

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 4 April 2001

Time: 2:00 pm to 5:15 pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

Attendance:

EPT Committee Members:

Richard Edwards, Chair

Preseli Pembrokeshire

Mick Bates

Montgomeryshire

David Davies

Monmouth

Sue Essex, Minister for Environment

Cardiff North

Ann Jones (for John Griffiths)

Vale of Clwyd

Helen Mary Jones

Llanelli

Tom Middlehurst

Alyn and Deeside

Karen Sinclair

Clwyd South

Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

Officials:

Martin Evans

Director of Transport, Planning and Environment
Group

Keith Bush

Office of the Counsel General

Robin Shaw

Director of Transport

Denzil Jones

Head of Transport Policy Division

Phil Bishop (item 1)	Environment Division
John Abraham (item 3)	Transport Policy Division
Meryl James (item 3)	Transport Policy Division
<i>In Attendance:</i>	Expert Advisor
Denys Morgan	Director of Public Affairs, Strategic
Chris Austin (item 5)	Rail Authority
Jonathan Melsom (item 5)	Liaison Manager, Strategic Rail Authority
<i>Secretariat:</i>	
Siwan Davies	Committee Clerk
Vaughan Watkin	Deputy Committee Clerk

Opening Remarks from Chair

0.1 The Chair welcomed members, officials and members of the public to the meeting, in particular officials from the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Development Committee who were visiting the National Assembly. He informed members that:

- the Environment Agency had written to clarify their role in advising the National Assembly and UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on potential environmental implications of carcass disposal as part of the effort to eradicate foot and mouth disease. Copies of the letter had been circulated to members;
- he had tabled an emergency question to the Rural Affairs Minister, for answer the next day, on the UK Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions’ (DETR) announcement of sites in Pembrokeshire and Flintshire for trials of genetically modified (GM) crops.

Item 1: Apologies, substitutions and declaration of interests

1.1 Apologies had been received from Geraint Davies and John Griffiths, for whom Ann Jones was substituting.

1.2 The Chair invited members to declare any interests under Standing Order 4.5. Mick Bates declared that he was a partner in a farming business.

Item 2: Report from Minister for Environment - EPT-06-01 (p1)

2.1 In addition to the items in the report, the Minister updated members on the following issues:

- Correction to written report – Axis Milk were "interested" in developing a rail based system for delivering bulk milk (bullet point 4, page 3);
- Spoil Tip and Landslide Seminar - the Minister and Geraint Davies had attended the recent seminar, which had provided a useful opportunity to share experiences and raise the profile of the subject;
- Sustainable Development - the Sustainable Development Unit had produced a newsletter for staff, copies would be sent to members for information.

2.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Foot and Mouth outbreak – Environment Agency and National Assembly staff were advising the State Veterinary Service and MAFF officials on the environmental aspects of various methods of carcass disposal, and were located in the National Assembly foot and mouth operations room. Members asked whether the National Assembly had issued a list of approved landfill sites for foot and mouth carcass disposal, and officials agreed to circulate a copy to the committee as soon as it was available;
- GM Crops - National Assembly officials were in regular contact with DETR officials on the potential siting of GM test sites in Wales. A new unit in the Countryside Division had been set up to co-ordinate all aspects of GM issues, both agricultural and environmental. Detailed issues on the recent announcement by DETR would be addressed by the Minister for Rural Affairs in plenary the following day;
- EC Water Framework Directive - a consultation paper had issued on 23 March jointly with DETR, further consultation documents would be issued in due course. The overall timetable for implementation was three years, and the committee would be kept informed of progress at various stages;
- Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) – members were keen that measures were in place to prevent development in conservation areas. Information on all candidate SACs put forward to the European Commission would be sent to members for information;
- Transport Forum – work on the Cycling and Walking Strategy was welcomed, however there were concerns about the introduction of joint cycle/walkways, particularly for pedestrians with visual impairment;

- Concessionary Fares – the committee welcomed the new scheme, and suggested that the Minister consider including community transport and taxis, particularly in rural areas where public transport was limited. This suggestion would be considered by the Transport Forum’s community transport review, which would also be looking into extending bus fuel duty rebate.

Actions:

- *Minister for Environment to provide members with a list of the candidate Special Areas of Conservation put forward to the European Commission*

Item 3: Road Safety Strategy - draft consultation document - EPT-06-01 (p 2)

3.1 The Minister invited the committee to comment on the draft consultation document prior to its consideration at a consultative conference on 15 May. Following the conference the strategy would issue for public consultation, and would include examples of best practice for the various solutions.

3.2 The main points covered in discussion were:

- Sustainable Development - the National Assembly’s broader sustainability agenda should be highlighted in the strategy;
- Travelling during work – members felt that the excessive hours some drivers spent driving as part of their work (e.g. salespersons) should be regulated. It was noted that a DETR led group was considering road safety issues relating to travelling during working hours;
- Speed limits – many members called for lower speed limits outside schools (particularly in rural areas), on country lanes, and in some towns. It was noted that speed limits were operated on a UK basis, but that the National Assembly had discretion on which limit to apply to a particular stretch of road;
- New road schemes – reduction in accident rates was an integral part of the cost benefit analyses for all new road projects;
- Funding - funding for various safety project and maintenance of the network was essential to sustain safe roads;
- Statistics – casualty statistics were broken down by gender, but not ethnic background. Health Authority statistics were a possible source of information on children from ethnic minorities injured in road accidents;
- Accessible information – it was essential that road safety information be available in a variety of media and languages, e.g. braille and Welsh.

3.3 The committee agreed that the consultation paper issue for discussion at the conference, subject to refocusing of the introduction around the National Assembly’s policies, and minor

revisions of the sections on child safety audits (paras. 5.21-2) and participation of children (para. 6.14). It was suggested that a short document highlighting the key questions accompany the consultation document, to assist those organisations with limited resources to respond to the consultation.

Item 4: Policy Review of Public transport: Rapporteurs report back on visits

4.1 This item was deferred to the next meeting.

Item 5: Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) – Strategic Agenda

5.1 The Chair welcomed Chris Austin and Jonathan Melsom to the meeting. Ann Hemmingway, SRA board representative for Wales, sent her apologies, but looked forward to meeting the committee at a future meeting.

5.2 The committee elected Tom Middlehurst as temporary Chair, as Richard Edwards was called away from the meeting.

5.3 Chris Austin gave a presentation on the SRA's strategic agenda (copy attached to the minutes), and the following points were covered in discussion:

- Strategic Agenda – there was disappointment that the positive relationship established between the SRA and National Assembly had not been highlighted in the strategic agenda, and that the document was not available in Welsh. These issues would be addressed when the SRA's strategic plan was published in the autumn;
- Wales and Borders franchise - good progress had been made and it was hoped that a preferred bidder would be identified by the end of the year;
- Structures – some members suggested that existing organisational structures might need to be rationalised in the longer term, although it was acknowledged that in the short term attention should not be diverted from the essential task of improving the network. The post-Hatfield industry working groups had considered that reliability and safety could and should be tackled together, and that the present structures did not present a conflict of interests;
- Funding – long term funding was secured commercially from train operators, banks and project management companies. Government also provided additional public money, but was keen to establish partnerships;
- Great Western route – members felt that this should be considered as a strategic route on the network, due to its essential role in facilitating economic development in South and West Wales, and as a vital connection to the ferry ports for Ireland;
- Time-tabling – information needed to be integrated across operating companies and services. Members were encouraged that a national time-tabling conference had been established, but asked that specific issues be passed on to the operating companies

concerned;

- Station and train improvements – passengers' priorities were being captured via the Rail Passenger Survey, and improvements (such as disabled access) were being addressed during the new rail franchise process, with penalties for not meeting the standards;
- Freight – targets for growth should be realistic, particularly in light of competition from increased tonnage limits for freight on roads, and the disincentive of carrying freight via the Channel Tunnel due to financial penalties associated with transporting illegal immigrants.

5.3 The Chair suggested that the SRA be invited to attend a meeting in the autumn term to present their strategic plan and update members on progress with awarding the Wales and Borders franchise.

Item 6: Minutes of meeting 21 March – EPT-05-01 (min)

6.1 The committee adopted the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March.

Any other Business

7.1 Members drew attention to two outstanding action points arising from the discussion of the draft Sustainable Development Action Plan on 31 January, which the Minister agreed to address as a matter of priority.

Date of next meeting

8.1 The next meeting of the committee would be at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 9 May at the National Assembly for Wales.

Committee Secretariat April 2001

Strategic Agenda for the Railway.

Forward Plans for Welsh Railways

**National Assembly for Wales,
Environment, Planning and Transport Committee
Cardiff, 4 April 2001**

Strategic Plan

By the Autumn -

- *Cullen inquiry*
- *New approach to infrastructure projects*
- *NAW vision for rail services*
- *Multi-modal studies*
- *Freight strategy support*
- *Instructions and Guidance*

SRA strategy

- *Our strategy is to deliver rail element of the 10 Year Plan*
- *Investment is needed in both people and processes as well as in equipment*
- *Only investment can deliver a bigger, better railway with ever-increasing levels of safety*
- *We can work with whoever backs us on this*
- *multiple models likely to develop*

Strategic Agenda - headline points

- *Delivering safety, performance and growth is a major challenge*
- *but is achievable without radical reform of industry structure*
- *Aspirations for the rail system are high*
- *Quality and capacity to meet customer expectations, rather than managing expectations down to a cash limit*
- *Railtrack's role must change*
- *need to complement its managerial and financial capability*
- *change in financial and project management structure*

Passenger

- *Franchise replacement - Wales & Borders*
- *Franchise extension - FGW*
- *Access to the network*
- *Rail Passenger Partnership/IOS schemes*

Freight

- *Freight Strategy*
 - *Bulk traffics*
 - *Intermodal*
 - *Ports/Channel Tunnel - Wentloog*
- *Freight facility grants*
- *Track access grants*
- *Network access*
- *Innovation - Cargosprinter*

Infrastructure enhancement

- *Main goal is the "two businesses"*
- *operations - utility return*
- *enhancement - construction-risk return*
- *Market testing of DBFT elements*
- *design, build, finance, transfer*
- *build, finance, transfer only*
- *Evolution not revolution*
- *Co-operation of Regulator, Railtrack and HSE needed for this*

Integration

- *Airport access*
- *Access to ports*
- *Intermodal*
- *Door to door journey*
- *Transport/spatial planning*
- *Environmental, health, employment*
- *Social exclusion*

Schemes for Wales

- *Great Western Main Line up-grade*
- *West Coast Main Line - better links for North Wales*
- *Valley lines upgrade - supporting SWIFT initiative*
- *Passenger services on freight lines*
- *Capacity and journey time improvements between Birmingham, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth;*
- *Investment in capacity and station improvement in West Wales*

- *North-South Wales via Hereford&Shrewsbury*

What happens next

- *Agenda widely distributed*
- *Invites response about the principles we are following*
- *This is not a statutory consultation*
- *Development of strategies - fares, capacity, Channel Tunnel Links and freight*
- *SRA's first plan in November*

Conclusions

Opportunities from:

- *Continued growth of the market and in the market*
- *Supportive Government policy*
- *Ten Year Plan funding*
- *Duty to develop and promote the network*
- *Focus and strategic development through SRA*
- *Private funding, public sector support*
- *Public perception*