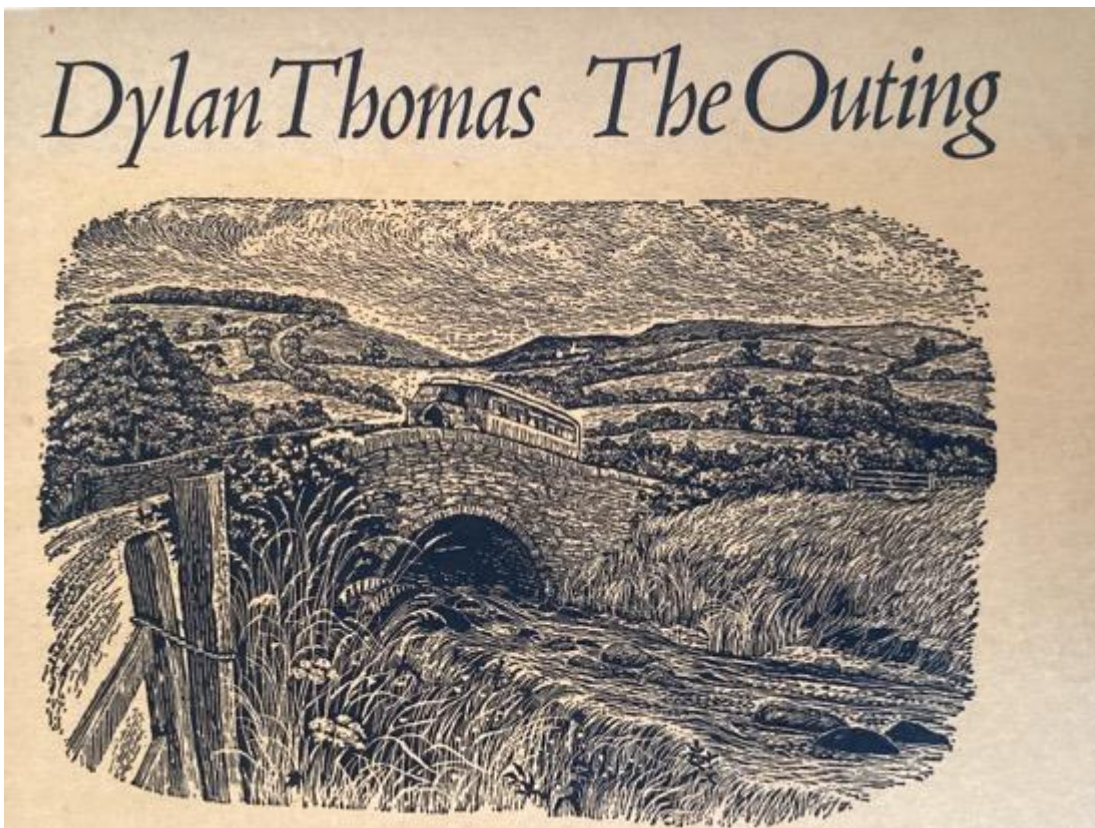


CARDIFF AND NEWPORT TRIP REPORT

AUGUST 2023



BACKGROUND

You need to see things from yourself so I spent best of part of a day on the buses in the Cardiff / Newport area.

Before we get started some caveats

- Utmost respect to those who keep this vital public service running.
- This is by no means a representative sample.
- I bring to it my own predilections and experience as a white, middle aged, non-disabled man.
- Also I'm a an unusual bus user – I am not making the same trip I've made lots of time before I'm looking at how it works as a network.
- I am an idiot – I don't always read everything carefully and I don't like to triple check all aspects of my journeys. But then again public transport should be idiot friendly (aka easy and simple to use). Don't make me think.
- I am an introvert – sometimes I just want to be invisible and don't want to suffer public bus humiliation, ask people anything or look like the idiot I might well be. I suspect I'm not alone in this.
- Ok that's enough of all that let's go

CARDIFF

Night before I have a root around the interweb to see what the best option is for a day ticket to use on all buses in the Cardiff / Newport area. I do find such a thing exists but can't find anything about how you actually purchase it. Maybe you buy it on the bus? I guess I will have to find out.

I want to go from Cardiff to Newport on the bus – not such an obscure mission right?

This was to be my first encounter with the often dire bus stop information – which the internet also has an, often, different opinion about. I was looking for the X30 but I could only find the stop for the 30 which had this bus info map on it.

Where to catch your bus in Cardiff it says.



Great. The X30 isn't shown so it must be the same stop as the 30 right?

I am at the right stop as shown on the map even though there isn't any info on the stop which identifies the code for the stop



Bus doesn't come. Ah well who needs an express bus anyway I will just get the regular 30 to Newport. Should be straight forward it's a Cardiff Bus

shown as stopping at this stop on the map. It doesn't show. So I check the Cardiff bus website which shows that it doesn't go anyway near this stop.

I'm finding this rather tiresome so I had a much needed haircut whilst I summon the energy to try again. Through bitter experience I've now worked out the Cardiff Bus stops live in a different world from the bus stops of other companies – so I cross through the bus deregulation invisible Checkpoint Charlie to locate the Newport Bus X30 stop which is round a corner.

After leaving Cardiff the X30 runs express on the M4 to Newport. The bus is fine though AV would have been good. Lacks the express trimmings in the interior but it's not a long journey and many passengers are not going end to end so maybe the trimmings don't matter so much.

NEWPORT

Newport has a smart small bus station which is part of a wider shopping complex. There are lots of battery electrics single deckers running in and out of the station proudly declaring their green status. This is a good thing. Though only saw when on the bus leaving the Newport Buses station that there was another bus station for non-Newport Buses nearby to the Newport (coming from PTE land I am not used to



all this dis-integration). Having experienced the exciting and disorganised world of competition for bus travel I decided to have a break and experience something better organised. So I went to check out what our well organised Roman friends got up to at Caerleon (a major hub for the Roman army) and get the Newport Number 27. The bus is one of the gazillions now being churned out in China as they Hoover up a lot of the insatiable global demand

for zero emission buses. The hill climbing performance compared with a grumbling diesel bus was excellent. It would have been nice though if there was working AV. There were screens which were live but they weren't doing anything useful. WIFI isn't essential on short hop buses but it would also have been nice. Good that the bus was proclaiming its green virtues but for my taste the interior and exterior promotion of the bus green credentials was a bit busy. Soon we are in lovely Caerleon where I alight to have a quick inspection of what the Romans got up to (usual kind of things but very interesting all the same) before having some lunch and plotting my next move.

I was excited about my plan to try out Newport's Fflecsi DRT service for a quick stroll at the RSPB Newport Wetlands bird reserve. I had a quick read about it on Newport buses website on my phone on an earlier bus trip and had downloaded the TfW Flecsi app. But now I just couldn't get the app to recognise this Newport Fflecsi service no matter how hard I tried. I took a closer look at the Newport Bus website on my iPad where at the top of the page in italics it says that the service no longer runs. Now I told you I was an idiot but there doesn't seem to be much point in having lots of info about a service which no longer exists – especially when you are speed reading a webpage to cut to the chase as I was doing earlier on when reading the page on a mobile phone on a bus.

What now? According to google maps bus stop info there is a Newport Bus that can get me to Cwmbran so I decide to give that a spin. I use google maps to find the stop. I can't see it at first but there is a dirty old stop sign attached to the wall which is preoccupied with telling people about an open bus tour. Can that really be it? Only Google's blue dot and the bus stop lettering on the road surface give me any confidence. The bus turns up on time and I get to try out the battery electric bus on more mixed and less fully urban terrain. Again the hill climbing is great however ride quality is very poor at times with bangs, rattling and movement in all directions. Nobody ever talks about ride quality - but I can't believe it's just me that thinks the ride quality of modern buses is so poor that after 30 minutes max I just...want...to...get...off. Feels like being in an industrial dryer. And if it's sunny weather - like an industrial dryer inside a greenhouse. I wonder what these kind of buses will be like in five to ten years time?

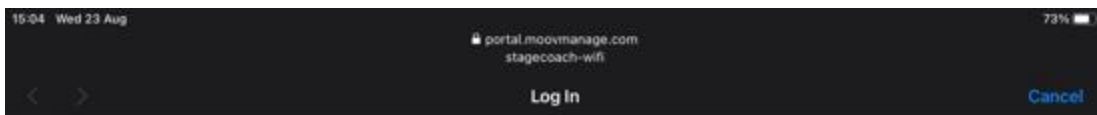
CWMBRAN

The bus stops at Cwmbran railway station where I alight (again without doing due diligence) which means a short walk to the bus station in the shopping centre. The shopping centre doesn't seem to be suffering from too many empty stores and is full of life. The planners of yesteryear have inserted the bus station right into the shopping centre and its busy. There is no digital information at the stops but the printed info is clear, consistent and



idiot-friendly (although it does ignore the existence of the railway station).

I decide to bus it back to Cardiff on a Stagecoach express service. Again the journey is fine and for the first time on this trip there is working AV. Although the USB chargers are just for fun rather than actually charging your devices and when you try the internet you get this dispiriting message.



We're temporarily turning off Wi-Fi on this bus.

We're working hard to continue to connect you with the people and places that matter most and making sure our services are safe and clean. We'll review the Wi-Fi decision at a future date.

If you have any feedback, please email us at customer.services@stagecoachbus.com

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It would seem, to paraphrase the Smiths, that bus passengers 'just haven't earned it yet Baby'.

Extra points though for signage discouraging people from playing their music out loud on their goddamn mobile phones. Not a problem on this trip though as I have the bus pretty much to myself.

CARDIFF

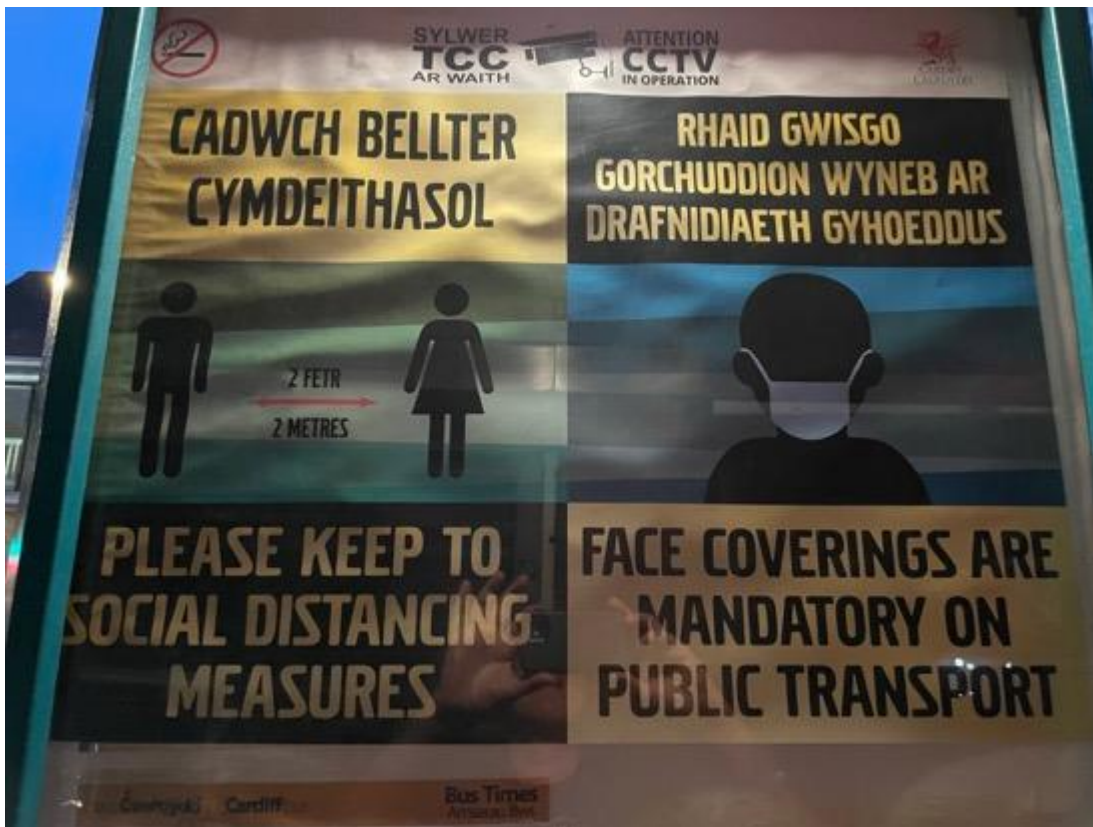
Back in Cardiff, having had a rest from the bus bashing and having done some other things, I decide to venture out in the evening to get something to eat.

My bus mission was to get to the Cathays inner suburb to a middle eastern place using the Cardiff Bus 9 which, according to the interweb, stops just

outside my hotel and the bus leaves soon. Good. I'm hungry. What leaves from which of the two adjacent bus stops is confusing. But the Number 9 is on the real time display of one of them so I am feeling confident. This confidence evaporates when the bus doesn't show and leaves no traces on the real time info display. Now what? I check the Cardiff Bus app which says I will have to wait 20 minutes for the next bus. I have now made the transition from hungry to hangry and am about to make a show of storming off indignantly to find somewhere to eat in the city centre when the bus turns up! So to recap – the Real Time Info display, the Cardiff Bus app and the printed information at the bus stop all gave different times for the bus arrival. And they were all wrong! This isn't the first time this has happened to me whilst using buses (First Somerset - shivers at the thought) and there are reasons for all of this (different technologies being introduced at different times) but still...it was giving me a headache. I only wanted to make a short bus journey and I was having to reconcile all sorts of different sources of info to try and get a fix on what was most likely to happen at the bus stop. Objectively this is ridiculous for a short bus journey.

The bus journey itself was fine and the restaurant was great - I recommend it: <https://minarestaurant.co.uk/>

But what's this at the bus stop to get back to the centre?



In other news 'Careless talk costs lives' and book your tickets now for the Festival of Britain.

THE FINDINGS

So all in all:

- The bus journeys I took were all good enough / fine in terms of vehicle cleanliness and presentation, interaction with staff and reliability (other than one Cardiff bus on the latter) but none of them offered the a combination of working WIFI, AV, USB chargers, Zero Emission. And of those the most important is arguably AV - which I

only experienced on one bus. Overall, what you get on board the bus is inconsistent.

- It's a dis-integrated system which is a very long way from providing a cohesive network for the region. Different bus operators inhabit different worlds whilst the railways are in another world of their own.
- Overall the standard of stops / information at stops was poor and sometimes abysmal or just plain wrong.

Wales can do so much better than this.

Jonathan Bray