

SWITCH Response to NAFW Enterprise & Business committee Inquiry into Public Transport Integration – November 2012

Inquiry into
Integrated
Public Transport

Background

The South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) comprises the four Local Councils in South West Wales working together to plan, develop and deliver improved transport and access to:

- support the local and regional economy
- to enhance social inclusion and
- to protect and improve the environment

SWWITCH was set up in 1998 and has evolved over the years since to meet changing demands. It is organised as formal Joint Committee and operates by a legal agreement.

Introduction

SWWITCH welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's Inquiry into public transport integration "Progress in Partnership" the SWWITCH Regional Transport Plan (2010 – 2015), which was developed with extensive stakeholder engagement, stresses the importance of integration within and between public transport modes as a key determinant to the attractiveness and thus use of public transport and other sustainable and healthy modes. The Regional Transport Plan can be viewed on the SWWITCH website at www.swwitch.net

In the current financially challenging circumstances, the need for improved integration, to maximise the effectiveness and utilisation of private and public sector investment in public transport, is critical. There is even more need for planners, funders and operators of public transport to ensure that their efforts are focused on providing the best quality, best penetration and best frequency services to encourage new users and to provide access for those who rely on public transport for work, education and training, health needs and for social and leisure purposes.

SWWITCH has not answered all the questions posed, but has provided detailed responses to most questions. Should you require any clarification on any points raised please contact SWWITCH for more details. SWWITCH has also accepted (subject to Member endorsement) the invitation to appear before the Committee (alongside other transport consortia) in January 2013.

SWWITCH Response

Question 1 - How can the integration of rail, bus and community transport services in Wales be supported and improved to meet the needs of communities and businesses in both rural and urban Wales?

- Improved integration within Welsh Government teams within the Integrated Transport Unit to ensure the improved alignment of policies, budgets and resources
- The provision of longer term (that is at least three years), consistent revenue support for bus and community transport services, whether this is through Consortia, local Councils or to the Community Transport Association. This supports longer term planning and capital investment by the private and public sector to enhance the public transport "offer". It will also enable more investment in marketing and awareness to encourage new users. Budget cuts which focus on less well patronised services impact on key links between and within settlements and adversely impact on rural communities.

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- Improved linkages with planning and economic regeneration processes – accessibility mapping as critical part of planning process, especially for health services and facilities
- An examination of the costs/practicalities of alternatives delivery mechanisms for rail and bus in Wales, including network franchising and not for profit organisations
- Ensure that the new bus funding regime’s quality scoring mechanism includes recognition of elements which support integration
- Improved linkages with and co-operation from Network Rails and Train Operating Companies in respect of integrated transport and regeneration
- Development of Wales “integrated ticket” which allows users to transfer between modes and providers with ease and without incurring financial penalties
- Use of Traveline Cymru to improve access to fares and ticketing information to facilitate journey planning

Question 2 - How successful are Regional Transport Consortia in supporting the provision of effective, integrated public transport?

- The Consortia work closely with their constituent Local Councils (LCs) to prioritise capital investment to support and develop public transport, through bus corridor enhancements; interchange development and other specific projects such as Swansea Metro, Bwcabus, and Western Valleys Community Transport project. However, Local Councils/Consortia have limited revenue funding streams to support mainstream or community transport services and even less to carry out the investigations/background research/ practical activities likely to support improved integration. Local Councils /Consortia also have limited control over commercial public transport services
- Regional Transport Plans prepared by all Consortia, set out Public Transport Strategies/policies and information strategies. However, with limited revenue budgets and very few staff the actual delivery remains with individual LCs, each of whom has different priorities and different drivers relative to the topography and demography of their urban and rural areas. LCs have developed Public Transport teams with the knowledge and skills and in many cases integrated teams already work to secure maximum efficiency from public and school transport networks
- RTP Committees/Boards do have Public Transport representatives and users involved and so could be a useful vehicle for sharing plans and trying to co-ordinate/integrate better. However, the commercial sensitivity of some information and the public nature of these meetings means that most information is carefully worded or shared only when plans are complete

Question 3 - How effectively does Welsh Government policy support public transport integration?

- Not very effectively, the Wales Transport Strategy and National Transport Plan make references to the importance of integration but there are few practical examples of this emerging to date. Cuts to funding act against integration where vulnerable, under utilised but connecting services may be lost. To be fair the WG like LCs and Consortia have limited control over the private operators who remain

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free to change/withdraw/introduce services with limited notice. The legislative framework based around competition and the “benefits” therein militate against integration and has a real price tag for the public sector. There is legislation in place which allows for Quality partnerships and Quality Contracts to be implemented. However, the timescales and costs involved in setting up and running these (and especially being able to guarantee ongoing revenue support streams) is off-putting

- There are some good examples of WG support for integration and one such in SWITCH is Bwcabus. This service has secured integrated ticketing and inter-availability of tickets with guaranteed connections for passengers between Demand Responsive services and the core corridor service between Carmarthen and Cardigan
- Additionally policy support does not translate into investment decisions at WG level, for example the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan, Despite the Plan giving priority to economic (jobs and growth) over social infrastructure, the reality is that c £100m of the “additional £175m to support additional investment priorities in the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan” is being spent on social infrastructure. This importance of this is clear, but what investment will the Plan make into transport improvements, ports and airports that will help to drive economic recovery

Question 4 - In particular, the Welsh Government is considering the establishment of Joint Transport Authorities in Wales, and the feasibility of operating the Wales and Borders rail franchise on a not-for-dividend basis. Additionally, the Minister for Local Government and Communities has indicated that he is considering the use of quality partnerships and contracts in delivery of bus services. How far would these proposals improve integrated public transport provision in Wales?

- Setting up JTAs of themselves will not guarantee any better integration. They are simply an additional tier of public sector (when some might argue there are too many tiers already!). A JTA without full highways powers will be of limited use and without links to travel generating activities (health/education etc) will create another tier of “dis” integration rather than help. Setting up JTAs will cost a lot of money and take away local democratic accountability and in the main buses serve local markets and communities
- Wales and Borders franchise as a not for profit organisation – seems worth looking into and with 5 years to go until the new franchise is due to be let - now is a good time to consider this in terms of why/what/who and how before any decisions are made
- Quality contracts and partnerships – these are not the simple panaceas to all the issues created by privatisation and de-regulation. Quality partnerships can be very valuable provided everyone has something to gain and is able to commit to a medium terms level of service/funding etc. They however, will not create instant integration as they tend to focus on a clear/distinct set of services/corridor. Quality Partnerships are route/service specific usually linked to the provision of new infrastructure where access is restricted on the basis of vehicle/ service quality. These can improve standards but not necessarily improve integration with other transport modes. Quality contracts are very expensive to deliver and politically difficult. Effectively they are franchise agreements where the whole network is

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awarded to one operator or subdivided into smaller sections where there is exclusive operation by an operator in that area. They can create integration because the local authority specifies the timetable and can include connections between modes. Fares can also be specified. The lead in time for set up is lengthy and costs are high. The Competition Committee in 2011 estimated set up costs at £1m with similar annual running costs. LAs would need to commit to funding these at a given level for up to 10 years. This is not feasible in the current or proposed funding regimes

- All of the proposals under consideration may do something to help integration, but ultimately the problem is in areas where competition exists we are trying to make commercial organisations which are competing with each other to work together – to provide exactly the same product for the same price and share information on each others product. There is a need to convince public transport operators that the competition is the car or technology and not other operators. In those areas where there is limited competition and most services are subsidised integration is easier practically to achieve, but comes at a price. In current declining budgets it may be that integration will be sacrificed to maintain base levels of public transport to communities

Question 5 - What innovative approaches to delivery of public transport in Wales might be considered to improve integration?

- Wales Travel card, an All Wales Smart multi modal card
- Franchising
- Further development of schemes like Plus Bus
- All Wales Real Time information system linking buses, trains and Community /Demand Responsive Transport
- Further integration of walking and cycling facilities within and between key communities and to/form public transport interchanges
- Further development and integration with Park and share sites along key corridors to encourage modal shift
- Innovative DRT services, (exploiting technology for scheduling effectively) for rural areas to support core strategic bus corridors.
- Better and Smarter targeted marketing of services
- Whole journey integration (single ticket, coordinated timetable etc)
- Improved access to temporary storage of baggage/goods (such as shopping) to remove barriers to public transport use
- Further development of Traveline system to include
- ❖ A more detailed process for verifying timetable and route information before posting on the Traveline website. This will increase user confidence in the information provided
- ❖ A system that would allow the production/printing of standardised timetable information (eg. bus stop displays, timetable leaflet etc) directly from Traveline website for LA users as well as the general public

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Question 6 - How effectively do key stakeholders, particularly transport operators and public bodies, cooperate to ensure effective service delivery?

- Within context of current legislative and funding constraints groups try very hard to integrate and deliver effective services by working with a range of local and national operators. However different LAs have different priorities which can change along with the Council Administrations. It is also difficult to commit to long term strategies when funding from year to year is uncertain. There is partnership working with some of the larger bus operators but there is often reticence in sharing patronage information as they are in a competitive market
- Much more needs to be done to ensure public transport services operate with minimum delays and to encourage new, smaller entrants into markets
- Further progress could be made to enhance service delivery and integration of non emergency patient transport with other public transport/demand responsive services
- There is a recognised need to improve co-operation and integration with train operators and Network Rail and this process should be assisted through the devolution of some responsibility to a Wales Network rail division

Question 7 - How can the creation of a Network Rail Wales devolved route support effective, integrated public transport in Wales?

- If it will truly allow devolved decision making it could help to make sure that rail/bus integration is smoother, for example early decisions on station access enhancements and ticketing inter-availability. Better sharing of plans and proposals at an early stage to allow real engagement. If timetables for rail services are available well in advance then connections with other modes can be maintained or planned
- There is recent evidence that with the devolution of some responsibilities to Wales Network Rail is becoming more effective at the local level by engaging with LCs on improvement projects. This will help to militate against previous experiences where Network Rail appeared to be an insular, national UK conglomerate organisation

Question 9 - What examples of good practice in public transport integration can be identified within Wales, more widely within the UK and internationally?

- Traveline Cymru
- All Wales Rail/Bus maps
- Traws Cymru services
- Bwcabus services
- Concessionary fares
- Major interchange improvements – Swansea City Bus Station (where coaches, Buses/taxis/P&R/ft are all easily accessible)