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

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

**Wednesday 28 September 2022**



**Adroddiad o’r cyfarfod**

**Meeting Report**

North and Mid Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum

The forum met on the 28th of March 2022, 11.01 – 11:55 (via Microsoft Teams)

**Attendees**

**Forum Members**

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| Ian Nellist |  |
| Simon Roberts  |  |
| Josie Rayworth |  |
| Michelle Clarke |  |
| Ben Perkins |  |
| Sian Jones |  |
| Nick Smith |  |
| Joe Hodgkinson |  |
| Ceri Hansom |  |
| Daniel Edwards |  |
| Haf Jones |  |
| Philip Evans  |  |
| Clare Britton |  |
| Josie Rayworth |  |
| Ceri Hansom |  |
| Andrew Saunders |  |
| Jones Jones | Integrated Transport |
| Ann Elias |  |
| Gareth Yates |  |
| Laura James-Mowbray  |  |
| Harry-Joe Gallimore |  |
| Helen Hodgson |  |

**Transport for Wales**

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| Elise Jackson | Community Engagement Officer – North and Mid Wales (Chair) |
| Louise Moon | Sustainable Development Programme Manager |
| Jessica Clement | Stakeholder Manger – Southeast Wales |
| Lowri Joyce | Head of Community and Stakeholder Engagement  |
| Gail Jones | Stakeholder Manger – North and Mid Wales |
| Laura Kendrick | Communications Business Partner – North Wales |
| Lewis Brencher | Communications and Engagement Director  |

**Agenda**

1. **Introductions**

**Elise Jackson, Community Engagement Officer, North Wales (Chair), Transport for Wales**

Elise Jackson welcomed everyone to the forum and remind members that there will be an opportunity to ask questions after each presentation. Elise advised that the meeting would be recorded. There were no objections to this.

1. **Community Woodlands**
**Louise Moon, Sustainable Development Programme Manager** **TFW (Transport for Wales) and Elise Jackson, Community Engagement Officer TFW**

Louise Moon introduced the forum members to the Coed Cymunedol/Community Woodlands is a community partnership project that TFW (Transport for Wales) is undertaking with eleven partners to create, enhance and maintain nine woodland sites across Wales funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. TFW has been awarded £100,000 towards working with 11 groups in 9 communities across Wales. We will be planting over 36,000 square meters and managing existing woodland over 630,000 square meters. New trees will focus on a native mix of species and will be planted in new areas and within and alongside established woodlands to improve connectivity and woodland health. Maintenance will include path restoration and creation, improved accessibility, and the introduction of way markers, fencing and signage.

Elise Jackson went no to give details about each of the five projects in North Wales. This first of which will see Pwllheli town council to reinvigorate a disused car park and transform it into a new community woodland. The carpark sits within the nature reserve in the centre of Pwllheli and is about half an acre in size. This exciting project will allow the council to remove the car park and replace it with a woodland, enhancing the local area and improving biodiversity and wellbeing opportunities. The aim is to increase volunteering and, through this, learning about nature and its benefits to well-being. Nature, the environment and learning new skills can bring people together, and TFW hope that the project will increase confidence and pride in the community.

TFW will also be planting one hundred new native trees to fill out the woodland at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw as part of the project. The project also seeks to recruit volunteers to assist with woodland management. And there will be many opportunities for the community to become involved. A programme of woodland maintenance and enhancement works will also be undertaken to improve woodland biodiversity and wellbeing opportunities for visitors and local people. Introducing new life to the woodland by planting young trees is vital for its biodiversity and the public’s enjoyment of the walking trails which lead through the 14-acre site.

An area of Abergele will also benefit from Transport for Wales environmental mission. We are creating a green corridor linking woodlands in Abergele to the Wales Coastal Path. Working with Abergele Town Council the green corridor will include a nature walks. The Town Council hopes that the project will support the long-term goals in Abergele, strengthening links across the town, creating a green route for residents and visitors to explore all that Abergele has to offer. The project will help to meet key objectives in the town’s ‘Place Plan’ and will have a fantastic impact on the biodiversity, access, well-being, and culture aims.

And in Little Vawnog, Wrexham and Penyffordd TFW will be creating new accessible pathways and enhancements to the woodlands. Woodsworks, a Community Interest Company are working with Offa Community Council and Penyffordd Community Council. We are working to make the woodlands in Wrexham more accessible, with restored paths and essential maintenance. In Penyffordd the nature area will benefit from the removal of undergrowth to allow planting of native trees creating a new woodland area in this urban area of Flintshire.

Louise summarised the project timeline, the project has now started, and delivery will continue until February 2023, in the spring we will hold some community events to highlight the sites. We will share the monitoring and evaluation outcomes with the forum members on completion of the projects.

Michele Clarke, Community Transport Association congratulated TFW on the greening of stations, providing a welcoming atmosphere when people arrive. Michele asked about the longevity of the community woodlands project, around green social prescribing. She asked if these projects provide opportunities for volunteering that could have a positive impact on people's mental health and wellbeing? She mentioned that people who lack transport may miss opportunities to volunteer. And noted that Community Transport Association may be able to support volunteers with this.

Louise Moon was please to confirm that TFW would be happy to connect with Machele on this idea. Elise Jackosn reiterated this.

1. **Barmouth Viaduct Restoration Works**
**Ben Perkins**, Scheme Project Manager, Network Rail

Ben Perkins provided an overview on the current and forthcoming Barmouth Viaduct restoration works. He gave an overview of the project connecting the towns of Barmouth and Fairbourn. The bridge is Grade || listed, and the only major timber carrying bridge still in use.

The work began in Summer 2020 with a 16-day track closure, and phase to started in summer 2021 with a 15-week track closure. A huge amount of wood and steel elements were replaced during the second phase of the project. Rails were replaced and a new walkway installed.

The timber phase has had significant recognition and has been nominated for construction and conservation awards. The feedback has been positive, the safety of the bridge has been improved for the public and thanks to the long-term investment there should be minimal disruption now in the future. There has also been a large amount of charity and community engagement work in the area to raise awareness and support the community.

The mantellic section will see a like for like replacement whilst retaining the historic elements. Lessons learned from the timber phase will see improvements in the speed and safety of the work carried out.

Ben shared a video animation of the works planned for 2023.

Ben opened the floor to questions. Ian Nealist asked about the impact of the work on the footbridge as part of the all Wales costal path. In answer ‘yes’, it will result in a closure of the footbridge while the works take place. The handrail will be replaced with a rail more in keeping with the original.

Ian asked if and how Network Rail would be in contact with the various ramblers and tourist associations to communicate the closure and reopening of the footbridge. It was noted that there has been constant contact with local authorities and walking and ramblers' groups in the area, particularly around the popular September walking event.

1. **Avanti West Coast**
**Nick Smith, Regional Growth Manager**

Nick Smith provided an overview of Avanti West Coast’s Business and Service update and details of Avanti's recovery plan.

Nick started by saying that they know that services havent been great over the last couple of months, and they are sorry for the inconvience and the disruption this has caused passengers across the netwok. This is a situation across the rail industry and they apologies for their part in that. But they are looking to improve, and they have a recovery plan.

The plan explains why they are where they are and what they are planning to do to increase and improve services to give customers more certainty. And they do have plans to add more trains to the North Wales timetable.

There has been press about rest day working and overtime. The timetable moving forward will be delivered without reliance on overtime as it historically has been. Due to the wider industrial action landscape, we have seen a reduction in the number of drivers putting themselves forward to work overtime, and this has impacted services. The training program will see about one hundred new drivers come into the business so there will be enough drivers for the future. Avanti is looking at how to run a seven-day network without relying on overtime.

Nick noted that they send regular stakeholder newsletters and there is a wealth of information about timetables etc. on their website, social media and the app. Transport Focus are acting as a critical friend in this regard also.

Nick noted that North Wales specifically sees no change to the timetable between now and December. That is one service direct from London to Holyhead until December 11th. From the 11th of December there will be a restoration of two thirds of the serviced between London and Chester. Restore approximately 90% through services between London and North Wales. There will be weekend improvements to address demand for leisure travel. And later and earlier services From London to Holyhead also. Some of these changes are now trickling through to various journey planning websites.

Recovery of all Avanti West Coast routes is currently at 66% of pre-covid base level and Holyhead route is lowest recovered route at 45%. Only 7% of the current reservable capacity which is available to book over next month is being used – this does not indicate that there is constrained demand on the route. Avanti appreciates that demand may not represent the ideal metric for North Wales, which is why they have planned to step up services at weekend leisure, with early and late trains – as well as increasing service levels across the week. As they recover, the priority focus needs to match demand and resource – to be an efficient operator.

Nick assured the forum that Avanti do share common objective for more trains when thet are confident, they can be reliably run. Partnership with TfW (Transport for Wales) – we have agreed a joint vision statement, identified some key collaboration priorities that we are now working to progress. They are investing up to £244,000 to refurbish offices in Stena House in Holyhead which will be the new home for our onboard teams. This is in addition to the driver depot which opened last year with 15 drivers now based in the station. Working with the Go North Wales, to collaborate on marketing activity to attract leisure travelers to the region via rail. Continue to invest in community projects - the Station Community Fund has enabled and facilitated collaboration between British Transport Police, staff at Holyhead Station and young people from a local high school - 5 pieces of computer-generated artwork for Platform 2. North Wales route will see Hitachi Class 805 bi-mode trains in 2023 – greener and additional benefits for passengers.

Philip was pleased to see the partnership working with Go North Wales, developing tourism and leisure travel is a priority of the West Coast Partnership. Nick referred to the reduction in reservations being made, would that be impacted by many of the reservation have been allied to advise purchase tickets?

Nick said that there is an anomaly as some advanced tickets have not been made available until quite late in the day. Historically advanced reservations could be made for the period between the two yearly timetable changes. The problems encountered over the last couple of years have meant lots of timetable changes, and this along with engineering works have impacted on advanced bookings. Journey panners will not show advanced tickets due to this as well as the resource needed to enable timetables to go live. This has caused an anomaly in the data.

Ann asked about timetable amendments, is Avanti connecting to Holyhead Ferries and about the planned increases in services into Shrewsbury?

Nick said that the services are broadly the same, without knowing the ferry times he could say if they were aligned or not. This is something Avanti can look to do in the future once back on an even footing. This will happen with bus links too.

With Shrewsbury there are negotiations with West Midland trains about how best to serve Shrewsbury and the best mix of services. These discussions are still ongoing so there will be no additional increases at the present time.

Ann noted that Avanti is a London train that was planned for growth, concerned that West Midlands are not planning to increase those services. Nick answered that this is all being looked at in the round and not in isolation. So much has happened over the last 18 months that there has been a lot to consider.

Ian noted that Avanti is in a recovery position now but comparing the London to North Wales service to London to Penance which was better. He asked what Avanti's aspirations were long term to get to that high service level? Nick said that they want everyone to have the best experience on their trains. They want to move to a position where they have the appropriate staff to have trains on time, no cancelations, at seat ordering, on board shop, accepting card or cash. Yes, the aspiration is to have the best service, Avanti is building towards that. As a long distance long intercity operator Avanti recognize that people spend a lot of money and time on our services and we want to give them the best service we can.

1. **Forum Close / Stakeholder survey**

## Next Regional Stakeholder Forum

The next North and Mid Wales Regional Stakeholder Forum is scheduled for 14th December 2022. The meeting will be held virtually over the Microsoft Teams platform between 9:30 – 12:00.