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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, 10th February, 2021 at 10.00
am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson and S. Woodhouse

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

D. Flint	Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG)
T. Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail (MAGOR)
P. Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail (MAGOR)
R. Corcoran	Friends of the 65 Bus
B Mahony	Friends of the 65 Bus
R Lemon	Transition Chepstow
J. Callard	Abergavenny Cycling Group
L. Mertens	Transport for Wales, Community Engagement
T. Melville	Transition Chepstow

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Service - Strategic Projects (Fixed Term)
Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Mark Hand	Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Deb Hill-Howells	Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services
Gareth Emery	Passenger Transport Operations and Fleet Manager
Naomi Thomas	Passenger Transport Contract and Compliance manager
Paul Sullivan	Youth, Sport and Active Travel Manager
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)

1. County Councillor D. Dovey

Led by the Chair, the Strategic Group held a minute's silence in memory of County Councillor D. Dovey, recent past Chair of the Group. Describing him as a true gentleman, members paid their respects to Councillor Dovey reflecting upon their memories of him, his achievements, such as his support and encouragement for the Magor Walkway Station, and his dedication to the

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Group. The Chair, on behalf of the Group, wished to record sincere condolences to Councillor Dovey's wife, Steph, son Spencer, his family and friends.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Discussion on the feedback from the recently circulated questionnaire

The Chair thanked Head of Service (Strategic Projects) and Communications Officer for compiling and circulating the questionnaire also everyone who had completed it.

The role of the Group originally was to offer support for the Cabinet Member by bringing in expertise from outside the authority from individuals with specialist interest in developing transport within the county. The Group is not a scrutiny committee but is invaluable in providing comment on and challenge to regional and national policies and strategies. The Group has benefitted from presentations from many outside agencies. These assist in informing the Council's position to develop strategy, priorities, opportunities and initiatives.

Feedback was reported as follows based on 13 responses:

- The majority agreed that the frequency of meetings was suitable with one or two responding that it was too often;
- Length of meetings were thought to be right, one response was that meetings were too long; and
- Length of the agenda was thought to be suitable with two responses that it was too long.

Other feedback was:

- The majority thought the group should continue as it is with one response that it should be more strategic and less operational, with a suggestion of sub committees (for e.g. bus and rail) reporting back to the main Group with a view to managing the agenda better;
- A comment was received that there was too much emphasis on public travel and not enough focus on active travel and reducing car use;
- A better understanding of how funding is allocated by the council was requested; and
- A suggestion of themed meetings.

Exploring what encourages members to attend and what it offers, the following feedback included:

- Concern about public transport;
- A suggestion to return to the original North/ South of the County format;
- Questioned if the Group could be a sub- committee of the Strong Communities Select Committee;
- Raises profile of public transport and challenges public transport providers;
- Offers opportunities to raise cross border public transport issues;
- Helps to improve public transport;
- Presentations from external organisations is beneficial;
- Networking with Councillors and officers to share current issues;
- Rural bus transport – opportunity for interested parties to be heard in a strategic group;
- Select Committees would not have the time to concentrate on integrated transport provision;

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- Important committee – area committees representatives could attend for wider issues of bus services, trains, accessibility to rail stations, parking etc.;
- Can raise issues otherwise overlooked; and
- Should have greater objectivity in purpose.

A synopsis of the feedback will be circulated to the group. The terms of reference will be redrafted to reflect the feedback. The draft terms of reference will be discussed at the next meeting.

It was confirmed that Active Travel has been added to the portfolio for the Group. The Chair reminded the Group that any bid for funding must have an Active Travel element.

The Youth, Sport and Active Travel Manager explained the strategic focus for a whole authority approach on Active Travel. Ambitious bids, totalling £4.2m have been submitted this year for projects in Caldicot, Abergavenny and Monmouth. Regular updates on current work and future plans will be provided and any input from group members is welcomed.

A Group Member stated that, at a recent meeting, in giving their full support to Magor Walkway Station, the Minister and Deputy Minister emphasised the importance of considering the whole journey from home to the station. Consequently, a strategic plan integrating active travel for whole journeys is urgently needed. The Active Travel Manager and Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flooding will liaise with Magor Action Group On Rail (MAGOR) to consider active travel, parking and replacement Local Development Plan (LDP).

A Group Member raised the importance of a bus service connecting to rail services from rural starting points. Everyone in the Group was encouraged to read the Wales Transport Strategy document. A regional bus team will be created to administer grants to the bus industry, and will be the remit of the Cardiff Capital Regional Transport Authority. [see Cabinet Report \(20th January 2021\) - click here](#)

Discussing bus and rail connectivity, it was commented that Tourism is missing from the Wales Transport Strategy and the Chepstow Transport Study. This could have a major impact on car use whilst sustaining services for residents. The regional bus team must consult bus users, bus user representatives and also work on marketing and communication. The Friends of the 65 Bus offered to be involved.

A Member asked why there was no consideration given to public transport to the new Grange Hospital in Llanfrechfa. It was agreed that the Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flooding will make enquiries with Torfaen County Borough Council Planning. It was added that residents in the South of the County have struggled to get to Cwmbran Station for the COVID vaccination. The Grassroutes service enables residents to use Grassroutes within normal operating hours to travel to Cwmbran (a relaxation of the usual 15 mile limit). It was advised that residents with appointments in the daytime, Mon-Fri can use the service. It was agreed that a review of the Grassroutes service/bus services/community demand would be beneficial and could be discussed further at the next meeting.

A Member commented that bus timetables are not available on bus stops and that not everyone has access to smartphones to access this information. Bus service companies should make details of real time provision available so users can see when the next bus is due and existing services should be reviewed / rearranged with a view to increasing passenger numbers and being more effective. Bus Service provision (including the Grassroutes Service) to be added to a future agenda.

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4. Responding to Consultation Documents (as available)

The Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services introduced the Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Strategy for Wales Consultation inviting Group Members to comment to add to the authority's response.

A Group Member suggested there should be fast-charging points at Magor Walkway Station in the proposed car parking area. It was explained that a bid has been submitted to Welsh Government for funding for next financial year for an EV charging strategy. It was added in the South of the County the electricity network is constrained and consequently Western Power Distribution can switch off any future renewable technologies. We need to understand capacity in the areas concerned such as using solar panels and batteries. It was agreed public car parks could be viable opportunities for fast charging points. Social equity must also be considered in considering locations e.g. not discourage on street EV points.

A Group Member explained that Karshare allows car owners to rent their cars out to people without a vehicle. Transition Chepstow is considering buying electric vehicles to add to this fleet which would allow people to trial electric cars. Additionally, a fleet of electric bikes may be purchased requiring bike charging points.

The Active Travel Manager confirmed that some e bikes have been purchased as a pilot scheme in Caldicot. Covid has restricted the project currently. An offer was made to consider supporting a similar project in Chepstow. Further details will be sent to Transition Chepstow.

The Chair reminded the Group of the River Simple hydrogen vehicle project.

Group Members were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

5. Any Other Business

- Wye Valley Villages Study: The project is proceeding and ARUP will be contacting members of the group for comments. The study will include tourism and public transport.
- Chepstow Transport Study: The WelTAG Stage 2 review report should be ready in March 2021.
- Abergavenny Railway Station: A study will consider interchange options and Park and Ride.
- Local Transport Plan (LTP): A group member suggested that the Authority produces a new LTP through a consultation process to strategically capture all the topics raised, have clear objectives and to reflect the authority's ambitions to deliver its CO^2 targets and its land use plan. The Head of Place-Making, Housing, Highways and Flooding confirmed that a consultant is being engaged to produce an updated LTP. This will reflect the Councils Climate Emergency declaration.
- Electric vehicle charging: In response to a query, it was explained that it is not council policy to have trailing cables across pavements. The Authority is looking at different ways of charging electric vehicles including on-street charging.
- Transition Chepstow: The group was informed that Transition Chepstow has produced the first sustainable transport plan. It is hoped that the plan will provide a possible blueprint for other towns. It was agreed the plan will be shared with the group.
- Rurality: A member referred to the Welsh Government priority to reduce the need to travel but commented on the need for residents of rural communities to have access to public transport and the option to travel by car to address rural isolation, to access services, experience a sense of community and the social benefits of meeting people. It

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was agreed that the drive is for less overall mileage, less travel to destinations; difficult in rural areas. It was acknowledged that residents' age and health limits active travel opportunities.

- Bus Timetables: It was noted that bus timetables are not on the Council's website. It was recognised that these have been taken down due to the many service changes during the pandemic and lockdown. It was agreed to add details for the 75 and 65 buses to the website. Timetables for the 65 Bus are also available here: <https://friendsofthe65bus.org.uk/>
A Wales-wide journey planner is available: <https://www.traveline.cymru/#>
- Abergavenny Station: Transport for Wales has provided an update on the improvement work ongoing at Abergavenny Station. The station, which has served the town and wider community since the mid-Victorian era, will see some of its empty spaces converted to become an art gallery. See press release below.

<https://news.tfwrail.wales/news/improvements-at-abergavenny-railway-station-thanks-to-investment-by-transport-for-wales>

6. Action List from the last meeting

The action list from the last meeting was noted.

7. Forward Work Plan

Group Members were invited to send possible items for inclusion to: wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk

8. To confirm the notes of the meeting held on 25th November 2020

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

9. To confirm the date of the next meeting as 14th July 2021

The meeting ended at 11.35 am

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