

Minutes

Date: Friday 11 May 2001
Time: 10.00am to 12.55pm
Venue: Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead

Attendance

Members

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| Ann Jones, Chair | Vale of Clwyd |
| Eleanor Burnham | North Wales |
| Alison Halford | Delyn |
| Gareth Jones | Conwy |
| Tom Middlehurst | Alyn and Deeside |
| Alun Pugh | Clwyd West |
| Rod Richards | North Wales |
| Peter Rogers | North Wales |
| Janet Ryder | North Wales |
| Ieuan Wyn Jones | Ynys Môn |
| Rhodri Morgan, First Minister | Cardiff West |

Railtrack

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| Andrew Skidmore | Development Planning Manager, North West |
| Simon Maple | Route Development Manager, West Coast Moderisation |

North Wales Economic Forum Transport Group

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| Councillor W J Williams | Chair |
| Mike Simkins | Director of Development Services, Wrexham County Borough Council |

Secretariat

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| Adrian Crompton | Committee Clerk |
| Howell Rees | Deputy Committee Clerk |

Item 1: Introduction and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Ucheldre Centre for their hospitality. Apologies had been received from Dafydd Elis Thomas, John Marek, Karen Sinclair and Dafydd Wigley.

Item 2: Minutes and report back from previous meeting - NWR 02-01(p1); NWR 01-01(min)

2.1 At its meeting on 26 January the Committee agreed that a letter should be sent to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning summarising the points raised about support for young people in Wales. The Committee noted the letter the Chair had sent and the Minister's reply.

2.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January were approved.

2.3 The Chair said that the Committee had been due to consider the Assembly Review of Procedure at its meeting on 23 March. That meeting had been cancelled because of the foot and mouth crisis. Copies of the terms of reference for the Review and a comment sheet were available and she invited members of the public to put in writing their comments on the way the Assembly worked.

2.4 As a member of the Review Group, Ieuan Wyn Jones explained how it was examining the way the Assembly worked internally and externally and would be making recommendations before the end of the year. It was important to bring the Assembly to the people of Wales through, for example, the regional committees. The Review Group would welcome any comments especially on the way the Assembly communicated with the public.

Item 3: Transport

3.1 The Chair welcomed Councillor Williams, Mike Simkins, Andrew Skidmore and Simon Maple to the meeting.

3.2 The Committee received a short presentation from Railtrack on developments in North Wales and on the West Coast main line. Click [here](#) to view the presentation. The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

3.3 How could Railtrack overcome the perception that they fail to think strategically about rail access? As an example, an entertainment centre had been built at Llandudno Junction but a pedestrian bridge access to the railway station had not been provided.

- Andrew Skidmore said that Railtrack was willing to facilitate access but he was not familiar with the financing arrangements for the development.

3.4 The date for introducing new Virgin trains on the North Wales line had slipped. Was the delay because of problems with the new trains or the track?

- Simon Maple said that the target for introducing the trains was now 2002 and that they would be able to run as soon as they were delivered.

3.5 It was suggested that North Wales was receiving second class treatment. Why was track speed being increased to only 90 miles per hour when the West Coast mainline was being upgraded to 140 miles per hour?

- Simon Maple explained that line speed depended on the nature of the line. Andrew Skidmore added that Virgin was making a significant investment in the new trains.

3.6 What were the advantages and disadvantages of electrification and would passengers or the economy of North Wales suffer if the line was not electrified?

- Simon Maple said that electrification was expensive and added a potential cause of train failure. The main advantage was better performance but modern diesel trains were increasingly able to match in terms of speed and acceleration. .

3.7 A breakdown of the £6.3 billion investment on the West Coast mainline was requested. It had been 40 years since the West Coast line was last upgraded. Why had it taken so long?

- Simon Maple said he was unable to provide a detailed breakdown of the £6.3 billion investment but significant amounts were coming through a commercial arrangement with Virgin and from the Strategic Rail Authority. The typical life of a line was 25-30 years. Although the West Coast line had been due for an upgrade for some time, this was a major logistical and financial task.

3.8 How could Railtrack ensure that, in future, maintenance and upgrading work did not compromise services?. How could the public's confidence be rebuilt?

- Simon Maple said that confidence could be rebuilt only by providing a good service and acknowledged there was a long way to go. When the West Coast mainline upgrade was complete he believed the service would be faster and safer.

3.9 Would diesel trains provide the service between London and Holyhead or would it still be necessary to change trains?

- Simon Maple confirmed that a through service would be provided.

3.10 What was Railtrack doing to improve journey quality, for example, through providing good quality car parking, waiting and toilet facilities, disabled access and clean stations?

- Andrew Skidmore said that better facilities were being provided. Disabled access was being provided when stations were altered and agreed to write to the Committee on disabled access and the work being done to improve journey quality. Simon Maple added that car parking and public

transport links to stations were important and that significant work had been done at major stations.

3.11 A team approach was required from Railtrack and the train operators to address issues such as service quality and station staffing

- Andrew Skidmore acknowledged that better teamwork was needed and said that a greater customer focus was being developed. Station staffing was the responsibility of the train operators.

3.12 A number of opportunities existed in North Wales for increasing rail freight including Mostyn Docks and slate waste. What was being done to increase the amount of freight?

- Andrew Skidmore said that Railtrack was participating in a feasibility study on moving slate waste by rail. Simon Maple added that 100% more paths would be provided for freight as part of the West Coast mainline upgrade.

3.13 The Chair welcomed pupils from Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones, Amlwch and invited questions from the public.

3.14 Gwenllian Roberts, Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones, was concerned about the cost of travelling by train for young people. A student railcard cost £17 but the discounts available were not enough especially in rural areas and she asked who was responsible.

- Andrew Skidmore said that fares were set by train operators not Railtrack

3.15 Councillor G O Parry, Isle of Anglesey County Council, welcomed the Committee to Holyhead and asked what plans Railtrack had to raise the level of platforms of stations on the Island. Mrs Ritson from Gaerwen said that it was difficult to manage luggage when meeting someone off a train and asked what was being done.

- Andrew Skidmore said that Railtrack was looking at stepping distances at a number of stations on Anglesey.

3.17 Bob Barton said that it was difficult to obtain information on which stations had disabled access. The national rail inquiry line was unable to provide the information and it was no longer possible to telephone individual stations.

- Andrew Skidmore agreed to write on this point.

3.18 The Committee then received a short presentation from the North Wales Economic Forum

Transport Group. Click [here](#) to view the presentation.

3.19 The Chair invited comments and questions from the public.

3.20 A man, who did not give his name, said that it took over 4 hours to drive to Cardiff and road links needed to be improved as soon as possible.

3.21 Barrie Mee, Denbigh Access Group, said that the Forum's presentation had not made any reference to wheelchair access and that it must be taken into account in an integrated transport system.

3.22 Mrs Ritson from Gaerwen said that there were no signs from the new A55 to services and amenities in the towns and villages on Anglesey. As a result businesses were suffering.

3.23 Reverend Hywel Davies said the new A55 across Anglesey was excellent but agreed that the signage was inadequate.

3.24 Mark Waddington, Rhyl Youth Forum, said that cycling was an essential form of transport for young people but most cycle routes were on the periphery of towns. He urged routes to be provided through towns.

3.25 Stephanie Howlett, Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones, asked how young people could be encouraged to use buses and trains. They often had to pay the full adult fare and she felt fares for young people should be subsidised.

3.26 Mark Youngman, Rail Users Consultative Committee for Wales, said that improved facilities came at a cost and priorities needed to be carefully assessed to see what could be afforded.

3.27 Keith Roberts, Isle of Anglesey County Council referred to Taith's vision for the next 5 years. The environment had been acknowledged as an asset but the existing transport infrastructure should also be seen as an asset. He said that trunk roads needed to be improved.

3.28 Gwyneth Owen, Prince of Wales Committee, said that many requests were received from young people for driving lessons. It was the only qualification some young people could offer prospective employers and their only way of getting to work. Proper driving instruction should be provided through existing training schemes.

3.29 Robyn Parri, said that North Wales needed more airports to develop links throughout the UK and Europe. He suggested that a light railway system should be developed in tourist areas and that long-term planning was needed to establish a coherent rail system in Wales.

3.30 Eilian Williams, Plaid Cymru, said that the new A55 did not link directly into Holyhead station or

the port. This caused congestion in the town at peak times.

3.31 Albert Owen agreed that the lack of an adequate link between the A55 and the port created a problem. The Forum's presentation had mentioned integration and partnership but little had been said about the potential of air and sea transport. Anglesey had a large port, excellent road connections, an improving rail network but lacked a good airport.

3.32 David St George, Celtic Connections, agreed that better facilities for air travel would benefit business. Facilities could be set up in weeks while it took years to improve road and rail links. He asked what the Assembly could do to support the development of air services.

3.33 Stuart Anderson, Conwy County Borough Council, asked how a new investment programme would be developed after the current 5 year strategy was completed. He felt that much could be learned from the examples of Holland and Austria which both invested more in their transport infrastructure.

3.34 Rhiannon Efans, Bethesda Community Council, said that bus services in her area had become poorer since a new contractor took over. She asked the Assembly to step in to get the 11pm service reinstated. She said that she had been impressed by low platform buses on a visit to Lancaster recently. They made access much easier and hoped they could be introduced in Gwynedd.

3.35 Bob Barton said that bus services in his part of rural Denbighshire were few and infrequent. He suggested that Objective 1 funding could be used to buy post buses for rural areas. He also asked if community councils were represented on Taith.

3.36 Iwan Thomas said that a request for brown signs for Caernarfon, a world heritage site, had been with the Assembly for a year and asked when a reply could be expected. He added that better links were needed to the A55 to encourage businesses to set up west of Bangor.

3.37 Denzil Jones, from the Assembly's Transport Policy Division, responded to some of the points raised. He said that many of the issues raised at the meeting struck a chord with the Assembly's consultation document "The Transport Framework for Wales". The broad aims of the Strategy were to create a transport system that was more accessible, physically and to those at a social disadvantage and was better integrated with the environment between different modes and with land use planning.

3.38 The Assembly had discussed what influence it had over the rail system in Wales and the Environment, Transport and Planning Committee was now considering this in detail as part of its review of public transport.

3.39 The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions was conducting a study into air transport that would report by the end of the year. One of the issues was the extent to which a service would need to be subsidised. RAF Valley had indicated that they would be prepared to participate subject to operational requirements.

3.40 The Assembly would be issuing proposals in the summer for the improvements to the trunk road system but there was no quick fix to solving the problem of north - south road links. Road improvements were planned in consultation with local authorities on a regional basis. The request for brown signs for Caernarfon was being considered. Denzil Jones explained that he was not personally responsible but would raise the question about the time taken to reply to the Council with those who were.

3.41 The Chair invited the Committee to comment on the issues raised and the following points were made:

- the trunk road system still needed considerable investment;
- the Assembly had announced concessionary fares for elderly people and help should be provided for young people. The point would be taken back to the Environment Transport and Planning Committee;
- the North Wales Economic Forum should look to develop and integrate community transport into an integrated transport system;
- more needed to be done to improve access for disabled people. In cities low platform buses provided an excellent service and more needed to be done in rural areas;
- a positive perception of north Wales needed to be developed. The over riding issue was the level of investment necessary to support the local economy and help it to recover after the foot and mouth crisis.

3.42 Councillor Williams said that the North Wales Economic Forum Transport Group would be revising its strategy and would take the comments made at the meeting into account.

Action points

3.43 **Railtrack** to write to the Committee with details on the work being done to improve disabled access and journey quality.

3.44 **Railtrack** to provide information on which stations on the North Wales region had disabled access.

Item 4: First Minister

4.1 The Chair welcomed the First Minister and pupils from Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi to the meeting.

4.2 The First Minister said how pleased he was to be in Holyhead. Holyhead was closer to Dublin than Cardiff and Wales had much to learn from Ireland in the way it had invested in education with an emphasis on vocational training. He felt that co-ordinating training and industry was the secret of Ireland's success and would make sure that the WDA and ELWa followed a similar route which he hoped would bring economic prosperity to all parts of Wales.

4.3 The Chair then invited questions for the First Minister from the public.

4.4 Ron Ankers, Ruabon Community Council, said that two trains a day between Holyhead and Cardiff passed through Ruabon. He asked if it was possible for them to stop in Ruabon.

- The First Minister said that, with the introduction of an all Wales rail franchise, the problem of north – south links should start to be addressed. He said the Assembly would be looking for the maximum improvements for the minimum subsidy from prospective bidders.

4.5 Councillor Trevor Lloyd Hughes, Isle of Anglesey County Council, welcomed the Committee to Anglesey. He said a link from the new A55 was needed to the port and should be built as soon as possible. The problem had been raised at the public inquiry.

- The First Minister said he would raise the issue with Sue Essex and ask her to write setting out the latest position.

4.6 A councillor from Bethesda, referred to a press release from Sue Essex in January which had announced investment of £300 million for transport improvements in Wales over the next 5 years. He was concerned that the programme did not include improvements in Bethesda.

- The First Minister said that he did not have the detail of the programme to hand. He pointed out that in recent years considerable investment had been concentrated on the M4 and A55 corridors.

4.7 Stephen Hughes, Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi, said the Welsh language was under increasing pressure in rural areas as English speakers moved in. He asked why policy makers were unwilling to introduce policies to help local people similar to those implemented in the Lake District and elsewhere.

- The First Minister said that it was difficult to control who bought houses in a free country. It was legitimate to help local people to satisfy their housing needs but it was not possible to prevent people from outside the local community buying houses.

4.8 A man, who did not give his name, said he was a regular traveller on the A55 and had seen the investment it had brought to Bangor. He said Objective 1 should be used to meet the needs of Holyhead.

- The First Minister agreed that the A55 project represented a huge investment on the Island.

4.9 Dylan Morgan, PAWB, said that in January Wylfa Power Station had stopped producing electricity. BNFL had recognised problems with welds in the reactor and wanted to use a new fuel. PAWB had concerns about the reopening of Wylfa and urged the Assembly to oppose it.

- The First Minister explained that this was not a matter for the Assembly but for central government and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

4.10 Reverend Hwyl Davies said that there was a great deal of enthusiasm and many ideas for Objective 1 schemes on Anglesey but he said that not enough match funding was available.

- The First Minister said that there was some confusion about Objective 1 match funding. Before Objective 1 had begun it had been necessary to decide how much investment should be allocated to different categories of project. The allocations had been based on estimates and some categories, like energy, were under subscribed while others were over subscribed. In two years time there would be an opportunity to make appropriate adjustments between categories.

4.11 Bob Barton said that more money was needed for Sportsmatch. The Sports Council for Wales had £50,000 match funding available for the scheme but £170,000 was needed to match the applications that had been made. He suggested that Objective 1 funding could be used.

- The First Minister doubted whether Objective 1 was appropriate for this scheme but said he would ask Jenny Randerson to look at the issue.

4.12 Neil Crumpton, Friends of the Earth, Wales, questioned the Assembly's priorities for funding transport improvements and the assumption that new roads equalled economic development. He said that greater priority should be given to cycling schemes and traffic calming measures to reduce car dependency. He asked the First Minister to emphasise the environmental benefits of high fuel tax to the Prime Minister.

- The First Minister said that the Assembly supported public transport through initiatives such as support for the Holyhead-Cardiff rail service, a cycling strategy and concessionary fares for elderly people.

4.13 Mrs Ritson from Gaerwen said that footpaths were a good way for children to get to school and said more and better ones were needed on Anglesey.

- The First Minister said that Sue Essex gave high priority to the safe routes to school scheme.

4.14 A man, who did not give his name, said the Assembly should look at Welsh language policy and suggested that similar strategies to those in Finland should be introduced with the involvement of the Welsh Language Board. The First Minister said a review of language policy was underway.

4.15 Jonathan Portelli, Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi, asked if the whole of Wales wanted the Assembly.

- The First Minister said that people generally had a cynical view of government at all levels and that was healthy. The Assembly was new but its existence should not be denied. It was doing a job of work and people should judge it by comparing its efficiency with the UK and local government.

4.16 The Chair thanked the First Minister and all those who had contributed to the meeting. She said that if anyone had been unable to ask a question they could submit it in writing and would receive a reply. A list of the written questions received is at annex 1. The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Friday 6 July in Rhyl.

Action points

4.17 **First Minister** to raise the issue of a link between the A55 and Holyhead port with Sue Essex and ask her to write setting out the latest position.

4.18 **First Minister** to ask Jenny Randerson to look at funding for the Sportsmatch scheme.

Secretariat

May 2001

Annex 1

Written questions submitted by members of the public

Mr Walters, Railway Development Society

The proposed Caernarfon – Bangor rail link was estimated at £14m. Can you tell me what progress has been made with this and what involvement the Assembly will have/has?

Barrie Mee, Chair Denbighshire Access Group, Vice Chair (North) Scope Cwmpas Cymru

With the integrated transport system proposed to what extent will the Assembly and it's committees, consult with people with disabilities as to what they have identified as an accessible transport system.

N Rees, Conwy Community Transport

Are the committee aware that the recent transfer of funding for Community Transport from the Assembly to County councils has (in our case) made the situation worse due to the lack of interest shown in Community Transport by the relevant officer? Why can't the funding be apportioned directly to Community Transport organisations? This would avoid the problem of officers having control over organisations in which they appear to have no interest and would prevent them from using the available

funds for other purposes.

David St George, Celtic Dimensions

Transport can be seen as an issue of unison and communication.

North West Wales has poor accessibility both with Wales and outwardly to the business centres of UK and Europe. We are missing air links which would improve our attractiveness to the Business Community. It is recognised that air services become economic generators for a region. Air links could be started within weeks and improvements to existing local airports could be achieved quickly and cheaply within months. Road and rail, whilst being vital, are high cost and will take years.

- Do the committee agree and how could the National Assembly support the development of air services?

Communication could also be broadened out to include IT with broad band and radio links, especially as this is something that can be done relatively quickly and without interim disruption.

We have been disappointed to learn that Welsh IT suppliers have had problems in gaining contract because the current tendering process means that they are insufficiently large to enter that process. We would like therefore to ask:

- Can the tendering process be altered to include significant, but in global terms, 'small' Welsh players? (this is particularly important not just of the economy, but because Welsh players can supply Welsh language formats and help – e.g. Gaia)
- Until the transport problems have been resolved, we would ask that communication via IT be in place to stop social exclusion – both from a business point of view as well as the known social exclusion which poverty places on those who do not have private access to IT?

Gwyneth Owen, Caergeiliog Community Council

The recent sale of a number of MOD houses in the area has meant that there has been a large influx of people. However, there are no local amenities to cater for the increase in population. Can the Assembly give funds directly to Community Councils to deal with local issues.

Stephanie Howden, Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones

Why is there a bilingual policy in primary schools but not in secondary schools. This is leading to a deterioration in language and culture by the time young people reach 18 and leave school to join the world of work thus leading to a decrease and deterioration in the Welsh Language. Why, in Anglesey particularly are monoglot English-speaking teachers being employed in bilingual schools?

And why is only one secondary school in North Wales able to offer A-Level subjects such as Sciences through the medium of Welsh and all pupils who pursue the Welsh A-Level course are having to suffer because of lack of resources?

G Francis Roberts

Does the First Minister realise the difficulties that exist in the Assembly's Translation Unit with regard to the problems and standard of translating from Welsh to English and that the National Health Service in England claim it takes six weeks to have advertisements translated.

The background is :-

- a) When I asked the NHS why an advertisement in the Daily post was in English only, the reason given was that translating takes six weeks and they could not wait that long.
- b) When I asked the Assembly's Children and Families Department why there were so many errors in one of their letters, the reason given was that as the officer drafting the letter spoke Welsh, they had not arranged to have the Welsh version of the letter checked by the Translation Unit. They said they were keen to develop the Welsh skills of their staff, but promised that in future such items would be checked.
- c) There is also a problem in that parts of the NHS in England (eg the Retained Organs Commission) say they are only responsible for England and give this as justification for having their advertisements in the Daily Post in English only, (regardless of the Welsh Language Act).

Dylan Morgan, PAWB

How many Greenpeace slips concerning keeping Wylfa closed were received by the Assembly from members of the public?