



Pwyllgor Defnyddwyr
Trafnidiaeth Gyhoeddus Cymru
**Public Transport Users'
Committee For Wales**

Provision of **Public Transport** Information April 2012

Provision of **Public** **Transport** Information

April 2012

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Executive **summary**

This report is a summary of the Public Transport Users' Committee evidence gathering exercise into the provision of public transport information in Wales.

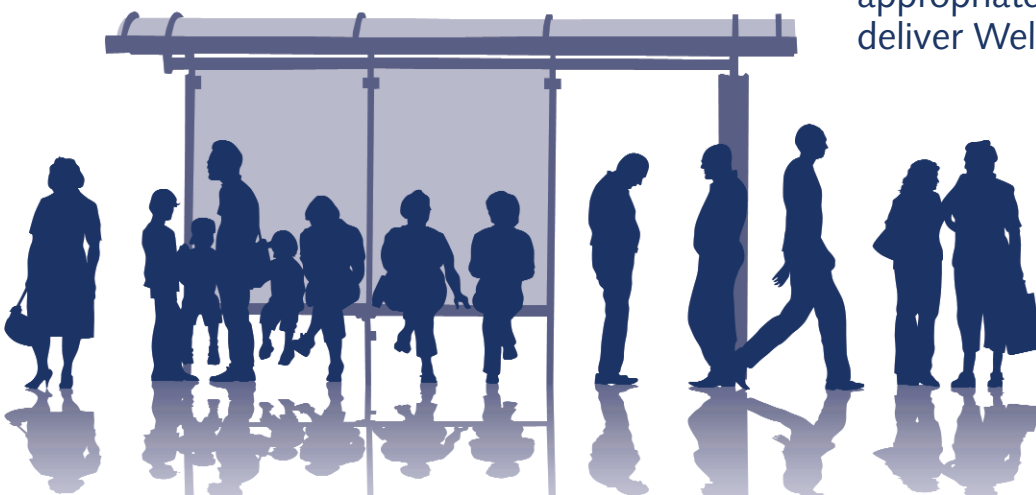
At the heart of all our work and findings was evidence that current provision of information in respect of public transport in Wales is centred on operational need and individual expertise. The needs and views of users are rarely sought or considered in how, when and where to provide appropriate information.

Our research shows that current public transport information across the Welsh public transport network, especially for bus users, is inconsistent, fragmented, largely historical / legacy based and not driven by input from users. It appears dependent upon individual authority budget allocation and/or the ability and general comprehension of responsible officers.



No minimum standards have been identified or implemented. This failure has led to chaotic and inconsistent provision across Wales which is inefficient, more expensive than it could be, confusing to users and often leads to a lack of credibility and faith in the product.

The Welsh Government currently invests significant amounts of public money into the bus industry, for example, through the concessionary fare scheme. It is not clear how this funding is used to ensure that appropriate levers are in place to deliver Welsh Government outcomes.



Executive **summary**

There are no levers or incentives for operators to engage with users or apply standards to the information they provide. However, the dependence on Welsh Government funding presents an opportunity to create change and set standards and leadership in respect of the provision of public transport information.

From our work we make the following six key recommendations. The full report provides further information and detail in respect of these recommendations:

1. That the Welsh Government produces guidance in respect of the provision of public transport information in Wales.
2. That the Welsh Government undertakes further research into best practice in the provision of public transport information from a users' perspective, including meeting the needs of people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
3. That mechanisms are put in place to restrict timetable changes in respect of buses to twice a year in line with train timetabling changes. Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to inform public transport information providers and the public of these changes.



4. That the Welsh Government leads on establishing Wales-wide protocols on the provision of public transport information during service disruption. This guidance should include the delivery of the maximum information to the passenger in a timely and effective manner.
5. That the Welsh Government conducts a review of funding mechanisms to bodies responsible for the provision of public transport information and develop ways of ensuring standards, accuracy and completeness are part of the funding criteria.

Executive summary

6. Our evidence demonstrated that the most effective delivery of public transport information occurs under a regulated and centralised environment. Whilst we recognise that this is unlikely to meet the current needs and policy direction in Wales, we recommend that the Welsh Government considers the implementation of a Joint Transport Authority as outlined in the Labour Government's manifesto.

The Public Transport Users' Committee looks forward to working with the Welsh Government and partners across the sector to deliver changes which will create better outcomes in the provision of public transport information for all the citizens of Wales and for visitors to Wales.

We hope that this report will be of interest to many across the sector and that we can continue to work in partnership with all to create and implement some real changes,

which will ensure that access to information and public transport in general is better for all citizens in Wales and visitors to Wales.

Further comprehensive details of our work, papers and reports are available via our website www.wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/public/ptuc

The Public Transport Users' Committee would like to thank everyone who has engaged with us during this work and for the vast amount of information we have received. Apologies to all those who are active in this area where your work is not fully recognised in this report.

We look forward to both tracking the implementation of our recommendations and continuing to work across the sector to build on this work.



Public Transport Users' Committee – **role and remit**

The Public Transport Users' Committee is a committee which offers advice to Welsh Ministers about strategic issues relating to public transport services in Wales from the perspective of users' experiences and needs.

Our role and remit is wide, and of necessity, due to resource constraints, we have to keep our focus strategic. Therefore, our aims are:

1. To put public transport users' needs at the heart of transport policy making in Wales;
2. To provide expert, evidence-based recommendations to Ministers, policy makers and user groups on all aspects of transport policy.

Visit:

www.wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/public/ptuc

for our full remit and terms of reference. The membership of the Committee has deliberately been drawn from across Welsh society with the intention of obtaining the views not

only of specialists and special interest groups, but also the opinions of those who use a particular form of transport for whatever reason and who may develop ideas or opinions which they might not feel strongly enough to express formally, but which may be no less relevant because of this.

It was with this in mind that the evidence gathering exercises were carried out and many varied views and suggestions were heard. Their relevance or indeed achievability varied, but the very act of seeking the opinion and listening was important and should not be discounted even if it was not gleaned from an expert or a specialist.

Naturally, great weight has been placed on research and opinion from specialists and while we have deliberately emphasised practical actions, we have always tried to give the due weight to highly valued professional opinion.

Why did the Committee decide to **review public transport information in Wales?**



At the Public Transport Users' Committee meeting of the 24 March 2011, it was agreed that our

inaugural evidence gathering exercise would look at the provision of public transport information within Wales.

The Committee acknowledged in particular, that the inadequate provision of information acts as a significant barrier to public transport use and that the appropriate availability and accuracy of public transport information can have major benefits.

A legislative and policy context can be found on our website, www.wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/public/ptuc/meetings/110324 meeting paper 5 refers.

From our initial investigations we learned that the largest proportion of public transport journeys are made on the local bus network (83% local bus; 16% rail and 1% long distance bus). The Committee therefore agreed to concentrate on the provision of public transport

information in relation to local bus services.

In preparation for the formation of the Public Transport Users' Committee, the Welsh Government conducted a survey entitled 'tell us your views.' In the results of this survey, the provision of public transport information was identified as being highly important for users. As a factor, satisfaction with the provision of public transport information had a stronger correlation than any other factor on whether users were satisfied with public transport overall. This suggests that making improvements to the provision of information would have a significant effect on users' overall satisfaction with public transport. For some, provision of information is a major barrier to use of public transport. For others, provision of information is a routine frustration.

This research also showed that passengers reported lower satisfaction rates with public transport information on buses than in trains, which gave a further reason for the committee to concentrate on buses.

Scope of **review and report**

This report aims only to be a summary of our work between April 2011 and March 2012, giving clear findings and recommendations for action. In accordance with our remit, we have written this report with the intention of making clear recommendations for Welsh Ministers.

We recognise however, that many of the outstanding issues and barriers presented by the provision of information remain within the remit of others and therefore we have included recommendations on where we feel that the Welsh Government could or needs to use its role and influence with others.

Methodology

The Committee divided into 3 sub-committees to gather evidence from:

- users, via a questionnaire and survey analysis;
- gathering and evaluating existing research; and
- providers of public transport information.

This work was conducted to complement the Committee's evidence gathering opportunities at our meetings.

The responses provided by organisations have been taken into account in our findings and recommendations. Replies and responses were too numerous and varied to provide a full copy in this report.

The Committee commissioned specialist research from Halcrow into evidence of good practice regarding user led provision of public transport information and the conclusions of this research are included in our findings and recommendations. <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/public/ptuc/reports/ptiresearch/?lang=en>



Public Transport Information Report

Public transport information can be a barrier or an enabler. It is critical that it is timely and accurate and that relevant information is available and accessible at each stage of journey planning and during the journey.

A sustainable economy of necessity requires many more travellers to move out of their cars and onto public transport. By making it easier for people to use public transport through good public transport information, the issue of sustainability is partly addressed.

Good information on its own is not enough; the services need to be reliable, accessible and have a frequency that is useful to passengers. However, good information should help boost numbers of users.



Public Transport

Information providers

The UK transport industry, the Department for Transport and industry user groups have provided guidance on public transport information. However, much of this is out of date and has been developed from an industry rather than a users' perspective.

In Wales, key players in providing public transport information are the 22 Local Authorities, the four Regional Transport Consortia, individual bus operators and Traveline Cymru, alongside partner organisations such as Visit Wales.

Regional Transport Consortia

The four Regional Transport Consortia do not have any legal responsibility for public transport information provision; they offer some support to Local Authorities, yet appear to have been unable to significantly influence consistency and deliver enhanced information provision. The Consortia do have a role on consultation and funding. All four Consortia gave evidence to the Public Transport Users' Committee in respect of public transport information.

SWWITCH

South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) works closely with the Local Authorities in their region. It helps to create travel plans, often working with organisations such as the NHS, police and larger companies. It provides advice, undertakes surveys, suggests options (often using Traveline Cymru's journey planning options) and works closely with the organisations concerned.

The SWWITCH website provides a range of advice and suggestions in respect of public transport information.

Sewta

South East Wales Transport Alliance (Sewta) commissioned research in 2004 on timetable provision and standards based on users' views. This report has formed the basis of Cardiff bus timetable and information provision to date.

It would appear that no systematic approach to implementation, monitoring or accountability for standards has followed this report. Implementation by Cardiff Bus has been entirely voluntary. It is not clear which, if any, of the other information providers, including Local Authorities, have adopted any of these standards.

TraCC

Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC) has carried out work within the region to make public transport information more uniform. It has purchased omnitimes for all local authorities (Ceredigion, Powys and a third of Gwynedd) but problems with technology have prevented this from progressing. TraCC has created some regional timetable booklets: Brecon Beacons, which won an award, Aberystwyth and Dolgellau. These have been produced in conjunction with Local Authorities and aimed at tourists. It recognises the problem of timetable changes that happen too frequently result in publications becoming quickly out of date.

Taith

Taith is aware of the inconsistency in the provision of public transport information in its region. It has used grant monies to implement some real time information provision but it is limited. Taith recognises that there is a need for a single operating system to ensure consistency and financial efficiency.

After listening to the four Consortia, it is clear that when providing public transport information the needs of different customers need to be addressed and information provided through a variety of different mediums.

For example, older people are less likely to use the internet to access public transport information, whilst young people's requirements are more likely to focus on modern technology. Both younger and older

people are more likely to be dependent on public transport than others.

All four consortia recognised that there needs to be a greater level of co-operation and co-ordination between bus operators, Local Authorities and the four Regional Transport Consortia in the provision of public transport information.

Local Authorities

Local Authorities have an obligation to provide public transport information. Current spending and resource allocation for bus service information provision differs significantly according to Local Authority priorities. In the absence of clear minimum standards, the passenger experience is inconsistent particularly in respect of cross boundary services or journeys.

Different Local Authorities do in some circumstances co-ordinate their work on public transport information. The Association of Transport Coordinating Officers brings together Local Authority officers whose work involves strategic policy development and implementation for securing passenger transport services for a wide range of public authorities. Through exchanging information and views, the Association helps formulate policies and standards and promotes transport initiatives aimed at achieving better passenger transport services for all.

In 2008, the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers produced a report to provide guiding principles for what the industry believes the passenger wants in respect of public transport information. Many of the guiding principles set out in the report have yet to be implemented and remain valid. Therefore many of the recommendations in this report reiterate those of the 2008 Association of Transport Coordinating Officers report.

There is a national bus stop database for the whole of the UK, by grid reference, which describes the bus stops in detail. Local Authorities should, but most often don't, update this database whenever changes are made. This means that the database is never accurate and up to date and cannot be relied upon. If this problem were solved, it would greatly enhance the value of public transport information to both users and operators.

Traveline Cymru

Traveline Cymru provides a single point of contact for all forms of public transport information across Wales.

Traveline Cymru is funded and supported by Welsh Government to fulfil this role. It was set up by Welsh Government initially as a call centre operation but has been expanded to include journey planning facilities through their website, as well as providing mobile media communications.

Additional funding for Traveline Cymru comes from payments made by operators for each call it receives that points to/gives information on that operator's services. Such payments are not mandatory in Wales, unlike England, where there is a regulatory requirement for operators to pay Traveline England. A number of commercial operators currently refuse to pay these fees in Wales.

There are significant issues around data accuracy where Traveline Cymru is not consistently told of service changes. Bus operators are required to notify the Traffic Commissioner 56 days in advance of changes. This information is not always passed on to Traveline Cymru and it has no legal right to this information.

Whilst persuasion and outlining the mutual benefit of information sharing has made some improvement, requirements for information sharing would ensure the accuracy of public transport information for users.

Bus operators

There are many bus operators in Wales, both large and small. A number were interviewed by members of the Public Transport Users' Committee in order to get a fair overview of their competence and their role in providing public transport information and in order to appreciate the obstacles they face. Bus operators have no formalised guidance setting out what provision they offer; most of what is done is driven by history and experience. Operators are responsible for producing their own timetable information, but bus stop infrastructure in the main is owned by Local Authorities.

Some operators have the responsibility for the provision of public transport information at bus stops delegated to them by the Local Authority. Where there is more than one operator using a bus stop relevant public transport information in respect of all services is not always made available.

On occasions where an operator wants to improve the provision of public transport information they can experience resistance from within the Local Authority to allow them to do so.

Visit Wales and Tourist Information Centres in Wales rely heavily on tourism for a large part of their income, especially the rural parts of Wales. Tourists in particular rely on information being available on-line, from tourist information centres, train stations, bus stations, bus stops, hotels and other accommodation. An all-Wales approach would make the accessibility to up to date correct information much easier.

Visit Wales and Tourist Information Centres provide public transport information to tourists. Two reports highlight the importance of their role and made recommendations. These have not been fully implemented and this report reflects some of those findings.

Key issues

Consultation

The Public Transport Users' Committee commissioned research to identify good practice in respect of the provision of public transport information. This research and our own evidence gathering has shown that users are rarely consulted on their wants or needs in respect of public transport information.

Welsh Government and Local Authorities currently undertake a range of consultation activities in respect public transport decisions and provision. We have not seen any evidence or research which summarises consultation activities specifically in respect of information provision.

There is some anecdotal evidence from providers that they also consult users and prospective users on the provision of information, but this is less evident.

Timetabling changes can have a significant impact on those using public transport. Currently there is no requirement for operators to consult on changes they make, although some do.

In our work to date, the Committee has collected evidence from a range of users and user groups who seek to represent their views to decision makers at various levels in respect of all aspects of public transport.

The evidence examined to date appears to indicate that some user groups are more effective in having their views heard and taken into account than others.

No evidence was seen of a consistent approach to seeking users' views on the provision of public transport information and designing and delivering it accordingly.

Disabled people

Disabled people are not a homogeneous group. Clearly public transport users who are disabled have particular requirements in respect of the provision of public transport information, and these needs will vary. The Public Transport Users' Committee received evidence in particular in respect of hearing and visual loss.



A range of communication methods needs to be used to meet disabled people's needs. Audio and visual announcements are particularly beneficial to certain disabled people. Where audio and visual announcement systems are available they are not always activated.

How, where and in what format information is provided does not currently consistently take disabled people's needs into account.

In addition public transport information in respect of accessibility of services for disabled people is not consistently available.

Staff and driver behaviour were identified as a significant issue for disabled people.

Timetable changes

Frequency of timetable changes can cause significant issues for the travelling public and for those trying to provide accurate public transport information.



For those responsible for public transport information, frequent change to bus timetables are a significant drain on resources. Timetable booklets are out of date the moment they have been printed,

information at bus stops needs to be updated at an unsustainable rate and online information becomes quickly inaccurate.

Passengers also feel the effect of frequent timetable changes.

Due to less frequent service in rural areas this impact can be exacerbated. Accurate public transport information is critical. The Regional Transport Consortia highlighted issues in respect of the cost of updating 'at stop' information in rural communities as a particular issue.

Changes to the timetabling of train services are only made twice a year. If the bus industry in Wales emulated this model this could mitigate some of these issues. The Committee recognises that reducing the amount of times operators can alter their timetable would reduce the flexibility inherent in a bus service.

Limiting timetable changes would significantly improve the provision and accuracy of public transport information.

Service Disruption

We received evidence from many groups, local authorities and operators that disruption of services is one of the most difficult things for passengers to cope with. Information provided to passengers during disruption is patchy and difficult to obtain, especially if travellers are not at a transport hub.

Key issues

There is currently no standard mechanism in place to keep drivers, passengers or public transport information providers up to date on service disruption.

Where passengers are on a journey or not at transport hubs during disruption, drivers are key to providing appropriate and timely information.

Traveline Cymru is reliant on operators and Local Authorities telling them and keeping them informed of disruption to services and consequent changes. This means whilst a single point of contact is available to passengers through Traveline Cymru, accurate information remains unavailable.

There is evidence of some good practice. Certain operators use modern technology to the advantage of the passengers. That includes the use of Facebook, tracking buses via satellite, having a dedicated website and phone line and involving Traveline Cymru at an early stage.

The Office for Rail Regulation is currently seeking ways of ensuring that train operators implement standards in respect of passenger information provision during disruption. Similar standards should be pursued in respect of the bus industry.

Bus drivers and operational staff

Bus drivers are a key point of information provision during journeys and at stops.

Drivers' attitudes and role in providing effective and timely information is critical. Consistent customer care training including a demonstrable understanding of equality and diversity, and practical guidance on disability awareness should be included in this training requirement.



Good practice

Halcrow was commissioned by the Public Transport Users' Committee to identify examples of public transport information best practice and where public transport information had been based on a users' perspective.

Information was gathered on public transport information across Wales, the UK and within Europe. This demonstrated that whilst information in a number of places was considered to be very good,

it may not necessarily be considered good by users themselves, or be defined as 'best practice'.

Much of the information gathered in this research exercise was echoed by those that we met. Their report contains recommendations on how best practice can be developed and delivered within Wales. The report can be found on the Public Transport Users' Committee website.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/public/ptuc/reports/ptiresearch/?lang=en>

Welsh Government funding

The Welsh Government currently invests significant levels of public money into the bus industry, for example, through the concessionary fare scheme. It is not clear how the Welsh Government ensures that appropriate levers are in place to deliver outcomes.

There are no levers or incentives for providers to engage with users or apply standards to the information they provide. However, this dependence on Welsh Government funding presents an opportunity to create change and set standards and leadership in respect of the provision of public transport information.



Recommendations

From our work we make the following recommendations:

1. That the Welsh Government produces guidance in respect of the provision of public transport information in Wales. This should include:
 - a. Clarification of roles and responsibilities in respect of public transport information including the role of Traveline Cymru and other partners such as Visit Wales.
 - b. A definition of what is meant by information.
 - c. Setting minimum standards for the provision of all public transport information with regards to format and content. These standards should be based on user views, taking into account those with protected characteristics. Such standards might cover, but are not limited to, information on safety, fares and accessibility.
 - d. Putting in place systems to monitor performance in respect of such provision. This should include consideration of methods of enforcing such standards including financial sanctions.
2. That the Welsh Government undertakes further research into best practice in the provision of public transport information from a users' perspective including meeting the needs of those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
3. That mechanisms are put in place to restrict timetable changes in respect of buses to twice a year in line with train timetabling changes. Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to inform public transport information providers and the public of these changes.
4. That the Welsh Government leads on establishing Wales-wide protocols on the provision of public transport information during service disruption. This guidance should include the delivery of the maximum information to the passenger in a timely and effective manner.

5. That the Welsh Government conducts a review of funding mechanisms to bodies responsible for the provision of public transport information and develop ways of ensuring standards, accuracy and completeness are part of the funding criteria.

6. Our evidence demonstrated that the most effective delivery of public transport information occurs under a regulated and centralised environment. Whilst we recognise that this is unlikely to meet the current needs and policy direction in Wales, we recommend that the Welsh Government consider the implementation of a Joint Transport Authority as outlined in the Labour Government's manifesto.



Conclusions

Our research shows that the current provision of information across the Welsh public transport network – especially for bus users – is inconsistent, fragmented, largely historical / legacy based and not driven by input from users. It appears quite dependent upon individual Local Authority budget allocation and/or the ability and general comprehension of responsible officers.

Our evidence leads us to conclude that at present there is no clear message coming from the Welsh Government as to what is expected of Local Authorities in fulfilling their obligations in respect of public transport information. This failure has led to a chaotic and inconsistent provision across Wales which is inefficient, more expensive than it could be, confusing to users and often leads to a lack of credibility and faith in the product.

The various recommendations and key messages arising from historic research and studies relating to public

transport information since 2003 seem prone to repetition. Public transport information is important, yet often very complex but this should not deter the minister from taking measures that are shown by this latest research report to be essential if the provision of public transport information is to be improved.

It should be noted that many of these measures have been successfully introduced in other countries where they have had a significant impact on the quality of public transport information provision. The public transport users committee look forward to tracking the implementation of our recommendations.

Having an all Wales approach will be beneficial in financial terms, with public transport information provision being considered as a key part of an overall, integrated transport approach. This is an area that Public Transport Users Committee will be addressing in 2012.

