

## REPORT FOR INFORMATION

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	All Members
<b>REPORT NO:</b>	COET/41/24
<b>DATE:</b>	5 December 2024
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Councillor David A Bithell, Lead Member for Housing and Climate Change
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Andrew Mytton, Ext 3760
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Local Bus Services
<b>WARD:</b>	All

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update Members on progress of the Council's financial investment made to support local bus services, and future bus franchising in Wales.

### 2. INFORMATION

#### Wrexham Council Supported Local Bus Services

- 2.1 Executive Board (COET/16/23) approved funding of £200,000 in 2023/24 and a further £200,000 in 2024/25 to support additional local bus services.
- 2.2 In 2023/24 this established additional evening and Sunday bus services across parts of the Arriva Bus Wales Network, to communities that were unserved at the time.
- 2.3 Patronage on the additional services is satisfactory and continues to increase as the services become established. The table below details total patronage to date on the additional journeys introduced on each route (inclusive of months stated).

(Route Number) & Description	Dec23-Mar24	Apr24-Oct24
(3) Wrexham - Penycae. Monday-Saturday Evenings	4248	9750
(3) Wrexham - Penycae. Sunday & Bank Holidays	2320	4632
(7) Wrexham – Caia Park via Hightown. Mon-Sat Evenings	1316	3201
(8) Wrexham – Caia Park via Hightown. Mon-Sat Evenings	805	1910
(7) Wrexham – Caia Park via Hightown. Sunday & B/Holidays	833	1846
(8) Wrexham – Caia Park via Hightown. Sunday & B/Holidays	637	1479
(11) Wrexham - Minera. Monday-Saturday Evenings	3701	8309
(35) Wrexham – Borrás. Sunday & Bank Holidays	707	1599
(44) Wrexham – Barkers Lane. Sunday & Bank Holidays	308	634

- 2.4 Phase 2 of the funding in the current financial year 2024/25 has focussed on considering connectivity to other rural and less accessible areas in the County Borough. Network enhancements have necessitated a balance being struck for affordability. Further outlying settlements require additional driver and vehicle resources that in some cases makes route enhancement not financially viable.
- 2.5 An additional evening round trip to bus service 146 was introduced from Monday 4 November 2024. The route operates between Wrexham & Whitchurch, departing Wrexham-Whitchurch at 1900hrs and Whitchurch-Wrexham at 2000hrs. The additional journey provides extra travel options for leisure or social purposes by providing additional connectivity to rural villages in the Maelor area including Bangor on Dee, Overton on Dee, Penley, Bronington and Hanmer.
- 2.6 In line with the Executive Board report (COET/16/23) to review and consolidate the local network, so as to improve connectivity in less connected communities a review has been undertaken of the current provision of Flexibus services. Patronage data for the year April 2023 to March 2024 was reviewed. The review of the services applied the industry accepted methodology of Subsidy Cost per passenger, to evaluate value for money. Additionally as a further test, the patronage per journey was calculated, based on capacity utilisation of the vehicle under contract.
- 2.7 The outcome of the review informed that some service patronage is satisfactory, and some less so. As a result Flexibus provision will be consolidated, with focus placed upon two stronger performing services.
- 2.8 A procurement exercise has been undertaken to increase the timetable offer of the identified services. Service 45F in the Maelor area, providing public transport access to villages including Horsemans Green, Tallarn Green, Worthenbury, Eyton and Isycoed will see the introduction of an additional Thursday service in early 2025 subject to approval from The Office of the Traffic Commissioner.
- 2.9 Service 17 to Moss and Lodge via Plas Coch Retail Park and Colliery Road estate, will benefit from improved access to public transport. Currently served 3x per week, this will increase to a Monday-Saturday hourly daytime service in early 2025 subject to approval from The Office of the Traffic Commissioner.

#### Bus Funding and Ongoing Industry Pressures

- 2.10 The number of passenger journeys made by local bus service in Wales, in 2022-23 was around 61 million, compared to 52.7 million passenger journeys in 2021-22. Patronage is still significantly below the level in 2019-20 of 91.7 million prior to the Covid pandemic. [Public Service Vehicle Data GOV.WALES](#)
- 2.11 Bus operators are still reliant on routes being supported, this resulting from reduced fare-box income due to changes in commuting and travel pattern behaviour, and ongoing increases in operational costs such as wages, fuel and maintenance that continue to outstrip revenues.
- 2.12 Welsh Government are yet to confirm to Local Authorities the (Bus Service Support Grant (BSSG) & Bus Network Grant (BNG)) financial settlement of funding to be provided for 2025/2026 year. Funding was reduced to £25m in 2013 and has remained “cash flat” since then. Had it kept up with inflation, the budget would be worth around £34m.

- 2.13 Recognising the ongoing fragility of local bus networks, the Lead Member for Housing and Climate Change wrote to Ken Skates MS (Cabinet Secretary for Transport & North Wales) in September, urging him to increase funding for bus services. The correspondence was acknowledged by the Cabinet Secretary, who made an ongoing commitment to support local bus services and a pledge to progress with further financial support as soon as the funding position improves.

#### Future Bus Service Reform and Franchising in Wales

- 2.14 Welsh Government have committed to reforming bus services throughout Wales over the next 5 years. The thinking first came about in March 2022, in the publication of a White Paper “One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket” which set out proposals to transform bus services.
- 2.15 Welsh Government and Transport for Wales in March 2024 jointly set out “[Our Roadmap to Bus Reform](#)” that detailed an outline of their proposed approach to bus franchising. Most recently it has been identified that Wales will consist of 4 regional franchised areas that align to Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) boundaries, with the 6 regional authorities locally making up the North Wales franchise zone.
- 2.16 The Legislative process is expected to begin in March 2025 when The Bus Bill is introduced to the Senedd. At the end of the process it is expected to receive Royal Assent in early 2026. During this process in 2025, Transport for Wales will engage with Elected Members in Local Authorities to offer workshop type sessions where Questions and Answer discussions can be explored in depth.
- 2.17 Discussion with Transport for Wales suggest that in the current challenging economic climate, the future bus network, initially, may not look too dissimilar from what is in place today. Some services may however be streamlined to offer better connections and quicker “through” journeys, that could link up existing bus routes for onward travel.
- 2.18 Welsh Government and Transport for Wales plan to work with Local Authorities to discuss and test approaches to packaging the proposed network into franchise contracts. The procurement process will be led by Transport for Wales in collaboration with Welsh Government and Corporate Joint Committees. Routes and timetables will ultimately be specified and designed by Transport for Wales.
- 2.19 The current timeline published by Welsh Government indicated that the roll out of franchised bus routes in North Wales is likely to commence around early 2028.