

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 19th September, 2018 at
10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, S.B. Jones, S. Woodhouse, D. Flint,
T. Hand, G. Nelmes, P. Turner and R. Corcoran

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Mike Powell	Rural Programmes Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

T. Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail
D. Flint	Severn Tunnel Action Group
P. Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail
G. Nelmes	Abergavenny Action 50+
R. Corcoran	Friends of the 65 Bus
D. Cole	Abergavenny Civic Society

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Introductions- 1) Friends of 65 Bus: Rosemary Corcoran 2) Forest of Dean District Council: Councillor Roger James, Deputy Leader and Nigel Gibbons, Forward Planning Manager

The Chair welcomed Councillor Roger James, Deputy Leader, and Nigel Gibbons, Forward Planning Manager, Forest of Dean District Council. New member of the Group, Rosemary Corcoran (representing Friends of the 65 Bus and the Monmouth area) was also introduced. She provided the Group with background information on the successful campaign to retain the 65 bus, supporting rural bus transport to assist business and employment, tourism, loneliness and isolation, both elderly and young people, social wellbeing and affordable housing.

Mrs Corcoran was thanked for her contribution to the meeting.

3. Chepstow Transport Study: Update from Michelle North-Jones, Capita

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The Chair welcomed Michelle Jones-North, Capita to the meeting to provide an update on the Chepstow and surrounding area study.

It was explained that a long list of potential options has been developed and that an initial appraisal of the options has been undertaken. Meetings have taken place to gather information on the revised Local Development Plans in Monmouthshire and Forest of Dean to establish what sites and areas may be developed in future.

The draft appraisal has been discussed with the Group Engineer, Highways and Flood Management and the Transport Manager from Gloucestershire and their comments have been included.

As required by the Welsh Transport appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) a draft report will be compiled. This will include a five case model assessment and conforms to English requirements. Then an independent review group will be set up mid-October and the appraisal results will be included in the draft report to produce a final stage 1 (Strategic Outline Case) Weltag report.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that currently there are a list of options recommended for further appraisal with a view to completing Weltag stage one. The next step will be Weltag stage 2 involving more quantitative information being gathered on a shorter list.

Subject to the outcome of the independent review, the identified alternatives include a by-pass with different route options and one will be recommended for further appraisal. Also, there is a public transport option e.g. looking at better rail frequency and services to Bristol. Ideally this would include half hour frequency at peak times and include improved Park and Ride at Lydney and Chepstow stations with improvements at Severn Tunnel Junction. It was added that there is further potential for a new junction off the M48 determined after further appraisal.

Additionally, complimentary options could include increasing local public transport services in Chepstow including Tutshill and Sedbury, also improving local transport links to railway and bus stations. Active Travel plan improvements would assist communities in Tutshill, Sedbury and Chepstow.

A Member referred to the delayed decision on the M4 Relief Rd, and the suggested links from the M48 to the B4245 to provide better access to Severn Tunnel Junction. Clarification was sought if the Metro would stop at Llanwern and not include further developments towards Lydney, and if this would be detrimental to a proposal to have a by-pass for Chepstow. In response, it was confirmed that Chepstow By-Pass is on the long list alongside other options.

A Group Member raised awareness of the Magor and Undy Walkway Station Group. It was explained that there are 30,000 users of the Severn Tunnel Junction station per annum. If the station bid is successful, space could be freed up at Severn Tunnel Junction. It was confirmed that this information can be added into the consideration of improvements to Severn Tunnel Junction and wider area at Stage 2.

The Head of Operations explained the WelTAG process. If Stage 1 is successful, Stage 2 will involve investing significant funding to carry out detailed analysis to support or oppose the options. After consideration by officers, the Stage 1 report can be promulgated further as decided by both authorities. It was suggested that Welsh Government is invited to the review group meeting.

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The Group were informed that Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG) had surveyed commuters and a high proportion travel from Forest Of Dean and Chepstow to Severn Tunnel Junction. This information will be passed to Capita.

Councillor R. James expressed support for the link from Lydney to Severn Tunnel Junction. He wanted the service to be maintained, and improved e.g. more trains to stop at Lydney to increase the ability to travel to Wales and Bristol.

Michelle North-Jones was thanked for her attendance and contribution to the meeting.

4. Presentation: Opportunities for Rural Transport - Mike Powell, Rural Programmes Manager

Michael Powell, Rural Development Programme Manager (for The Vale of Usk: Monmouthshire and Rural Wards in Newport) provided a presentation. Carly Jones, Apprentice, was also welcomed to the meeting.

Priority matters for the authority include:

- Connectivity by broadband;
- Using technology to access to services;
- Business and enterprise network;

Members were encouraged to visit: <http://monmouthshire.biz/>. Following the presentation, questions were invited:

- A Member asked about the Cardiff City Region City Deal (CCRCD), specifically for rural areas (including travelling to Gloucestershire and Forest Of Dean), the need for bus and train links with the Metro, integrated transport and TrawsCymru. It was responded that currently Traveline has a static list of connected timetables. Discussions are taking place with Traveline about how to connect rural areas to main services with a view to replicating the approach across the region and beyond. It is planned that the CCRCD Transport and Digital groups will work more closely going forward.

It was explained that connectivity between transport service providers (including volunteer transport groups to e.g. hospitals) and routes is fundamental. Regarding buses, a Group Member explained that there is a problem with buses because it is an unregulated system and many buses are commercial, private companies in competition with each other with no interest in connectivity which results in long waits. In respect of the Metro, Monmouthshire is in Stage 3 (runs to 2032) which includes only an hourly Express Bus link from Newport to Monmouth, Abergavenny and Brecon.

It was confirmed that the Metro should involve the whole of Monmouthshire but there are no specific plans or firm funding commitments to date. The consensus opinion is that it will cost significantly more to make the necessary improvements and innovative alternatives are being explored. Some funding has been secured to consider possible solutions.

The Head of Operations reflected there could be a conflict between on-demand (Rural Uber) services and successful scheduled services which may begin to pay for themselves. A review of rural transport has been commissioned.

- Members commented that information is vital to success and that timetables are not always available or up to date. It was suggested that technology could be used to find

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out what people want and to keep them informed. It was acknowledged that not everyone uses a computer.

- A Group Member reminded that integrated travel is not a new thing and suggested that sub groups are needed to make recommendations to the main group to adopt a more strategic and joined-up approach.
- A Group Member welcomed the 'Wheels for Work' scooter suggestion for young people in rural areas that can help them access further education and employment. It was explained that it is a Community Transport Association scheme and there are no travel limitations. It was agreed that it was a scheme that could be replicated in the County. Interest was also expressed by colleagues from Forest of Dean District Council.
- An offer of a presentation on Hackney Community Transport by D. Powell was accepted.
- The Chair explained that there is a shortage of bus drivers for our services. Regarding technology, it was suggested that there must be opportunities for a simple to use App to access service information.

5. A40 Trunk Road

6. A40 Monmouth Wyebridge Junction: Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations

The Head of Operations reported on the Monmouth Wyebridge Junction (3rd Lane) scheme, funded through Welsh Government. The funding will be released to the Council to progress the scheme. In October, a report will be considered by full Council for approval to create a new capital budget to build the third lane at the traffic lights. This funding is coming from a grant to release blockages in and out of Wales and will improve traffic congestion.

It was hoped that the funding will be released this year and work is likely to commence next year.

7. A40 Abergavenny - request to divert: Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations

The Head of Operations confirmed that correspondence was received from the Minister that there was no intention of trunking or de-trunking any roads in Wales in the foreseeable future due to funding constraints. He agreed to write to the Minister again.

A Group Member clarified that the issue is not about the road status but about easing traffic in Abergavenny. It was explained that the new traffic lights by Morrisons and the closure of Frogmore St. have created more congestion, rat runs and air pollution. The Town Council has asked the Council for air quality monitoring. It was commented that there is an opportunity to investigate a route for a by-pass and also diverting HGVs from the A40 to the A4143.

The Chair agreed that the letter shouldn't be accepted as it is an important issue to the County and Abergavenny town. It was agreed that the Head of Operations will draft another letter to the Minister inviting him to look at the issue together. The Cabinet Member agreed and added that consideration needs to be given to stopping large lorries going through Mardy.

A Member suggested that this matter should be considered by a subgroup with town representatives to look at it in more detail.

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A Member referred to the Minister's decision not to make a decision about a Chepstow By Pass until the Prince of Wales Bridge tolls are removed. The Group was reminded of the Capita Chepstow Transport Study and it was suggested that a letter could be written when the study is completed.

8. A466 Wye Valley: Proposed Road Closure and diversion route. Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations

The Head of Operations reported that the A466 will have to be closed in November for slip works by Gloucestershire County Council and closed for either two 6 week periods or one longer closure to address two major slips by Monmouthshire County Council. The authority is trying to reduce the impact on traffic through the valley, and on businesses and residents but there is no option other than to close the roads to carry out the work. Tintern and St. Arvans Community Councils have been given the option to choose closure for 12 weeks or two 6 week closures.

A Group Member asked what effect there would be on the 69 bus from Chepstow to Monmouth. It was responded that there will be official diversions but disruption is inevitable.

9. Wales and Border Franchise: Hugh Evans, Keolis Amey

The Group welcomed Hugh Evans from Keolis Amey, the new franchise operator for the Wales and Border contract from 15th October 2018. It was explained that the new branding will be Transport for Wales Rail Services (TfW Rail) not Keolis Amey.

He emphasised that it will be necessary to manage expectations as this is a long term journey, but comments received have been taken on board. It was explained that there will be no new trains at the present time but there will be a programme of improving, updating and rebranding stations. New rolling stock in this area can be expected in 2022.

There is commitment to connect with customers on a more local level and increase effective engagement on a regional basis. He was interested in furthering links by taking up representation on local rail groups. Community ambassadors will be employed to work locally to encourage better and increased numbers to use trains.

It was stated that solutions to the issues with Abergavenny and Chepstow Stations will be sought and also improvements to services (e.g. more Sunday services) are under consideration.

A community rail partnership will be introduced to improve station environments to e.g. make visitors and resident feel more welcome. Accessibility issues are under consideration with appropriate groups asked to advise.

Working together to provide an integrated network with bus service operators will also be a priority.

A Group Member raised the following points:

- The next refranchising of Cross Country trains is likely to impact on commuters from Lydney and Chepstow to Bristol. It was pointed out that if Cross Country Trains would no longer be stopping at Lydney and Chepstow then these would only have one train per

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hour which would be an unacceptable outcome. It was stated that TfW would look into implications of the changes to the Cross Country franchise.

- It was explained that the ticket offices at Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction are operated by independent ticket sellers. It was confirmed that this will be continuing. TfW Rail is committed to developing community hubs across Wales.
- The fares from Chepstow to Cardiff are up to double that from Merthyr to Cardiff; a similar mileage. It was confirmed that there will be no fare changes before January 2020.
- There were no details when Llanwern station will open. It was questioned if there will be a 1000 place car park which would indicate the end of the Metro line. If so, this would have a significant impact on roads in and around Magor. In answer to a question about whether the station is on the main line or the relief line, the Transport Planning and Policy Officer explained that it will be on the exchange sidings via the relief line. The exact location will rely on the site for the train factory.

It was explained that, following a meeting with Department for Transport representatives and MAGOR, a new New Station Fund bid for funding for the new station was recommended once GRIP 3 is progressed. If successful, the UK Government would fund up to 3/4 of the cost of a new station. It was queried if Keolis Amey would have a policy on investment in infrastructure. It was stated that there could be an opportunity to work together when GRIP 3 is done to explore funding sources.

Clarification was sought on Abergavenny Station Bridge, and how the signalling and Network Rail aspects would be controlled. It was confirmed that Network Rail would control the work but Keolis Amey will work together with them.

It was questioned when a bridge at Abergavenny might be constructed. It was explained that the money in the Keolis Amey franchise bid was not intended for the new bridge but for enhancing the station to be a better interchange. There is a fund for accessibility across Wales and Abergavenny is a priority scheme. Timescales are not confirmed as yet. It was explained that there is concern locally regarding station staffing in the meantime to provide assistance. It was explained that there are no plans to increase station hours.

A Group Member queried when community rail partnerships would start as it would be beneficial to start as soon as possible especially where Abergavenny Station is concerned. The Community Rail Officer posts start in October 2019. Information about station adoption schemes was requested.

Mr. Evans, and all Group Members were invited to a Community Engagement event on progress with the station development in Magor on 20th September 2018 at 7.00pm.

Mr. Evans was thanked for his attendance and contribution.

10. Rail Service to Bristol and London: Christian Schmidt, Transport Planning & Policy Officer

The Transport Planning and Policy Officer reported that information should be sought from Great Western Railways. It was agreed to defer this matter until the next meeting. In the meantime, it was noted that the Department of Transport has submitted a report of its consultation regarding the GWR franchise and there is no mention of Monmouthshire or Severn Tunnel Junction. There is mention of the Cardiff to Bristol service.

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It has also been announced of the potential to delay the electrification of the line to Cardiff. It has been stated that the current timetable can't continue over December 2018. It was suggested to try and get a representative to the next meeting.

11. Active Travel Update: Christian Schmidt, Transport Planning & Policy Officer

It was reported that further funding has been announced for Abergavenny Llanfoist Bridge (£1.5m next year). The application will be considered at the next Planning Committee.

12.1. Bus Service Update: Richard Cope, Passenger Transport Unit Manager/ Christian Schmidt, Transport Planning & Policy Officer

The Passenger Transport Manager was at a meeting with Welsh Government therefore unable to attend.

12.2. Bus Stops in Abergavenny

In terms of Abergavenny, it was explained that the new stops in Lion St. now have shelters and the A40 stops should no longer be used as they are deemed unsafe – as this is a trunk road this is the responsibility of Welsh Government Highways Agency. It has been reported that some bus operators are still using these stops as routes as formally registered as hail and ride and passengers are still waiting there.

Bus Operators have complained that buses struggle to access the westbound stops on Lion St because of illegally parked cars in Market Street.

A Group Member added that access to King Street is closed so buses can't access Lion Street. Until the authority takes over enforcement of yellow lines on street, larger buses will not be able to access Lion Street. It was confirmed that the Council are in discussion with the Police regarding parking. There is a proposed bus stop by Tesco planned for Feb 2019.

A Member said that there were lots of complaints regarding bus stops and a lot of confusion about the temporary bus stop. It was questioned if a different temporary location was possible as people are very confused.

The Head of Operations asked for more detail and will investigate further with the Project Manager and Passenger Transport Manager and will report back to the Abergavenny Members.

13. Chepstow Local Services

It was reported that there was consultation over the summer resulting in a new bus service hourly from Chepstow to Bulwark/Thornwell and back, plus an hourly circular service to Tesco and Garden City, and a third hourly service to the hospital. It was commented that the contractor seems to be happy with patronage.

14. To receive the notes of the previous meeting held on 2nd May 2018

The minutes of the last meeting were confirmed as a true record.

15. Any Other Business

- It was commented that a Group Member had been on the first afternoon First Severn Express bus from Chepstow to Magor. The service terminated at Blenheim Ave, Magor. The driver advised that it then runs back empty to Chepstow. It was questioned if it

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could be a circular service. The Transport Planning and Policy manager will make contact with the service operator.

- It was commented that it is likely that a resident will raise parking issues in Magor at the community engagement event.

16. To note the date of the next meeting as 16th January 2018

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm