

Let's Shape the Future

About CPT Cymru

Cyddfederasiwn Cludwyr Teithwyr Cymru/The Confederation of Passenger Transport Wales (CPTCymru) is the professional trade association of the bus and coach industry in Wales and is part of CPT UK. Its members in Wales include operators forming part of large multinational transport operators, municipally owned operators, medium sized independent operators and small family businesses. CPT Cymru members provide over 80% of all bus journeys and some 70% of all public transport journeys made across Wales. Our members are often significant local employers, especially in the rural parts of Wales, and make major contributions to their local economies. The bus and coach industry as a whole employs some 4000 people across Wales.

Introduction

CPT Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the Welsh Government/Visit Wales on its approach to a recovery plan for the tourism sector in Wales. Our members as coach operators are key to ensuring visitors, wherever they come from, are able to take advantage of our fantastic tourism offer as a nation.

Key Challenges

In summary, we would suggest the following are the key challenges facing coach operators in Wales as we look to exit the pandemic towards a better future:

- **Uncertainty** – the regulatory environment caused by Covid-19, while absolutely necessary, changes frequently and makes it incredibly difficult for operators to plan activities. This is particularly challenging for tour operators who contractually require 8 weeks notice to confirm operation or cancellation of each and every departure, this was something that was sadly lacking in July 2020 and cost the sector dear.
- **Consistency** – the rules around Covid-19 have developed across a number of sectors in different ways. For instance, visitors may socially distance in bubbles on the coach to an attraction, then be required to enter a one-way system at an attraction before taking a meal in the attraction restaurant under strict seating arrangements. This inconsistency makes it hard to manage the visitor experience and organisations such as Visit Wales, CADW and Welsh Government should work together to harmonise approaches where possible.
- **Cashflow and investment** – the pandemic has taken a huge financial toll on coach operators in Wales. Operators are typically family-owned businesses that have had to rely on debt finance or their own finances to keep businesses afloat during the pandemic. This creates a challenging platform upon which to invest in future products and services.
- **Social distancing requirements** – the UK Government recently published its lockdown exit plan with the suggestion that social distancing may end on 21st June 2021. Clarity on this is vital for the sector, as it limits the number of passenger that can be taken on any one trip.
- **Consumer confidence** – customers need to know the risks when undertaking travel by coach as they visit Wales. The Welsh Government and Visit Wales, along with coach operators, have a key role in ensuring the public has clear and reasonable expectations of safety in choosing to visit Wales this year.

Despite these very serious challenges facing the sector, there are also plenty of opportunities. For instance, domestic visitor numbers are likely to be higher this year as travel abroad remains a challenge (though the reverse of this is also true for inbound travellers to Wales). Coach operators in Wales are eager to do what they do best, to market and sell their products and to ensure their customers are satisfied.

To help them to do this, Welsh Government and Visit Wales could consider the following themes in the recovery plan:

- **Providing timescales for regulatory change** – whilst we appreciate the public health advice leads the agenda in this area, as much as is possible must be done to give coach operators a timeframe upon which to base their activities for 2021. As mentioned previously, it is not reasonable for operators to develop and market products within the three week review period that is used for the current Covid-19 regulations.
- **Partnership working** - bringing coach operators, hotels and attractions together as much as possible to ensure all opportunities for businesses between partners are taken advantage of and that in as much as is possible under the regulations, the visitor experience is properly curated.
- **Business Development Funding** – The Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) has, in its most recent phase, including specific support for the tourism sector. It is important that the next stage of ERF, or a Business Development Fund as happened previously, is available to coach operators to help them finance investment for the coming season. Without this, many coach operators will find it difficult to finance profitable opportunities.
- **Undertake a consumer confidence campaign** – this should focus reassuring potential visitors that Wales is a safe place to visit with a fantastic and varied tourism offer. It is also important that the message that Wales is a welcoming place, particularly to English visitors our largest, is maintained.
- **Helping with recruitment, training and skills** – Coach groups often visit during the shoulder seasons meaning the season in Wales isn't confined to the summer holidays as conventional views would suggest. As such, the strategy needs to help with developing and maintaining a workforce beyond seasonal workers.
- **Ensuring a quality offer at destinations** – Demand is likely to be high in Wales as a result of increasing staycations. Local authorities should be encouraged and funded to ensure that bins are emptied, streets are cleaned and services such as toilets are of a high quality during busy periods.
- **Managing peaks in demand** – Many visitors to Wales arrive by car which causes many difficulties in destination management such as high levels of congestion and inadequate parking provision. This also reduces visitor spend in Wales with day trips rather than overnight stays. Coaches are a part of the solution to this problem, taking congestion off the road, reducing pressure at tourism hotspots and encouraging longer stays. Measures should be taken to prioritise coach visitors at such attractions.
- **Encourage more overseas visitors in the longer-term** – whilst restriction may make it difficult in the short-term, Wales could do much more to attract overseas visitors and coaches can play a key role in this. For instance, the promotion of Wales overseas needs to be linked with coach links into Wales from major English airports such as Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. CPT Cymru would welcome close engagement with Welsh Government on this to develop the approach further.

Conclusion

CPT Cymru hopes this is of interest and would welcome the opportunity to continue to engage positively with the Welsh Government and Visit Wales as we emerge from Covid-19.

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