

YMUNWCH Â'R MUDIAD



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# Making the Connection

Why Wales must act now to tackle transport poverty and ensure access for everyone.

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# Introduction

Everyone should have the same freedom, dignity, choice and control, at home, work, in education and in the community<sup>1</sup>. Access to transport plays an essential role in ensuring this is the case. Without viable and affordable transport options, people are at risk of exclusion from jobs, healthcare, social connections and of being disadvantaged when it comes to shopping or accessing cultural activities, all of which are vital for living happy, healthy lives.

The picture of transport access is a complex one. We know that those most affected by transport poverty are people on lower incomes those living in rural areas, or in areas with high levels of deprivation. We also know that income and locality are only part of the puzzle, and that particular groups such as women, disabled people, older people, children and young people, and ethnic minority groups<sup>2</sup> are more at risk of experiencing transport poverty. Though there is a striking lack of evidence on this issue, throughout this paper, and alongside the quantitative evidence, we strive to convey the lived experience of individuals who face barriers to accessing viable transport options. We acknowledge that this is only a snapshot of some of the issues faced and we believe that further research is urgently needed to more clearly identify the breadth of who is affected by transport poverty and how significantly this impacts social inclusion.

Through this paper we hope to provide a picture of transport poverty in Wales today, along with its drivers and implications. We also examine why tackling transport poverty can play a crucial role in tackling inequality in Wales more widely.

COVID-19 and its response have only acted to exacerbate inequality in Wales<sup>3</sup>, and with a cost-of-living crisis only expected to worsen<sup>4</sup>: the time to act is now. Wales's transport system is no exception and can form part of the solution to alleviate inequality and create happier, healthier places across the nation for current and future generations alike.

Ten years on from our last report highlighting the issue of transport poverty in Wales<sup>5</sup>, it continues to impact the lives of far too many. We must act now and act decisively to tackle transport's role in exacerbating inequality and make the connection between living happy, healthy lives and providing equal access to affordable transport.

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, 2019, Action on Disability: The Right to Independent Living, Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-09/action-on-disability-the-right-to-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Government Office for Science, 2019, Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/784685/future\\_of\\_mobility\\_access.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Dr Sara MacBride Stewart and Dr Alison Parken, 2021, Inequality in a Future Wales, Available Online at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/inequality-in-a-Future-Wales-full-report-ENGLISH-UPDATED.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Bevan Foundation, 2022, The cost of Living Crisis: a Welsh action plan, Available Online at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Cost-of-Living-Action-Plan-Final-.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Sustrans (2012) Access Denied: Transport poverty in Wales.

# The Current Policy Context – Where Are We Now?

Between 2012 and today, Wales has been on a journey of creating climate change and transport-related policy, strategy and legislation such as:

**The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)** sets out five ways of working needed for Public Bodies to achieve the seven wellbeing goals. Transport planning was identified as playing an important role in ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens are supported in their mobility choices, whilst we reduce air pollution and meet carbon reduction targets<sup>6</sup>.

The strategy and action plan **Action on Disability: the right to independent living (2019)** commits to “improving the accessibility to public transport for disabled people” through better engagement and consultations with those affected, better monitoring, and improvements in infrastructure<sup>7</sup>.

The **Connected Communities strategy (2020)** sets out as an objective to “provide an integrated public transport network that is safe, reliable, punctual, environmentally sustainable and accessible, and that meets the needs of the travelling public regardless of their economic status or whether they share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital or maternity status)”<sup>8</sup>.

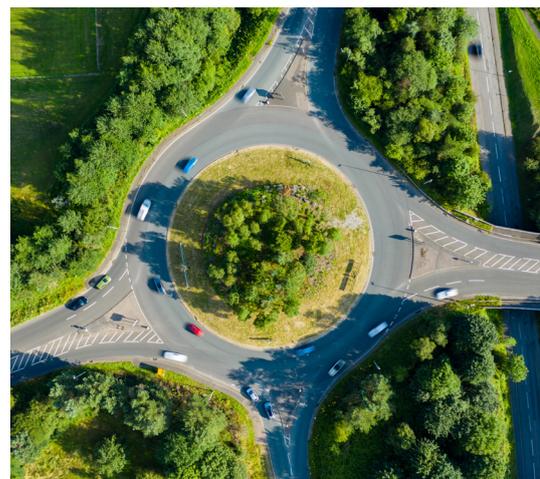
**Age Friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society (2021)** sets out a vision for an age friendly transport system, with a focus on demand-responsive travel, bus services, community transport and door-to-door support<sup>9</sup>.

**Equality Act (Wales) Regulations (2021)** places a duty on public bodies must now consider how their strategic decisions, such as setting objectives and developing public services, can improve inequality of outcome for people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage<sup>10</sup>.

**Net Zero Wales (2021)** outlines Wales’s pathway to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The report outlines the need to transition to more sustainable transport modes, by making it more attractive and affordable for all<sup>11</sup>.

**Llwybr Newydd (2021)**, the new transport strategy for Wales, aims to “improve our health, tackle poverty and open our transport system to all, particularly for those without access to a car and those living in rural areas.”<sup>12</sup>

**Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales (2022)** highlights the need for continued and sustained investment in active travel as a means to encourage healthy, active lifestyles<sup>13</sup>.



## Wales’s Transport Poverty Challenge

Whilst the current strategic framework recognises the role of transport in delivering social inclusion, our data illustrates that there’s a long way to go in order to address the issues in the Welsh transport system. On the following page, we explore some of the barriers that drive transport poverty and examine their impact on people’s daily lives.

<sup>6</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020, The Future Generations Report 2020, Chapter 5: Transport, the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner, Available at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Chap-5-Transport.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government, 2019, Action on Disability: the right to independent living, Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-09/action-on-disability-the-right-to-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government, 2020, Connected Communities, A strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections, Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/connected-communities-strategy-document.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Age Friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society, Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-10/our-strategy-for-an-ageing-society.pdf>

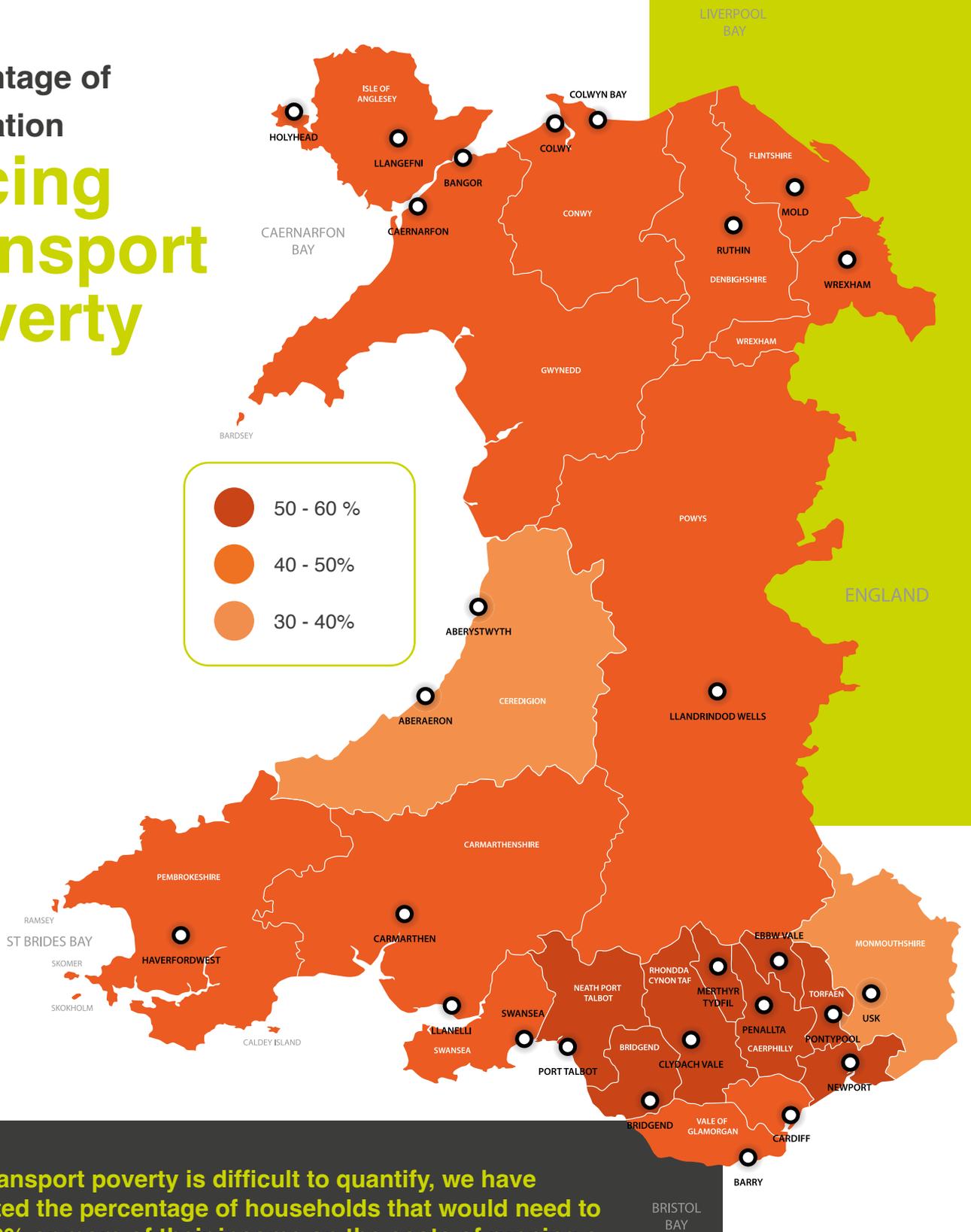
<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, A More Equal Wales: The Social-economic Duty, Available at: <https://gov.wales/more-equal-wales-socio-economic-duty>

<sup>11</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Net Zero Wales, Carbon Budget 2, Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-10/net-zero-wales-carbon-budget-2-2021-25.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government, 2020 Llwybr Newydd: A new Wales Transport Strategy, Available at: [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/llwybr-newydd-wales-transport-strategy-2021-full-strategy\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/llwybr-newydd-wales-transport-strategy-2021-full-strategy_0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government, 2022, Healthy Weight Healthy Wales: Moving Ahead, 2022-2024, Available at: [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-03/healthy-weight-healthy-wales-2022-to-2024-delivery-plan\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-03/healthy-weight-healthy-wales-2022-to-2024-delivery-plan_0.pdf)

# Percentage of Population Facing Transport Poverty



Whilst transport poverty is difficult to quantify, we have highlighted the percentage of households that would need to spend 10% or more of their income on the costs of running a car (regardless of whether or not they have one currently) in the map above. The map displays the widespread nature of transport poverty in Wales, making the case for centralised solutions to tackle the scale of the problem.

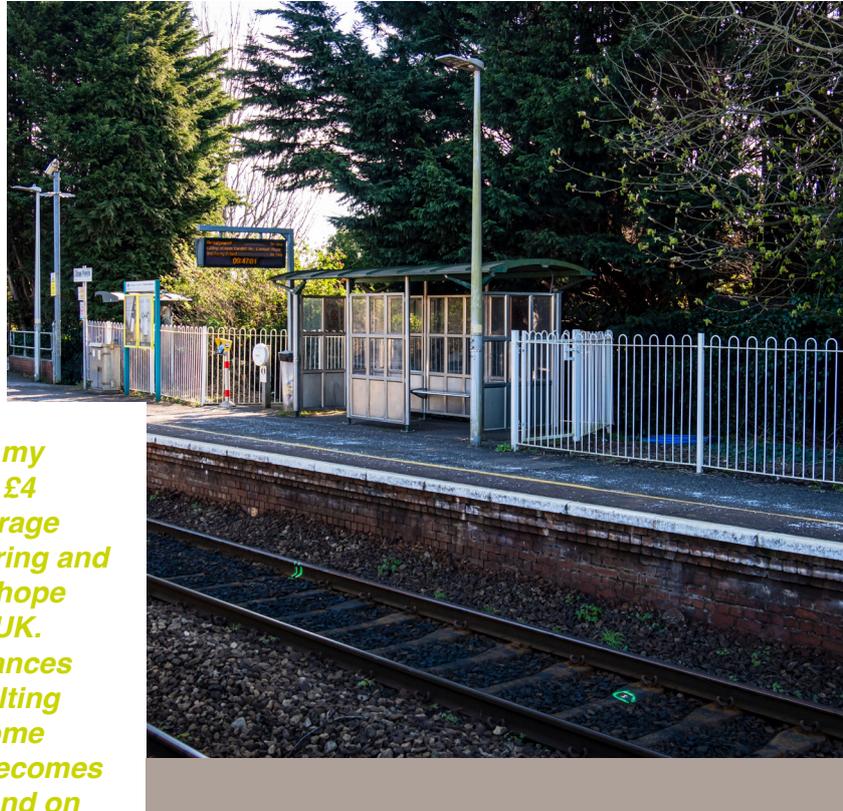
Due to being reliant on census data, the above map was produced with figures from 2012, whilst we await for the next round of relevant data to become available. The context for this is also evident from the rising cost of transport as discussed later in the report.



# The Rising Cost of Travel

In the past decade, fuel prices have risen by less than 10% while rail, coach and bus ticket prices have increased between 33% and 55.7%<sup>14</sup>. Bus fares increased by 3.5% from 2019 to 2020 alone<sup>15</sup> and a 3.8% increase in rail fares has been announced for 2022<sup>16</sup>. With a broader cost of living crisis, many will have to make some serious decisions about how, when and where they travel.

For many in Wales, public transport isn't a choice - 23% of the population in Wales don't have access to a car or van<sup>17</sup>.



***“The lack of transport has a huge impact on my everyday life because of the high costs. The £4 day-to-go ticket is very expensive for an average asylum seeker who is interested in volunteering and travelling long distances to do things in the hope of a better life in regards to their stay in the UK. As a result, many of us walk these long distances so are constantly tired and dehydrated, resulting in consistent illness. In addition, because some distances are too long and the ticket price becomes inevitable, it affects how much we get to spend on food and other important needs. This in turn leads to malnutrition and general inconvenience”.***

***Female Asylum Seeker, Cardiff<sup>18</sup>***

As highlighted above, higher fares have a greater impact on those who rely on public transport and people on low incomes. In Wales, many who do not have access to a car rely on bus services to access basic necessities<sup>19</sup>. Despite this, many services have been struggling with the number of individual passenger journeys falling by nearly 50% since 1990<sup>20</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused further challenges and whilst the Welsh Government's Bus Emergency Scheme<sup>21</sup> has been crucial in protecting vital bus services, not all services have survived, and the extent of the recovery remains to be seen. This poses questions about who and what our transport network should be serving. We know the positive impact of bus services, with research displaying that improving local bus connectivity was associated with a 3.6% reduction in social deprivation<sup>22</sup>, as well as bus travel providing physical health benefits by encouraging bus users to exercise as part of their journey<sup>23</sup>. Rather than being driven by profit, Sustrans believes the maintenance and development of our transport system should be driven by its role as a public service.

Whilst all households in Wales are feeling the effects of a developing cost of living crisis, it will have a disproportionately large impact on low-income households<sup>24</sup>. The rising costs of transport are already playing a significant role in squeezing household incomes<sup>25</sup>. We must therefore consider the rising cost of transport when planning how best to counteract the broader cost of living crisis over the coming years.

<sup>14</sup> RAC Foundation, N.d, Transport Price Index, Available at: <https://www.racfoundation.org/data/cost-of-transport-index>

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Statistics, Public Service Vehicles, Available at: <https://gov.wales/public-service-vehicles-buses-and-taxis-april-2019-march-2020.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/transport-wales-rail-fares-increase-23112139>

<sup>17</sup> Figures from the 2011 Census

<sup>18</sup> Case Study provided by Oasis Cardiff

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Public Service Vehicles (buses and taxis): April 2019 to March 2020, Available at: <https://gov.wales/public-service-vehicles-buses-and-taxis-april-2019-march-2020.html#:~:text=During%202019%2D20%2C%20there%20were,covering%2088.8%20million%20vehicle%20kilometres>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Lee Waters MS 2021, Written Statement: Additional Funding and a New Partnership for Bus Operations in Wales, Available at: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-additional-funding-and-new-partnership-bus-operations-wales>

<sup>22</sup> Greener Journeys, 2016, The Value of the Bus to Society, Available at: <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Value-of-the-Bus-to-Society-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Confederation of Passenger Transport, 2020, Post COVID-19, Putting bus first in the transport network, Available at: <https://www.cpt-uk.org/media/tbdlg2o/cpt-bus-priority-document.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Bevan Foundation, 2022, The cost of Living Crisis: a Welsh action plan, Available Online at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Cost-of-Living-Action-Plan-Final.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> ONS, 2022, Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2022, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/january2022>



# Insufficient Public Transport Network



Since 2010, bus vehicle numbers have decreased by 17.8%<sup>26</sup>. Consequently, 12% of people now do not have any public transport links within their local area<sup>27</sup>.

Where services are present, they may not be accessible; half of rail stations in Wales are not fully accessible to disabled people, with 34% having no access for wheelchair users<sup>28</sup>.

The existence of a service does not guarantee an alignment with people's needs. Variations between weekday and weekend services, services that stop early in the evening, and a lack of stops in key places mean that people have to be able to walk to their destination. Failure to integrate effectively with other modes of travel (including active travel), a requirement to go through an urban centre to reach the other side, and lack of frequency of service can all form barriers to viable use<sup>29</sup>.

***“I am a wheelchair user so need appropriate spaces and am required to pre-book assistance to use the train. It would be far better if there were level boarding for trains, or an automatic system for letting down a ramp, same with buses. Not all bus drivers are very amiable about putting the ramp out, and some seem to think it isn't necessary and one should be able to “jump” over the gap between the bus and the pavement, I don't always agree with their estimation of the distance for my small front wheels, a bit anxious about getting stuck between bus and pavement.”***

***Wheelchair User, Swansea<sup>30</sup>***

***“The cost and the amount of public transport's not always good depending on your area you're living in. You know they finish at stupid o'clock in the evening, in some areas they don't get the buses.”***

***Juror, South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel<sup>31</sup>***

The quotes above highlight issues faced by disabled transport users and people who don't live on well-serviced routes, often outside of the urban centres. Network issues may also be faced by people on shift work, those who require access to transport outside of peak hours, older people who can face issues changing services in the centre of an urban area or navigating regularly changing timetables, and people on low incomes who can't afford separate fares for multi-modal journeys.

<sup>26</sup> ONS, 2022, Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2022, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/january2022>

<sup>27</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Statistics, Public Service Vehicles, Available at: <https://gov.wales/public-service-vehicles-buses-and-taxis-april-2019-march-2020.html>

<sup>28</sup> Oxfam Cymru, 2020, The Welsh Doughnut 2020: A framework for environmental sustainability and social justice Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-welsh-doughnut-2020-a-framework-for-environmental-sustainability-and-social-620979/>

<sup>29</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020, Accessible public transport for older and disabled people in Wales, Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/accessible-public-transport-for-older-and-disabled-people-in-wales.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Fransen et al, 2015, Identifying public transport gaps using time-dependent levels, Journal of Transport Geography, vol.48, p.167-187, Available at: <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/6956461/file/6956466.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Case study provided by Transport Focus

<sup>31</sup> South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel - The South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel is one of four citizens' juries around the UK held by the Environmental Justice Commission in late 2020 and early 2021.

# Barriers to Active Travel



Cycling remains inaccessible to large numbers of people, despite there being a sizeable appetite from different demographic groups to start cycling. 85% of people aged over 75, 78% of disabled people, 76% of women, 75% of people at risk of deprivation, and 75% of ethnic minority groups never cycle<sup>32</sup>. Whilst there are differences between all these demographics, many barriers to cycling are often shared. Sustrans' 2019 Bike Life report, which assesses cycling in cities and urban areas across the UK, revealed that 47% of individuals don't cycle or cycle less often because they are concerned about safety, 20% say they live too far from their destination and 16% say the cost of a suitable cycle is prohibitive<sup>33</sup>.

The same is the case for walking and wheeling, where many of the barriers to access are shared<sup>34</sup>. Marginalised groups are more likely to be affected by barriers to walking or wheeling, which can make journeys uncomfortable, unsafe and inaccessible<sup>35</sup>.

However, experience shows that where cycle-schemes are available, they can have hugely positive impacts.



## Case Study

### E-Move, Rhyl

As part of a Sustrans' e-cycle loan scheme, wholly funded by Welsh Government, in Rhyl, one beneficiary took up the opportunity of an e-cycle to aid their new daily commute from Colwyn Bay to Rhyl - an 11 mile ride each way.

The participant had been made redundant when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and had taken a job in Rhyl. Without access to a car and the timing of shift patterns making commuting by train difficult, their only option was to cycle. However, the 22-mile round trip on an old bike was proving too much on top of a day's work. The opportunity to borrow an e-cycle made a huge difference, especially during the commute home when cycling in adverse weather conditions. The experience re-invigorated their desire to travel actively and ultimately resulted in the beneficiary purchasing their own e-cycle.

***"There were days I'd never take my bike out because of wind, but I found that with the e-cycle I can master the wind...I find it great help to have the assistance, somebody at my age, which is over 80, it's a great assistance."***

**Retired teacher**

Another participant remarked how with an e-bike:

***"I felt more confident in traffic, which was a surprise for me, that was a great positive. It exceeded my expectations. We went on one or two longer rides than we would have otherwise... jollies... the places we went were too far to go out on an ordinary bike"***

**Woman over 60, living in a hilly area**

This example highlights how e-bikes can also provide independence for older people. Addressing the barriers that make cycling inaccessible to many will offer independence to a wide range of people.

<sup>32</sup> ARUP, 2020, Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cycling in cities and towns. Available at: <https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cycling-for-everyone-a-guide-for-inclusive-cycling-in-cities-and-towns>

<sup>33</sup> Sustrans, 2020, Bike Life UK 2019 report, Available at: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/bike-life>

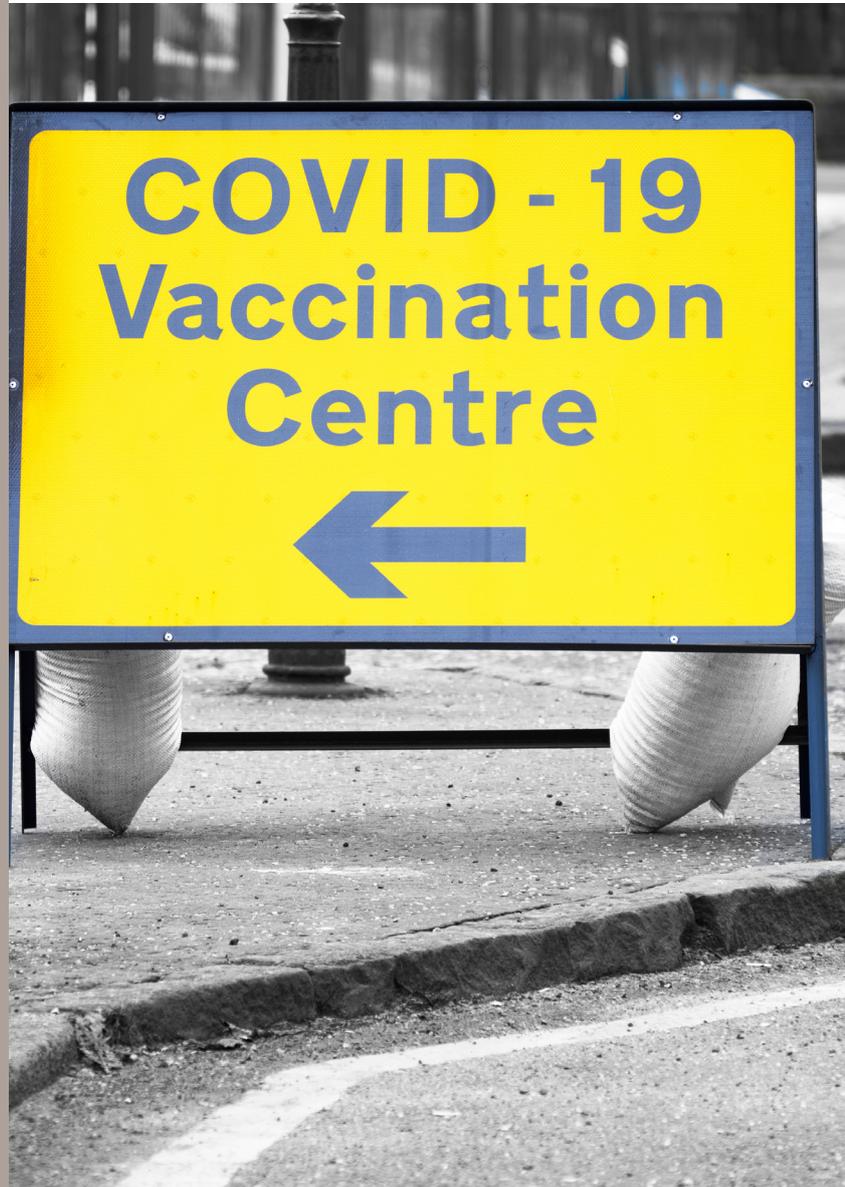
<sup>34</sup> Living Streets, ARUP & Sustrans, 2022, Walking for Everyone: Making walking and wheeling more inclusive, Available at: [https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10152/220322-inclusivewalking-a4report\\_v23\\_remediated.pdf](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10152/220322-inclusivewalking-a4report_v23_remediated.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

# COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has posed further challenges. Rail and bus services were reduced, particularly on rural routes already at risk, and official messages from governments urged people to keep away from public transport. People's behaviours have shifted away from public transport, with a 73% drop in bus journeys made in Wales between January and March 2021 compared to the previous year<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, rail passenger journeys dropped from 31.8 million in 2019/20 to 5 million in 2020/21<sup>37</sup>.

Farebox revenue has suffered severely and so has the confidence of potential passengers, affecting the financial viability of public transport services. The reality of declining public transport services is that the harshest and most damaging impacts will be felt by those who rely on public transport to access shops, jobs or healthcare, and are already socially disadvantaged. To put this into context, in the UK, over 90% of the highest earning households own one or more vehicles, while only 35% of the lowest earning households own one<sup>38</sup>. This shows that economically advantaged car owners are thus insulated from the worst effects of declining public transport services, which have a significant effect on low-income households who have no access to a private car for their transport needs. Loss of public transport services also disproportionately hits those living in rural areas of Wales, where public transport plays a key role in enabling access to services, employment, training and recreation<sup>39</sup>.



## Why Access to Transport is Vital

Transport underpins the functioning of society. It plays a fundamental role in enabling access to work, learning, health services, and social and cultural activities. If our access to transport options is not questioned, it is easy to take travel and mobility for granted. On the following page, we examine some of the areas that are influenced by our ability to access reliable and affordable transport options.

<sup>36</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2021, Quarterly bus statistics: January to March 2021, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-bus-statistics-january-to-march-2021>

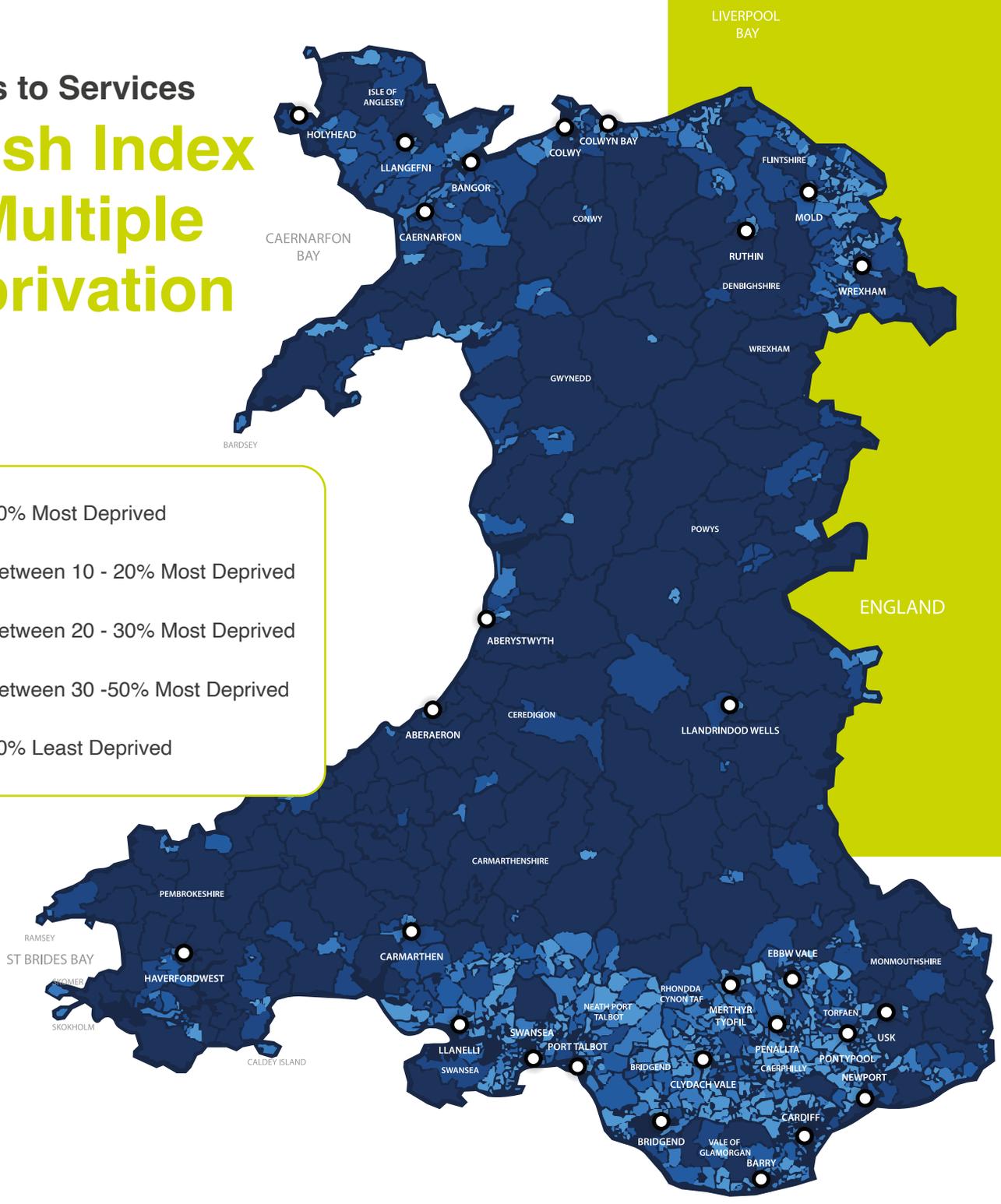
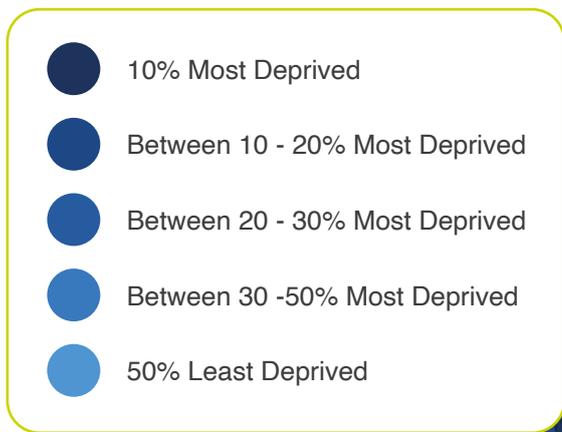
<sup>37</sup> Office of Rail and Road, 2021, Passenger Rail Usage 2020-21 Quarter 4, Available at: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1946/passenger-rail-usage-2020-21-q4.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2019, ONS, Percentage of households with cars by income group, tenure and household, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/datasets/pershageofhouseholdswithcarsbyincomegrouptenureandhouseholdcomposition/tables47>

<sup>39</sup> Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2018, What Works in Tackling Rural Poverty: An Evidence Review of Interventions to Improve Transport in Rural Areas, Available at: <https://www.wccpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/An-evidence-review-of-interventions-to-improve-transport-in-rural-areas.pdf>

# Access to Services

## Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation



The map above uses the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation Access to Services domain to consider the return journey travel time (for car and public transport) from each dwelling to the location of the nearest service.

It displays deprivation as a result of a household's inability to access a range of services that are necessary for day-to-day life. Poor access to services also compounds other forms of deprivation in an area<sup>40</sup>.

BRISTOL BAY

### Services Considered:

- Pharmacy
- Food Shop
- General Practitioner
- Post Office
- Primary School
- Public Library
- Sports Facility
- Secondary School
- % Unavailability of broadband at 30MB/s
- Petrol Station (Private transport only)

<sup>40</sup> Statistics for Wales. 2019. Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019: Technical Report. Available from: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-02/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation-2019-technical-report.pdf>

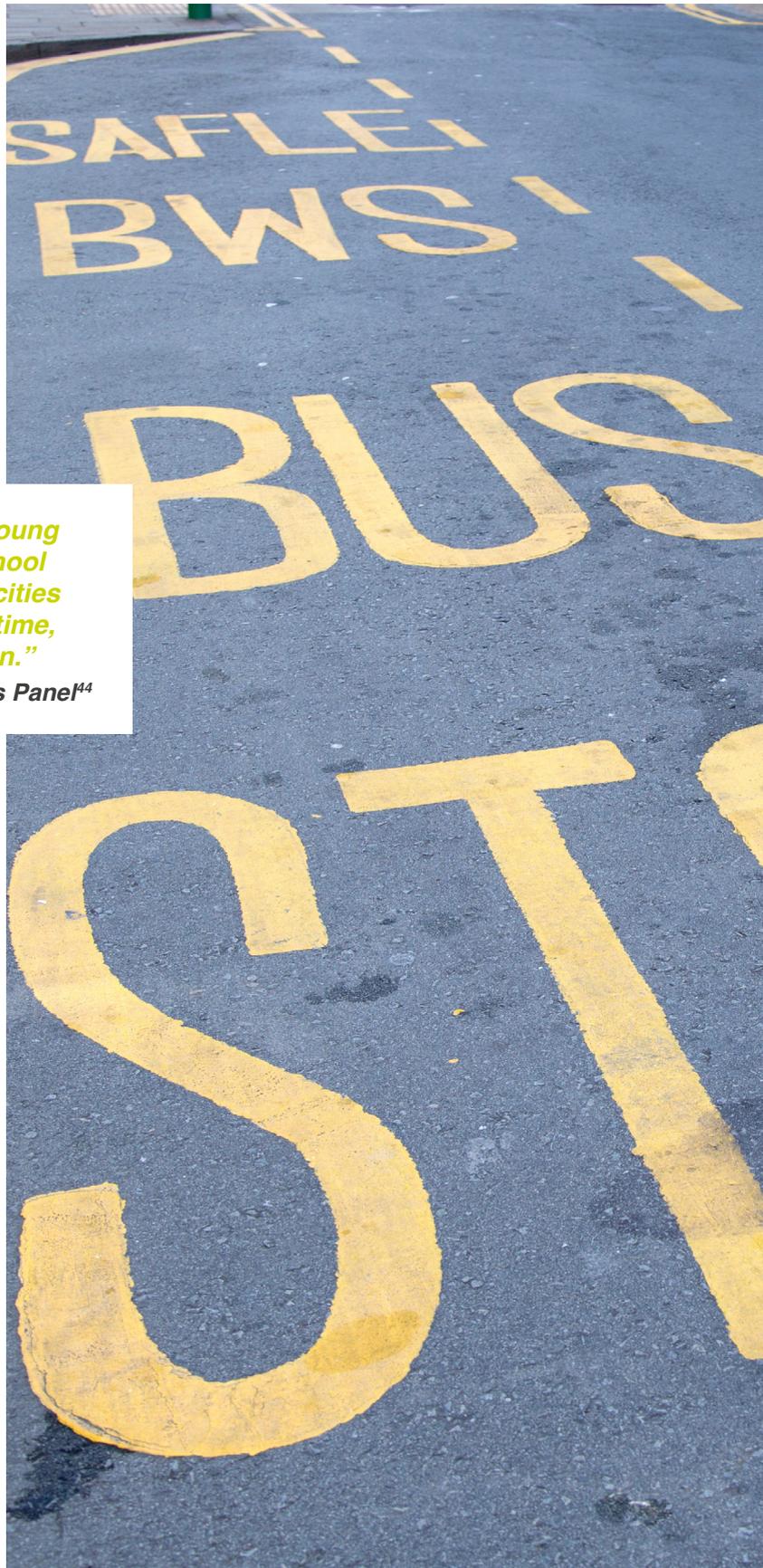
# Access to Work

Our ability to get to and from work is heavily impacted by the transport options we have available. Whilst location of employment is an issue, poor public transport options are also a significant barrier for many and is often seen as constraining rather than enabling employment. This is especially the case for residents living in low-income neighbourhoods<sup>41</sup>. A survey undertaken by Transport Focus highlights that 22% of people in the UK feel that public transport in their area limits their ability to access employment; this number was 4% higher for disabled people who answered the survey<sup>42</sup>. In contrast, research has demonstrated that having access to a private vehicle makes it 3.8 times more likely that someone is employed rather than unemployed (compared to not having car access)<sup>43</sup>.

***“One of the walls I face as a woman with a young family is being able to get my children to school on time and then travel to one of the bigger cities (Swansea, Cardiff) to work and get there on time, making public transport an impossible option.”***

***Juror, South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel<sup>44</sup>***

As this example demonstrates, access to work via public transport is limited by the routes available, the time the journey will take, and the time services are available. This will have a disproportionately adverse effect on women, who are more likely to need to make multiple stops on a journey, shift workers who require transport outside of the 9 to 5 commuter window, and people who have to travel to non-city centre locations, such as people working in factory or industrial settings<sup>45</sup>.



<sup>41</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019, Tackling transport-related barriers on employment in low-income neighbourhoods, Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/tackling-transport-related-barriers-employment-low-income-neighbourhoods>

<sup>42</sup> Transport Focus, 2021, Accessible Transport, unlocking a better normal. Available at: <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/accessible-transport-unlocking-a-better-normal/>

<sup>43</sup> NatCen, 2019, Access to Transport and Life Opportunities, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831766/access\\_to\\_transport\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel - The South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel is one of four citizens' juries around the UK held by the Environmental Justice Commission in late 2020 and early 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Sustrans, 2018, Exploring gender and active travel, Available at: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/research/all-themes/all/exploring-gender-and-active-travel>



# Access to Learning

Access to school is fundamental, but access to extracurricular activities is equally important to help children and young people extend their social networks and give them the opportunity to learn new skills and abilities. This impacts long-term career aspirations, as well as university and job applications<sup>46</sup>.

Unfortunately, relying on public transport services to get to and from school on time becomes problematic when the services are regularly unreliable<sup>47</sup> and issues may be compounded when lateness results in punishments or fines. This is also a major barrier for secondary school children who are forced to rely on public bus services to get home after accessing extracurricular provision<sup>48</sup>.

***“Since the school withdrew the free bus, families can’t afford to get their children to the local primary and having to keep a car on the road has pushed people even further into poverty. It’s so sad to see people with no other option, traipsing their children up and down the hills for 2 miles, in all weather, but with no public bus either their only other option would be a taxi. Who can afford that every day?”***

***Member, Cefn Golau Together, Blaenau Gwent<sup>49</sup>***

Research in England which analysed the link between low achieving schools and poor public transport provision has shown that places with poor public transport provision are more likely to have low achieving secondary schools<sup>50</sup>. The study found that secondary schools with fast public transport links have 24% more schools graded as outstanding. It also found that where public transport is combined with high levels of deprivation, schools are more likely to rate badly, with 66% of schools in deprived areas with longer travel times rated inadequate or requires improvement. This is thought to be a consequence of the struggle to hire and retain the specialist staff needed at secondary schools.

This forms part of a cycle where people are unable to access quality education partly as a result of transport poverty, which consequently presents a greater barrier to escaping poverty in future<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, evidence suggests that transport costs prove a barrier to young people that are not in education, training or employment from accessing such opportunities<sup>52</sup>. Positively, research suggests that providing better public transport provisions has the potential to unlock education and training opportunities for young people, especially if such services are accessible and affordable<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Social Mobility Commission, 2016, An Unequal Playing Field, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818679/An\\_Unequal\\_Playing\\_Field\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Personal story from a constituent in Pontypridd, debate on bus services 23/06/21.

<sup>48</sup> Children, Young People and Education Committee, 2020, Children's rights in Wales, Available at: <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13405-r/cr-ld13405-r-e.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Case Study Provided by CTA Wales

<sup>50</sup> BBC News, 2020, Bad local transport linked to failing schools, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51707148>

<sup>51</sup> Transport Scotland, 2021, Transport and Child Poverty – Beyond the Pandemic, Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transport-and-Child-Poverty-Beyond-the-Pandemic.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> NatCen, 2019, Transport and inequality: An evidence review for the Department for Transport, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/953951/Transport\\_and\\_inequality\\_report\\_document.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

# Access to Healthcare

Of those who don't own a car in the UK, 44% find it difficult to access health services<sup>54</sup>. People who have long-term illnesses or people with disabilities are less likely to have personal car access than the national average<sup>55</sup>. As a result, buses and community transport have a critical role to play in providing access to health services. One study found that where bus services are easily accessible, particularly through the provision of concessionary bus passes, access and use of health services and facilities is higher<sup>56</sup>.

However, barriers still exist. For example, a recent study of older people accessing healthcare in Wales demonstrates that even in areas where public transport services make travel possible, a lack of basic facilities, such as shelters, seating and timetable information makes travel an uncomfortable and difficult experience<sup>57</sup>.

Additionally, access to healthcare can become a challenge due to the relocation of surgeries and health centres to the outskirts of town, and the lack of viable public transport options to get there.

Where Community Transport is available, it may not always meet the needs of users, as the time it takes to get to appointments or picking up others on the way can mean journeys take all day, despite the appointment itself only being short<sup>58</sup>.

***“We have one lady we support who has to go to hospital several times every week. She has no family or friends nearby and had started missing appointments because she couldn't even afford our fares – we could see her health deteriorating. We've put arrangements in place now so she pays for one journey a week and we cover the cost of the rest; we don't want to see her getting more ill because she can't afford to travel.”***

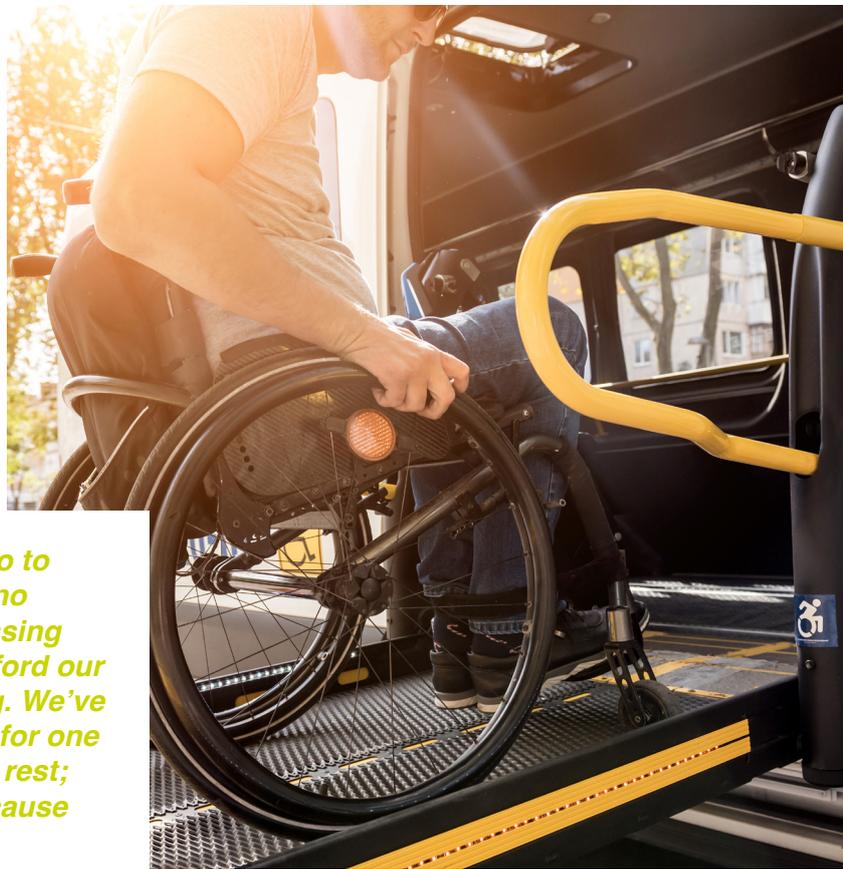
**VEST Community Transport, Cardiff<sup>59</sup>**

As this example demonstrates, it can often be people who need access to healthcare the most who face transport barriers to receiving this support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has starkly highlighted barriers to accessing healthcare, with many people struggling to access vaccination centres easily and safely. Over 5 million people in UK live more than one hour's travel on public transport from their nearest vaccination centre, many of whom do not have access to a car<sup>60</sup>.

Location of vaccine centres and the lack of public transport options to get there were reported as significant barriers to vaccination. When the results were broken down by ethnicity, respondents from Black communities were 50% more likely to face these barriers<sup>61</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to reductions in public transport, fear of exposure to the virus and increased inaccessibility of services, some disabled people saw travel become even more challenging than before. This left many disabled people having to resort to using private taxis<sup>62</sup>.



<sup>54</sup> Nat Cen, 2019, Transport, Health and Wellbeing: An evidence review for the Department for Transport, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/847884/Transport\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/847884/Transport_health_and_wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> NatCen, 2019, Access to Transport and Life Opportunities, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831766/access\\_to\\_transport\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Mackett, 2014, Has the policy of concessionary bus travel for older people in Britain been successful?, Available at: [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1443617/1/Mackett\\_B60%2526%20CS%20in%20TP%20on%20concessionary%20travel.pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1443617/1/Mackett_B60%2526%20CS%20in%20TP%20on%20concessionary%20travel.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 2021, Accessing Health Services in Wales: Transport Issues and Barriers – Summary of findings and action to date, Available at: [https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/Accessing\\_Health\\_Services\\_in\\_Wales\\_-\\_Transport\\_Issues\\_and\\_Barriers\\_-\\_Summary\\_of\\_findings\\_and\\_action\\_to\\_date.sflb.ashx](https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/Accessing_Health_Services_in_Wales_-_Transport_Issues_and_Barriers_-_Summary_of_findings_and_action_to_date.sflb.ashx)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Case study provided by Community Transport Association Wales

<sup>60</sup> Financial Times, 2021, Covid vaccination sites out of reach for hundreds of thousands, Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/cf3d5611-7604-46dd-8a85-aade152b09f8>

<sup>61</sup> Healthwatch, 2021, Getting to vaccine centres more of a barrier for Black communities, Available at: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2021-02-22/getting-vaccine-centres-more-barrier-black-communities>

<sup>62</sup> Welsh Government, 2021, Locked Out: liberating disabled people's lives and rights beyond COVID-19 Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/7/2/1626187155/locked-out-liberating-disabled-peoples-lives-and-rights-wales-beyond-covid-19.pdf>



## Access to Social, Cultural and Sporting Activities

### Access to Shops

Access to shopping is increasingly reliant on cars: growing numbers of out-of-town shopping centres have led to the reduction of town-centre options<sup>63</sup>. COVID-19 has exacerbated this phenomenon, with almost one in five high-street shops being empty in Wales in November 2020<sup>64</sup>. The shops that are left are also, on average, more expensive than the out-of-town options<sup>65</sup>. This penalises those who do not own a car the most, when they are likely to already be the most socially disadvantaged.

Research shows that the ability to take short journeys by public transport to town centres (10 minutes or less) make it 1.7 times more likely that someone can access services<sup>66</sup>, such as shops. For older people and disabled people, concessionary bus passes, particularly for those without access to a car, have improved access to shops<sup>67</sup>. However, if town centres decline, and buses aren't available to out-of-town retail centres then their choice of shops will radically reduce.

Participation in leisure activities is crucial to people's quality of life and can play a major role in improving health outcomes, reducing crime and building cohesive communities. Measures such as "percentage attending or participating in arts, culture or heritage at least 3 times/year"<sup>68</sup> and "percentage participating in sporting activities 3 or more times/week"<sup>69</sup> are key wellbeing indicators under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Good quality, accessible public transport can be the difference between a person feeling isolated and excluded from community life or being able to physically get out and socialise. This will have a disproportionate impact on those who are already more vulnerable<sup>70</sup> with over 30% of people aged over 75 failing to access arts, cultural and heritage activities, including reasons such as lack of transport options<sup>71</sup>.

This is particularly the case for young people living in rural areas, as the report on tackling rural poverty by Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) has identified. WCPP's research found that young people in rural areas are "disadvantaged as car ownership is expensive and rural jobs often have lower rates of pay than in urban areas; socialising can be difficult for teenagers as bus services often stop early in the evening, and also inflict constraints on pupils taking part in after-school sport and social activities."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Audit Wales, 2021, Regenerating Town Centres in Wales, Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/asao0bgj/agr-ld14511-e.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Welsh Retail Consortium research, in BBC, , 2020 Almost one in five shops in Wales empty, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-55000777>

<sup>65</sup> Walsh, H, 2021, The cost of convenience: how much extra will you pay at Sainsbury's Local and Tesco Express?, Available at: <https://www.which.co.uk/news/2021/02/the-cost-of-convenience-how-much-extra-will-you-pay-at-sainsburys-local-and-tesco-express/>

<sup>66</sup> NatCen, 2019, Access to Transport and Life Opportunities, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831766/access\\_to\\_transport\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> Government Office for Science, 2019, Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System, Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/784685/future\\_of\\_mobility\\_access.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> Welsh Government, 2015, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Available at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WFGAct-English.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Leonard Cheshire, 2021, Manifesto, Available at: <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/our-impact/our-uk-work/wales/our-manifesto-asks>

<sup>71</sup> Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 2019, State of the Nation: An overview of growing older in Wales, Available at: [https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/State\\_of\\_the\\_Nation\\_e\\_-\\_online.sflb.ashx](https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/State_of_the_Nation_e_-_online.sflb.ashx)

<sup>72</sup> John Powell et al., Countryside and Community Research Institute, 2018, What Works in Tackling Rural Poverty: An Evidence Review of Interventions to Improve Transport in Rural Areas, Available at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/An-evidence-review-of-interventions-to-improve-transport-in-rural-areas.pdf>

# Conclusions - What Needs to Happen?

This paper represents a high-level exploration of the current picture of transport access in Wales. What is clear is that not enough has changed since Sustrans Cymru undertook this analysis a decade ago<sup>73</sup>. In this report we have provided a glimpse into the issues that are faced by people across Wales, and we believe there is an urgent need to break down the barriers that so many face to accessing transport in Wales.

In terms of action, we believe there needs to be improved data collection to allow robust analysis of transport services across a range of social indicators. It should also be recognised that those who are affected are the best placed to help design solutions; developing an effective transport network requires meaningful engagement across all groups of society to ensure services meet their needs.

Ultimately, we believe that all households in Wales should have a variety of safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport options to choose from and that Welsh Government should set standards for delivery now to ensure goals are met by 2040.



In practice, this means:

- 1 **Setting an expectation that Local Authorities will provide walking and cycling infrastructure that connects communities to each other and to essential services, which are integrated with the wider public transport network.**
- 2 **Delivering increased access to public transport and active travel in economically disadvantaged communities, connecting people to jobs and services.**
- 3 **Embedding the 20-minute neighbourhood concept into local and national planning policy to allow residents to meet their needs within a 20-minute round trip by walking or wheeling.**
- 4 **Taking meaningful steps to diversify the transport workforce to ensure representation in transport planning and ultimately, decision making that leads to a more inclusive system.**
- 5 **Improving the safety and security of vulnerable groups when accessing sustainable modes of transport. Investing time and resource to understanding what makes people feel unsafe when travelling actively.**
- 6 **Setting out a clear plan of action for addressing transport poverty, beyond concessionary travel for selected groups, which are not effectively targeted at those most in need of support<sup>74</sup>.**

This paper has sought to distil the urgent need for action to address transport poverty in Wales. As more people in Wales face the risk of being dragged into transport poverty as a result of a cost-of-living crisis, now is the time to focus on those most in need of support. The time to make the connection between transport and inequality is now, we must ensure that everyone has access to the services that enable them to live happy and healthy lives.

<sup>73</sup> Sustrans (2012) Access Denied: Transport poverty in Wales.

<sup>74</sup> Bevan Foundation, 2021, A New Wales Transport Strategy – Consultation Response – Available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-New-Wales-Transport-Strategy-Bevan-Foundation-Response-.pdf>



# About Sustrans Cymru

Sustrans Cymru is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Sustrans Cymru works in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done.

We are grounded in communities and believe that grassroots support combined with political leadership drives real change, fast.

Join us on our journey. [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

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