



North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

ANNUAL REPORT 2008 - 2009

Introduction

The Forum works for the provision of an effective integrated transport system in the North Pembrokeshire area, promotes the benefits of public transport and works towards greater use of public transport systems. Our activities involve conducting research and gathering data with regard to all aspects of transport; providing an advice and assistance service to the travelling public; and actively promoting our aims to and through governmental, quasi-governmental and advisory bodies.

As we reported last year, bus services in the area continue to provide an extremely good quality ride, and the remarkable growth in innovative community transport services continues apace. The excellence of the cycling and walking facilities in our area also remains a source of great pride. Passenger services on West Wales trains continue to improve, and we are delighted to report that additional services to Fishguard are among the top rail priorities of the forthcoming Regional Transport Plan. The maintenance and development of the South West Wales Community Rail Partnership is also assured, as is the development of the Fishguard and Goodwick Rail Station as a bus-rail interchange. A well integrated transport system for North Pembrokeshire now seems more than just a pipe dream!

The Forum values the positive relationships that we have developed with our individual, family and corporate members, as well as with transport providers, a wide variety of groups with a transport interest, and elected representatives and officers in all levels of government. We extend our sincere thanks for their interest, encouragement and support.

Buses

Service News

- *Operations.* Local area representative, Cllr Judi Hartland, reported that Bus Users UK in Wales (BUUK Cymru) did not receive any complaints about Richards Brothers services during the period under review.
- *Timetables.* Many passengers do not know that local bus timetables can be obtained in Tourist Information Centres. Also, while the TIC in Fishguard is located in the Town Hall beside the bus stop, other TICs holding such material are not in such convenient locations.
- *Roadworks.* Changes in service provision resulting from roadworks can cause problems for passengers. Operators should ensure that all sources of information are provided with full details about the changes.
- *Summer travel offer.* Pembrokeshire Greenways offered free travel for children between 4 to 16 years on Pembrokeshire's dedicated coastal buses during the school summer holidays.
- *Survey.* BUUK Cymru commenced a detailed survey into the quality of all aspects of bus services in Wales. The results will be compared with those of last year's survey to see if services have improved, deteriorated and/or changed. Work on the survey of Pembrokeshire services is well under way.

Forthcoming Developments

New Bus Passes. Pembrokeshire bus pass holders have been provided with their new smartcard passes. New ticket machines and smartcard readers will be installed on buses later this year. Until then the smartcards should be used as 'flash' passes, in the same manner as the old passes, until this equipment is installed.

Pembrokeshire County Council. The Council has finished re-tendering the local bus services that are financially supported by the authority (approximately 85%). The Council has increased the number of routes operated with low-floor buses, improved the quality of buses used, provided better connection times with train services and enhanced services for a number of communities. The new contracts will commence in April 2009, with a new timetable booklet to be published and distributed in mid March 2009.

Four Optare Solo buses have been ordered; converted to run on recycled vegetable oil and to be delivered in March 2009. The new vehicles will be low floor and wheelchair accessible and will be used on the coastal bus network. Officers are also investigating the possibility of fitting cycle racks to the rear of the vehicles.

Community Transport

Service News

- *Fishguard Town Rider.* This wheelchair accessible vehicle dial-a-ride service, operated by the Pembrokeshire Community Transport Organisation (PACTO), has run 3 days a week in Fishguard and Goodwick since 2006. It is designed for concessionary pass holders who are unable to access conventional bus services. The Welsh Assembly Government, under the Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative, funded all of the Pembrokeshire Town Rider services for three years. The Deputy First Minister has now announced further funding of £1m in 2009-10 to take forward the initiative. An independent evaluation suggests that there is merit in continuing with the initiative for a further 3 years until 31 March 2012.
- *Bws y Bobol.* Wheelchair accessible minibuses developed by the St Davids and Peninsula Community Minibus Group were launched on 9th October. The bus's name was selected from 60 competition entries, and local schools were invited to participate in a competition to design the logo. The bus is available for use by community groups and non-profit organisations in the St Davids Peninsula, and the new services are already getting established.
- *Preseli Green Dragon.* The Preseli Rural Transport Association has been operating the Green Dragon wheelchair accessible minibuses since 2002. From the start services included dial-a-ride and group hire operations. Services have steadily expanded to meet a wide variety of needs, and a fleet of 3 minibuses now operates services in North Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

The Pembrokeshire Community Transport Organisation (PACTO) holds twice yearly community transport forums for transport operators, user groups and others with an interest in community transport. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity to share information about the wide variety of community transport services currently operating in the county, to discuss possible solutions to problems faced by operators and users, to receive updates on training requirements, and to hear presentations on a variety of subjects relevant to community transport.

Cycling and Walking

New Developments

- *Utility routes.* The new route linking Fishguard and Scloddau, alongside the A40, is being extended in the Letterston direction. It is proving to be extremely popular with both cyclists and walkers.
- *Information provision.* A raft of useful information about cycling and walking in the area can be found on the following websites: www.sustrans.org.uk, www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/walking, www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/scooting, www.pembrokeshiregreenways.co.uk, www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk, www.cyclepembrokeshire.com, and www.planed.org.uk. Many include information about accommodation, attractions and events throughout the area.

Trains

Service News

- *Significant improvement in service provision.* The Forum can report that, in contrast to previous years, we now receive many more favourable than unfavourable reports from rail passengers about their experiences travelling to and from Pembrokeshire by train. Punctuality and reliability now score highly, and there are few reports of the missed connections that used to bring such misery. Although older rolling stock still leaves much to be desired, the cleanliness and comfort on the newer rolling stock is praised. Staff are also praised for their helpfulness.

- *Unresolved problems.* The inadequate frequency of services to Fishguard continues to top the list of unresolved problems, followed by the limited overall service provision on Sundays. Although value for money can be obtained on many fares, on the whole far too many travellers regard the fare system as confusing and expensive.
- *Stations.* The Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association is producing rail guides for each of the Pembrokeshire railway stations (available on www.prta.org.uk). The guides contain timetables, journey times to various destinations, sample fares and information about bargains, ticket sales, bus connections and taxi services. Information is also provided about station car parking, and a wide range of useful telephone numbers and websites are included.

Forthcoming Developments

The proposal for 5 additional trains per day to Fishguard and the maintenance and development of the South West Wales Community Rail Partnership are among the rail priorities for the SWWITCH Regional Transport Plan (RTP). Interviews have been held to fill the Community Rail Officer's post. The successful post holder will work in partnership with the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH), Arriva Trains Wales, Network Rail, local and regional economic development and tourism interests, local communities and businesses to promote, facilitate and co-ordinate improvements to local stations and train services west of Swansea.

Pembrokeshire County Council's Cabinet has approved the acquisition of the Goodwick Rail Station site, and development of the site as a bus-rail interchange is to be included in the Regional Transport Plan.

Arriva Trains reports that discussions continue with the rolling stock leasing companies on significant refurbishment of the older Class 158 fleet.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

The Forum was one of the groups invited by the Authority to join their stand at the County Show in August, to help them promote the sense of community in the National Park. It provided an opportunity to tell visitors about the work of the Forum.

The Forum was represented at Community Panel meetings that were held by the Authority in Newport and St Davids in October. The discussions revealed that mainline and coastal shuttle buses, as well as dial-a-ride community transport services, were regarded favourably. Suggested transport improvements included: better bus services back from Cardigan and Haverfordwest at night (for young people and those in employment), less expensive bus fares for young people, bus connections between Newport and the facilities in Crymych, and better integration between bus and train services.

Transport – Disabled Access

In October the Forum Executive Committee met with Alan Hunt, Pembrokeshire County Council's Access Officer, to examine the issues surrounding access and transport for disabled people. In the discussions the following issues emerged:

- Disability discrimination regulations for the various transport modes focus in the main on vehicle accessibility and do not deal with problems (such as access, provision of information, etc.) that may be experienced by disabled passengers before and after they travel on a public transport vehicle.
- Wheelchair spaces on vehicles are often not large enough to accommodate the types of scooters that are increasingly being used by disabled passengers.
- There is usually only a single wheelchair space per bus; potential wheelchair passengers may be deterred from using public transport as they cannot be certain that a wheelchair space will be free when their bus arrives on either the outward or return journeys.
- Wheelchair spaces on buses are not meant for prams or push chairs, which should be folded up. Drivers should make certain that the spaces are left clear for wheelchair users.
- Drivers on all types of public transport vehicles may not know how to deal with disabled passengers, including those with visual or hearing impairments; there is a need for easily accessible disability awareness training for these individuals.
- There is also an urgent need for training that is applicable to meet the needs of rural areas.

- The number of disabled parking spaces is being reduced in many train station car parks.

Examples of the improvements that new technology can provide include:

- *The Announce System:* an audio/visual broadcasting system linked to a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system that features a speaking voice and visual display, telling on-board passengers what the next approaching stop is and, when the bus comes to a halt, informing passengers which stop they are at. For customers waiting for the bus there is also a speaker focused to the exterior of the bus informing them what service has arrived at the bus stop, and in which direction it is going. The system also enables passengers who are unfamiliar with the area to feel comfortable that they know where they are going and when they ought to alight from the bus, and benefits regular passengers during evening and night-time journeys when visibility outside the bus is poor.
- *Talking Bus Stops - Linked to Real Time Bus Information Signs:* allowing blind and visually impaired people to hear announcements at bus stops which tell them which bus stop they are at, which buses are coming and when they are due to arrive.

Working with Others

During the period under review the Forum represented the transport interests of North Pembrokeshire through its involvement with the following bodies, organisations and meetings:

- Bus Users UK Cymru
- Community Transport Association Cymru
- Fishguard and Goodwick Chamber of Trade and Tourism
- Fishguard Town Rider: Sounding Board meeting
- Institute of Welsh Affairs - South West Wales Branch: Transport Forum, Carmarthen
- National Assembly for Wales: Enterprise and Learning Committee and Plenary sessions
- Passenger Focus
- Pembrokeshire Association of Community Transport Organisations (PACTO)
- Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS)
- Pembrokeshire Community Transport Forums
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Pembrokeshire Federation of Women's Institutes: Transport Forum, Letterston
- Pembrokeshire Greenways
- Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association
- Preseli Rural Transport Association
- St Davids and Peninsula Community Bus Group
- South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH): Regional Transport Plan Workshops and SWWITCH Joint Committee meetings

The Executive Committee

We wish express our appreciation to members of the committee for their steadfast contribution to the work of the Forum throughout the year. During the period Michael Field was co-opted onto the Committee. We wish to extend our sincere thanks to Ann Greaves who left the committee. The committee accepted her resignation with regret. Ann designed the Forum's logo, and her input into our work was always enthusiastic, imaginative and constructive.

Cllr Byron James
Chairman

Hatti Woakes
Secretary