

NAfW – Enterprise and Business Committee - Inquiry into Integrated Public Transport

Written evidence from Taith (North Wales Regional Transport Consortium)

Background

TAITH is the Transport Consortium for North Wales. It is a formally constituted Joint Committee of the six North Wales County Councils. Its remit is to develop an integrated transport strategy for North Wales, delivering the aims and objectives of the Wales Transport Strategy in the region. In common with the other three Regional Transport Consortia, the Regional Transport Plan (RTP) was completed in 2009, and covers strategic interventions in North Wales to 2015.

Introduction

Taith welcomes the opportunity to submit information to the Enterprise and Business Committee review of integrated public transport.

In providing written evidence to the Committee, Taith has focused on addressing the issues that in particular it wishes to bring to the committee's attention without repeating much of the material provided by other respondents.

QUESTIONS

How can the integration of rail, bus and community transport services in Wales be supported and improved to meet the needs of communities and businesses in both rural and urban Wales?

Improvements to integration between transport modes as part of the daily lives of residents, business and visitors in terms of work, education, health shopping, leisure and other activities is essential as costs of transport and demand for accessibility increases. In determining arrangements for integration of public transport in and to/ from Wales the needs of industry especially access to employment and freight transport must also be taken in to account. Integration of transport services must happen in planning, management and delivery of transport services.

The planning framework for transport in Wales is at best fragmented - not only between modes but in the case of buses within the mode as well. At the strategic planning level the overarching document is the Wales Transport Strategy (WTS) which is delivered with the context of the current Programme for Government (PfG) of the current administration.

Supporting the WTS is the National Transport Plan (NTP) – prioritised in December 2011 and the four Regional Transport Plans (RTP's).

It is our view that there is scope for a revised planning framework to better deliver a suite of integrated transport interventions at a national and Regional level across Wales. It is encouraging that work done by the Simpson Compact Steering group has recognised there is scope to improve current arrangements in their work.

In the TAITH area we are acutely aware that the planning, management and delivery of integrated public transport on a cross border basis to / from England is of crucial importance to North East Wales. Accessibility to employment and services across the border can be difficult due to the different funding regimes and governance structures either side of the border. Effective working relationships are being developed through the Mersey Dee Alliance and other bodies to try and overcome these issues.

Buses

Within the bus network, there are currently two types of provision, commercial and tendered / supported bus networks. With the exception of services that operate within Statutory Quality Partnership (SQP) scheme areas of which there are currently only two in Wales – there is currently no formal mechanism to plan an overall network between both types of service provision and between operators. This issue has been recognised in the report recently produced following the review of bus funding initiated by the Minister for Local Government and Communities.

Following the conclusion of the review the Welsh Government has indicated that that the Regional Transport Consortia will be taking on an additional role to develop Bus Network strategies from April 1st 2013. This role will enable better integration of the funding available and through the preparation of Regional Bus and Community Transport Network Strategies. This should allow scope for a better integrated bus network to be developed. There are concerns that the budget reductions included as part of the package will impact on both the number and frequency of services, and this will need to be managed carefully as part of the network development work.

Rail

Compared to 2009 when Taith last prepared evidence to this committee's predecessor, the interface with Network Rail has improved significantly following the establishment of the Wales Route in November 2011 with its own Managing Director and local planning and operations teams. In North East Wales we have some concern that the key hub of our network, Chester, is located within the North West route; however we are assured that this will be managed appropriately within Network Rail.

At the planning level, the early engagement of the Regional Transport Consortia with Network Rail through the Long Term Planning Process and other rail schemes is strongly welcomed with the early signs suggesting that this new approach will be much more successful than the previous arrangements such as the Wales Route Planning Assessment (2007) and Route Utilisation Studies (Wales – 2008). Further work in this area is being considered by the Government as part of Wales Futures work which was formally launched by the Minister for Local Government and Communities at conference on this subject on October 1st 2012.

Taith believes that in future the level of planning integration will need to further improve between Network Rail the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders. In particular how we integrate bus services with the railway

network (and other modes) as part of an overall network remains an issue to be addressed. If we are to plan, manage and develop an effective joined up network for the benefit of the public and industry users such integration will need to be enhanced.

Air

Currently there is only one internal air route in Wales, which is the RAF Valley to Cardiff International Airport Route which commenced in 2008. At the commencement of the service, public transport connections at both ends of the route were initiated. In the case of RAF Valley it is Route 4 / 4A / X4 as part of the Holyhead to Bangor service. Surface access arrangements to Cardiff Airport are being addressed through the Cardiff International Airport taskforce.

The recent announcement by the Minister for Local Government and Communities in December 2012 with the establishment of two Integrated Transport task forces (South East and North East Wales) provides an immediate focus to providing a framework to bring together an integrated transport network (planning, management, and delivery) in Wales and to and from Wales. We consider that in some cases further regulatory and legislative changes may be required beyond that which Wales currently has competence in, such as railways and in bus regulation.

The next stage of the Silk Commission Part II will provide the opportunity to look at what powers Wales should seek to gain in the future. The committee as part of its consideration of the both the written and oral evidence may wish to take a view on this.

How successful are Regional Transport Consortia in supporting the provision of effective, integrated public transport?

The Regional Transport Consortia as presently constituted have the responsibility to prepare, on behalf of their constituent local authorities, a Regional Transport Plan for the management and delivery of transport interventions through their constituent local authorities. The delivery of RTP projects commenced two financial years ago and consequently implementation of many of the major projects is at an early stage.

The development of a regional plan has been positive. The position is however compromised by having interventions on the strategic network delivered through the NTP. There have not always been effective links between the two plans, although offering the RTC an opportunity to comment on the reprioritisation process of the NTP was a welcome and positive development.

The role of the RTC is changing, especially in the light of the bus funding review. We believe there is scope to further enhance the role the RTC play at a strategic regional level, to build on progress made to date, within the limited remit given to the RTC.

How effectively does Welsh Government policy support public transport integration?

The WTS and NTP at a high level are clear in their intent to deliver integration of transport networks in Wales. This is however compromised by the ongoing and recent funding reductions.

Until recently the inability to drive through reform in the local bus market has been a constraint to progress. Although progress has been made in joint ticketing there is some way to go and the funding arrangements have made leading the required change difficult. The outputs from the recent bus funding review provide an opportunity to improve policy support to public transport integration. However the significant reductions in funding at the point of transition will restrict the ability of the public sector to secure the gains in the efficiency and effectiveness of the proposed networks that could arise from the forthcoming regional public transport network strategies.

As we have previously said, future integration between rail and bus networks and opportunities for other modal users to integrate still require improvement. We have recently completed a substantial report in partnership with the Welsh Government, the North East Wales Area Based Transport Study (NEWABTS). This report considers an area wide approach to transport integration to resolve severe congestion on the strategic road network. Once implemented, the outcomes of this report should offer transport improvements and reduced congestion through delivery of integrated solutions. This is a positive approach and we welcome the recent announcement by the Minister of a group to consider how the implementation of the reports recommendations can be progressed

In particular, the Welsh Government is considering the establishment of Joint Transport Authorities in Wales, and the feasibility of operating the Wales and Borders rail franchise on a not-for-dividend basis. Additionally, the Minister for Local Government and Communities has indicated that he is considering the use of quality partnerships and contracts in delivery of bus services. How far would these proposals improve integrated public transport provision in Wales?

Organisations or structures in themselves do not automatically improve integrated public transport provision in Wales, nor does the use of Quality Partnerships, Statutory Quality Partnerships or Quality Contracts alone achieve desired improvements. The planning, management and delivery of integrated public transport provision in Wales needs to be considered on a whole 'systems' approach. Traditional thinking in this area is no longer adequate and as part of the outputs from the Simpson Review in Highways and Transport services collaboration work streams this has been identified as a barrier.

Once the appropriate planning framework is determined then the management and delivery frameworks can be put in place to achieve the required outcomes. The output from the forthcoming Simpson Compact work streams if approved by the WLGA council on the 22nd February may lead to an improvement without the need to introduce new organisations / legislation or the fuller use of existing legislation.

What innovative approaches to delivery of public transport in Wales might be considered to improve integration?

This is a broad area and has been extensively covered by others in their written evidence.

In summary the following points are relevant.

Closer integration with the local planning process- The forthcoming Planning Bills will provide an opportunity to strengthen the integral relationship between transport and land use.

Closer integration with economic development. - To ensure that the location of, and development of, industrial activity is linked to the provision of and maintenance of appropriate transport infrastructure.

The use of spatial planning processes - in both city region, regions and in rural areas.

How effectively do key stakeholders, particularly transport operators and public bodies, cooperate to ensure effective service delivery?

This varies across the country. It is important that recently there have been significant improvements in this area – most notably with Network Rail. The internal relationships within local government and the regional transport consortia have been good and are further developing as part of the work required in delivering the Simpson Compact agenda for Transport and Highway services.

Relationships with the local bus operators have been through local authorities but with the reforms arising from the bus funding review, the RTC will take on a strategic and operational role with the local bus operators. Having regional relationships with bus operators will make it easier to develop effective regional networks.

How can the creation of a Network Rail Wales devolved route support effective, integrated public transport in Wales?

The establishment of a Wales Route was welcomed by Taith. By devolving local planning, management and delivery to Wales brings the organisation both closer to its main customer (the Welsh Government) and other stakeholders.

Notwithstanding this positive statement the question of planning, management and delivery of cross border links and integration with the wider UK and international rail network remain a cause for concern.

We have also previously noted the issue of the hub of the North Wales network being in a neighbouring route, and also have concerns that many of our key services are impacted by developments in adjoining conurbations, especially Manchester and Birmingham. Developments in these areas have a profound impact on our services and effective relationships at a National UK level are critical. These can only be delivered through the Welsh Government and Network Rail.

What are the implications of the England and Wales High Level Output Specification and Statement of Funds Available for Control Period 5, published by the UK Government, for the development of integrated rail services in Wales?

There are a number of positive announcements in the reports which will bring benefit to the TAITH region. These are welcomed.

The schemes which were in Wales and of relevance to Wales are included in the HLOS and Sofa for CP5 as set out in the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2012.

The main implications concerning the detail of the schemes and timelines were set out in more detail with the recent publication of the Wales Route Strategic Business Plan on the 8th January 2013.

The two integrated transport taskforces which have been set up between two regional transport consortia and the Welsh Government will as part of their remit look to ensure that the delivery of the schemes as set out in CP5 can be supported and augmented by further schemes which will increase the cost benefit of the forthcoming Network Rail schemes.

The bigger and on-going opportunity is presented with the reform to the Transport Planning Framework in Wales and the rail futures work that is being led by the Welsh Government. This should in build the principles of integrated transport into the planning, management and delivery of transport in Wales at an earlier stage than previously possible – not just those schemes which happen to be on the shelf at the time or are 'easy to do'. The use of WelTAG at both the scheme and plan level and its recent refresh will help play a part.

How well is Welsh public transport integrated, particularly in relation to bus, rail and community transport services, and what factors limit integration?

We are of the view that there is scope to better integrate transport across Wales, as many of the comments made previously in our response suggest. In particular the delivery of the integrated approach suggested by the recently completed NEWABTS report, supported by the potential improvements to the Transport Planning Framework emerging from the Simpson Compact work offer opportunities for the future

What steps can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales?

We would offer the following suggestions.

- A budget framework that allows multi mode interventions to be developed at a regional level
- Improvements to the planning framework that ensures that decisions to invest in transport interventions are made across modes so far as is possible.

- Better management arrangements at a regional level that allows bus and rail networks to be integrated through revised franchise and outcome based bus funding, leading to better integrated networks.
- Clarity over the wider planning framework that enables development opportunities and service change proposals to be integrated better with transport planning.

For further information please contact:

Michael.Whittaker@taith.gov.uk

Michael Whittaker
Taith Executive Officer
Taith
Flint Railway Station
Flint
CH6 5NW
01352 704541