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**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held  
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 19th July, 2017 at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

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

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr. D. Cole  
Mr. P. Inskip  
Councillor P. Molyneux  
County Councillor V. Smith

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Roger Hoggins	Head Of Operations
Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning And Policy Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer

**APOLOGIES:**

Mr. D. Flint, Mr. T. Hand and Cllr. G. Nelmes

**1. Election of Chair**

County Councillor D. Dovey was elected as Chairman.

**2. Appointment of Vice Chair**

Mr. P. Turner was appointed as Vice Chair.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**4. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting on 11th January 2017**

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

**5. South East Wales Metro**

Clive Campbell, Cardiff City Region City Deal (CCRCD) Liaison to Transport for Wales and Andy Falley, Head of Infrastructure Delivery Division at Welsh Government, was welcomed to the meeting to deliver presentations on the CCRCD, the Wales and Borders Rail Service and South Wales Metro.

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Presentations covered the City Deal, the proposed Regional Governance arrangements, the role of the CCR Cabinet, Connecting the Capital Region, the integration of bus and rail services, and priorities. Secondly, a general overview was provided covering the background and progress of the Wales and Borders rail franchise, Metro procurement and timescales, and also the plans to maximise benefits and opportunities.

A representative of Severn Tunnel Action Group raised a cross border issue that for every person boarding at Severn Tunnel Junction at peak times for Newport and Cardiff, five are travelling to Bristol. It was queried how requirements (e.g. park and ride) will be addressed as whilst it's a key issue for this area, it is not a factor in improving the economic development of Cardiff and surrounding region. Mr. Falley offered to find out more but acknowledged that cross border links are a key factor of the franchise and have been discussed in detail. It was confirmed that Wales and Borders franchise doesn't extend to Bristol and that there is reliance on private operators. It is the Welsh Government's aim to try to establish as many cross border links as possible.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the consultation process has been conducted and comments received from the whole of Wales have been fed into the specification. Some of the aspects are aspirational to see what the developers can deliver on Welsh Government's behalf. Questioning the opportunity for flexibility at this stage, it was explained that some additional points can still be included for some aspects but there are also some constraints through working with the Department for Transport (DfT) e.g. on cross border links; but this is a stronger position than in the past in terms of influence.

Considering the Metro timeline, it was queried how it is possible have the awards for capital works ahead of the design and discovery stage and responded that there is an overlap in the process. It was explained that the operation delivery partner will be appointed and will identify its requirements, will start the design process then some of the processes can start with the aim to deliver aspects in parallel rather than sequentially.

It was not possible to answer if Chepstow would be a Metro station but that information would be sought. It was considered important for Chepstow to be a Metro station ensuring inward/outward links to Cheltenham and Lydney to integrate cross border travel. A Chepstow By Pass would contribute to a sustainable system of transport.

It was questioned who is responsible for the aspirational ideas of the academies at and near Metro stations, e.g. software and cyber academies. It was explained that no one specific person has responsibility but that different partners are working with the business sector to see what theoretical requirements are. It was confirmed that this is not the last opportunity to express views.

A Group Member noted the exciting proposals but felt there was a disconnect between the vision and practicalities in a rural county stating that Abergavenny and Monmouth would not be part of the Metro, and questioned the authority's position in the list of priorities for buses. It was explained that there will be a Bus Director appointed to lead bus strategy for the future and that there was a commitment to make buses work better, not just rail, considering public transport for the whole Metro area. There is considerable political will to deliver on The Metro as a medium to long term project.

It was commented that early next year when the grant agreement is awarded, it will be clearer what the successful bidder's solution will be, and how it differs from the existing franchise and the opportunities for change.

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It was queried what channels of communication exist between CCRTA and the authority, and confirmed that the Cabinet Member for County Operations, and Officers, strongly represent the County's interests, and are developing alliances with Bridgend and Newport because of similar issues. The Cabinet Member agreed to report back further after the next meeting in September.

The representative of Forest of Dean and Gloucestershire Councils was concerned that the STJ was not linked to Bristol in the plans and questioned how the border issues are being approached, what partnerships are being utilised and the long term plans to integrate transport both into and out of the region. It was confirmed that Welsh Government negotiate with the DfT regarding rail with the aim of maximising cross border links. Detailed discussions with DfT have taken place to strengthen all links in and out of Wales. Other partners are Highways England, Severn Crossings, Midland Connect (regarding links to road network in the West Midlands) and the same for roads in North Wales.

Some uncertainties were expressed about the proposals for Magor station at Grip Stage 3 which was not included in the recently announced list. Consequently, the Minister visited and assured it will be taken forward to the next stage at the right time. It was agreed to ensure that this point is taken back and taken into consideration.

Considering average fares, it was stated that the annual season ticket for Chepstow passengers to Cardiff is more than double that of any other fares for similar distance towns. Forecast of growth is approximately 4% but Chepstow is 8% and as such has the highest growth, the highest fare, and is therefore delivering the most in economic terms. In terms of improved services over the length of the franchise, every Valley line has had increased numbers of trains per day, yet Chepstow has two less Wales and Borders services than at the start of the franchise. It was therefore devastating that, under the new franchise, the same service level was to be retained. It was agreed that this was a well-made point and would be taken back.

A question was asked about the monitoring and review of the new franchise to ensure dynamic fluidity so that the circumstances above do not continue, and reassurance was sought accordingly. It was responded that there is a fundamental difference between the old and new franchise mainly more flexibility, and contractual mechanisms to react to situations that arise as the franchise progresses. The contractor will be incentivised to grow patronage to allow Welsh Government to respond to future opportunities with investment. The contract period is 15 years from 2018.

It was mentioned that the Chepstow to Cheltenham service has been earmarked for extra incentives, and queried if there would also be incentives for the Chepstow to Bristol service which has five times the amount of passengers to help grow the local economy and take advantage of the economic growth in the Bristol area. If there is no such plan, the reasons why were requested. It was explained that incentives are for the whole of the network and the bidders have been provided with current passenger figures and growth over the franchise period.

It was commented that Cheltenham is not part of the Wales and Borders franchise and asked if it was to be an extension. It was added that a significant consideration is that pay in the financial sector is better in Bristol than Cardiff.

It was stated that, possibly due to competition issues, bus integration is not possible until bus times are adjusted to allow connections at Severn Tunnel, adding that buses connect to Bristol services. Without changing primary legislation there can't be an integrated bus service. It was accepted that there is a huge challenge ahead to be addressed by the Bus Director to achieve a reshaped network for passenger and region needs. WG is seeking increased powers to effect the necessary changes.

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In response to a question, it was speculated that the new branding would be released as soon as practically possible.

Regarding funding and Brexit, it was answered that a key element of the core Valleys Line upgrade would be covered by ERDF structural funds and Welsh Government is working closely with its European Funding Office and the Commission in Brussels on a major project application which is proceeding with no issues anticipated. Assurance has been provided that Central Government will underwrite the project as it has already been approved, should there be any issues regarding Brexit.

Clive Campbell and Andy Falley were thanked for their time and contribution to the meeting.

#### **6. Monmouthshire rail matters**

This item was included to consider Monmouthshire's input into the City Deal noting that all the projects from the local transport plan have been added into an interim regional transport plan and list of initial priorities. The types of projects that have been included are STJ park and ride extension, and development of park and ride at Abergavenny and Chepstow stations. Whilst noting that land issues could be complicated, hopefully there will be some progress, The Group were informed that the Transport Planning and Policy Officer was seconded to the Cardiff City Region Transport Authority (CCRTA) for three days per week.

In terms of the Wales and Borders franchise, the Council's consultation response included our requirements for station enhancements and service frequency priorities which have been passed onto Transport for Wales and the bidders; meetings have been held and are scheduled to be held direct with three bidders.

It was explained that Transport for Wales has been guarded about specific projects and it has been a key priority to try to influence the franchise arrangements to make our projects look good particularly in terms of the Metro and its integration in Monmouthshire. The example of the Turn Up and Go service was provided that should be implemented in Chepstow and Abergavenny as well. Realistically, a half hourly service would be welcomed and we have asked Welsh Government to include a minimum service specification in the franchise not just for the core Valley lines but for other routes. Where the existing core minimum had good services this was acceptable but not for poor service routes e.g. Abergavenny has reasonable service up to two trains per hour with the opportunity for more trains to increase North/South services but Chepstow and Caldicot is a different case; much poorer services.

Transport for Wales were pressured to provide incentives for routes with poor service and the earlier presentation mentioned the new information that the Chepstow line will be included as part of this. It was explained that franchise bids will be scored 70% on quality and 30% on price so to get the aspects we want delivered, they must be items that would score strongly. The mention of a special focus on Cheltenham was of interest as bidders will look at provision of additional services to improve quality. It will be key point for the Magor station proposal to benefit from the incentives that there is clear and demonstrable community engagement about what can be developed around it.

A big issue is integrated ticketing and Monmouthshire is in a good position because it controls most of its bus services and can communicate to the bidders that we can work with them to deliver integrated ticketing, especially on the non-commercial routes.

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Arrangements for Bus integration were discussed and it was agreed that the appointment of a Bus Director and team will be very important as currently each authority has its own individual transport team. Previous work on a regional bus strategy will be useful.

It was commented that originally it was stated that the Metro would include services to and from Wales but there has been no word since regarding Bristol services which are run by the GWR franchise. Electrification of the line from STJ to Bristol is an issue to raise when the GWR franchise is up for renewal in 2019.

It was noted that in September trains from Chepstow to Bristol will be running without stopping for a fortnight due to works at Bristol Parkway and Cross Country trains will go from Birmingham to Gloucester and on to Chepstow and then reverse to Bristol. This could improve our case for trains doing this on a normal basis.

It was agreed to circulate papers from meetings of the CCRTA.

Some questions were submitted from David Flint regarding STJ, firstly about the car parking areas beyond the road bridge which will open soon (the Rogiet Community car park), and also questioning what is happening at the area that Network Rail were asked to leave as unplanted to use as a new car park. Secondly, is the development at Garth Allan Drive going ahead, if so what provision will there be for an ash path, car parking and turning at the station.

It was responded that when the bridge opens, it will operate as before i.e. the countryside car park. An initial priority for City Deal is to get funding to develop STJ and implement a proper car park on land previously used as the compound for the bridge. Some preliminary development work could start in the Autumn if a funding bid is successful.

There was no information on progress with the planning application for the Garth Allan Drive development. The path can be submitted to the GWR improvement fund and also under City Deal (active travel to stations) plus under road safety priorities on Station Road to make two deliverable priorities. It was pointed out that two previous developers were refused planning permission as it was considered a green field site and one included tarmacking and lighting of the ash path. It was suggested that if there are discussions with developers, it would be worth asking if they would consider including that aspect in their plans. It was agreed to refer this matter to planning colleagues.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that when the road bridge opens, the footbridge to STJ Platform 1 will be removed, adding that the road bridge will include a pavement to provide a safe route.

A question was asked about proposed timing of a DDA bridge at Abergavenny Station as it has been impossible to find any definitive information about its development. It had been previously advised that a signalling issue had prevented implementation of a planning decision. It was responded that more information may be available when the franchise for the Metro is published as local services for Abergavenny will be looked at. It was known that signalling work has to be done before the DDA bridge can be addressed. It is still listed for DfT funding which runs until 2019. It was agreed to try and find out from Welsh Government when the signalling work will be done. It is thought that the new operators will want to increase services to Manchester and N. Wales and therefore signalling will be important.

The DDA bridge in Chepstow will be a matter of compliance as for all stations. Station improvement is part of the new franchise. A question was asked about the development at Mabey Bridge and discussions with Network Rail about a car park and access. It was agreed to make enquiries and report back at the next meeting.

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It was commented that it may be worth asking Network Rail about land at Chepstow station as it was felt that it won't give up land generally because it isn't known what land will be required for future engineering works.

It was suggested that a DDA bridge at Chepstow station had never been on the DfT list. The DDA footbridge at Abergavenny had outline planning permission rejected but has since been approved.

A further point was asked about refurbishment of Chepstow station noting that the roof has been replaced, and requested that the ticket office and operation of the toilets is also addressed. It was also added that the footbridge requires work. It was responded that these matters require ongoing conversation with the new operator.

#### **7. Local Transport Plan review/update/priorities**

An overview of the local transport plan was provided and questions were invited.

A question was raised about availability of bus information, and statutory requirements citing that some bus stops have old timetables and some stops don't have timetables; this is required to be included in the approved transport plan. Also, it was commented that the Monmouthshire CC website doesn't show routes.

It was responded that the Newport Transport website has routes, route maps and timetables. Work is in progress to try to link the website with these routes, and with Traveline. There is no capacity to develop this aspect in house, unfortunately. The link for Traveline would be made available through the Communications team. It was commented that some services are not Newport buses. It was stated that the routes concerned are run by First. Discussions took place on whether the legal responsibility for the content and provision of information was the responsibility of the Council or the operator and it was agreed that sections of the Transport Act (s.108-111 and s139-141) would be checked.

However, it was commented that this matter should be addressed from a regional point of view going forward.

A question was asked about integrated services noting the comment that people use buses more than rail. An example of a partial reduction in service was quoted (No. 65 from Monmouth to Chepstow) which has left the last bus leaving Monmouth at 16.55 which is inconvenient for after school activities or for people returning home from work. It was explained that if a service isn't used, it will be cut. Grassroutes is being used to accommodate resulting needs but it was commented that this service needs support and investment to develop. The opinion was expressed that Welsh Government funding distribution is not fit for purpose and there should be more funding for rural bus services.

The status of plans for a walking and cycling path between Rogiet and Undy was queried. It was explained that the route was rejected by Welsh Government. The M4 plan proposed half of the route which is considered insufficient. It was agreed that there must be a full path. The plans are still in existence and there may be possibilities with the development of the M4 or City Deal access to station programme. The situation will be monitored.

The status of the Chepstow By-Pass was queried especially in view of the plans to remove the Severn Bridge tolls. It was queried to what extent the Welsh Government commissioned modelling system transfers to across the border and if it could model the effect of increased

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homes in Sedbury and no bridge tolls. It was confirmed that there is discussion with Transport for Wales about what the model can and can't do with a technical meeting soon. It was added that there are ongoing conversations with Gloucester County Council colleagues regarding road and rail, and the uncertainties of the impact of the removal of tolls which will be a matter for Welsh and Central Government. It was also added that the air quality problem in the area is worsening. It was requested that attention is paid to what the external inputs are that could be used in the Welsh model.

A Member provided an update that Freedom of Information requests to the DfT, Welsh Government and Gloucester County Council and a briefing from Mon CC had concluded that there was no scheme. Land searches in Thornwell revealed that either side of Bluebell Drive was earmarked to be used for road widening.

#### **8. Great Western Railway Customer and Communities Improvement Fund 2018**

It was explained that there was a successful bid in 2015/16 for £20,000 for car parks extension at STJ. In 2016/17, five more bids were unsuccessful (Rogiet- Undy safe footpath, Cycle footpath in Caldicot, an additional shed at STJ (turned down due to no support from the operator), station enhancement of a disused building in Chepstow (as GWR serve the station there is an improved chance of success) and Southside STJ car park (it was suggested that if applied for again, there would be a better chance of success).

It was explained that the deadline is the end of August.

#### **9. To confirm the constitution of the group and its fitness for purpose**

It was explained that today was an opportunity to review the Terms of Reference which were to bring together informed individuals and Elected Members to consider the council's responsibilities and brief on transport matters.

It was commented that there is a good case to retain the Group but that there needs improved representation from across the county. Overall, the Group has been very useful to inform decisions and plans, and has proved its value as it has developed. It was suggested and agreed to add County Councillor S Woodhouse to represent the Abergavenny area.

The proposal to ask all area committees nominate representatives from all areas was agreed.

The Chair was praised for his passion and commitment and it was added that the Group influences important decisions and members of the public provide great detail, knowledge and expertise.

#### **10. Any Other Business**

- It was agreed to keep a watching brief on Network Rail amid comments that there is not much consultation with other operators on closures etc.
- It was noted that the new franchises for GWR and Cross Country will be renewed in 2019 and this is an opportunity to think about what will get written in to the franchise offer and get prepared. The Transport Planning and Policy Officer offered to prepare a draft for the next meeting and also to talk to neighbouring councils.
- It was noted that meetings are Public and the agenda would be switched to be available on the public website

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**11. Future Meetings**

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at 10.00am

**The meeting ended at 1.15 pm**