

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 7th February, 2018 at 10.00
am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, S.B. Jones, J.Becker, and
S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Hywel Price	Assistant Engineer
Paul Keeble	Traffic and Network Manager
James Woodcock	Business Insights Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Dick Cole

David Flint

Ted Hand

Graeme Nelmes

Paul Turner

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. To receive the notes of the last meeting

The notes of the last meeting were confirmed as an accurate record.

3. Magor Station Update (Paul Turner and Ted Hand)

Paul Turner and Ted Hand reported on the meeting held with James Price, Chief Executive, Transport for Wales and Andrew Bold, Transport for Wales, to update them regarding the Magor Station campaign and GRIP studies, Severn Tunnel Junction and the Southern Line. It was emphasised that whilst the application was not in the list of successful applications, the Minister/DfT has made clear that the bid for a new station is still viable and has a strong business case; feedback overall was of encouragement to continue with the GRIP studies and not to wait for the next round before submission.

Discussions also took place about the successful meeting with Network Rail, Arriva Trains and Mott Macdonald to consider the remaining stages of GRIP 3 and the announcement that Magor

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Walkway project will be sponsored by Network Rail. Funding from Welsh Government will assist the completion of the GRIP 3 stage.

It was also mentioned that when the GRIP 3 study is completed, it is preferred that Transport for Wales takes over management of the Magor Walkway project to contribute to the wider project e.g. Llanwern and Cardiff Parkway. The notes of the meeting to be circulated to all group members.

It was added that a meeting had been held with Abellio. The bid director, if the bid is successful, is keen to enter into discussions as what is proposed is the same as the Dutch model. Tribute was paid to colleagues in MAGOR for their commitment, drive and enthusiasm.

4. Abergavenny Station Update (Christian Schmidt)

Considering the letters circulated from DfT and Welsh Government, it was questioned why signalling has caused problems relating to the bridge at Abergavenny Station. Support is strong for action to be taken to address lack of disabled access (and for able bodied with luggage) to cross the bridge. It was noted that we can apply in next round of Access for All funding.

It was reported that Network Rail will attend next meeting of Abergavenny Town Council to explore potential for signalling changes to allow the bridgework to proceed and it was hoped there would be some progress.

It was confirmed that a bid will be submitted in 2019. In the meantime it is hoped that there is commitment from senior managers at Network Rail. Regarding car parking and access, it was noted that previous work stalled because of lack of funding. In the next financial year the authority will be looking to buy land in the vicinity and there has been positive feedback from some of the local landowners. As soon as the new rail franchisee is known it can be explored with the successful bidder if they would wish to take plans forward. It was hoped to report further progress at the next meeting

Cabinet Member, County Councillor B. Jones agreed that Abergavenny Station stairs and bridge are a disgrace and he agreed to send a follow up letter.

5. Chepstow Station Update (Christian Schmidt)

It was reported that there is a very similar situation at Chepstow Station with the bridge, car parking and access. It was confirmed that the bid is for funding for both Chepstow and Abergavenny stations. Some positive discussions have taken place with landowners. In terms of a footbridge, there is the additional issue that there is no opportunity to safely cross the tracks by barrow crossing.

The Bridge is not in a good condition and this matter has been unsuccessfully raised with Network Rail in the past. It was commented that the issue is that the bridge is technically unsafe and because of the historic nature of the bridge, specialists are required to effect a repair. It was questioned if there was any Health and Safety legislation that could be applied in these circumstances, and queried if this point could be progressed. It was also questioned what details stopped previous refurbishment and asked if further enquires could be made.

6. Severn Tunnel Junction Update (Hywel Price)

The Assistant Engineer explained progress on a project to create a station carpark. So far, ground investigation works and an ecology report, pre-planning processes and topographical

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survey of the area have been carried out. Planned is the tender process and planning application from mid-March. Traffic road orders and footpaths from the side of the bridge are being organised to the existing carparks. The scheme will be in two phases, a scalping carpark and an application for funding will be made for a tarmacked one.

In response to a query, it was explained that phase one will result in 88 spaces and full capacity would be 200 places. Currently, it is noted that the number of vehicles parked in the entryway and entrance to the countryside park could contribute £100 per day income if a charge was made.

Negotiations are in progress with Network Rail to extend the bridge over the electrified relief line. More information from Network Rail to follow at a future meeting. The response is expected soon and the cost was speculated to be considerable. The response will be circulated when received.

Surprise was expressed that the proposal was for a bridge over an electrified line as it was thought that the plan was for an extension of the current footbridge over an existing relief line which won't be electrified. It was confirmed that the relief line will be electrified but no electric trains will be used on the line for some time. This matter will be addressed further when more is known.

7. M4 Bridge Tolls and Chepstow By-Pass (Roger Hoggins)

The Business Insights Manager introduced a report which reflects anecdotal evidence and the most recent report from Welsh Government prepared by ARUP in May 2012 regarding plans to abolish tolls on the Severn Bridge by the end of the year. The report highlighted a range of issues including businesses using the bridge for transport of goods forecasting that impact was most significant on those moving low value goods. Some changes have already occurred (e.g. CM Downton has taken out a lease at Newhouse Farm).

In terms of tourism, the report broadly concluded that the highest impact would be on day visitors as the reduction in their expenditure represented a significant proportion of their overall spend.

The Report also considered the labour market and commuting and it was believed that there could be an increase in related traffic of around 12% recognising that labour markets take time to evolve.

There is no specific detail on the property market but it is acknowledged that there is noticeable movement to more affordable housing in south of the County by persons wishing to commute to Bristol and surrounding areas, and property prices are expected to rise.

The Head of Operations addressed the Chepstow By Pass. He reminded members of the presentation provided by Mr. A. Braund and the strength of feeling to address traffic congestion and air pollution in and around Chepstow. There is a meeting with Gloucestershire and Forest of Dean Councils next week, as these are issues for both sides. It was also reported that officers have met with Welsh Government and a method of funding feasibility and design studies is sought.

Correspondence has been received that proposals will be progressed from next year and there are indications of political progress. More information will be circulated as it becomes available.

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An addition was provided that the issues were raised at a recent meeting of the Severn Growth Summit and the Secretary of State promised to make contact. Councillor Becker agreed to chase progress.

It was suggested that the removal of tolls could present an opportunity for the Council to construct a car park on the Newhouse site for care sharers.

It was reported that there has been a noticeable reduction of commuters from Severn Tunnel Junction which could be contributing to the gridlock or be related to issues with GWR, Network Rail maintenance, delays and overcrowding. Concerns were expressed about Chepstow on race days, worsening delays at the Brynglas tunnels and the omission of the needs of Caldicot in the long term plans for the capital region.

It was questioned if there was any modelling done on commuting or impact measurement on train usage and agreed that these aspects would be an essential element of a feasibility study to address the broad issues in the area including the consideration of a Chepstow By-Pass.

A Member made the following points:

- The possibility that the City Deal developed traffic modelling system may be utilised,
- that it was accurate that emphasis is strongly on linking Cardiff to Bristol overlooking the Caldicot/Chepstow issues,
- that a digitally enabled Park and Ride should be considered with Gloucestershire County Council at a variety of sites and that there may be funding available under the heading of digital inclusion e.g. to develop an app.

8. Active Integrated Network Maps

It was explained that the Council has a duty, under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, to submit integrated network maps of key walking and cycling routes that should be developed over 15 years, to Welsh Government. The long list of routes (compiled following public consultation), consultation responses and maps were made available for group members. The proposals will be prioritised as short/medium/long term, and will be considered by full Council on 15th February and submitted by 28th February 2018.

The maps will have to be reviewed every 3 years. Once the maps are accepted, the Council should expect £175,000 to develop the design and planning of the proposals. It was confirmed that some routes are already in existence, some need refurbishment and some are completely new. The audit scoring system was explained which defines the criteria for good routes.

It was queried if routes that combine business and leisure could be prioritised to positively influence some of the aspirational leisure routes. It was responded that this would be for elected members to decide and that the guidance was unclear about routes connecting to towns.

A member questioned the pedestrianisation in Abergavenny and referred to complaints received about where bus stops are situated. It was explained that consideration of bus stops is key in the intention to remove traffic from Frogmore St. A traffic survey was undertaken to look at re-routing that concluded that it is feasible but new bus stop locations would be required. As part of the survey a presentation was made to the Public Realm Group and the proposals were well received. Morrisons would provide funding for an extra stop and it is proposed to provide a new stop on the A40 near the Cenotaph. There is also a proposal to create a stop closer to the centre (King St./Lion St/ Market St./Morrisons). Some progress has been made with Morrisons

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to use its land to create a better bus stop. Work and discussion continues and more detail will follow. The scheme is out to consultation at present and the safety audit is due.

It was further questioned when and where the temporary bus stops will be. Where work had started, there was a lot of disruption and people were left behind to await the next hourly bus and assurances were sought that there will be clear publicity.

Clarification was sought about the active travel route from the new Ty Mawr development to Gilwern Primary School and an update was provided that it has not been possible to construct a footpath by the road so it is proposed to create a path through an adjacent field. The planning application has been submitted to the Brecon Beacons National Park and an ecology study completed as required. Although unconfirmed, funding may be found through some S106 monies.

An update was requested regarding a foot/cyclepath between Caldicot and Magor and potential funding. Previous bids for the whole pavement were turned down. Discussions are in progress as part of the M4 scheme but it is uncertain if it is for the whole or part of the route. It was previously turned down because of insufficient footpath width. This was raised with Welsh Government but unresolved in time for the bids to be submitted and more discussions are needed. It was suggested that a strong response is required as it is not possible to travel the road at night and improvements can't wait for the M4 relief road.

It was suggested and accepted that the plans for a footpath could integrate with Magor Station, Caldicot and Severn Tunnel Junction, and access to a rail link at Newhouse and a strategic approach was required. A meeting with Severnside Area Committee and members of the public has been arranged to identify all the problems and explore the best approach, design a scheme/s and look for funding. Particular concern was expressed about heavy lorries on the route and the routes provided by SatNav.

Public engagement events on the construction of a community centre adjacent to the Magor station site are in progress and the maps will be added to the displays.

9. Great Western Railways (inc. next franchise consultation)

There was no draft response available for meeting. A number of responses will be submitted from various sources including Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority, Great Western Cities (Cardiff, Newport and Bristol), West of England and Gloucestershire and it is intended to co-ordinate responses on the main points.

It was agreed that we want Intercity London high speed trains to stop at Severn Tunnel Junction and to address the issue of availability of trains from south Monmouthshire stations to Bristol. It was stated that we want the electrified services promised two years ago to be delivered and also faster services from Cardiff to local stations.

It was suggested that the franchise needs to be different in terms of rolling stock, journey times and better performance than recently experienced. A draft response will be circulated to members in order to include their observations.

The Chair explained his concerns about the quality of GWR service (incorrect carriages, cancellations, train interiors, and incorrect manning) and expressed disbelief that available rolling stock is unknown until 5am each morning. It is understood that there is difficulty retaining staff in servicing sheds.

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A Group Member had heard that the DfT believed that services would be reduced because everybody currently using Severn tunnel Junction will return to using cars to get to Bristol once the tolls are abolished on the bridge. For this reason, it was agreed that it will be important to model usage through a survey of users this month in order to convey the information to the DfT.

Concern was expressed that High Speed trains are being replaced with inferior trains that are not fit for purpose to travel e.g. from London to S. Wales, and also that no decision has been taken on which trains to use from Cardiff to Portsmouth.

10. Transport Grants Update (Christian Schmidt/Graham Kinsella)

The Transport Planning and Policy Officer explained that the grant bids processes are split more this year. Further funding has been requested for the schemes in the Local Transport Fund as they fit the criteria having had successful bids last year for Abergavenny/Llanfoist active travel bridge, Wye Bridge work, Magor station and Abergavenny town centre. It was explained that the amount of money available this year has been reduced.

£5m has been allocated for active travel design and the Council will receive a share. A local transport network fund has been created for metro related schemes; a bid will be submitted for Abergavenny and Chepstow stations.

It was speculated that the active travel maps would have to receive approval before the £175,000 will be allocated and it will be necessary to define which schemes to spend the funding on.

It was queried if the money for this year's budget would roll into the next year but explained that it has to be spent by the end of year or has to be returned. For Llanfoist Bridge, it is hoped to deliver the planning application and tenders over the summer.

11. CCRTA Board: To inform members of the work undertaken by the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority (see <http://cardiffcapitalregioncitydeal.wales/ccr-meetings.html>)

The papers were provided to inform members of progress noting that it is linked to the wider City Deal.

12. Any Other Business

13. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as 2nd May 2018.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am