

BWCABUS

DELIVERING A PUBLIC TRANSPORT REVOLUTION IN RURAL WALES



Background

Distances between people and between settlements means that difficulty with transport is often a dominant consideration for those who live in rural areas. Low population densities, dispersed settlement patterns, and scattered patterns of service outlets, increase the need for long travel distances. Therefore, transport is a significant factor in terms of social exclusion and access, particularly in areas such as rural Wales.

The potential value of public transport in rural areas is well documented. It enables mobility and access to resources that are often not available locally to people without cars and provides an element of choice that can reduce car dependency. However, it is often the case in rural areas that public transport is not available within acceptable distances from rural households or offers an insufficient service in terms of frequency and timing.

It has been suggested that Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) could be used to tackle a number of policy objectives such as improving accessibility and addressing social exclusion. Mageean and Nelson (2003) define demand responsive transport as “services that provide transport on demand from passengers using fleets of vehicles scheduled to pick up and drop off people in accordance with their needs”. DRT is therefore a ‘hybrid’ form of transport, falling somewhere between that of a conventional timetabled bus service and a taxi. Its services benefit from greater flexibility than conventional public transport in meeting travel demand where demand is low and spread over a large area such is the case in much of rural Wales.

What is Bwcabus?

The Bwcabus concept was developed by the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan. The Bwcabus innovation came from a simple question posed to the Wales Transport

Research Centre by the Welsh Government – ‘how do we provide a high quality bus service for rural areas where the services are in decline?’

The Bwcabus vision is to create an integrated rural public transport network which better serves the rural community, improves accessibility, and will prove attractive to car users, thereby achieving modal shift. This has been delivered by creating a demand responsive local public transport service which connects people into the strategic public transport network allowing travel to key regional centres. It uses the latest technologies to maximise vehicle efficiency and provide flexible local public transport.

Bwcabus has been developed by a partnership between a range of stakeholders that include Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion County Council, the University of Glamorgan’s Wales Transport Research Centre, Welsh Government, Traveline Cymru, and bus operators Richards Bros and Morris Travel.

The first Bwcabus scheme became operational on 24th August 2009, following the award of funding by the Welsh Assembly Government, the European Convergence Fund and Carmarthenshire County Council.

In March 2011 it was announced that Bwcabus would be extended to open up new areas of operation and to extend the service until 2015. The enlarged Bwcabus operating area is due to launch on the 5th December 2011 and will additionally improve connectivity with strategic public transport routes such as the new Traws Cymru service and thereby enhance the North – South, East – West travel opportunities.

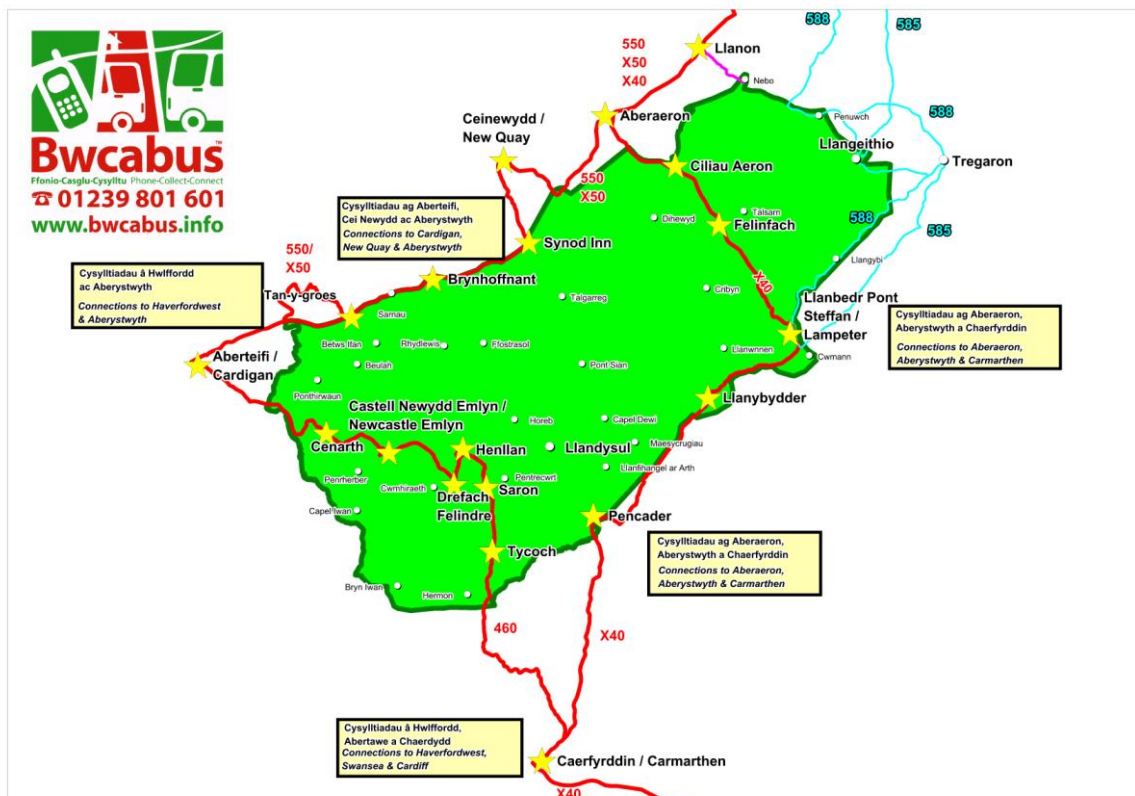
How does Bwcabus work?

Bwcabus is a demand responsive flexible local public transport service, helping people living in parts of rural Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion get to work and access education, training and health services. The service is tailored to the needs of the passengers by operating in response to pre-booked journey requests. The Bwcabus service operates Mondays to Saturdays, 0700 to 1900 hours.

In accordance with VOSA regulations, passengers have to pre-book their journeys. This is done by phoning the bilingual call centre operated by Traveline Cymru. The call centre is open from 7am until 8pm, 7 days a week, and is also able to provide a “one stop shop” for travel information in Wales including bus, coach, rail, air, and ferry. Morning journeys must be booked by 8pm the day before travel and afternoon journeys by 11.30am on the day of the journey. Journeys can be booked 28 days in advanced and passenger can block book regular journeys. All journeys are subject to availability and are offered on a first come first served basis.

Bwcabus is a public bus service and will collect passengers from their nearest bus stop, however passengers with mobility difficulties can be picked up and set down at or near to their home address providing it is safe and practical to do so. Passengers living in rural and isolated areas where there are no designated bus stops can also be picked up and set down at or near to their home address.

Figure 1 – Extended Operational Area (Effective from 5th December 2011)



The Bwcabus demand responsive element is integrated with conventional bus services, feeding passengers into key strategic bus routes travelling to Aberaeron, Aberystwyth, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Lampeter, Llandysul, and Newcastle Emlyn. The introduction of Bwcabus enabled the 460 service to be upgraded to provide an hourly frequency, Monday to Saturday (7am – 7pm). A new timetable was carefully designed to connect with train services, a major hospital at Carmarthen and other bus services in Carmarthen and Cardigan. Diversionary spur journeys were also removed, improving journey times by up to 20 minutes. Connection between the 460 and Bwcabus is made via designated hubs. If the connecting service is running late, Bwcabus waits up to 15 minutes subject to following bookings allowing this.

The Bwcabus extension area to commence operation on the 5th December has been designed to provide an integrated service with the Welsh Government's new Traws Cymru long distance bus and coach network. The Welsh Government has announced plans to significantly upgrade two key Traws Cambria bus services early in 2012, and that all Traws Cambria services will be rebranded as Traws Cymru in a series of phases starting in March 2012.

The first to be upgraded will be the existing X40 service linking Aberystwyth – Lampeter – Carmarthen. This service has been selected in recognition of the key strategic importance the service plays in terms of providing links between major regionally significant centres and the rail network. It is envisaged that investment could be further protected through the use of new Statutory Quality Bus Partnership powers.

Subject to detailed discussions it is envisaged that the following Service TC1 Aberystwyth – Aberaeron – Lampeter – Carmarthen improvements will be delivered:-

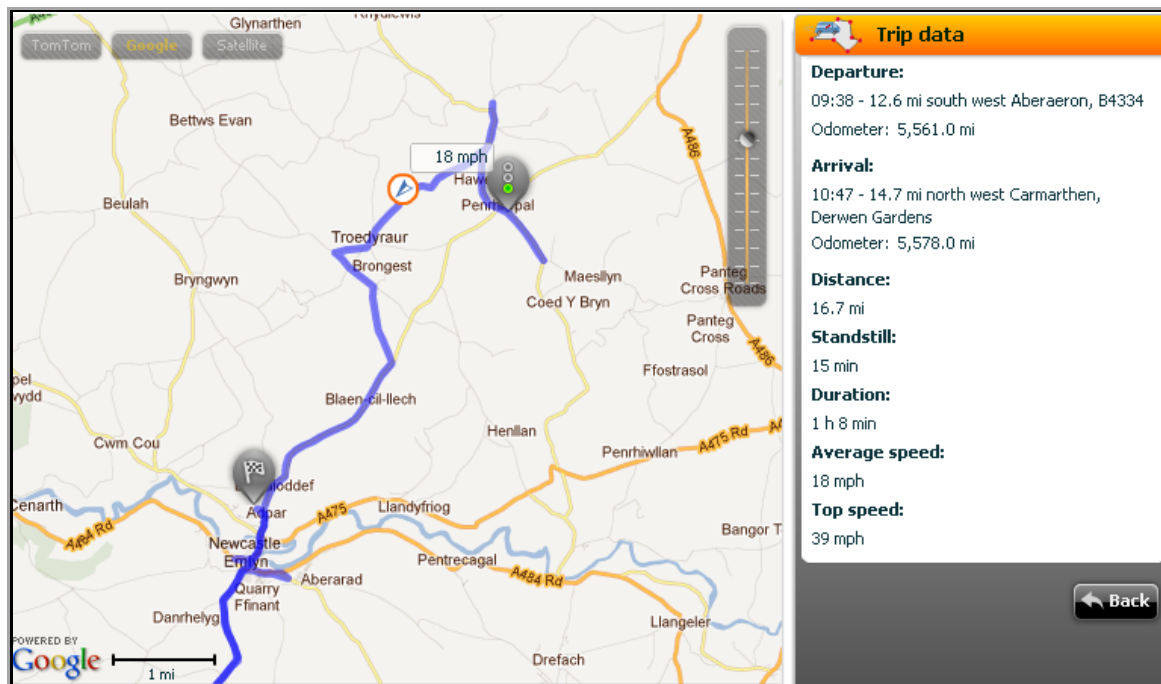
- Standard hourly service be reintroduced with regular clock face times at all key points along the route;
- Better connections with other services including rail services at Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, other longer distance bus services;
- Integration with the expanded Bwcabus service;
- Faster travel times by re-routing the service between Lampeter and Aberaeron onto the A482 and then serving the smaller settlements of Cribyn and Llanwnnen by the expanded Bwcabus;
- Improved passenger interchange facilities at Carmarthen and Aberystwyth rail stations; and
- Introduction of a dedicated fleet of six new low floor coach style vehicles featuring more comfortable coach style seating, greater luggage space, real time information and WiFi.

The Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan has developed bespoke Bwcabus booking and scheduling system software. The software utilises GPS, a scheduling module, GIS mapping and a real time information system, to enable travellers to book a feeder service via the call centre. The buses are fitted with Tom Tom PRO 9100 Satellite Navigation units. The booking and scheduling system has been integrated with the Tom Tom system to enable the schedules to be automatically transmitted to the drivers and other messages to be communicated via the in vehicle units. The Tom Tom system also provides full vehicle tracking which is utilised within the scheduling module to refine journey times based on 'real' data.

For more information about how Bwcabus operates please go to www.bwcabus.info or view a short demonstration video at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=no581rb3fg4

Figure 2 – Vehicle Tracking provided by Tom Tom Live



Marketing and Branding

A strong Bwcabus brand has been developed using a distinctive logo and the strap line 'Call. Collect. Connect'. It is intended that the brand will be consistent with new Welsh Government transport branding which will shortly appear on the new Traws Cymru service and may in future appear on Wales and Borders trains.

A wide range of marketing and promotional activities have been undertaken, aimed at raising the profile of Bwcabus locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. These activities have included:

- Newspaper advertisements
- Tourism brochure advertisements
- Production of a DVD
- Radio advertisements
- Promotional Materials including: bus vinyls, quarterly newsletter, MOGO plates, posters and leaflets
- Events & Awards including: launch event, dissemination event, community/local events

The Bwcabus project is featured in the Wales National Transport Plan and both the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWITCH) and Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC) regional transport plans.

Figure 3 – Image of Bwcabus Website



Outcomes

Patronage on Bwcabus has been above expectations. The Bwcabus service has completed in excess of 27,000 passenger journeys and boasts over 950 registered users. In the first year patronage levels were 37% over the annual target.

The popularity of the service with travellers in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion has increased demand on the 460 service by over 40% since launching. This compares with a general decline in rural public transport use.

A survey of regular Bwcabus users (95 respondents) held in February 2011 showed that:

- 24% are travelling to new destinations not previously available by public transport
- 51% stated that since the introduction of Bwcabus they now use public transport more frequently
- Bwcabus has improved access to health facilities, shopping centres and allows passengers to visit friends and family more frequently.
- Only 27% of regular users owned a car.
- 81% of car owners stated that they now used their car less since the introduction of Bwcabus.
- 84% were satisfied with the ease of booking a journey.

Results have shown that people are using Bwcabus to access a wide range of services such as healthcare and employment and have started travelling to additional destinations not on a

conventional bus routes. Regular users Mr & Mrs Pearce from Pentrecwrt said, "At first we were sceptical about the running of such an innovative service, but are delighted at its efficiency and success. From a personal view point, we no longer have to walk a mile or more to the bus route in all kinds of inclement weather, in order to meet the Carmarthen to Cardigan service to socialise with friends or go shopping. Not only do we get to our connection, the Bwcabus will get us back home. A superb door to door service."

Passenger feedback has been very positive, survey results showing that users are highly satisfied with this new service:

"Bwcabus gives us a new lease of life."

"Best thing has happened. We no longer need to walk far to catch the bus."

"There is nothing better than Bwcabus - Excellent."

"A fantastic service that takes into account the needs of people living in isolated rural areas"

"The service has allowed me to travel to Helsinki (Finland) entirely on public transport, Bwcabus picked me up in Pentrecwrt and met me from the 460 in Saron three weeks later"



The project has already won three prestigious awards in recognition of its success. In October Bwcabus scooped top honours for excellence in 'Transport Policy and Planning' at the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport National UK awards. In July the project was awarded 'Most Innovative Transport Project' at the National Transport Times UK awards. The project held off strong competition from national and regional initiatives in both awards. This follows on from the award won earlier in the year from the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport Cymru. Bwcabus won the category of Best Partnership recognising the work of Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion County Council, the University of Glamorgan's Wales Transport Research Centre, Welsh Assembly Government, Traveline Cymru, Richards Bros and Morris Travel.

