

# Free weekend bus travel pilot off to a fast start

The Welsh Government funded pilot applies to all buses on the extensive TrawsCymru network and will continue every weekend until at least May 2018. When compared with data from the previous year, increases of well over 100 per cent have been recorded across the network, with the T4 service between Newtown and Cardiff currently boasting the greatest increase.

The highest increases in total daily bus passenger numbers (including child and concessions) were recorded on the following days and services:

1. TrawsCymru T4: Newtown – Brecon – Merthyr Tydfil – Pontypridd – Cardiff

Saturday 26 August 2017: 1,971 bus passengers used the service compared with 461 on Saturday 27 August 2016 – an increase of 328 per cent.

2. TrawsCymru T5: Aberystwyth – New Quay – Cardigan – Fishguard – Haverfordwest

Sunday 9 July 2017: 555 bus passengers used the service compared with 146 on Sunday 10 July 2016 – an increase of 280 per cent.

3. TrawsCymru T5: Aberystwyth – New Quay – Cardigan – Fishguard – Haverfordwest

Sunday 20 August 2017: 389 bus passengers used the service compared with 126 on Sunday 21 August 2016 – an increase of 209 per cent.

4. TrawsCymru T1: Aberystwyth – Lampeter – Carmarthen

Sunday 13 August 2017: 437 bus passengers used the service compared with 169 on Sunday 14 August 2016 – an increase of 159 per cent.

5. TrawsCymru T4: Newtown – Brecon – Merthyr Tydfil – Pontypridd – Cardiff

Saturday 12 August 2017: 2,130 bus passengers used the service compared with 874 on Saturday 13 August 2016 – an increase of 144 per cent.

Welcoming the news, Economy and Infrastructure Secretary Ken Skates said:

“The TrawsCymru network covers large areas of Wales, some of which would otherwise be inaccessible by public transport and it’s extremely encouraging to see this pilot boosting summer passenger numbers.

“From Bangor to Cardiff, Fishguard to Wrexham, this scheme provides a perfect opportunity for people from across Wales and beyond to

jump on a bus and spend their weekends enjoying the diverse beauty of Wales and I am delighted it has already proved so popular.

“For those who are yet to take full advantage of the pilot, there’s still time to find out where your nearest service could take you. I’ve been keen that this pilot, at the very least, serves to increase the awareness of what bus services are available locally and today’s figures suggest that to be the case. I look forward to seeing how this TrawsCymru increase has impacted other services later this year.”

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## Welsh Government business mission to MIT Innovations in Management Conference

Held as part of Massachusetts Institute of Technology – Industrial Liaison Program (MIT – ILP), as well as benefitting from world class speakers and workshops, the companies will access a range of experts on a one-to-one basis, tailored to their company’s needs.

Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Infrastructure, Ken Skates said:

“We consider a strong and resilient economy fundamental to a successful Wales. Developing a pro business environment in which businesses can start, grow and flourish is a key priority. The success of Wales in a global market place is demonstrated by the number and profile of companies already operating in Wales.

“But Wales is not complacent and recognises the vital importance of promoting world class skills, expertise, innovation and forward thinking to ensure continued economic success.

“Enabling companies to learn from the best is one strand of the varied business support offered by Welsh Government through their links with MIT-ILP. This programme puts business leaders in direct contact with the finest minds and practitioners from MIT and provides unique networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

“I hope the unique input from the experts presenting in the MIT-ILP into the companies will underpin and fast track business growth, innovation and collaboration and help to strengthen and future

proof the Welsh economic landscape.”

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## Welsh Revenue Authority Chief Executive and board members appointed

The Welsh Revenue Authority has been set up to collect and manage devolved taxes from April next year. It will become a legal entity from next month, when the board will hold its first meeting.

Following a pre-appointment interview, Dyfed Alsop has been appointed as the first Chief Executive of the WRA until August 2019.

The following have been appointed to the board of the WRA:

- David Jones;
- Lakshmi Narain;
- Jocelyn Davies;
- Dyfed Edwards; and
- Martin Warren

Earlier this year, the Finance Secretary confirmed that Kathryn Bishop will be the WRA's first Chair.

The WRA will be the first non-ministerial department set up by the Welsh Government and will become operational in April 2018. Over the next four years, the WRA will collect more than £1bn of tax revenues.

Further information on the role of the WRA can be found on its new website: [gov.wales/wra](http://gov.wales/wra)

Confirming the appointments, Professor Drakeford said: “From next April, Wales will be responsible for collecting and managing our taxes when land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax are introduced.

“Significant work has been underway to prepare for the devolution of tax powers and the setting up of the Welsh Revenue Authority.

“I am pleased to confirm the appointment of Dyfed Alsop as the first Chief Executive of the WRA and five new board members, who will have the important task of overseeing its work. Dyfed and all board members bring a wealth of experience to their roles and together will play a key role in ensuring a smooth transition to tax powers.”

Welcoming today's announcement, WRA Chair Kathryn Bishop said:

"With the formation of the WRA, Wales will take a large step forward in the journey of devolution, with responsibility for revenue generation as well as for public expenditure. The taxation revenue we collect from house-buyers and land fill operators will support the public services provided throughout Wales.

"We will deliver Welsh Ministers' tax policy and follow the strategic direction set by them, but will be operationally independent. We will be an organisation which does what we say we will do – and we hope tax payers and citizens will find our services easy to use and efficient."

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## **Tabor Centre in Brynmawr opens thanks to £499,969 Welsh Government funding**

The Tabor Baptist Chapel, which was built in 1835, has been completely refurbished with £499,969 from the Welsh Government's Community Facilities programme and £398,181 capital and £101,787 revenue from the Big Lottery.

On a visit to the official opening of the Tabor Centre, Communities and Children's Secretary, Carl Sargeant said: "This new and improved centre has been made possible by capital funding of £499,969 from the Welsh Government's Community Facilities Programme and £398,181 from the Big Lottery's People and Places Fund.

"The centre will now be well placed to provide access to vital services as well as volunteering and training opportunities. The range of activities on offer will also provide people of all ages with a chance to socialise and build new friendships, helping to combat isolation.

"The Community Facilities Programme has to date provided funding totalling over £16 million to 60 projects across Wales."

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## Extra £30m to support small and medium size construction companies

It is anticipated that the loan fund, which enables SMEs to access affordable finance, will help more local companies build new homes.

The Cabinet Secretary said that innovation and an increased role for SME home builders will help identify alternatives to the existing model for house building.

Carl Sargeant said:

“SME house builders were hit particularly hard by the global economic crisis and continue to be affected. I hope the expansion of the Property Development Fund will have a significant impact in helping SMEs who are building homes, and encouraging more local companies to become developers.

“We have a challenging target of delivering 20,000 affordable homes over this term of government. In working to meet our target, I want as many homes as possible to be delivered by SMEs, creating new capacity in this sector. I want to see people thinking innovatively about how we can do things differently to address the challenges we all face.”

The loan fund, which is run by Finance Wales, supports small and medium sized construction companies, who are unable to access affordable finance from traditional sources, to get projects off the ground to build new homes.

Cenydd Rowlands, Property Fund Manager at Finance Wales:

“The additional £30m is a real boost to the fund and with an expanded team in place we’re excited to support even more small to medium-sized developers. The mixed-use and residential projects we can fund have direct impact on their local communities through direct and indirect employment opportunities as well as providing much needed quality housing.”