

The proposals for more effective management arrangements will have impacts on governance and management of bus networks in North Wales. Although there is some regional coordination of bus funding schemes with Flintshire acting as a lead authority, each local authority currently procures bus services independently. Both the BES 2 scheme and the future delivery of the regional network will likely need to be managed on a regional level and will require joint work with Transport for Wales.

Members will receive an update on progress with the Welsh Government proposals to establish Corporate Joint Committees however it will be some time before this legislation is enacted. In the meantime, consideration will need to be given to potential, joint working arrangements to deliver the BES 2 scheme and the regional bus network engagement and delivery approach.

**5. Financial Implications**

There are no specific financial implications from this report, it is mainly information on work currently proposed in relation to the Bus Emergency Scheme and on the emerging regional bus network approach.

The impacts of these proposals once adopted could well have significant financial impacts, but these will be highlighted in future update reports or during the consultation that should be undertaken prior to implementation.

**6. Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications from this report. Consideration of management and governance arrangements for the delivery of the BES 2 scheme will be required.

**7. Staffing Implications**

There are no specific staffing implications at this stage – the report provides updates on work currently underway. It is likely that any agreed approach to manage funding or bus networks on a regional basis could have implications on staffing within existing bus teams.

**8. Impact on Equalities**

There are no specific equalities implications at this stage – the report provides updates in work currently underway. Detailed consultation on any reports where impacts are possible will be carried out at the appropriate consultation process.

**9. Consultations undertaken**

There are no specific consultations required at this stage – the report provides updates in work currently underway. Detailed consultation on any reports where impacts are possible will be carried out at the appropriate consultation process.

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**STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:**

**i. Monitoring Officer – responsible body:**

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ii. **Head of Finance – responsible body:**

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