



North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

News Briefing – December 2013

Buses

New Haverfordwest - Aberystwyth Services. Following the withdrawal of Arriva Buses from its Ceredigion bus routes on 22nd December, new contracts, funded through the Welsh Government (that last until end of June 2014) have saved key public transport links in the area.

Cllr Alun Williams, Ceredigion County Council Cabinet Member for Transport, announced replacement services on the 40, 40C and 50 routes, expressing gratitude to the local companies who tendered for the routes, to the Council officers who worked hard behind the scenes and to the Welsh Government for its financial assistance. Through-ticketing is being provided by the operators, and passengers will no longer have to change buses at Synod Inn. Richards Bros will now run the 50 route between Cardigan and Aberystwyth, providing an important transport link (via the company's 412 service) between Haverfordwest, Cardigan, Aberaeron and Aberystwyth.

Community Transport

New Green Dragon Scooter Scheme launched. Emma Lewis, Preseli Green Dragon Operations Co-ordinator, has reported that the first applicant (who has been struggling to get to work in the south of the county) has been issued with his scooter, after successfully completing his Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) and receiving his safety clothing. Emma notes that 'this marks the start of an extension of community transport in the region to people and for needs we just haven't been able to reach effectively in the past – people unable to access sustainable employment through lack of access to transport'. There are still scooters available, and Preseli Green Dragon welcomes applications from others who may benefit from the scheme, as long as they are 17 or over. Ring 0845 6860242 or email: info@greendragonbus.co.uk for details.

Cycling

Charity Bike Ride. A recent *Western Telegraph* report, 'Riders in the Saddle for Disabled Youngsters', highlighted the achievement of 22 cyclists who participated in the sixth annual Boxing Day bike ride from the Cilgerran Wildlife Centre to Poppit Sands and back. More than £200 was raised to support disabled skiing for young people at the Urd Ski Centre in Llangrannog. Well done!

Trains

South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) Rail Strategy. On 6th December the SWWITCH Joint Committee approved its updated Rail Strategy. AECOM prepared the strategy which is intended to:

- Contribute to the Welsh Government Planning Framework and influence the next National Transport Plan;
- Inform Network Rail's Long Term Planning Process;
- Influence the forthcoming Great Western and Wales & the Borders franchise specifications;
- Support the growth of the Swansea Bay City Region; and
- Input to the multi-modal Regional Transport Plan.

The strategy sets out a phased delivery plan comprising short, medium and long term interventions. The short term interventions feature measures to 2018 to provide consistency with the estimated timescales of electrifying the GWML to Swansea. The medium term covers the period to 2023, with the longer term post 2023.

Proposed short term measures of relevance to North Pembrokeshire include:

- Higher frequencies, faster journey times and good connections to stations east of Swansea;
- Further growth in rail travel to support the vibrant Swansea Bay City Region economy;
- Co-ordination of bus and rail services in rural areas;
- Adoption of a collaborative approach to introduce a fully integrated ticketing system which includes all bus and rail services;
- Targeted marketing campaigns to promote rail services in the SWWITCH area to ensure that recent patronage growth is continued;
- Retention of the extra Fishguard trains

Medium term proposals include:

- Replace current service pattern with a two-hourly service to Fishguard, with all trains operating to / from Swansea. Services timed to connect with the Bristol trains at Swansea. Confirm rolling stock strategy for the service (refurbished Class 150s).

National Assembly Enterprise & Business Committee Franchise Report. On 11th December the Committee launched the report on its Inquiry into the Future of the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise. Among the points that are set out in the Foreward, the following are particularly noteworthy:

- The lack of certainty about the exact roles of the Welsh Government and the UK Department for Transport in developing and procuring the next franchise needs to be resolved quickly.
- Procuring and delivering the rolling stock required for the franchise and beyond needs to be planned to comply with disability regulations and to cope with the phasing in of the electrification programme.
- With regard to arguments for and against possible models for managing the next franchise, the committee is not fixed on any one approach but agrees with some witnesses that the key criterion should be choosing the model that delivers the best outcomes for passengers and taxpayers. The Welsh Government also needs to be clear about how the risks involved in the chosen management model will be managed. A decision on this has to be made by 2015 at the latest.
- The current franchise map should be retained if not expanded so that cross-border routes and services are protected for passengers in both the Welsh and English domains of the franchise.
- The report includes a Charter that sets out a clear set of actions that the Welsh Government will need to implement to secure and deliver an effective franchise for the future.

In his blog 'Committee launches report on the future of the Wales & Borders rail franchise' (*In Brief*, the National Assembly for Wales Research Service blog; <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/45-2>), Assembly Research Officer Andrew Minnis provides further information about the key issues that are addressed in the Charter:

- Although the next franchise will not begin until 2018, the Committee believes preparations need to begin now. The charter recommends that powers and funding for the specification and procurement of the franchise should be devolved, and that the roles of the Welsh Government and Department for Transport must be clarified soon to allow work to get underway in earnest.
- A wide ranging and early consultation with passengers and other stakeholders on both sides of the border is required to identify priorities for the franchise specification and performance management of the operator.
- Due to the procurement lead time and the need to address legal requirements on accessibility of rolling stock by 2020, prompt action is required to ensure the right rolling stock is available in the right quantity. The Committee also believes the Government needs to act to ensure it has sufficient staff with the expertise to procure the franchise, including the rolling stock.
- While the Welsh Government is considering options for a not-for-dividend franchise, the Committee has no fixed view on the management model. Whichever approach is adopted, however, the Committee believes it should allow a closer relationship between the operator and Network Rail, and the Government must show how it will deliver the best outcome for passengers and taxpayers. A decision on the management model is needed soon.
- Finally, the next franchise has to be framed within policies for better integration of the public transport network. In this respect the report and charter therefore build on the Committee's previous report on Integrated Public Transport in Wales.

The Committee's report and charter and recommendations have been passed to the Welsh Government and a response will be provided in the coming months.

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The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum is an independent voluntary group that works for the provision of an effective integrated transport system in the North Pembrokeshire area, promotes the benefits of public transport and works towards the greater use of public transport systems.

The Forum is a member of Bus Users UK Cymru, the Environmental Network for Pembrokeshire and the Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association.

The Forum's work is supported by:

Individual Members (£5 p.a.), Family Members (£8 p.a.) & Corporate Members (£12 p.a.)

(Corporate members include town and community councils, transport operators, and groups, organisations and associations with a transport interest)

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