

## Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Gwasanaethau Bysiau a Thrafnidiaeth Gymunedol yng Nghymru	Bus and Community Transport Services in Wales
BCT 09	BCT 09
Traveline Cymru	Traveline Cymru

### Consultation questions

**Question 1** –How would you describe the current condition of the bus and community transport sectors in Wales?

Our role is one of providing public transport information; we do not think we are in a position to comment fully on this question.

However our work load is influenced by changes to the bus service network and its accompanying infrastructure; we have seen many changes in recent years including large scale bus station redevelopments, and wholesale bus network changes as operators refine their networks in light of economic priorities and local authorities reduce their subsidies to ‘supported’ services. One might describe the bus sector therefor in recent years as changeable.

**Question 2** – why do you think the number of bus services and the number of bus passengers is declining in Wales?

From the perspective of information providers we have seen a reduction in the number of bus services on our systems from 1,412 services in 2010 to 1,091 on Sept 29<sup>th</sup> 2015

We understand that to be as a result of consolidation of services by some operators, a reduction in local authority support for socially necessary services and more stringent commercial route viability assessments by operators. A consequence of fewer services, might inevitably lead to fewer passengers.

**Question 3** – what do you think is the social, economic and environmental impact of recent changes in bus and community transport service levels?

As information providers we do not consider ourselves in a position to comment substantively on this question. However verbatim feedback from our last 2 call centre customer survey's reveals higher levels of dissatisfaction, as quoted below:-

"There wasn't a bus when you needed one"

"They (agents) can't improve but fare's should be reduced"

"Nothing wrong with 'call just lack of Sunday service"

"They were very helpful ..... with a route but the buses don't run frequently enough for my requirements"

"The bus times aren't as frequent (The X91)"

"the person was lovely, the bus service isn't good"

"the telephone call was perfect but the timetable was appalling"

**Question 4** –what do you think the Welsh Government should do to support bus and community transport in Wales?

We believe that Welsh Govt might do more to ensure more consistent and effective provision of public transport information at street level, by using / creating powers to require local authorities to offer a minimum standard consistent across Wales. We have argued this before in evidence to Public Transport Users Committee and others.

**Question 5** –what do you think Welsh local authorities should do to support bus and community transport services?

We believe that local authorities should do more to market the availability of bus services in their area perhaps by partnership working with operators and others. In the same way that for instance a leisure facility, local theatre or similar is promoted so that everyone has the opportunity to use it, and is aware of opening times and prices, the same should apply to bus services with operating times and fares being more widely promoted.

**Question 6** - what do you think about proposals to devolve bus registration powers to Wales? How should these be used?

This is an area which could directly affect our role and we therefore make the following comments.

Traveline Cymru believes that there would be significant benefits to bus users (our customers) and bus operators (our stakeholders) if bus registration powers were devolved to Wales.

Firstly, we understand that the bus registration process, which is currently managed in Leeds, is not able to offer a bi-lingual service, and that is frustrating to bus operators. Anecdotal feedback suggests that there is an element of 'rubber stamping' of registrations and insufficient scrutiny applied – potentially causing consequential difficulties for bus users.

Secondly, the process itself involves the examination, collation and data input of timetable and other relevant information. This process is also undertaken by Traveline Cymru, who need all of the information submitted to Leeds, in order to update its systems and provide accurate and up to date bus timetable/routing information to the travelling public.

Thirdly, there is currently no requirement for a bus operator to notify Traveline Cymru of any new, cancelled or amended service. This means we are totally reliant upon operator goodwill/relationships to obtain changes in order to keep our data to the bus user as up to date as possible. By taking on the task of managing bus registrations – mandatory for bus operators – Traveline Cymru would in one stroke remove the biggest source of complaints from customers – 'not knowing what we don't know'. While Traveline could physically process bus registrations, the current legislation requires that the Welsh Government would be responsible.

We have long argued that if the bus registration process was undertaken by Traveline Cymru in Wales it would:-

1. Speed up the time taken to process registrations – with benefits to bus users and operators.
2. Offer a bi-lingual service to operators.
3. Reduce duplication of effort, ie two different organisations handling the same information, saving overall cost.
4. Keep the fee's paid by operators in Wales (£60 per registration).
5. Ensure the very best level of accuracy and up to date information is available to bus passengers in Wales.

Please see also attached a copy of our submission to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee, dated February 2014, in regard to this issue

**Question 7** - please tell us whether you think further powers to regulate the bus industry in Wales are required and why?

We have no view about Bus regulation; we simply wish to have all information about any bus service made available to us at the earliest opportunity, so as to inform passengers / potential passengers.

**Question 8** - what other action can be taken to ensure that bus and community transport services meet the needs of people in Wales?

We have no view in relation to this question.

Please tell us anything else you would like to mention this topic, thank you for contributing to our inquiry.

Please see attached briefing note about the role and scope of Traveline Cymru, thank you.

**PO Box 83, Cardiff CF11 8TB**

**02920 344470**

### **About Traveline Cymru**

PTI Cymru Ltd is a company primarily funded by Welsh Government and formed as an output of the Transport Act 2000 by Wales' large Bus operators, and operates on a not-for-profit basis. Its' core purpose is to provide bi-lingual impartial travel information about all forms of public transport in Wales. It does this under the brand name Traveline Cymru by collating information from local authorities, bus, coach, ferry and train operators, and then making this information available to the public.

Traveline Cymru delivers around 2.2 million journey planning / travel solutions via its award winning website, and circa 1.4 million 'App' based travel solutions per year. The organisation has seen significant growth in demand for information over recent years and supplied a total of 3.8 million pieces of information in 2014.

We are committed to offering a telephone service in order to provide an accessible service to the people of Wales, especially those without internet or mobile 'phone access, the aurally and visually impaired and others for whom modern technologies present usability issues. The company has continually developed its bi-lingual contact centre operation in recent years, and it now delivers a high quality service on a 364 days per year basis.

The facility is based in Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd and it operates from 7 am to 8 pm, 7 days per week except Christmas Day. The contact centre handles around 100,000 'calls a year for Traveline Cymru.

The facility also services other contracts including full customer service provision for Arriva Trains Wales, First Cymru Bus and Welsh language 'calls for NRES, several utility companies and the Bwcabus scheme for Carmarthen and Ceredigion councils. These contracts generate commercial revenue helping to offset the cost of the Traveline Cymru service provision.

More recently the company has taken on the role of operating the 'mytravelpass' initiative which offers discounted bus travel for young persons aged 16 – 18 yrs.

### **Company objectives include:-**

- Providing all public transport users *one location* where they can get any information needed, both in timetable or real time format, together with printable journey plans.
- Supporting Welsh Government policies around public transport integration, improving provision of travel information and to improve customer experience of public transport services.
- Working closely with other organisations such as local authorities in order to distribute the information, thereby maximising the return on investment and avoiding duplication of expenditure and expertise.
- Marketing and promoting the availability of the travel information on a consistent and wide ranging basis throughout Wales, paying particular attention to ensuring the information is accessible to all sections of the community.

- To delivering a highly cost effective service by continual review of costs and exploiting the ever reducing costs of technology.



PO Box 83 Cardiff CF11 8TB

PTI Cymru Ltd t/a

# TRAVELINE CYMRU

## Evidence to:

House of Commons Transport Select Committee

'Inquiry into the user experience of Government motoring agencies'

## Contents

1. **Executive Summary**
2. **About Traveline Cymru**
3. **Traffic Commissioners, Office of the Traffic Commissioner and VOSA – Bus Service Registration**
4. **Bus Service Data processing within Traveline Cymru**
5. **How to make things better for Users in Wales**

Prepared by:

Graham Walter CMILT,

General Manager

February 2014.

## **1. Executive Summary**

- Traveline Cymru provides impartial travel information to the public about all forms of public transport in Wales. The service is totally dependent upon receiving accurate and up to date Bus service information from bus operators and / or local authorities.
- This same information is required by law to be submitted by bus operators to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) supported by VOSA in Leeds; there is no obligation upon operators to submit it to Traveline Cymru.
- There is a significant duplication in effort which could largely be avoided if the Registration process were handled, under licence or otherwise, by Traveline Cymru.
- In so doing there are further benefits to bus operators, the travelling public, and others. These include saving money, the ability to process Registrations in the medium of Welsh, speed up the process by use of better local knowledge, and apply greater rigour to the process itself (especially with short notice changes).

## 2. About Traveline Cymru

- 2.1 Traveline Cymru is the brand name of PTI Cymru Ltd, a company primarily funded by Welsh Government, and formed as an output of the Transport Act 2000 by Wales' large bus operators. Operating on a not-for-profit basis, its' core purpose is to provide impartial travel information to the public about all forms of public transport in Wales.
- 2.2 In 2013 the company delivered 3.9 million pieces of travel information via different modes as detailed at 2.6 below.
- 2.3 The company operates independently from UK Traveline governance but within agreed service arrangements.
- 2.4 The company and also provides data to bus companies, local authorities and other suppliers supporting the provision of real time bus information services, bus stop and timetable information, and publically accessible information displays.
- 2.5 The Traveline Cymru service is completely dependent upon the maintenance of an accurate database which forms the basis of all public transport information provision; this database is compiled from data supplied from bus operators and local authorities in Wales (plus national rail, coach and air data). It requires constant updating as bus operators are able to change timetables at any time, subject to statutory notice requirements.
- 2.6 Demand for public transport information in Wales is growing at a very high rate. The emergence of digital and mobile technologies means that Users now expect the very latest up to date information at their fingertips, and while on the move. This trend is evidenced below:-

### **Information volume and modal distribution 2009 to 2013**

Information Delivery Mode	2013 total	2013 share by mode	2012 total	2011 total	2010 total	2009 total
Calls answered at Contact Centre	152,283	3.9%	176,037	224,236	300,408	319,529
Texts	150,530	3.9%	151,432	174,271	146,885	106,558
Tablet / phone Apps	1,401,615	35.9%	739,382	143,511	67,206	13,296
Website derived info	2,198,412	56.3%	1,953,449	1,471,299	1,154,686	998,378
Fares via Web/App	3,475					
<b>Total Info Provided</b>	<b>3,906,315</b>		<b>3,020,300</b>	<b>2,013,317</b>	<b>1,669,180</b>	<b>1,437,761</b>

- Total Information provided increased by 29.3% in 2013, mainly driven by demand for Tablet & 'Phone Apps which were nonexistent 5 years ago.

- 2.7 Now more than ever, it is vital that information known to bus operators and VOSA is made instantly available to the traveling public via services such as Traveline Cymru and others, yet the means of obtaining such information is not supported by legislation, only voluntary mechanisms, meaning inevitable delays, duplication of effort and unnecessary costs, as set out below.

### 3. VOSA and Bus Service Registration

- 3.1 In practice, the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) is staffed by employees who are employed by VOSA (soon to be DVSA) but who work for and on behalf of the traffic commissioners either with regard to administrative matters or with regard to exercising delegated functions.
- 3.2 All bus operators running services in Wales have to register the proposed service, and any variations to existing services, by application to the Traffic Commissioner using procedures set out by the OTC. There is a fee of £60 per registration payable to VOSA.
- 3.2 For most, this means the completion of Department of Transport form PSV350 which is sent to the OTC's office in Leeds, who handle the registration process on behalf of the Traffic Commissioner. Operators are also required to send a copy of the paperwork to all local authorities in which the service operates.

Often in Wales, where the service is tendered, i.e. subsidised by the local authority, and the operator is a smaller independent, the registration is completed and submitted by the local authority.
- 3.3 A properly completed registration must include a clear route description, accompanying maps and a full timetable. It should be submitted on time, ie, **at least fifty six days before** the proposed commencement date, or if late, must be supported by letter from the relevant local authority endorsing the reason for the late submission.
- 3.4 An electronic means of registering services (EBSR) was introduced a few years ago. This process was meant to simplify the procedure, offer efficiencies and speed up the process. However the system is not perfect, and take up generally has been slow.
- 3.5 We understand that there is currently no provision for the registration paperwork to be submitted via the medium of the Welsh language, nor any provision for dealing with subsequent telephone conversations between the bus operator and the OTC in Welsh.
- 3.6 We further understand that the Traffic Commissioner for Wales has previously commented that due to the lack of local knowledge there have been complaints from users that services were registered from "ysgol to ysgol", or "school to school" for example; demonstrating – from a Welsh operator's perspective – a frustrating lack of local knowledge. There being many schools in Wales, the registration was of limited value.
- 3.7 Further, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that in many cases, detail submitted fails to reach the minimum level, requiring OTC officials to contact operators directly; anecdotal evidence suggests that this is done to save time, when documentation should be returned for correct submission.
- 3.8 Other noted concerns are that due to limited staff resource in Leeds, registrations are "rubber stamped" without being properly scrutinised. It is widely accepted that the issue of late / short notice registrations is largely ignored. Operators are required to give 56 days' notice to OTC in the event of a variation to or withdrawal of a service. This is to ensure, amongst other things, that passengers are given adequate notice. Statistics held by Traveline Cymru show that for 2012, 95 of 1,248 registrations were received by Traveline Cymru **after** the service change date, let alone 56 days prior to

it. This leads to frustration by the travelling public and adds to misconceptions about public transport reliability.

#### **4. Bus Service Data processing within Traveline Cymru**

4.1 As set out above, in providing a comprehensive public transport information service, Traveline Cymru requires information from the bus operator about every service operated, and every change made to existing services. In other words the company requires sight of everything the bus operator is legally required to submit to OTC at para 3.3 above.

4.2 However, Traveline Cymru has no legal entitlement to receive bus operators' statutory registration documents, including changes and variations.

4.3 Instead, copies of the Registration form PSV350 are often obtained from the local authority or operator via voluntary arrangements. Where these fail, other more creative yet time consuming measures are taken to establish up to date information.

Because the accuracy of the Traveline Cymru service is wholly dependent upon local authorities and operators sending copies of registration details; when these are not made available inaccurate timetable / journey planning information is be provided to the public.

This system is not robust enough and it is often the case that 'we don't know what we don't know'.

4.4 Complaints about inaccurate data provided by Traveline Cymru are highly visible, leading to missed journeys and upset customers; in 2013 there were 80 data related complaints.

4.5 Traveline Cymru is in effect handling the same document from a bus operator as the officials in Leeds, and extracting largely similar information from it; this is a duplication of effort that could be avoided thus reducing cost to the public purse.

#### **5. How to make things better for Users in Wales**

5.1 In this context we define 'Users' as public transport users, potential users, local authorities and other parties displaying timetable / journey planning information.

5.2 Following investigation work carried out in 2011, Traveline Cymru believes that there would be real benefits in their undertaking the processing of bus service registrations for the Welsh Traffic Area on behalf of, or in the place of the OTC in Leeds. These benefits include:-

- Improving the quality public transport information for Users.
- Improving scrutiny, checking of route geography and timetable logic and accuracy.
- More robust approach to incomplete or most importantly, late registration content.
- Reduced turnaround time from receipt of service registration to availability of information for the public (and other stakeholders).
- Processing of registrations in Wales, with local knowledge and most importantly via the medium of the Welsh language.
- Removing significant duplication of effort in data capture activity.

- Saving money for the tax payer.
- 5.4 Traveline Cymru is also deploying new IT systems to improve the position for Wales by minimising internal registration processes and improving the depth and quality of data. Relocating the service registration process from the OTC in Leeds to Traveline Cymru would place the starting position of the data supply chain where it can best support Welsh public transport information needs.
- 5.5 In our view the simplest way of migrating the handling of registration processing from the OTC in Leeds to Traveline Cymru would be to negotiate with OTC, VOSA, DfT, and the Traffic Commissioner for the Welsh Traffic area, to undertake this activity on the Traffic Commissioner's behalf under some form of licensing arrangement.
- 5.6 Alternatively, it might be possible to promote changes to the legislation for Wales allowing the activity, and possibly other related public transport regulation activities to be brought under the direct control of the Welsh Government.
- 5.7 The approach at 5.5 does pose some difficulties that would need to be addressed including:-
- Obliging operators to submit their registrations to Traveline Cymru instead of the OTC. This may be comparatively simple, or achieved by redirection from Leeds, but it is not reflected in the current legislation.
  - Ensuring Traveline Cymru staff are legally entitled to bear delegated responsibility for aspects of registration processing, currently reserved for 'servants of the Crown'.
  - Finding acceptable and affordable systems solutions providing the link and necessary integration between Traveline Cymru and the OTC.
- 5.8 If undertaken within the framework of a broader change to legislation (see 5.6), the process of migration would be simpler, the systems implications less onerous, and Traveline Cymru would have the flexibility to independently implement processes customised for Welsh requirements rather than ensuring full alignment to the OTC's existing work-flow. This is an important consideration as Traveline Cymru would wish to improve on the current situation rather than just relocate the activity.

Ends