

Date: Wednesday 14 November 2001
Time: 2.00 to 4.30 pm
Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

GREEN TRANSPORT PLAN

Finalisation of the Draft Green Transport Plan has been a little more time consuming than anticipated. However we do expect it to be published by the beginning of December. The Plan will then be finalised in the light of comments received with a view to publishing the final version as soon as possible in 2002.

COUNTRYSIDE

Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Financial Guidelines

The Assembly has published revised guidelines on payments under management agreements for the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Natura 2000 sites. The new guidelines, which have been updated to reflect the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and also EU state aid requirements, emphasise that management agreements will be used to support the positive management of sites. The guidelines are available on the Assembly Intranet site.

Marine Wildlife Conservation

The Committee will wish to be aware that a Private Member's Bill on Marine Wildlife Conservation has been given its Second Reading in the House of Commons. The purpose of the Bill is to allow for the establishment, protection and management of a network of nationally important marine areas throughout the territorial waters of England and Wales.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The Countryside Access Draft Maps and Local Access Forum Regulations are progressing well. Both sets of regulations will be discussed in the Business Committee on the 13th of November and the Legislation Committee on the 27th of November.

Appointments

I was pleased to appoint Mr. Richard Howells to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority for a three-year term. I have also re-appointed Mr. Robin Pratt, Dr Elizabeth Andrews, Mr. Roger Lovegrove and Mr. Dei Tomos to the Countryside Council for Wales, for a further term to run until 30 September 2005.

Landmap

On 26 October I attended a seminar to launch LANDMAP. LANDMAP is a system that will provide information on the key elements and features that make up landscape in a way that helps and supports sustainable development.

I took the opportunity of visiting the Countryside Council for Wales' Llandrindod Wells Office on 29 October. This was a courtesy visit, to meet some of the staff working there. I hope to carry out more visits such as this in the future.

National Parks Seminar

On 2 November I gave a speech at the Welsh National Parks Members Seminar held at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch in Snowdonia. I also attended a dinner held the evening before to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Snowdonia National Park.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

River Water Quality in Wales

Welsh rivers have maintained their high quality and are still among the best in the UK according to a monitoring report published by the Environment Agency on 5 November.

Ninety-nine per cent of Welsh rivers were classified as being good or fair for chemical quality in 2000. 93% were classified as of good quality, a similar level to recent years and an improvement when compared with 86% in 1990.

In Wales almost all rivers are again classified as good or fair biological quality, although it is disappointing that there has been some decline within the biological quality category with a fall to 76% being classified as good - down from 85% in 1995.

Where there has been a decline in standards achieved, the Environment Agency Wales will investigate the reasons. Future improvements to river quality can be anticipated as a consequence of the current five year environmental investment programme being undertaken by Dwr Cymru (a programme approved by the Assembly) as well as a number of other initiatives being developed by the Environment Agency.

Full details can be found on the Environment Agency's web site at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/yourenv/eff/water/river_qual

Bathing Water Quality in Wales

A record 60 per cent of Welsh bathing waters met European Blue Flag standards, while 93 per cent of identified bathing waters in Wales met mandatory bacteria standards in 2001. 45 of the Welsh bathing waters monitored reached guideline standards, a significant increase from 32 last year. The guideline standards are 20 times higher than the mandatory standards and are also the standards that beaches must meet to be eligible for a European Blue Flag.

Of the 75 Welsh beaches monitored, five failed to meet the mandatory standards, resulting in a drop from 99% compliance last year to 93%. It is disappointing that there has been some decline this year in the number of bathing waters reaching the EC's mandatory standards.

The five bathing waters, which failed to meet mandatory standards, are at Tywyn, Llandudno West Shore, Llandudno North Shore, Rhyl and Prestatyn. The Environment Agency will now investigate the causes of the failures at each of these bathing waters and will consider any remedial action needed to bring them back up to standard in the coming year.

The Committee will recall that it asked earlier this year for a report from the Environment Agency into the reduction of the number of Beaches receiving a Blue Flag award in 2001. An earlier draft of this paper is being updated to reflect this year's bathing waters results and will be forwarded separately to EPT Members.

Baroness Young Meeting

I met Baroness Young, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, on 25 October to discuss waste incineration. Although the meeting focussed on the proposals for an incinerator at Crymlyn Burrows and the possible health implications, we also considered incineration in the context of the Waste Strategy in Wales. It was also an opportunity in light of the proposals for an incinerator in Wrexham, to discuss and consider the lessons learnt from the decision making processes surrounding Crymlyn Burrows.

Landfill Directive

In August, DEFRA consulted on draft Regulations for England and Wales which would implement the regulatory elements of the EC Landfill Directive. Consultation closed on 26 October. DEFRA hope to lay the Regulations before the end of the year.

Save-a-Cup Launch

On 30 October, I was pleased to host the Welsh launch of the Save-a-Cup scheme at the Assembly. The industry led scheme collects and recycles plastic vending cups.

PLANNING

Waste TAN

I am pleased to announce the issue of the Technical Advice Note for Waste.

The TAN will be placed on the web page on 15 November in English only. When the Welsh translation is available in about 2 months, the bilingual TAN will be published and circulated to local authorities and other organisations.

The TAN is being made available now to enable local authorities to start using it to establish the new voluntary joint regional arrangements over the next couple of months. These regional arrangements will be needed to provide the land use planning framework to help implement Waste Strategy 2000 and the Wales Waste Strategy that will issue in 2002.

Local authorities and other organisations are being advised of the availability of the TAN.

Seminars are to be arranged early in the New Year to explain how the regional arrangements are intended to function.

TRANSPORT

Railtrack Successor

The UK Government has proposed to the Administrator its intention that the membership of the board of the Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) to replace Railtrack PLC, should be predominantly private sector reflecting railway stakeholder interests as far as possible. The board would comprise 12-15 executive and non-executive directors and would include passenger representatives.

The proposed CLG board would be accountable to the members of the CLG. It is anticipated that the majority of the CLG's membership would be drawn from the private sector/private interest groups but the membership would comprise a diverse cross-section of rail industry stakeholders. These could include representatives of the devolved administrations and regional agencies as well as Train Operating Companies, Freight Operating Companies, Rolling Stock Companies, groups representing the disabled, passenger groups and unions. The Government will consult widely about its proposals.

In addition the Government has announced that it will legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to rationalise the present regulations structure.

Cycling

I opened the Machynlleth Millennium Bridge on 22 October - the bridge provides a safe traffic free by pass of the A487 which can be used by cyclists, walkers and less able-bodied users. Prior to the opening I visited the Centre for Alternative Technology at Corris and then cycled down to the bridge.

Road Safety

I recently announced that each local authority will receive funding to recruit and retain a new Child Pedestrian Training Co-ordinator. It will be the job of the co-ordinators to train and support parent volunteers who will take young schoolchildren out on the streets to teach them key road safety skills. Each local authority will receive £37,000 - to cover the remainder of this year and next.

Welsh Affairs Committee

I attended the Welsh Affairs Committee Inquiry on transport in Wales along with Assembly Officials on Monday 29th October.

Sue Essex AM Minister for Environment

ANNEX A

TRANSPORT GRANT BIDS 2002-03

1. This paper is presented to the Committee for information. It reports on the bids received from Local Authorities for capital funding in 2002-03.
2. The National Assembly supports local authority transport expenditure in a number of additional ways as follows. The Local Government Revenue and Capital Settlements cover general highways expenditure. These settlements are unhypothecated and it is for local authorities themselves to determine their spending priorities.

- The Local Transport Services Grant (2002-03 £7.3 million distribution by formula)

enables local authorities to support socially necessary bus services and community transport services.

- Specific additional funding of £17.7 million has been put into the settlement to meet the estimated costs of the concessionary fare scheme.
- The Road Safety Grant (2002-03 £5 million distribution by formula). It will provide support for the delivery of local road safety strategies with special focus on the needs of children and other vulnerable road users. We expect engineering measures and educational, training and publicity initiatives to be supported. In addition, funding has been secured for a child pedestrian safety training co-ordinator to be appointed in each local authority area - £30,000 has been allocated for 2002-03.
- A new capital grant, to be distributed by formula, which will help authorities tackle the backlog of major structural maintenance and renewal of the primary road network, was announced on 31 October 2001. It will also address the growing demand for noise mitigation works on the busy roads. (2001-02 £5 million; 2002-03 £20 million.)

3. On 7 March 2001 the Committee considered paper EPT-04-05 (p5) concerning the categories of project which should be invited to bid for Transport Grant Support in 2002-03. These were determined as follows:

- a. preparation costs support for additional infrastructure schemes, costing over £5 million, contributing to a wider community regeneration programme;
- b. road schemes currently receiving support in line with the indicative start dates in the 5-year programme announced on 11 January 2001;
- c. package schemes costing over £1 million currently receiving support, in line with indicative allocation and decision issued with 2001-02 settlement letters;
- d. new package schemes that address cross-border transportation issues, presented as part of an overarching partnership or consortium strategy including innovative proposals for public transport; and
- e. Safe Routes to School projects. Priority will be given to those projects that demonstrate enhancement of local communities generally, paying particular regard to road safety issues.

4. The closing date for receipt of bids was 31 August 2001. 154 bids have been received, seeking support in 2002-03 of £133 million. Of this, £60 million is needed to fund projects already approved. Projects up to £4 million can be added.

5. The draft budget for 2002-03 for the Programme, as published on 18 October is £63.8m. Of this budget some £16.9m represents expenditure on committed road schemes and on the purchase of land for road schemes where construction is being funded through Private

Finance Initiative contracts. A further £28m has already been promised to local authorities to support continuing implementation of integrated transport packages.

6. My Transport Grant announcement on January 11 this year also identified a five-year programme of support for the implementation of major rail and road investments. Recent events in the rail industry have created uncertainty about timing of the rail investments. Some £7.2 million of the earmarked £9.4 million for rail projects in 2002-03 will be required for the Vale of Glamorgan Line alone.

7. New packages represent bids for some £21.9 million and no expenditure has been committed to these projects. Bids include the North East Wales Docks and Railfreight Transportation package, which promotes better road and public transport links to Mostyn Docks, TAIH Smartcards, Demand Responsive Transport and Passenger Information System in North Wales, the Snowdonia Green Key project that promotes interchanges and cycling in Snowdonia National Park and an extension of the TIGER and SWITCH packages. There are also 14 bids in the new major infrastructure category. These include the reopening of the Ebbw Valley Railway line to passenger traffic, the Greater Bargoed Community Regeneration Project, which will improve the A469 route and relieve Bargoed town centre, the Ammanford Distributor Road and the West Wrexham Communities Link that will assist in the redevelopment of the former Brymbo Steelworks. The table at Annex B shows forward commitments – although no provision has been made for any major infrastructure schemes or new packages. There are 30 bids representing £5 million for Safe Routes to Schools schemes. £2.7 million has been earmarked to support successful projects. Total bids for **new** projects in 2002-03 amount to £30.1 million. There is about £3.8 million available. (There would be ongoing commitments since most projects will take several years to complete.)

8. Bid documents are in the library. I hope to announce my decision on Transport Grant support for 2002-03 in January 2002.

ANNEX B

Forward Commitments – Updated 1 November 2001 (£ million)

	2002-03 bids	2002-03 indicative expenditure	2003-04 indicative expenditure	2004-05 indicative expenditure	2005-06 indicative expenditure
Draft budget		63.8	72.8	72.8	72.8
Package delivery		28.0	18.6	0	0

}82.3

Rail projects in the 5 Year forward Programme		9.4	17.0	18.0	4.0
Current estimated costs of Committed Road Schemes	} 16.9	16.9	16.1	12.6	5.4
Road projects in the 5 Year forward Programme	23.3	3.0	10.0	19.0	42.0
Safe Routes To School	5.0	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7
Major infrastructure schemes	3.3	0	0	0	0
Total of commitments		60.0	64.4	52.3	54.1
Balance Remaining		3.8	8.4	20.5	18.7