

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross-Party Group for North Wales in the Welsh Senedd Friday 14th July 2023

Present

Senedd Members:

Mark Isherwood (Chair), Ken Skates, Llyr Gruffydd, Darren Millar, Gareth Davies and Rhun ap Iwerth

Local Authority Leaders:

Cllr Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy), Cllr Jason McLellan (Denbighshire) and Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn (Gwynedd)

Speakers:

Shanker Singham, CEO Competere

Ian Davies, Head of UK Port Authorities, Stena Line

Christian Branch, Head of Service (Regulation and Economic Development Service), Isle of Anglesey County Council

Cllr Gary Pritchard, Ynys Mon

Officials:

WLGA:

Chris Llewelyn (Chief Executive), Lucy Sweet (Group Secretary), Dilwyn Jones (Communications and Public Affairs Manager)

Welsh Government:

Wendy Boddington

Ambition North Wales:

Alwen Williams, Portfolio Director

Transport for Wales:

Lee Robinson, North Wales Development Director

Alex Fortune

Actions Agreed:

- Invite NW Transport Commission to a future meeting of the CPG (they have just completed their interim report and have met with MSs).
- Invite TfW's Chief Operations Officer, Jan Chaudhry van der Velde, to attend a future meeting of the CPG to talk about operational challenges in delivering

rail services in North Wales, particularly those affecting the Wrexham to Bidston Borderlands Line.

- Send follow up letter to TfW about North Wales season ticket options, reducing fares in North Wales and the location of senior and operational staff in NW relative to those in SW (Ask TfW to report back at the next CPG meeting).
- CPG to apply pressure on Government re Holyhead Port decision.
- CPG Secretary to arrange meeting with Chair and Vice Chairs to discuss group's work programme (before next meeting).

1. Welcome from the Chair and Introductions (13-13:05)

2. Minutes of the Previous Meetings held on 10 February and 19 May '23 and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meetings were agreed.

Freeports

3. Presentation from the Anglesey Freeport Governance Board

Presentation slides are attached with minutes.

Key points:

- Freeport managed by one local authority, Ynys Mon, which is unique when you look at other freeports.
- It was a **regional** bid and there will be benefits for North Wales as a whole.
- Freeport status secured, but a lot of work still to do
- Next step- business case to both governments by the end of the year.

Questions

Is there a breakdown of economic benefits by NW LA? (Gareth Davies MS)

Have used an economic modelling group to project economic activity, the 13k jobs number is not specifically in Anglesey.

Haven't got a council by council breakdown, will depend on eco systems that exist in the freeport.

Rail freight- have there been any discussions already on freight using the port? (Alex Fortune, TfW)

Don't have much land in the port, looking at utilising the railhead to add value and there has been a lot of interest. One project currently being looked at- import of aggregates on scale.

There is/will be a Transport Workstream- there will be engagement with relevant stakeholders, including TfW.

How will the Governance Board engage with relevant delivery partners like TfW and Ambition North Wales? (Mark Isherwood)

See the Freeport as an opportunity for NW as a whole.

Already an existing relationship with the growth deal, can envisage role within the governance structure for the growth deal.

There are all sorts of freeports around the world, not all of them good, how to make sure this one is a benefit rather than a very big problem? Will there be robust governance and monitoring processes? Will jobs have local impacts? Will FE providers be tied into the ambitions? (Rhun ap Iorwerth)

Good freeports have better compliance- OECD clean zone etc will be crucial to development.

Geared towards sustainable development, long term employment of people. Focus on driving education and skills. Welsh Customs and Trade Academy in Anglesey.

Both Governments are pushing for appropriate local, national, regional representatives on the governance board.

What sort of job number of we talking about? (Rhun ap Iorwerth) And are they purely additional jobs? (Ken Skates)

Will be able to provide further information later on in the process.

Yes, purely additional jobs, not job displacement.

Impact on Rosgoch? (Rhun ap Iorwerth)

Rhosgoch is an asset in terms of redundant rail line.

From council perspective, redundant line to be brought back into life.

Lots of bad examples from other freeports, seeking to learn the lessons from those examples.

Rail Connectivity

4. Update and discussion on actions from 19th May meeting

Stephen Jones, North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Task Force (Secretary to the Board), gave an update on the letters sent to and responses received from TfW and the Welsh Government since the last NW CPG meeting.

Important to campaign with costed asks, wait until Autumn, TfW will go through a number of processes and we may be lucky enough to have rail network enhancement pipeline and possible response to connectivity review by then.

Questions:

Increasing problem is the lack of reliability. Need to get a better understanding from TfW about what action being taken in the short term to address serious issues (Darren Millar MS).

Could there be a season tickets of sorts for north Wales? (Darren Millar MS)

Action- Invite NW Transport Commission to a future meeting- they have just completed their interim report and met with MSs.

TfW- a lot of work is ongoing but appreciate the situation is not good enough.

Season tickets issue- will pass on to colleagues who look at tickets and revenue.

Action- Invite TfW's Chief Operations Officer, Jan Chaudhry van der Velde, to attend a future meeting of the CPG to talk about operational challenges in delivering rail services in North Wales, particularly those affecting the Wrexham to Bidston Borderlands Line.

5. Update from Ambition North Wales

Cynghorydd Dyfrig Siencyn, Chair of the Ambition North Wales, gave a short update on the work of Ambition North Wales, focusing on projects shortlisted and withdrawn, and the progress of existing projects.

Action- Holyhead port decision is a major stumbling block. CPG to apply pressure on Government.

6. AOB

Next meeting to be in October or Nov, date tbc.