

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 15 May 2002
Time: 2.00 to 4:45 pm
Venue: Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, Blaenavon

REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Wales and the World Conference

The 'Wales and the World' conference was highly successful. Over 400 people were there, and the plenary sessions and workshops were well received. There was a real feeling of enthusiasm for the whole sustainability agenda.

The associated website has had over 2000 'hits', and we are discussing with WWF Cymru and Oxfam Cymru how this can be maintained and expanded in the run-up to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Visit by the Sustainable Development Commission

The Sustainable Development Commission (whose members are appointed by the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of all the devolved administrations) meet in Cardiff on Wednesday 8th and Thursday 9th May.

They are also visiting the Arts Factory in Ferndale and the Welsh International Climbing Centre in Taff Bargoed, meeting the First Minister and Environment Minister, and having discussions with Welsh Assembly Government staff and people from partner organisations.

We hope to show them how we are going about mainstreaming sustainable development into our work, and to establish how their work at the UK level can be of benefit to us in Wales.

COUNTRYSIDE

Glyndwr's Way

On the 19th of April I opened Wales' third National Trail, Glyndwr's Way. The 132 mile National Trail is contained wholly within the County of Powys, and contains some of the finest scenery in Mid Wales.

The potential economic benefits to the local economy of north Powys is very clear from the existing two National Trails, with Pembrokeshire Coast Path for example generating approximately £14 million annually.

Nantgwynant Integrated Land Management Phase II Project in Beddgelert.

On 26 April I visited the Nantgwynant Integrated Land Management Phase II Project in Beddgelert. The National Trust has been given £1.2m Objective One Grant for the project to fund further environmental work in the Beddgelert area.

It will create 7 new jobs as well as securing 7 existing jobs involving, with partners, the protection and conservation and rejuvenation of the countryside, built heritage and community in the Nantgwynant Valley.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Meeting with Environment Agency Wales

As part of my sponsorship responsibilities I held one of my regular meetings with Environment Agency Wales on 25 April. Their report to me for that meeting highlighted a number of positive outcomes being achieved largely as a consequence of the additional grant in aid that has been given to the Agency by the Assembly.

Highlights included continued success with targeted waste enforcement, and the production and implementation of action plans for all identified bathing waters in Wales. The results of the targeted enforcement activity will be published.

Waste Strategy

I propose to launch the new waste strategy for Wales on 14 June. If all goes to plan the launch will take place in both North Wales and South Wales with contributions from both places. Members of the EPT Committee will be welcome to attend and details will be sent out shortly.

The new strategy will replace *Waste Strategy 2000* and will mean that the Assembly has taken responsibility for the sustainable management of waste in Wales. However, while publishing the strategy will be a significant step forward, it will need to be implemented to have any effect. I shall bring detailed proposals for an implementation plan to the Committee in the autumn session, and seek the Committee's comments on these.

The Nant-y-Gwyddon landfill site

In our meeting on 17 April I undertook to report back on communication from the European Commission on the Nant-y-Gwyddon landfill site.

In this case, the key facts are:

- i. the UK Government has received an Article 226 Letter from the Commission. This is the first formal stage in the infraction process;
- i. the letter raises concerns about the site having regard to the requirements of the EC Waste Framework Directive.

It is the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government to respond to the Commission and my officials are assisting with the preparation of the response.

PLANNING

House of Commons Select Committee on Transport Local Government and the Regions

Following an invitation, I appeared before the House of Commons' Select Committee on 8th May. The Select Committee was considering the Department of Transport, Local Government, and the Regions' Planning Green Paper. I was asked to explain the background to our consultation and the reasons for the distinctive approach.

TRANSPORT

Transport Grant

Attached, for Committee members' consideration, at Annex 1 are the Transport Grant 2003 –2004 criteria for bids from Local Authorities.

Transport Meetings

I attended a session of the Commission for Integrated Transport's plenary meeting here in Cardiff Bay on the 9th May.

I have concluded the meetings with the Transport Consortiums. I met SWITCH on the 24th April and opened the newly refurbished Haverfordwest railway station. In May, on the 2nd and 8th respectively, I met the SWIFT/TIGER consortia and the Mid Wales Partnership.

I am attending the Welsh Affairs Committee in London on the 22nd May to give evidence at their enquiry into transport.

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MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

ANNEX 1

TRANSPORT GRANT BIDS 2003-04

1. This paper invites the comments of Committee members on the categories of Transport Grant bids to be invited from local authorities for capital funding in 2003-04 for new projects.
2. **I propose that the following bids be invited, but support for any new projects will be subject to the outcome of the budget planning round:**
 - i. new capital projects arising from the draft regional bus strategies Authorities. Where there are related revenue implications, I would be prepared to provide support, subject to the establishment of Quality Bus Partnership arrangements;

- ii. new projects reflecting the emerging Assembly Cycling and Walking Strategy and the Road Safety Strategy, which will deliver improvements in provision for cycling and walking, including creation of routes to bus stations, railway stations, town centres and other major trip destinations; and
- iii. new bids for Safe Routes to School, and subject to the outcome of the budget planning round, I propose a small increase in the budget earmarked for these projects. It is currently £2.7 million.

Background

3. Transport Grant is allocated annually, on the basis of 50% grant and 50% supplementary credit approval, in response to formal bids for support. Originally a top-slice of local government resources, designed to fund road schemes costing more than £5 million that are beyond the normal financial resources of an authority. The programme has been progressively extended since 1997. It now also supports integrated package schemes costing more than £1 million, support for small Safe Route to School schemes which are not subject to a qualifying financial threshold, and infrastructure schemes costing over £5 million contributing to wider community regeneration.

4. I have set out a rolling £430 million programme of strategic support to deliver key infrastructure improvements to the road and rail networks, and to deliver other package interventions. The indicative budget for 2003-04 and following years is £72.8 million. Those resources are needed to meet the funding needs of the existing projects and accepted major schemes. Authorities will need to submit applications for funding to comply with the requirements of the formal allocation process in 2003-04

Other Funding Streams

5. Significant funds are being committed to transport in addition to the Transport Grant programme. In addition to the Welsh Assembly Government's budgets for trunk road maintenance, improvement and construction, in respect of which I announced the forward trunk road programme on 21 March, there are a number of other budgets supporting the delivery of integrated transport across Wales. In November 2001 I announced a £25 million package of additional funding to help tackle the backlog of repairs and maintenance on local authority roads and also funding for each Council to recruit and retain a new Child Safety Co-ordinator. The Welsh Assembly Government is funding the introduction of free bus travel by pensioners and the disabled through the local government settlement and continues to provide Road Safety Grant and Local Transport Services Grant, distributed in accordance with agreed formulae, to local authorities. The Local Regeneration Fund is also a source of support for smaller transport schemes. Local authorities also receive provision for transport spending within the general unhyphenated local government settlement. It is for them to determine their own priorities in deciding what proportion of their own resources to commit to expenditure on transport.

6. I will be seeking additional resources through the spending review and budget planning round for this and other transport programmes in order to maintain the momentum in delivering a step change in integrated transport across Wales. I will be looking to this Committee to support these bids.

Discussion

7. This Committee's policy review of Public Transport has set a challenging agenda for the development of quality public transport provision. I have responded to recommendation 4 of the Report and asked the local authority' consortia to prepare draft regional bus strategies by this June, and final strategies by 2003. I propose to invite bids for capital projects identified in these draft strategies. Revenue funding consequences of capital investment also need to be addressed. TG guidance requires local authorities to satisfy themselves they can meet revenue consequentials. This remains the case generally, but for specific problems I am prepared to consider revenue support. This is the case for park and ride services, where the revenue implications are very different. I propose to ask authorities to identify the revenue implications of bus projects. Where projects are accepted for capital funding under TG, and form part of a Quality Partnership, I propose that, subject to funds being approved by the Assembly, I would award revenue support on a tapering basis under Section 156 of the Transport Act 2000.

8. A consultation draft cycling and walking strategy will be considered by the Committee today. It is not the function of transport budgets to support leisure activities but there is a great deal of scope for encouraging healthier life styles and modal shift through further provision for cycling and walking. I have therefore decided to invite bids for further work, building on the success of 'Safe Routes to Schools', and extend the concept to links to town centres, bus and rail stations and other major trip destinations, if money is available.

9. Improving security is a key issue and projects involving developments, particularly at bus and rail stations, will be encouraged.

10. I know that members across the Assembly warmly support the Safe Route to Schools funding which is provided through Transport Grant. To build on the very real success of these schemes at the local level, subject to the outcome of the budget round, I propose to continue the scheme with, subject to funds being approved by the Assembly, a small increase.

11. Not all the infrastructure schemes submitted for funding in the 2002-03 received support and I recognise that there remain schemes across Wales which local members and Councils would like to see supported. However, consideration of the future expenditure plans for this grant and the trunk road announcement I made in March will clearly demonstrate that the Assembly Government is already committed to a very significant road building programme. 16 major local authority road schemes across Wales are receiving Assembly support, 2 supported with PFI credits (see Table 1).

Compliance and Financial Implications

12. Transport Grant is paid under the powers conferred by Sections 87 and 88 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and Section 40 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Revenue funding of bus projects can be paid under Section 156 of the Transport Act 2000. These powers have been delegated by the Assembly to me in my capacity of Minister for Environment via the First Minister. There are no immediate financial implications arising from the categories and criteria set for the invitation of bids for grant support. However, it should be noted that my ability to allocate funds to any new bids will be dependent upon my securing additional resources in the next budget round.

Table 1

LOCAL AUTHORITY ROAD SCHEMES COSTING MORE THAN £5 MILLION RECEIVING SUPPORT

Local Authority	Road	Scheme Name
Blaenau Gwent	A4046	Cwm Relief Road
Caerphilly	A4808	Sirhowy Enterprise Way
Caerphilly		Greater Bargoed Community Regeneration
Cardiff		Wentloog/St Mellons Link
Carmarthen		Ammanford Distributor Road Phase 1/1
Ceredigion	A486/B4336	Ceredigion Link Road Stage 1
Gwynedd	A497	Abererch to Llanystumdwy
Gwynedd	A499	Aberdesach to Llanaelhaearn
Neath Port Talbot		Port Talbot PDR 1b } Port Talbot PDR 1c }
Neath Port Talbot		Port Talbot PDR 2
Newport	A4042/A455	Newport Southern Distributor Road

Newport	A48/A467/M4	Tredegar Park Interchange/A48 Improvement
Pembrokeshire		Moatway
Rhondda Cynon Taff	A4058/A4233	Porth/Lower Rhondda Fach Relief Road Phase 1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	A473	Church Village Bypass
Wrexham		Improved Access to Wrexham Industrial Estate