



# Sustainable Transport

*Report of the Scrutiny Panel 02/2014*

*A study into: How effective is the National Park Authority, through partnership, facilitation, practical action and the planning function contributing to the encouragement and enhancement of the use of sustainable transport by visitors?*



## **Report No. 02/2014**

### **Scrutiny Committee**

#### **REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL**

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#### **SUBJECT:**

**How effective is the National Park Authority, through partnership, facilitation, practical action and the planning function contributing to the encouragement and enhancement of the use of sustainable transport by visitors?**

#### **Purpose of Report:**

To ask Members to:

- Consider the evidence presented and make recommendations to the National Park Authority;
- Agree an action plan be drawn up.
- This work follows on from a very comprehensive report entitled Brecon Beacons and Powys Visitor Transport Plan. Any extract from this document appears as italics in the following text.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

The Panel met to discuss and agree the questions to be posed. David Thomas met and questioned the Tourist Information Centres, Ed Evans reviewed the online comparisons of National Park web sites. The study benefited from time and comment from a number of businesses in the Brecon Beacons, and a wider view was obtained from other National Parks. All staff approached were helpful but the Lead Member particularly singled out the Scrutiny Officer for her help in compiling this report.

#### **LIST OF APPENDICES:**

- **Brecon Beacons & Powys Visitor Transport Plan June 2012**
- **List of Publications Produced by Visitor Transport Partnership**

- **Notes of Panel Meeting & Focus Group 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015**
- **Notes of Focus Group with BBNPA Staff 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015**
- **Notes of Panel Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This is the seventh scrutiny study to be carried out by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. The process of scrutiny is now embedded in the working of the Authority and can be viewed on the Authority's scrutiny page on its website: <http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/the-authority/who-we-are/scrutiny/>.

Once again the topic chosen for scrutiny is one of the objectives for the Authority as part of its Improvement Plan namely:

**How effective is the National Park Authority, through partnership, facilitation, practical action and the planning function contributing to the encouragement and enhancement of the use of sustainable transport by visitors?**

In answering this question it is necessary to look at the resources available in this area of the National Park Authority's work. Essentially, there are two staff involved, firstly the Sustainable Tourism Manager who oversees the Sustainable Transport programme and has expertise in obtaining grant funding and from partners, with 5% of his time calculated for this role and secondly the Visitor Transport Officer currently funded until March 2016. In 2014/15 sustainable transport was funded through grants and contributions but also through an earmarked reserve and core funding of £10,000, although more funding was generated which enabled £7000 to be put back into reserves. For 2015/16 onwards there is no contribution from core funding; the project must be covered by external contributions and by drawing on the earmarked reserve for sustainable transport. This reserve currently stands at £41,208.

The strategy is to gain as much grant aid as possible to enable either spending more per year or extend the project longer.

### **UK National Park Authorities**

As for most scrutiny studies, it is beneficial to look to other National Park Authorities for evidence and the comments gathered thus far are summarised below.

### **Northumberland National Park Authority**

Many attractions run by the other organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage, and other privately-run attractions are not as pro-active in promoting the bus service to visitors as they could be. Reasonably this is due to the timing of their respective marketing print. Whilst the marketing literature for the attractions is generally finalised and produced in October/November of the previous year, the timetables for bus services are often not published until March/April of the year of operation.

Northumberland NPA are looking to develop and publish bespoke itineraries for those travelling from Newcastle or Hexham for example, encouraging the visitations of more than one site per day on Hadrian's Wall by using the bus service provided.

Northumberland NPA would agree that it is essential to engage with and involve tourism providers in order for them to appreciate the benefits of sustainable transport.

### **New Forest National Park Authority**

The New Forest National Park Authority has carried out a number of initiatives for public transport. The funding is up front from the National Park but it is there to demonstrate to the bus company operators that the service is viable. They have set up three major routes across the National Park; a blue route, red route and green route. These are set routes which explore the National Park but also give a chance to communicate messages about the National Park. There is a beach bus that links Southampton with the National Park beaches which is an adaptation of an existing route that operates for four months in the summer. This year they are pioneering a new service from West to East on Weekends and Bank Holidays.

The rail links in the National Park are good both locally and in the wider network there are good ferry links and stations generally have cycle hire.

In answering the overarching question there was evidence gathered to demonstrate effective partnership working and the achievements in this area were obvious when we visited the Brecon Transport hub. Not only did we see improved information at the bus station but we heard from the Sustainable Transport Officer the work to engage those in transport provision including the private providers such as taxi firms on the integration of transport from Brecon.

As stated elsewhere and evident from discussions with other National Park Authorities, where public money is available for facilitating public transport initiatives, then services are provided. This Authority has exemplars in dealings with Hay and Talgarth. It is right that the

Authority should act as a facilitator rather than a provider.

At a separate meeting with Authority staff, the final part of the overall question was posed. There are a variety of ways that as planning authority the NPA can contribute to sustainable transport. One positive comment made by a planning officer was to look at the creation of cycleways when major planning applications are considered. To facilitate this maybe an outline plan of where cycleways would be an asset to a community could be drawn up.

The Planning Officer commented that it would be useful to have a strategic overview of potential cycling routes in order to ensure that viable cycle links could be developed. It is often the case that cycling paths are included in the development brief but do not necessarily link to a hub or other cycle paths. This overview is essential or the result is ad hoc stretches of cycle ways which don't usefully link up.

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## **FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS**

- 1. How effective has the Authority been in developing sustainable transport (bus routes and itineraries for activities accessible by bus)?**
- 2. How effective has the Authority's training on sustainable transport been for tourism businesses and taxi operators and how could it be extended?**
- 3. How effective has the Authority's information provision been in promoting sustainable transport (leaflets, website and signage) and what should be the Authority's priorities in future?**
- 4. How effective has partnership working been to date in supporting visitor transport initiatives and how could this be further developed?**

## **QUESTION I**

### ***How effective has the NPA been in developing sustainable transport?***

This is a difficult aim that governments and public bodies struggle with along with other demands; however on that will affect our very future. The challenges and barriers to the use of sustainable transport, quoting from the Brecon Beacons and Powys Visitor Transport Plan are:

*The mind-set, knowledge and perceptions of the visitor are key – they need to feel confident if they are to use public transport or alternatives to the car. As well as perceptual barriers, such as being worried about using the bus or the fear of things going wrong with public transport journeys, there are also many structural and practical barriers which make it more difficult for visitors to choose to leave their cars behind. These include poor information and infrastructure, lack of Sunday services, lack of bicycle racks or space on trains and a lack of knowledge amongst many tourism operators.*

*However, experience has shown a range of incentives which can be used to change behaviours including promoting public transport as a mainstream option and an enjoyable way to explore and experience the scenic area. Endorsements, special offers, cost comparisons and branding may also help boost visitor confidence.*

### **Bus Initiatives within the Brecon Beacons National Park**

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) was approached by the Talgarth Rural Alliance to support a feasibility study to investigate the reintroduction of a bus service on summer Sundays (April until October) between Brecon, Crickhowell, Llangors, Talgarth and Abergavenny Railway Station. It was requested that the service should be designed to promote the area to visitors, primarily walkers. The initiative has the support of a number of local councils and tourist promotion bodies.

Reductions in general funding from the Welsh Government means that Powys has to find savings of £1.9m in its transport budget during the next financial year - at a time when operating costs are rising because of implementing the Disability Discrimination Act, reducing pollution from bus engines, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG - formerly Fuel Duty Rebate) is being scaled back and the amount which can be reclaimed for each pensioners travelling free is reducing.

Consequently, neither Powys County Council nor the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority is able to consider supporting new Sunday bus services when they are having to withdraw many weekday routes. However, there is the example of the 'Hay Ho!' bus service between Hay-on-Wye and Hereford, whereby local communities and businesses took over responsibility for supporting the Sunday buses when Herefordshire Council withdrew funding in September 2014, which might be used as a model.

Brecon Bus Interchange was also the centre of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority-sponsored 'Beacons Bus' network of connecting summer Sunday bus routes until September 2013. The network was not operated during 2014 because of funding cuts by many of its Partner organisations and uncertainties about the level of funding which could be reclaimed from the Welsh Government for concessionary fares usage and Bus Service Operators Grant (formerly Fuel Duty Rebate).

In 2014, the Authority supported Cardiff Bus to operate the 'Bike Bus' BI service of one round trip from Cardiff to Brecon from late May until late September and also two round trips from Brecon to Talybont, Bwlch, Crickhowell and Abergavenny as service B4. These facilities will be repeated for the summer of 2015 and a new operator, the NAT group (New Adventure Travel Group), has been appointed to run the same routes as last year.

Service 39A from Brecon to Bronllys, Talgarth, Hay-on-Wye and Hereford was a year-round operation until September 2014 when it was withdrawn because of Herefordshire Council funding cuts. It was replaced by a local initiative, 'Hay Ho!', but only between Hay-on-Wye and Hereford.

### **Brecon Bus Interchange**

Another initiative facilitated by the Visitor Transport Officer is the Brecon Bus Interchange which is the hub of a network of connecting services supported by Powys County Council, which includes the Welsh Government-sponsored TrawsCymru service T4 from Cardiff and Merthyr to Llandrindod and Newtown. The Authority produced and managed the installation of information and interpretation signage as part of a project funded by TraCC.





*Signage at the Brecon Bus Interchange*

### **Interviews with Tourist Information Centres (TICs)**

TICs are fully aware of all of the Authority publications, but keeping stock up to date and full can be a problem at some centres. Talgarth, for instance, did not know how to get more Days Out leaflets, which suggests that the distribution of leaflets could be an area for some work, although this is not a major issue. They all thought the quality of leaflets very good indeed.

Brecon TIC reported a lot of people arriving by bus wanting to go to Llangorse and having to use taxis at £15 each way. All lamented the loss of the Beacons Bus and this seems to have hurt the National Park Visitor Centre in Libanus most. They also said that people arrive by public transport with unrealistic expectations. They expect to be able to hop on a second bus to go to their intended destination either to find there is no bus or that the timing is such that they can't do anything in the time available and have to kick their heels around the Centre for four hours. They also said that people were unaware that they could be dropped off anywhere on the route and this would save them going to a terminus like Brecon and then looking for an onward journey. People do not understand how big the Park is and how difficult to get around. Bus services in the National Park are generally operated on a 'hail and ride' basis, i.e. passengers may hail a bus at any point along the route and if the driver considers it safe to stop he will do so. Passengers may also request to be set down at various points – again this at the driver's discretion.

None of the people spoken to in the TICs had had any direct training on transport and perhaps the possibility of providing such training could be investigated by the Authority in association with Traveline Cymru.

A meeting was arranged with National Park staff and the question in the scrutiny was asked of them. There was clear support for the efforts being made. There was recognition that the reviewed Management Plan was an opportunity to progress the sustainable transport initiatives. There was recognition of the role that walking and cycling played in visitor enjoyment. The Geopark very much includes public transport information in its literature. The latest leaflet around Ammanford demonstrates that not only can the Geopark create an interest in an area closer to home but also there are clear messages of sustainable transport use in the leaflet.

Planning Officers stated that possibly they could do more when schemes came forward to look at alternatives to car transport and stated that provision of cycle ways for short distances was one way of helping in this.

It would be helpful if Authority Planning Officers were fully informed of developments and cycling strategies allowing for cycle paths, for example, to be written into a developers' transport brief and the allocation of funds for the development of specific routes etc.

It has been clear from the study and from evidence in the Visitor Transport Plan that the Authority has been good at obtaining funding and initiating visitor transport schemes. Discussions with other National Parks would suggest that their success is very much in line with the amount of money, staff resources and priority given to developing capacity in the community. Unfortunately at a time when money is reduced in the public sector then sustainable transport initiatives are correspondingly reduced. From evidence gathered by looking at UK National Park Authority web sites the two National Parks chosen to contact were in the upper quarter of implementing schemes.

## **QUESTION 2**

***How effective has the NPA's training on sustainable transport been for tourism businesses and taxi operators and how could it be extended?***

*The Sustainable Visitor Transport Initiative established in September 2008 and managed by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in association with some of its partner local authorities, is an imaginative project which seeks to grow the usage of patronage on the*

National Park network by 15%. It was initially designed to run for three years and has continued to run to the present day thanks to funding by various partners and the NPA. It aims to increase sustainable transport usage by encouraging the use of weekday services through bus walks, visitor attraction endorsement, website and other promotional material and training. It has also pioneered linkages with taxi operators with a view to piloting 'Walkers Taxis'. It also continues to promote the Beacons Bus network of services<sup>1</sup>.

Several locally based bike hire/cycling holiday companies offer electric bikes for hire. A locally based initiative has been working for several years to develop innovative electric vehicles in the Brecon Beacons. The Eco Travel Network ([www.ecotravelnetwork.co.uk](http://www.ecotravelnetwork.co.uk)), based in Talybont on Usk received support to develop and trial the B-Bug electric buggies which cover a distance of about 30 miles before needing recharging – through the Talybont community hydro scheme. The scheme was awarded an NPA Sustainable Development Fund grant to extend the trial and the electric buggies have been replaced by a fleet of seven Renault Twizys available for hire from tourism businesses in the Park. Zero Carbon World, a charity involving Beacons based individuals is funding 100 electric charging points to be installed across the Brecon Beacons and Powys. There is also the Green Valleys Initiative, a Community Interest Company, which is working with local communities on green energy schemes.

### **Taxi Training Programme**

**October 2009** – A drop in session was held at a local café, inviting local taxi drivers to give their views on taxi driver training. They were all positive provided it wasn't too lengthy as any time spent away from work would result in loss of earnings. This resulted in the preparation of a short training session (2 hours) for spring 2010.

**February 2010** – training session for Brecon taxi drivers was held giving them an overall guide to the National Park with some interesting facts about Brecon

**October 2010** – A training session for Abergavenny drivers was held giving them an overall guide to the National Park and a talk on the town from a member of the local history society.

**February 2011** – A session for Brecon drivers taking them (virtually) along the A40 to Abergavenny, pointing out things of interest along the route

**October 2011** – A session for Abergavenny drivers taking them along the A40 to Brecon

**February 2012** – A joint session for both Brecon and Abergavenny drivers following the route from Tretower to Bronllys, Glasbury and Hay

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<sup>1</sup> The Beacons Bus network of services has been discontinued but the Bike Bus Summer service continues to run on Summer Sundays and Bank Holidays from the end of May to the end of September.

**February 2013** – A session for drivers from Brecon, Abergavenny and Llandoverly following the route from Brecon to Llandoverly

**February 2014** – A session for all drivers focusing on the walking market including information on festivals, Walkers are Welcome and marketing tips

**March 2015** – A session with a military theme including information on the Roman presence in the area, World Wars I & 2, Air crash sites in the Beacons and Rourkes Drift, including a guest speaker from the Regimental Museum.



*Brecon Taxi Drivers involved in the Training Programme*

In addition to the taxi driver training programme, the Authority runs several transport training days for businesses each year, where the Authority raises awareness of various bus routes by taking them on familiarisation trips actually on board the buses so that they are able to recommend routes with confidence. They are also provided with advice on how to encourage their guests to explore without their cars and how to find travel information.

Looking at tourism attractions in the National Park, little is being done to promote or encourage the use of public transport. Indeed it could be reasoned why should they, as their main purpose is to attract numbers to attend. *Some 34 attractions have very limited information on their website only (in some cases there is no leaflet for the attraction or it was not located). Six attractions did not give any information on transport at all. In some cases, such as Brecon Cathedral, there may be an assumption that it is in the town and can therefore be reached by public transport. Some businesses choose not to put much information on public transport on their websites as they feel it is a negative message when there aren't many options. Most will willingly check out information when requested but it is a reactive stance for visitors who do not have a car or are specifically requesting alternatives.*

As will be seen from the above there have been some successes particularly with taxi firms. Although not interviewed, the Panel were aware of the ambassador scheme whereby interested businesses and individuals are supported by the NPA and given information on good practices in the National Park. Staff at the Visitor Centres, wardens and those on the visitor/resident interface would benefit from a raised awareness of the sustainable transport options.



*Private Sector Training On Board a Double Decker Bus*

Promotion of further training for businesses would require an incentive for the business. Elsewhere in the UK there are proposals for emission charging but these are confined to cities where pollution levels could affect respiratory health. Until such time as there is more urgency than further training will eat into existing resources. Opportunities for staff to experience public transport in the Brecon Beacons may go some way into leading the way for others to adopt.

At the meeting with Authority staff, it was suggested that perhaps those members of staff on the visitor/resident interface such as wardens and those in the planning and community departments would benefit from a raised awareness of the sustainable transport options.

*'All members of staff should be considered as 'ambassadors' for the national Park and there is no better way that actual experience of a transport service to understanding its limitations and possibilities.'*

### QUESTION 3

***How effective has the NPA’s information provision been in promoting sustainable transport and what should be the Authority’s priorities be in future?***

A Panel Member carried out a comparison analysis on the availability of information for sustainable transport in each of the UK National Park Authorities via their websites. The findings are summarised as follows:

The analysis is based on a “quick” view of each website to mimic what many website visitors would do when searching for information – so ease and speed of access were key drivers.

Good examples of best/useful practice were identified on Pembrokeshire Coast NPA and Cairngorms NPA websites which could support improvements at Brecon Beacons NPA.

The use of YouTube videos is considered a helpful improvement as these allow good/quick access to information. The Lake District website has particularly good examples.

Most websites provide links to public transport options via other websites. In some cases these are not functioning well.

It has not been possible to access printed materials.

National Park Authority	Visibility of ST options on website	Ease of website navigation to ST options	Usefulness of website links	Helpfulness Score (0-10)
Brecon Beacons	Brecon Beacons Our NP website : ST options visible on homepage but need to scroll to bottom of page. Could be more visible. Further options easily accessible from homepage.	Easy to navigate from homepage to ST options via 2-3clicks	Helpful with route planners, timetables, YouTube videos, etc.	7
	BBNPA website : No ST option link on homepage but link	Not an obvious route to ST options		3

	to Brecon Beacons Our NP website will allow access as above – but ST option not obvious and role of BB Our NP website not obvious either.		Access to above	
<b>New Forest</b>	NFNPA website : ST options not visible on homepage but travel option link on homepage via “Visiting” tab (but ST option not obvious).	Not an obvious route to ST options but 2-3 clicks via Visiting tab	Links to useful bus timetabling data	5
<b>Loch Lomond &amp; The Trossachs</b>	LLNPA website : <b>ST options available on homepage via “Visiting” tab and “Travel” link to other websites and apps. Further options accessible from homepage.</b>	Easy to navigate from homepage to travel options via 2-3clicks	Helpful links to timetables and apps	8
<b>Peak District</b>	PDNPA website : No obvious ST option link on homepage but public transport info available via Visiting page  Visit Peak District website not clear on travel options	Easy to navigate from homepage to public transport options via 2-3clicks	Links to useful bus timetabling data	7
<b>Lake District</b>	LDNPA website : <b>“Visiting” tab on homepage provides access to non-car transport options. Not specifically labelled as ST but good examples of good practices including YouTube video and travel apps.</b>	Easy to navigate from homepage to ST options via 2-3clicks	Links to many different timetabling and connection options plus YouTube video of “bus	9



			experience	
<b>Exmoor</b>	ENPA website : “Visiting” tab on homepage plus public transport tab provides access to non-car transport options. Not specifically labelled as ST	Easy to navigate from homepage to non-car travel options via 2-3clicks	Links to useful bus timetabling data plus YouTube video of “bus experience”	7
<b>Northumb- erland</b>	NNPA website : “Plan your visit” tab on homepage plus “Travel – Getting Around” tab provides access to non-car transport options. Not specifically labelled as ST  <b>There is a link to other NPs info on “getting around” which is quite helpful and could be used by each of those NPs as a step forward.</b>	Easy to navigate from homepage to non-car travel options via 2-3clicks	Links to other websites either not working or not helpful/easy	3  6
<b>Pembroke- shire Coast</b>	PCNPA website : “Enjoying” tab on homepage plus “Getting Around” tab provides access to non-car transport options. Not specifically labelled as ST and not obvious on the homepage	Easy to navigate from homepage to non-car travel options via 2-3 clicks	Links to other websites not helpful/easy	3
<b>Cairngorms</b>	CNPA website : “Our NP” tab on homepage plus “Getting Around” tab provides access to non-car transport options. Not specifically labelled as ST	Easy to navigate from homepage to non-car travel options via 2-3 clicks	Links to different timetabling and connection options	7



## **In reference to Chapter 9 of the Brecon Beacons and Powys Visitor Transport Plan.**

Information provision and marketing is key in all this – promoting positive messages but most importantly making it easy to find out about, book and buy sustainable transport options. Attractive propositions in the form of itineraries and good value tickets with discounts and benefits will be required.

The new destination web site has very clear links to visitor information and was one of the action points from the Visitor Management Plan.

A list of all the printed publications the Authority produces or is involved with has been included in the appendices.

### **QUESTION 4**

#### **How effective has partnership working been to date in supporting visitor transport initiatives and how could this be further developed?**

All those who work in the visitor economy are key players; providing visitors with information and hosting them. The aims of the NPA will not be successful unless it can bring on board a large number of tourism providers and convince them of the benefits of sustainable visitor transport.

The Visitor Transport Partnership will agree the allocation of responsibility for seeking funds, progression of actions and monitoring of outcomes.

The Visitor Transport Partnership includes relevant officers and members from the following organisations:

- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
- Powys County Council (Public Transport and Tourism)
- Welsh Government Transport Department
- Welsh Government Department for Environment & Sustainability
- Visit Wales
- Wales Train Franchisee
- Cambrian Railways CRP
- Heart of Wales Line CRP

- Destination level private sector bodies
- Sustrans
- British Waterways successor body – Canal and River Trust
- National Trust
- Natural Resources Wales
- Local Authority transport officers

Walkers are Welcome and along the border Walking with Offa is an example of partnership working. The Brecon Beacons National Park was a key player in this. By coincidence the lead of this scrutiny study was on the committee of the main grant aided project and therefore at first hand saw the success of all organisations along the border of England and Wales working for a common purpose to promote a joined up visitor experience. The project engaged a wide cross section of business, local authorities, charities etc but it only came together because of the funding that was available. Clear evidence of its success can be seen by logging onto the Offas Dyke National Trail website.

This is a clear example where bodies do come together with good outcomes but a few years from the ceasing of funding some of the enthusiasm and initiatives dwindle. It is hoped that continuing transport initiatives will be developed and the way forward is for the NPA to support staff in applying for funds to extend these schemes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has helped to exemplify the role of the National Park Authority in a range of initiatives that have demonstrated good practice. We particularly commend the interpretation at the transport hub in Brecon associated with encouraging use of local buses. Where money has been made available, the staff have used it to good effect, acting as a facilitator within the communities of the National Park to encourage the awareness of alternative transport to the car. We noted the enterprising spirit of Drovers who have helped achieve the Hay Ho! bus as addition transport link with Abergavenny.

We were also heartened by the actions of individual small businesses in the Park who were promoting sustainable transport. We hope that under the constraints of public funding that further initiatives and seed corn money will be available to further the issue of sustainable transport which will have benefits not only to visitors and those with a feel good factor but to the very quality of life in the National Park. Dare we dream of

the day when congested lay-bys and blocked roads on busy summer days will be a thing of the past.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. The Authority is asked to look at the possibility of a cycling strategy and to investigate the feasibility of a grant fund towards promoting cycling in the National Park for residents rather than off road cycling**
- 2. When managers are carrying out Performance Management Reviews to consider the opportunity for staff to experience public transport throughout the National Park.**
- 3. To ask the Visitor Transport Officer to liaise with the TICs in relation to promotion of public transport initiatives and improvements for leaflet distribution**

**Ian Rowat**  
**Lead, Visitor Transport Scrutiny Study**

**30/4/15**