

Date: Friday 6 July 2001
Time: 10.00am to 12.50pm
Venue: Rhyl Town Hall, Rhyl

REPORT BACK FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

1. Following the meeting held on 11 May the Chair wrote to the Minister for Environment summarising the main points that came out of the Committee's discussion of transport issues in North Wales. A copy of the Chair's letter is at annex 1.
2. The Minister for Environment replied on 30 June. A copy of the reply is at annex 2.
3. Railtrack undertook to write to the Committee with information on the work being done to improve disabled access and journey quality and which stations in the North Wales region had disabled access. A copy of Railtrack's response is at annex 3.
4. The Committee is invited to note the correspondence.

Committee Secretariat

June 2001

Annex 1



Sue Essex AM
Minister for Environment
National Assembly for Wales

Pwyllgor Rhanbarth y Gogledd
North Wales Regional Committee
Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

1 June 2001

North Wales Regional Committee – Transport

At its meeting on Friday 11 May in Holyhead the North Wales Regional Committee considered transport issues in North Wales in the context of *The Transport Framework for Wales*. About 150 members of the public attended to give their views and several clear messages emerged that I should like to pass on to you.

Public transport issues featured strongly. In particular, the Committee heard a plea for subsidised public transport for young people and for low platform buses to improve access for disabled people. More needed to be done to improve public transport in rural areas and a suggestion was made that Objective 1 funding could be used to buy post buses. It was also important to develop and integrate community transport into an integrated transport system.

There was a general welcome for the new A55 across Anglesey although there were some criticisms. The new road did not link directly to Holyhead port causing congestion at peak times and the Assembly was asked to address this as a matter of urgency. The First Minister undertook to raise this issue with you. Local businesses were experiencing difficulties because of a lack of signs from the new A55 to services and amenities in the towns and villages on Anglesey.

There were a number of calls for improved road links between North and South Wales. However the assumption that new roads equalled economic development was questioned by one individual and it was suggested that greater priority should be given to cycling schemes and traffic calming measures to reduce car dependency.

A number of other points were made during the discussion including the need to:

- improve cycle routes so that they extended through towns rather than ending on the periphery as

was often the case;

- provide more and better footpaths on Anglesey to enable children to walk to school;
- improve links to the A55 to encourage businesses to set up west of Bangor.
- provide driving instruction through existing training schemes as the ability to drive was an important skill and was sometimes the only qualification young people could offer prospective employers;
- provide facilities for air travel in North Wales.

The Committee was also asked for a response to Caernarfon Town Council's written request for brown signs which, it was claimed, had been with Assembly for a year.

Representatives from Railtrack also attended the meeting and undertook to write to the Committee with details of the work being done in North Wales to improve access for disabled people and improve journey quality. They were also asked which stations had disabled access and will provide details.

The minutes of the meeting are attached for information. I am copying this letter to Rhodri Morgan and Richard Edwards.

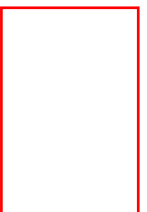
Yours sincerely

Ann Jones
Chair, North Wales Regional Committee

Annex 2

Sue Essex AM

Minister for Environment



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales

Ann Jones AM
Chair
North Wales Regional Committee
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Eich cyf / Your ref

Ein cyf / Our ref SE 01767/01

Dyddiad / Date 30 June 2001

Dear Ann

Thank you for your letter of 1 June about the North Wales Regional Committee's meeting on 11 May and the transport issues raised by members of the public in attendance. I have, below, responded to the specific points raised in your letter.

Many of these issues are being considered in the development of the Transport Framework. My officials are currently assessing the responses from the recent consultation and I plan to publish the Framework later this year. It will set out aims and objectives to create a better co-ordinated and sustainable transport system in Wales.

Access to Public Transport

I acknowledge the need for enhanced access to essential services and facilities using public transport. Through specifically Welsh initiatives and policies the Assembly Government is promoting actively the needs of public transport users with impaired mobility. Many bus operators have already made very encouraging progress in introducing more accessible vehicles, recognising the social and commercial value of doing so. As Environment Minister, I will continue to ensure that accessibility remains central to the Assembly Government's integrated transport policy.

Subsidised Public Transport

Under existing legislation, local authorities have discretion as to whether or not to operate concessionary travel schemes. They also have discretion as to the persons - within certain broad categories - who may receive such concessions. Those categories include young people, for example those aged sixteen years and below and those between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. It is therefore open to local authorities to include young people within these categories in their concessionary travel schemes.

The Assembly Government's policy that concessionary travel by pensioners and disabled people on buses should be free has been extremely well received. I am pleased that we are on target to implement this mandatory policy from April 2002. In the meantime, I have ensured that local authorities have introduced a new minimum standard guaranteeing free bus passes for pensioners and disabled persons, along with discounts of at least 50% when travelling by bus. In both cases, local authorities will be funded through the revenue settlement to achieve these measures. Although I have no plans currently to extend the mandatory scheme to other groups - we will need to see how it works and develops in practice - you may be assured that I will utilise the experience of the free scheme to inform the development of concessionary travel policy in the future.

Our policy for concessionary travel on buses is linked closely with our desire to enhance accessibility. For the full benefits of these policies to have their desired effect, buses must be running, and with that in mind, I have this year increased by 20% to £6.3m the budget provided by the Assembly to subsidise local buses and for community transport projects. The indicative budgets for this Local Transport Services Grant scheme are £7.3m in 2002-03, and £8.3m in 2003-04. I am also considering a proposal from the Community Transport Association in Wales that would provide £100,000 of Assembly funding annually over three years to extend and develop the existing CTA network of support for the community transport sector in Wales.

Community - or unconventional - transport solutions can often provide a particularly flexible and more suitable response to local transport needs, especially in rural areas. It is not always necessary or desirable for full size buses to be used on lightly used routes. The community transport sector is already very familiar with meeting the needs of elderly and disabled persons, although its role is far wider and greater than that. I hope that local authorities will use their allocations under the LTSG imaginatively to explore fully the potential offered by the sector in circumstances in which conventional buses may not be the most appropriate solution. The transfer to local authorities of responsibility for supporting community transport projects within LTSG reflects my wish to see the sector brought within an integrated transport network in Wales.

Post Buses in Rural Wales

Although these services do indeed make an extremely valuable contribution to the local public transport network, I understand that it is unlikely that they would be eligible to be considered under the Objective 1 programme. However, community transport proposals taken forward by representative community and voluntary groups might well have the potential for funding. In the first instance, any such proposals should be discussed with Local Objective 1 Partnership organisations. Another option might be to discuss plans with the CTA's Rural Transport Officer for Wales, Mr Wynford Lloyd-Davies, whose post is funded by the Assembly.

A55 road link to Port of Holyhead

A direct road link from the A55 to the port is one of the elements of the Isle of Anglesey County Council's Holyhead Transport and Environmental package. The Package is being taking forward in partnership with Stena, WDA, Holy Island Partnership and Railtrack, with the Assembly and the Police having an advisory role on the Project Management Board. The Council has been allocated £200,000 Transport Grant support for 2001-02 to provide support for the feasibility and design measures of the package. The Council's Transport Grant bid for 2001-02 indicated that the total estimated cost of the package is some £17 million. Not all elements of the bid are eligible for funding under the TG criteria.

The new road link is planned to link the recently constructed A55 Kingsland Road Roundabout and the port. Cost estimates have risen from £3m to just under £5m. The Council have been advised informally by the Assembly's Transport Directorate that the cost of the road was close to the £5m threshold for Transport Grant as a major road (costing over £5m). Alternatively the Council could submit a bid for Principal Road Grant funding under provisions in the Highways Act 1980. The Council have been advised that to be considered for PRG the scheme should be submitted at a reduced cost profile, around the original estimate. Otherwise, it should be submitted as a TG bid in the normal way, when it would then be considered in competition with other road bids. New bids for Transport Grant funding in 2002-03 were invited on 15 June 2001.

A55 signage

I am aware of the issue of signing local services in Gaerwen from the new A55 dual carriageway. Officials from the Assembly's Transport Directorate have met recently with Ieuan Wyn Jones AM who has voiced local concerns and I have asked my officials to discuss this further at a meeting which Albert Owen MP for Ynys Môn is arranging.

Request for brown signs - Caernarfon Town Council

Caernarfon Town Council requested a sign be erected on the A55 showing Caernarfon as a world heritage site. Unfortunately, there was a delay in response, but officials wrote to Gwynedd Council in early April confirming the Assembly was content with the proposal. The erection of the sign is imminent.

Improving North-South road links / links to the A55

Improving transport links between north and south Wales is one of the Assembly Government's main priorities - it is imperative for the economic, social, cultural and administrative cohesion of Wales that improvements are made. The Assembly commissioned consultants Babtie to conduct a transportation study to identify potential improvements to north-south links. The Assembly's forward trunk road programme will be developed following publication of the Transport Framework and the results of the Babtie study will be taken into account in informing decisions on improvements to north-south road links. I have invited bids from local authorities for Transport Grant support in 2002-03 and the bid criterion includes those for preparation costs support for additional infrastructure schemes which contribute to a wider community regeneration programme including those with road elements. However, in the short to medium term only very limited resources will be available for such infrastructure schemes.

Traffic Calming / Walking and Cycling

I consider road safety to be one of the Assembly's main priorities and it is vital that we are proactive in reducing road traffic casualties in Wales. It was for this reason I set up a Road Safety Strategy Board to develop an implementation programme for road safety in Wales. I have also made additional money available directly to local authorities to help them respond to the safety needs of their own communities. £3.6m was distributed to authorities across Wales last year and a further £3m will be distributed this year through the Local Road Safety Grant.

Greater priority is already being given towards cycling schemes and traffic calming measures within the context of the Assembly's integrated transport policy. This is reflected in the 2001-02 Transport Grant settlement with £23.2m of continuing support for integrated transport schemes, many of which contain traffic calming and cycling elements and £2.7m for Safe Route to Schools initiatives. Responsibility for the improvement of cycle routes and the provision of footpaths rests with local authorities as the primary agents, however, the increase of walking and cycling is part of the Assembly's strategy for widening travel choices. Local authorities can bid for support under the Safe Routes to School scheme and they are encouraged to integrate this into their walking and cycling strategies. In Anglesey the Assembly is fully supporting the Llangefni Cycling / Pedestrian Improvements package under Transport Grant. Anglesey Council was awarded £400,000 for 2001-02 and indicative allocations of £285,000 and £610,000 for 2002-03 and 2003-04 respectively.

Provision of driving instruction for young people

Where there is a demonstrable occupational need for driving tuition it can be delivered as part of the training frameworks for Skillseekers and Skillbuild provisions. For example, the Road Haulage National Training Organisation has a UK wide junior driver programme as part of its National Traineeship / Modern Apprenticeship provisions. Under New Deal arrangements participants who show that they are unable to get to a job without their own transport have in exceptional cases been helped by the Employment Service / ELWa with the costs of driving lessons. The costs associated with offering driving tuition to all eligible young people regardless of any occupational requirement would be prohibitive.

Air Travel

The Assembly and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) recognise the need for debate on air services in Wales, and many of the issues will be covered in the forthcoming Wales Air Services Consultation Document. However, neither DTLR nor the Assembly have any direct responsibilities for the development of new air routes. Decisions to operate internal air services within Wales are commercial matters for the airlines themselves. The potential for Government subsidy for air services within and from Wales is governed by European regulation.

Railtrack

My officials have contacted colleagues at Railtrack and have confirmed with them that they will be writing directly to you about the works being done in North Wales to improve access for the disabled and improve journey quality.

Best wishes



Annex 3

Response from Railtrack

Railtrack, on behalf of the Strategic Rail Authority, is working on proposals to improve the platform stepping distances at the following stations:

Valley
Deganwy
Roman Bridge
Tal-y-Cafn
Ty Croes
Hope (Flintshire)
Llanwrst North

Discussions involving the SRA and the Office of the Rail Regulator have been taking place to determine who in the industry is responsible for what under the Disability Discrimination Act. In Railtrack's last ORR regulatory review (covering the current control period to 2006) the Regulator did not fund us to carry out modifications at stations to improve access. It is possible that the mechanism for this to happen in the future will be, for instance, Railtrack carrying out the work but the funding coming via the SRA as is the proposal at the stations mentioned above. New station developments have disabled access built in as part of the project.

Information about what access is available at individual stations should be available via the train operator which leases that particular station. For instance, First North Western has a dedicated telephone line (08456 040231) for such information. A passenger with mobility problems wishing to make a journey involving several train operators can have access arrangements made for the whole journey via the first train operator involved. One example is that a passenger travelling from Holyhead to Euston would make contact with First North Western, who would liaise with Virgin via the Disabled Persons Reporting System. Information about how to contact an individual train operator to initiate such arrangements can be obtained via the National Rail Enquiry Service (08457 484950) which is operated on behalf of the Association of Train Operating Companies. This process is also outlined on page 6 of the current national rail timetable, and individual train operators also publish helpline numbers in their timetables.