

North Wales Economic Forum

Response to National Assembly Consultative Document on Policy Review of Public Transport in Wales

2 October 2000

The North Wales Economic Forum Standing Committee on Strategic Transportation issues includes membership from the six North Wales County Councils, Cheshire County Council, WDA, CELTEC and the private sector. The Committee co-ordinates statutory transportation issues across North Wales and liaises as appropriate with Mid Wales and the North West of England.

The Committee has provided a lobbying document for high speed TENS status for the North Wales coast main line, has obtained funding from the National Assembly for line speed improvements between the English Border and Bangor and has commissioned a study on increasing rail freight in North and Mid Wales. Partners are currently compiling a draft Transportation Strategy for North Wales.

The Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultative Document on the Policy Review of Public Transport in Wales and endorses the responses already submitted by the WLGA and the ACTO technical papers. In the context of North Wales, we respond as follows:

1. The National Assembly Policy Review seeks to consider what changes are required to the current "statutory, regulatory and organisational framework to facilitate the delivery of improved and integrated services". **It is the view of the North Wales Economic Forum that the existing framework has already delivered improvements, and providing adequate funding is available, can build on these improvements without the need for changes.** Examples are given below of regional initiatives that have already taken place including cross border initiatives involving Cheshire:
 - Conwy County Borough Council was successful in bidding for Transport Grant on behalf of the North Wales Economic Forum to increase the line speed on the North Wales Coast Rail Line.
 - Co-ordinated lobbying by North Wales Authorities has persuaded Virgin Rail to increase the number of trains they operate between North Wales and London from three to seven.
 - The North Wales Local Authorities have worked together with colleagues in Mid-Wales to produce the North and Mid-Wales Rail Freight Study and are now considering how the

recommendations of the study can be taken forward.

- A regional response to OPRAF during the original PSR negotiations protected the existing through train between Holyhead and Cardiff and improved the PSR between Holyhead and London.
- A number of cross-border quality bus improvements have taken place through inter-authority co-operation e.g. Conwy/Gwynedd, Flintshire/Denbighshire, Flintshire/Cheshire and joint package bids have been submitted for multi-modal improvements e.g. Conwy/Denbighshire. As a result of these initiatives there has been a considerable improvement in public transport infrastructure with better "on-road" information, more bus shelters and better quality buses e.g. 33% of buses in Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey and 40% of buses in Flintshire of new low-floor standard.
- Partnerships have been developed involving the Snowdonia National Park to create the Northern Snowdonia Initiative to improve public transport in the area.
- A partnership is being developed between Cheshire, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy to deliver bus priority and real-time information along the North Wales Coast using compatible equipment.
- Cheshire and Flintshire are introducing a "smart-card" ticketing scheme which it is hoped will be extended to include Denbighshire.
- Good relationships have been established between the Forum and Train Operating Companies, Railtrack and SSRA and regular meetings take place to discuss strategic issues.
- Conwy, Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey have agreed that holders of their concessionary bus passes are entitled to reduced fares in each others authority.
- Flintshire, Wrexham, Cheshire and Merseyside PTE have jointly submitted an RPP bid to SSRA to obtain funding for increased frequency on the Wrexham-Bidston line.

2. The North Wales Economic Forum acts as the co-ordinating body which oversees these regional initiatives and will continue to carry out this function as part of its role in promoting sustainable transport throughout North Wales.

3. The current structures of local government and strategic partnerships through the Forum enable strategic issues to be dealt with on a regional basis and also enable attention to be focused on local initiatives and integrated transport to be delivered at a local level:

- All local authorities in North Wales are developing Quality Bus Partnerships within their areas.
- A programme of railway station improvements is being carried out across North Wales driven by individual local authority initiatives.
- A number of authorities employ Community Rail Officers to raise awareness of local rail lines in their areas.
- Links with colleagues employed in traffic Management, Highways Maintenance, Education and Social Services, transport etc. within the same authority enable integrated transport to be delivered on a local basis.

4. The North Wales Economic Forum does not favour the PTA approach as this could restrict and confine our approach to transportation links within the North West of England and our current close working relationship with Cheshire County Council.

In our view , the examples outlined above show that through the North Wales Economic Forum, the current structure of local government in North Wales is already developing improved integrated transportation programmes at a North Wales and at a more local level.