

Western Dales Bus is a community bus service, run by volunteers and covering Sedbergh and Kirkby Lonsdale Local Area Partnership (parishes of Barbon, Casterton, Dent, Firbank, Garsdale, Killington, Kirkby Lonsdale, Mansergh, Middleton, Sedbergh in South Lakeland).

It provides a mini-bus service at weekends on routes which aren't commercially viable and the bus is also available for private hire by charities and community groups.

Background

The bus service links Dent and Dent Station with the service centres of Sedbergh and Kendal. Work to support this bus route started in 2011 when Cumbria County Council withdrew their subsidy to the existing Saturday service.

Dent Parish Council agreed to replace the subsidy themselves to keep the service going and raised £8,400 from a range of grants and donations. This continued the service for a year while they considered how to sustain it longer term.

The Project

A group of volunteers established Western Dales Bus (WDB) as a Limited Company with Charitable Status and, with a £41,000 grant from the Government's sustainable transport fund through the Dales Integrated Transport Alliance, leased a mini bus from Cumbria County Council to run the Saturday service themselves. Western Dales Bus has around 30 volunteers, half of which are drivers and half of which are involved in management and administration. The Service was launched in May 2013 running a timetabled route which needed to be registered with the traffic commissioners.

WDB used part of their grant to pilot a Sunday service, run by a commercial operator, between April and October over the summers of 2012 and 2013 to see if there was a demand for it.



The Western Dales Bus

It was aimed at both walkers and local residents and they also had funding from the Friends of Settle/Carlisle Railway as it linked up with railway services. There has been sufficient demand for the Sunday service for WDB to decide they will run it themselves during the summer of 2014.

What has been achieved?

WDB has kept a bus service running and has increased the numbers using it, reducing isolation for people who might otherwise find it difficult to travel.

The use of volunteers to manage the service and drive the buses has increased community cohesion and brought local people together.

The minibus which WDB uses is accessible and has allowed groups of disabled and older people to go on trips and outings.



Launch of the bus with Tim Farron MP



Picking up passengers in Dent

An advisory board has been set up with representatives from each of the ten parishes served by the bus. This gives users and local representatives an opportunity to feed in ideas and views on the service.

There have been some challenges. WDB's bus is currently leased and they would like to buy their own vehicle. They also need top-up funding to run the service which is difficult to find.

The Learning

The bus service covers a wide area and, given the low rural population, this is needed for the route to be viable.

WDB found it was vital to maintain close contact with Cumbria County Council officers to ensure that they are working together and not at cross-purposes, and the resulting support has been invaluable.

It's also been important for them not to compete with the commercial operators. They will only run scheduled services on routes which aren't viable for commercial operators.

WDB have found that as much effort is needed to manage the organisation as to drive the buses. It was relatively easy to find volunteer bus drivers but as many volunteers

are needed to run the organisation and plan rotas. Between 6 and 8 drivers are needed for each route to allow volunteers to have time off for holidays and other commitments.

WDB have had a lot to learn and found the support of a volunteer who has holiday cottages in the Dent area, and who had been involved in running a community bus in the south of England, invaluable.

Support is available from Cumbria County Council for communities that don't have volunteers with community transport experience.

Contact Details

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