



Ein cyf/Our ref MA -- P/KS/0834/18

Russell George AM
Chair
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

12 March 2018

Dear *Russell,*

Thank you for your letter of 22 February about the Committee's scrutiny of new transport powers to be devolved shortly with the commencement of the Wales Act 2017. I have also received your request for an evidence paper on these and other matters within my portfolio, where I will provide a more detailed response.

I have noted the emerging issues that have been set out in annex A to your letter in relation to the registration of local bus services, the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles and the devolution of ports and development policy. A number of these emerging themes are familiar to me as the Welsh Government has been undertaking extensive stakeholder engagement and in some cases, public consultation on these matters in preparation for this improved devolved settlement.

We share the view that the current ports policy model is generally effective as being primarily market led, which provides for ports to adapt quickly to changes in the market. We support the view that devolution will provide a strong opportunity to better align the activity at our ports with wider Welsh Government ambitions, set out in our National Strategy and underpinned by the Economic Action Plan.

In addition to the legislative competence which will enable the National Assembly to legislate in respect of ports in Wales (excluding reserved trust ports), the Wales Act will also grant executive functions to the Welsh Ministers, which primarily concern the consenting regime under the Harbours Act 1964, and the processing of 'Harbour Orders'.

My officials have been very closely engaged with partners who currently have this responsibility in the UK -- including Transport Scotland and the Marine Management Organisation -- as well as ports sector representatives, to ensure we have the right skills and expertise and ultimately deliver a framework which promotes sustainable development at ports whilst better aligning with wider Welsh Government policy. Good progress has been made and we are confident we will have suitable administrative arrangements in place by 1st April 2018 to undertake this function efficiently and effectively.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In respect of the planning and delivery of local bus services, it is disappointing that the latest bulletin issued by Statistics Wales on 22 February illustrates a further contraction of our local bus network in Wales. The number of vehicle kilometres travelled and passenger journeys have decreased year on year since 2012/13, apart from passenger journeys in 2015/16 where a slight increase was observed. The 2016/17 figures represent a 5.2 per cent and 1.7 per cent decrease on the 2015/16 figures and a 13.4 per cent and 8.4 per cent decrease on the 2012/13 figures for vehicle kilometres and passenger journeys respectively.

I was particularly interested in relation to concerns about the introduction of bus franchising in Wales, together with the universal support for improved access to information about registered bus services to enable companies such as Traveline Cymru to improve the quality of the information provided to passengers. It is important that passengers have accurate information to be able to better plan journeys using public transport. I have also noted the evidence provided to Committee about the registration of local bus services by the Traffic Commissioner for Wales.

In relation to the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles, I published an outcome report at the end of December following the public consultation that ended on 8 September and it was clear that there was support for removing the current distinction between hackney carriages and private hire vehicles as both sectors provide taxi services. It is worth noting that only three local authorities in Wales continue to licence hackney drivers and private hire vehicle drivers separately, accounting for fewer than 5% of the driver licences issued in Wales. Technological advances that have taken place since 2013 however, necessitates further consideration of developing a licensing framework that works in the interests of the travelling public, professional drivers and licensing authorities.

These are matters, together with our proposals for reforming the planning and delivery of local bus services that require further consideration in readiness for the public consultation that I plan to hold later this year on the detailed proposals for reform. I shall keep the committee informed as work progresses on these very important matters. I look forward to discussing these matters in more detail at Committee.

I have also noted your request for data on trunk road projects (new roads and improvements) from 2007/08 until 2017/18. I would be happy to provide this information to the committee separately, however I would be grateful if we could clarify what level and amount of information would be useful to you. Our projects range from around £1,500 to in excess of £450m and we deliver on average 800 road projects each year.

Yours ever,



Ken Skates AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi a Thrafnidiaeth
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport