

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE OF MEETING	15th September 2022
TITLE	Update - Update - Developments within the Public Transport Sector
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dafydd Meurig
PURPOSE	To Update the Committee on the work at hand and for their consideration

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Many within our communities are reliant on public transport to travel to work, education, to attend appointments and of course the service is very important for living independently. You will recall that in July 2021 the Environment Department submitted a report to the Communities Scrutiny Committee outlining a procedure for prioritising services on grounds of social value rather than the cost per passenger [Appendix 1].
- 1.2 Gwynedd is very rural, as are several other Counties in Wales, which of course makes it unlikely for routes that have a relatively low number of passengers to be commercially viable. There are approximately 60 Public Transport services in Gwynedd, and of these approximately 87% need to be subsidised from the public purse. Gwynedd Council contributes £2.3 million every year to provide Public Transport services to our residents.
- 1.3 This report outlines what has been happening in the Public Transport field during the last two years, and outlines the challenges that face us. The purpose of providing this overview to the Communities Scrutiny Committee is to update the Committee in the first place, but also to give the Committee an opportunity to consider whether it wishes to receive a more detailed report for Scrutiny on any aspect of the Service's work.
- 1.4 The report sets out specific headings which collectively provide a picture for the Committee Members of work that has taken place, work that is ongoing and work that is in the pipeline.

2. COVID 19 - GRANTS

- 2.1 From March 2020 we paid 75% of the daily price for every school bus and taxi contractor during lock-down. This ensured that the operators were still in business when children returned to school.
- 2.2 Public transport continued throughout this time but the majority were only running 75% of their journeys, this ensured that key workers continued to have access to their work.

BUS SECTOR 2 (BES 2)

- 2.3 The Welsh Government wanted to take steps to help bus operators in Wales survive the COVID-19 pandemic, and these steps have ensured that operators can continue to provide services that could not have been provided without this financial support, since March 2020. This support through the BES2 has been instrumental in enabling operators to retain customers and a network of services that might otherwise have been lost or significantly reduced. It was hoped that the financial support would support the network when the rules on social distancing (and any other factors) were relaxed.
- 2.4 The bus industry was supported during the pandemic to keep essential services in place, and the Emergency Scheme for the Bus Sector 2 (BES2) was a key part of this. This agreement was between the bus companies, Gwynedd Council, Transport for Wales and Welsh Government. An additional £37.2 million was received across Wales to support the industry.
- 2.5 This ensured that we were able to provide additional buses due to social distancing requirements. Dedicated school buses were arranged for children who usually travelled on public buses. Bus operators were also able to apply on a monthly basis for loss of income and the difference in the concessionary travel pass when compared with the same time in 2019.
- 2.6 All Covid payments to the operators has ended on 31st July 2022.
- 2.7 The new Bus Sector 3 [BES3] schemes has come into effect since August 2022 (We are yet to receive the terms and conditions)

Impact of Covid on Services

- 2.8 A significant reduction was seen in the demand for travel following the advice for everyone to stay at home, the need for social distancing, and the fact many were working from home. Generally, the numbers travelling on public bus services in Gwynedd are down by 23%, when comparing the numbers from April to June in 2019 and 2022. Nevertheless, there is an increase in some services such as an 18% growth in passenger numbers for the new Snowdon Sherpa network (when comparing the numbers for April to June 2022 and 2019).
- 2.9 We also see an increase in the number of travellers this year compared with the same time last year (a 47% increase), therefore it is heartening to see that people are gaining the confidence to return to public transport.
- 2.10 A shortage of drivers is having a major impact on the industry, a number of drivers have retired or left for entirely different lines of work and it seems that all bus companies in Gwynedd are having recruitment difficulties.

3. SCHOOL TRANSPORT

- 3.1 We purchase contracts on behalf of the Education Department for schools and colleges in Gwynedd. We have 23 bus contracts for primary schools, 52 buses for secondary schools, 9 college buses and 218 taxi/mini bus contracts for primary schools, secondary schools and additional learning needs. Learners can also travel on our public buses where the Council contributes to a seat purchase scheme.

3.2 We purchase contracts for the Gwynedd and Anglesey post-16 consortium. This enables year 12 and 13 learners to travel from one secondary school to another to receive their lessons. We have 190 contracts.

4. FUEL COSTS

4.1 Given the substantial increase in fuel prices over recent months, a number of requests have been received for additional funding from operators. Usually, every year we add inflation to public transport contracts and school buses, this year inflation was 4.1% and this was acceptable to the operators.

4.2 In terms of school taxis, a number of requests were received for additional funding with a number stating that they wished to terminate their contracts. It was decided as a mark of good will to add an additional 20% to their contracts for June and July 2022. We will review the situation in September 2022.

4.3 Other Welsh Counties that have re-tendered contracts recently have received prices back that are three times higher than the previous prices. We re-tendered one public bus contract recently (Bethesda - Mynydd Llandygai - Bangor) where an 11% increase was seen in the contract cost (2019 price v 2022 price).

5. WHITE PAPER - ONE NETWORK, ONE TIMETABLE, ONE TICKET

5.1 The White Paper on Buses, published by Welsh Government is a key step towards a new model for bus operation in Wales, and is an opportunity for us to look at what public transport services in Wales need to provide.

5.2 Welsh Government is working closely with local government, the bus industry and travellers on a proposed franchising model with the aim of eventually providing One Network, One Timetable and One Ticket.

5.3 As part of this work, a twelve week public consultation has just closed, this enabled people across Wales to have their say on how the new system would be planned.

6. Network Review

6.1 The Council has been working closely with Transport for Wales officers in recent months to review the Gwynedd bus network. The current network has existed for years.

6.2 The purpose of the review is to improve transport provision by amending the timetables to strengthen links between buses and trains and create wider travel opportunities. The vision is to use the resources we already have but tailor the timetables to operate more sustainably with the hope of increasing travel possibilities for rural areas that do not currently have sufficient provision. This could involve using a taxi or a mini bus that feeds into main bus services on the strategic network.

6.3 There will be limitations to the possibilities due to the emphasis on education / commute journeys that are essential for users and important to ensuring financial sustainability for the Council.

- 6.4. It is hoped to trial a Flexi bus in the Pwllheli area next year. Fflecsi is a different way of travelling on a bus and may sound quite radical on the face of it! Fflecsi works by picking you up and dropping you off in a service area (or zone) and is not restricted to bus stops. Journeys must be booked in advance via the app or by making a phone call. Then, the bus picks you up, and changes its route so that every passenger reaches their destination. The Fflecsi has been a great success in Denbighshire, Dyffryn Conwy and as the Fflecsi-Bwcabus in north Carmarthenshire and south Ceredigion.
- 6.5. COVID-19 has had a great impact on public transport and on how people travel, and there are fewer people travelling. Fflecsi can help these passengers in a safe and sustainable way, providing services whenever and wherever they are needed most. Choosing when they travel also means that key workers can get to their work on time and that passengers can make essential journeys without much delay.
- 6.6. It is hoped in the future to collaborate with Partneriaeth Ogwen, Yr Orsaf, Penygroes and O Ddrws i Ddrws to see if they can offer accessible means of transporting passengers.
- 6.7. O Ddrws i Ddrws operates a flexi bus around Pen Llŷn which has replaced the seasonal coastal bus services on Pen Llŷn. Fflecsi Llŷn operates on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays and it offers a more flexible way of travelling by doing pick-ups and drop-offs within a defined area, enabling people to reach beaches, camp-sites, tourist areas and make other local journeys.

7. TrawsCymru

- 7.1. TrawsCymru bus services are an important component of the integrated public transport network in Wales - as part of long distance journeys and local bus services.
- 7.2. The buses are funded by Welsh Government and provide essential links in terms of public transport for many communities across Wales. They link to railway services and offer an accessible, affordable and environmentally friendly mode of travel for visitors, which enables them to enjoy Wales' spectacular views.
- 7.3. There are exciting developments in the pipeline in terms of TrawsCymru services as new electric vehicles, a new app for passengers and a new website will be introduced in the coming months. We will be sharing the latest information with passengers on our buses and through our channels on social media.
- 7.4. The Integrated Transport Unit staff have been working closely with Transport for Wales officers over recent months to revise the Gwynedd bus network. There are plans to introduce the new T22 service later this year, to serve Blaenau Ffestiniog - Caernarfon via Porthmadog with electric buses.
- 7.5. The proposed timetables for the new TrawsCymru T22 service have been designed to provide a cohesive service with the TrawsCymru T2 service (Aberystwyth - Bangor via Dolgellau) and to provide strong links in Porthmadog for customers wishing to connect between T2 service journeys to and from Bangor and Caernarfon and T22 service journeys to and from Blaenau Ffestiniog.
- 7.6. We are also in the planning process for re-tendering the T2 (Bangor - Aberystwyth) and T3 (Barmouth - Wrexham) services as the current contracts will cease at the end of January 2023. There are proposed timetables in place for the beginning of February 2023. There will be a interim timetable for the T22 with an amendment to coincide with the T2/T3 timetables next year.

8. SNOWDON SHERPA IN ITS NEW FORMAT

8.1 The following is a summary of the major improvements introduced to the new Snowdon Sherpa network, which came into force on Saturday 9 April 2022.

8.2 Local people benefit from the launch of the new Snowdon Sherpa network which provides more travelling opportunities across a broad area, with opportunities to travel across Snowdonia and the vicinity with excellent linkage between different routes in key locations.

- Route S1 (Betws-y-coed - Caernarfon via Llanberis)
Direct service between Caernarfon and Pen-y-Pass/Betws-y-coed and there is no need to change buses in Llanberis - this is a combination of the old 88 and S2. The buses run every hour on a daily basis, with a significant increase in the number of journeys between Caernarfon and Llanberis - there were 10 buses running Monday to Saturday and 4 on Sunday where we now have 13 journeys on Monday to Saturday and 12 on Sunday. Also, there are excellent links in Pen-y-Pass with the S4 running to/from Beddgelert/Porthmadog.
- Route S2 (Bangor - Pen-y-Pass via Llanberis)
Direct service between Bangor and Pen-y-Pass and there is no need to change buses in Llanberis - this is the old 85/86 route. The buses run every hour on a daily basis, with a significant increase in the number of journeys between Bangor and Llanberis - there were 9 buses to Bangor and 7 to Llanberis running Monday to Friday, 7 to Bangor and 6 to Llanberis on Saturday and 4 each way on Sunday. The new network provides 13 buses to Bangor and 12 to Llanberis Monday to Friday, 12 each way on Saturday with 11 to Bangor and 12 to Llanberis on Sunday.
- Route S3 (Beddgelert - Dinorwig via Caernarfon)
New service which is a combination of the old 83 route and the S4. It provides an hourly service, Monday to Saturday, between Beddgelert and Llanrug passing through Waunfawr, Caethro, Caernarfon and Beddgelert. There are excellent links in Beddgelert with the S4 route to/from Pen-y-Pass and to/from Porthmadog. There is a significant increase in the provision for Bethel, with the number of buses from Monday to Friday increasing from 7 in the east/9 to the west to 13 to the east/14 to the west. Buses on Saturday have increased from 7 to the north/6 to the south to 12 to the east/13 to the west and on Sundays increased from 3 to 5 journeys. We also see a significant increase in the number of buses linking to Beddgelert and Caernarfon via Waunfawr and Caethro - the number of buses has increased from 6 to 12 Monday to Saturday and from 3 to 6 on Sunday. Lastly, the number of buses connecting Caernarfon and Deiniolen has increased also - on Monday to Friday the number has increased from 6 to the east and 8 to the west to 9 to the east and 10 to the west; on Saturdays the number of buses has increased to 6 to the east and 8 to the west to 9 each way; and on Sunday the number of buses has increased from 3 to 5 journeys each way.
- Route S4 (Pen-y-Pass to Porthmadog via Beddgelert)
Excellent links with the S3 in Beddgelert to travel to/from Caernarfon and Pen-y-Pass and also with S1 buses to/from Betws-y-Coed and Llanberis. Increase in the number of buses connecting Beddgelert and Porthmadog as follows - on Monday to Saturday the number of buses has increased from 6 to 7 journeys and has increased from 2 to 3 on Sunday. There has been a significant increase in the number of buses that connect Beddgelert and Caernarfon, with the number of buses increased from 3 to 5.

- Route S5 (Llanberis - Pen-y-Pass)
Buses operates every half hour, daily, between Llanberis and Pen-y-Pass via Nant Peris - with the first bus leaving Llanberis at 0710 in the morning, and the last bus down from Pen-y-Pass leaving at 1930. Additional buses operate between Nant Peris and Pen-y-Pass on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays and also Monday to Friday during School holidays which provides a bus every 15 minutes on this route. Excellent service for visitors and it reduces the use of personal cars in order to try to cope with parking problems that can affect communities in the area.
- Passenger numbers
The following is a comparison of the passenger numbers on the 'old network' compared to the new Sherpa network. The 'old network' included the 83, 85, 86, 88, S1, S2, S4 and S97.

The number of passengers	2019	2021	2022
April	30,364	14,581	37,431
May	36,681	24,699	39,923
June	33,253	36,929	40,880

2019 v 2022	
Increase in passengers	Increase (%)
7,067	23%
3,242	9%
7,627	23%
2021 v 2022	
Increase in passengers	Increase (%)
22,850	157%
15,224	62%
3,951	11%

- 8.3 Overall, the passenger numbers are up 39% compared with 2021 figures which prove that people are more confident in using public transport following the pandemic. The number of passengers is up 5% on 2019 which proves that the provision has improved when compared to the historical network and that the service attracts more people on the buses. The new network has had major success within a short period.
- 8.4 Revenue on the network is up 41% this year compared to the same time in 2019 and is up 57% this year compared to the same time in 2021.

9. CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE

- 9.1 The functions of the Joint Corporated Committee (CJC) for North Wales came into effect on 30 June 2022. The functions of the CJC include a statutory requirement to produce a new Regional Transport Plan (RTP) for the region by July 2023, which is an extremely challenging timetable. The CJC will then be asked to formally review the plan every three years, and produce a new plan every 5 years.
- 9.2 The projects and actions included in the RTP will continue to be the responsibility of each local authority where those projects/actions are located.

9.3 It is not entirely clear at the moment what the implications of this are for public transport services county wide, but the Council will try to influence on the content of the RTP, in order to ensure that it meets the needs of Gwynedd.

10. TO CONCLUDE

10.1 This report is submitted to form an overview for the Communities Scrutiny Committee firstly to update the Committee, but also to give the Committee an opportunity to consider whether it wishes to receive a more detailed report on an aspect of the Service's work for Scrutiny. The Environment Department is happy to respond to any question to help the Committee decide on the direction it wishes to follow.

Appendix 1: Report to the Communities Scrutiny Committee – 13th July 2021