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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, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, S.B. Jones, F. Taylor,
S. Woodhouse and J.Becker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail (MAGOR)
Dick Cole	Abergavenny Civic Society
Graeme Nelmes	Abergavenny Action 50+
Mark Youngman	GWR Development Manager Wales and Integrated Transport Manager
Michelle North-Jones	Capita, Senior Transport Planner

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor A. Easson	
David Flint	Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG)
Phil Inskip	Severn Tunnel Action Group (STAG)
Ted Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail (MAGOR)
Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Councillor P. Molyneux	Forest of Dean District Council/Gloucestershire County Council

1. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 9: Bus services update concerning Nevill Hall Hospital, County Councillor F. Taylor declared a personal , non-prejudicial interest as a Member of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

2. To received the notes of the previous meeting held on 7th February 2018

The notes of the meeting held on 7th February 2018 were received.

3. Chepstow Transport Study (Michelle North-Jones, Capita)

The Group received a presentation from Michele North-Jones, Senior Transport Planner, Capita regarding the Chepstow transportation study and its various stages (slides forwarded to Group Members). Following the presentation, questions were asked as follows:

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

A Group Member welcomed the study to appraise a long standing problem but was sceptical that funding would be made available at Stage 4 for implementation and sought reassurance if the evidence supported changes that there would be money available. It was confirmed that Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) was represented at the workshop and that there had been good discussion about funding sources involving all parties. Whilst acknowledging that funding for major capital schemes in England and Wales is limited, it was confirmed that any groundwork completed now will be compliant in the event that funding becomes available. The study will concentrate on smaller (e.g. active travel improvements or use of pinch point funding for improved junctions) and larger scale solutions in case a phased approach is utilised. Reassurance was provided that GCC has liaised with Monmouthshire County Council about a potential by pass in the local transport plan as queuing on the GCC side is just as bad and there will be impact from the removal of the tolls from the Severn Bridge there too. The Group noted the establishment of a Forest Economic Partnership (FEP).

County Councillor J. Becker asked to see the long list of options and possible solutions. This will be forwarded to Christian Schmidt who can distribute as necessary. It was added that Councillor Becker is working to strengthen links with the FEP. It was questioned if there was a need to have national involvement and confirmed that Welsh Government representatives were present at the workshop to consider Chepstow traffic congestion and all aspects of public transport. Representatives of the rail industry and Highways England will be consulted with at another time due to unavailability.

The Chair and Chief Executive referred to the news that Chepstow is one of the five worst towns for air quality in Wales. Whilst welcoming explanation of the study stages, the Chief Executive stressed the importance of making every investment to optimise the timing, and expressed his preference for an engineering solution. It was confirmed that appraisal takes place in June with first output in early July. The Chief Executive stated his expectation for significant flow and pace to ensure the least delay between Stages 1 and 2.

It was announced that a petition in support of a by-pass has been submitted to Welsh Government and that will be considered in mid-May. The Secretary of State has expressed interest in visiting Chepstow. Comments from this Group and working groups were welcomed and will be passed on.

Regarding costs, it was explained that at Stage 2 sufficient detail is required to provide effective cost benefit analysis and outline design then at Stage 3 full design can be undertaken. Decisions on what proposals to take forward will be taken at the end of Stage 2 with some engineering design and quantitative assessment to assure the proposals stand up against Welsh Government criteria.

The funding so far covers Stage 1 and it would be beneficial and timely to meet the Secretary of State now.

The Chair thanked Michelle North-Jones for her presentation and attendance.

4. GWR - Severn Tunnel closure (Andy McRae & Mark Youngman, GWR)

Mark Youngman, GWR Development Manager Wales and Integrated Transport Manager attended to provide information on the Severn Tunnel closure.

The refranchise of rail services in the area was discussed and it was speculated that a better service should be expected for the Wales and Borders region. It was reported that responses submitted in a recent consultation on GWR franchise raised the need for more direct services to

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

and from Chepstow and Bristol. It was suggested that the terms of the extended franchise will be published soon and it would be very worthwhile to lobby politicians to attract their interest.

It was commented that train performance is not where it should be e.g. delays, less carriages than needed and gaps in services. Possible reasons included the significant training schedule for drivers covering the new and different trains being brought into service and also engineering works to electrify the mainline between London and South Wales by 2019. There is also pressure from Network Rail to gain access to undertake maintenance.

Reference was made to the parliamentary debate secured by Jessica Morden MP regarding the campaign for a new station at Magor, and the bids for new stations at Llanwern and Cardiff Parkway – all of which want trains to stop frequently. It was observed that a balance needs to be struck on the priority for faster services or frequently stopping trains at more stations. The source of evidence that rail travellers want either faster services or more connections was queried. It was explained that such evidence originates from politicians, senior officials and business organisations who want faster journey times. It was suggested that a higher level of service would allow more flexibility. A response was provided that the Welsh Government vision for public transport promotes both types of service with faster journeys on routes to key destinations including Bristol and London. This approach is supported by councils in Wales and the West of England. Transport for Wales are in agreement. It will be necessary to persuade the rail companies accordingly.

It was questioned if it is easier to have quick wins i.e. faster trains when what is needed is a comprehensive transport infrastructure and responded that in the SE Wales region there is a good understanding about an integrated network with connections to Bristol. It was explained that it is possible to deliver both types of service; a direct train to London via Severn Tunnel Junction is not necessarily suitable but a trial was advocated.

A Member attended the GWR Customer Panel recently and accepted the poor performance was for valid reasons, but observed that 44 % was an unacceptably low level of trains arriving on time. With regard to long journey times, it was noted that previously there had been a temporary service between Chepstow to Bristol with a long journey time. This service was liked by passengers who could use the time to work on the train. It was suggested that passengers would be interested in a reliable, longer journey service from stations in the Cardiff region to Bristol.

It was commented that a pattern had been detected of poor service alternating between services in S. Wales and West of England and questioned if it is a staffing, servicing or resources issue. It was responded that it can be all those things including changes to the trains in use, training and staffing/depot changes. The problems are equally spread across the network.

In response to a question, it was commented that the new trains will be in operation possibly from May 2019.

Mr. Youngman was wished well for his future ventures.

The Chief Executive suggested that the Council may wish to consider its position on quality and reliability or service versus speed, inclusive v. exclusive and how to organise a Chepstow to Bristol service.

It was explained that there is a possibility of a trial service from Chepstow/Lydney to Bristol during business hours. The franchise bidders have all expressed interest but it is not part of the base franchise and therefore there is no commitment at this stage.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

A Member asked what the Council's vision is and it was suggested that presentation a proposed vision and policy should be presented at Council.

It was confirmed that the Council has Local Transport Plan objectives within which priorities change according to circumstances. Whilst reliability is a priority now, safety is always the first objective. It is also key that the views communicated to stakeholders are acted upon and important to work with other authorities in West of England to define priorities for both sides. It was commented that it would be worthwhile lobbying the Department for Transport to address the challenges.

In terms of timescales, it was confirmed that the Wales and Borders franchise will be awarded at the end of May with a formal announcement in June. All bidders have been asked to attend meetings of regional transport authorities and officer level meetings to understand the detail of direction and any joint delivery plans.

The Head of Operations agreed that development of the Council's vision and strategy was a piece of work to do, with consultation and reflection on previous engagement, to set out our position. This can be used when lobbying recalling that the Corporate Plan, "22 for 22", includes improvements to rural transport.

5. Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority update (Christian Schmidt)

An update was provided on Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority that there has not been a board meeting since the last meeting. A Workshop is planned for May.

6. Active Travel development (Christian Schmidt)

It was reported that the Integrated Network Maps have been approved by Welsh Government meaning that Monmouthshire County Council has future walking/cycling routes to work towards for the seven settlements of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Gilwern, Magor, Monmouth and Usk. There is £175,000 to spend this financial year to develop plans and specific recommendations were invited from Group Members.

Secondly, Welsh Government Local Transport funding has been secured for the next stage of public realm improvements in Abergavenny to be delivered this financial year. Funding was not secured for the Llanfoist Bridge proposal but notification has been received that an additional amount (£60m) has been allocated to Active Travel to be used between now and 2021 and more details will be announced in due course. The Llanfoist cycle route would be our top priority. Clarification was sought and provided that the suggestions must relate to the routes on the maps.

A Member questioned if the money can be used for more tourism cycle paths in the county. It was responded that primarily the routes suggested have been business, work or school routes to reduce reliance on cars. A programme will be developed to spend the funding in the financial year and this point can be considered.

It was queried, if the bridge is delayed, what priority will be given to the connecting routes and whether or not this aspect should be postponed pending bridge construction. A response was provided that now is the appropriate time to develop the link routes to support the case to implement the bridge.

7. Rail station progress - Abergavenny, Chepstow, Magor (GRIP3 progress) and Severn Tunnel Junction

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

An update was provided that a Local Transport Plan proposal is to buy land to build interchanges at Abergavenny and Chepstow stations. Funding is secured for the purchase of the land but not yet for the detailed design stage.

A Member asked to see details of proposals for the Abergavenny interchange. It was explained that previous studies in 2006 and 2011 have been accepted by Welsh Government as the basis for a case and sufficient to award the funding. The next stage is to carry out consultation on the proposals, following discussions with the franchise winner.

Regarding the pedestrian footbridge at Abergavenny Station, a meeting was held between Network Rail and the Town Council at which it was implied there were no difficulties in preparing a scheme to amend the signalling to remove obstruction to the construction of a new bridge. The message from the meeting was that the Town Council should lobby the County Council to find out who would pay for the study to get the bridge into the programme. It was emphasised that this is a significant local problem.

In terms of Severn Tunnel Junction, a regional Local Transport Fund grant has been available across the region to develop Metro related schemes and this was used last year to progress car parking on the south side and the same is hoped for this year. It is hoped to have planning permission and to proceed to tender this year.

It was raised that car parking at stations is a significant problem across the region and it was queried what would happen to the toll plaza after the removal of the Severn Bridge tolls and if it could be used as a park and ride/park and rail facility for east of Cardiff and Newport and it was agreed that question should be asked of the appropriate body.

It was confirmed that it is a priority to establish park and ride facilities at Severn Tunnel Junction and Abergavenny stations. It was queried if there is an opportunity to access a funding stream to resolve poor air quality on the M4 in the Chepstow area. The importance of integrated transport routes was emphasised and that we must be well prepared.

A Member asked if there had been any progress in Chepstow to build some parking as part of the Mabey Bridge development, noting that Network Rail have electrical signalling equipment there and questioning if they have been asked to move it.

Paul Turner provided an update on Magor station and reported that there had been a visit from officers from the Future Generations Wales Commission. They were impressed with the work so far as it is in line with the Active Travel Act, with sustainability priorities and were interested in examples where third sector can get involved on such projects.

Mott McDonalds office was visited in February as progress on GRIP 3 had stalled but this has moved on. A meeting was held in March with the Head of Operations and the Transport Policy and Planning Officer to consider Active Travel implications for the proposed station and it was agreed that a proper study would be commissioned.

Additionally, in March there was a visit from James Price, Transport for Wales, to better familiarise himself with the site and proposals. If the GRIP 3 is completed, money secured from the New Station Fund, and approval from Welsh Government received then Transport for Wales will take over the project delivery.

Updates were also provided that:

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

- Glyn Smith, Sustrans, visited in March and there is agreement to continue to work together.
- The Group's response to the Cardiff City Region transport strategy has been submitted.
- The Group assisted Jessica Morden MP with preparation for a question to the Minister.
- In April, as part of GRIP 3, a draft option report has been received as well as a draft strategic business case.
- There was an end of day debate arranged by Jessica Morden MP, in parliament on Monday this week to which the Transport Minister responded positively.
- It was confirmed that the transport assessment for the community centre has been received.

8. Bus services update (Richard Cope)

It was reported that a study has been commissioned to undertake an appraisal of bus services and future vision for transport in Monmouthshire. The outcomes of the study will be brought back to this Group. Elements will include affordability and use; the improvements necessary to public transport and rural transport. In response to a question, it was clarified that the study will look at current services, the state of industry and what future service options will be. The report will be available this year.

County Councillor F. Taylor declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as a member of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. It was commented that there is an ever decreasing circle of use and that all bus routes are subsidised, and questioned whether or not this is the best use of the subsidy. It was observed that a different way of thinking was required. The example was provided of the change in health provision to Llanfrechfa Grange Hospital creating new demand for a route.

It was reported that Welsh Government has commissioned a study around use of electric and hydrogen for the fleet and possibly public transport in the future. It was reported that GWR operates buses that operate on compressed gas derived from waste. The cost is less and presents a more viable option.

The specific issue of bus stops at Nevill Hall Hospital was raised. Stagecoach has stopped its drivers going into the hospital and there have been many complaints, mainly from elderly people. The solution provided was totally unsuitable and there is the possibility of a site meeting with the Health Board being arranged. County Councillor S. Woodhouse asked to attend the meeting. A potential solution was suggested of making a space though the grassy area on Brecon Rd to establish bus stops at the end of the car park.

There will be a Welsh Government led Bus Summit in Swansea tomorrow that will be attended by the Passenger Transport Unit Manager.

It was reported that some improvements are planned to the Bus timetable pages on the MCC website to make them more user friendly. Some other changes are planned and will be circulated.

It was proposed that there should be more promotion of the My Monmouthshire App as bus timetables are included, and if kept up to date, are very helpful. It was also requested that maps of routes are included on the website. The suggestion was made that an advert for the App could be displayed at bus stops/stations.

Concern was expressed about the school bus service citing unreliability to and from The Dell Primary School and poor communication with parents. It was responded that there is currently some work being undertaken on the condition of the fleet. The comments will be investigated.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Transport Group held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 2nd May, 2018 at 10.00 am

Regarding changing timetables in bus stations, it was suggested that Town and Community Councils could be approached as there are no staff to undertake this task otherwise.

9. A466 Wye Valley Update

It was explained that there are two sets of traffic lights on the A466 and a landslip. The Head of Operations has written to the Minister to seek support for funding for remedial works on the highway to reduce the impact on residents, business and tourism. A study has been undertaken throughout the Wye Valley to identify other issues and funding will be pursued to make the road more reliable.

A Councillor stated that a higher volume of traffic, with heavy lorries and increased traffic speed has been observed on the top road. Concern was expressed that large trucks should not travel over Bigsweir Bridge.

10. Any Other Business

- Traffic congestion has been noted on the trunk road through Abergavenny and commented that Nick Ramsay A.M. had approached the Minister regarding re-routing the A40 through Llanfoist to ease traffic in the town and questioned if the Council had a position.

It was responded that the most recent correspondence suggested that there were no plans to re-route the A40 through Abergavenny.

- A Workshop to define a vision for consideration by Council was suggested.
- The first Newport Marathon came through Magor and feedback about Monmouthshire and the good work of colleagues was excellent. Those involved were thanked for their efforts.

11. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 19th September 2018 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

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