

Parking and Transport in Eryri - Consultation

This document has been compiled by a working group of BMC Cymru members who live in the National Park or surrounding villages. Its contents have not been agreed at an area, or national, level and therefore does NOT represent a BMC view. However, members may find it useful when posing questions and presenting their ideas at the Gateway Village Workshops to be held at the end of February and early March 2021.

Summary notes made following the on-line working group's meeting, 1st Feb 2020.

We welcome the opportunity to consider the issues surrounding parking and transport in Eryri and we share many of the ideals outlined in the strategy, including:

The sustainable tourism approach,
Reducing impacts on the environment,
Supporting local communities,
Equitable access for marginalised groups
Transport solutions in line with the BMC's Climate Emergency Declaration

Nevertheless, we have some significant questions and concerns about the feasibility of the overall vision.

We welcome proposals for:

- Better information provision to visitors about the availability of parking, park and ride etc. This information needs to be updated in real-time, and accessible on mobile phones, via a single app (perhaps shared with other UK national parks where similar plans are being developed?)
- Better public transport services connecting the inner area of Eryri with satellite villages and surrounding towns, including links to mainline railway stations. This has the potential to improve access for those who lack cars, as well as enabling e.g. linear walks.
- Providing electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Improved parking management where illegal/informal parking causes real safety hazards, or problems for residents in the gateway communities. We are concerned that proposals to reduce parking in some places may exacerbate some of these issues (e.g. as has happened in Nant Gwynant during parking closures at Pen y Pass and Pen y Gwryd).
- Improved low-level walking and cycling routes.

Suggestions, Questions and Concerns

While we recognise that it is desirable to decrease the environmental impact of private car use, we note that:

1. A considerable proportion of traffic (especially on the A5) is through traffic. Reducing parking will do nothing to reduce the noise and pollution from this traffic. Does the park have estimates of how much traffic through the inner area of the park would be reduced by

the proposals? Have other options been explored, such as improved routing of through traffic (especially HGVs) along the A55?

2. Tree screening (as in the long Ogwen layby) and grass block paving (as used at e.g. Pen y Gwryd) could reduce the visual impact of parking without reducing parking spaces (and have other environmental benefits). Whether parking is reduced, or not, these options should be investigated.
3. Other options for dealing with safety concerns relating to roadside parking should be considered, including significantly reducing speed limits at key locations like Pen y Pass and Ogwen (and enforcing these limits). We understand that this approach has been taken on main routes through Dartmoor National Park.
4. The summer of 2020 was unusual, given the lack of overseas travel, leading to enormous demand for domestic tourism (though we recognise that visitor numbers to Eryri have been rising steadily). We are concerned that any plans have used projections (which should be made publicly available) based on long term trends, rather than one anomalous year.
5. In addition, the effects of previous reductions in parking need to be considered: how many of the problems seen in 2020 were due to reductions in parking capacity at Pen y Pass, Pen y Gwryd and other locations?

6. Viability: Private cars are a very quick and convenient method of moving people and equipment to a their preferred point of access to the hills, especially in poor weather when walkers are wet and tired. Being required to park outside the Park, and then catch a bus into the inner area, could easily add an hour to a long day. For public transport to be a viable and attractive alternative to private cars for hill-goers, it needs to be reliable and frequent from before dawn to after dusk, and be able to deal with huge fluctuations in demand, due to weekends, holidays, weather and hill conditions. Could buses cope with the demand at 9.00am on a sunny Bank Holiday weekend?

Achieving effective frequency and service coverage in the off season would be very challenging and we would be concerned if off-season car parking was reduced without a viable alternative provided, especially if the remaining parking was essentially rationed by price. We could see a situation where only the wealthy could afford to access the inner area in quieter periods, when buses are too infrequent, and the limited parking is booked up by those who can afford the fees.

Locals, in particular, require year-round, unplanned, quick and short-stay access to the hills. We would like to see a detailed analysis of the financial viability of bus services, before any reductions in parking are made.

7. Public transport also needs to be able to accommodate often bulky outdoor equipment (e.g. ice axes, skis, bouldering mats, large rucksacks). This is possible (e.g. buses can be fitted with external racks) but needs building into the plans.
8. Costs of using public transport and car parking should be low enough to ensure that less privileged groups are not excluded (including many local residents). Any parking permit or bus pass systems should give consideration to, for example, evening use by locals, who may only need relatively short-stay, off-peak parking, or 1-2 bus trips in a day/week.
9. What effect will the proposals have on demand for taxi use? If the scheme simply transfers passengers from private cars to taxis, it will do nothing to reduce road traffic or noise pollution, and risks pricing out the less well-off and frequent local visitors. Taxis will likely undermine the viability of buses, especially during off peak periods, unless the buses are very frequent. We note that on-demand services are proposed, but the financial viability of this needs thorough analysis.

10. The needs of local outdoor centres must be considered – these typically use minibuses to transport groups which could not be easily split across two different buses if one is full (for organisational and safeguarding reasons). Many of the centres are not located at convenient points for bus pick-up and will likely still need to park minibuses in the inner area.
11. The proposal contends that reducing parking availability in the inner ring will increase demand for public transport, making it more viable. However, it will also potentially reduce revenue for the park and other stakeholders, which might otherwise be used to subsidise public transport. A thorough analysis is needed of the trade-offs here.
12. Improved public transport links to north west Wales (rail and coach) are desirable but outside of the park's control. In the meantime, the same number of cars will need to be accommodated somewhere, and we are concerned that the removal of some of the existing legal parking in the inner area will exacerbate parking problems elsewhere. Most of the satellite communities around the inner ring already struggle with car parking demand and lack suitable areas for increased car parking. The impacts of creating large new hub car parks on the fringes of the park needs careful consideration. A large car park, half a mile from a Gateway Village will not only result in loss of green space but could deflect trade away from local amenities and services.
13. Although lower-carbon transport is desirable (and called for in the BMC's own Climate Emergency Declaration, and BMC Cymru's 2021 Manifesto), it should be recognised that a park and ride scheme based on visitors driving long distances to north west Wales, then using buses for the final 5-10 miles will not make any real difference to greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, merely shifting traffic and parking from the inner area to satellite communities does not necessarily reduce its environmental impact.
14. Van/overnight parking can cause problems with waste disposal etc. The proposals should include appropriate, low-cost provision for overnight stays in vans close to villages, encouraging spending within local communities.
15. Access to affordable accommodation options is important for ensuring that access to the park is not rationed by income, and this becomes even more true if day visits by car are discouraged. At peak times, demand for low cost camping or bunk house accommodation far outstrips supply. We'd like to see consideration of this in the Park's strategy (including planning strategy), especially considering that these accommodation options do not compete with local people for housing (unlike holiday homes, AirBnB etc).
16. We are surprised that bicycle parking infrastructure in the inner area (which is cheap, but sadly lacking from nearly all car parks in the park) is not mentioned anywhere in the proposal (only in hubs). We suggest widespread provision of simple bicycle parking infrastructure (e.g. 'Sheffield stands') in all car parks in the inner area AND other useful locations where cars cannot park (at the start of footpaths etc).
17. We welcome the focus on encouraging active travel, including low level, traffic-free, cycle and walking routes linking communities and popular areas of the park. All aspects of travel provision (by car, by bus, by bike, on foot) need to be integrated. This should include a review of low-level rights of way (outside of access land) which are poorly developed in many parts of the park, leading to visitors being concentrated into certain locations. Many low-level ROW reflect the needs of the 19th century not the 21st, and serve mainly to link farms to highways, rather than provide circular walks or access to the higher ground.
18. We would be interested to know what lessons were learned from the Green Key initiative, and how have they been applied in the design of this scheme?

Alternative Plans?

1. The proposals make no mention of a 'Plan B' should the initial investment and/or on-going funding be insufficient to meet the Park's vision in full.
2. 2021, and possibly 2022, are likely to very busy summers in Eryri and yet there is nothing in the consultation document which addresses transport and parking issues in the short-term. Shouldn't we also be discussing emergency, temporary arrangements?

Questions posed in the Park's consultation document, which may be asked at the Gateway Village Workshops:

QUESTION 1: To what extent do you support the principles of the sustainable tourism approach?

QUESTION 2: Do you have any suggestions of where additional parking could be provided in the gateway communities or wider area?

QUESTION 3: Are there any other parking-related issues that you want to see addressed through this strategy?

QUESTION 4: Do you use the local bus services? If so, which services and how often? If not, what would encourage you to use the local bus service?

QUESTION 5: Do you have any suggestions where a transport interchange could be located for the gateway communities?

QUESTION 6: Which of the potential interchange services and amenities do you think are most desirable and are there any others that should be considered?

QUESTION 7: What improvements could be made to encourage walking and cycling in the gateway communities?

QUESTION 8: Do you have any ideas for improving or developing leisure walking/cycling routes for all users, including people with reduced mobility?

QUESTION 9: How much value to the visitor offer do you think the identified services will add to each of the gateway communities?

QUESTION 10: What enhancements to community/visitor amenities would you like to see in the gateway communities?