



North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum

Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

ANNUAL REPORT 2002 – 2003

During the past year there have been many transport developments that have had a significant impact on the North Pembrokeshire area. While there have been disappointments and set backs, we are pleased to report that most developments have been positive, bringing improved transport to areas that have previously suffered from extremely poor transport provision. Throughout the period the Forum interacted and worked with those involved in proposals to improve transport services and also with a wide range of other transport interest groups, at both local and national levels.

Bus services

Among the positive developments this year was the introduction of the concessionary bus pass scheme, with a high take-up from those entitled to receive the passes. However, concerns have been raised about the fact that those who are physically unable to access buses are unable to take advantage of the scheme. We hope that the planned introduction of a low-floor bus corridor on the 412 route will enable more disabled passengers to use buses in future.

The Forum welcomed the introduction of the new Poppit Rocket and Strumble Shuttle coastal bus services in 2002 and was pleased to hear that the services will have an earlier start this spring. It is hoped that the services will be extended into October in future.

Disappointingly, hoteliers and B&B operators have reported that their customers experience problems in accessing bus services on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The Forum has also continued to receive complaints about the lack of information at bus stops about Sunday and Bank Holiday services. Moreover, the inadequacy of public transport in general and, in particular, of public transport after 6 or 7pm. in the more remote rural areas continues to be a matter of concern.

Community Transport

Community transport has received a boost with the introduction of the Preseli Green Dragon scheme, a pilot project providing dial-a-ride services and community transport for groups in the Newport-Brynberian-Maenclochog-Tegryn-Llangolman area. The Forum is pleased to report that this pilot project has now been extended indefinitely.

Another encouraging development was the announcement from the Welsh Assembly Government in August that community transport services will be eligible for fuel duty rebate grants. The savings provided by this funding will enable community transport organisations to expand and develop their services, including services for disabled and older people, those receiving income support or jobseeker's allowance, as well as carers or persons under 16 accompanying these passengers.

The Forum held transport surgeries in St Dogmaels and Mathry this year. As at the surgery held in Crymych last year, it was clear members of the public know very little about the Country Cars scheme and that the service is not seen as part of the public transport system.

Road safety initiatives

As road safety is an important element in transport, the Forum was pleased to express its full support for the Big Quiz joint schools road safety initiative, the Bikesafe Cymru road safety initiative for motorcyclists, as well as for Pembrokeshire County Council's proposals for additional Safe Routes to Schools schemes.

Rail Services

Positive developments included the completion of the new railway station layout at Haverfordwest and improved ticket selling facilities at Fishguard Harbour. Wales & Borders Trains took over the high summer rail service to Fishguard after First Great Western announced that it was no longer willing to operate the service. The Forum survey of the replacement service revealed that on the whole the service had been reasonably well received, and, to our surprise, minimal demand for the restoration of a through service to London.

The Wales and Borders franchise replacement exercise has continued throughout the period under review. The Forum negotiating team presented the case for improved rail services to Fishguard and West Wales at meetings in Fishguard with each of the short listed bidders for the new franchise. Each of the companies expressed a commitment to working with the Forum to develop funding applications for additional services to Fishguard under the Rail Passenger Partnership scheme if they were selected to operate the franchise.

The Forum has also welcomed Wales & Borders Trains' forthcoming introduction of a Pembrokeshire Railcard, offering one-third off leisure travel for residents. Of even greater long term significance has been the approval in principle by the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWITCH) of the proposal to establish a Community Rail Partnership for West Wales. Consultations are now being held on the practical steps required to put the partnership in place.

Regrettably, the positive effects of these developments may have been seriously undermined in view of the funding cutbacks recently announced by the Strategic Rail Authority. The Forum is also disappointed that passengers continue to complain about problems at Haverfordwest Station: in particular about toilets being closed when there are no staff around, the limited opening hours of the ticket office, and about difficulties in obtaining information about delays and cancellations when the station is unstaffed. Passengers also continue to complain about occasions when there is extreme overcrowding on the Swansea-Fishguard train.

Transport Development

During the year the Forum put forward the case for improved transport in North Pembrokeshire in the following consultation responses: (1) The Joint Unitary Development Plan (Pembrokeshire County Council and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority), (2) Rail Fares Review (Strategic Rail Authority), (3) The Walking and Cycling Strategy (Welsh Assembly Government), and (4) The Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire Regeneration Proposals (Welsh Assembly Government and Pembrokeshire County Council).

We also represented the interests of the area at the following meetings: (1) Community Transport Association – National Health Service transport meeting, Swansea, 5 June 2002, (2) Pembrokeshire Community Transport Forum meetings, 25 July and 20 November 2002, (3) Rail Passengers Council meetings, London, 11 September and Bristol, 11 November 2002, and (4) Rail Passengers Committee for Wales meetings, Holyhead, 24-25 September 2002 and Barry 28-29 January 2003.

Working with Others

As in previous years, the Forum has continued to develop productive relationships with those who share our transport interests. We have welcomed the support and cooperation of elected representatives and government at all levels, as well as our ongoing contacts with bus, ferry, rail and community transport operators. We have also liaised with and/or provided information to a wide variety of groups with a transport interest. The support and information provided through all of these exchanges has been invaluable.

The Executive Committee

During the year the Executive Committee held 6 meetings. An additional member, Becci Johnson, was co-opted onto the Committee. The committee has worked with tremendous dedication and enthusiasm, and we offer sincere thanks to each of them for the valuable contribution that they have made to the work of the Forum throughout the year.

Cllr Byron James
Chairman

Cllr Hatti Woakes
Secretary

19 March 2003