**Fforwm Rhanbarthol Rhanddeiliaid — Gogledd a Canolbarth Cymru**

**North and Mid Wales — Regional Stakeholder Forum**

**Friday 3rd December 2021**



**Adroddiad o’r cyfarfod**

**Meeting Report**

North and Mid Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum

The forum met on the 3rd of December 2021, 09:53 – 11:43 (via Microsoft Teams)

**Attendees**

**Forum Members**

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| Alex Woodall   | Strategic Rail Officer, Transport for Greater Manchester   |
| Andrew Mytton  | Public Transport Officer, Wrexham Council  |
| Andrew Saunders   | Surface Access Strategy Manager, Manchester Airport   |
| Ann Elias   | Strategic Transport Officer, Growing Mid Wales Partnership-Strategic Transport   |
| David Jones  | Rail Development Manager, Liverpool City Region |
| Gwen Thomas  | Active Journeys Officer, Sustrans Cymru |
| Ian Nellist  | Regional Chair for the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales  |
| Karen Wiliams  | Community Rail Officer, Conwy Valley Rail Partnership  |
| Kelly Hodder   | Transport Officer, Denbighshire Council   |
| Melanie Lawton   | Community Rail Manager, North TfW   |
| Michelle Clarke  | Community Transport Association  |
| Michelle Roles  | Stakeholder Manager Wales, Transport Focus  |
| Nick Smith  | Regional Growth Manager, Avanti West Coast |
| Paul Spencer  | Bangor University  |
| Sian Jones  | Community Rail Ambassador  |
| Chris Purcell | Principal Review and Procurement Officer, Shropshire Council |

**Transport for Wales**

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| Andrew Sherrington | fflecsi/Demand Response Transport team |
| Dave Mccullough | Transport Planner (North Wales Metro) |
| Elise Jackson | Community Engagement Officer (Mid and North Wales) |
| Gail Jones | Stakeholder Manager (Mid and North Wales) |
| Geraint Stanley  | Customer Experience Project Manager |
| James Price |  |
| Jamie Warner | Community Engagement Officer (South East Wales) |
| Jane Purdie | Communication Business Partner -Bus |
| Jeremy Morgan |  Head of Corporate Governance  |
| Lowri Joyce (Chair) | Head of Stakeholder and Community Engagement (Interim) |
| Louis Mertens | Community Engagement Officer (Borders) |
| Louise Yau | Communication Business Partner |
| Victoria Madelin | Governance Advisor  |

**Note from the Chair, Lowri Joyce**

“I would like to thank all our members for attending our seventh North and Mid Wales Regional Forum. I would like to give thanks to our presenters and remind members that there will be an opportunity to ask questions in our Q&A session with James Price, Chief Executive Officer for Transport for Wales.” Lowri advised that the meeting would be recorded. There were no objections to this.

**Agenda**

1. **Introductions**

**Lowri Joyce, Head of Community and Stakeholder Engagement (Chair), Transport for Wales**

Lowri Joyce welcomed everyone to the forum and went through the housekeeping slides and Covid update, reminding everyone to wear face coverings on public transport. Lowri also asked members to kindly complete the survey at the end of the meeting.

1. **Question Time**

**James Price, Chief Executive Officer, Transport for Wales**

James Price, Chief Executive Officer (TfW), conducted an open question and answer session with the forum members. James Price told the forum that the main reason for his attendance was to hear what people had to say and to engage in a dialogue that promoted an honest and useful discussion.

Ian Nellist, the Regional Chair for the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales, mentioned overcrowding and the lack of storage space for luggage on the carriages. He noted that the train journeys might be the first introduction to Wales for tourists coming into the area and that we should be very mindful of this. He also noted the need to reflect that Wales is a tourist destination.

James Price responded to say that the issue of luggage space had only recently been raised, and some evidence might suggest that leisure travel is becoming increasingly important post-pandemic. If this trend continues, it follows that luggage capacity will also become more important. The new CAF trains have a lot of space for luggage and bikes. James Price assured the forum that TfW (Transport for Wales) would investigate the issue.

James Price agreed with the statement about the importance of tourists’ first impression of Wales and said that TfW had done some work with various tourism organisations, but more work was required. The new catering offer may be an opportunity to make more of this. Some of the new trains have first-class accommodation. There is an ongoing conversation post-pandemic, with more leisure travel taking place, about the need for these or if they should be reclassified back to standard class or something else. This might be a conversation for a future forum.

James Price noted that there might be an option in the summer to take a couple rows of seats out of the back of the units running in North Wales. Lowri Joyce will investigate this option.

Paul Spencer from Bangor University asked about the increasing challenges presented by the weather and what plans TfW have formulated in response, in terms of establishing alternative services to address the anticipated disruption.

James Price commented that some infrastructural issues are linked to the weather. He added that other infrastructural issues were linked to rolling stock reliability as well as significant staffing problems due to the backlog of training caused by Covid-19. We should have got through this backlog of training in December, so things should gradually improve.

James Price went on to say that the big picture, in terms of infrastructure working with Network Rail, is a priority, so we know if failures are likely to occur trying to do the work before they occur. There are questions about trees being so close to lines that every time the wind blows, they fall onto the line, contravening the standard. Also how do TfW respond when issues happen, both in terms of getting bus replacement on the ground, which in the recent storm proved difficult as many roads were closed. And importantly very proactively communicating with people information about changes to services.

James Price referred to TfW’s response time on social media as being a real focus. He would be keen to hear any ideas as to how we could improve. The board are aware that running an 85% service is inadequate, and they aspire to run a 95%< service.

Paul Spencer commented that communication is a challenge in these situations. He will take this back to Bangor University to determine whether the team has any suggestions.

James Price went on to cover some issues with face coverings and social distancing. He wanted to assure forum members that TfW are working with BTP (British Transport Police) in relation to mask wearing and social distancing. He noted that it has been quite helpful that a lot of retail outlets in England are not going to ask staff to enforce mask wearing because of the significant risk it would pose to their staff. This is the position TfW have taken throughout the pandemic, believing that it is our responsibility to issue announcements and to remind people, and that we cannot, however, enforce this. This position is supported by the main trade union. We are working with BTP to publicise information that makes clear that mask wearing is a legal requirement. There have been a couple of issues with announcements, including their being switched off for potentially spurious safety reasons on board some of our units. TfW are dealing with these.

 TfW are promoting the Capacity Checker so that people can see which services will be busy and act accordingly. But, of course, we want to encourage people to use the train, and so on busy days services are still going to be more crowded. James noted that, during a pandemic, this might not be comfortable for passengers. However, he assured members that this is being taken very seriously at board level and that TfW are doing everything they can to give everyone the opportunity to practise social distancing as much as possible on services.

1. **fflecsi/Demand Response Transport pilots**

**Andrew Sherrington, the fflecsi Team, Transport for Wales**

Andrew Sherrington gave an overview of the pilot projects taking place throughout Wales, including lessons learnt. He stated that there were currently 11 pilot schemes using 29 vehicles across Wales, including a seasonal service on the Llyn Peninsular. He stated that the point-to-point service with virtual stops as well as standard stops was increased due to demand over the Covid-19 pandemic. He stated that each fflecsi service works differently to meet local needs and is a demand-led responsive service.

In North Wales, there are services in Flintshire, the Conway Valley, Llyn Peninsular, Denbigh, and Prestatyn. The Denbigh scheme is the biggest in North Wales and carries around 250-300 people a week. The app is overwhelmingly the preferred way of booking, even for the older generation; over 70% of bookings are made through the app. It is more efficient and provides a better user experience. There is also a phone centre for the remaining 30% of people. These may not have access to digital facilities such as a smart phone.

All the schemes across Wales vary slightly. The reason for this is to find out what works and what people like. In Denbigh, it is more like Uber insofar as it is an on-demand service which can also be booked in advance. In other areas, buses can only be booked in advance. The aim is to get more people on one bus so that it has a greater aggregation, otherwise it can involve a lot of miles per one person. So, we have been looking to make the service more financially viable by looking at the feedback on these two separate ways of offering the service and testing across the pilots' various timescales for people to book in advance. In another ‘book a bus’ area in Caernarfonshire, people were only able to book a day in advance. Work with our tech partner, now bookable an hour in advance. In Denbigh people can book a bus on demand so that it arrives immediately.

Andrew highlighted some interesting stats: the service gets to people within half an hour of their booking time, 90% of the time. Last month, Conway attracted 36 new users and there were 25 new users in Denby. Users with a mobile phone receive texts to confirm bookings and alert them when the bus is 5 minutes away. The demand responsive transport is what we call a corner-to-corner service and that means we use bus stops in the traditional sense, as well as using virtual stops, for instance, at the end of a road or where it is safe to do so. This means that people are not walking far to the bus stop. In rural areas around Conway, this has proven important; we can penetrate lots of lanes, and it means that some people who have never had any prior access to a bus service now do, which is valuable in the rural sphere.

Michele Clerk from CTA agreed that for people living in rural parts of Wales having access to this flexible responsive service is of enormous value. She went on to ask about the evaluation of the flexi services and if Andrew could share any of the key learnings with the forum. And the potential for other community transport organisations were able to get involved with any further roll out of flexi projects.

Andrew noted that the beauty of fflecsi is that it lends itself quite widely for use in the community, it could be used for hospital transport, for school children, for commuting etc.

The research which will be published in mid-December shows that the driver is still the number one thing that can make or break the service. Human interaction is more important than the app, branding, call centre etc.

The different pilots allow us to assess which service has the most value, it is not something that can replace every bus service in Wales. At times of course a normal fixed line bus more service it will is more appropriate. But its use in rural areas, first mile last mile and feeding into mainline bus and train is coming out quite strongly from the evaluations. Continuing with the pilot we hope to get a consistent offer across Wales with the best standard product so people are familiar when they go from area to area how it works, and Flexi will become a staple part of the transport mix in Wales.

Chris Purcell, Principal Review and Procurement Officer, Shropshire Council, asked to connect with Andrew after the meeting regarding a potential pilot scheme around Shrewsbury. Mike Dolton offered to make arrangements for this.

1. **Transparency, Governance, and information provision Changes**

**Jeremy Morgan, Head of Corporate Governance, TfW and Victoria Madelin, Governance Advisor**

Jeremy Morgan joined the forum to present about the provision of information and overall transparency delivered through the Transport for Wales website.

Jeremy Morgan told the forum that it is vital for any public sector organisation to look to the ‘Seven Principles of Public Life,’ also known as the ‘Nolan Principles.’ These principles state that anyone working in public life or in the public sector should adhere to the ethical standards of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, authenticity, and leadership. Working in a transparent way, making information available to the public about our services standards, and optimising performance all underpin TfW’s plans. Striking a careful balance to protect confidentiality, private and personal information. As well as being open and disclosing things that are in the public interest.

Alongside that we have developed a publication scheme in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. So, as well as responding to information requests we also must outline to stakeholders what we will be publishing through our website. We want to build an organisation that is accountable, fair, inclusive, and trusted by the people of Wales to operate with the highest standards of integrity. This accountability will result in driving up standards. And is also about taking our stakeholders and our customers and providing as much information as we can to help that agenda.

TfW are in the process of developing a transparency strategy, consulting internally and externally with stakeholders and looking to expand what we can offer in terms of sharing information. We are collating a register of information for publication and refreshing our transparency webpage. We plan to include more information about supplier spend, gifts and hospitality, declarations of interest from the board, information about performance etc. These are the KPI's that the Welsh government want us to report, they cover aspects around service provision effectiveness, customer, and cost efficiency. We hope this will help with understanding a bit more about our performance and to improve our accountability.

1. **Bangor Gateway**

**Dave McCullough, Transport Planner, TfW**

Dave McCullough introduced the forum to plans for the Bangor Gateway, and initial feedback from the WelTag 1 process. Dave’s role within the North Wales team at TfW, which primarily looks at the first and last mile connections on public transport networks. Making sure that customers know the services we are offering to get near to their destination. And importantly looking at how customers finally make it to their end destination.

Using the example of a WelTag we are currently working on relating to the Bangor Gateway. Dave went on to explain the process. The gateway study came about with discussions with between TfW and Gwyneth Council, showing the benefits associated with plans for the North Wales metro programme. Not just looking at rail travel but multi modal journeys creating a station that is a gateway into the city of Bangor. The station is serving a wide catchment, not just Bangor city as an entrance point but also it is the nearest rail access to many surrounding areas and an important trip destination also.

At WelTag stage one we are right at the start of this process, everything is on the table in terms of ideas there maybe solutions to transport problems are necessarily transport related, thinking creatively and gathering stakeholder feedback is particularly important at this stage. We were therefore able to extend the proposed area to consider connections a lot further from Bangor Station, in the context of the Bangor Gateway.

WEltag stands for Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance, and we will follow the five-stage process. Stage 1 focuses on the strategic outline looking at the project, defining the problems and opportunities related to the study. From this a list of options, an extensive list all ideas on the table that have been suggested and fed into the next phase. From this we start to develop 5 cases: strategic, transport, financial, commercial and management.

Key to this appraisal is the national, regional, and local policy that is already in place, for instance the Future Generations Act, looking at sustainable and active travel. As well as looking across social, environmental, health and economic factor factors that feed into the proposes project.

The next steps will include consultation with the public as well as undertaking further studies with partners and stakeholders. There is a questionnaire available if anyone is interested in sharing their views, this will be circulated to stakeholders soon.

Ian Nellist asked Dave about the inclusion of tourism in the Bangor gateway study as well as highlighting the need for signage and information displayed at the rail and bus stations to improve Bangor as a gateway.

Dave answered to say that these points are already coming through from the study at this early stage and TfW are keen to push this into more prominence during the project.

Paul Spencer from Bangor University offered to make sure things were linked up between key contacts at the university and TfW regarding the plans for the Bangor gateway project. He also mentioned the importance of links with the local hospital and local sport facilities.

1. **Virtual Customer Panel**

**Geraint Stanley, Customer Experience Project Manager (TfW)**

Geraint Stanley, Customer Experience Project Manager, TfW, shares news and seeks feedback on a new virtual customer panel ‘Sgwrs,’ which draws out qualitative feedback on TfW services from customers to improve and deliver TfW services. This was a new recently launched initiative will be a representative panel involving 1000 participants involving customers and non-customers in Wales and the borders.

The aim of Sgwrs is to test innovative ideas, shape campaigns and products and identify new areas where TfW should be involved. Participants in Sgwrs would be able to enter free prize draws for participating as a reward for their time. We have 200 people signed up so far. We will use Sgwrs to gather quantitative and qualitative surveys tailored to the participants based on their demographics, age etc. so we can understand customer needs and views.

Sgwrs will enable TfW to test ideas and concepts, shape new services, enhance existing services and identify ‘the next big thing’ whatever that may be. It can also be used for quick insight on a specific event, for example getting insight about how people have been affected by severe weather.

Geraint highlighted that Sgwrs is a fully bilingual service, it will allow TfW to engage with people to create a continually improving experience that places the customer at its heart. Geraint asked that forum members please sign up and share information about Sgwrs as widely as possible with their contacts.

For more information on Sgwrs and to sign up, please visit: <https://tfw.wales/info-for/communities/sgwrs-customer-panel>

1. **New rolling stock ‘mock-up’ visits at Taffs Well**

**Jamie Warner, Community Engagement Officer (TfW)**

Jamie Warner introduced and summarised the Taff’s Well train mock-ups  at the visitor centre, which has recently opened to display the new life-size TfW trains that will be operating throughout Wales in the coming year. He stated that the mock-ups and trains will be available for viewing by members of the public from early 2022.

Visitors will be able to familiarise themselves with the new trains, for example, the new 197 ‘Civity’ units. These will be introduced in North Wales in the next year or two. He stated that TfW are developing written and visual materials for the visitor centre, and they will welcome visits from groups from the start of 2022. The train mock-up visitor centre will be open for the next 18 months, until Autumn 2022, and meet all current Covid-19 regulations. Jamie encouraged members to visit the centre to maximise this opportunity.

Please contact engagment@tfw.wales to enquire about your visit.

1. **Forum Close**

**AOB**

Lowri Joyce drew attention to the Welsh Government’s publication of the draft budget before Christmas and how the National Transport Delivery Programme (NTDP) will align with those budgets. There will be a twelve-week period of consultation held after the local government elections in May 2022. Teams across TfW are preparing an integrated sustainability assessment to be published in time for the consultation. Further updates will be provided at future forums.

**Forum Feedback Survey**

Please follow the link to provide your feedback on the forum The code for this meeting is 71614698

<https://www.menti.com/mkm45sqdwr/0>.

## Actions

The actions below were raised during the forum and will be addressed prior to the next Regional Forum where possible.

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| **Action**  | **What will be done?** |
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## Forum digital chat highlights

Highlights of the conversation within the chat function of the Forum were:

* Ann Elias

“Commonwealth games 2022 will see the opportunity for lots of new travellers on TfW services”

* Mike Dalton

“We have a 'family friendly train' group visiting our depot soon to see the new units”

## Next Regional Stakeholder Forum

The next North and Mid Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum is scheduled for March 2022. The meeting will be held virtually over the Microsoft Teams platform between 10:00 – 12:00.