

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at Remote Meeting on Wednesday, 23rd September, 2020 at 10.00 am

**PRESENT:** County Councillor J.Pratt (Chair)

County Councillors: J.Becker, A. Easson, S. Woodhouse and D. Dovey

### **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
Susan Hughes	Active Travel Officer
Deb Hill-Howells	Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Simon Jones	Director, Economic Infrastructure
Nicole Rossiter	Senior Consultant and Stakeholder Lead, ARUP
Victoria Robinson	Senior Planner, ARUP
Gerallt Dafydd	Transport Consultant, ARUP
Richard Gibson	Head of Communications, Arriva CrossCountry Trains
Dick Cole	Abergavenny Civic Society
David Flint	Severn Tunnel Action Group
Ted Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail
Paul Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail
Phil Inskip	Severn Tunnel Action Group
Rosemary Corcoran	Friends of the 65 Bus
Brian Mahony	Friends of the 65 Bus
Andrew Callard	Forest Economic Partnership
Wendy Jackson	Forest Economic Partnership
Richard Lemon	Transition Chepstow

### **1. Election of Chair**

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County Councillor D. Dovey stood down from the position of Chair and thanked the Group Members for their support over many years. Councillor Dovey was thanked for his commitment and contribution to the Group during his time as Chair.

County Councillor J. Pratt was elected Chair.

### **2. Appointment of Vice Chair**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. Future of Bus Services - Simon Jones, Director, Economic Infrastructure, Welsh Government**

The Chair warmly welcomed Simon Jones, Director, Economic Infrastructure, Welsh Government, to the meeting to discuss proposed changes to bus industry funding in Wales. The changes will enable taxpayers to have greater control over services.

For scheduled services, the concessionary fare scheme costs approximately £70m to run in Wales per year and also grants/funding (from Welsh Government and local authorities) are made available to bus operators. In total, approximately £115m supports the bus industry per annum (not including home to school transport). This year, due to COVID 19, the amount of funding to the bus industry will be closer to £200m to cover e.g. the reduced capacity offered due to social distancing requirements.

Problems have been encountered trying to introduce a single, common ticket but there is ambition to have an integrated ticket for passengers to use more freely on bus and rail journeys independent of operator aligned services, timetables and fares.

In the context of climate change, more journeys are made by private car in Wales than in the rest of the UK. This is partly due to the inadequacies of the transport network. The aim is to make public transport an attractive option to help address climate change e.g. congestion and air quality. The presentation slides were shared with Group Members by e mail.

Group Members were invited to ask questions:

- A Group Member was concerned about legislation, noting past failures to align bus and train services, and referred to the disconnected timetables that discourage bus passengers from using the trains. It was commented that without primary legislation, bus companies may not comply with integration. It was explained that commercial negotiations are in progress regarding funding. This will involve agreement to enter into a long term partnership where Welsh Government can have influence. Those operators choosing not to work together risk access to the funding. In response to a question, it was accepted that there may be a need to legislate.
- A Group Member asked how engagement with bus customers is planned stating the need for more promotion and marketing of bus services. This aspect will be undertaken by Transport for Wales (TfW). Discussions are in progress to see if local authorities are interested in part-ownership of TfW. There is an ambition to have a national TfW brand to cover bus services in Wales.
- A Group Member highlighted the need to keep Climate Change at the top of the transport agenda. It was confirmed that Climate Change is central to Welsh

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Government's thinking. It is a priority to make bus travel an attractive option to customers' using private cars. This may require significant changes such as making less space available for cars on roads and more for buses, priority signalling for buses etc.

- A Group Member explained the difficulties linking train and bus journeys. It was agreed that there is a lot of work needed to improve and create transport hubs, to also include Active Travel. In terms of Chepstow services from Gloucester to Cardiff. These have been reduced to less than one train per hour. More services are needed.
- A Group Member asked about timescales and it was explained that the Bus Emergency Scheme (BES) is in place currently for which bus operators have had to sign up to changes. More significant change will take place at the end of October. Funding under BES may have to continue as social distancing is disrupting services from being commercial. It is difficult to predict timescales during the pandemic. The new contract is for 12 months.
- A Group Member queried previous plans for a train/bus transport interchange at Chepstow. It was responded that such changes are needed throughout Wales and Welsh Government's aspiration is to have the ability to exert some control over operators (bus stops, timetables etc.) and would be part of building the case for physical investment such as in required Chepstow.
- A Group Member queried if the survey mentioned was for urban bus routes and rural areas referring to the importance of connecting communities. Friends of the 65 Bus offered to co-operate with Welsh Government to share their experience. It was responded that the survey was from across Wales using traffic models to measure where people and goods travel to and from. The "Flexi" demand responsive service was explained. Some rural trials are taking place. It was suggested that regular service users are elderly and unused to technological solutions. Additionally mobile signal can also be poor in rural areas so this is possibly not a workable model. It was added that the Grass Routes community on demand service is available in Monmouthshire. This is bookable via telephone.
- Members mentioned the ongoing campaign to create Magor Walkway Station which "ticks all the boxes" in terms of linking with bus services, reducing car use, active travel options etc. It was questioned why Welsh Government is not interested in taking the option forward. It was welcomed that Magor Station has recently been published as a Welsh Government aspiration in terms of ambitions for rail services in North and South Wales. It was added that other than the Valley Lines, the rest of Wales train services are owned by the Department for Transport funded by UK Government. Conversation is ongoing with UK Government about the lack of investment in the rail system in Wales generally.
- The Active Travel Officer asked if the ambition is to include bike racks on bus services. Discussions have included bike racks on Traws Cymru services and the suggestion of all services requires further thought taking into account e.g. space elements. It was suggested that the racks could be on the back or front of the vehicles. There is also a need to include more plans for bike racks on trains.

The Chair sincerely thanked Simon Jones for joining the meeting and participating in today's meeting.

#### **5. ARRIVA CrossCountry Services to Lydney and Chepstow - Roger Gibson, Head of Communications for CrossCountry**

The Chair welcomed Richard Gibson, Head of Communications, Arriva Cross Country Trains, to the meeting.

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It was explained that, due to the pandemic, it has been difficult for the transport industry to run services safely for customers and staff. The requirement for social distancing has reduced the number of passengers to 20%. Infection and self-isolation of staff has also limited the ability to crew trains.

Since March very few people have opted for train travel. Custom increased in July when restrictions were relaxed. An hourly peak service (every two hours off peak) was introduced from Gloucester to Cardiff in March. In July, change was necessary to protect the national timetable and to safely provide the capacity needed for social distancing. More time is also needed to allow passengers to board and alight safely. There are 29 trains available to run through Monmouthshire providing services from Cardiff to Nottingham, Birmingham and Stansted Airport and local services between Birmingham and Leicester and Birmingham and Nottingham.

A decision was taken to provide most capacity where there was most need and some services were rearranged to free up the ability to join two trains together to provide capacity. These mainly affected services between West and East Midlands, and in areas such as Monmouthshire where there were other services running. It was explained that Monmouthshire is not the only place where reductions in services have occurred. It is understood that the changes have caused difficulties for residents and tourists. Questions were asked as follows:

- A Member commented that train services in Chepstow are abysmal and stopping at Chepstow would only take a few minutes as there is a 30mph speed limit. Trains at Gloucester stand to make up recovery time. A plea was made to reconsider the changes at Chepstow and to allow all trains passing through to stop. It was commented that there is a service provided from Cardiff at 18.45 then nothing further until the TfW service at 21.09. It was responded that the changes were well thought through and made for good reasons. They are not local services but part of the national timetable. Since the impact of COVID 19, timetables have changed five times and reviews are frequent.
- A Member asked about the 7.26am to Manchester previously a Great Western Railway service. There are no plans to reintroduce this service at the current time but it is still under consideration.
- The Chair expressed concern that services are being reduced at the current time of climate change when the priority is to encourage use of public transport.
- A Member asked if it would be possible for a survey to be carried out at Gloucester to review if the trains are standing there for a length of time sufficient to enable a stop at Chepstow. It was agreed that the survey would be undertaken.
- A Member acknowledged the explanation but wished to emphasise that the service to and from Chepstow is a lifeline for many people.

The expert members of the Group were thanked for their highly valuable contribution to meetings. Richard Gibson was thanked for his input to the meeting.

#### **6. Chepstow Transport Study - Victoria Robinson, Ellie Mitchell and Nicole Rossiter (Arup)**

Nicola Rossiter, Senior Consultant and Stakeholder Engagement Lead and Victoria Robinson, Senior Planner, Arup, were welcomed to the meeting. There will be a public consultation on Chepstow Transport Study in early November and the slides presented today will be available at this time.

The main presentation points:

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- Introducing the WelTAG Stage 2 Transport Study for the Chepstow Area and the current context (COVID 19, Brexit, Removal of Bridge tolls, climate change announcements etc.)
- The problems to be addressed have been reworded and reordered and the priorities of the Wellbeing of Future Generations have been embedded. The issues centre on high levels of congestion, increased traffic flows and air quality. Additionally there is limited bus connectivity and higher relative cost of public transport journeys. The aim is for solutions that have low emissions, that are sustainable and that integrate and encourage active travel.
- The 21 long list schemes has been reviewed and put into five categories to impact on:
  - Reducing the need to travel
  - Active travel and cycling
  - Public transport options
  - Ultra low emission vehicle
  - Highways options
- The 21 options were tested against the study objectives including some stakeholder engagement. Options were reduced from 21 to 15 which have been further tested.
- The five categories have been reduced to four, the final two being combined.
- The public consultation is in early November and the group was urged to encourage as many people as possible to participate.

Questions were asked as follows:

- A Member asked if the study has taken into account the recent discovery of more damage to the old Chepstow Bridge enquiring if it will have to be closed down for repair. Gerallt Dafydd, Arup, confirmed that this aspect has been taken into account in the study. It was explained that there are no plans currently to close the bridge as it is an important route. It was emphasised that this is a cross border scheme backed by Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester County Council, Welsh Government, Welsh Office and Department of Transport, whilst being led by Monmouthshire County Council.
- A Member asked what model was used to measure the cross border traffic flow. Gerallt Dafydd explained that access was available to the Severn Tolls model. The highways schemes in the options will be tested accordingly. It was asked if there was any modelling from the Forest of Dean direction. This information will be shared with the group member after the meeting.
- A Member asked how the public consultation will be organised. It was responded that there will no opportunity for a public consultation meeting in person because of the pandemic. The event will be arranged in a digital space but a hard copy of the documentation and survey plus a freepost addressed envelope to return will be made available to those people with no access to (or inclination to use) technology. The Chair offered the help of the Communications Team in Monmouthshire. The Forest Economic Partnership also offered to promote the consultation.

The Chair thanked the contributors for the interim report, adding that any further information would be welcomed for circulation to the Group.

#### **7. Active Travel Future Network Consultation - Sue Hughes, Active Travel Officer/Paul Sullivan, Youth, Sport and Active Travel Manager**

The Group welcomed Susan Hughes, Active Travel Officer, to the meeting. It was explained that the 3-month Active Travel consultation/engagement phase was launched in August. Opportunities to engage have been face to face (low take up), a webinar and through online questionnaires (higher take up). Pleasingly, to date 545 adults and 281 primary school children have responded with a lower take up from businesses. An easy read version is available for

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vulnerable children and adults from which there has been 23 responses. Work is in progress to engage with secondary school pupils. At the end of the consultation period, the results will be analysed and new maps will be drawn up with a further 3-month consultation.

Referring to the low response rate from businesses, it was agreed that all businesses should have active travel plans to reduce car usage. Questions were asked as follows:

- It was confirmed that the Abergavenny Civic Society will soon be sending a response. It was commented that the older generation responders may not have been able to fully benefit from the interactivity of the maps. It was queried if property owners directly impacted by routes have been notified. It was confirmed that they have not been notified but this would be followed up.

It was commented that even with fast progress rates, schemes could take many years to complete. Short term, more realistic bids plus using S106 funding etc. were suggested. It was confirmed that the authority has been successful to have a £1.8m bid approved for active travel in terms of realistic bids. It was accepted that some proposals are ambitious (e.g. an alternative to the Wye Bridge). An approach of full governance with groups from various departments will provide a collective approach to each proposal plus taking into account the consultation responses for balance. Regarding the challenges of the digital consultation, it was commented that there were a surprisingly high number of responses from 60+ age band. An offer to provide remote Teams meeting for specific groups was made.

- A Group Member asked how the consultation was advertised and asked if consultations arise between meetings, that they could be circulated to the Group. It was confirmed that there was a rolling programme of media advertising using Facebook, Twitter and the local press. The Strategic Transport Group will be notified in January when the next stage of consultation commences. Friends of 65 Bus were interested in how active travel and public transport can work together in rural areas (e.g. carrying bicycles on buses). The bus companies have all been contacted regarding the consultation.
- A Group Member was concerned about the lack of response from business and the Abergavenny Business Club was suggested as a contact group. It was confirmed that the Business Resilience forum has been used as a conduit and bigger businesses have been approached direct. Group Members were asked to encourage participation with their contacts.

The Active Travel Officer was thanked for her participation in the meeting.

#### 8. Updates

- Abergavenny Station: Network Rail provided the following brief update: *“AE have now concluded our assessment of the signalling solution that is required. The outcome of that means that the original proposed location is unchanged. We have started early discussions with the Conservation Officer at Monmouthshire Council to capture their requirements before we start design.”*

It was added that Monmouthshire CC has been offered funding from the Cardiff Capital Region/Welsh Government joined with MetroPlus (Phase 2) to initiate other work at Abergavenny Station (outline of potential work in Local Transport Plan). This has not been taken forward to date but will be reported upon at a future meeting.

It was queried if an interim meeting is required with members in the Abergavenny area regarding the funding offered to improve the station. Christian Schmidt said that it was key to receive more information from Network Rail in the first instance.

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- Severn Tunnel Junction (STJ): A Member questioned if Grand Union Trains (GUT) are still planning to introduce a direct service from STJ to Paddington in May 2021. Part of the agreement involved a new park and ride at STJ with bike shelters and an M4 link road. It was confirmed that GUT have been informed of our plans but there has been no further news.

It was commented that the calming device installed at STJ that was causing difficulty, has been replaced with a better version.

A new ticket machine has been installed which, because of its positioning and no barrier, will not allow season ticket holders to benefit from the new season tickets that offer more flexibility than previously. It was requested that the matter is brought to the attention of Transport for Wales as it is an important point for commuters. More information was requested in order to make contact with TfW. Communication with TfW rail services will also be undertaken on the topic of future car park management which will involve all rail car parks. The Chair asked Christian Schmidt to keep the group updated on developments.

- Magor Station: In June Magor Action Group On Rail (MAGOR) and Monmouthshire County Council applied to the New Station Fund and also the Restoring your Railways (RYR) Fund supported by Jessica Morden MP and John Griffiths AM. Of the 200 applications submitted, Magor was in the shortlist of 50 with one other station in Wales for the RYR Fund, which if successful would provide funding towards the GRIP3.

MAGOR has also been approached as a stakeholder for the SE Wales Transport Commission into the abandonment of the M4 Relief Road and has provided input on some of the initial findings. Of note were was a possible upgrading of the relief lines to provide a backbone rail service between Cardiff and STJ stations (Magor Station received a mention here). It was notable that integrated and active travel were prioritised.

A Traffic Management and parking study of the Magor area that includes the potential impact of the walkway station has been concluded. The comprehensive Capita report has been circulated and will help the GRIP3 study.

Information was provided that SouthWestern railways have been given £1m by the UK Government to change the mode of travel to stations.

#### **9. Any Other Business**

- Bus Stop Infrastructure Grant: An update was provided, by the Passenger Transport Manager, that the grant was being used to replace some bus shelters on the Severnside corridor. Whilst there is no extra funding at the current time, it is likely there will be more funds available from Welsh Government in the future and the proposals submitted by the Friends of the 65 Bus will be considered then.
- Future of the Severn Express Service (X7): The report commissioned by Welsh Government to look at the service and its links has been circulated. There has been an encouraging growth in patronage in last few weeks. The service will run to the end of the year and alternatives are under consideration based on the report findings.
- Replacement Bus Stop, Abergavenny: Regarding timescales for the replacement bus stop on Park Rd next to Tesco in Abergavenny, an update was provided that the plans were approved but no date is available as Welsh Government has raised queries from the safety assessment. It is hoped to finalise plans and enter the tender process early in

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the new year. Members were disappointed with the timescale as before Christmas would be much more preferable for businesses at that end of town. The Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood will follow up this matter with Welsh Government.

- Roadworks (A466): An update was provided that Gloucestershire County Council are carrying out resurfacing work on its side of the border and Monmouthshire CC is also co-ordinating some work on its side to minimise disruption. Details are on the roadworks report on the website. Some work that may have involved road closure is postponed to next financial year.
- Transport for Wales services to Chepstow: A plea was made for contact to be made with TfW as there is a service from Cardiff at 18.45 and then nothing until 21.09 which is the last train. Connections to the Midlands and the North need significant improvement. The Chair asked Officers to follow this matter up with TfW.

#### **10. Forward Work Plan**

The forward work plan was noted as circulated. Members with suggestions for the forward plan were invited to send them to [wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk) The plan requires reprioritisation and officers were asked to review the contents.

#### **11. To confirm the notes of the previous meeting held on 5th February 2020**

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

#### **12. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 25th November 2020**

**The meeting ended at 12.50 pm**