

Bus Action Day Report

Report on the outcomes of the discussions on the Bus Action Day held in Aberystwyth on 16 September 2023



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Introduction

Ceredigion Bus Action (CBA) was formed in 2023 by a group of passengers who came together after an impromptu protest at the launch of the T1 electric bus in Aberystwyth. Passengers turned up from a number of places, annoyed at their own local bus service being reduced and yet so much money being spent on one bus service.

The group that came together afterwards consists of passengers who had already been campaigning since the pandemic through emails to local politicians and letter writing to the local paper, the *Cambrian News*. Some had also spoken on Radio 4 and on BBC Radio Wales. They felt constantly let down as more services were cut. They decided that whatever they had been doing was not working. In order to keep the issue in the media they organised a protest that was eye catching. They walked around Aberaeron's Alban Square in a 'walking' bus, copying a comedy act from the 1960s. They also decided to have a Bus Action Day that would focus on positive solutions.

The Bus Action Day was held on 16 September 2023 in Aberystwyth. Organisers invited all Ceredigion's Councillors individually, the Senedd members for the region and for Ceredigion, the MP, the Deputy Minister in the Welsh Government responsible for transport, officers from Ceredigion's transport department, Bus Users Cymru, bus operators, trade unions, bus drivers and, of course, passengers. By this time they had been receiving help from Aberystwyth University's Transport and Health Integrated Research Network (THINK). Their input was to help CBA to organise an event where all participants would be equal, where all voices could be heard and where fresh ideas could be on the table without ridicule or prejudice.

After a short introduction, participants were asked to sit at one of four discussion tables. They could choose to move at any time but it was made clear that there would be a second discussion session after the tea break. Most participants chose to stay at one table for the duration of one discussion session. The four topics discussed at the tables were as follows: Alternative Transport in Communities, Franchising and Vision of Bus Transport in 5 Years, Image of Bus Use, and Funding.

After the first discussion session, an example of a successful campaign to save a bus service was outlined - the campaign by 'Friends of the 65 Bus' in Monmouthshire (Appendix 1).

After the second session, participants were asked to make a pledge each. They did so enthusiastically and it is hoped that all participants have fulfilled them.

The organisers were aware of the many passengers who would turn up on the day (over 80 out of the nearly 100 participants were passengers,) would come not to share positive ideas but to vent their frustration and anger over the cuts that have been made the last few years to Ceredigion's bus services. It was decided to have a Grievance Wall where everybody could write their complaint down which would be collected by the organisers and form part of this report. It is telling that the complaints were about every single bus service operating in this county, showing not only the Ceredigion wide participation but also the widespread problems.

The organisers hope that this report will help solve the many problems that are experienced by bus dependent people and urge decision makers to take the suggestions seriously.

Summary

Who has written this report?

This report has been put together by passengers from around Ceredigion, THINK and the facilitators on the Bus Action Day.

What is the situation for people who need buses?

People who rely on buses for their every day activities, from going to work, shopping, visits to health care facilities, family, entertainment, schools and colleges, are upset at the cuts that have been made to bus services since the start of the pandemic.

Passengers who came along to the Bus Action Day wrote down their complaints. From these it is obvious that many lives have been turned upside down. Some people have to walk long distances along unsafe roads in order to reach a bus service. Others cannot take part in activities that enrich their lives. Many have to rely on neighbours, family or friends to take them to places such as appointments that are urgent. They don't like this feeling of dependence on others. Yet others are complaining about buses being packed and they want more buses on their route.

Bus services in Ceredigion are not timed in a way that is useful when passengers need to use more than one bus service.

For many residents car travel is too expensive. They also cannot afford to pay for taxis.

Cycling and walking is an option for some but most find it too dangerous, especially in the dark and along lanes without pavements.

There are, or were, other ways to get to very rural places such as Country Cars and the post bus. The postbus is now gone. Country Cars and community transport (only available in a few places) is run by volunteers. It is seen as something to use in case of emergencies, not for every day.

Information on bus services is not good in Ceredigion. The paper timetables at the bus stops are out of date and missing. The electronic timetables are often wrong. There is no information when passengers really need it such as when the last bus has been cancelled. Not everybody has a smart phone.

Some ideas to think about

Bus services should be seen as a social service, not a profit making industry.

Having a decent bus service saves money for other services such as the NHS and Social Services because it keeps people, especially the elderly, fit and active.

Bus services in Ceredigion are funded in different ways and it is confusing for passengers. Passengers want to understand and would like to have more information.

Good bus services help to get people out of their cars which is good for the climate.

Evening services and early morning services help people to work in jobs that are not 9 to 5. They will also allow people to go to the theatre, to restaurants and visit family. It will allow young people to be with their friends after school. All this will be good for the shops, restaurants and other places.

Structural problems

Franchising of services is the way forward according to the Welsh Government Transport Minister. This is likely to be very difficult to do in Ceredigion. Ceredigion is a large rural county and franchising works well in cities. Manchester is an example where they are using this method. We do wish to understand how the 1985 Transport Act will affect any decisions made in Ceredigion.

Costs in rural areas are always going to be higher than in urban ones. Funding from the Welsh Government needs to take that into account. Because the funding is currently so complex, it is difficult to understand. It is also difficult for local companies to plan. These companies are mainly small and cannot compete with the large companies. It appears that large contracts, for instance for the T1 service, are subsidised by the Welsh Government. Will the Welsh Government fund start-up cost for new buses if they are not T services?

When it comes to subsidies, there also needs to be a comparison between subsidies for the private car and subsidies for bus use. The private car currently is subsidised to a much higher level, yet bus passengers are always the first people to suffer cuts. Funding for roads is around two to three times the amount of funding for buses. Could funds be reprioritised from those roads not used by bus services, to improve public transport, and reduce wear and tear on the roads?

Recommendations

We recommend setting up a Strategic Transport Body that sets out what the needs are in Ceredigion. Such a Body would be in charge of all services and make sure they operate with the needs of passengers at the heart. Such a Body would need passengers on it as well as Councillors and officers from Ceredigion's Transport Department. This Body would be able to meet regularly to discuss where the needs are and how to meet those needs. Such a Body exists in Monmouthshire.

A Strategic Transport Body should be responsible for making sure that bus times are at useful times, services that meet up with other buses and with trains. It could also create new routes that would be attractive to Ceredigion's residents and tourists.

A Strategic Transport Body should be responsible for making sure that information is correct and available at all times that buses are on the road. Passengers and/or Community Councils could take on the responsibility for putting up new timetables in the cases at bus shelters.

A Strategic Body should be responsible for advertising bus use as an exciting way to get around. It should get the message out to young people that it is 'cool' to travel on the bus. It should get the message out that travelling on the bus is good for the planet.

A Strategic Transport Body should look at all forms of social transport in Ceredigion and make full use of it. That is an efficient way to use resources. This includes school transport. Many of the current stock of buses used to take our children to school are old and polluting vehicles. Upgrading these will be expensive. The latest bill for Ceredigion's tax payers for school transport has increased by 43%. It is therefore important that new vehicles can be used by both school children and paying passengers. There are other vehicles on the road that are underused which could carry paying passengers. All this makes common sense as we face a climate emergency.

A Strategic Transport Body should also look at the design of new vehicles. All vehicles should be able to take more passengers with mobility problems. They should also be able to carry bicycles. The information on these buses should be run past local passengers to make sure it is correct.

Our conclusion is that responsibilities are shared. Different levels of Government have different responsibilities. Passengers are also willing to take on responsibility for certain aspects of making sure Ceredigion's bus services become so fantastic that many more people will want to use them. Together with the Welsh Government and Ceredigion County Council, we need to set out who is responsible for what. And once that is done, all bodies involved need to accept that responsibility and take it seriously. Our current 'bits and bobs' way of providing a level of service, that is frankly dreadful, has to come to an end.

We trust that the decision makers reading this report will accept the challenge set by passengers and take the necessary steps to help create the services that passengers need now. Decent services will help tackle the climate emergency we all face. We don't have time to waste; we need to act now.

Outcomes of the four discussion tables

What are the alternatives to buses to serve the needs of the community?

The participants had an opportunity to explore alternatives to traditional bus services in case they are not improved or get taken away all together.

Firstly, it was acknowledged that there are many reasons to leave the house that go beyond the needs traditionally served by bus services which focus on the 9-5 jobs based away from home and going to a larger town for shopping. Other reasons to need transport provision include attending health and non-health related appointments including vets and volunteering and job interviews, meeting friends and family, training and education, leisure and health pursuits like swimming and including getting to the start of official walks like coastal paths, attending funerals and visiting graves, and evening cultural visits such as theatre and film. Sunday day trips, pure exploration and meeting religious needs are also valued needs to travel that contribute to overall wellbeing and a sense of agency, autonomy, and independence. Buses need to provide access to support these needs to travel and compliment alternatives to traditional bus services. For some people it's vital that buses provide the gaps left behind by a lack of alternatives to traditional bus services, so people's very diverse needs to travel, which can vary from one week to the next, are met. If no bus services serve a community the alternatives are driving your own or family car/ van which requires the income to purchase and run these and having somewhere to park them which is a growing challenge for many, as costs to run a car rise and parking spaces become harder to find, especially as people feel forced to have two cars per household to allow them flexibility due to lack of alternatives.

Hiring taxis is another option which is very expensive due to long journey times between home and facilities in rural areas and not many taxis available in an area to book in the first place, especially to serve those with accessibility needs or need to take pets with them, which drivers can refuse. Lifts from friends and family is useful if you are lucky to live somewhere near friends and family who have a car, and they have the time and capacity to take you where you need to go when you need to go there. For some they don't like to ask for help or be a burden and constantly asking for lifts can leave people with a sense of a loss of independence.

Cycling would be an alternative option for some but in rural areas the distances are long, and it is very hilly in Ceredigion and cyclists are mostly forced to share many 40mph and 60 mph roads with traffic to take direct routes between towns and indirect routes face winding roads with very little visibility to be seen by fast moving cars on national speed limit roads. For an older population and those with children cycling does not feel feasible until it feels safer. Electric bikes could help with cycling accessibility for those with mobility needs and carrying equipment or children or pets. However, without affordable e-bike rental services in all towns and villages these are still very expensive and lack a joined-up charging infrastructure. Can councils and Welsh Government help fund e-bikes in communities? Walking to get to bus stops is often required anyway as they are not very frequent in rural areas. Walking as an alternative is only possible for short journeys as in many areas there are no pavements in rural areas and no quality, regular street lighting to help vulnerable people in particular, such as women, feel safe walking alone. Setting up walking buddy service to help you feel safe would be really helpful and using tools like the app

'What3Words' to tell people your precise location might be reassuring to some walkers. Providing more solar panels to run batteries on street lights like in Greece and solar panels on bus shelter to light those too, will also make people feel safer especially in isolated rural areas where there are few grid connections. Walkers might also use cycle lanes and routes so those should also have lighting to enable them to be used all year round, especially in the shorter winter daylight hours. However, good tree management is key to stop branches from covering the lights. To go for a walk along an official route or in a particular part of the countryside, you might need to first travel quite far to reach it, so some form of smaller transport than the traditional buses is needed to help access these routes, as they are usually accessed via small roads which are not easy for large buses to get down anyway.

Old fashioned hitching a lift from a stranger as you walk along still happens but has become less safe. If you could have a service like in Birmingham where someone can stay on the phone with you until you reach your destination, that might be reassuring for those who walk and hitch. Non-traditional bus services like Bwcabus and Flecsibus which are non-timetabled and bookable could be useful for some communities if it's a reliable and an understandable service to use and accessible to all, without the need to understand apps. Another example is the 14-seater community bus run by Ystwyth Transport driven by volunteer drivers from the community who were trained in how to drive mini buses and the Council paid for wear and tear, petrol and insurance. It's a bookable service at reliable times so you know how long you have to go shopping. Another example is the old Post Bus service in the area, now cancelled since Covid-19, which was a small post van driven by the mail delivery person offering a twice a week service. It was only 1 journey each way per day but made efficient use of existing vehicle visiting the community and its use if fuel and generation of emissions, e.g. Rheidol Valley. Until recently school buses could also be used by community passengers but due to changes there are now liability and insurance issues stopping people getting on in the last few years, which is not maximising a valuable community resource.

Train stations are only in a few areas and not well connected or have reliable services to form a reliable alternative at the moment. As well as personally own motorbikes, mopeds and horses which have their own safety challenges in rural areas along national speed limit winding roads, promoting organised formal lift sharing via online website apps like 'blahblahcar' and 'liftshare' and 'takemetoo' or other approaches such as Country Cars with trained, DBS checked volunteer drivers, could be helpful but needs external funding to promote in communities. Plus, organised formal car sharing like electric car clubs within communities could be positive ways to fill some of the gaps left by infrequent traditional bus timetables. These also need external funding and expertise to run them.

Community spirit needs to be fostered to help meet the needs relating to reasons to leave the house. If communities are vibrant, and helping each other is the norm, more informal methods of meeting travel needs could be made possible. However, there is a balance to be struck because participants didn't want councillors using 'community' as a 'weasel word' to put all the pressure on the communities to solve the problems, rather than decision makers who are paid to tackle issues. Participants also didn't want councillors dismissing individual needs as frivolous and making a distinction between wants and needs because many 'wants' (like hairdressing appointments) are beneficial to wellbeing which benefits mental and physical health. Cwmystwyth is a good example of village where it has great community spirit because when you move to the village get welcome community email and has monthly social events planned in advance to meet people, find out what is

going on and feel involved. Communities need more person to person opportunities to meet each other via community hubs that can spread news and pro-active community councils are needed to be linking up with communities groups in their area to help with more support and joined up thinking.

'Warm Spaces', funded in communities to tackle rising fuel costs last winter, could be continued in some way to provide free, supportive social spaces for communities to meet, allowing incidental meetings between residents which foster a sense of belonging and increase mental wellbeing. The challenge is how to reach out to people who aren't the same ones who always get the support through these measures.

How can councils and Welsh Government work with communities so that residents are supported to deliver some of the suggestions here such as community transport alternatives and informal and organised lift and electric car sharing? What funding can be provided to support vibrant communities so that people feel bothered about what happens and have a stronger sense of belonging and not feeling so worthless which can happen in rural communities as the structure of the community, such as banks etc all disappear? Communities might benefit from being empowered to take on more responsibility, but they don't want that dumped onto them with no transparency or support or funding.

Since our Bus Action Day, the sudden demise of Fflecsibus/Bwcabus has been announced, leaving many more isolated communities with no services at all.

<https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/resident/news/2023/fflecsi-bwcabus-service-to-end/>

Will franchising work in Ceredigion? And what is our vision for Ceredigion's bus services in 5 years' time?

It is understood that the current Minister in charge of transport in Wales, MS Lee Waters, is keen on a franchising model to run bus services. Questions arose as how that would work in Ceredigion. Is there the capacity of companies? Which services would be included? Would a company bidding for a franchise be expected to cover the up-front cost of buying suitable vehicles, in the knowledge of a new vehicle costing £180k for a diesel and £400k for an electric bus? If electric buses are required, who would fund the charging station?

These questions it was felt need to be answered by the Minister before companies, Ceredigion Cllrs and council officers can even contemplate whether a franchising system would work in Ceredigion. The overall feeling is that franchising works well in large urban settings but with Ceredigion being a large rural local authority (LA), such ideas are not straightforward.

There was also a question regarding legal issues. The 1985 Transport Act deregulated bus services. Would it be legal for a LA to take over a failing bus company? Ceredigion has a number of small bus companies that are struggling and they will not even come forward to run a small service at the moment. Here is a classic case of the tail wagging the dog with companies dictating what they can offer and the council having to accept such a dreadful offer or have no service whatsoever. It is vital that the legality is understood so that this LA could step in and run services themselves or set up an arm's length company to do it for them.

Franchising transfers the risks to the companies and this was seen as an unstable solution to a difficult problem. Also, do LAs always have to accept the lowest bid? In the section on our vision, there are many more criteria that we would like to see as part of a contract or franchise. Many train franchises have been taken back into the hands of Government. Basically, why should we take such risks in the first place?

There was a real worry amongst participants that the Welsh Government's intentions are to run all the TrawsCymru services via Transport for Wales from Cardiff and that all other services in Ceredigion would become Demand Responsive services using the Flecsibus model. It was argued that this would constitute non-desperate travel as non-essential travel and therefore not deserving of a proper bus service. The desperate always find a way via neighbours or family to get where they need to go.

Some of the problems that are currently being experienced have already been mentioned. Further problems that came up were to do with unreliable funding streams, bad pay for drivers, and contradictory information for passengers. The funding issue will be dealt with elsewhere in this report. Drivers' low pay was seen as a major problem in recruiting new staff.

Information is currently provided by a number of sources, including the bus companies themselves, Traveline Cymru, other on-line services and at bus stops on a few electronic timetable and paper ones. The situation in Ceredigion is quite dire. The paper timetables that are inside the designated cases are mostly out of date and the few up-to-date timetables are stuck elsewhere and many are missing. The electronic timetables are frequently not working or show the wrong times. They also are not showing delays or anything like that, which is what most people looking at an electronic timetable expect because that is what they're used to at train stations. They are therefore seen as expensive gimmicks in their current form. They are updated and corrected in the most bureaucratic and time-consuming manner which could be rectified if control over them was local.

A major problem with information provision, or the lack of it, is when something goes wrong, eg the last bus not turning up. There is nobody to answer a phone-call after 8pm at Traveline Cymru and they themselves are reliant on bus companies to tell them that there is a problem. Bus companies do not reveal their depot's number either like they used to do. Nor do all passengers have access to a mobile phone or even do the internet. One passenger explained the dire situation she found herself in, and her fellow passengers, when the last T1 service did not show up in Aberystwyth. Her concern was less about compensation for the taxi ride home, even though that would be a welcome step, but more for the 'not knowing what to do' and 'vulnerable people being left in the dark' such as young people, elderly, disabled.

The vision of services in 5 years' time is very clear; we need reliable, predictable, integrated services with timetables that take other services into account. That requires an overarching strategic body in Ceredigion which would decide on the timetables of all services, large and small, consider links to train services and make sure that there are early and late services so that workers can get to work, especially in employment which requires out of office hours work, so that residents can go out in the evening which in turn will support the restaurant and entertainment economies, and it would take tourism into account creating new routes eg a circular route via Devil's Bridge, Tregaron, Lampeter and Llandysul. In short, a strategic body that would create services that would be popular, turning the current downward spiral

into a virtuous upward one. Someone described the current situation in Ceredigion as a 'bits and bobs' service with too many companies involved. The feeling was that bus services should be seen as a social service, not a service run for profit, but run for the wellbeing of the residents.

After hearing about the 'Friends of the 65 Bus' in Monmouthshire (see Appendix 1), who have a place on their council's strategic forum, participants expressed a desire for a similar body in Ceredigion. They want Ceredigion to be in charge of its own destiny. They argued that there ought to be one overarching body in Wales with a centralised plan but that a kind of federal system would then be required to solve the problems local to Ceredigion.

School transport is a statutory service. It is in a rural county like Ceredigion also extremely costly. We heard that the cost this year have increased by 43%. Many passengers are old enough to remember travelling on a bus that had dual usage, both school children and paying passengers. Indeed this is still the case for some of the services. The vision expressed was that this should be expanded, especially in the very rural parts, and that therefore any new buses have to be able to cater for both users, that these buses should also operate throughout the year and at the weekends. In the long term we see this as a cost saving exercise. These smaller routes are used by passengers who then get on the more major routes. It was argued that lack of smaller services affect the major ones negatively.

Investment in bus services is key to sorting out many problems. Higher patronage means lower car use, means it's good for the climate. People being able to move around, get to places, take part in activities, stay independent, all these things affect their health positively, which means less spending needed on the NHS and on Social Services.

How can we improve the public image of buses?

It is possible to change this image if the following ideas are taken on board by bus companies and councils.

- To have a PR campaign to make using buses cool
- This would need a good graphic designer
- See Southampton best practice with corporate image: Bluestar – shining across your city (bluestarbus.co.uk)
- A catchy slogan would be a good idea
- Having messages about the positives for buses such as 'Saving Money as well as Saving Lives'
- Need to think about how to appeal to car drivers to use/support bus services
- Advertise services and discounts better – eg the coastal weekly ticket isn't advertised well also free for over 60's
- Get rewards related to using the bus (like at coffee shops, number of rides and then get a free one) – save carbon
- Loyalty card
- Peer pressure is very strong with children and also adults. If there was positive peer pressure towards taking the bus, this would make a difference

- Promote walking route links
- Encouragement for children and parents – start at school and raising awareness at school
- Get support from businesses in town to provide support for buses in some way, and for workers to use the buses to get to work as well as customers
- Learning in school – sustainable transport and taking care of the world – children and secondary school. Secondary school is key to a change in image
- Positive images of going somewhere nice on the bus like beach or countryside – it's not only people coming to town for shopping and appointments

There are lots of positives in bus use. We need to get the message out that they are:

- Safer than car travel
- Drier than walking or cycling, especially in the winter
- Sociable
- Can nap
- Don't have to drive
- If you are not confident with driving and directions a bus clearly takes you from one point to another, however care is needed regarding location of bus stops
- Less environmental impact than car travel
- Cheaper – when compared to full cost of car purchase, MOT, fuel, tax, insurance, repair
- Better for health, yours and people around traffic, reduce air pollution, get more steps in walking to the bus than to a car
- Electric buses are lovely and quiet and comfortable
- Don't have to find a parking space
- Disabled friendly – can be
- Free Wi-Fi
- Freedom of a chauffeur
- Safer travel – less accidents
- Use of words – invest in buses rather than subsidise busses

There are many ways that car travel is supported over and above bus travel, for example the use of the word investment compared to subsidy. It would be good to hear we are investing in buses. It is also important in image not to demonise car drivers.

Transport needs to be seen as a human right alongside food, work, health and mental health and buses are a key part of this for rural areas. By having the foundations of a good service then the image of buses can be improved, both sides are needed for people to feel confident to take the bus and for people who have no alternative to then receive an improved bus service.

In cultural settings such as TV shows, films and in stories, there needs to be positive bus representation. Instead of Margaret Thatcher's negative stereotypes, change the narrative and say: "Show me someone on a bus and I will show you a wise person."

To support such a positive image the reality needs to focus on the following:

- Correct timetables at all bus shelters
- Reliability – being able to get to a job interview for example
- Electronic timetables to be correct
- Better joined up times with other buses and when people work for example
- More buses at more locations to make bus travel the norm
- Evening services
- Good maps and other information
- An app? (They exist for some services such as the T1 and T5)
- More consistency with bus drivers – many are good with passengers but not the case for all unfortunately
- Potentially use cctv if people feel unsafe – anti-social behaviour
- Should young people be free? This was put forward but examples were also given of problems with ant-social behaviour and safety for the young people
- Be affordable – flat rate
- Need good space for children
- Need space for bikes and e-bikes, see the excellent example in the following link: <https://youtu.be/OBujMNB RDdE>
- Be able to choose to take the bus rather than the car otherwise without a car in a rural area it is really isolating
- For young people challenge of understanding about timetabling and scheduling as so used to a have now culture with the change to streaming services and food delivery for example either you fit in with a timetable or it fits in with you

Messages that compare one mode of travel with another are often negative about buses. How about we change the following:

- Have an infographic comparing costs and/or environmental impact of taking the bus vs having a car
- Have one statement with numerical facts that is easily remembered and can be repeated – would work well for young people
- Car is always advertised as freedom – but always paying for it
- To encourage the 17+ to stay with bus and not get a car

How can bus services be funded?

The discussion about bus services funding revealed participants knew that funding buses was a complex issue but many knew very little about the funding system, its subsidies and the different funding schemes. It's important to note the discussion at this table included participants with direct links to government and expertise with bus funding issues while others participants had almost no knowledge. Much of the conversation was spent allowing

those with expertise to share knowledge with others. Their contributions do need to be fact checked.

The question of funding traditional bus services in Ceredigion during Bus Action Day was an example of the lack of understanding amongst many members of the public about how the complex funding structure works, which causes confusion, frustration, and assumptions. During the discussion, some participants shared that there are three bus networks in Ceredigion, each with different remits and contract conditions. Other participants had no idea which demonstrates the confusion.

Some participants began the conversation sharing their perception of profiteering by bus companies and hearing new information shifted the tone of the conversation almost immediately. For example, hearing there is a subsidy of between £9-£20 y per person per journey shifted many participants understanding of the state of funding for buses in the region. (This subsidy has since the event been the subject of a Freedom of Information request by Ceredigion Bus Action to Ceredigion's Corporate Transport Unit and the reply received indicates that these subsidies only apply to a few bus services in Ceredigion, not the commercial ones, nor the TrawsCymru services) Participants appreciated learning about the difficulties Ceredigion has experienced just trying to find providers to take contracts. Yet many still felt bus companies were making too much profit and too much unanimous control over timetables.

When asked, 'what would they be willing to give up to fund buses?' some participants struggled to answer. However, they appreciated being challenged to think about re-allocating funding priorities with the realities of limited funds and how compromises must be made.

Participants suggested further information about the complexity of funding scheme and the general shortfall in funding would be appreciated. They also sought more information on how bus funding fits in with larger funding priorities for Ceredigion and Welsh Government. They seek further clarification on what franchising means and how the 1985 Transport Act with its deregulation act has affected public transport. These effects may be linked to ongoing examinations of the pros and cons of devolution. The participants wanted more clarity around the implications of HS2 not coming to Wales but being deemed a 'England and Wales' project thereby reducing the funding for transport that Wales can access.

Participants also suggested celebrating the positives and continuing to promote bus service to get people back onto busses at pre-Covid 19 pandemic levels. Participants identified the importance of feeder busses to get people back into the transport network and increase ridership. Participants strongly supported buses as a not for profit and financially supported as a right. Could this approach work best under nationalisation of bus services and could urban areas subsidise rural area bus services because we can't all live in cities. Could this be a long term project across Wales? Are there examples from elsewhere about how bus services have been funded in rural areas that can be replicated in Ceredigion?

Suggestions made about alternative ways to fund the buses include [community bond schemes](#) (which are a social finance tool that can be used by charities, non-profit making and co-operative companies in order to finance socially and environmentally impactful projects. They still attract interest which needs to be paid back over a period), taxing high polluting vehicles, totally privatising some potentially profitable bus routes, or leaving council subsidy for the more isolated rural areas that will never be profitable. What if

people agreed to pay more for their journeys and a wider range of ticket passes like open returns, monthly, x trip numbers per month/year etc. were available? What if we do not automatically give all seniors free bus passes, but means test eligibility instead, so some seniors who can afford to pay for the bus do so, which might free up some funding capacity for young people to have free bus travel too.

Participants suggested good infrastructure and services could bring in more money. They wanted to celebrate the modern, comfortable, clean, electric buses like the T1 between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen and thought they were worth the more expensive price tag. They wondered if to support more electric buses, can there be cheaper renewable electricity rates for buses to recharge.

The Grievance Wall

The focus for the day was to have input from all participants on an equal basis: passengers, Cllrs, transport officers, bus company bosses, bus drivers, anyone else involved in the bus industry. It was recognised by the organisers that passengers would want to have a space to complain. They did. We supplied a Grievance Wall where they could write any complaint about the current service, no matter where they live in Ceredigion, no matter what service they use. They filled ten sheets of A1 paper. Their grievances have been condensed below under certain headings. Some of the grievances mentioned below have come from people who could not attend the Bus Action Day but have sent them to us.

Service cuts

Cuts need to be reversed, we are 100% bus dependent for school, work, shopping, health, family (mentioned T5 and 512)

Buses are overcrowded, people standing (T5)
512 needs to be hourly

Isolated areas: scrapping services means we cannot get to places, crime against humanity. European Court of Human Rights: Right to: 1) independence; 2) education; 3) sociability; 4) psychological health; 5) access to physical health facilities eg swimming, exercise classes; 6) health care services; 7) employment; 8) access to family and friends; 9) business; 10) tourism

Long term effects of cuts: degradation and closure of services, businesses, tourism. Harmful effects on young and old - Ceredigion 2nd poorest in Europe a few years ago – when services were ‘good’

1st thing economy needs is infrastructure

Extra buses for tourists in summer or is it reduction in services the rest of the year for residents. Makes me feel like a second class citizen, we are 12 month of year place, not an 8 week holiday destination

Shift workers need evening services – good for social life too! Eg night classes

On the T21 no more weekend services – how can we get to work? Teenagers can't socialise with friends, isolates older people without a car or people who can't afford a car - missing out on weekend events – we want family and friends to visit on the bus

No 585 service on Saturdays

The X47 is missing a stop now in Llanbadarn Square, long walk

The 501 Waun Fawr: shoppers need hourly service

The X47/525, we need early 525 from Aberystwyth to Llanidloes to open the Wye Valley to bus users and late afternoon-return journeys too.

YP25 school bus is full – doesn't stop at the bus station in town now, therefore difficult for college students and also 6th formers if they have free time they have to 'kill' this time in town/at college – can't go home to study – no buses

Lack of buses from nearby villages for young people to come and visit friends, particularly have friends in Llanilar - buses not going in the evening and as a child what to do when/if a bus doesn't turn up

Demand responsive services such as Fflecsibus

Fflecsibus does not recognise multiple same journeys

They don't work all the time

School buses

School buses must let us on! Even if there's only one of us – lifesaver!

Please let us use school buses

Bad connections and bad routes

T12 misses X28 therefore stops students accessing Newtown College and people working early in Machynlleth

T12 misses T4 to Llanidloes, Builth Wells, Brecon, etc, by 5 minutes, therefore 1hour and 55 minutes wait. Needs coordinating

Also coordination with trains needed. In Newtown students have to walk 25 minutes to FE College, why not have a local bus service?

Why can't the T1 or the T1C not go through Llanfihangel yr Arth?

Bad information

Electronic signs unreliable, eg today 512 not displayed on 'even' hours so only 3 passengers 'in the know' on board

X47 bus info is bad too – from Aberystwyth to Ponterwyd – stop just called Llanbadarn, don't know where it is

T1 on board information all wrong, bad for visually impaired people, especially when entering Aberystwyth and Carmarthen when screen goes to a film of the bus

Access and disability issues

Bus drivers need to be educated to park close enough to the pavement so we can get on with ease – they don't put the ramp down

There is not enough space on buses for wheelchairs, mobility scooters, mobility aids, shopping trolleys, pushchairs, large shopping bags

The new T1 is a bad design for deaf and visually impaired people, people who use a stick or dog. There are too few spaces at the bottom, we can't use the steps

There is no bleeping at the crossing in Park Avenue by the big Tesco as it wakes the neighbours, but it's for visually impaired people!

Why not still have a Park and Ride to Bronglais Hospital? It is especially hard for disabled people without it

Can we have bikes on the buses! More bike space too on trains - needs to be in addition not instead of disabled spaces

I'm 6 foot tall – difficult to find seats that fit, only the rear middle seat on the bus or the disabled seat at the front which I don't want to use as others need it

Safety

No bus service to the crematorium – no footpath so unsafe to walk

No T21 bus direct after college at 4.15. No school bus so have to wait for 1 and ½ hours, then bus drops me off 2 miles from home, then walk, in winter in the dark, no pavement on road

The 512 (due to cuts to trip up hill) doesn't go to top of Borth – elderly can't get to surgery, shop, post office – it only takes 5 minutes for the bus to do this, please do!

Environmental and economic concerns

It's against ECO! Shouldn't be profit making
Climate change is a desperate issue, too many cars on the road now

Feel discriminated against because I live in rural Ceredigion

Rural area – no 'economies of scale' – should be the responsibility of Council to plan universal services – there is now failure to plan!

Current subsidy regime needs reviewing – current criteria are outdated, they do not reflect demand or use

Not all users have a bus pass – can we make Cambrian Railcard valid?

Full fare paying passenger – it costs me 2 fares if I split journey between bus and rail (need to due to timetable issues) – integrated ticket would be great – make journeys multi-modal, flexible!

Image

Buses don't need to be 'cool' – regular, cheap and safe

Pledges from participants at the end of the Bus Action Day

Pledges from the alternative community services table

- Follow up on continuing warm spaces idea
- Will look up the THINK website
- Will engage more with local groups on these issues as a community councillor
- Will pursue grant idea to run experiment for alternative Saturday provision for buses
- Will ask what is the council's transport plan and put the councillor on the spot
- Write to relevant agencies and petition at national and local level to get topics discussed.

Pledges from the franchise, five years' vision table

- Write report
- Email Welsh Government – where were they today!
- Get my petition “free bus travel for the under 22s” submitted to WG Committee stage
- Take part in any activism with “Bus Group”
- Push MPs, Councillors, etc to get a person/organisation that integrates timetables
- Continue to write to Cambrian News and get in touch with politicians and others in charge

Pledges from bus image table

- e-mail politicians/local councils and welsh government re bus services
- e-mail MP and council re cuts to service
- to use buses whenever possible, and support the group, write e-mails to council/Senedd, put up posters at my local bus stops
- keep people local to me in touch with bus companies
- to show support to any bus actions, whenever I can
- stand up for the workers who have to get to and from work by bus. Stand up for the drivers!

Pledges from the Funding table

- More clarity around information and how decisions are made
- Tell my husband stuff
- Raise awareness of the difficult realities
- Look at annual budget report to see where priorities are
- More research on how it works
- Spread the word ‘ECO TO ABER’ infrastructure is a vital life service to everyone of us – it's life or death, never mind quality of
- No profit!

- I can put up posters if you have one. Printing @aber uni really cheap, 2per sheet I don't mind printing posters for you

Conclusion

It is clear that there are major problems in Ceredigion. Many people who rely on buses to get around in order to access work, health and education, are struggling. They want to see more buses, more reliable services, more long-term contracts, far better information and a lot more joint-up thinking. Passengers do understand funding problems although they don't understand the complexities involved. From the discussions it is clear that there is a need for a Strategic Body in Ceredigion that can address many of the problems.

Services in Ceredigion have been described as 'bits and bobs' with the people in charge actually being unable to provide proper services because of the structural nature in which bus services are provided. This is largely historical. In order to modernise services and create a system that works for passengers, these structures need to be altered. A system that works for passengers will bring in more passengers. That is good for the economy in its widest sense. It is also good for the environment.

Passengers are willing to take on some of the responsibilities in an attempt to improve bus services in Ceredigion. They now look at decision makers, from Ceredigion's Councillors and Transport Officers to the Welsh Government, from local operators to Community Councils. Improvements can only be made if all are open to change. The Bus Action Day showed that all participants were willing to listen to one another. That is a fantastic start. Ceredigion Bus Action aims to carry on with its activities until there is a network of bus services that Ceredigion can be proud of.

Appendix 1

This is the experience of the group of passengers in Monmouthshire known as 'Friends of the 65 Bus'. Below is the text taken from their website which was read out on the Bus Action Day. For further information, please visit their website:

<https://friendsofthe65bus.org.uk/>

WHO ARE FRIENDS OF THE 65 BUS?

In June 2018 passengers found out by chance that Monmouthshire County Council planned to withdraw the 65 bus service that connects Chepstow, Monmouth and the villages along the "Wye Valley High Road". A regular passenger led a high-profile campaign to save the bus, supported by local councillors. Villagers along the route lobbied officers and members of the County Council, by writing letters and emails; they contacted the MP and the Welsh Assembly Member; they wrote to the local paper and spoke to journalists so that there was front page coverage in the papers and articles about the bus appeared over a number of weeks; they helped to circulate a paper petition round the villages and towns, and set up an online petition. As a result of all this work, more than 1400 people signed the petition and MCC decided to suspend the withdrawal of the bus service, pending completion of a strategic review of bus services across the county and the sharing of its findings.

In the wake of celebrating a successful campaign, we established a group called "The Friends of the 65 Bus". Our aim is to promote and develop the 65 bus service for local residents and for leisure and tourism. We have made positive contact with the Passenger Transport Department at MCC and are in regular contact with them by email and in person. We have been in contact with each of the community councils along the route, as well as Monmouth and Chepstow Town Councils. We have been offered, and taken up, a place on the Monmouth Strategic Transport Group.

We are building links with walking groups and other leisure users. We have been talking to [Visit Monmouthshire](#) who have offered us a page on their website which makes available tourist information for people visiting the area. We are compiling a list of suggested walks from the bus.

We have a named contact in each of the villages along the route who takes responsibility for promoting the 65 Bus in their communities and looking after the bus stops in their village. There is, for example, currently no-one whose job it is to ensure that the bus timetables on display at each stop are kept up-to-date. Our village contacts will have a key to the bus stop cabinets and will ensure that they are kept clean and that the timetables are up-to-date. We have produced village-specific timetables and our "time-in-town" journey planners that show how long you can have in either Chepstow or Monmouth and which buses you need to use to do this.

Our objectives continue to be to: –

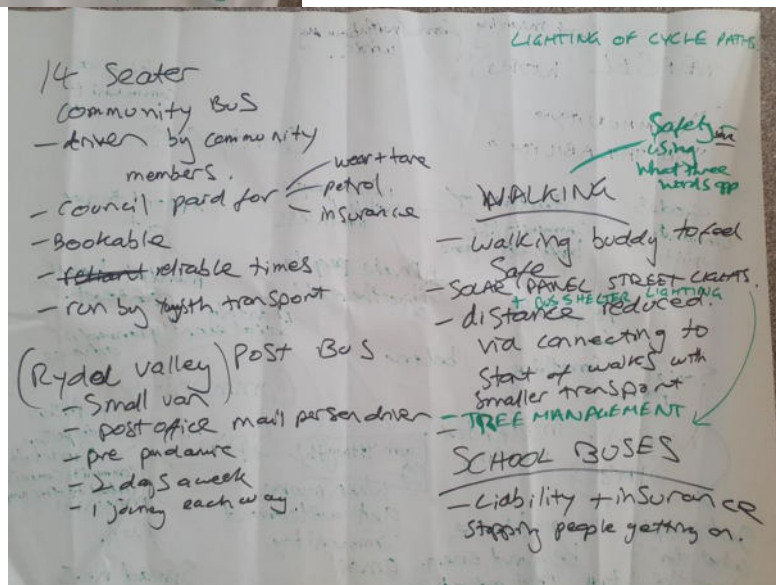
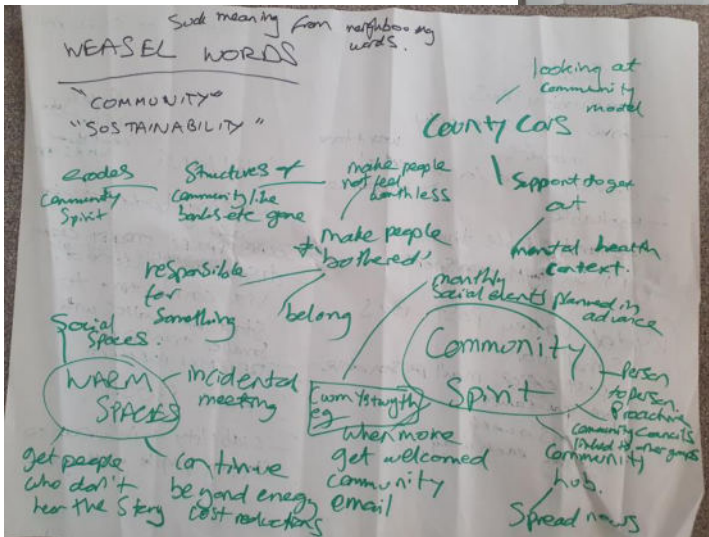
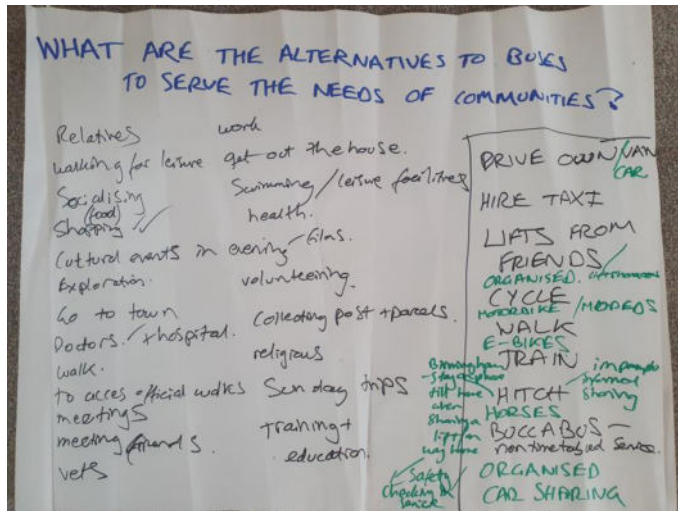
* work with Monmouthshire County Council to promote and develop the 65 bus service

- * ensure the 65 bus is appreciated and passenger numbers are increased and sustained across the timetable
- * join up and involve local communities along the route to ensure the 65 bus is well-used
- * link with local tourism and leisure groups and facilities to promote bus usage

Appendix 2

These are photos of the raw notes taken at the four discussion tables.

The discussion table on alternatives to scheduled buses



- Consolidating Budgets via franchising
 - increase stability or feel of renewable energy
 - long term project = miles wide
 - Urban areas must subside rural areas here
 - flexibus service
 - good distance routes + get people on feeder bus.
 - train subsidy for bus. vs same - not subsidised + non-profit
 - 3.1% core funding out ^{out of} ~~total~~ 900 million -
 * Promote the positives more!
 - clarify what franchising actually is - do you want this or for nothing? operational business
 - bus as non-profit entity - not a process
 - relation to devolution - HSE - £8 funding - energy, water etc. sell to UK for funding.
 - Funding is so unclear!
 - 100% private bus service, - taxi services - 501/506/502 is completely private of bus route

What do we know? Funding

- driver by profit - really difficult to make companies
- partly private + something state funded
- increasing funding but it doesn't go as far
- COMPLEX! - they are all subsidised - so much support - some
- good infrastructure creates £

1991-1992 million - cost - 50 million users - less users = less £
 - revenue falling

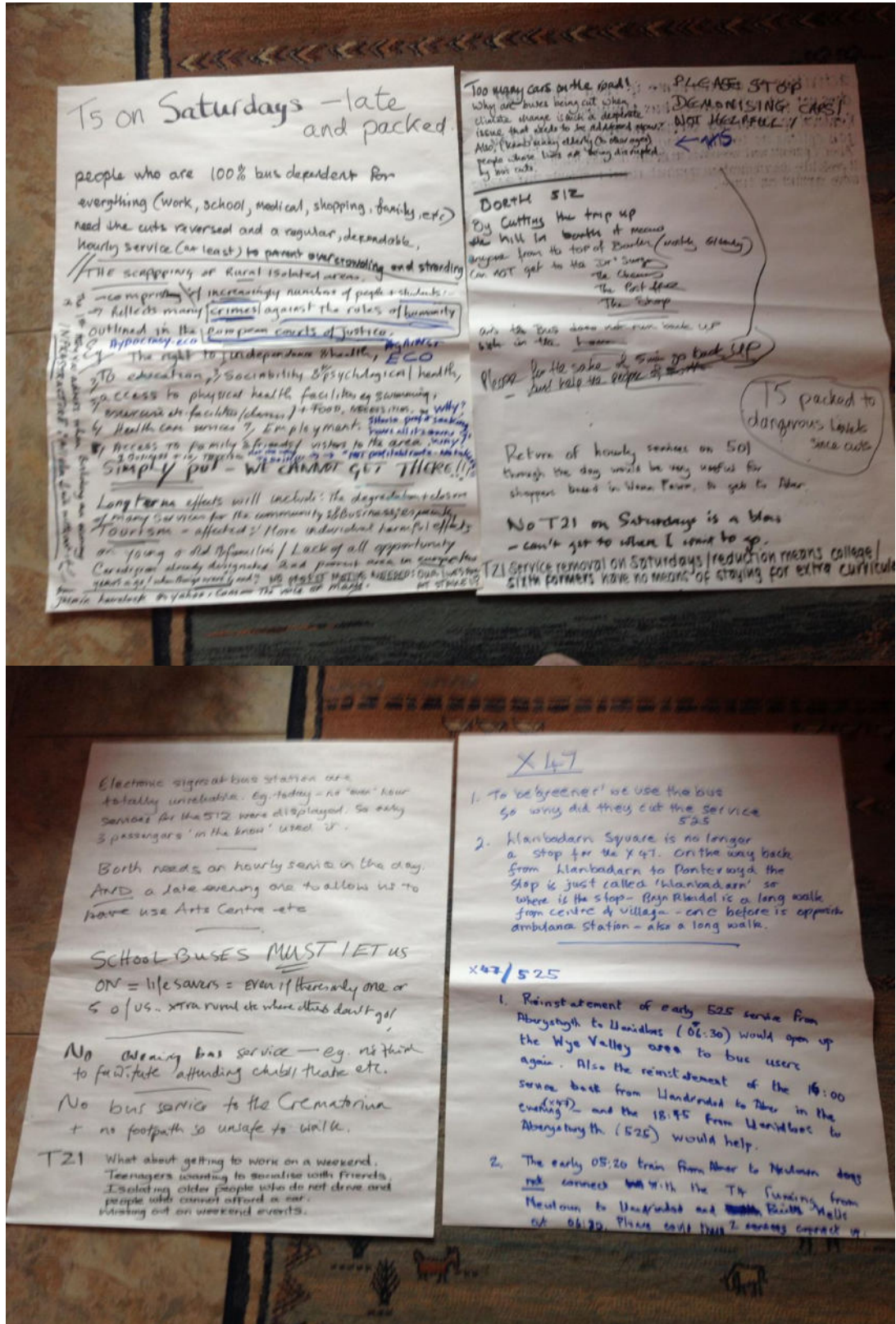
What don't we know

exactly how profit works
 - would it help if the people agreed to pay a bit more?
 - average person doesn't know the complexity of funding model
 £9-20 go to subsidizing per person per journey - capital payment

2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013
 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Appendix 3

Photos of the Grievance Wall sheets.



The reduction in service on the 512 (Ysglas/Aberystwyth) means that I have no more flexibility in my journey choices.

The provision of additional services on the 512 in the summer for holiday makers makes me feel like a second class citizen - my year round journey don't matter, me getting to the shops, hospital appointments, work - none of this matters. We are a 12 months of the year place - not an 8 week holiday destination.

Evening services - this would make having a social life possible!! It would help shift workers and it would make night classes accessible.

Please remember not all bus users have bus passes - it would help the Cambrian Railcard was applied on holidays less cars more buses please

As a full fair paying passenger it costs me 2 fares if I need to split my journey between the buses and the trains (due to timetable issues) We need to look at one ticket for integrated ticketing for all our public transport options. Flexibility between bus companies and multimodal journeys.

Urgent review needed of subsidised services - the current criteria and assessments are out dated and do not reflect current demand or use

Buses don't need to be 'cool' they just need to be regular, cheap + safe

Facilities for multimodal journeys - bikes on buses and more bike space on trains - spaces in addition to accessible spaces not in head of

I am 6F tall and my legs do not fit any seats on any Welsh buses in service apart from rear seat middle section and front seats for disabled & wheelchair persons. This is stupid. The other issues are lack of bike storage on buses and poor baggage storage. People in real communities do big shops.

585 Lampeter to Aberystwyth has improved but the huge loss is no service on Saturdays - THIS IS NO ONE'S FAULT FROM TREGARON HERE!!

This is a rural area - there are NO 'economies' of scale. Please stop looking to have a 'financial incentives' to get systems to work because we have none. Services should remain the responsibility of the council - what is their plan for transport (failure to plan = punishment for private services!!) I am not looking forward to a time when I have to rely on current transport networks... :-)

activities or getting home if their school day does not fit with school bus timings Removal of Saturday service means no Saturday job options as teenage daughter unable to get to Aber (parents work weekends as give in emergency services) It feels like discrimination against rural residents and goes move against car travel.

Fflecsi bus doesn't recognise multiple same journeys.

Struggle with access to bus with my mobility aid - Not enough space - not close enough to pavement - drivers don't put ramp down

How Safe? The Amk + Risk to Dronglets Hospital Angleric Hill and Back to Town? I am speaking up for those who have no transport / built drive and physical disabilities The Electric Bus is a Bad construction for those who are Deaf + Blind

A Council of Farmers they can't have sleep C Traffic Light Noise by Big Trees in Park Avenue, because it will awake the neighbours! regarding for the 'Blind People' my opinion Rubbish to this situation.

T21 - No bus directly after college at 4.15. Have to wait for an hour and a half for bus that drops me two miles from my house on a road with no pavements. Dangerous in dark winters.

T21 - Re-instate SATURDAY SERVICE - I couldn't have got here today but now have to drive but previously walking 4 miles to catch it + back again.

YP25 - School bus is becoming full, and no longer stops at the bus station in town. Makes it more difficult for college students and sixth formers to get to bus if they've had a free lesson. Should have other buses so that we can get home during 'school hours' so don't have to kill LOTS of time.

T21 - Bring back Saturday service. We had to Bonk drive in today + Aber car-parks are congested.

For a green future we need a good bus service. Our freedom of movement is being restricted unless you are a car owner. Friends + family who used to visit us on a Saturday using the bus can no longer do so.

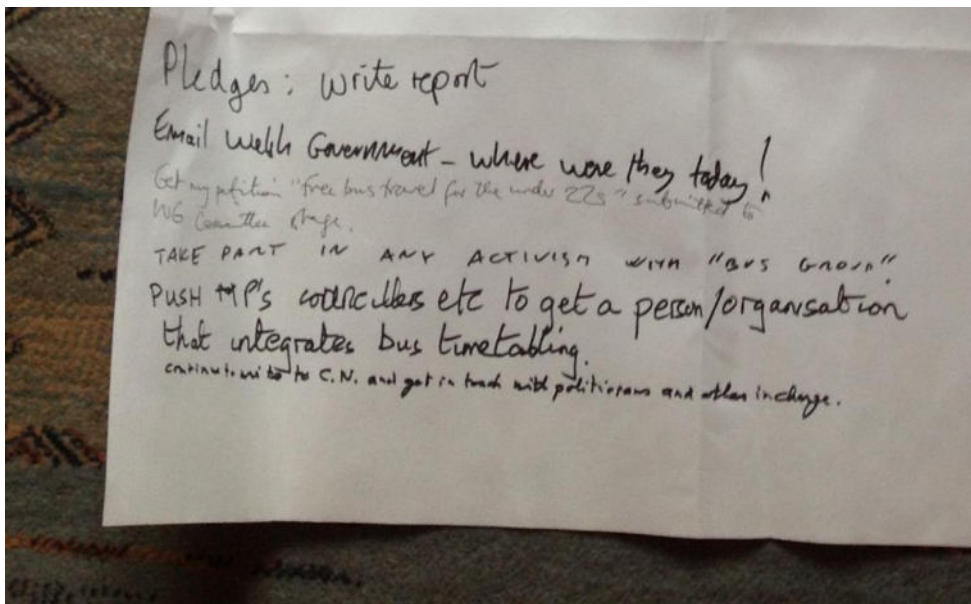
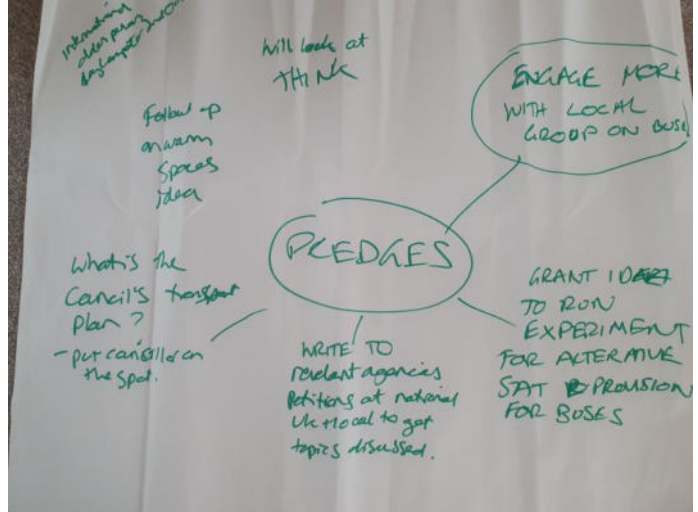
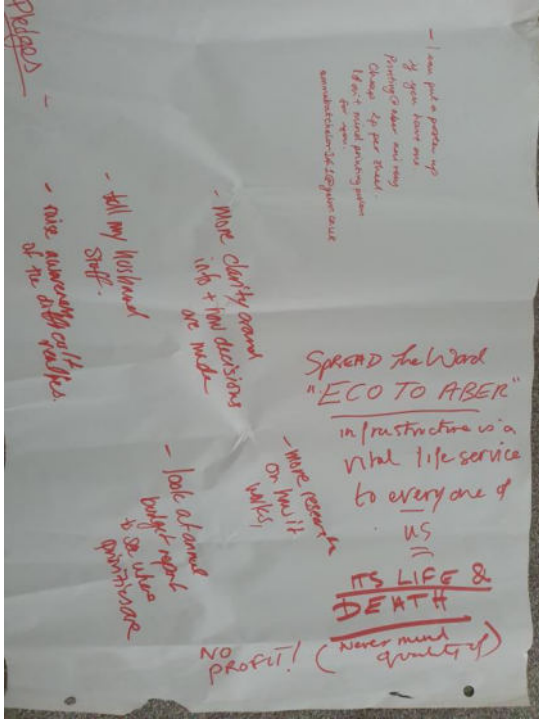
T12 - Miss connects with X28 - no early
 Morning bus from Aber direction to Mach for 7.34
 bus from Mach. stops students accessing
 Newtown college if they have to be there by 9am or
 those working there if they have not got a car left/drive to
 Machyallath early in the morning.
 On the way back, X28 leaves 5 minutes before T12 arrives so
 an hour wait fill next bus.
 T12 ²⁰¹ going to Newtown Misses T4 to Lundloos, Buth, Brecon, Cadf
 & returning?
 by 5 minutes so there is 1 hr 55 minute wait.
 With those 5 minute missa's proper time taking should be undertaken
 so buses co-ordinate. Rehaulose a 5 minute miss buses should
 wait to connect. & flexibility should be in timetable. Co-ordinating with

Trains should also be considered. Those traveling to Newtown have a 25 minute
 walk to the college if the bus ran from via the station or a local service that could also help
 with transport options

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Appendix 4

Photos of the pledges that were made



Appendix 5

Photos taken at the Bus Action Day of the participants talking at the discussion tables.

