

## Inquiry into Integrated Public Transport

### Evidence from Stephen Drewell

#### **Inquiry into Integrated Transport**

Although I have lived in London for many years, I am a native of South Wales and still visit the area on a regular basis. I have also enjoyed a number of holidays using the Wales Flexipass. My experiences of public transport in Wales have, on the whole, been very positive.

I have no doubt that some people have such a deep attraction to the car, that there is, in reality, virtually nothing that would persuade them to use public transport. I am equally sure that there are people who, given the right information and the right service at the right price, would use (or make more use of) public transport.

**1 Integrated ticketing.** One of the best things about public transport in London, is the integrated ticketing system which allows the user to buses run by different operators, the Underground, National Rail, the Docklands Light Railway and Tramlink with a single ticket. I doubt that there's a London resident who hasn't heard of the Travelcard or Oyster. If you asked a Londoner if the city had integrated transport, my guess is that the vast majority would say 'yes'. That's interesting because I'm not actually aware of a single bus service that's timed to connect with another bus or a train in London. Granted many train and bus services are high frequency, but many are not (the Chessington, Hampton Court and Shepperton line train services, for example are all half hourly). The Travelcard and Oyster brand names are so strong that, in my view, they make people feel that there is an integrated system. As a result people are encouraged to use public transport because they know in advance:

- what ticket to buy;
- where to buy it;
- how much it will cost.

This is, of course, very different to the situation in Wales. There are, of course, tickets (e.g. the Red Rover, Powys Rover and Network Rider) which offer travel on services provided by a range of bus operators: there are also tickets (e.g. The Valley Lines Day Explorer) that allow travel on a selection of bus and train services. However, ask say an Abergavenny resident if they have heard of the Powys Rover, Valley Line Day Explorer or the Network Rider (all valid on one or more bus services in the town) and my guess is that only an infinitesimal number will be familiar with these products. Indeed I have twice, in recent years, come across bus drivers who were not familiar with the Network Rider ticket despite their being issued and accepted on the routes on which they were driving.

From the perspective of the current public transport user, there are two fundamental problems with such tickets:

- Many are very poorly marketed or not marketed at all;

- They each apply to a limited range of services and have their own qualifying rules.

The Network Rider, for example, is valid on most bus services shown in the excellent Monmouthshire Bus guide but not a single mention of it is made in the Guide. Some operators that accept it (e.g. Newport Bus), don't even mention it on their website.

In order to give the integrated feel of the London system, Wales (or ideally GB) needs a single ticket covering the whole of the country. There is obviously the issue of getting operators of commercial bus services to accept it, but as long as it is priced above any tickets that they offer, one would hope that they would at least 'give it a go'. A supplement might have to be charged on some very long routes - ideally a fixed amount – payable once.

With ITSO-based ticket machines, apportioning revenue should no longer be a problem. A logo could be shown on every timetable where the ticket was accepted and posters put on all buses and in bus stations. Daily, weekly and monthly versions would be sold. The aim would be to make the brand name as well known as that of Oyster in London.

## **2 Information**

Good public transport information is, of course, vital. Unfortunately, it is sometimes not readily available or is out of date.

**2.1 Traveline Cymru.** I make regular use of this and other Traveline sites and find that they invariably give me good information. The only drawbacks are that:

- I don't have mobile broadband so can't access it once 'on the road'. If I change my plans (or they are changed for me by, say, a late running train or bus), I have to rely on other sources.
- Without a map of all bus routes in an area, planning a day out is more difficult.

While Traveline is very useful, I therefore still like to have the traditional printed timetable booklets (even if I have to pay a nominal amount for them) with county or area maps.

**2.2 Bus companies own publicity.** While the larger companies are fairly good at producing good, easy-to-read timetables, smaller operators are not. And, even with the larger companies, with bus stations and enquiry offices being much reduced in number, getting hold of this information is often not easy.

Of particular irritation, is the practice of operators who only operate a service for a part of the day or on certain days of the week to only show their own services. This must, on occasion, lead to prospective passengers not using the bus because they think they can make the outward journey but not the return or vice versa. There is also invariably a lack of information on the acceptance of return or rover tickets when say the evening service is operated by another operator.

**2.3 Information at bus stops and bus stations.** Londoners have probably been spoilt in this respect, having real-time information at a significant proportion of stops. People find it reassuring to see that the bus they expect to catch is running even if it's running late. Indeed, if this is the case, it

is then possible to consider alternatives. The next best thing, of course, is the printed timetable. Keeping these up-to-date obviously costs money but I think it is the least that those prepared to use public transport can expect. I have regularly seen timetable and route number information at bus stops in the Monmouthshire area that was at least 2 years out of date.

**2.4 Rail travel information.** I find that the National Rail Journey Planner (and similar sites) gives accurate reliable information on times and fares. All of the stations that I've used in Wales have displayed a current and easy to find timetable. The only mis-information that I've come across has been from station announcements (e.g. one at Abergavenny saying that the train would not be stopping at Pontypool and New Inn when it did and one at Newport saying that a train was cancelled when it wasn't) and an on-train announcement giving incorrect information about diverted services to London.

### **3 Service integration**

**3.1 Bus/bus.** While I believe integrated ticketing gives a feel of integration, I recognise that many journeys do require connecting services and that where reasonable connections are not available, public transport may not be used. However, there will always be conflicting needs – especially on infrequent rural services that have to cater for a variety of different needs such as travel to work, the shops and schools. While clockface timetables are no doubt something to which to aspire, local needs may sometimes need to take precedence.

**3.2 Bus/train.** With regard to train - bus interchange, there is no doubt that this is poor in a number of places including Swansea, Newport and Abergavenny.

In the case of the latter, even if a turning circle could be built at the station, it is difficult to see what services would use it. The 43/X43 services to Brecon are obvious candidates since they pass close by but in order to connect with the T4 at Brecon they have an alternating 70/50 minute frequency from Abergavenny so would not make good train connections. The two local services (the 43 and 45) would both need an extra bus if they served the station and I'm sure there is no way that this could be justified. The service to Holywell Crescent (a few minutes walk from the station does not currently make good rail connections but is excellently timed to connect with the X3 to Cardiff and X4 to Hereford.

In Newport, poor road planning and the moving of the station entrance have created an almost impossible situation as far as bus connections are concerned. In 1980, an experimental evening bus service linking the train station with the bus station was introduced. It was not successful and replaced by a day-time service (marketed as 'Centrebus'). My recollection is that average loadings were probably less than one. Not surprisingly it was withdrawn. With the train station entrance slightly further away from the bus station and town centre, maybe a few more might now use such a service but my guess is that loadings would still be extremely low.

While I do believe that buses and trains should be planned to connect, I also recognise that sometimes the downside to this (e.g. increased running time, need for extra vehicles or

inconvenience to people not making rail connections) does not justify diverting buses to run via a station.

**3.3 Train/train.** The only train to train connections that regularly come to my attention are those at Newport out of the London and Bristol services and into the Manchester train. Both work fine in the opposite direction. In the case of the London service, my recollection is that Arriva Train Wales planned the service when FGW services were still leaving Paddington on the hour and on the half hour. There are only a few minutes between the arrival and departure of these services so they are not advertised as connections. However, invariably there is a number of people hoping to change between these services. With single lines in West Wales and high frequency services around around Crewe and Manchester, it's probably difficult to do anything about this but if the situation could be improved, I'm sure that a number of travellers would appreciate it.

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