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e-mail response sent to: SeneddEIS@assembly.wales

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to: Rail Franchise & the Metro

1. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing some 23,000 spatial planners. RTPI Cymru represents the RTPI in Wales, with 1,100 members. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of spatial planning for the benefit of the public. As well as promoting spatial planning, the RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development.
2. The response has been formed drawing on the expertise of the RTPI Cymru Policy and Research Forum which includes a cross section of planning practitioners from the private and public sectors and academia from across Wales.
3. Our comments focus on the Metro, on important connections between economic development, housing, transport and planning, and on areas and ways that planning can help to maximise the value of the Metro investment in delivering sustainable growth.
4. A key issue for the Metro programme will be the extent to which it is integrated with spatial plans for the South East Wales region. Spatial planning can positively support the economic performance of the region through influencing factors which determine productivity, for example by defining the future role of key settlements and strengthening their interrelationships by providing enhanced connectivity through both the Metro programme and other transport investment.
5. RTPI Cymru believes there needs to be a greater integration of the Metro proposals with wider policy areas. Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) and Local Development Plans (LDPs) would be an effective way of setting proposals in an integrated context. The statutory status of LDPs and SDPs would also bring significant benefits in terms of the delivery of individual projects within an agreed development framework, thereby helping to mitigate delivery risks. In this regard, it is important that the new Wales and Borders franchise has the flexibility and capacity can respond to the growth in passenger demand that may be generated by new developments and future land use proposals. To this end, RTPI would encourage engagement between the new franchise holder and local planning authorities/ regional groupings of authorities developing Strategic Development Plans to ensure that the planning and operation of rail services fully supports local and regional land use strategies.

6. The following paragraphs set out some broad principles for strategic planning, before applying these more specifically to the Metro proposals.

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015

7. Strategic planning is an important and proven tool under the Planning (Wales) Act 2015. It enables an approach which can cover a wide range of areas of public policy and effective cooperation for planning across boundaries.

8. The RTPI has devised various general principles which strategic planning should follow irrespective of where it is practised, these are:

- Have focus - being efficient in the use of resources and clear about its purpose;
- Be genuinely strategic – dealing only with matters which require resolution across boundaries;
- Be spatial – i.e. it should make choices between places, not simply establish general criteria for later decision making;
- Be collaborative - meaning that partners work together to see how they can deliver each other's agendas;
- Have strong leadership – so that negotiations between places are productive and not protracted;
- Be accountable to local electorates.

9. If carbon reduction and the costs of road traffic congestion are to be tackled effectively within the City Region, there will be a need to focus on ways of uncoupling economic growth from road traffic growth. As an example, concentrating development around Metro nodes could be a very influential contributor to growth and sustainability in the medium to long term. Planning policies could be adjusted through the SDP and LDPs to facilitate higher density developments in these locations. There is a compelling case for an integrated approach to planning for the development of stations and the land around them.

10. A key issue is that the timeframes and the need for early investment could outpace the completion of an SDP. However, this could be overcome by accelerating work on a strategic/spatial planning framework which sets out the key spatial priorities and investment priorities for the region. Such a document could function as a form of 'staging post' towards an SDP to ensure that crucial (short term) investment decisions are strategically targeted. The framework could largely be developed from existing evidence bases and incorporate work which would need to be progressed as part of the SDP. LDPs already in place in the region would provide a strong and coherent evidence base in advance of an SDP.

Competitive City Regions

11. There is a growing body of evidence indicating that the most productive and competitive cities/city regions are those which exhibit the features of so-called 'agglomeration economies' including clustering of companies involved in high value/knowledge-based production. Cardiff and South East Wales clearly possess some of these attributes, with high concentrations of Financial and Professional Services employers/growing life sciences, digital and creative sectors/clusters of HE/research institutions/high concentrations of graduates etc. Yet the region is still lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of productivity/GVA per capita and there are considerable disparities between the performance and prosperity of Cardiff and surrounding communities.

Connectivity

12. We believe that poor connectivity between Cardiff and its satellite settlements is also a contributing problem. Current thinking and evidence indicates that good connectivity between cities and their surrounding regions/ satellite settlements is key to development of greater productivity and competitiveness by:

- Increasing choice and range of (sustainable) travel modes
- Reducing journey times between settlements
- Increasing business to business interactions
- Expanding markets for business
- Expanding labour markets
- Increasing competition and innovation

13. Delivery of the Metro would help to address the connectivity issue. However, the issue is not just about “movement”. Accessibility to jobs, facilities and services is the key requirement. This requires a fully integrated approach to transport and development planning. Such an approach would ensure the relationship between key settlements and its satellite settlements across South East Wales is addressed across a much wider field, which is the role of spatial planning and an SDP, as discussed above.

Accessibility

14. The Metro programme provides a key opportunity to address the needs of those who are disadvantaged in accessing transport services. For example, the procurement of new rolling stock could facilitate a step change in accommodating the needs of those with push chairs and wheelchairs, as well as accommodating more bicycles.

Targeting Investment

15. There are concerns that following the funding of the Metro and interventions to stimulate economic development, funding for other infrastructure may be in short supply. It will be important that the focus on the Metro within the City Region does not lead to the development of better transport links and services with the adjoining Swansea and Bristol city regions being overlooked. This in turn could lead to a drift in skills towards the City Region, away from other regions at their expense. Skills training close to residential communities and integrated with employers should take place across the regions. There will be a need to target investment strategically at key strategic regional projects and infrastructure. Again, this is where it would be helpful to have a spatial planning framework in place with agreed regional priorities informed by robust analysis of gaps/need. This would help to resist pressures to invest in infrastructure (such as local by-pass schemes and other expansions of highway capacity, to use a transport example) which may be politically desirable at a local authority level yet run counter to the strategic interests of the wider region. The Community Infrastructure Levy could be a potential funding opportunity and is linked to both the SDP and LDP.

Well-being

16. There of course must be recognition of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This law requires any proposals implemented by a public body to act according to the sustainable development principle. We would therefore recommend that the proposals for the Metro are developed with sustainable development as the central organising principal.

17. Engagement with the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (NICfW) and the UK National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) who are producing a National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) and also the National Development Framework (NDF) will be important.

18. It is important that the Metro proposals are seen within the context of the broader agenda for transport in the region, and that expenditure on transport is recognised as a mechanism to deliver broader economic, environmental and social goals. The RTPi has a policy and research programme, and the publication “Capturing the Wider Benefits of Transport Infrastructure” is particularly pertinent to the theme of this enquiry.

http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/816110/capturing_the_wider_benefits.pdf

Challenges and Opportunities

19. Key challenges for the Metro proposals will be to ensure that they contribute to the wider needs of the region, that they can be deliverable in terms of funding and in securing stakeholder buy-in and approvals, and that investment in infrastructure is supported by sustainable revenue funding to support services. The broad concept of the “Metro” network has gained considerable currency within the region, and we welcome the Welsh Government commitment to grasp this opportunity.

Transport Integration

20. Given the lead role of the Welsh Government on the Metro, and its responsibilities for railways, motorways, trunk roads, ports and airports, alongside the local planning, highways, transportation and active travel responsibilities of the local authorities, a high level of integration in terms of planning, funding and governance will be particularly critical.

21. A challenge for Local Authorities in the South East Wales Valleys has always been that all transport routes were north south i.e. down the valley to Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. It is appreciated that Cardiff is the economic hub for the region but better cross valley transport linkages could assist the valley towns develop and maintain their economic position.

22. Much of the publicity around the Metro proposals has focused on the potential for increasing investment in rail based solutions. There is no doubt that the extensive rail network represents a major opportunity to achieve a step change in public transport connectivity. However, a large majority of the journeys by public transport are made by bus. This will remain the case over coming decades. It is important therefore that enhancements to bus services, and in particular bus priority on the highway, are recognised as key priorities for the Metro programme. Bus operators, and the local authorities who manage the highway network on which bus services operate, need to be at the core of planning and delivery for the Metro, alongside the rail industry and the Welsh Government.

23. With growing passenger numbers, the rail industry has been working to improve access to stations without generating extra road traffic. A number of stations around the UK now have Station Travel Plans. There is a strong case for the Metro programme to include travel plans for new stations.

24. It will be important that the focus on the Metro in improving links between the valleys and coastal communities does not lead to broader strategic transport issues being overlooked. Whatever conclusions are reached by the inquiry into current proposals for the M4, traffic pressures along the M4 corridor will remain. Access by road to city centres will continue to experience heavy congestion. Newport in particular remains poorly linked to its catchment by public transport services. Focused investment in public transport along the M4 corridor will continue to be important if the aims of the City Deal are to be achieved. While the issues along this corridor may be more difficult, this needs to be a key Metro priority.

25. Links to the adjoining Swansea and Bristol city regions are of growing importance to the economic future of the Cardiff City Region. It is important that planning for the Metro sits within a strategic transport and development planning framework that looks beyond South East Wales alone.

Public Consultation

26. While there have been public information exercises around the Metro proposals, opportunities for the public to express their views on the proposals have been limited. Widespread consultation can often lead to the refinement of proposals to deliver better outcomes for the user. Early consultation can also help to identify issues which might give rise to difficulties in securing the consents needed to implement proposals. There will be a need to address the current “consultation deficit” as the proposals are taken forward.

Transport Funding

27. While we welcome the proposed creation of a regional transport authority, we believe that the option of a statutory body should be further considered. The Welsh Government already has the legal power to establish a statutory passenger transport authority (PTA). A critical benefit of a PTA is the ability to levy a precept on council tax bills. This would provide a source of revenue funding for bus and rail services, which the Metro proposals will need to support the capital funding for infrastructure coming through the City Deal. As a guaranteed revenue stream, it would widen opportunities for borrowing. It would help to address concerns over affordability. It would also level up the playing field in competing with the English City Regions.

28. If you require further assistance, have any queries or require clarification of any points made, please contact RTPI Cymru on 029 2047 3923 or e-mail Roisin Willmott at walespolicy@rtpi.org.uk

Yours sincerely,



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