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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd  
Deputy Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

John Griffiths MS  
Chair - Local Government and Housing Committee

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31 January 2023

Dear Chair,

Further to the commitments made by the Minister for Finance and Local Government during the Committee for Local Government and Housing's scrutiny of the Welsh Government draft budget 2023-2024 on the 12 January, I have been asked to update the Committee regarding school transport and grid capacity to charge electric vehicle fleets, as these fall under my portfolio.

### School Transport

The Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I met on 11 January as part of a series of bilateral meetings taking place with fellow Ministers to explore new opportunities to deliver Cymraeg 2050 across all Government policies. The Minister took the opportunity to update me on issues relating to home to school transport arrangements affecting families attending Welsh-medium education, as raised in his recent meetings with local authorities to discuss progress against their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. During the meeting I confirmed a wider programme of work regarding the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 was underway following an initial review in 2020 and that this will feed into discussions on the Bus (Wales) Bill.

An initial review of the Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008 took place during 2020 – 2021, concluding at the end of the previous government term. It gathered evidence and views on potentially:

- reducing the distance thresholds for free school travel;

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- free travel for post-16 learners, children of nursery age and learners attending their nearest Welsh medium school and faith school; and
- revising the guidance.

It became apparent that a wider review of the Measure was required due to the complex nature and implications of home to school transport. An official has now been appointed to lead on the wider learner travel review. The wider review is presently being planned and will ensure full engagement and collaboration with local authority partners, as well as other key stakeholders, to inform the development of this important piece of work. I will be happy to share details of the timetable for that review with the Committee when it becomes available.

The government has published a White Paper, One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket, which sets out an ambitious vision for transforming bus services in Wales. The proposed bill will offer us a chance to look a fresh at bus service delivery across Wales, including the provision of school transport. As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right to support learners and our wider reform programme

My officials have been in discussions with local authorities and school transport providers throughout Wales regarding the general cost of school transport, as they continue to discharge their statutory duties in providing home to school transport to learners. Local authorities confirm that the cost of school transport services has increased significantly.

There have been differences across Wales in the way local authorities have dealt with increases to school transport costs. Some automatically provide an annual inflationary rise to contract prices, some provide when requested, whilst others do not provide at all.

With regards to the availability of bus drivers, we continue to work closely with the bus industry and other government agencies to support and stimulate driver recruitment and retention.

The volatility of fuel prices has also been a major issue for school transport providers. The duty charged on fuel is not a devolved matter within the Welsh Government competencies and remains a matter for the UK Government. It was hoped that the UK Government would offer widespread support to assist with the current global uncertainties we're facing.

Welsh Government Ministers have written to the UK Government to express our deep concern about the increase in domestic energy price. We await a response.

### **Grid Capacity to charge electric vehicles**

We need to be clear on the size of the challenge decarbonisation presents. Electrification is clearly the way forward for many forms of transport and heating: the impact of this is to increase the demands on the electricity infrastructure. Building new networks to meet this demand, across the nation, is an enormous undertaking. In Wales there is little transmission infrastructure, which in the current way networks are funded mean there are no financial signals that trigger new infrastructure.

Last July, National Grid ESO identified the need for a transmission link from North to South Wales, and National Grid Electricity Transmission will now have to look at options for routes. We are actively looking for the earliest opportunity to feed into this process and identify how it can deliver solutions for Wales's grid challenges. In addition, the recent funding round for distribution network operators, for 2023-28, does allow some development ahead of need. However, network companies need clarity on exactly what technologies will need to connect to the networks and when, so they can target activity.

Our local energy plans, which are currently being developed in all local authorities, are intended to bring much more clarity to local requirements – though these will clearly evolve in future. We have also been working with the Energy Systems Catapult on our Future Energy Networks for Wales project to identify where we can add clarity about the future need for infrastructure. We've modelled a range of futures to see what is needed across most reasonable scenarios. We are working with all the networks on this project, so they can also build these insights into their planning.

Following the publication of the EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy for Wales ([Electric vehicle charging strategy for Wales | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/electric-vehicle-charging-strategy-wales-action-plan-html)) and its Action Plan in 2021 (<https://gov.wales/electric-vehicle-charging-strategy-wales-action-plan-html>), Welsh Government set out to accelerate the roll-out of EV charging infrastructure across Wales. We have collaborated closely with Transport for Wales (TfW), local authorities and the private sector to start delivering a baseline infrastructure across Wales, and to identify future opportunities that will support different charging needs; that will ensure sufficient provision of charging infrastructure is available to allow equal access and create a seamless and enjoyable experience for all users.

The Welsh Government, TfW and local authorities in Wales have been collaborating with the Distribution Network Operators (Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) and National Grid) to maximise the availability of power for EV charging. National Grid and SPEN have used the Green Recovery funding awarded by Ofgem to reinforce certain areas of their network.

National Grid selected sites across the South Wales region on the basis of proximity to the Welsh Strategic Road Network (SRN) and also for proximity to key substations which will make connections to the electrical network more cost effective. Whilst SPEN have also done this, they have worked closely with us to choose 17 electrical connections of up to 1MVA (megavolt amperes) across their North Wales region specifically for EV charging. These connections have an average value of £100k each. The locations were set against a preferred network of proposed rapid charging stations across the SRN generally located at key road junctions. The SPEN approach has proved successful, leveraging private sector investment in EV rapid charging infrastructure at all 17 sites.

Welsh Government and TfW have also collaborated with the DNOs in developing tools that model the electricity network and its constraints and help pinpoint constraints on the grid where investment is most likely to lead to significantly improved opportunities for EV infrastructure development.

Going forward, we will look at the creation of a connections group that can help maximise the availability of power for charging EVs even further; and help realise the benefits as described in the Action Plan.

TfW has been leading a project to deliver 17 rapid EV charging points on the Strategic Road Network. This is being delivered by a unique partnership whereby the network is largely funded commercially, but public funding is focused on “unlocking” sites with severe grid constraints through funding DNO works. The location of these sites is focused in areas which are considered unlikely to benefit from purely commercial investment in the near to mid-term, yet are vital for ensuring consistency of provision across the SRN for “top up” charging en-route to key tourist and other destinations across Wales.

Please write to me if you require further information on these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

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