



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

VOLUNTARY WELSH BUS QUALITY STANDARD

2016

Introduction

1. In 2014, the Welsh Government published guidance to local authorities about Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG). BSSG funding is allocated to local authorities by the Welsh Government with a view to grant aiding operators of eligible bus services towards their costs in operating those services.
2. The guidance recommends that local authorities should use the BSSG funding to promote social inclusion and wellbeing, through the provision of public transport services that improve accessibility to essential services and facilities. This can include using the funding for improved access for training and work, transport interchanges, access to medical, leisure or community facilities.
3. In June 2014, the Bus Policy Advisory Group, comprising representatives drawn from the bus industry, local authorities and passenger groups, submitted recommendations on how the quality of local bus services could be improved whilst at the same time improving their financial viability and longer term sustainability.
4. One of the key recommendations made by the group and accepted by the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, was that a Welsh Bus Standard be set up, building on the scheme developed for use in south east Wales.
5. It was proposed that a national Welsh Bus Quality Standard should incentivise and reward operators for achieving and maintaining the required quality standards through grant payments. Operators not achieving the agreed core standard would not be entitled to apply for public funding made available from the BSSG.
6. On this basis, operators providing local scheduled bus services will be required to meet the core requirements of the Welsh Bus Quality Standard to maintain their eligibility for public funding made available through BSSG.



The Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard

7. In January 2013, and following a bus funding review, the Welsh Government announced that 2013-14 would be a transitional year, during which the bus funding implementation group would identify key quality outcomes for commercial services that would need to be achieved in return for public funding from 1 April 2014.
8. At that time, the desired quality outcomes included:
 - a. Driver training in disability equality and awareness.
 - b. The provision of audible and visual announcements on buses.
 - c. Standardised information displays at all bus stops.
 - d. The application of safe and efficient – economical – driving.
 - e. Networks that take account of the needs of people who wish to use buses to access health, education, training and employment.
 - f. Multi-operator integrated ticketing schemes so that passengers are able to use their tickets on any service, not just some.
 - g. Integration of timetables with other transport modes.
9. The purpose of the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard is to ensure that:
 - a. the quality of local bus services that passengers can reasonably expect are consistently and universally available throughout Wales; and
 - b. local bus operators are encouraged to improve the quality of the services they provide to passengers.
10. In developing this standard, it has been recognised that some of the requirements will take time to implement and their introduction may depend on external factors outside the control of local authorities and bus operators, such as the availability of Wi-Fi and smart phone connectivity.
11. The Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard therefore includes core essential standards that must be achieved to maintain operators' eligibility for public funding from local authorities through BSSG. An enhanced standard has been included for those quality requirements that are considered more aspirational for the industry. These enhanced requirements should be achieved in a reasonable timeframe if services are to become more attractive to more people, especially when alternative transport modes are available to them.
12. These enhanced requirements, if achieved by bus operators under this scheme, should attract a premium payment from local authorities. The amount of funding available to meet these enhanced standards will be determined by local authorities from within their BSSG allocations, although local authorities may wish to use available funding from their budgets to help meet the cost of the enhanced standards.
13. When deciding the level of funding that is made available for premium payments to be made, care should be taken not to disproportionately disadvantage smaller operators who may rely on historic levels of public funding to maintain existing services, especially in more rural areas of Wales.
14. It is recommended that operators' eligibility for premium payments under the standard is based on a points-based assessment. Working with local bus operators, local authorities should agree the point value to be attributed to each of the enhanced quality requirements based on local circumstances and priorities.
15. For example, local authorities and local bus operators in rural areas may consider that meeting euro cat V diesel engine requirements may be less important than introducing next stop audio visual announcement systems on board. In this case, a higher point value could be awarded to the next stop announcement system.
16. Agreement between local authorities and bus operators needs to be reached about the number of points to be achieved to be eligible for a premium payment.



17. The key benefits of this approach are:
- A consistent, core standard across Wales which also enables local authorities to respond to local needs through adjusting the weighting of enhanced standards.
 - Similar flexibility to adjust the percentage split of funding between core and enhanced standards. This supports a phased introduction of enhanced requirements to minimise the risk of unintended consequences (e.g. service instability).
 - The ability to add and remove standards over time to enable continuous improvement, subject to the periodic review and consultation between Welsh Government, local authorities and bus operators.

Eligibility



18. As set out in the current BSSG guidance, eligible local bus services will be those on which passengers are entitled to travel free under the Welsh Government's mandatory concessionary bus travel scheme.

19. For this purpose, local services are as defined in section 2 of the Transport Act 1985 and registered with the Traffic Commissioner. These can include, for example, a community bus service provided under section 22 of the Transport Act 1985, a flexible bus service, a service using a vehicle with fewer than eight seats, and a taxi bus service, as well as a conventional bus service.

20. Flexible services introduced by the Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2004 are also eligible.

21. Whilst the primary objective for these standards is to improve the quality of local scheduled bus services, local authorities can apply these standards to other local bus services that are in receipt of BSSG funding.

22. Coach services that are primarily designed to service longer distance markets that are not eligible for BSSG payments are specifically excluded from this standard.



Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standards – Core requirements

23. Following introduction of the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard, “conventional” scheduled and other eligible local bus services will be required to achieve and maintain the core requirements of the standard to maintain their eligibility for BSSG payments. This means that bus operators will ensure that:

- a. they participate in the Welsh Government’s Young Persons’ Discounted Bus Fare Scheme¹ by offering a third off the price of the ticket compared to the equivalent adult fare for 16, 17 and 18 year olds;
- b. vehicles operated are compliant with the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000² and any associated legislation
- c. vehicles with a capacity exceeding 22 seats are fitted with working destination blinds that are clearly visible at night, in low light and poor weather conditions providing accurate information about the route destination and key stopping points along the route;
- d. vehicles are cleaned inside and out in preparation for first service each day;
- e. Audio / visual next stop information equipment is installed on vehicles acquired after 2015 and in use during passenger carrying journeys (applicable as a core requirement only on operators with 50 or more vehicles operating in Wales;
- f. vehicles are fitted with an operational and approved ITSO compliant smartcard³ enabled electronic ticket machine;
- g. drivers and, where appropriate, other on-board employees are issued with a uniform, and are required to wear it;
- h. A written customer complaints policy is in place. The policy will include arrangements to acknowledge a complaint within seven days of its receipt by the operator, with a final response issued within 21 days of the complaint being received. The complaint policy will include arrangements for how passengers are able to make an appeal if they are not satisfied with the bus operators’ response.
- i. A clear and accessible notice displayed on- board and online advising passengers how and to whom a complaint or an appeal can be made, including contact details and response times; and
- j. Traveline Cymru is supplied with a full copy of a registration (either paper, PDF or other recognised format and wherever possible an electronic file of the timetable) for a new bus service, or variation / cancellation of an existing service at the same time the application is lodged with the Traffic Commissioner’s Office and the local authority.



1. <https://mytravelpass.gov.wales/en/> – see Annex A
2. www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-coach-accessibility-faq – see Annex A
3. ITSO compliant smart card enabled ticket machine meeting the specification at Annex B

Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standards

– Enhanced requirements

24. The following table sets out the enhanced requirements to be met by operators to be eligible for the premium payments described at paragraphs 12 to 16. The suggested point values

attributed to each of the enhanced requirements is provided as a guide only. Local authorities may vary these values based on their local circumstances and priorities.

Enhanced requirement	Description	Suggested Points Value
Information	Provision of timely information about unplanned service changes using accessible communication formats ⁴ including social media channels and notification Traveline Cymru	(30)
Information	Up to date, bilingual passenger information using accessible communication formats is available on board all vehicles about service frequencies, planned service changes, timetabling and ticketing options.	(20)
Information	Systems in place and maintained that ensures operators participate in local, regional or national real-time information scheme where these exist.	(20)
PlusBus	Participate in PlusBus schemes (where local schemes exist).	(10)
Ticketing	Daily Ticketing Scheme – Participation in a local authority co-ordinated or established daily network ticketing scheme.	(30)
Ticketing	Weekly network ticket – Participation in a local authority co-ordinated or established weekly network ticketing scheme.	(20)
Ticketing	Digital ticket scheme - Participation in regional / national smart or digital ticketing scheme, when in place and operational.	(20)
Ticketing	Availability of a ticketing scheme aimed at people employed on a part time or irregular working pattern basis	(20)
Passenger and driver safety and security	Proportion of vehicles fitted with functioning CCTV	Higher: >90%=20, >50%=12, >10%=6
Accessibility	Audio / visual next stop information equipment installed, operational and in-use on vehicles acquired after 2015. (applicable to operators with less than 50 vehicles operating services in Wales)	Higher: >90%=20 >50%=12, >10%=6
Euro III engines*	Proportion of vehicles achieving EURO III standard or better.	Higher: >90%=20, >50%=12, >10%=6
Euro IV engines*	Proportion of vehicles achieving EURO IV standard or better.	Higher: >90%=20, >50%=12, >10%=6
Euro V engines ⁵	Proportion of vehicles achieving EURO V standard or better.	Higher: >90%=20, >50%=12, >10%=6
Telematics	All vehicles equipped with a telematics system that monitors driver / vehicle performance (e.g. Greenroad, Mix etc.).	30
Disability awareness and equality	Proportion of drivers having completed Disability Awareness and Equality CPC module.	Higher: >90%=20, >50%=12, >10%=6

4. Accessible Information as defined by the UK Government Office of Disability Issues. Further information source is provided at Annex A

5. * It is recommended each area chooses the Euro Emission Standard(s) most appropriate for their operating environment. In south east Wales, operators gain points for Euro III, IV and V, noting that by default, vehicles achieving Euro V, will additionally gain credit under Euro III and IV. It is anticipated that in subsequent years, Euro VI to give credit for investment in new generation buses.

Implementation

25. Local bus routes in Wales often operate across more than one local authority boundary. In implementing these standards, it is important that local authorities collaborate with bus operators and neighbouring authorities sharing bus routes in their areas.
26. In south east Wales, for example, the current quality standard scheme has been overseen by a multi-organisation project board. In developing proposals for this national standard, the Bus Policy Advisory Group recommends that 'Local (or area) Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard' project board is set up to oversee implementation. Once established, future governance arrangements to administer the scheme will be a matter for the individual appropriate funding authorities.
27. It is unreasonable to require local authorities and operators of local bus services to bring these voluntary standards into effect by April 2016. The Welsh Government does, however, expect standards to be introduced during 2016-2017. This means that all local bus operators in receipt of public funding through BSSG will need to meet the core requirements set out in this standard by no later than 31 March 2017.
28. It remains the ambition of the Welsh Government that the enhanced requirements within the standard will be achieved by bus operators within a reasonable timeframe.

Management and monitoring

29. It is essential that the claimed standards are monitored and that the process for doing so is proportionate and reasonable.
30. In determining BSSG payments to bus operators, local authorities will need to receive sufficient supporting evidence that the 'quality standards' have been met and will be maintained, for both core and enhanced requirements, as appropriate.

31. Bus Users Cymru has agreed that Bus Compliance Officers will assist local authorities to ensure that reported standards are being met and maintained. Should the relevant local authority have reason to believe that an operator has claimed for standards that are not being achieved, then further information and documentation may be requested from that operator. In some cases, it may be necessary to inspect records, depots and/or operations.
32. Information gained from other sources may also be used. Operators will co-operate with any such request as failure to do so may result in payments for BSSG being withdrawn.
33. In terms of governance and accountability, it is proposed that the current regionally-based governance and administration arrangements in place for BSSG will be appropriate for implementing the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard.

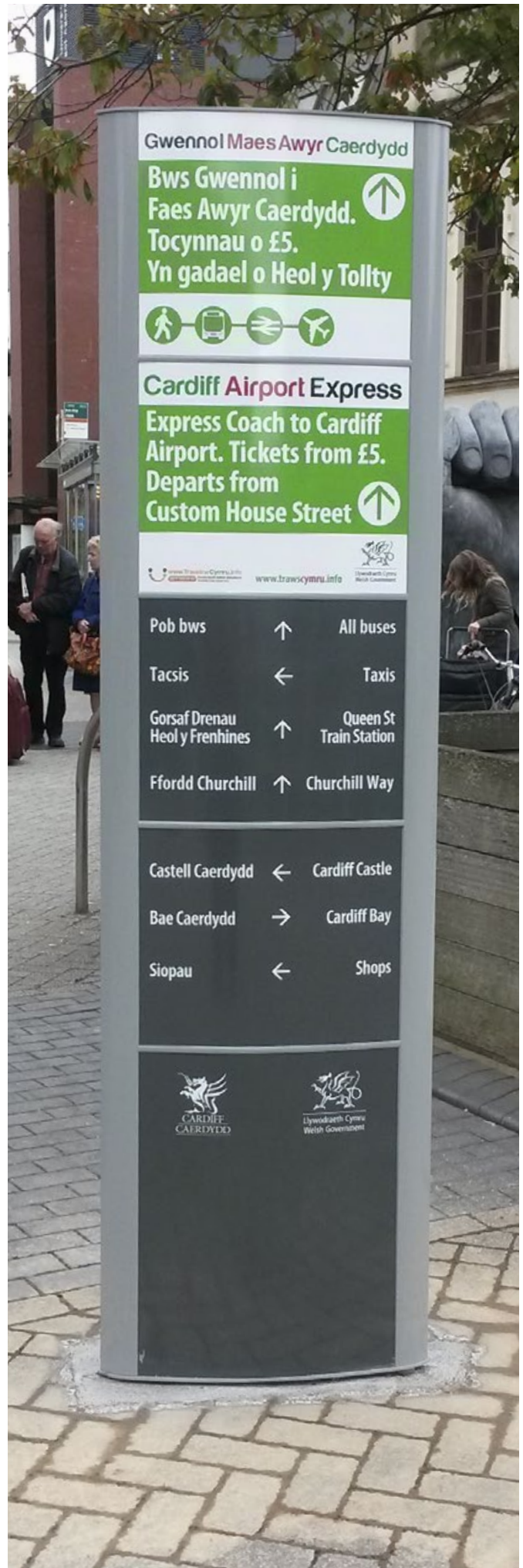
Periodic review

34. It remains the ambition of the Welsh Government that within a reasonable time frame, the enhanced requirements within the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard will be met and consolidated into the core requirement, thus creating a single national standard.
35. This will provide passengers with the assurance that the quality of local bus services provided in the more rural areas in north, mid and west Wales will be no less favourable than the quality standards experienced by passengers in south east Wales, or vice versa. The objective is to achieve a consistent and universal quality standard for local bus services across Wales.
36. In the meantime, in south east Wales and until convergence is achieved, the current three tier scheme comprising bronze, silver and gold standards can be maintained on the proviso that the bronze standard is equal to or better than the core requirements within the national standard.

37. The Welsh Government will keep the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard under review to monitor implementation and give consideration about the timeframe within which convergence of the requirements within this standard can be achieved. It remains important to ensure that smaller operators delivering services in more rural and less densely populated areas are not disproportionately affected from the introduction of these standards.
38. Our expectation is that the local authorities will implement the core requirements within these standards by March 2017, at which point an assessment can be made about the implementation of the standards and a decision taken about the appropriateness of undertaking a formal periodic review.

Welsh Language

39. The Welsh Government's vision is to see the Welsh language thriving in Wales. To achieve that, our Welsh Language Strategy aims to see an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language. In addition to the requirements within this Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard, the Welsh Government expects that local authorities and bus operators will work in partnership to improve the use of the Welsh Language in the delivery of local bus services.



Annex A: Guidance

Young Persons' Discounted Fares Scheme

– “mytravelpass” is a discounted travel scheme funded by Welsh Government providing people in Wales aged 16, 17 and 18 with 1/3 discount off their bus travel.

<https://mytravelpass.gov.wales/en/>

Ticketing schemes to benefit people working part time or irregular working patterns

It is estimated that 44 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men work part-time or work on irregular work patterns. Ticketing schemes offering discounted bus travel to part time or irregular working pattern commuters will encourage more people to use buses. A scheme eligible for premium payments under the enhanced requirements of this standard would be expected to include the following characteristics:

- A person working part time, reduced hours or on irregular work patterns using the bus to travel to and from a place of work are able to undertake the journey at a cost that is no less favourable than the cost to a person commuting five days in any seven day period
- Ticketing schemes designed to benefit people working part time, reduced hours or irregular work patterns are available electronically, on board or at ticketing outlets.

Public Service Vehicle Accessibility

Regulations (as amended) applies to all new public service vehicles (buses or coaches) introduced since 31 December 2000 with a capacity exceeding 22 passengers used to provide a local or scheduled service.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-coach-accessibility-faq

Accessible Information

There are more than 11 million people with a long term illness, impairment or disability in Great Britain. Communicators must be confident their messages will reach everyone, including disabled people. This can be done by ensuring all communications are inclusive and accessible. Advice is provided by the UK Government's Office of Disability Issues (ODI) about how to produce communications that include, accurately portray, and are accessible to disabled people.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-disability-issues.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication

Guidance is provided that demonstrates how to:

- communicate using inclusive language and know which words to use and avoid when writing about disability
- include disabled people in your communications and campaigns and make sure that they're portrayed positively and realistically
- make sure your communications are accessible
- choose and use appropriate communication channels to reach disabled people

Guidance about how to create an accessible PDF
www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-publish-on-gov-uk/accessible-pdfs

Annex B: Itso Compliant Smart Card Enabled Electronic Ticket Machine

ITSO Specification is the UK technical standard for interoperable smart ticketing. The Specification defines the key technical items and interfaces that are required to deliver interoperability between both components of a smart ticketing system – smart media, point-of-service terminals and back offices, and between separate ticketing systems. The purpose of the Specification is to provide a platform and a tool-box for the implementation of interoperable contactless smart customer media in public transport ticketing and related services.

The ITSO is Crown Copyright, and any manufacturer can produce equipment to be certified for compliance with the ITSO Specification.

In general, ITSO promotes open standards but it does not disallow proprietary solutions where they are offered on reasonable, non-discriminatory terms and contribute towards the ultimate objective of interoperability.

ITSO Specification is a technical solution and leaves room for schemes to develop their own business rules.

Further guidance is available at www.itso.org.uk/the-specification/specification-resources/publicly-available-specification