

Calls for subsidised train travel in Wales

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The **Welsh Government** has been called upon to do more to encourage people to use public transport by introducing subsidised bus and rail travel, in a bid to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

The **Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee's** latest report, looking at the future of bus and rail travel in Wales, called for subsidies to be introduced to help those living in transport poverty.

Transport poverty, when a household spends more than 10% of their income on travel, is on the rise with increasing fuel, bus and train costs all adding to the financial squeeze. The Committee heard that as this costly issue has a particular impact on certain parts of the community, including disabled people – who make up a quarter of bus passengers – as well as older people and women.

To make bus and rail travel more appealing, the report urged the Welsh Government to look at and learn from the examples set by other countries. Germany has recently rolled out an experiment allowing a month's unlimited travel on regional train, tram, and bus networks for €9. Spain was also referenced, following the introduction there of free travel on short and medium distance trains run by the national rail operator.

Similar pledges have also been made elsewhere in the UK. Recently, the UK Government committed to bringing forward similar measures in England from January 2023 and both Scotland and Northern Ireland have also made similar commitments.

Llyr Gruffydd MS, chair of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, said: “An efficient, popular bus and rail network is crucial for the Welsh economy and is especially important if the Welsh Government’s target of ‘net zero emissions by 2035’ is to be achieved.

“The drive to get more people to use public transport has stalled due to the pandemic and this isn’t being helped by cutbacks. It’s unacceptable that it’s the poorest areas of Wales that have been hit hardest by reductions in bus services.

“Undoubtedly, the cost-of-living crisis will exacerbate the situation of many families who are already in transport poverty, and we believe that it’s imperative that the Welsh Government sets out how it will help people in this situation. Nothing should be off the table, including creative solutions like we have seen in Germany and Spain and which are now being promised for other parts of the UK.

“You can’t expect more people to use buses and trains if those services are inconvenient and expensive. We’re urging the Welsh Government to listen and to act on our recommendations if they are serious about encouraging more people to use public transport.”