



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th JULY 2023

SUBSIDISED BUS TRAVEL SCHEMES ACROSS RHONDDA CYNON TAF DURING THE 2023/24 FINANCIAL YEAR

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – FRONTLINE SERVICES, IN DISCUSSIONS
WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, THE CABINET MEMBER
FOR ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE, (CLLR A CRIMMINGS), AND THE
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (CLLR A MORGAN OBE)**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- (i) Seek Cabinet's approval to introduce a £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 24th July 2023 – 3rd September 2023 (inclusive), for all journeys that start and terminate within the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) county boundary. This would apply to all operators currently operating a scheduled service. Subject to the continuation of Welsh Government Bus Funding beyond 24th July 2023.
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Director of Frontline Services to introduce a £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 1st December 2023 – 31st December 2023 (inclusive), for all journeys that start and terminate within the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) county boundary – subject to the outcomes of the School Summer Holidays scheme and available funding, and in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure. Subject to the continuation of Welsh Government Bus Funding beyond 24th July 2023.
- (iii) Seek Cabinet's approval to introduce a 1 year 7-day bus travel pilot scheme for all school and college students that are in receipt of a public bus season ticket to attend school or college between 4th September 2023 and the end of the respective academic year 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet notes the contents of the report and approves the proposals to:

- (i) Introduce a £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 24th July 2023 – 3rd September 2023 (inclusive), for all journeys that start and terminate within the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) county boundary.

Subject to the continuation of Welsh Government Bus Funding beyond 24th July 2023.

- (ii) Delegate authority to the Director of Frontline Services to introduce a £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 1st December 2023 – 31st December 2023 (inclusive), for all journeys that start and terminate within the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) county boundary – subject to the outcomes of the School Summer Holidays scheme and available funding, and in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure. Subject to the continuation of Welsh Government Bus Funding beyond 24th July 2023.
 - (iv) Introduce a 1 year 7-day bus travel pilot scheme for all post-16 school and college students that will be in receipt of a public bus season ticket to attend school or college between 4th September 2023 and the end of the respective academic year 2023/24.
- 2.2 It is recommended that officers review the outcomes of the bus travel schemes during the 2023/24 financial year and seek to develop further bus travel initiatives during the 2024/25 financial year, subject to funding.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has been successful in bidding for funding through the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund to introduce initiatives that will help reduce the cost of living for residents, through measures that improve energy efficiency and combat fuel poverty and climate change. £500k had been awarded for the 2022/23 financial year, with further awards of £1.1m for 2023/24 and £1.2m for 2024/25.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Wales Transport Strategy 2021 recognises the need for an accessible, sustainable, and efficient bus transportation network with specific attention to reliability, frequency, and geographical reach. Together with the review of mandatory and voluntary fares, the scheme looks to encourage modal shift from private car use towards sustainable travel.
- 4.2 The Council's 'Making Rhondda Cynon Taf Carbon Neutral by 2030' strategy, agreed by Cabinet on 22 June 2022, states 'Working with Cardiff Capital Region and Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority (CCRTA), Transport for Wales and Welsh Government to develop public transport infrastructure and services to enable sustainable travel across the region that will meet future demand. Reducing the user cost of public transport would support this commitment and incentivise bus patronage.
- 4.3 Changing travel patterns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighted the need to promote a public transport system that is reliable, affordable, and easy to use, as a low carbon alternative to the motor car. Reduced public transport patronage has also necessitated a review of the way bus travel is funded in Wales.

- 4.4 As a result of these evolving travel patterns, local bus services in Wales are currently financially supported through the Welsh Government's Bus Emergency Scheme (BES). This support addresses the loss of farebox revenue by operators and the additional costs associated with responding to the COVID 19 pandemic. Under the terms of the agreement, operators provide bus services that meet local needs under the direction of the lead authority for each region, working with and on behalf of its constituent local authorities. With the continuation of BES funding for the 2023/24 financial year, this initiative would encourage greater sustainability within the bus network by encouraging the return of patronage that was lost during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.5 With the expected continuation of WG bus funding beyond 24th July 2023, for the remainder of the 2023/24 financial year, this initiative would encourage greater sustainability within the bus network by encouraging the return of patronage that was lost during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. PREVIOUS FREE BUS TRAVEL SCHEME

- 5.1 During the period 1st to 31st March 2023, RCTCBC provided a free bus travel scheme for all users in accordance with the terms of the SPF Grant funding, operating alongside the existing WG concessionary fare scheme.
- 5.2 The initiative offered free travel on all scheduled bus services (regardless of operator) that started and terminated within the county boundary. Services that started or terminated outside the county boundary were excluded and subject to the full regular fare.
- 5.3 There were no time restrictions applied, and free travel was available from the first to last service each day, with wider benefits for social interaction and supporting economic activity across the county borough.
- 5.4 Passenger data for the month of March 2023 has shown an average increase of patronage of 35% across all services and operators from February 2023 numbers. However, passenger data for April 2023 has shown that patronage numbers decreased by an average of 28% from March 2023.
- 5.5 Whilst the April 2023 decrease is disappointing, the increase in numbers in March 2023 demonstrates the desire of the public to use bus services, providing the product on offer is affordable, and reliable.
- 5.6 It should be noted that all operators reported a significant increase in youth travel across the county borough, which may have been less prevalent had there been a charge in place. This increase also resulted in some reports of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) on buses and at bus stops/stations.

6.1 PROPOSED £1 MAXIMUM SINGLE BUS FARE SCHEME

- 6.1 This report outlines the proposal to introduce a £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 24th July 2023 – 3rd September 2023 (inclusive),

and 1st December 2023 – 31st December 2023 (inclusive, and subject to the outcomes of the School Summer Holidays scheme and available funding), for all users in accordance with the terms of the SPF Grant funding, operating alongside the existing concessionary fare scheme.

- 6.2 The proposed initiative offers reduced fare travel on all scheduled bus services (regardless of operator) that start and terminate within the county boundary. Services that start or terminate outside the county boundary would be excluded and subject to the full regular fare.
- 6.3 There would be no time restrictions applied, so reduced fare travel would be available from the first to last service each day, with wider benefits for social interaction and supporting economic activity across the county borough.
- 6.4 The proposal prioritises people and the climate.
- 6.5 With transport being responsible for 17% of Welsh Greenhouse gas emissions, the need to encourage transport modal shift has never been greater, with private car use emitting 62% (2018).
- 6.6 The proposal supports longer term objectives to encourage the use of more sustainable modes of travel as supported by the Wales Transport Strategy.
- 6.7 It also makes transport services accessible, fair, and inclusive through the removal of economic barriers, which potentially prevent people from using sustainable public transport and encourage increased usage of public transport for retail and leisure activities. Over 30% of households in RCT do not have access to a private motor car.

7. 7-DAY BUS TRAVEL FOR SCHOOL / COLLEGE STUDENTS

- 7.1 This report also outlines the proposal to introduce a 1 year 7-day bus travel pilot scheme for all post-16 school and college students that will be in receipt of a public bus season ticket to attend school or college between 4th September 2023 and the end of the respective academic year 2023/24, in accordance with the Council's School Transport policy and the terms of the SPF Grant funding.
- 7.2 This scheme would be offered as a 1-year pilot, with passenger data being monitored to determine usage and travel patterns.
- 7.3 Free transport will not be transferrable across various operators and students will only be able to travel routes operated by the bus company that the individual is allocated to for their daily school / college commute.
- 7.4 Students will have free travel on all scheduled bus services that start or terminate within the county boundary by their respective operator. Services that start or terminate outside the county boundary would be excluded and subject to the full regular fare.

- 7.5 There would be no time or day restrictions applied, so free travel with their respective travel operator would be available from the first to last service each day, with wider benefits for social interaction and supporting economic activity across the county borough.
- 7.6 It is anticipated that by encouraging post-16 age students to use bus travel for a wider range of journeys outside of school times, they will be more likely to continue to use public transport when they leave school and do not automatically purchase a private car.
- 7.7 This proposal is not available to students that are transported to school or college by any other means than through Council provided public bus season ticket.
- 7.8 Points 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7 of this report also apply to this proposal.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 8.1 An Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full report is not required. There are limited negative or adverse equality or diversity implications associated with this report, which can be easily mitigated.
- 8.2 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010, Local Authorities are required to have due regard to the need to:
1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
 2. Advance equality of opportunity.
 3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.3 The Council is committed to meeting the requirements of the Equality Act and in doing so contributing to the national Well-being goal of a more equal Wales, required by the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 10.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 11.1 The estimated cost of the £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 24th July 2023 – 3rd September 2023 (inclusive) initiative is approximately

£450k, which will be wholly funded by Shared Prosperity Fund grant funding.

- 11.2 The estimated cost of the £1 maximum single bus fare for travel between 1st December 2023 – 31st December 2023 (inclusive) initiative is approximately £315k, which will be wholly funded by Shared Prosperity Fund grant funding.
- 11.3 The Council will agree the costs of these initiatives with operators in advance by using a historical level of “on bus” revenue (November 2022) with a percentage increase to reflect recent bus fare increases. This arrangement simplifies administration and removes any financial incentive for operators to inflate claims; and has been endorsed by the lead regional bus funding group, responsible for managing the WG bus funding scheme. It also provides parity between bus operators and does not cross subsidise or unduly increase the WG bus funding national agreement.
- 11.4 The initiative will operate alongside the WG concessionary bus pass scheme, and concessionary pass holders will need to present their pass to ensure the correct level of funding is obtained from the Welsh Government.
- 11.5 The estimated cost of the post-16, 1-year 7-day bus travel pilot scheme between 4th September 2023 and the end of the respective academic year 2023/24, is approximately £220k, which will also be wholly funded by Shared Prosperity Fund grant funding.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 12.1 The Council can provide reduced cost or free bus travel for RCT residents under its general powers of well-being, provided that the way in which it operates does not breach any of the competition requirements or other statutory provisions relating to local transport provision in the various Transport Acts.
- 12.2 As such, the proposal would apply to all bus operators in RCT, but only to journeys starting and terminating within the county boundary and on routes already registered. This would ensure no unfair competitive advantage for specific operators or cross-subsidising out of area passengers.
- 12.3 This additional voluntary agreement between the Council and the RCT bus operators would operate alongside the BES/BTF national agreement, with the Council underwriting the revenue that the operators would have received from the paying passengers.
- 12.4 As the current BES/BTF contracts cap each operator’s profit, there would be no financial advantage or disadvantage to operators if the scheme was introduced.
- 12.5 The Transport Act 2000 requires authorities in Wales to issue statutory travel concession permits to any applicant resident who is aged 60 or over or meets the eligibility criteria, with regard to disability as set out in

Section 146 of the Act. In Wales, this is the All-Wales Concessionary Travel Scheme.

- 12.6 The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to assess the travel needs of learners in its area and to provide free school/college transport to those learners of compulsory school/college age who live beyond a safe walking distance of 2 miles or 3 miles from their nearest suitable primary and secondary school/college respectively.
- 12.7 Beyond the statutory minimum, the Council has determined that when assessing entitlement on the basis of safe walking distance, to use the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Measure to make a more generous provision to learners.
- 12.8 As a consequence of this policy position, free travel is provided for nursery and primary school learners who live 1.5 miles or further from their nearest suitable school, and for secondary and post 16 learners who live 2 miles or further from their nearest suitable school or college.

13. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 13.1 The Council has committed to reducing our carbon footprint. This supports the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan 'Making a Difference' – 2020-24.
- 13.2 Public transport supports and promotes the Council's Corporate Plan priorities for People – are independent, healthy, and successful; Places – where people are proud to live, work and play and Prosperity – creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be entrepreneurial and fulfil their potential and prosper.
- 13.3 These in turn support the seven well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This proposal contributes to the Well-being Goals and is consistent with the five ways of working, as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 These further initiatives to reduce travel costs by public bus will make transport services more accessible, fair and inclusive through the removal of economic barriers that potentially prevent people from using sustainable public transport and encourage increased usage of public transport for retail and leisure activities. Increasing the patronage of bus services improves the viability of those services into the longer-term.