

**BANGOR – ABERYSTWYTH BUS SERVICE
OCTOBER 2012**

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Arriva Buses Wales gave notice, effective as of the 22 September 2012, of their intention to withdraw what was known as the X32 bus service between Aberystwyth and Bangor.
- 1.2 Since the 1 of April 2012 The Monday - Saturday services were operated on a totally commercial basis by Arriva and provided for a regular two hour daytime services on the corridor. Prior to this Gwynedd Council had facilitated the payments of Welsh Government funding to Arriva for the upgrading of vehicles deployed on the route.
- 1.3 The services were designed to integrate with the X94 services between Barmouth and Wrexham at Dolgellau. The X32 and X94 formed part of the TrawsCambria network of long distance bus and coach services in Wales.

2. CHALLENGES RESPONDING TO THE SITUATION

- 2.1 On receiving confirmation of the withdrawal, Officers from Gwynedd Council and colleagues from Ceredigion, Powys and Welsh Government have worked together with a view of maintaining key travel opportunities on the route. As well as longer distance travel opportunities, the X32 also provided for a number of local travel requirements especially on sections of the route not particularly well served by other services.
- 2.2 The two main challenges that required consideration were:
 - The complicated nature of existing commercial services on sections of the route. Prior to the subsequent tendering process some operators were questioning the legitimacy and legality of such a process due to apparent concerns of abstraction. Although it appears that the concerns were more to do with protection than abstraction, it would not be possible to tender services that mirrored those previously provided by Arriva.
 - The lack of a revenue budget to pay for the services.

3. FACILITATING THE RESPONSE

- 3.1 As part of the Welsh Government's national TrawsCymru long distance bus and coach network it is intended to provide travel opportunities on key travel corridors across Wales.
- 3.2 The TrawsCymru services will complement and support local and longer distance services operated by companies on a commercial basis.
- 3.3 A project was established to provide certain weekday and Saturday journeys on what will now be known as the *TrawsCymru*™ service T2, which will be provided as part of the longer distance strategic bus links as part of the national *TrawsCymru*™ network.

3.4 The aims and objectives of the project were to:-

- Provide a series of agreed longer and shorter distance local bus services linking Bangor to Aberystwyth via Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Dolgellau and Machynlleth during weekdays and Saturdays, including:-
 - 06.50 Dolgellau to Machynlleth journey ;
 - 07.30 Aberystwyth to Bangor and the corresponding 13.25 Bangor to Aberystwyth return journeys;
 - 16.30 Machynlleth to Bangor journey;
 - 19.20 Dolgellau to Bangor journey;
 - 17.20 Dolgellau to Aberystwyth journey; and
 - 19.20 Dolgellau to Aberystwyth journey.
- All of the above will be operated by a modern low floor buses, equipped with comfortable seating and luggage space to facilitate comfortable travel for longer distance passengers;
- The service shall connect with the local bus service X94 (Barmouth to Wrexham) service at Dolgellau, and the local bus service 40 (Aberystwyth to Carmarthen) service at Aberystwyth.

3.5 The services tendered provide opportunities for longer distance journeys to access General Hospitals and Universities at Bangor, Aberystwyth and Wrexham, as well as offering local journeys for commuting / work, education, shopping, cultural, health, social purposes.

3.6 Gwynedd Council have facilitated the procurement of the tendered services.

3.7 The Welsh Government will meet the total annual cost of the tendered Monday – Saturday services on what is now known as the T2 corridor. These are in the region of £214,000 per annum.

3.8 The services were tendered as individual journeys with a view of increasing competition and providing the best value for money options.

3.9 The journeys tendered avoided any direct or obvious claims of abstraction (*‘abstraction’ – ‘where a service receiving state aid is seen to compete for passengers with a service operated on a commercial basis. This is contrary to the relevant legislation’*).

3.10 The journeys were tendered in a way that was likely to result in additional travel opportunities being provided through commercial positioning journeys required to facilitate the provision of the tendered services.

4. SUNDAYS AND BANK HOLIDAY SERVICES

4.1 The Sunday and Bank Holiday services on the Aberystwyth – Bangor and Barmouth – Wrexham routes have been retendered to align with the same timeline as Monday – Saturday services.

- 4.2 The incumbent operators were successful in retaining these contracts.
- 4.3 The travelling public will see no change therefore to the Sunday and Bank Holiday services on these corridors.
- 4.4 These services are paid for by the local Authorities on the route on a previously agreed mileage based formula.

5. PASSENGER PERCEPTION

- 5.1 The demise of what was a well established brand and service is unlikely to be well received initially.
- 5.2 The timeline from receiving confirmation of the withdrawal of the Arriva commercial services on the route and completing the procurement process was especially challenging. Tenders closed only 10 days prior to the services becoming operational. This meant that communicating details of the services, including timetables and operators was particularly difficult.
- 5.3 Details of the new services can be found at:
http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/gwy_amserlen_bws.asp?rhif_gwasanaeth=T2
- 5.4 It will take time for passengers, and other stakeholders, to understand that while there has been a reduction in the number of through services that connecting services do provide journey opportunities along the length of the corridor. Previous evaluation of journey data showed that only 16% of journeys were over what could be described as longer distance.
- 5.5 The use of different service numbers on various sections of the corridor is not helpful for those wanting to make longer distance journeys. These, in the most, apply to commercially operated services with a local focus (X28,X27,35,X1,1B). As such Gwynedd Council is not in position to directly influence or impose changes to these.
- 5.6 As with any change to bus services some may see the new arrangements as better meeting their requirements while others will not.
- 5.7 Some localised concerns relating to commercial services on the corridor (Express Motors not serving Gellilydan as a matter of course - request only) have already emerged. In general, Gwynedd Council where possible, will attempt to positively influence operators to satisfy local needs.

6. THE FUTURE

- 6.1 The tendered services recently procured, operational from the 24 of September 2012, are to be operational until the 1 of November 2014. It is intended that this allows the Welsh Government and the local Authorities on the route an opportunity to appraise requirements on the corridor. There is also an aspiration to establish a new Statutory Quality Bus Partnership Scheme for the corridor, using powers under Section 114 of the Transport Act 2000 Act (as amended).