

# Meeting note

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	National Access Forum for Wales Meeting No 79
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	5 November 2024
<b>Time of meeting:</b>	10:30-13:00
<b>Members and named representatives:</b>	<p>Ruth Rourke (IPROW) Deputy Chair, Carys Drew, NRW Secretary, Rosie Plummer NRW, Beverley Penney, OSS, Jont Bulbeck, NRW, Bill Purvis, NRW, Charles de Winton, CLA, David Evans, Elan Valley, Steve Rayner, WATO, Ian Mabblerley LAFs, Rebecca Brough, Ramblers Cymru, Sarah Smith, WG, Gwenda Owen, Cycling UK, Fiona Clay-Poole, WLGA, Simon Pickering, WG, Scott Ashworth, Defence Estates, Catrin Jones, One Voice Wales, Steve Williams, Sport Wales, Phil Stone, Canoe Wales, Adrian Walls, CSS Wales, Dave Waterman, LARA, Helen Donnan, BHS, Bill Somerfield, WG, Anthony Richards, Wales National Parks, Mathew Teasdale, YHA, Simon Patton, Mountain Training Cymru, Eben Muse, BMC, Elan Evans, FUW, Pam Bell, WoW,</p> <p><b>Observers:</b> Mark Weston, BHS, Peter Rutherford, Wales National Parks, James Nevitt, Defence Estates, Kate Ashbrook, OSS, Caroline Ferguson, Carmarthenshire CC, Chris Heaps, NRW, Dave Maccallum, NRW, Michael Smith, NRW, Eifion Jones, Ceredigion CC, Dave Liddy, NRW, Gwyn Lloyd Evans, Gwynedd CC, Alison Roberts, NRW, Gruff Owen, NRW, Dafydd Lloyd, NRW, Rachel Parry, NRW, <i>other observers attended but names are not recorded (on GDPR advice)</i></p> <p><b>Speakers:</b> Joanna Maurice, BBNPA, Dana Williams, Eryri NPA, Catrin Glyn Eryri NPA, Ash Pearce, NRW, Gordon Keyes, Network Rail, Thomas Matthews, Network Rail, Eve Nicholson, NRW, Nick Carsen, Network Rail, Translator Carys Walters</p>
<b>Present:</b>  (*= deputising for named representative)	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Geraint Davies, NRW Chair, Disabled Ramblers, Campaign for National Parks

## 1. Welcome and apologies

Ruth Rourke Chaired the meeting as Geraint Davies was unable to attend. She welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.

The meeting had been given a theme based on previous suggestions of 'transport for recreation'. The Chair noted that as we become increasingly aware of the impact of climate and nature emergencies it is important that we all consider our carbon footprint and what action we can take to reduce it, individually and as a sector. With transport being a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, this is a good place for us to start.

## 2. Encouraging our visitors to travel by sustainable modes of transport in the National Parks of Wales

Joanna Maurice, Destination Management Officer, Bannau Brycheiniog NPA (BBNPA), shared work to support uptake of sustainable transport.

Jo summarised the situation for BBNPA which is accessible by rail from gateway towns. Bus services are arranged by the 9 different local authorities with the usual rural issues of lack of frequency and under use, she noted that there is a car culture with most visitors coming by car but not many of these are e-cars.

BBNPA commissioned a net zero sustainable transport strategy and action plan 2022. One of the proposals was to pilot an improved bus service to Pen y fan (the highest peak in South Wales) which still regularly sees illegal parking issues due to its popularity, despite improvements seen with National Trust carpark.

As part of the pilot project over the summer in 2024, BBNPA paid to increase the number of buses running and subsidised tickets to travel to Pen y fan from Brecon or Merthyr for £1 on bank holidays and weekends. This was widely publicised through 'Hop on a bus to brecon' advertised on buses in Swansea, Merthyr and Cardiff and accompanying social media campaign.

Initial results showed that there were 1001 subsidised bus journeys on bank holidays and weekends made by 832 people, but currently waiting on comparative statistics from previous years and can share this to understand the extent of impact.

Sharing experiences from Eryri NPA, Catrin Glyn project manager for Eryri NPA had been working on parking and transport matters for the past 5 years, as part of the plans for the Wyddfa, which draws thousands of tourists and locals each year, which presents challenges.

Eryri NPA launched a plan in 2018 to bring anyone involved in management of yr Wyddfa in any way and with wide consultation to see how to address these challenges. Transport and parking were key priorities to address, even before the covid pandemic.

In 2020 Eryri NPA commissioned a review to look at all aspects in Wyddfa and Ogwen. The review came to the conclusion that the inner area is a car dependent destination with

people having an expectation of driving to it and this was undermining bus services. It also recommended that minor tweaks to parking, tariffs and bus service wouldn't generate sufficient change and that there was a need to change social norms and expectations.

With support from Transport for Wales they trialled some of the recommendations; installing sensors in some car parks to share live information about how busy they were, a number of further studies to expand on the work also with Transport for Wales trialling the T10 Bus going through the Ogwen Valley which helped, and pre-booking system at Pen y Pass.

Dana Williams expanded on the work here, noting that in 2019 there were just under 250,000 walkers going up yr Wyddfa from Pen y Pass. Following the lifting of covid restrictions, there was a sudden excess of visitors arriving by car and parking problems preventing safe use of roads and access for emergency services, it created pressure for staff on the ground managing the area and local communities felt pressure from litter and the fear of spread of covid at that time.

To address this unsustainable situation, there was need to take immediate action. The NPA worked in partnership with the police and Gwynedd Council to get the message across that people needed to use public transport and to use park and rides to use sites. To make this possible, there was a need to change the travel and parking in the area. A pre-booking system on Eventbrite was implemented for Pen y Pass and to park at sites to use the Sherpa bus service. There was a need to make the service more frequent to enable this and buses from Nant Peris were running every 15mins, which changed how people considered public transport as an option. Also used electronic signs on the A55 to encourage use of public transport and park and ride as people come into the area. In 2021 the pre-book system was formalised using JustPark, which enabled bilingual service and could continue with support from Transport for Wales having frequent bus services. The Sherpa bus service also had a rebrand that encouraged use.

This has an impact in figures, recent figures from Gwynedd Council had seen the busiest period with 75% increase in use in buses. Also seeing reduction in parking at Pen y Pass alongside increases in other car parks outside the area.

Looking at benefits and challenges of pre-booking, Dana noted that it was a success but a challenge to get a fully bilingual service in order to adhere to the NPA language policy. The system is welcomed by staff on the ground and attitude to staff had improved. Illegal parking has significantly reduced since making the changes and an increase in use of the Sherpa bus. The automatic system frees up staff time and feedback from users is positive. Due to ownership issues, NPA leases the site so cannot install a barrier so there are high costs in order to have security guards. Not able to offer shorter booking slots to enable local use which would be desirable. Seeing some displacement which is being monitored. She noted that there is a lack of competition, with only one provider and one of the biggest challenges was to find a fully bilingual service.

Partnership working and multiple factors and actions has been crucial to the success, and this is something that they will continue to work on.

### Discussion points:

- The Chair thanked all speakers and noted the Forum's ongoing interest in this issue. She noted the challenges of trying to change public attitudes.
- Anthony Richards highlighted from his written contribution the work Pembrokeshire Coast NPA do on promotion and awareness with visitors, noting this is the biggest challenge and to giving confidence to people to switch from using their cars
- Challenge of getting confidence of the public, dependability and reliability is critical, how can this be grown? One method used for the linear National Trail in Pembrokeshire is to promote the message of 'bus out walk back'
- In Eryri, sustainable travel is also built into advice to event organisers to think about sustainable transport to get to the area as well as thinking about where there is public transport provision in designing new routes.

## 3. Wales's New National Park Proposal - Public Consultation 2024

The Chair welcomed back Ash Pearce, Team Leader, Designated Landscapes Programmes. Ash reminded members about the project to assess the case for a new National Park in Wales. The assessment is based on the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape in NE Wales and North Powys. NRW is the designating authority and has responsibility to make this assessment. No decision has been made yet, NRW is providing advice to WG to make a decision based on a designation order, if it gets that far.

The broad timeline is to complete within the current Senedd term and there is a statutory procedure to follow.

The stages of the procedure were set out and members advised that the programme is currently on schedule and at the public consultation stage. The information and details reports from the stages is available online, [Wales's New National Park Proposal - Natural Resources Wales Citizen Space - Citizen Space](#)

Ash reminded members of the designation criteria for a National Park (NP), which includes opportunities for outdoor recreation which is the criteria that differentiates the NP designation from a national landscape designation.

There is ongoing evidence gathering to meet requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and for a comprehensive process enabling everyone to have their say.

Ash shared maps that showed how the candidate area had evolved and the demonstrated the online map that is available to view and showed detailed information of the access and recreation datasets that had been considered as part of the assessments.

Sharing the key themes that had come up from public engagement to date, Ash noted the concern related to tourism and transport issues and with people fearful that designation would cause transport issues such as those seen in Eryri. Access and recreation are important themes and there are lots of local people and visitors who would like to see access managed better. Landowners have concerns about trespass and dogs and

livestock worrying. There is recognition for the quality of the area and enjoyment and appreciation of the tranquillity of the area.

The next steps of the process include ongoing public consultation, and members were encouraged to contribute to this. A report on the consultation process will then be published, and further evidence gathering and working with advisory groups and stakeholders will take place to understand the issues.

NRW Board will review the information and make a decision about whether it would be desirable to designate a National Park in that area, on balance, considering all of the issues. If the NRW Board decides that it is, then a statutory consultation would follow in 2025 and a proposal would then be presented to Welsh Government with any feedback. This would be presented to WG within the timeframe to enable WG to designate in 2026. There is a risk of public inquiry that could delay the process or they could chose not to do so.

## **Discussion**

- In response to a question about why the area had been put in the spotlight and where the momentum came from; Ash responded that it had been a WG manifesto commitment for new national park and WG had specified to NRW to assess the case for one based on the Clwydian Range. The evaluation following the guidance and processes have shown that there is an area of landscape that does meet the criteria.
- Alongside this programme, WG have funded an all Wales mapping project to give an impartial look across all landscape in Wales identifying areas of opportunity for potential interventions
- Question about whether, after going through the considerations if the area doesn't reach the threshold of being NP or the Board doesn't consider it desirable to designate, could the Berwyn still be given protection as a national landscape or would a separate project be needed?
- Ash confirmed that a separate project would not be needed because the process has been gone through. NRW's intention is to present the best solution, but if Board decide that it is not desirable to designate a NP they may decide that it is desirable to designate a national landscape, so there is opportunity to use the work and assessment, however NRW is presenting a proposal based on NP status as this stage.
- Ash confirmed that NRW had reviewed the reports and learning from the previous AONB designation process. However the starting point for this project has been on the basis of landscape evaluation and if areas met the criteria then they were potentially included. Engagement period in 2023, consultation now and a further statutory consultation. Some of the issues have resurfaced, some have changed and evolved. NRW are taking a fresh look and basing decisions on the feedback now.

## 4. Reducing Level Crossing risk in Wales whilst mitigating impact on public access

The Chair introduced the speakers and thanked Adrian Walls who had facilitated including the item on the agenda.

Gordon Keyes – Programme Manager (Level Crossings) looks after the whole of Wales and Borders for Network Rail (NR) and he welcomed the opportunity to have dialogue with the Forum.

Gordon gave an introduction to level crossings, sharing some facts and statistics noting that there are over 1000 crossings in the Wales and Borders area. NR have to manage and maintain a safe railway. Of the 1000 there are high number of authorised user crossings where individuals are authorised and NR work closely with those people. Over 600 crossings are on public rights of way which anyone can use. Gordon shared information that showed that there is an increase in inappropriate use and a number of near misses at crossings, that highlighted the increase in risk and need to take action.

He then shared examples of how NR invests in the network to make crossings as safe as reasonably practicable. As a publicly funded organisation this comes with responsibility to ensure that NR spend that money to do the right things in the right places at the right price. He shared examples of the limited tools available including, e.g. increasing sighting through vegetation clearance (which means working with NRW to consider environment and work within ecological rules and law), access improvements to get people across as safely as possible, telephone installation to liaise with signaller, new technology on busier crossing like traffic lights for pedestrians, diversions and open to discussing these including building bridges.

Gordon shared a case study to demonstrate the challenge of getting the balance between cost, safety, access and train performance. Noting the cost of approximately £5-6million for a ramped footbridge, he asked how could stakeholders work together to stretch the funding available to get the best solution?

Tom Matthews, Project Sponsor noted that it is an interesting era in Wales, Network Rail is a railway organisation whilst Transport for Wales (TfW) looks at multimodal travel and has aspirations and plans for improving train and other transport services in Wales. Tom is looking at how NR respond to this. Overall, the vast majority of routes are seeing a dramatic increase in train services. E.g. between Llandudno and Chester seeing increase from 69 to 96 trains per day with longer trains and better passenger experience to enable people to enjoy Wales, without taking cars, connectivity to bus services is also part of the plan.

Most of the routes in Wales are affected as are most of the 1000 level crossings, increasing the number of trains and increasing the level of risk. Tom's work has been to look at and help colleagues work on risk, to understand the impact of that and understand the project scope to identify which crossings need upgrading or changing. A number of changes have gone ahead, e.g. Cardiff-Cheltenham service, South Wales mainline timetable change in December including West Wales. In future, they are looking at North

Wales coast as soon as possible, as long as infrastructure and level crossings allows and improvements on the Marches line (Cardiff -Liverpool).

Tom then focussed on North Wales as a case study and to use the opportunity to raise awareness with Forum members. TfW have a planned 40% increase in train frequency, with an overall 50% increase in capacity, when newer, longer trains are factored in. This provides lots of opportunities for social, economic, environmental benefits. TfW are ready to lead into this (12-18months), but that can only be done if there are no unacceptable level crossing risks. There are 4 level crossings currently holding this back; 2 crossings in Prestatyn and 2 near Abergele and Pensarn (which link to two different caravan park and WCP sit to north of the railway), they provide crucial links and there are also holiday makers, high proportion of users are vulnerable users, and he explained that these crossings can't tolerate increase in frequency in train.

Tom shared the challenges and opportunities and maps showing the location of crossings and adjacent land use. He noted some nearby solutions to get people off the railway, stepped bridges, have been used in places but these are not fully accessible. Accessible structures are large and imposing and can be opposed by local residents as a result. Where there are multiple rights of way, NR are trying to rationalise and are seeking to find a balance e.g. putting large structures where they are more palatable for local residents may mean longer diversions for users.

NR are also looking with local authority at active travel standards(3.5m widths), and opportunities to provide wider benefits. Costs are significant especially if there is a need to have bespoke structures.

There is a high level of stakeholder engagement and creativity needed and this tests roles and relationships within and between organisations. Finding solutions that have sufficient stakeholder buy in to progress through planning and rights of way processes takes effort. NR need organisations to work with them; TfW want overall outcomes and benefits for train service and Active Travel, increasingly NR need local authorities working with them to develop palatable solutions, lots of collaboration is required and it would be great to kick start with Forum organisations that can work with NR.

Tom shared examples of standard structures, describing the pros and cons of the different designs. He noted that sometimes due to the time taken to do the right thing, there is a need to look at temporary structures to get people off the railway and meet timetables, then having the commitment to long term solution. There are examples from highways that can give good creative solutions for design.

Tom concluded by posing a question to members: How do we work together to delivery a safe and enhanced railway for Wales while ensuring access to enjoy this beautiful country?

## **Discussion**

- Chair noted that from local authority and IPROW perspective, that it was great to see how approach as moved on from seeking extinguishment of rights. Know that



IPROW has an MOU with NR and hope this has helped. Can see things are much more joined up regarding accessibility and least restrictive access.

- This view was supported by National Park representative who noted a change in relationships and practical solutions and welcomed the approach taken forward.
- Ramblers Cymru noted that, it is important to look at deferred risk, they are not against closures but need to look carefully at where forcing vulnerable road users onto a different risk e.g, onto roads with cars and traffic. Really important to have public engagement in the process and a consistent way of people having their say and evidence considered in consistent way. A suggestion was made to consider making a case to government for flexibility in Active Travel restrictions for railway crossings.
- Mathew confirmed that NR will not be putting people on A roads, and for the sites in question this wasn't a consideration. If NR build a good structure, this should increase use. They are keen to align NR and local authority Active Travel work. He noted that issues that are currently holding back developments have been known about for some time but haven't been dealt with due to their complexity. It is a question of how issues can be dealt with before they hold back big developments, and Mathew has been asked to look at how this can be done proactively. Hope that senior managers with WG can consider a mechanism for Active Travel to top up to projects. Funding timeframes often don't work and there is a need for flexibility. Public inquiry can dramatically increase timescales and can lead to loss of funding as a result.
- It is a collaborative effort especially at a local level where NR have an issue it will impact others, important to articulate where sites are across Wales to facilitate close working and to be in sync with TfW. Question asked about how comprehensive are plans to make the railway network more resilient to climate change, benefitting nature and people?
- Gordon manages the control funding and has ability to react whilst Tom works in the investment team who are funded for renewals and essential safety work. When it comes to bigger enhancements that make the railway better, often the enhancer will provide the funding, E.g. TfW are spending so much money on trains and drivers and staff working with Dept of Transport on the huge timetable change programme. NR are seeking to be proactive in sourcing money and dealing with challenges before they impact. Gordon has a CP7 budget settlement and a shopping list of things to deliver. If NR can have opportunity to talk more locally about project the funding can be stretched, potentially by de-formalising the process, but he warned that there can be issues that arise that mean that plans need to change, but offered to collaborate on local sites.
- BHS noted that Active Travel can exclude equestrian users, shared an example of a level crossings have been closed for 16years for safety reasons, through lobbying and work with local authority there is a bridge going in. It was suggested that more engagement is needed with local equestrian users and she asked how can better engagement be facilitated?
- Gordon noted that he has sight of all level crossing in Wales, so he hoped that contact with Forum can provide opportunity to engage to share the work planned.
- Discussion about speed, whilst road speeds are being slowed, the aim for trains is to increase speed, although slowing down trains is one way of managing risks.



Services need to be good enough (speed and frequency) to encourage people away from using cars

- Noted by WLGA that this fits in with regional transport plans
- Chair welcomed NR offer of further contact, engagement and partnership working, noting that there had been a lot of interest and it is good to have a better understanding of how complicated the situation is for everyone involved. Look to include on a future agenda.

**Action 79.1: Secretary to share email contacts**

## **5. “Are We There Yet?” Sustainable transport on the Wales Coast Path and National Trails: A collaborative approach**

Eve Nicholson, Wales Coast Path (WCP) Marketing and Comms for NRW, works closely with Rachel Parry National Trails to coordinate the walking offer in Wales.

Sustainable tourism is at the heart of the marketing strategy, and NRW work closely with Visit Wales with their approach and Visitor Strategy. WCP team contribute to that to provide clearly accessible information to enable people to make sustainable choices for getting out walking in Wales. Eve highlighted the types of questions that visitors have, on reliability, information sources, clarification. In marketing and comms, they consider the ‘virtual user journey’ to give people confidence, raise awareness and promote services, she noted that not having information hampers people’s journey on the ground. One key objective is to make sure that clear, up to date information is available that is easy to find.

Eve shared examples of projects that WCP have worked with to raise the profile of using sustainable transport to walk in Wales. Circular walks developed, working with an outdoor writer, Paddy Dillon has created 30 walking itineraries using sustainable transport. These are all on the website but have also developed a partnership with Ordnance Survey and they are shown on the OS website which has a much wider reach. Another project with Cambrian Railway partnership, working together to update information and make information more web friendly. Printed leaflets include distance to give people the confidence and have generated positive feedback.

WCP have worked with Transport for Wales (TfW) for a number of years. TfW had a big campaign on ‘Rail to Trail’ in response to Visit Wales’ successful tourism campaign Llwybrau, Wales by Trails. WCP worked on messaging and branding to encourage people to walk the WCP and Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail. This included on site branding and digital advertising to raise awareness that you get access to walk the Wales Coast Path by train.

A further project involved working in collaboration with TfW and Muslim Hikers, who do big organised walks. WCP team invited Muslim Hikers to walk the WCP. Really good collaboration, with 150 people on the walk, targeting a new audience, people who had never been to Wales. TfW reported an increase in ticket sales as a result of the campaign.

Eve shared the films that had been developed with TfW and an example of large branded photo wall at Newport train station highlighting that you can walk to WCP from that station.

Work with TfW is ongoing with different types of work, and have been able to share resources including editorials in BBC countryfile about WCP and Offa's Dyke Path and Glyndwr's Way, also Rail to Trail walking itineraries. Including short descriptions from train stations to WCP to meet the information objective.

Looking at bus provision, feedback from WCP community was that the information can be unreliable, confusing and hard to find. WCP worked with Traveline Cymru to better understand how things work and the different features with aim to pull information together and improve information on the WCP website.

Eve noted that whilst a good start has been made, there is more to do. There's a need to work better with existing bus campaigns, sharing information e.g. partners highlighting which bus services can be used, having clear information and to promote Traveline Cymru resources e.g. showing all bus stops. People also need reliable on the ground information.

Eve emphasised the need to work collaboratively and shared a quote from the Cambrian Railway Partnership. She concluded by saying that sharing information is important, doesn't have to cost a lot and this is really valuable to the walker.

## 6. Written Contributions

Dave Waterman, LARA raised a concern about written contributions on Access Reform. Noting that the repeal of cut-off date will not be included in the Legislation (Procedure, Publication and Repeals) (Wales) Bill. He said this throws up risk that WG could change it's mind in the future. He asked for clarification on of why repeal isn't going ahead and to have some assurance not to have a possible u-turn in Wales, noting that the issue is a cause of concern in right of way users.

Sarah Smith, stated that WG fully intend to repeal the 2026 cut off but due to change of approach in England it fell without the scope of this Bill. It will be repealed but WG need to find another piece of legislation to do so. Sarah noted that the legislation had not been commenced in Wales but WG want to repeal it completely.

The Chair highlighted the other written contributions that had been shared, and noted that members were encouraged to contribute.

## 7. Closing remarks – Chair

The Chair thanks all contributors to the meeting and all presenters, it had been a very interesting and informative meeting. She encouraged members to put forward suggestions for future agenda items and themes.