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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, 25th October, 2017 at 10.00
am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, S.B. Jones, S. Woodhouse, D. Cole,
D. Flint and P. Turner

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. D. Cole
Mr. D. Flint
Mr. P. Turner
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
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Mark Youngman	Development Manager Wales And Integrated Transport Manager, Great Western Railways

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor F. Taylor, Mr. P. Inskip, Mr. T. Hand and Cllr. G. Nelmes

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2017.

The notes of the last meeting were confirmed subject to the addition of Mr. P. Turner to the list of those present.

Matters Arising

- **Chepstow By-Pass:** Mr. A. Braund was welcomed to the meeting and provided a presentation on the campaign for a Chepstow By-Pass and relevant traffic relief in the surrounding area. He circulated a paper with sketches of proposed routes highlighting that the problems related to congestion in both Wales and England, plans to develop significant numbers of new dwellings in the Chepstow and Lydney area increasing demand for access to the M4 and the heavy pollution concerns around Hardwick Hill. It was explained that there is a need for one body to take the lead in defining a route and associated costs.

Sketch 1, proposes a route from Tidenham (Old Quarry) to Thornwell. Reference was made to the road layout in the Thornwell area which is perceived locally as a potential joining point for a By Pass. It was reported that Welsh Government has promised to look

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at congestion in the Chepstow area and a meeting is arranged on Thursday 26th October 2017 with a Welsh Government official at High Beech Roundabout to witness congestion at peak times.

Additionally, a plan to provide an interim on/off junction at Hayes Gate was suggested to divert traffic from the surrounding villages to relieve traffic flow on High Beech Roundabout in a relatively inexpensive way.

Further plans looked at the North side to divert Lydney traffic to avoid Chepstow benefitting the surrounding villages of Tutshill and Sedbury to avoid passing by Tesco.

The impact of significant housing development in Chepstow and surrounding areas was emphasised.

The Head of Operations responded that there had been a plan some years ago that included a route through Thornwell hence the wide access point and added that the issues raised by Mr. Braund and other members regarding congestion in the area are already lodged. He welcomed the maps provided that define traffic congestion in SE Monmouthshire and also SW Gloucestershire. It was agreed that a scheme/s would need to include a potential on/off junction on the M48 at Hayes Gate and improvements High Beech roundabout as part of an overall scheme to address traffic issues in the whole area.

It was reported that there have been Officer and Cabinet Member meetings with colleagues in Gloucestershire on the issues including the air pollution on Hardwick Hill. It was agreed that existing and proposed housing development will exacerbate traffic issues. It was confirmed that any petitions received have been reported to Members. There is also a current petition on Nick Ramsay AM's website, see <https://www.nickramsay.org.uk/news/chepstow-bypass> It was agreed that a joint strategy is needed between Monmouthshire County Council and Gloucestershire County Council and officers will raise this matter as a high priority. It was recommended that political support from MPs is sought.

It was agreed to speak to officers and Welsh Government officials to determine the best approach and to prepare a paper for consideration by this Group in due course. It was pointed out that it is unlikely that Monmouthshire or Gloucestershire County Councils will have the funds to provide such a costly scheme and therefore the financial support of the Welsh Government and the Department for Transport will be required.

It was added that the opportunity of high tech industry moving to SE Wales will increase the demand for a suitable infrastructure. It was responded that currently the LDP doesn't currently include the development of high tech industry in the area. Should it do so in the future linked with increased residential development, it will only add to concerns about congestion in the area.

The Chair asked if a critical plan can be prepared to consider how to initiate progress noting that joint England and Wales support will be required to prepare a feasibility study with estimates that are as accurate as possible. It was acknowledged that there will be significant costs linked to early design proposals and option appraisal in preparation for bidding.

A Member supported the plan for a Chepstow By-Pass but queried the proposal for an on/off junction at Hayes Gate as it wouldn't relieve traffic on the B4245 or provide a good

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link for Severn Tunnel Junction station and suggested a wider plan for an on/off junction between the Severn Bridge and Magor Services. It was cautioned that agreement on a junction could lead to the M48 being downgraded to A48(M) and so would be cheaper to maintain. It was suggested that if this occurred, the road would still be the responsibility of Welsh Government adding that a study would have to take account of that in view of the M4 Relief scheme and the downgrading of the existing M4 west from Magor. It was considered that the M48 may not be downgraded as it would be required as a contingency motorway is the Second Severn Crossing was closed. If this is the case a new on/off junction would be more expensive to construct.

3. GWR - 2018 timetable

Mr. M. Youngman, Development Manager Wales and Integrated Transport Manager (covering bus, cycling and rail integration) Great Western Railways (GWR) was welcomed to the meeting and kindly delivered a presentation to provide a service update.

It was noted that new trains are in service and the offer of a guided tour was extended to all Group Members if travelling.

Considering performance, it was explained that there had been some problems with the train fleet that have caused service pressures resulting in reduced services which, on occasion, have seen instances of people being left behind. Efforts are made to make the best use of available trains on a daily basis.

Contingency plans include e.g. acceptance of tickets by First Bus Bristol and the High Speed Train (HST) stopping at Severn Tunnel Junction (STJ) if the Cardiff/Portsmouth Harbour train is short formed). GWR Managers have been tasked to look at performance to improve services.

The recent introduction of Turbo trains has improved performance in and around Bristol. It was noted that signalling work and engineering work, and trespassing incidents have caused an impact. It was also explained that sometimes there is no advance notice of large sporting and music events which can be challenging.

Details of new trains were provided and also plans to alter the use of HSTs e.g. a shorter (four carriage) HST may be introduced between Cardiff and Swansea to increase capacity.

The Intercity Express Programme (IEP) was explained, noting that some formations will be longer compared to existing trains (up to ten carriages). Whilst they are too long for some platforms, it will be possible to select to only open certain doors. Features in standard class include ramps for wheelchairs etc., more capacity, more legroom, wi-fi, laptop fold down table, power points for each seat, trolley service and overall faster journey times. Reservations are compulsory for dedicated cycle space. GWR is working with local authorities to provide cycle parking at stations, and is also working with cycle hire companies.

An update was provided on Intercity Train current services and planned routes (e.g. Hereford, and between Cardiff and Newport) to be introduced within a year. A new timetable will be introduced in December 2018. It was confirmed that car-parking is an ongoing issue at stations in S. Wales despite passengers being encouraged to walk, take the bus or cycle to stations. It was noted that discussions are in progress with the autonomous vehicle sector to explore future possibilities to reduce use of own vehicles.

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An update was provided that Turbo trains started between Taunton and Bristol this week, and there are plans to start a Cardiff to Taunton service before the end of the year. These services have greater seating capacity than current provision

A Group member provided feedback that there were problems with the 17:25 service recently having insufficient carriages and passengers were left behind. There was a lack of information that those going to Cardiff/Newport could have gone to Bristol Parkway to catch another service – the 18:10. This service was identified as a possible train to stop at STJ.

It was responded that GWR provide information on alternatives but often passengers do not want to change trains. It was added that consideration is being given to making permanent the HST stopping once in the morning and once in the evening at STJ which could then be added to journey planners. It was acknowledged that the 17.25 service causes challenges and is being monitored.

Feedback was provided regarding STJ that the closure of the foot and road bridge, whilst being rebuilt, added to the availability of fewer carriages, has caused a downturn in usage at peak times. There has also been a large increase in off peak travel including Sundays. The challenge of the potential impact of the removal of Severn Bridge tolls was considered (e.g. encouraging increased use of cars), lack of car parking and also the effect of future engineering work puts people off travelling due to longer journey times and the use of buses.

It was questioned if GWR supported the development of Didcot station carpark and confirmed that GWR manages it. It was financed from an enterprise partnership, growth fund and other sources. It was hoped that the new franchise for the Wales and Borders contract will include development of car parking.

The Chair questioned if it was correct that the trains are only made available to routers in the morning on a 24 hour basis. It was confirmed that a log is issued at 5am and 5pm with information on what trains are available due to maintenance etc. It is then planned e.g. which services will have to run with fewer carriages. It was explained that new trains are being built to more reliable standard. There is an e mail alert system for passengers to provide advice on short form trains or cancellation plus Twitter and platform announcements but advice is not always heeded - suggestions were welcomed.

It was confirmed that Turbo trains are not yet converted and this is still under discussion but it was speculated that they will be used on the Cardiff - Portsmouth service.

It was questioned if operators consider availability of car parking when planning where trains stop. It was commented that passengers need to be able to drive to it a station and to park.

Mark Youngman was thanked for his contribution to the meeting.

4. Outline Regional Transport Plan Consultation

It was reported that, as part of the City Deal and the City Regional Transport Authority, a regional transport strategy has been developed. It was stressed that this doesn't replace local plans but brings them together as a regional framework to work with Welsh Government. The consultation document was circulated. Formal consultation will commence in the next fortnight. It was agreed that the Cabinet Member should respond on behalf of the Group.

A Group Member asked if the plan will prioritise projects noting that Monmouthshire would be a minor contributor in pipeline projects with most emphasis being on the Valley lines. It was

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commented that it was difficult to know how to best to respond to the regional plan consultation other than to ask for priority for Monmouthshire's objectives.

It was responded that the consultation will seek thoughts about the objectives, initial strategic priorities and actions. There will be no immediate prioritisation of pipeline projects which will be considered over the medium term. The list will be revisited in 12 months time. It then depends on City Deal funding availability and the plans of the successful franchise bidder. An update will be provided in a year.

The Cabinet Member emphasised that he makes strong representations at meetings and has formed an effective alliance with the Chair of the Regional Transport Authority who represents the interests of Bridgend which is also on the outskirts of the region.

5. Rail Franchising / Metro update

This item was covered in item 4.

6. Wales and Borders Franchise

It was explained that some papers were circulated prior to the meeting and noted that Transport for Wales has made available the final tender for the Wales and Border franchise. A report was published containing plans for members to see rail services for the future but it is not possible to have the tender specifications.

7. Next Great Western Railway Franchise

It was reported that the franchise for GWR (which serves the south Monmouthshire area) is due to be renewed in 2019. Officers have met the DfT Franchise Team with other relevant council representatives.

8. Rail Station Updates

Updates were provided for individual stations in items 10-13.

9. Next CrossCountry Franchise

It was noted that the franchise for Cross Country trains is due for renewal in 2019. Consultation is expected and the intention is to write to the Cross Country consultation team next spring.

It was agreed to draft a letter on behalf of group members to respond to the consultation.

10. Abergavenny

A Member raised the issue of the public footbridge at Abergavenny Station, reporting that this is a long standing complaint that is being actively campaigned about in the town, including a petition, the support of the Town Council and Mayor. It was explained that out of office hours, it is not possible to cross the line causing difficulties for disabled people and other persons (those passengers with prams, heavy luggage etc.) who have to struggle over the footbridge. The Member sought the support of the Group to improve the situation.

It was responded that Network Rail and Welsh Government have been notified of the concerns. It was suggested that the Council could take action via the Cabinet Member contacting Network Rail. It was acknowledged that there are signalling issues but no update on progress, also no

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progress on DfT Access for All. The matter has been raised with three of the four bidders for the new franchise and will be raised again when the winning bidder is known.

A Group Member stated that if the need for signalling changes is preventing the construction of a new bridge, consideration should be given to temporary rearrangement of signalling. It may then be possible to bid for DfT Access for All funding.

It was explained that there are a number of issues at Abergavenny station including parking. The new franchisees may propose additional services and suggested that the matter should be raised as a scheme with Welsh Government. It was added that a scheme may be looked upon more favourably if there was match funding from the new rail operator, Welsh Government or Transport for Wales. It was agreed to raise the issue with the regional transport authority and to await further information when the franchise winner is known in the New Year.

The support of the group was appreciated, and the Cabinet Member also confirmed his support of a new footbridge and the local campaign.

It was noted that there had been some recent work on the footbridge at Abergavenny to repair an unsafe part when it could have been reconstructed instead. A temporary bridge will be removed.

11. Chepstow

The Chair explained that there were similar problems to Abergavenny at Chepstow Station with the added issue that the footbridge is a listed structure. It was agreed that this footbridge would be included in the correspondence as above.

12. Severn Tunnel Junction

It was confirmed that the new road bridge is in place at Severn Tunnel Junction (STJ). A report will be written to create more temporary parking on the countryside side of the tracks on the site of the old works compound used for the bridge. The scheme will be temporary only to take advantage of available space to relieve pressure on the Countryside Park where visitors are unable to park and to reduce on- street parking in Rogiet. It was emphasised that this would be a temporary measure only not a permanent Park and Ride arrangement. It was added that a small grant of £15,000K has been received to carry out an early feasibility study on a possible Park and Ride facility which will help to improve usage of STJ.

A Group Member provided some photos of the site at STJ taken from the footbridge and was unaware of the proposal for a temporary Park and Ride facility. It was believed that the land, owned by the council, could park 200 cars. It was estimated that permanent development could cost £2m.

There is another temporary car park on the south side which has a capacity for 170 vehicles but extension of the footbridge is the issue. It was clarified that a Park and Ride needs a proper footbridge for direct access to platforms. The temporary scheme is an interim plan whilst looking for a permanent modern comprehensive scheme with a crossing.

It was explained that initial work is in progress to assess levels of contamination on the land, if unsatisfactory, this could discontinue the proposed temporary scheme.

13. Proposed Magor Station

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A Group Member provided an update that, since the last meeting, a bid had been submitted to the UK New Station 2016 Fund. The bid was unsuccessful but the DfT expressed a wish to provide feedback and this occurred on 12th October 2017. It had been explained that the bid was insufficiently complete to enable a business case review to be independently fully analysed. DfT officials were, however, positive about developments and suggested that the Magor Station bid had merit and traction and could be fit for purpose on completion of a GRIP 3 study (noting that the DfT Commercial Director had been impressed with the strength of the bid). The advice was to fully complete GRIP 3 and resubmit the bid. Whilst the funding will not be available until 2019, encouragement was given to submit the bid when ready. DfT officials recommended a formal letter to Network Rail from Welsh Government to confirm that it, Monmouthshire County Council and MAGOR will work together to produce GRIP 3 deliverables. It was also suggested that the GRIP 3 study could be broken down into several component parts to be completed as funds become available.

Additionally, it was pointed out that the view of Transport for Wales is critical. Network Rail have offered to facilitate dialogue. It was added that there will be opportunities with the new franchise operators and a meeting should be arranged as soon as the successful bidder is known. It was advised that the term "community owned" should be exchanged for "community adopted" for future bids. It was recommended that a meeting is held with freight operators to mitigate their issues.

It was agreed that the reported progress was very encouraging, and all involved were congratulated.

It was agreed that a letter should be written to the Minister, endorsed by elected members, to recognise his support to date and encourage his backing to half fund the costs with a view to completion of GRIP 3.

14. Feedback from Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority Shadow Board Meeting

In response to a request for feedback, some draft notes were circulated to the Group prior to the meeting for information. The Group were reminded that the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority is a shadow authority and will remain so until the business plan is confirmed. It is still under review.

It was commented that there has not been much information provided recently and responded that there are issues with the business plan, noting that it will have to be signed off by each participating authority. Currently, experience indicates that one authority is dominating but the plan has to be acceptable to all ten authorities.

It was confirmed that Monmouthshire has made appropriate input on transport and an outcome is awaited.

15. Future Walking and Cycling Key Routes - Active Travel integrated Network Maps Consultation

It was reported that this work has been delayed and that the Council will have to complete a consultation on future walking and cycling key routes formally known as Active Travel Integrated Network Maps Consultation. This should be available within the next few weeks.

A Group Member queried if the work will include the proposed pedestrian bridge at Llanfoist.. The draft plan for Abergavenny will likely identify a gap between Abergavenny and Llanfoist for

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which we have a scheme prepared. The current status is that all the supporting documents are being worked on for a planning application. There has been some delay due to a change in the location leading to design changes which has required more work. An update can be provided via the Head of Operations.

It was noted that the consultants (WSP) are seeking a solution to address flooding implications because of increased flooding levels that are more than the permitted level.

It was questioned, with regard to cycling, what access there will be to the bridge. It was explained that the maps will show the existing routes to the new bridge location and will have to be scored on quality. It is likely that a better route will be required, and funding will be needed accordingly.

The Chair questioned if this is a normal timescale for such works and confirmed that it is.

16. Bus Services

The Head of the Passenger Transport Unit reported that there a consultation currently open (closes 12th January 2018) on the Welsh Concessionary Fares Scheme <https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/mandatory-concessionary-fares-scheme-wales> and everyone was encouraged to respond to it as it contains relevant questions regarding future delivery. There are no indications that there is a move away from free travel but there are questions about whether availability should be at all times or off peak and if there should be a charge for bus passes. There are a number of questions for local government. It was explained that Monmouthshire pays the largest contribution into the scheme at 30% with examples given of Newport City Council (27%) and Cardiff (6%). Consequently, the Council will be writing a letter to the Minister for a more equitable approach or a reduction.

It was added that the Youth Concessionary Fare Scheme also under consultation closing on the 4th January 2018. <https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/discounted-bus-travel-younger-people-wales>

It was explained that there is also Transport Select Committee papers in parliament regarding community transport and how it's run currently due to a number of complaints from bus operators about the commercial nature of the business (mostly in England). A consultation exercise is expected. The Council will be responding as a community transport operator.

It was reported that the Stagecoach had withdrawn the 45 Service in Abergavenny as it was no longer commercially viable and also handed back the 47 Service from February 2018. Another operator took over the 45 Service (now A2) this week. The 47 Service is under review to potentially link with other services.

It was explained that Sunday Services will be re-tendered next year and there will be a consultation on their continuation.

The Council is in discussions with Welsh Government regarding regional bus funding noting no account is taken of rurality; the Bus Service Support Grant (BSSG) is distributed on a percentage basis only. A number of rural counties are writing a paper to request more funding for rural bus services. Urban councils don't require so much funding as their services are mainly commercial. Monmouthshire only has two commercial services (X3 and X4).

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As there are fewer/no passengers on the later runs, the timetable of the 65 Service (Chepstow to Monmouth via Devauden and Trellech) is under review to make the route more demand responsive, retain sustainability and to improve infrastructures in the area.

Regarding publicity and information, there are no resources available and some of the timetable cases (especially in the Severnside Area) are broken so information is often out of date and cannot be updated. It was explained that a funding bid will be made to improve infrastructures in the Severnside area to enable provision of updated information. There is not a wealth of operators to work with to secure bus services and it is a struggle to keep services running within the available funding.

Transport for Wales have an integrated alliance board working on improving bus corridors and patronage. It was reported that the council is also working with Welsh Government on a Traws Cymru route from Brecon to Chepstow (Brecon to Monmouth / Monmouth to Chepstow via the Wye Valley) for next year. Once this service is in place, it will enhance any bid to upgrade Abergavenny Station by enabling a potential upgrade of bus shelters and other work to establish a connection into the railway station.

A Group Member thanked the Head of the Passenger Transport Unit for his work to retain the 45 service. She also supported work to improve timetable information.

17. Any Other Business

- **Event:** Abellio is holding a stakeholder event on 8th Nov 2017 at the Newport Riverfront.
- **Severn Tunnel Junction Access Road:** Referring to the photos of the new speed bumps, it was reported that there had been social media activity complaining about them. The view was expressed that they are beneficial as they address speeding vehicles. Station users will also embed use of the pedestrian corridor in due course as the route becomes established.

It was responded that Network Rail and the Station's Manager will be present next Monday to review the speed bumps/walkway and also agreed that the speed bumps have been an effective addition.

- **Gloucestershire County Council:** A report on the future of transport in Gloucestershire was highlighted as an avenue to feed into in respect of the congestion issues in Chepstow.
- **Removal of Severn Tolls:** Concern was raised about the predicted strong impact on local roads of the removal of Severn Bridge Tolls. It was agreed that there is a surge of house movement due to the variance in house prices. The matter was discussed earlier in the meeting.
- **Electrification Consultation:** The Group were advised of a UK Government electrification consultation.

18. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 7th February 2017 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm

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