

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held  
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am**

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

County Councillors: J.Becker, A. Easson, F. Taylor, S. Woodhouse,

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

T. Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail
P. Inskip	Severn Tunnel Action Group
G. Nelmes	Abergavenny Action 50+
P. Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail
R. Corcoran	Friends of the 65 Bus
A. Callard	Forest Economic Partnership
B Mahony	Friends of the 65 Bus
R Lemon	Transition Chepstow
W. Jackson	Forest Economic Partnership
J. Callard	Abergavenny Cycling Group
L. Mertens	Transport for Wales

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sadie Beer	Town Centre Engagement Project Officer
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, Property, Fleet and Facilities
Gareth Emery	Passenger Transport Operations and Fleet Manager
Paul Sullivan	Youth, Sport and Active Travel Manager
Richard Cook	Public Transport Officer
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Faye Reynolds	Transport for Wales
Rhian Sheady	Transport for Wales

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

Leanne Farrow	Transport Planner, Mott MacDonald
Gareth Potter	Senior Project Manager, Transport for Wales
David McCallum	Strategic Development Programme Manager and Rail Lead
Charles Varey	Transport for Wales
Peter McKeown	Project Manager, Mott MacDonald

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Active Travel and Cycling Strategy Update [15 mins]**

The Youth, Sport and Active Travel Manager, MonLife provided a further update on Active Travel and the Cycling Strategy. Following the update, members were invited to ask questions.

- The Active Travel Network Maps submission has been sent to Welsh Government. Feedback is awaited. 5,000 individual responses were received. 399 routes have been put forward each rated high, medium or low.
- Of 23 projects, public consultation is live on current projects:
  - Caldicot Links Project
  - Williams Field Lane link to town centre
  - Monnow Street
  - Wye Active Travel crossing and Wyesham links
  - Castle Meadow
  - Llanfoist Bridge

Funding received this year is just over £3m. Officers are working hard to create an integrated network to provide an alternative to short car journeys.

- Construction projects due by the end of this financial year include:
  - Williams Field Lane (Phase 2 of 3) to include a new play park at Kingsfee
  - Old Dixton Rd to widen the pavements to provide safer access to Monmouth Comprehensive school and encourage walking and cycling
  - The Cross, Caldicot – a designated crossing
- 21<sup>st</sup> C Schools, new school Abergavenny: discussions are ongoing to have input into the design to provide flow and an east/west through route.
- Next Year: Bids are in progress for:
  - Church Road (Phase 2)
  - Caldicot Links (Phase 1)
  - Castle Meadows (and continuation of Abergavenny linked projects)
  - Kingswood Gate (Phase 3)

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

It was noted that the bidding process has changed, and it is only possible to bid when ready to build.

- Cycling Strategy: the draft document has been produced with many areas of focus and to form an action plan. The strategy concentrates mainly on leisure and tourism; there are references to Active Travel throughout. Officers are working through the stages of the Leisure and Physical Activity Strategy that will involve investment to leisure centres, programme delivery and some of the support to community sports. The Cycling Strategy and Leisure and Physical Activity Strategy will be presented to Cabinet at the same time.

Members asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- It was confirmed that the route from Glangrwyney to Gilwern didn't meet the criteria. It was queried if Gilwern will receive any funding given the consultation results. It was confirmed that £30,000 was invested in WelTAG 1 for Gilwern last year and 5 routes have been identified for further investigation. Four funding bids have been allowed this year and scheme development proposals must be within core funding of £0.5m to cover multiple projects. It is hoped to develop opportunities across all seven main settlements within the criteria. There is potential for in-year funding that may cover further investigation of some of the identified routes in Gilwern.
- It was confirmed that the Cycling Strategy will be subject of further consultation, particularly to gather feedback on the action plan.
- It was pointed out that the documents in respect of the new school in Abergavenny make no reference to Cycling Strategy despite very low numbers cycling to and from the school. It was confirmed that there is a detailed analysis of routes around the school for both walking and cycling and a database of improvements required. The focus is on integrated network routes from home to school. Level 2 Cycle training for adults is available to build on the Cycling Proficiency available in schools. Assurance was provided that Active Travel is at the forefront of the plans for the new school. The Head of Placemaking, Housing, Highways and Flooding added that a Home to School Travel Plan is the responsibility of schools. Additional funding has been mandated to fund an extra road safety officer to encourage cycling, walking and scooting throughout the county, and to support schools.
- A Member congratulated the team and asked if bus services could carry cycles bearing in mind the focus on leisure and tourism. It was agreed to raise this point with the national Active Travel Group. The capability to carry cycles on buses needs further investigation as the industry moves to create solutions.
- A Member asked that the last half mile of the Caldicot link that uses the Caerwent branch is futureproofed against the reopening of the branch to provide the answer to the Burns Report problem of the tram trains having to terminate at Severn Tunnel Junction. The last half mile is wide enough to design a path for a single-track tram train if required to avoid the motorway issue if there will be no train service. This suggestion will be sent to the design team.

Officers were thanked for their contribution to the meeting.

### **3. Bus Reform and other bus related matters [15 mins]**

The Passenger Transport Unit Manager provided an update:

- Bus Services: Patronage has dramatically dropped due to the pandemic. Prior to Omicron, passenger numbers were recovering reaching 60-70% fare paying on some routes and 45- 50% concessionary fares. There is still a significant gap, so funding is needed to ensure bus operators survive. None have ceased to trade.

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

Bus Emergency Scheme Phase 2 (BES2) tops up fare revenue loss and concessionary fares are topped up to 2019 levels. The Bus Services Support Grant BSSG. This arrangement ends in July 2022. The Public Service Order (PSO) has a two-year lifespan. Any services after that date will require alternative support until at least March 2023. The funding is available for the next financial year and funds leftover from this year can carry over. However, current services included in a PSO won't be covered by a new one.

A new mechanism will be required, and Welsh Government and TfW are looking at this to avoid a wholesale withdrawal of services. Welsh Government is looking at regional franchising. Corporate Joint Committees, when established, could deliver services with help from TfW. A regional reference network plan is in progress. Local authority officers are overstretched, and more resource is needed to assist progress.

There are huge driver shortages including school bus drivers which is a considerable issue for workers and schools.

It is hoped to return services to 2019 levels when possible.

- Infrastructure Grants: There are plans to upgrade bus shelters, bus information and bus stations. There are plans for a regional allocation of funding for smaller works instead of full WelTAG bids. Looking at a marketing campaign to get "Back to Bus".

Members asked questions as follows:

- What would a regionally franchised bus service look like compared to present and how would passengers be affected? The regional bus network would be better than present in terms of services, better frequency and area coverage, through ticketing and more integration. The concept is dependent of funding.
- Progress on Abergavenny Bus Station? Quotations are due back today and it is hoped to have the work completed before the end of the financial year.
- Traws Hafren (T7) early morning and evening service to Magor. It was questioned if the service could be more frequent. The T7 runs in the morning and afternoon currently. There is an extra bus in the afternoon to avoid congestion in Bristol. To increase the service, some work would be needed on patronage. It was suggested that this could be considered as part of the Severn Tunnel Access plans (part of the regional bus network). No funds are available at present.
- Problems with contractors handing back licenses: This is a difficulty across all Wales as smaller operators and taxi drivers are no longer working. Wheelchair access taxis are rare. This issue needs to be looked at over the next 4/5 years as the situation is not currently sustainable and recruitment of drivers is very difficult.
- Published timetables: Chepstow bus station has details of main services but not local service information. It was noted that some improvements are in progress to upgrade facilities.
- The Friends of the 65 Bus reminded everyone of the need to take the needs of the passengers into account and questioned if there is there any update on the restoration of Sunday services. The Back to Bus campaign was welcomed but there is a need for up to date timetable information and better bus stations. Timetables on Traveline are often out of date. It was explained that the shortage of drivers has to be addressed to enable the restoration of Sunday services. This aspect is under consideration. The Back to Bus campaign requires careful planning to ensure there are enough services and drivers.
- Monmouth Bus Station: Work to upgrade facilities is out to tender currently. It was agreed that there are significant problems with Traveline information due to the

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

excessive amount of timetable changes due to the pandemic and driver shortages. Updated information will be sent to Traveline.

- Improvements at Abergavenny Bus Station: Progress is welcome and it was enquired if there are plans for a transport hub to link to the rail station. As work on the bus station progresses, it was confirmed that timetables will be updated. It was explained that a WelTAG 1 study is planned into the creation of an enclosed transport interchange for bus and rail to include active travel options.
- The Passenger Transport Unit Manager will follow up reports that Stagecoach has closed off the disability area at Abergavenny Bus Station.
- It was queried if passengers can use school service no. 43 to Brecon? It was confirmed that passengers can use the service if there is space. This matter will be followed up with Stagecoach.
- A suggestion was made to improve accessibility by providing cycle cages at key bus stops. It was noted that this is under consideration at bus stations and in town centres. More work will be required to identify key bus stops.

#### **4. Severn Tunnel Junction WelTAG 2 Consultation [15 mins]**

The Chair welcomed Gareth Potter, Senior Project Manager, Transport for Wales, Burns Delivery Unit and Leanne Farrow, Mott MacDonald Technical Study Lead for Severn Tunnel Junction Access Scheme. The work is a result of the recommendations of the SE Wales Transport Commission (chaired by Lord Burns). The public consultation starts next week. The Group and authority were asked for help to publicise the consultation. The presentation slides were circulated to the Group. Following the update, Members were invited to ask questions:

- It was questioned where this project stands within the moratorium on road building in Wales (until the study is completed). It was responded that the scheme is being considered as part of the road review process and is aligned to new Wales Transport Strategy.
- It was queried if hybrid working due to the pandemic will have any effect on Severn Tunnel Junction as it is predominantly a commuter station. The study is aligned to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Whilst travel patterns in the future are more difficult to predict, these are long term plans in the hope that rail and bus demand will resume to normal levels.
- Buses will stop directly at Magor and Undy Walkway Station so there is no need for road construction etc.
- It was pointed out that the Chepstow Free Press is a more appropriate publication in this area.
- It was queried if any work has been undertaken to understand how the proposed active travel route on the new road will integrate into the active travel network in the surrounding area. It was confirmed that this work has taken place to ensure integration. The authority is working closely with TfW. The work is ongoing.
- A Member asked about the intersections of the A48 to the B4245 to Severn Tunnel Junction. Care is needed to ensure that the B4245 isn't overloaded with traffic especially through Caldicot, Rogiet, Magor and Undy areas. It was confirmed that there are more detailed plans available.

The contributors were thanked for their attendance.

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

#### **5. Update from TfW on Eastern Valley and Newport/Chepstow Corridor Studies [15 mins]**

Faye Reynolds, Project Manager, Transport for Wales provided an update on the Eastern Valley and Newport/Chepstow Corridor Study. The presentation slides were circulated to the Group Members. Group Members were given the opportunity to ask questions:

- A Member asked if there was any vision to make more use of Caldicot Station, recommission Portskewett Station and create a station at Newhouse Industrial Estate to serve the Severnside area and reduce car use on the B4245. It was confirmed that these suggestions would fall within the scope of the study.
- It was queried where Magor with Undy's Walkway Station sat in the study. Rhian Sheahy, confirmed that this would be included in the mainline study. There would also be reference within the Newport/Chepstow corridor study.
- A copy of the brief was requested before it is forwarded to consultants. This will be followed up.

#### **6. Update from TfW on the South Wales Mainline Study [15 mins]**

David McCallum, Strategic Development Programme Manager covering the South Wales Mainline, and Wider Rail Lead for Strategy Development, Transport for Wales attended to provide an update on the South Wales Mainline Study. The presentation slides were circulated to the Group. Members were invited to ask questions:

- A Member asked if there was any progress on the limitations in the agency agreement between London and the Welsh Government which precludes more than one train an hour to Cheltenham and precludes any extra trains to Bristol. It was responded that service arrangements need to be discussed and as the franchises are run by the government, there will be more opportunity for discussion.
- Referring to upgrading the lines and speeds, it was explained that between Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction, 40%+ of the mainline is at 75mph or less and it was queried if there is any consideration being given to upgrading the low speeds on the mainline as well. If the relief line from Newport to Severn Tunnel Junction is upgraded to 75mph all the way, this would match the journey times on the mainline. It was replied that the work is to maximise the relief lines for higher speed and an intention to further work to lifting mainline speeds. Network Rail looking for funding to upgrade the relief lines for many years to shut the mainline (instead of weekend possessions) and run the London trains on the relief lines to save money. If there are only platforms on two lines for the Burns Stations, then part of the objective of upgrading the relief lines will result in those stations being closed and bus replacements under the concept of upgrading the relief lines. How does the post Burns fit in with the pre Burns proposals for upgrading the relief lines. It was confirmed that the plan to upgrade gives more flexibility for maintenance and the ability to close one pair of lines. The new stations are planned as two platform stations, with some being four platform possibly. The challenge is cost. It was suggested that passenger would perceive the upgrade of the relief lines would lead to poor reliability for local services because of the financial pressure to close those stations to allow weekday engineering work. It was explained that this is not the intention as there would be too many trains but there would possibly be night closures. It was added that the level of demand doesn't align with doubling the cost of providing four platforms.
- A Member asked for details of demand forecasting. There was a request for consideration being given to a through service from the Hereford to Newport and Bristol. Detailed demand forecasting will be carried out during the next year. Initial appraisal indicates £1.5m extra journeys across the five new stations and further uplift due to increased frequency of trains to Bristol reducing the interchange time at Bristol.

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am**

#### **7. Update on Magor & Undy Walkway Station [15 mins]**

An update was provided by the MAGOR representatives. With support from Jessica Morden MP and John Griffiths AM, a meeting took place with Professor Simon Gibson, Chair of the Burns delivery group. It was a very positive meeting and he has agreed to visit the site. The objective now is to ensure Magor Walkway Station is built first for which pressure from Monmouthshire County Council will be vital. 95% of villagers support the station proposal. Businesses are also supportive. The detractors have concerns about indiscriminate car parking.

The Transport Planning and Policy Officer added that the passenger forecast for Magor is similar to the other proposed new stations, which is good for the business case. The funding for the new stations is unclear at present. TfW are contacting the DfT in this regard. Locally, the infrastructure needs for the station will have to be explored. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

A question was asked about the outcome of the Capita traffic management study carried out a few years ago. It was confirmed that the work was carried out but didn't progress due to the Burns Commission recommendation that the platform should be in the middle, but it is now assumed the platforms will be on the outside. It was requested that this work could be resumed for the local area.

A Member requested that consideration is given to limited parking (3 hours) to discourage commuters. It was suggested that car share spaces could be made available and spaces for users of the Hub.

The longer-term car parking issues were acknowledged and need to be considered as part of a study. The security of cycles and electric cycles is an important consideration to include CCTV. Cycle parking is under consideration as part of Active Travel.

Everyone was thanked for their contributions.

#### **8. Any Other Business**

- a) Local Transport Plan (LTP): Group Engineer, Highways and Flood Management, explained that officers are in the early stages of refreshing the LTP (at the same time as development of Local Development Plan). Capita has been commissioned to assist with this process. Some officer workshops have been held including a session to look at strategic development sites and the implications for the transport network. There is no longer a requirement to create a LTP and the Council will be expected to work with other authorities on a regional transport plan (RTP). The guidance for these is due to be published and will have to be considered. The LTP will have to fit in with the RTP.

The LTP will also cover the proposals for each of the towns. There has been good progress so far. Wider engagement will be undertaken in the development of both the LTP and RTP.

- b) The Group was reminded that free car parking in each of the towns is offered on weekends in the run up to Christmas. Feedback has been received about the possibility of providing free buses to reduce car use. Some authorities have trialled free buses. Further information will be sought.

#### **9. To note the Action List from the previous meeting**

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 26th January, 2022 at 10.00 am**

There were no items outstanding from the previous meeting.

It was suggested that an item on Corporate Joint Committees could be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their support

#### **10. To confirm the record of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed subject to the addition of a statement that bus services currently withdrawn from timetables will be restored.

The Passenger Transport Unit Manager confirmed that, provided that driver shortages improve, and the impact of the Covid reduces, the intention is to return to 2019 service levels. It was emphasised that it takes between 6-8 months to train a driver. There are also significant delays with services provided by the DVLA e.g. to renew licenses.

#### **11. To note the cancellation of the meeting due to be held on 23rd March 2022. The next meeting will be held on 13th July 2022**

**The meeting ended at 12.29 pm**