

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE OF MEETING	13 July 2021
TITLE	Update - Strategic Review of the Public Transport Service
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Gareth W Griffith
PURPOSE	To update the Committee on the progress to date

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is submitted to the Committee in order to provide an update on the Transport Strategic Review.
- 1.2 The Environment Department presented a report to the Leadership Team on 9th October 2018 outlining the difficulties with bus companies which has affected passengers in Gwynedd since 2014. The report identified risks, and the principal risk, given the history, was over-reliance on bus companies. The main impact of this risk, amongst others, was an increase in public transport costs in Gwynedd thus reducing the number of services available for users.
- 1.3 In order to mitigate these risks, the Department stated that it intended to conduct a comprehensive review of the Public Transport provision and consult with communities to address the following:
- Identify the need
 - Assess the social value
 - Prioritise services
 - Offer public transport through innovative methods and get more for our limited money
- 1.4 A further report was presented to the Communities Scrutiny Committee on 4 April 2019 offering an update, and specifically outlining the aim of the Public Transport review and how it would be carried out. It was explained that the review would take into consideration the existing public transport network and assess whether it is fit for purpose, with the aim of establishing a safe, reliable and cost-effective network for the future.
- 1.5 An update was provided to the Leadership Team on 24 September 2019, and the Scrutiny Committee on 26 September 2019 [Appendix 1] on the progress of the Strategic Review of the Public Transport Service.
- 1.6 To remind the Communities Scrutiny Committee, we intend to complete this review by undertaking the 7 following steps:
1. Identify the need amongst the public; not only the demand by those who currently use public transport but also what would encourage other members of the public to use public transport. This will be done through engagement and consultation.

2. Having established the need, the current network will be surveyed to ensure that it can meet the needs of the travelling public. This will include making any necessary changes to the network.
 3. Having established the network, it will then be necessary to consider what type of provision will be the safest, most reliable and most cost effective. This is where we will need to draw on the experience of other authorities and experts to evaluate options.
 4. Consult with communities to share the results of the review and the time-line for establishing the new network before commencing the tendering process.
 5. Initiate the tendering process.
 6. If the funding is insufficient to meet the need, then we will need to prioritise the bus routes depending on the analysis of Social Return on Investment.
 7. Commence the new service.
- 1.7 The Department is keen to trial alternative ways of meeting transport needs by means of, e.g. using community transport methods, on-call services, mini-buses, taxis, etc.
- 1.8 The timetable for action was outlined [Appendix 2] and it is now timely to report on the progress to date to the Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.9 The main purpose of this report is to provide you with an update on progress and the next steps to be taken by the Department.

2. UPDATE

Survey work

- 2.1 To ensure the Department understands what services our residents need and to also understand the purpose for individuals' journeys, essential information was gathered through the use of surveys.
- 2.2 Paper questionnaires were collected, mainly from community events that had been organised in advance in different locations throughout the County. Officers also sat on buses or in bus stops and completed the questionnaires with the users. A number of questionnaires were collected on-line, and the success in securing such a large number of responses was down to members and officers publicising the need to respond.
- 2.3 The work of analysing the questionnaires has now been completed, and the information gathered has fed into two main work streams:
- Identify the 'social value' of the (subsidised) services that we deliver.
 - Review our 'public transport network' to ensure that we meet the need in the most effective way

3. THE SOCIAL VALUE OF SERVICES THAT WE DELIVER

- 3.1 It should be noted that commercial services or the 'Snowdon Sherpa' services have not been included as part of the work on 'social value'. A separate report has been completed to consider Parking and Public Transport needs in Northern Snowdonia through the 'Snowdon Partnership'.

3.2 A comprehensive report was commissioned by us and prepared by Bangor University [Appendix 3], which explains in detail the background, and methodology which led to reaching the results. Social value has been calculated for the 39 subsidised bus routes. In considering the social value and the cost of providing a service on a particular route, the Social Return on Investment [SROI] can be identified. The SROI methodology has been recommended by the Treasury as a form of assessment, and of course, consideration of social value is a particularly important aspect to us in light of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

3.3 As we consider the SROI ratio, there is substantial difference between various routes. At one end we have 9 routes outlining a social value of over £10 for every £1 invested, and at the other end, 4 routes outline a social value of less than £1 for every £1 invested. The relevant table is included in table 12.2 of the report in Appendix 3 and is included below in Table 1.

Table 1: The Social Value Methodology for comparison of bus routes (as Table 12.2 in the report in Appendix 2)

Social value ratios of more than £10 : 1		Social Value Ratios between £10 : 1 a £6 : 1		Social Value Ratios between £6 : 1 a £3 : 1		Social Value Ratios less than £3 : 1	
1) Route 38	£59.96	10) Route 1F	£9.93	19) Route 83	£5.87	29) Route 29	£2.97
2) Route 88	£36.36	11) Route 8	£9.79	20) Route 37	£5.30	30) Route 27	£2.75
3) Route 3B	£22.89	12) Route 67S	£9.02	21) Route 76	£4.78	31) Route 1S	£2.34
4) Route 30	£16.38	13) Route 28	£8.53	22) Route 17	£3.98	32) Route 1NS	£2.25
5) Route 12E	£14.31	14) Route 85	£8.16	23) Route 1E	£3.91	33) Route 23	£2.20
6) Route 93	£13.63	15) Route 39	£7.96	24) Route 18	£3.64	34) Route 88S	£2.03
7) Route 5E	£12.44	16) Route 35	£6.77	25) Route 3	£3.44	35) Route 67E	£1.31
8) Route 1N	£11.38	17) Route 92	£6.21	26) Route 3S	£3.27	36) Route 8S/18S	£0.76
9) Route 78	£10.69	18) Route 1A	£6.15	27) Route 91	£3.11	37) Route 14	£0.72
				28) Route 33	£3.08	38) Route 2S	£0.44
						39) Route 8AB	£0.31

3.4 Very briefly, the work identified that passengers of all ages benefit from subsidised bus services. The report draws our attention to an ageing population who are reliant on Public Transport for their independence. The report also highlights that around 1 in every 5 households in Gwynedd are without a vehicle. The report concludes that subsidised bus services offer a positive social value in that they enable people to travel to their work, education, to the shops, medical appointments, opportunities to volunteer and socialise and care for others.

4. REVIEWING THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK

4.1 The existing Public Transport network has developed gradually over a number of years, and no comprehensive review has been undertaken to ensure that we are meeting the need in the most effective way possible.

4.2 With the wealth of information that was gathered through the questionnaires together with the results of the social value report prepared by Bangor University, we have a unique opportunity to examine the existing network in detail and ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the demand.

- 4.3 The Environment Department has received specialist support from Transport for Wales (TfW) to examine the network. They have undertaken very thorough work which identifies some services that are duplicated by the 'Traws Cymru' services (which are subsidised by the Welsh Government). This of course begs the question whether one service could address both local needs and 'Traws Cymru' needs? This question has been considered very carefully, and it is possible, however the Traws Cymru Services (in particular routes T2 and T3) would need to run every hour rather than every two hours.
- 4.4 Welsh Government has now commissioned work to consider bus networks throughout Wales with a view to securing better consistency and flow through the Counties to transport our residents in the most effective way. Officers from the Department are working very closely with Transport for Wales and ARUP company to this end and are eager to ensure that important rural services are protected.
- 4.5 In addition, the Department has begun discussions with Welsh Government officers to understand whether it might be possible to increase the frequency of the 'Traws Cymru' services. At present, significant costs seem to be preventing this. Broader options are being considered, which include co-funding in an attempt to establish a comprehensive network that meets the needs of those travelling locally and those wishing to travel further distances. It is encouraging that the Gwynedd has received over £3.7 million to prepare infrastructure and purchase electric buses to address the Traws Cymru bus service T22 [between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Caernarfon via Cricieth and Rhoslan]. This additional service will provide a better service to the Gwynedd communities between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Caernarfon
- 4.6 At the same time, the Department has been considering tender packages for subsidised services, and again we are liaising with TfW with regard to ensuring that we are innovative in securing services that offer value for money whilst meeting the need. The Department's aim is to re-tender the Arfon Area of the County first, with the new services to begin operating in September 2021. During 2021, the Department intended to re-tender services in Dwyfor, with Meirionnydd being re-tendered in 2022, but the COVID pandemic has forced the Department to postpone this work.
- 4.7 Generally, the public's use of Public Transport services is substantially lower, and from the feedback we receive, the reason behind this is confidence in mixing with others on the journey in the context of the COVID pandemic. There are also restrictions on the numbers able to travel on a bus and the need to keep windows open and wear face covering. The Department is working with Public Transport providers as well as other bodies to try to re-establish passengers' confidence and enable the most vulnerable people in our communities to have the freedom to live independently once more.

5. RELEVANT TIMETABLE

- 5.1 The Department's intention, in accordance with the timetable, was to proceed to the tendering process to have the Arfon part of the new network in place by September 2020, with the remaining areas to follow. The challenging times which have struck us with COVID 19 has means that we have had to re-think this. The Department is of the opinion that prices would not be competitive as companies' confidence is low. Therefore a decision has been made to postpone starting the re-tendering process until spring 2021.

- 5.2 The Department is working with Transport for Wales and ARUP company to review the bus network in Gwynedd within the national context of the national bus network review.
- 5.3 The department is working to set purposeful infrastructure and purchase electric buses to run the T22 service [Blaenau Ffestiniog to Caernarfon] with a view to starting those services in spring 2022
- 5.4 The Department will monitor the use of Public Transport Services and work with the providers and other bodies to promote and re-establish passengers' confidence which has been undermined due to the pandemic.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Report to the Communities Scrutiny Committee 26.09.19
- Appendix 2: Timetable for Action
- Appendix 3: Bangor University Report