

To Owen Roberts Passenger Transport Co-ordinator Pembrokeshire County Council

Re: Consultation on Fflecsi bus services 2023/2024

Additional response from Marloes & St Brides Community Council

Dear Mr Roberts

This message is additional to our responding to the PCC Fflecsi bus online consultation; the feedback from our neighbouring communities would be near identical...

Marloes & St Brides residents have numerous and serious complaints about Fflecsi buses:

- crucially, the Peninsula no longer has reliable public transport.
- such journeys as one can make are difficult for many people to book;
- even if you are "tech savvy", the booking process is a time-wasting guessing game. This is because if your journey request is turned down, the software does not offer you an alternative itinerary based on what trips other people have already registered for – no, you have to start again from scratch, trying a different departure time. It can thus take people up to 45 minutes to book the simplest trip! And of course all this assumes a good internet connection.

In summer 2023 we sent PCC our Fflecsi bus concerns: you replied by email on 03.08.2023. For the benefit of some people we are CCing this message to, that email is added below after the asterisks.

At our council meeting last night (08.01.2024) we discussed your email in the light of the PCC consultation, and fresh Fflecsi bus complaints received from residents. Our points are -

1. You advised an increase in bus journeys since Fflecsi began; but is overall passenger mileage more or less? We think there may be many more short journeys; and, if these are within the towns, this means the Fflecsi fleet isn't available for rural use
2. Is increased usage down to more leisure rides? We think yes, because people can't now trust buses for getting to work, or hospital/GP appointments, or catching trains/long distance buses & coaches. Fflecsi providing more leisure trips isn't a good outcome, when essential journeys are no longer possible
3. Further to (2) – even if you book a Fflecsi to say Haverfordwest railway station and give an Arrive By time, after your booking has been confirmed the computer can then add more stops and pick-ups along the way, so you miss your train. A recent and worrying example of "journey stretch" was two Marloes children whose home run from Milford Haven took two hours: the bus went via Broad Haven and Little Haven. How can people plan anything with a service this shoddy?
4. We know that Fflecsi buses are being used "frivolously" in towns: as substitutes for short taxi trips, or the school run, or even worse by children who normally walk to school. A massive waste of money. The Fflecsi booking system should be prioritising the provision of "rural lifeline" essential journeys.
5. As well as letting down residents, during the very important Skomer season Fflecsi is no substitute at all for the late afternoon bus which used to call at Martins Haven after the last return boat, meaning island visitors had reliable transport back to where they were staying. As proof, the number of taxis passing through Marloes must have gone up tenfold.
6. The most obvious flaw in the Fflecsi booking system is that it is First Come First Served, and will accept any request regardless – thus, by booking well in advance, one person can tie up a bus for a long haul on an obscure route, thus denying the use of that bus to the majority. And, if the bus ends up "in the middle of nowhere", it won't be back in useful service for a good while afterwards.

*Whatever your analysis of the new scheme data, the truth is that Fflecsi does not adequately serve this and other rural communities because it wasn't properly thought through.*

*Our preference would be to return to a rigidly timetabled daily bus which guarantees to deliver people into town or to the station; including a Saturday service, which is important for young people's social lives and general wellbeing. At the very least, the Fflecsi booking method must be changed so that the majority traffic demand is satisfied in a reliable way. This must mean a core service with only limited flexibility, so a "one-off" booking as described in (6) above would not be accommodated. With limited flexibility, Peninsula residents could be confident that whilst their morning Haverfordwest or Milford Haven bus might change its itinerary somewhat from one day to the next, they could be sure of being in either town by 9 AM for work or hospital appointments or onward transport connections; and they could be confident of a return working at day's end to get them home.*

*Marloes & St Brides Community Council*