

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 20th February, 2019 at 10.00
am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Mark Hand	Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

D. Cole	Abergavenny Civic Society
T. Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail
G. Nelmes	Abergavenny Action 50+
P. Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail
Cllr. R. James	Forest of Dean Council
A. Callard	Chair – Forest Economic Partnership
B. Mahoney	Friends of the 65 Bus

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor S. B. Jones

County Councillor A. Easson

D. Flint Severn Tunnel Action Group

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were made.

2. Transport for Wales Bus Review: Tony Meacham, Transport for Wales

The Group welcomed Tony Meacham, Transport for Wales (TfW) who provided a presentation on the review of bus services.

The following points were covered:

- TfW is creating a programme business case.
- Need identified for a national bus network, integrated and better co-ordinated ticketing and back office across public transport in Wales and integrated responsive transport with

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a broad spectrum of users (children and young people travelling to education, health appointments, social, community etc.).

- No intention to centralise decision-making for transport as local decision making is key. There may be a co-ordination function.
- Options include: i) do minimum, ii) re-prioritise, iii) improve, iv) transform or v) revolutionise.
- TfW to deliver replacement for concessionary card scheme on behalf of local authorities who are the statutory providers. There will be a national system to provide consistency across buses and trains. This is a challenging project to deliver in a short timescale. New cards will be issued from 1st August 2019.
- National bus survey: This has concentrated on Cardiff, Wrexham and Pembrokeshire as representative case studies of similar areas in Wales. ARUPs is working on what services in these regions would look like and is identifying schemes. Outcomes will form part of the business case. It is fully taken into account that local people and local government understand their areas best.
- Integrated Responsive Transport; may be suitable for some rural routes to feed into core routes.
- Multimodal and cross operator ticketing.

The chair thanked Tony Meacham for his presentation and invited questions and comments as follows:

- A Group Member explained about the campaign for a new walkway station at Magor which is looking to deliver integrated transport. The unique business plan addressed all relevant points for new station funding but the GRIP 2 application was unsuccessful as the business plan was incomplete. There was encouragement to continue. However, local transport funding was applied for and not granted. In response, the frustrations were agreed with, clarifying that TfW is the operational and delivery arm whereas funding is decided at Welsh Government. It was recommended that the matter is raised again with Welsh Government officials and also to Keolis Amey who may be interested in developing new stations, revenue and integrated travel. It was confirmed that the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, plus the MP and AM will be meeting with Welsh Government officials. It was suggested that there may be other opportunities for funding schemes via different avenues e.g. social inclusion, active travel.
- A Group Member was interested in the bus review and observed that rural bus services are not well promoted, information is poor (bus stop panels are often empty and dirty), there are poor connections and limited connectivity with other services. It was added that passenger power can be harnessed e.g. to generate new users and wider engagement with service operators. Reliability and consistency are also key in terms of services operating to timetable, consistency of vehicle and willingness to work in partnership. Possible areas for communities' participation were identified as promotion through community networks and newsletters, responsibility for bus stops, providing good accessible information e.g. time in town journey planners. Some other ideas include e.g. village hall park and ride scheme to connect to scheduled services. These points were supported and it was emphasised that the business case deliberately makes it clear that there will be decline if things stay the same to make a bid for investment for improvement. The national bus network scheme will address information, connectivity etc. Local branding will be encouraged with a reference to national integration. The importance of reliability and consistency was agreed.
- Community transport was raised as a problem within some communities. Considering integration of services with railways, it was noted that TfW has a plan for regenerating Abergavenny station in 2023. It was commented that there must be integration with bus

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services as currently, a customer can often wait one or two hours for a connecting bus. Disabled access is an issue at the station and also on buses. It was commented that customers' mobility trolley/walkers take up considerable space on buses for which solutions are sought.

- It was confirmed, in response to a query that the older person's and future generations commissioners are being engaged with. The suggestion of engagement with the children's commissioner was taken on board.
- A Group Member commented that passengers must be listened to, that bus timetables and information must be provided and commended the work of community groups, who do a fantastic job.
- The Chair commented that future housing developments must take public transport into account.

3. Welsh Government Bus White Paper

The Passenger Transport Manager introduced the White Paper: Improving Public Transport with opportunity for consultation. The consultation questions were explained and feedback invited as follows. Comments will also be accepted by the end of the month and will be added into the response.

Bus Services and Joint Transport Authorities:

Question 1: Do you agree that it is important for local authorities to work together with regard to local bus services?

- It was explained that the authority works regionally with the Cardiff Capital Regional Transport Authority but there are no national standards or information.
- It is essential for local authorities to work together in the planning and operation of local bus services as many services cross into other authorities, and cross border.
- A regional standard for bus infrastructure, operating standards and public transport information would all be of benefit to authorities and service users.
- Provision and commissioning of local bus services requires standard terms and conditions. There is a regional quality standard in South East Wales that all bus operators have to adhere to but this is not the case for all Wales.
- It is easier for bus service operators to work on a regional basis for administrative purposes e.g. concessionary fares.
- Staff resources are limited in authorities, sharing services and not duplicate activities would be a benefit.

Question 2. Please provide comments on the proposed organisational structures; preferred option and why?

- A national joint transport authority, if formed, would be responsible for setting policy, legislation, funding levels, setting infrastructure standards, contract standards, quality bus partnerships, possible franchising and provision of information and ticketing for all Wales. The Board would consist of Officers and local authority Member representatives. Welsh Government want Ministers running the Board which could cause conflict of interest. To avoid Ministers' involvement in operational matters, there must be a clearly defined structure.
- It was questioned if three regional transport authorities was sufficient. In the Autumn there will be another white paper on regional transport authorities focussing on operational functions to deliver local transport. There is confusion on the functions and powers for the regional transport authorities. As well as buses, school buses, community transport etc. have to be taken into account; also how many functions stay with the local authority.

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Question 3. Is there another organisational structure for JTAs to consider?

- SE Wales is the most populated area and we should question our level of influence on the running of operations, monies and duties, as the largest rural authority in the region.

Question 4. Comments on the proposal that Welsh Ministers should be represented on JTA?

- Comments were invited on the possible options.

Question 5: Comments on Welsh Ministers being able to issue guidance and directions, and to intervene where a JTA is failing to exercise its functions effectively?

- Guidance, directions and interventions within a framework would be welcomed.

Question 6. Is the proposed division of national and regional functions appropriate?

- This depends on the division of functions between strategic and operational, national and regional.

Question 7: Should any other transport functions be transferred to JTAs?

- Regional transport strategies, air quality, freight, air, health transport, school transport, active travel and community transport.

Question 8: Is legislation required to secure benefits of enhanced partnership working?

- There are current powers to establish voluntary bus partnerships or quality bus partnerships. Few authorities have implemented these. Partnerships are needed with operators and authorities have to tackle congestion and unfit infrastructure.

Question 9: Do you agree to the proposals for EQPs, in particular the process for their development?

- Agree with principle but remains to be seen if they will work.

Question 10: Is the proposed scheme a more workable option for franchising local bus services?

- Franchising has huge costs, especially to include rural areas.

Question 11: Should the assessment be subject to independent audit?

- Agreed.

Question 12: Other comments on franchising?

- Franchising might work in some areas if the market is failing in any area.

Question 13: Comments about permits where there is franchising?

- This would depend on circumstances.

Question 14: Impact on SME?

- Important not to disenfranchise small operators. Small and medium size operators still need opportunities to engage in the market.

Question 15: Transitional arrangements?

- If franchising is decided, potentially some operators might leave the market.

Question 16: Should the local authority be able to run bus services directly?

- Depends on the circumstances, operators and resources available.

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Question 17: Should local authorities be able to set up arms' length companies to operate local bus services?

- Some are not competing with commercial operators because of resources, terms and conditions.

Question 18: Concessionary fares, proposal to align entitlement with a woman's pensionable age?

- Moving from 60 to 66 free bus pass. Is this affordable? This may be a way of finding funding to make changes.

Question 19: Is incremental change most appropriate?

- Proposal possibly to move year on year.

Question 20: Do you agree with the proposal to require the release of open data on routes, timetables, fares and tickets?

- If the data is usable, it can be collated easily. There has been difficulty obtaining data from operators in the past.

Question 21:

- Should local authorities be enabled to obtain information on services to be cancelled or varied, and where appropriate disclose the information as part of the tendering process?
- Yes, this would be needed if we take over commercial services.

Members of the Group were asked to send any comments about taxi services to the Licensing Department.

Following consideration of the above questions, comments were raised as below:

- A Group Member observed, with concern, that a noticeable omission from the paper was that there was no involvement from passengers or customers.
- Considering the Minister's vision particularly regarding integrated transport, it was noted that there was no reference to active travel.
- It was commented that there was no mention of cross border services.

4. <https://beta.gov.wales/improving-public-transport>

5. Local Development Plan: Mark Hand, Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping

The Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping attended to provide an update on the Local Development Plan (LDP); the statutory plan for the future development of land use in the County to last until 2033. The items regarding the LDP and the Local Transport Plan (LTP) were considered together.

The three and a half year timeline that started in May 2018 was shared. We are currently at the point looking at Issues, Objectives and Vision moving to Growth levels and options in May 2019, and adoption in December 2021.

Suggestions for candidate sites have been sought and a list published. The sites could potentially provide a maximum of 50,000 homes. However, it was noted that no candidate sites have been assessed to date.

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Key issues have been picked out from the public wellbeing plan and address the main challenges of demography, economic base, housing prices and affordability, infrastructure, job availability and attractiveness of the County to incoming businesses and investment etc.

The LDP can look to tackle some of these issues and others such as cost of commuting, environmental impact and also reflecting national planning policy to reduce the need for travel or providing opportunities for sustainable travel.

It was noted that the Local Transport Plan will run in parallel with the LDP. Input on infrastructure and development opportunities was welcomed from the Group. Questions were invited:

- Regarding addressing healthy lifestyles, a Group Member referred to the bid for a new walkway station at Magor, acknowledged the support so far from the authority and queried if any more can be done. It was responded that the work so far can continue to help inform infrastructure. It was suggested that the walkway station could be put forward as a candidate site in November with a caveat that inclusion may be removed according to the views of the inspectorate. It was agreed that the proposed station is intended to be a community hub so could be tied into the LDP accordingly.
- The Chair informed the group of the campaign to reduce traffic from the route between Lydney and Chepstow, and to seek a direct rail route from Lydney/Chepstow to Bristol and Wales. It was agreed that there are also insufficient trains and that there is impatience for improvements. The Transport Planning & Policy Officer confirmed that Lydney is always included in discussions and assured that the authorities are working together. There were no positive updates in relation to the new franchise, there is commitment for an hourly service and not for an accessible turn up and go service, same for Bristol services. It was confirmed that discussions continue. It was agreed that it may be worth an approach to the Secretary of State, David Davies MP and Mark Harper MP from the Gateway for Wales aspect.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Place Shaping advised that there is a duty to work alongside neighbouring authorities and confirmed that we are working with all.

It was added that it is important to consider how our work links into Metro plans especially building transport to serve new development.

6. Local Transport Plan

Discussed as per previous item.

7. Chepstow Transport Study: Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations

The Head of Operations provided an update on the Chepstow Transport Study. The study considers issues surrounding transport congestion, impact of road travellers to and from Forest of Dean and Chepstow.

Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire County Councils have jointly funded Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance at Stage 1 (WeITAG) which has been prepared by Capita to consider all transport opportunities with input also from Forest of Dean and other partners. Three major recommendations were put forward.

1. Chepstow By-Pass via Beachley

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2. Improvements to public transport (particularly rail).
3. Another junction leading to the A48 to reduce traffic up Pwllmeyric Hill.

The options were presented to members of the three authorities. The report was supported and it is proposed that the next step is to move to WelTAG Stage 2. The challenge is to find funding for Stage 2 (estimated at £950,000 - £1.3m).

Welsh Government has been approached by Monmouthshire CC, and funding alternatives in England are also being sought. No commitment has been given at this stage but interest has been expressed. Members that have been consulted have given their full support.

It was agreed to send the Presentation from WelTAG Stage 1 to Group members by e mail.

Group Members were pleased to hear of progress. It was, however, questioned why, in the interim, housing development is allowed when roads are inadequate.

8. Programme/ Project/ Operational Updates: a) LTF b) Magor Station c) Abergavenny Bus Stops d) Bus L3 Llanelly Hill e) A465 Bus Stops f) Timetables g) Llanfoist Bridge

The Transport Planning & Policy Officer circulated a summary of the Local Transport Fund.

- **Llanfoist Bridge:** It was queried if the Llanfoist Bridge money rolls over year on year. It was confirmed that there has to be a new bid every financial year. The project can only be built in the summer because of lower riverflow. It is hoped, if successful, to complete some preparatory construction in 2019/20 with an aim to deliver in 2020. The flooding issue has to be resolved with Natural Resources Wales first. It was noted that the appeal timescale is unknown at present. Welsh Government is being kept updated. The money from this year has been returned.
- **Abergavenny and Chepstow Station Bridges:** The Chair asked about progress with the bridge over the railway line at both Chepstow and Abergavenny rail stations. Nothing has been heard about funding and a decision is expected in the Spring. Both stations are high enough on the Welsh Government list that funding could be expected.
- **Abergavenny Bus Stops:** An update on progress regarding siting a bus stop at Tesco on A40 was requested as this will have a big impact on businesses. The Group Engineer, Highways and Flood Management explained that the safety audit came back and a better design is needed. The designer has responded and some issues can be resolved. The Group looked forward to a positive outcome. It was raised that buses continue to stop at Robert Price Builders and suggested that bus operators need to be reminded to desist.

9. Forward Work Programme

The new Forward Work Programme was introduced as a means of encouraging a more strategic approach. Feedback was provided as follows:

- It was suggested that information in the plan was sparse and that reprioritisation was required especially in respect of Magor Station.
- Good forum – could be improved.
- Not strategic enough
- There are different priorities in different areas
- Provide the Group's views on presentations/ideas and make responses.
- Reports should be provided on progress on important matters in between meetings; group members should be given actions to follow up

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- Review the terms of reference
- Feedback from this Group is provided by one Member to the North Monmouthshire Area Committee. Opportunity to cascade information to community groups. Feedback is also provided on Grassroutes
- Regarding the White Paper, it was agreed to circulate it to all members –feedback would be appreciated.
- Opportunities to attend workshops should be extended to Group members.
- The range of expertise and experience in the Group is exemplary

It was agreed that the Head of Operations and the Chair will discuss means of increasing interactivity.

A report on the five GovTech pilots was requested for the next meeting.

10. To confirm the notes of the last meeting held on 19th September 2018

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

11. To confirm the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 10th April 2019 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.33 pm