

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

POLICY REVIEW OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

SUBMISSION BY SOUTH WEST WALES

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT CONSORTIUM (SWITCH)

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1. Introduction

1.1 The SWITCH authorities welcome the opportunity to comment on the Policy Review of Public Transport to be undertaken by the National assembly for Wales.

1.2 SWITCH was formed in 1998/99 and is a consortium of the four South West Wales Authorities, namely, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, the City and County of Swansea, and Neath Port Talbot County Borough.

1.3 The SWITCH Steering Group comprises the Political Chairs and Technical Chief Officers of the four Authorities, and is currently supported by four Working Groups covering the subject of "Second Generation" road based public transport, rail/sea/ports development, local transport plan liaison, and rural transport initiatives.

1.4 In the 2000/2001 Transport Grant Settlement, SWITCH was granted a £150,000 Transport Grant for feasibility and developmental work, as a preparation to future bids either as a consortium or by individual authorities within a sub-regional plan. As a result of these studies Transport Grant bids were submitted in August 2000.

1.5 SWITCH authorities endorse the submission made by the Welsh Local Government Association. SWITCH would wish to offer a supporting representation reflecting local and regional views on a number of key issues which have a crucial bearing on the ability of public transport to contribute to the delivery of important social, environmental and economic goals identified by the Assembly, which are reflected in Local Transport Plans and the emerging Unitary Development Plans.

3 SWITCH Initiatives

3.1 Rail Studies: Two rail studies are currently being carried out investigating line speed improvements and freight gauge enhancements. These projects are being managed by SWITCH, and are part-financed out of Transport Grant. The National Assembly is a contributor, through grant, to the studies. The reports on these issues will be able to inform coherent bids for Objective 1 funding as well as forward planning. Other sources of funding these proposals will also be investigated. It is clear that the Railtrack Network Statement, and the finance behind it, will not provide these facilities in the immediate term, and that alternative forms of funding are required to bring forward those schemes vital to South West Wales 's economic welfare.

3.2 Road based studies: SWITCH, through its Transport Grant provision, has also commissioned Oscar Faber to undertake a study of bus priority corridors in the Swansea Bay area and a Rural Innovation Public Transport Study. The first reports of these studies have been completed and bids were submitted for Transport Grant funding in August for the urban bus corridors. Bids arising from the rural study will follow in 2001.

3.3 The Rural Public Transport Study included an examination of innovative forms of Community Transport and social/car/car share/car club arrangements. As part of the bids for Objective 1, community-based transport, in association with the development of skill centres and other community support measures, will figure highly.

4. SWITCH has also commissioned a study to investigate the introduction of smartcards in South West Wales. A SWITCH bid for Transport Grant funding was submitted in August 2000.
5. SWITCH submitted a further bid for Transport Grant funds for a wide range of public transport feasibility studies in August 2000.

4. The Current Problems

4.1 The consultation exercises carried out by SWITCH authorities in preparing their Local Transport Plans highlighted the high level of dissatisfaction with the frequency, coverage and reliability of services and the high and complex fares charged by bus operators. It is clear that public transport is currently not a real alternative for most journeys for those with cars; for those without a car, access to jobs, shops and basic services is often severely restricted. Major improvements are required in order to meet people's needs and ensure that the transport and

social aspirations of the National Assembly and local authorities are met.

2. Significant improvements to public transport services should take place as a result of the following:

- The Government's proposals for putting Bus Quality Partnerships on a statutory basis
- The National Public Transport Enquiry Service
- The Assembly's proposals for Free Concessionary Fares
- The new Wales and Borders Rail re-franchising process
- The development of the SWITCH proposals for improved urban and rural bus services

Nevertheless there remain outstanding concerns which result mainly from the organisational and legal framework of public transport. These include the following:

- Public transport is an **essential public resource**, but it is also a private business. As a result there is an often uneasy relationship, and sometimes a direct conflict between commercial and social priorities. This separation of commercial bus services and socially necessary subsidised services makes it impossible for local authorities to ensure a co-ordinated integrated network of bus services.
- **Fares** are of fundamental importance to passengers. Bus and rail fares have increased by over 50% in real terms since 1974 while motoring costs have remained stable, yet those with low incomes are heavily dependent on public transport. Moreover there is a high marginal cost of travelling by public transport in comparison with the perceived marginal cost of car travel.
- Bus fares vary markedly in different parts of the UK, depending on the level of competition and the operator's costs. There is no regulation of bus fares, in contrast to rail fares. Local authorities have little influence over fares except on contracted services but even here a pragmatic approach is usually adopted whereby fares on these services mirror commercial fares.
- **Interavailability**: current arrangements make it difficult for local authorities to ensure interavailability of ticketing.

- The Assembly's proposals for free **concessionary bus fares** will be very beneficial to pensioners and disabled people. However other groups, such as young people and those seeking jobs, may be equally in need of concessions.
- Many **bus and rail stations** in South West Wales are physically separate making it difficult to promote effective interchange between services.
- The current rules under which **community transport** operate severely inhibit its effectiveness and reach. Community transport has the potential to fill the gap between reliance on the car and subsidising often little used conventional buses, in both urban and rural areas.
- As traffic growth continues it will become increasingly difficult for on- road **bus priority schemes** to operate in urban areas. More research is needed to investigate affordable solutions.
- The Rail Passengers Committee represents rail passengers, there is however no equivalent to represent the **views of bus passengers**.
- **Finance**, both capital and revenue, is required to achieve ensure that public transport can meet the aspirations of the Assembly and Local Government, in order to redress the underfunding in the past. . There a need for a Welsh 10 year Transport plan.
- Much new development constructed in the past two or three decades is inadequately served by public transport. Stronger **planning guidance** is required to ensure that future schemes are accessible.

5. Conclusion

1. After 20 years or so of the market ruling all the individual forms of transport, there is an enormous job to do in ensuring the coherence and co-ordination of all forms of transport one with the other in our region.
2. There is a need is to ensure that investment is targeted at encouraging a gradual move from the car towards public transport, to driving up the quality accessibility and convenience of public transport, particularly in inter-modal exchange to support this process.
3. We remain convinced that Local Authorities are the main vehicle through which the Government's Integrated Transport Policy will be delivered, and we ask for

support and enablement.

4. In particular sweeping away time-expired restrictions that stand in the way, of sensible integrated transport will enable Local Government to deliver Assembly policy objectives.

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