

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross-Party group for North Wales**

**Convened by Teams on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 12:00 to 13:30**

### **Present Senedd Members:**

Mark Isherwood (Chair), Ken Skates, Llyr Gruffydd, Carolyn Thomas, Sam Rowlands

### **Senedd Support staff:**

Rhys Hughes, Ann Owen- Williams Senedd Commission Staff

### **MPs:**

Mark Tami MP

### **Welsh Youth Parliament:**

Keira Bailey-Hughes, Leola

**Local Authority Leaders:** Cllr. Dyfrig Lewis Siencyn (Gwynedd) Cllr. Jason McLellan (Denbighshire), Cllr Ian Roberts (Flintshire), Cllr. Robin W. Williams (Anglesey, deputised for Cllr Llinos Medi)

### **Guests:**

Lea Beckerleg (CCRA - Transport and Digital Connectivity)

**Ambition North Wales** Alwen Williams, Portfolio Director

**Speakers:** Professor John Parkin, North Wales Transport Commission

**Transport for Wales:** Lee Robinson

**Officials WLGA:** Chris Llewelyn (Chief Executive), Lucy Sweet (Group Secretary), Evelyn James (Support Officer), Tim Peppin (Director of Regeneration)

**Translation:** Bethan Mair Evans

### **Actions agreed:**

- Write collectively to the Deputy Minister re transport report with further recommendations.
- Convene further short AGM to appoint officers (Lucy Sweet)

**1. Welcome by the Chair and introductions.** Professor John Parkin will address in place of Lord Burns.

**2. No matters arising from the last meeting** held 14 07 23. Stephen Jones happy to move that the minutes of the last meeting are an accurate record, seconded by Carolyn Thomas. No dissent.

**3. North Wales Transport Commission presentation by Professor Parkin:** Report out end November after stakeholder engagement -Senedd, Public Bodies and a survey (268 responses) 85% agreement improvement needed. Extended to cover the Menai Crossing in Feb. 23. Supported by TFW and North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency. North Wales populations remote and sparse and travel longer distances. Industry focused on Wrexham, Deeside and Chester. Cross border travel to these areas as well as Coastal Towns and National Parks, also freeport planned for Holyhead. All aware that HS2 cancelled by PM results in proposed funding for North Wales electrification for the mainline. This would also require capacity improvements to Chester station- new platform and signalling. Other rail improvements covered by the Commission include the Wrexham to Bidston Line with an interchange at Shotton to the mainline to Bangor, plus improvements on the route from Shrewsbury to Wrexham and Chester. Rail part of the answer but improvement needed for bus service and Active Travel. Legislative changes are planned in relation to franchising of bus services which would help improve co-ordination between use of buses and trains. Model for North Wales to promote a regional network incorporating coastal and rural services. Active Travel envisages the use of foot and bicycle but lack of suitable and safe routes, the development of which is subject to funding issues. Funding through TFW which has a prioritisation tool to identify what routes will have most impact. Planning, management and changing behaviour is required. Improvements to public transport could include integrated ticketing, schemes for a maximum fare, and use of "Tap on Tap off" payment systems.

Menai Straits – there are two bridges but a 3/4 of the traffic currently crosses over the Britannia Bridge. Prone to high winds, collisions, and a high pollution rate. Need to alter the junction arrangement and speed and mitigate against closures. Plan for wind deflectors and variable speed limits to ensure a smooth flow around junction 9 and 8A. Working with a multiagency framework.

. Question Cllr. Ian Roberts: Any deliberation on Queensferry and the A494 bridge over the river Dee? Bridge in a poor state and coping with a vast amount of traffic. Shocking summer across the A55 with accidents and closures pushing traffic from the A55 through towns like Flint. No mention of trunking of the A548 and transferring the Kelsterton Bridge from FCC to WG. If the Queensferry A494 bridge closes, results in traffic chaos across North Wales. Not advised the A494 had been downgraded. Professor Parkin replied it was not part of his remit, consequences of the cancellation of the red route?

. Carolyn Thomas advised she has been discussing the issue on an informal level in the Senedd, she will press for written confirmation of what she has been told informally. Welsh Gov is considering a smaller scheme, not increasing capacity so no need to move the railway line and Pylons. Not clear why it was not part of the review (like the Menai Bridges). Need to maintain existing highways and pavements and there is no money going into that. Can we use active travel funding as cyclists use the pavement? This needs to feed into the review. Alternative transport provides a new infrastructure which will need more maintenance. How are L/A to carve up/provide the revenue funding for that?

. Professor Parkin: Maintenance has been drawn to our attention, part of revenue funding not capital. Agreed that alternative transport provides a new infrastructure which will need more maintenance.

. Ken Skates -collectively the group needs to write a letter to the Deputy Minister since Red route was cancelled a replacement for the A494 Queensferry bridge should be in

place. He had previously asked for any major roadworks to be decided at regional level and wanted the road policy devolved to the North.

. Cllr. Robin Williams expressed his disappointment at the outcome of the review, he felt the measures recommended by the Commission (compared to a new Menai Bridge) would not make a difference and he would continue to fight for a better infrastructure. Geography was not understood. Impossible to have an Active Travel network with the roads and the distance between the towns on Anglesey, roads are essential. The Professor feels Active Travel can play a part in urban areas and they are not impossible to implement. Cllr. Williams's points to be incorporated into the letter.

. Mark Isherwood agreed for a letter to be sent and it would be backed up by the sentiments expressed in the Chamber.

**4. Transport for Wales update by Lee Robinson:** Not much had moved on from the previous meeting although TFW was looking at the entire structure – season tickets and sandwich fares providing a combination of train and bus travel. Some are already in place e.g., a One Bus ticket purchased weekly for £28.00. Season tickets do exist, but they are incredibly expensive. e.g., Holyhead to Manchester £7500.00. Rover Ticket North Wales between £15 -£40. The rail and bus network under entire review more than happy to update in due course. In process of upgrading digital Regional Operational Control Centre (ROCC) in Cardiff but there is also a small office in Wrexham with Director present as well as a training hub.

. Carolyn Thomas cited examples of RCT temporary scheme involving a £1.00 flat rate bus fare and the Traws Cymru bargains that are available. Lee confirmed TFW working with LAs in North Wales and looking at the retendering process.

**5. Presentation by Welsh Youth Parliament:** Positive feedback on roles given by Keira Bailey Hughes and Leola. Sixty members elected for period of 2 years and have an input on Climate and the Environment, Education and the Curriculum and Health and Wellbeing and discuss matters with Ministers. Keira advised she was working with GISDA a mental health and wellbeing charity that sourced hostels and provided art therapy amongst other services. She had been elected in 2021. She was networking with other organisations so that voices of young people could be heard. Campaigning for better resources, pushing for education and maintenance allowances amidst the cost-of-living crisis, had participated in a consultation/survey amongst teachers guardians and children. Report published 2022, over 3500 responses from young people and adults. Support through exams, safe space in schools and wellbeing support. Now working with Welsh Government on findings.

. Ann Owen Williams on behalf of the Senedd confirmed the findings of the report on transport was timely as it had considered the attitudes of 1300 young people. Events had been convened in Blaenau Ffestiniog and Pontypridd. [Sustainable Ways report \(Senedd. Wales\)](#) Main obstacle to public transport is the cost and over 70% not aware of "My travel card". Suggested public transport should be free for under 25s, most say they would use it if it were. Issues with convenience and safety as buses are unreliable. Agrees with Active Travel but need to make safer walking and bus routes. Contact @youth Senedd. More elections next year for Youth Parliament.

. Cllr. Siencyn confirmed there was a Youth Forum in Gwynedd Council and younger members could shadow the work of the council. Welcomed links to the Senedd.

Ann confirmed there are several officers in Gwynedd and she would be happy to network across Wrexham, Conwy and Flintshire. Identified a real need to explain to youth the governance arrangements.

#### **6. Update Ambition North Wales by Alwen Williams:**

. Main projects underway and now identifying new projects, application process ended September 2023, now evaluating. 5 projects received conditional allocation.

*Responsible Adventure Zip 6.2 million, Studio Kinmel 6.8 million, Holyhead Hydrogen Hub 3.8 million, Waste to Fuel Plant at Deeside /The Circular Economy Ltd 6.4 million and Wrexham Gateway Project 4.79 million*

. An extension planned to Holyhead freeport approved by Welsh Gov. a harbour amendment order is in place. Uncertainty now removed. The team followed up on Stenna Line Ports.

. Bangor University also accommodated with digital signalling now underway, more equipment purchased and 14 more members of staff. Collaboration between research and telecoms industry.

. Aim is to commercialise research and meet hydrogen challenge through the HUB, need to boost hydrogen economy for delivery and use subject to 11.2 million caps on fund.

. 4 new turbine developments with an energy crossover between sea and tidal. 50 MW output from the UK of which 22 MW produced from Morlais Zone. Revenue for developers. Work on substation continues and is complete. Morlais prospectus sets out skill set for the sector. Welsh Gov has allocated funds, put low carbon energy at forefront of social media campaign and research undertaken by Wavehill.

Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn has submitted a written report to the Senedd and gave evidence alongside Llinos Medi.

Nuclear Energy in North Wales secured funding and now recruiting in digital field. Portfolio Gateway Review in October 23. Panel of independent experts confirmed Amber /Red with 15 recommendations made, working on them. Will set out our response. Hope to bring further investment to the region. Savills Consultants commissioned to advise on increasing appeal to the investment sector.

7. **AGM** Mark Isherwood as Chair asked was the annual report ready, Lucy confirmed it would be within 5-6 weeks. Officer elections raised and Lucy confirmed happy to continue as secretary until the next meeting but anticipated being replaced thereafter. Who would propose etc.? Shortage of MS as they had left meeting so left on basis a further short meeting to be convened by end year to elect officers, in interim current officers continue.

8. **Any other business** – no.