**Mid and West Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum**

**07/03/2023**



**Adroddiad o’r cyfarfod**

**Meeting report**

Mid and West Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum

The forum met on the 7th March 2023 between 15:00 and 15:30GMT following the conclusion of the national Wales and Borders Stakeholder Forum.

**Attendees**

**Forum Members**

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| Emma Bingham | Community Transport Association  |  |
| Toni Macey |  |  |
| Philip McDonnell | Swansea CAN |  |
| Lucy Taylor | Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations |  |
| Liz Williams | Pembrokeshire Tourism |  |
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**Transport for Wales**

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| Tomos Davies (Chair) | Community Engagement Officer (Mid and West Wales) |  |
| Ben George | Strategic Development Programme Manager |  |
| Chloe Jenkins | Assistant Project Manager (fflecsi)  |  |
| Rhys Rowlands  | Communications and Engagement Graduate |  |
| Jamie Warner | Community Engagement Officer (Mid and West Wales) |  |
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**Note from the Chair, Tomos Davies**

*“Welcome to the March 2023 Mid and West Wales Regional Forum. My name is Tomos Davies, I’m the Community Engagement Officer for Mid and West Wales, covering for Alex Bryant-Evansnwho is currently on leave. I’ll briefly go through various things that have happened in the region lately. At the end of February, our team went to Carmarthen and Lampeter for soft launches of the upgraded T1 service, where we are introducing both a revised timetable and new electric buses. We have 8 new buses on that route, and the bus company [First Cymru] have installed new electric charge points. The timetable and the new buses will be launched from the 26th of March, and on the 16th of March, we have a Ministerial launch in Carmarthen ahead of this. We also have some exciting regional fflecsi updates, which my Bus Team colleague Chloe Jenkins will provide you with this afternoon.*

**Agenda**

1. **Fflecsi Pembrokeshire, Chloe Jenkins, Assistant Project Manager (fflecsi), Transport for Wales.**

Chloe Jenkins, Transport for Wales’s Assistant Project Manager for fflecsi, opened the item by introducing herself to Forum participants, outlining her nearly two years’ experience working within the fflecsi team.

After doing so, she provided them with an overview of the fflecsi service is, outlining how it was originally a piloted bus service born out of a desire to allow passengers the freedom to travel to where they wanted to go. Consequently, it was intended to offer a safer, more personal, convenient and controlled environment for customers, with assurances that they can see exactly where a bus is and know a space is guaranteed for them.

Chloe then explained that the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerated the need for semi-scheduled Integrated Responsive Transport (IRT) services to provide essential journeys, with the technology and support being provided by Transport for Wales (TfW) and its platform supplier, Viavan, delivered in partnership with local authorities and bus operators to provide the best service for all 11 current fflesci services. She outlined the benefits that this model brings, including the smaller vehicles having more flexibility to provide a ‘corner to corner’ service compared to conventional buses, and that the service can be tailored to meet the needs of passengers requiring additional assistance to travel.

Chloe outlined the three original objectives of fflecsi: to grow passenger numbers, especially considering the need to recover usage from the COVID-19 pandemic; to deliver excellent customer service by offering a more personal touch for its users compared to regular fixed line services; and to increase access to bus services, especially through the flexibility offered by its smaller vehicles and customer responsive model. She explained that although operational (for example, the ability to deliver through the operator mix and reduce journey and wait times) and economic (e.g., increased access to amenities, leisure and transport, together with integration with businesses and employment) are key benefits, to her, the social benefits of the service are some of the most important.

Notably, Chloe emphasised fflecsi’s ability to reduce social isolation and to engage younger people with bus services. She also explained that the scheme does accept concessionary cards, with tickets being issued by cash and car as per a traditional bus. Emphasis was also placed on its environmental benefits, which include effective use of smaller vehicles, its potential to generate genuine modal shift from car usage, and electric vehicle capability in a Demand Responsive Travel environment, of which several fflecsi schemes are already piloting successfully.

Chloe outlined the history of the Pembrokeshire fflecsi scheme, noting that it was originally launched in September 2020 as one of the 3 initial IRT schemes, operated in the St David’s area by Pembrokeshire Voluntary Transport as three zones. Since then, it has seen over 16,000 rides completed. The first expansion took place in June 2022, incorporating fflecsi Bwcabus Pembrokeshire (operated by Richard Brothers) to cover travel to Haverfordwest and Fishguard, linking in with both TrawsCymru (T5 and T11) and local fixed line bus services (313 and 430), together with rail services. On the 30th of January 2023, this was expanded again into the Dale Peninsula, jointly delivered with Pembrokeshire County Council, with 394 additional completed rides in the 5-week period since launch. Together, fflecsi Pembrokeshire now offers onward rail connections at Fishguard Harbour, Fishguard and Goodwick, Clarbeston Raod, Haverfordwest, Johnston and Milford Haven.

Chloe explained that the expansion was based on feedback from passengers, drivers and the local authority. This included combining all three original fflecsi zones into one to serve the areas all day whilst making new journey possible, providing new opportunities to travel for those not living along the fixed line network, and to extend the Bwcabws zone to the towns of Haverfordwest and Fishguard. Overall, Chloe stated this has resulted in a more efficient service whilst improving the experience for passengers.

Consequently, usage has increased from 38 completed rides in September 2020 to 1380 in February 2023 following the Dale Peninsula addition. Passenger feedback has been positive, with an average ride rating of 5/5 as of the day of the Forum. Usage increases during the summer on the back of increased tourism. A new leaflet to promote the improved service locally is currently being distributed, with joint work with the Transport for Wales Marketing team underway to promote the service to connect to the Wales Coastal Path. The TfW Community Engagement team are also undertaking activities to bolster popular awareness.

To conclude, Chloe outlined current projects that include a potential web booking option, incorporating social media and the web to increase passenger usage further, and utilising local community organisations, business and places to help the community to make bookings. Ending the presentation, she asked how fflecsi could be improved further.

Opening the floor, Tomos Davies asked whether Transport for Wales is looking to expand to other areas, particularly rural parts of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. Chloe responded that, although there is nothing currently set in stone, the team is currently speaking with several local authorities about potential options, subject to funding. Lucy Taylor followed on asking whether there is any potential for such a scheme in Powys. Again, Chloe responded that whilst there is nothing currently in the pipeline, that doesn’t rule out future consideration.

Emma Bingham praised fflecsi for its hyperlocal community knowledge and the subsequent quality of engagement that passengers have, together with fflecsi’s flexibility when organised through a community transport organisation, and the importance of continually supporting these. She also mentioned examples of younger people engaging with fflecsi, and the vitality of this in rural areas where they would otherwise be without transport, and that it must be promoted in communities as being for everybody, not just older people and tourists. Chloe echoed Emma’s praise for Pembrokeshire Voluntary Transport (PVT)’s role in the scheme and how its staff and volunteers have championed the service; for example, through their Bus Buddy system helping develop confidence in new users. She also agreed with the importance of continually opening the service out in communities, giving an example of how, when Dial-A-Ride passengers came over to fflecsi, the team added a personal touch to the process with support from PVT.

Philip McDonnell echoed the above and asked for consideration of a fflecsi scheme in the Gower. He also outlined recent work that Swansea Council have done in the community-led transport space, and where it is an opportune time for Transport for Wales to be part of the conversation to potentially integrate a fflecsi type system or other support into this. Emma said that following the forum’s conversations this was now part of her thinking too as a potential trial, and that several stakeholders would probably like to support with this, offering TfW the opportunity to participate in the ongoing discussions with these. Tomos Davies responded that the Mid and West Wales team would like to take up this opportunity, echoed by Chloe from TfW’s bus team’s perspective, and stated that the subject could potentially be considered as a future forum item.

1. **AOB**

Ben George, Strategic Development Programme Manager for Transport for Wales, mentioned upcoming stakeholder engagement opportunities for the Swansea Bay and West Wales Metro project. He said that business case work on rail service frequency enhancements was now largely complete and ready to be given over to Welsh Government for their considerations. Other technical work for upcoming engagement activities includes potential new Metro stations in the Swansea Bay area on both existing and reopened railway lines, and it is hoped that consultation work will take place soon, subject to considerations such as funding. Lastly, opportunities to integrate bus and active travel to these stations were mentioned, together with bus public transport modelling activities, and Ben stated that he would like conversations with stakeholders on such matters going forward. Tomos responded that Ben’s suggestions were very much something that should be covered in a future forum.

With no further questions or business, the meeting concluded at 15:32GMT, with Tomos thanking participants for attending and stating that he and Jamie would confirm the next forum date with participants at the earliest possible opportunity.

## 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?** |
| Chloe Jenkins to contact Emma Bingham to discuss potential opportunities for fflecsi in the Swansea area | Chloe Jenkins to contact Emma Bingham to discuss potential opportunities for fflecsi in the Swansea area  |
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## Forum digital chat highlights

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

* *“General information on how fflecsi works here Home - Transport for Wales (fflecsi.wales) - Jamie Warner*
* *“TfW website page on the Pembrokeshire fflecsi scheme: Pembrokeshire - Transport For Wales (fflecsi.wales)” - Jamie Warner*
* *"Thank you all for attending and participating in my passions for fflecsi. If there are any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Emma, I will email you regarding a meeting to discuss a potential Swansea fflecsi. Many thanks again, Chloe” - Chloe Jenkins*

## Next Regional Stakeholder Forum

The next Mid and West Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum is scheduled for Tuesday 6th June 2023. The meeting will be held virtually over the Microsoft Teams platform between 11:00 and 11:30