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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, 11th September, 2019 at  
10.00 am**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor D. Dovey (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, S. Woodhouse and J.Pratt

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ian Yeowart	Managing Director, Grand Union Trains
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Service - Strategic Projects (Fixed Term)
Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Dick Cole	Abergavenny Civic Society
Ted Hand	Magor Action Group on Rail
Phil Inskip	Severn Tunnel Action Group
Paul Turner	Magor Action Group on Rail
Christian Schmidt	Transport Programmes and Projects Manager
Rosemary Corcoran	Friends of the 65 Bus
Miranda Thomason	Project Lead - Volunteering for Wellbeing, Bridges
Lois Park	Senior Rail Stakeholder Manager, Transport for Wales
Matthew Cambourne	Head of Train Planning, Great Western Railways
Dafydd Williams	Rail Performance Manager, Transport for Wales
Brian Mahony	Friends of 65 Bus
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Paul Chase	Strategic Transport Analysis Manager, Transport for Wales
Andrew Hieron	Principal Engineer, Amey Consulting
Dan Scobie	Director, Box Clever
Hywel Price	Assistant Engineer

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### 1. Election of Chair

County Councillor D. Dovey was elected as Chair. Councillor Dovey introduced County Councillor J. Pratt, Cabinet Member for County Operations to the meeting.

### 2. Appointment of Vice Chair

Mr. P. Turner was elected Vice Chair.

### 3. Grand Union Trains: Ian Yeowart, Managing Director

Ian Yeowart, Chief Executive Director, Grand Union Trains (GUT) gave a presentation on the new express rail services between South Wales and London. These are open access services not specified by the Department of Transport; services successfully introduced in other areas of the UK.

GUT are aiming initially to introduce, in two stages, a London Paddington to Cardiff service every 2 hours with a journey time of 1 hour 45 mins, with all services calling at Cardiff Parkway and Severn Tunnel Junction. It is planned to introduce an hourly service from May 2023 between Paddington and Llanelli which will provide a fast service to Swansea with a target journey time of 2 hours 30 mins.

With regard to Severn Tunnel Junction, GUT is prepared to invest £5m to improve and increase car parking and passenger facilities to InterCity standard, including increasing staffing levels and opening times from the first to the last train. Bus and interchange facilities would also be provided and the capability to carry light parcels on board. Severn Tunnel Junction would be used as an arrival and distribution point with deliveries moving around the area using electric vehicles.

Following the presentation, questions were asked as follows:

- A representative of Transition Chepstow asked if the new build trains will be bi-mode and if so, how this will work at Severn Tunnel Junction. It was responded that for the first two years the trains will be bi mode hence the termination of service at Cardiff. Thereafter, solutions are being looked into and an answer is expected later this year.
- A Member referred to car parking and access at Severn Tunnel Junction and expressed the view that passengers were more likely to come from the M48 than the M4 and questioned if any consideration had been given to links from the M48 to Severn Tunnel Junction with appropriate access through Rogiet. It was confirmed that the M48 has not been considered to date however GUT does not want to put any pressure on the village of Rogiet preferring to develop the south side (subject to planning permission). There is an open mind and GUT is keen to engage with interested parties who have local knowledge. Areas other than Rogiet for Park and Ride could include Caerwent. Grand Union Trains are in discussions with Transport for Wales to ensure a cohesive approach.
- A Group Member put the case for the Magor Station project as a means to relieve the pressure on Severn Tunnel Junction, and reduce traffic in Rogiet and asked for the backing of Grand Union Trains. It was confirmed that it is planned to keep as much traffic out of the village as possible. Further discussion was offered outside the meeting, including collaborative meetings with other stakeholders.
- A representative of Rogiet Community Council and the Governing Body of Rogiet Primary School raised concerns about access to the proposed car park at Station Road, especially at the start and end of the school day, and for people who live on the road. It was explained that the road is narrow with double yellow lines, and a 20mph zone has

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yet to be implemented. It was questioned if there were plans to utilise the former toll booth area and confirmed that Welsh Government have plans for that land. GUT share the concerns about the village, and an offer was accepted to discuss the proposals with the Community Council.

- An explanation was requested about the change from the original decision to introduce an hourly service to a two hourly service. This was based on discussions with Welsh Government and the requirement to have services travel further west.
- It was commented that there are two forms of safety in the western zone (ETCS and legacy ATP) and questioned if there will be a programme to retrofit GUT trains with western region ATP as has happened with the Great Western Trains. It was explained that discussions are in hand to ensure the fitment of on board safety devices to provide the same level of safety.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that Network Rail would be responsible for the use of the school as an evacuation centre in the event of an emergency.
- The Group was advised that further questions were welcomed outside of the meeting and could be forwarded for response via the Clerk.

Mr. Yeowart was thanked for his presentation by the Chair.

#### **4. Plans for Severn Tunnel Junction: Christian Schmidt, Transport Planning and Policy Officer and Hywel Price, Assistant Engineer**

Monmouthshire County Council has engaged with Transport for Wales/ Keolis Amey regarding joint plans for the development of Severn Tunnel Junction. The Group welcomed Andrew Hieron, Principal Engineer, Amey Consulting, to the meeting who gave a presentation on the work requested by the Council to develop a masterplan, review existing car parking and undertake a feasibility study for a pedestrian footbridge.

Members asked questions, following the presentation:

- It was queried if any consideration had been given to an alternative to extending the footbridge that would result in direct level access to the Newport end of the platform and would potentially be less expensive. It was agreed to discuss the alternative with the Council.
- Regarding the plans for additional car parking spaces, it was commented that there would be more traffic through Station Rd creating more impact on the village and Country Park. It was confirmed that planners are aware of possible impact on Station Rd and a transport assessment may be required.

Mr. Hieron was thanked for his input at the meeting.

#### **5. Transport for Wales: Lois Park, Senior Rail Stakeholder Manager and Dafydd Williams, Rail Performance Manager**

#### **6. Overall Strategy**

The Chair welcomed Lois Park, Senior Rail Stakeholder Manager, Transport for Wales who gave a presentation on some of the improvements taking place. The main points explained included:

- Over the next few years there is £5 billion available to transform Wales and Borders rail services:
  - £1 billion on Valley Lines

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- £1billion on Rolling stock
- £1billion to maintain core Valley Lines infrastructure
- £2billion subsidy for the rail franchise contract
- There will be more services and more capacity
- All trains will be replaced
- All stations will have some improvements
- There will be better accessibility. It has been announced that Abergavenny Station will have a new Access for All footbridge by 2024 delivered by Network Rail. In addition, funding is being made available for it to become a Disability Wales designed station.
- There is commitment to stakeholder involvement and feedback; regional Stakeholder managers are being recruited to facilitate this.

#### **7. Future Services**

Paul Chase, Strategic Transport Analysis Manager for Transport for Wales (Rail Services) continued the Transport for Wales presentation talking about future schemes, services and performance within the Metro Enhancements Framework. This is a structured approach to where future investment should be made and takes into account the key transport corridors in the region.

The framework and the scoring criteria were explained, noting that they are based on the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and concentrate on Sustainability/Climate Change, Inclusive Communities, Economic Growth and Development and Culture/Tourism. Measures also include car dependency, air quality, access to employment opportunities, potential social exclusion risk (age 64+) and congestion hotspots.

A Group Member commented that there was no reference to Monmouth in the data presented and questioned if it is included in future plans. It was confirmed that Monmouth (and Usk) are included but there is limited access to public transport currently. The variation from other better served areas is fully recognised.

#### **8. Issues relating to cancellations and delays**

Dafydd Williams, Rail Performance Manager, Transport for Wales (Rail Services) was welcomed to the meeting to talk about rail performance, overcrowding and timetabling.

It was explained that the performance regime is based on Passenger Time Lost, Short Formations and % of Station Stops Missed and examples were provided. The franchisee, Keolis Amey, will be issued with penalties when expected performance on these measures is not reached.

#### **9. Opportunity for Group Members to ask about other projects (such as Abergavenny, Chepstow and Magor Stations)**

It was acknowledged that there are accessibility issues at Chepstow Station and explained that rail infrastructure funding is not devolved but the Minister is pressing the UK government for full devolution of funding and powers. In the interim, additional funding is requested for a number of stations with accessibility problems that didn't receive (CP6) funding. Abergavenny Station was successful in a bid for funding for accessibility work over the next five years. Chepstow Station is included in a mid-tier submission for the next round of funding; decision to be expected in April 2020. Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are supporting this application.

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A Group Member stated that the decision on which stations are adapted rests with the DfT and very strong representation would be needed by Welsh Government to get an allocation of funding that would enable an accessible footbridge at Chepstow.

It was considered to be unacceptable to wait for three years for the introduction of one train per hour and was suggested that any rolling stock could be utilised to provide this service earlier. It was responded that this was the service offered when the bid model was accepted and nothing can be added until 2022/23. Whilst the services are part of the contract, Transport for Wales is working with Welsh Government on the possibility of earlier changes to the timetable.

A suggestion was made regarding easing the regulations on valid tickets to provide more options for passengers between Bristol and Lydney. It was confirmed that the message had been passed to the right people, and that there is also an exercise to change the zones, and to look at fare consistency.

In response to a question about Abergavenny Station, it was confirmed that the DfT has committed funds and design work has commenced e.g. lift and positioning of signals. There will be public consultation in 2020. The aim is to make the station as accessible as possible with the Welsh Government committing extra funding to become a Disability Wales pilot station. County Councillor Woodhouse requested that officer are kept informed. It was confirmed that a Regional stakeholder manager is to be appointed to lead communications.

Efforts to better integrate buses with stations were requested and contact details between Transport for Wales and the Friends of the 65 Bus will be shared.

A Member highlighted the need for the Traws Cymru bus service to link with Chepstow and Monmouth Metro/ Metro Plus and that the Metro should go as far as Chepstow to better connect services. More frequent services between Cardiff and Cheltenham stopping at Chepstow were requested. It was responded that transport for Wales is looking at the population, where people are working/living, major development sites etc. to determine their needs. As part of these studies, particular issues have been identified in Monmouthshire where a large proportion of the population have no access to Metro or Metro plus schemes. It was added that the corridor between the Severn crossings and Newport is the subject of a detailed study and Transport for Wales will feed in knowledge to Welsh Government accordingly.

A Member referred to the decision to reduce the number of applications for new station from 12 to 4 querying how much analytical work has been passed to Welsh Government. It was confirmed that Transport for Wales is pushing evidence based decisions.

It was requested that timetable leaflets are revised to include details of Bristol and London connections from the Chepstow line. In response to a question, it was thought that open access bids were removed because of missing or insufficient evidence. It was confirmed that improved services to Bristol and London are a high priority.

The offer to return to a future meeting to provide an update on next steps was welcomed.

#### **9.1. Abergavenny Rail Action Group (request from CC. S. Woodhouse)**

County Councillor Woodhouse asked questions on behalf of Abergavenny Rail Action Group as follows:

- Does 'Step Free Access' mean the provision of a bridge and lifts?
- Is the project guaranteed to be delivered within a set timescale?

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- Has engineering planning and other project planning work commenced and when is it envisaged construction will start and finish?
- When will the public consultation mentioned by Network Rail take place and in what form?

It was agreed that the Strategic Transport Group supported the above questions to be submitted to Network rail.

#### **10. Great Western Railways: Matthew Cambourne, Head of Train Planning**

Mr. M. Cambourne, Head of Train Planning, Great Western Railways was welcomed to the meeting to provide a presentation and update on the December 2019 timetable.

It was noted that the timetable changes are the largest for forty years across the whole network and 75% of train times will be changed. There will be new, more frequent and faster services, and direct, superfast, non-stop services between Bristol and London. Attention was drawn to the availability of a Customer and Communities Improvement Fund. Bids can be made to support schemes that address wider social needs.

GWR was thanked for stopping high speed trains to alleviate pressure when the morning Portsmouth train has been short-formed. The additional stops have helped to avoid overcrowding.

It was queried how much liaison has taken place with other operators, as connections are important and other timetable changes would be needed. It was confirmed that there have also been amendments to other companies' timetables. Meetings have also taken place with Transport for Wales as there is a need to blend GWR with Transport for Wales and also freight services. Whilst it has not been possible to arrange perfect connections GWR is looking for the best balance.

#### **11. Chepstow Transport Study (inc. High Beech Roundabout study and Hayes Gate)**

Chepstow Road Study: The Head of Service – Strategic Projects (Fixed Term) provided an update that the Council has gone to tender on WelTAG and WebTAG Stage 2 to compare bids prepared by interested parties. The lowest bids will be assessed but it was emphasised that there is currently no funding available. Previously an estimate of £1m had been suggested and this process will provide a better indication of potential costs.

When an indicative price is available, approaches will be made to Welsh Government, the Welsh Office, Highways England and the Department for Transport to seek funding. It was emphasised that this is not just a Monmouthshire CC issue.

High Beech roundabout: Following the Transition Chepstow event, some ideas were forwarded to Welsh Government which are now being reviewed.

Gas Renewal Works: It was noted that congestion is expected in Chepstow due to 8 weeks gas renewal works and it was queried if the impact on local bus services has been accounted for. It was confirmed that there will be a revised timetable as there are also other unrelated road closures. Information will be made available as soon as possible.

#### **12. GovTech Update**

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The Head of Policy and Governance and Dan Scobie, Director of Technology at Box Clever Digital Ltd made a presentation about the Monmouthshire GovTech Challenge.

It was explained that Monmouthshire County Council applied to the GovTech Catalyst Challenge to provide a technological solution to the rurality problems of loneliness and transport. The bid was accepted and pre-approval was given for £1.25m to develop technology solutions to incentivise the private sector.

57 companies applied and 5 were appointed at Research and Development stage. 2 companies produced concepts that could solve the problems encountered in Monmouthshire and further afield and can be allocated up to £500,000 each.

The Group was informed of the work of the Behavioural Insights team to map loneliness, to raise awareness of community events and activities and to understand people's motivations and preferences. The work is carried out under the name of Connector.

The concept of the Thrive Engine, put forward by Box Clever was explained.

Mr. Scobie provided more information about the proposal where information is gathered about individuals and transport needs. The system would present the options available suitable to the individual's needs. The system provides public transport information, adding in routes and community transport options with a view to unlocking the potential of all vehicles already travelling on various routes with spare seats to be able to offer lifts to people.

Trustworthy drivers and passengers would be linked according to routes on virtual lift points. This would present employment, educational and social opportunities plus provide sustainable transport options.

It was agreed to invite Mr. Scobie to a future meeting.

#### **13. Bridges Car Scheme: Miranda Thomason**

The Chair, on behalf of the Group, welcomed Miranda Thomason, Bridges Centre, who leads on well-being and support projects which includes the car scheme as an offshoot of the befriending initiative.

The befrienders were helping people to get out where they were unable to do so independently; people who have no near supportive family. The 80+ volunteers have been enlisted through the safe recruitment process, use their own cars and are organised by a paid co-ordinator. There is always a campaign to recruit more drivers. It was confirmed that the scheme is not just for the elderly.

Leaflets were made available.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the scheme is available county wide. There is a base for volunteer co-ordinators and befrienders at the cabin in Chepstow Community Hospital. Funding is currently in place for the co-ordinator through the integrated care fund (ICF). The Health Board also contribute some funding in response to the closure of the dementia ward at Chepstow Hospital, and money has also been made available from the Green Energy Fund via County Councillor S. Jones.

A Group Member referred to integration of transport opportunities and was convinced that the answer lies in technology. It was suggested that this could be a topic for the next meeting e.g.

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where the scheme fits with Grass Routes and hospital transport services. The Friends of the 65 Bus would like to be involved in the planning processes using their experiences of a very rural bus service to achieve greater utilisation of services.

Miranda was thanked for her contribution to the meeting.

#### **14. Reconfiguration of meetings**

The Chair suggested more flexibility in meetings. He proposed meetings at the beginning and the end of the year plus two meetings arranged on a flexible basis to attract the best speakers and to ensure Group Members make a worthwhile contribution in a timely way.

Members were invited to send suggestions to the Chair.

#### **15. Forward Work Programme**

Suggestions to be sent to the Clerk ([wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk)).

#### **16. To receive the notes of the previous meeting held on 20th February 2019**

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

#### **17. Date of Next meeting: 5th February 2020**

**The meeting ended at 1.00 pm**