

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Friday 3 December 1999
Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm
Venue: Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend

Attendance:

Members

Carwyn Jones (Chair)	Bridgend
Rosemary Butler	Newport West
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Jane Davidson	Pontypridd
Geraint Davies	Rhondda
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Jocelyn Davies	South East Wales
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Sue Essex	Cardiff North
Michael German	South Wales East
Janice Gregory	Ogmore
John Griffiths	Newport East
Jane Hutt	Vale of Glamorgan
Peter Law	Blaenau Gwent

Huw Lewis	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
Lynne Neagle	Torfaen
Jenny Randerson	Cardiff Central
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Phil Williams	South Wales West
<i>In attendance</i>	
Martin Evans	Director, Transport, Planning and Environment Group
Denzil Jones	Head of Transport Policy Division
Cllr Mel Nott	Bridgend County Borough Council
Justin Cooper	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Mark Adams	Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
Mike Walker	Regional Director Wales, Confederation of Passenger Transport
David Worsell	Cardiff Bus
Bob White	Stagecoach Red and White
Sian James	Association of Train Operating Companies
<i>Secretariat</i>	
Martin Stevenson	Clerk
Vaughan Watkin	Deputy Clerk

Opening remarks

1. Cllr Roy Bowser, Deputy Mayor, welcomed the Regional Committee to Bridgend County Borough Council. He explained that the Mayor, Cllr Lyn Jenkins, would normally have been in attendance but tragically his wife, the Lady Mayoress Mrs Mwynwen Jenkins, had passed away suddenly.

2. The Chair asked the Deputy Mayor to pass the condolences and sympathy of the Committee to the Mayor on his sad loss. A number of Members paid tribute to the Lady Mayoress, who had worked unstintingly for the people of Bridgend and been an ambassador for the county borough.

3. The Chair welcomed Win Griffiths MP to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

4. Apologies for absence were received from Lorraine Barrett, Peter Black, Alan Cairns, David Davis, William Graham, Brian Hancock, Pauline Jarman, David Rhys Lloyd, David Melding, Jonathan Morgan and Rhodri Morgan.

Item 1: Minutes of the meetings held on 17 September and 1 October

5. The minutes of the meetings held on 17 September and 1 October were approved by the Committee.

Item 2: Postal addresses

6. The Chair explained that he had met the Post Office Chairman for Wales in September, who had agreed to attend the meeting accompanied by a Member of the UK Post Office Executive Board. Unfortunately this offer had subsequently been withdrawn because of the non-availability of a Member of the Executive Board. The Chair said that he did not feel that this was acceptable, and he had made it clear to the Post Office that the item would remain on the agenda for the meeting. The Post Office had indicated that they hoped to be able to attend the next meeting.

7. The following points were made in discussion:

- A number of Members expressed concern at the attitude shown by the Post Office, which they felt did not show sufficient consideration for the status of the National Assembly.
- It was felt that the Post Office's position reflected poorly on their senior management in Wales. One suggestion was that consideration should be given to the procedure for making appointments to the Post Office Board for Wales within the context of the Assembly's Concordat with the Department of Trade and Industry.
- It was reported that the new postal addresses were causing problems in some Valleys communities, with mail being misdirected where neighbouring towns had streets with identical names.
- It was noted that postcode changes imposed in some areas had resulted in financial penalties for residents, as a result of the new postcodes attracting higher insurance premiums.
- There was some concern about the closure threat to rural Post Offices.

8. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the First Secretary regarding the stance taken by the Post Office about attendance before the Committee. It was also agreed that the Chair would write to the Post Office to make them aware of the Committee's views and to issue a further invitation to attend the March meeting.

Item 3: Integrated transport policy: SEWR-04-99 (p.1)

Item 4: Integrated transport: Note by the South East Wales Transportation Forum: SEWR-04-99 (p.2)

9. It was agreed to take items 3 and 4 on the agenda together. Denzil Jones introduced SEWR-04-99 (p.1), which set out the background to the development of an integrated transport policy, the aim of the policy and the work in hand to achieve integration, together with a number of specific transport issues in the region. He emphasised the areas in need of further work, including the options for the trunk and local road networks, the integration of transport and land use planning, the development of a national public transport network, the future strategy for rail services and the development of a national concessionary fares scheme.

10. Introducing paper SEWR-04-99 (p.2), Cllr Nott explained that the South East Wales Transport Forum

involved the ten local authorities in the region working together to secure an integrated transport system. The Forum demonstrated the way that local authorities could work together for the benefit of the public. Justin Cooper said that the South East region offered perhaps the greatest scope within Wales for delivering integrated transport. He felt that local transport plans were an essential part of the process, but emphasised the limits on what local authorities could achieve on their own. He felt that significant additional resources would be required to take forward the local strategies.

11. Mark Adams explained the various partnerships which were already operating in the region, including the SWIFT and TIGER consortia, the South Wales Rail Forum and the regional arm of the national cycle network. He said that the SWIFT consortium had been established primarily to address the problems of commuting into Cardiff, and involved six local authorities, the train and bus operators, Railtrack and the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation. The strategy involved the development of bus corridors, improvements to bus stations, improved bus-rail interchange and more frequent rail services. Mark Adams suggested that the Assembly had a key role in terms of the provision of funding for taking forward the strategy and also in facilitating links with the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority.

12. The following points were raised in discussion:

- There was widespread support for the approach of partnership working. It was felt that integrated transport would be secured only if the Assembly, local authorities, public transport providers, Railtrack and the various regulatory bodies worked together.
- Members felt that it was vital to integrate transport policy with land use planning and environmental policies, as well as wider health and social policies. Improved public transport provision had a key role to play in combating social exclusion, as well as improving mobility for people with disabilities.
- Although it was not yet clear about the extent to which transport projects would qualify for Objective 1 funding, it was hoped that schemes outside the Objective 1 area would qualify for support where there was a beneficial impact within the Objective 1 area. One example was a scheme to enhance capacity at Cardiff Queen Street Station, which would allow increased frequencies on the Valleys Lines network. It was noted that the Local Government and Environment Committee would be meeting the European Commission in the New Year to discuss transport funding opportunities.
- It was noted that the public were not always aware of the integrated transport measures, such as bus-rail links or through ticketing, which had already been put in place.
- Members expressed concern about whether rail service enhancements might impact adversely on bus patronage, or vice versa. Justin Cooper explained that there was a need for investment in both bus and rail services, with the overall aim of increasing the modal share for public transport as a whole.
- It was noted that the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority had started work on the second round of rail franchising. It was considered vital for the Assembly to develop a strategic view of rail services in Wales, and to seek to ensure that the opportunity was taken to improve minimum service standards.
- There was support for the re-opening of railway stations at Llanharan and Brackla. It was noted that this formed part of the SWIFT strategy, although there was a question mark about whether there was sufficient capacity on the South Wales Main Line for services to stop at both stations. There was also support for the reopening of Caerleon Station, which it was felt would reduce congestion on the M4 motorway around Newport. It was noted that this was being taken forward as part of the development of the TIGER strategy.
- Members expressed support for the restoration of passenger rail services on the Vale of Glamorgan line and the Newport to Ebbw Vale line. It was noted that feasibility studies were under way in both cases.

- Justin Cooper suggested that the commitment to introduce free bus travel for pensioners represented a social rather than a transport policy, so that the initiative should not be funded from transport budgets. He explained that there was significant uncertainty about the cost of introducing the scheme, as it was not clear how much patronage would increase when free fares were introduced. Denzil Jones said that the commitment was to introduce the scheme by 2002, and that it would be necessary to bid for the additional funding in future budget rounds.

13. The Chair thanked Denzil Jones, Cllr Nott, Justin Cooper and Mark Adams for their papers and for responding to the points raised by Members.

Item 5: Integrated transport: Note by the Confederation of Passenger Transport Wales: SEWR-03-99 (p.3)

Item 6: Integrated transport: Note by the Association of Train Operating Companies: SEWR-04-99 (p.4)

14. It was agreed to take items 5 and 6 on the agenda together. Introducing paper SEWR-03-99 (p.3), Mike Walker suggested that the time had come to release buses from the growing congestion in urban areas by the increased use of bus priority measures, such as dedicated bus lanes and bus priority at traffic signals. These measures were a key feature of the Quality Partnerships which operators were keen to develop with local authorities. Work was also in hand to develop an all Wales public transport information system, which would be available from April 2000, and operators were engaged in a major programme of investment in low floor buses. He emphasised the need for the Assembly and local authorities to increase investment in transport infrastructure.

15. David Worsell said that reliability was the key to improving bus patronage, but the increasing congestion in town centres made it difficult for operators to deliver this. He identified indiscriminate car parking as a particular problem, and suggested that the decriminalisation of car parking was the way forward. Bob White emphasised the need for operators and local authorities to work together in partnership. He felt that bus and rail services could complement each other, with the overall aim of increasing the transport options available to existing car users.

16. Sian James introduced paper SEWR-04-99 (p.4). She said that the Association of Train Operating Companies represented the 25 train operating companies, six of which operated in Wales. She emphasised the major challenges facing the industry, including increasing passenger demand, the need to maintain performance and reliability, the coming round of franchise negotiations and the development of enhanced north-south services.

17. The following points were raised in discussion;

- It was noted that the Assembly had limited powers in relation to public transport, particularly the railways. However, even where the powers remained with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Assembly could seek to use its influence to ensure that the needs of Wales were taken into account. Martin Evans agreed to provide Members with a note setting out the Assembly's powers in relation to transport. *[Clerk's note: See attached annex]*
- There was widespread support for the development of bus Quality Partnerships. It was felt that high quality services to isolated communities had a vital role to play in helping to combat social exclusion. The operators acknowledged that there was room for improvement in terms of driver training, particularly in relation to their dealings with passengers.
- Members expressed some concern about the safety of the older buses used to provide school transport. Mike Walker explained that the age of the vehicles was not a safety issue, as all public transport vehicles

were subject to the same rigorous safety checks.

- Some Members reported that there had been an increase in the number of complaints about the services provided by Cardiff Bus. David Worsell said that in July the company had found it necessary to revise its service patterns in response to financial pressures. Some adjustment of these service patterns had been necessary in October, and Cardiff Bus would shortly be commissioning consultants to undertake a review of their network. Time lost through traffic congestion had made it necessary to move the terminus for some routes to Dumfries Place, and although this had not been popular with passengers there had been benefits in terms of traffic management.
- Members were keen to see an improvement in the reliability and frequency of rail services. There was support for an increased frequency of service on the Valleys Lines network in line with the SWIFT strategy. There was also support for additional services on the Maesteg line, particularly in the evenings when the train service terminated at Bridgend with a connecting bus service.
- It was noted that parts of the Valleys Lines network were single track. However, Sian James explained that improved signalling and the installation of passing loops meant that this was not a constraint on increasing the frequency of services.
- There was concern about the standard of First Great Western's services from South Wales to London, where trains were often dirty and seats double-booked. Despite the recent refurbishment work, it was also felt that Newport Station was an eyesore, particularly Platform 3 and the access to rear of the Station from the car park. Sian James said that First Great Western were aware of these problems and considering how they might be addressed.
- Members felt that there was a need to improve security at railway stations, for example, through the introduction of CCTV.

18. The Chair thanked Mike Walker, David Worsell, Bob White and Sian James for their papers and for responding to the points raised by Members.

Item 7: Open mike session

19. The Chair invited questions from members of the public. There were questions about the reopening of Llanharan Station and the routing of the Porthcawl to Bridgend bus link. The Chair asked the CPT and ATOC to carry out an initial investigation of the second point, and said that he would arrange for the Assembly Secretary to respond to both queries in due course.

Arrangements for the next meeting

20. Members agreed that the meeting scheduled for 4 February would be a consultation meeting about the Assembly's sustainable development scheme, to be held in Newport. The following meeting on 10 March would deal with health issues, with Barry as the venue.

**Committee Secretariat
December 1999**

ANNEX

SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S POWERS IN RELATION TO TRANSPORT

1. Statutory powers in relation to roads

1.1 The Assembly has a statutory role under the Highways Act 1980 as highway authority for the trunk road network in Wales. This means that it is responsible for maintaining the existing trunk network, reviewing the adequacy of the network and where necessary carrying out improvements to safeguard road users and meet public needs.

1.2 Non-trunk roads are the responsibility of local authorities. The Assembly does however have responsibility for the provision of funds for local authority expenditure on roads, through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Basic Credit Approval (BCA) mechanisms. It also pays grants and credit approvals (Transport Grant) to local authorities for major road projects which cannot be financed through BCA allocations.

1.3 The Assembly also has a number of powers which relate to the roads network generally. Examples are detailed powers relating to road safety and traffic signs. However, the Assembly's powers do not extend to the testing and licensing of drivers and vehicles or the regulation of the haulage industry.

2. Statutory powers in relation to public transport

2.1 In contrast with the position on roads, the Assembly has very few powers in relation to public transport. In particular, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions administers the following functions on a United Kingdom or Great Britain basis:

- setting the policy framework for public transport generally;
- regulating the railways, and the provision of financial support for passenger rail services;
- regulating the bus industry, and the promotion of safety, competition and reliability;
- setting the regulatory framework for taxis and private hire vehicles;
- promoting and regulating air services, and setting the policy framework for airports; and
- promoting and regulating shipping, and setting the policy framework for ports.

2.2 The Assembly does however have direct responsibility for the provision of funds for local authority expenditure on public transport (mainly subsidised services or concessionary fares). Within their overall budget allocations, the amount of expenditure on public transport is a matter for local authorities to decide, taking account of their assessment of local priorities. However, since 1998-99 additional funds for bus subsidies have been provided to local authorities through the Special Grant Report mechanism.

2.3 The Assembly also has a few specific powers relating to public transport. The main ones, in addition to Transport Grant support for integrated transport packages, are:

- the power to pay grants (Freight Facilities Grant) towards the cost of facilities to transfer freight movements from road to rail or inland waterway;
- the power to pay grants (Welsh Rural Transport Grant) to promote transport services in rural areas;
- the power to pay Bus Subsidy Grant in support of local bus services;
- limited regulatory powers in relation to the subsidised public transport services which local authorities are required to operate (for example, on tendering);
- limited regulatory powers in relation to the concessionary fares schemes operated on a discretionary basis by local authorities (for example, an order-making power to extend the classes of people eligible for

travel concessions); and

- a requirement to consider proposals for the sale or financial restructuring of local authority owned bus companies.

Transport Policy Division
December 1999