

November 9th 2010

1. Introduction

1. We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to contribute evidence to this committee inquiry. Learning Disability Wales is the umbrella body for all third sector organisations active in supporting or representing children, young people and adults with a learning disability in Wales. Our 110 member organisations include large and small service providers, youth groups, people first and self advocacy groups and parent carer groups. They work in all areas of Wales.
2. Our concern is to secure Wales as a country that values and includes every child and adult with a learning disability. Gaining access to good quality, accessible and efficient transport is essential if people with a learning disability are to achieve the independence and quality of life that we are striving for.

2. General Comments

1. We are pleased to support the findings and conclusions drawn by our colleagues in Mencap Cymru and in Torfaen People First.
2. We have also reviewed the written evidence submitted by a number of organisations and are pleased to confirm and support many of the concerns identified by Children in Wales, Disability Wales, Passenger Focus, Railfuture Cymru and Voice Wrexham.
3. In common with other citizens of Wales' people with learning disabilities can be adversely affected by weaknesses and failings in transport options as they seek to travel from one village to another, to travel to the nearest town, to travel across Wales or to travel beyond Offa's Dyke.

4. Unlike their fellow citizens, people with learning disabilities are far more likely to be dependent on public transport or taxis to make these journeys. Access to transport is therefore a major issue for people with learning disabilities.

3. Specific Comments

Issues of particular Concern to Disabled People

1. Rail. It is evident that Network Rail, National Rail and Arriva Trains Wales are taking steps to improve access to rail services for people with disabilities. These improvements are welcomed. We particularly note the good starting point represented by the guide for disabled travellers produced by Arriva Trains Wales and the practical assistance to travellers that is provided by the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service.
2. Rail. We also welcome the investment being made by W.A.G. to cut the gap between carriages and platforms at certain stations across Wales by building humps on platforms and to install lifts to platforms at stations including Cardiff Central Station, Shrewsbury and Wrexham General.
3. Bus. We commend the example set by Newport Transport in ensuring that all its bus drivers undertake a Certificate in Professional Competence that includes awareness of how to respond to the needs of disabled passengers.
4. People with learning disabilities benefit greatly from having access to concessionary bus passes. Bus drivers need to be advised that pass holders have a right to travel without being escorted by a supporter.
5. Rail and bus timetables continue to be produced in formats that are difficult to read and often require an ability to interpret obscure symbols and signs. More work is required by Arriva Trains Wales to make their guide more accessible and easy to use. We note that the London Underground now uses well known disability symbols on its famous tube map to identify stations that have 'step free access' and would ask that such graphic maps are developed for the Welsh railway network.

6. We note that it is acknowledged that much of the rolling stock in use in Wales does not allow appropriate disability access and that there are plans to improve some of this stock. We can find no detail of what these improvement plans amount to, the timeline and scheduling for this work, and what percentage of the rolling stock will have good disability access by the regulators deadline of 2020. We note that even then, Arriva Trains Wales evidence to this committee concludes that 'it will not result in full compliance.' We do not consider this to be reasonable.
7. Traveline Cymru. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people with learning disabilities do not have access to sufficient quantity or quality of information to help them make use of transport. The Traveline Cymru website could potentially be very useful but its current coverage of information for disabled people is very limited. We note that the Cardiff Bus website appears to carry no information to guide disabled people.
8. National Rail and Arriva Trains Wales promote use of the 'Stations made easy' section of the National Rail website. Though it claims that photographs of 2500 stations are provided to help disabled people plan their route, a brief random survey of a number of Welsh Stations could find only line drawings of station layouts that had been drafted by engineers or architects and were not very easy to understand or interpret.
9. Bullying and Harassment. Though incidents of this nature occur in aspects of life, there is anecdotal evidence that people with learning disability can feel vulnerable when travelling on public transport. We would ask that transport staff be given more training in how to deal with these incidents and that more stations are staffed.

Adequacy of the National Transport Plan and W.A.G. Activities

1. We were disappointed that the National Travel Plan made only brief reference to meeting the needs of disabled people and that the Equality Action Plan only picked up on a limited number of relevant points.
2. Many of the improvement plans being developed and implemented by regulators and providers are focussed only on outputs. That is on better platforms, more accessible trains and buses and so on.

3. We would like to see W.A.G. shifting the focus to outcomes and building these into plans, to franchise agreements and contracts. How many disabled people are using the rail Assisted Passenger Reservation Service? How many people have been satisfied with this service? How do we boost its use? How do we lift the percentage of disabled people using public transport?

Learning Disability Wales

November 8th, 2010