

**South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee - Regional Transport
Sub-Committee**

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

10 July 2023

Chairperson: **Councillor D.Price**

Councillors: E.Thomas, A.Stevens, P.Miller and W.F.Griffiths

Officers In Attendance S.Pilliner, M.Wade, D.Thomas, S.Aldred-Jones, D.Griffiths, L.McAndrew, B.George, M.Jones, D.McCallum and C.Plowman

1. **Welcome and Chairs Announcements**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests received.

3. **Terms of Reference**

The Committee were presented with the Terms of Reference of the Regional Transport Sub Committee of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee.

It was explained that the document set out the overarching aims of the Sub Committee, which were to drive an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system across the region; it also set out relevant information in regards to the objectives, functions, and attendees of the Sub Committee.

Officers highlighted the importance of quorum, and that an elected representative from each of the Constituent Councils would be necessary in order for the meetings to take place.

A discussion took place in regards to the frequency of meetings; the Terms of Reference set out that the Sub Committee would meet every quarter. It was noted that currently there were only two

scheduled meetings of the Sub Committee; however, it would be necessary, as work progressed, to find suitable dates for additional meetings.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the terms of reference of the Regional Transport Planning Sub-Committee

4. **Regional Transport Plan (RTP) - Presentation**

Members received a presentation in regards to the ongoing work relating to the Regional Transport Plan (RTP).

In terms of the policy drivers for the new RTP, Officers highlighted that there was a step change in strategy; this change would result in much more emphasis on moving away from private motor vehicle, and instead shifting the focus on public transport.

It was stated that there were a number of enablers in terms of how the region would move forward with the RTP. One of the enablers was noted to be the Regional Transport Planning Guidance, which Officers were still awaiting the final version of from Welsh Government. Members were informed that there would be a statement of funds made available to produce the various Regional Transport Plans for each region, and assist the work on the Metros, which would then feed into the National Transport Plan for Wales.

The next part of the presentation set out the position of South West Wales and what the region had so far adopted, in terms of the regional policy content; this will inform the work of the RTP going forward. It was noted that the context included a lot of emphasis on improving access within and beyond the region; as well as linking in with the work going on in Swansea Bay and South West Wales.

Officers highlighted that the RTP would have to take into account a number of regional interdependencies; such as the Economic Development Plan, Energy Plan and the City Deal.

Members were informed of the transport responsibilities across Wales and the UK; the presentation displayed the various different responsibilities and which organisation was responsible for what elements. It was evident that Local Authorities had a significant role in taking this work forward, in terms of the development of the RTP and ensuring that there was a regional angle to the planning moving forward.

Information was provided in regards to what needed to be achieved and delivered, following the last Joint Local Transport Plan; the RTP itself needed to achieve outcomes and deliverables, making a difference to the lives of the communities. It was noted that there were a number of outcomes from the Joint Local Transport Plan, which demonstrated that delivery of plans could be achieved for the region. Members were informed that this would be the aspiration of the RTP; to set out and frame work in a strategic context, but develop and deliver action.

It was explained that the purpose behind the RTP emanated from the Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy 2021; which set out the priorities and ambitions for transport in Wales. In addition to this, the National Transport Delivery Plan (NTDP) provided details of the programmes, projects and new policies that Welsh Government intended to deliver over the next five years. The presentation highlighted that the NTDP will, alongside RTPs, tailor delivery of the Wales Transport Strategy to the needs of every part of Wales. Officers confirmed that they will be working through these plans, to ensure that the RTP of the South West Wales region included policies and a way forward for the region itself, in terms of the context of delivery those plans; it was an opportunity for South West Wales to put its own stamp on some of the work going forward.

Members were sighted on the typical RTP process, which each region should be going through in order to develop their Plans; there were a number of steps in the production of the Plan. Reference was made to the initial risk assessment rating against each of the steps in the table of work; at this stage the ratings were showing mostly red and amber due to the fact that the work had not yet started on the development of the Plan.

Officers went through the programme of the RTP timeline, which highlighted the key activities and tasks of the whole programme, and when certain pieces of work were due to be completed. It was noted that Officers hadn't been able to make significant progress as the RTP guidance was yet to be issued. It was mentioned that the start date of this programme of work was February 2023, therefore there was a need to rebase the programme once the guidance had been received.

Following on from the above, Officers displayed the shorter term planning for delivery; which was focused on the production of the implementation plan associated with the RTP.

Officers raised concerns in regards to the increasing demands that Local Authorities were facing; including the 20 MPH default speed limit implementation, the work regarding bus reform and pavement parking, as well as the work relating to the RTP. It was mentioned that there was some degree of apprehension amongst transport colleagues in regards to how all of this work would be tackled; especially in regards to the RTP, as there was currently a lack of clarity from the guidance in terms of how to take the work forward.

The presentation concluded with the suggested priority actions for consideration, which were noted as follows:

- Seek clarity from Welsh Government on the timeline for the guidance and the programme
- Confirm the budget for the RTP process and programme
- Mobilise resources
- Re confirm the key milestones and align the RTP and metro delivery programme
- Agree a Committee programme in order for Members to be fully sighted on the work going forward

Members acknowledged the extensive work that needed to be carried out regionally in terms of meeting the asks from Welsh Government; and that it would be fundamental in receiving the final version of the guidance, as it will have an impact on the work going forward. Members queried if the current discussions with Welsh Government alluded to any potential dates of being in receipt of the guidance.

The Transport Official at Welsh Government explained that there was no requirement for Welsh Government to provide guidance, and it was not needed in order to start the work relating to the RTP; however, there was an understanding as to why Local Authorities were seeking clarity from the final version of the guidance. It was confirmed that the guidance would be available within the next few weeks; there will not be any significant changes from the draft that had already been circulated. The Committee was informed that a letter will be accompanying the guidance, setting out the financial support that Welsh Government were intending to provide; this will be £125k for this financial year.

Further to the above, it was mentioned that Welsh Government were encouraging Local Authorities to avoid or minimise the use of external consultants in order to prevent a high spend for this type of work. There was an understanding from Welsh Government that the work

needed to be carried out on the RTP will require consultancy work, particularly due to the resource limitations across Local Authorities, however Welsh Government and Transport for Wales will be able to provide some form of support in order to minimise the use of external consultants.

The Committee raised concerns in regards to the budget and resource requirements. It was understood that there was a commitment previously to fully fund any additional duties; Members asked if there were any indications of further discussions within Welsh Government, to fully meet the costs that Local Authorities will expect to face. It was explained that the funding was wrapped up in the wider settlement for Local Authorities and the Corporate Joint Committees, and the funding had to be found from this settlement; the previously mentioned £125k, was supplementary to that funding in order to help start the process of the RTP. It was noted that Welsh Government and Transport for Wales were being asked to provide more support in order to minimise those costs, as it was evident that there were pressures on Local Authorities in the preparation of the plan, which will be followed by the delivery.

A discussion took place in regards to an appropriate time for the next meeting of the Regional Transport Sub Committee, given the update from Welsh Government's Transport Official; it was agreed that an additional meeting would be arranged for the autumn period. In addition, it was highlighted that Officers had developed a job description and personal specification for a regional job post in order to assist with the development of the Plan, and this would be advertised over the next few weeks.

5. **Transport for Wales (TFW) Regional Priorities Overview - Rail and Bus Services - Presentation**

Transport for Wales provided a presentation which outlined their work on the Swansea Bay and West Wales Metro; this included the rail programme and the bus programme. The Committee was also informed of how Transport for Wales colleagues could support Local Authorities in their strategic transport planning, and the resources that could be utilised within Transport for Wales to support the delivery of the regional work.

Rail Programme

The presentation displayed how the South West Wales area was segmented in terms of the rail programme, and captured the course

of the South Wales Main Line, which ran through West Wales and Swansea Bay. Members were informed of the interchange improvements that Transport for Wales had been working on; the relevant stations were clearly highlighted within the presentation. It was explained that the focus for the West Wales area was identifying how rail frequency/service frequency could be increased; and the focus for the Swansea Bay area was on the urban metro intervention, and making use of rail infrastructure that presently wasn't used for passenger rail services.

A discussion took place in regards to the rail priorities for West Wales, which included a summary of the route options and frequency. The presentation displayed a summary of the current frequency of rail service at each of the principle stations. It was noted that the annual trips for each principle station was calculated, which provided an understanding of the general demand; it was mentioned that the presentation did not include all stations for the West Wales area, however it provided a general picture of the current route options.

Transport for Wales explained that over a number of years, they had been working on business cases to establish new frequencies; each of these could be identified in the presentation, and were captured in a key of 'additional service summary'. It was stated that if all of the additional route options could be assembled, the frequencies would improve; the proposed service increase was detailed for each of the stations. Members were informed that this would double the rail frequency across the network. It was mentioned that the Grand Union Trains secured rights to run trains through to Carmarthenshire, and this would be additional to the routes that were displayed within the presentation.

The Committee were provided with a summary of the three principle route options Transport for Wales had been looking at in the Swansea Bay area:

- Tram-Train Swansea to Aberdulais and/or Clydach (red line) – this was noted to be a very complex endeavour, as the line would be weaved through a densely built up urban area in Swansea; however, it had proved to be resilient during the discussions around the development as it would be a huge area of growth and generate a lot more trips, particularly due to the positioning of the Swansea Bay University Campus. It was added that Transport for Wales had continued to work on this route option, and would consult with Members at pertinent

points in the development of the project; although it would be a long term project.

- Pembrey & Burry Port to Swansea (yellow line) – it was explained that Transport for Wales had been undertaking work to re-establish the railway station at Cockett, which would increase the frequency on this line by a further two trains an hour; in addition to the trains that were already in operation. Transport for Wales highlighted that they had investigated whether that frequency could be increase further, to four trains an hour, however this would create a lot of other frequency requirements elsewhere if it was to be increased. Members were informed that this route option could be delivered in the short term, as the majority of the infrastructure was already there and in use, due to it being an existing passenger railway line.
- Pontarddulais to Swansea via Neath (green line) – it was stated this route did not presently benefit from passenger rail services. Transport for Wales had developed proposals for a service to run from Pontarddulais to Swansea operating initially on a basis of two trains an hour. Transport for Wales had also been looking into the option of making a commercial case to extend one of those services up to Ammanford; there were technical issues associated with this case, however these were being addressed. It was explained that there were some new railway stations on this line, which currently didn't exist and were in the heart of a number of large suburban communities; including Pontlliw, Felindre, Morrison, Llandarcy, Winch Wen and Landore. The Committee was informed that Transport for Wales had consulted on these opportunities, however were not in a position to confirm that all will be delivered. Officers highlighted that there was a compelling case for each station to be built at the right time, and under the right conditions; Transport for Wales had yet to take a view of which station would be best suited to be built first.

Following on from the above, it was mentioned that the presentation did not display how the rail network would interact with the bus network; the hope and expectation from Transport for Wales, was that in time the bus and rail networks will work seamlessly through integrated ticketing and a better ability to plan the timetables. It was

stated that this will transform the area as an urban transport opportunity in the coming years.

The discussions turned towards the type of demand associated with these stations, and the anticipated travel times between stations; the exact information could not be provided, however Officers were able to provide an idea based on technical reports and theoretical extrapolations.

In regards to additional passenger journeys on the network, it was noted that between the yellow and green line included in the presentation, this represented between 1.3-1.7 million additional trips onto the rail network each year; a million plus of which, on the green line, presently had no opportunity for rail connectivity. In the Wales national context, it was explained that this project was one of three that would be able to attract that level of additional growth; therefore, Officers were able to make a very compelling case to secure the high levels of investment that would be needed to develop this project further.

In terms of travel times, it was raised that not all passengers on this network would be travelling to Swansea; areas such as Neath and Llanelli would benefit greatly from this project, and there were reductions in travel time to a number of locations including Cardiff. It was highlighted that when discussing the totality of travel on the network, there were some improvements and benefits for the travelling public, and the ability to meet targets set by Wales Transport Strategies;

The rail investment priorities for South West Wales were provided to the Committee, which included the South Wales Mainline, the Swansea Bay Area Metro and the West Wales Rail Frequency. It was stated that Transport for Wales were making representations to the Wales Rail Board to secure investment going forward; Local Authorities were encouraged to assist with this by lobbying and representing these matters in the Regional Transport Plan. It was noted that there were similar exercises being undertaken in areas such as South East Wales and North Wales, and it would be important to press this to ensure that the investment can be sought for the South West. Officers mentioned that there were a number of technical variations to existing baseline service that Leaders questioned; Transport for Wales would be preparing advice notes on these.

Members raised queries in regards to the cost of the project. Transport for Wales confirmed that the calculations of the costings had been undertaken and were published on the Welsh Government website; it was agreed that this information will be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. Officers highlighted that the red line route would be the most costly due to the complexity, and the fact that it would be a long term project. It was stated that when considering the costs against the rail priorities for Wales and how many additional passengers would be brought in to use the rail network, the benefits provided a significant case; however, it would be important to be mindful in regards to strategizing the investment and what could be achieved.

It was asked if Transport for Wales had identified the journey time and passenger demand figures for the proposed service extension to a new station in Ammanford. Transport for Wales colleagues confirmed that options had been tested in the Ammanford area, and some of the figures were available. It was mentioned that the analytics team in Transport for Wales were preparing data and transport modelling packs to give to Local Authorities to inform and support their Regional Transport Plan development; these will contain some information in regards to travel demand, whether there was latent and/or suppressed demand, and accessibility planning.

A discussion took place in regards to the Regional Transport Sub Committee's role in this work going forward. It was noted that for the next meeting, Transport for Wales could provide information in regard to the transport modelling data.

Bus Programme

The Committee were informed that there was a large number of areas in which Welsh Government, Local Government and Transport for Wales were working on to reform the way bus services were provided in Wales; the bus programme was subject to a huge area of transition and some turmoil in Wales currently. It was noted that there were a number of complex issues that needed to be dealt with simultaneously; it was realised that there short term challenges that would need to be considered in the first instance, which was evident from dealing with the Bus Emergency Scheme.

In terms of long term planning, it was mentioned that there was cause to believe that the region could deliver a bus programme that was substantially better than what was currently available, which would offer a greater amount of control to the public sector in the way these

services would be provided; however, there would be a number of complexities in delivering the project, and difficulties in working with the public transport operators, particularly in the challenging circumstances post Covid-19. The presentation highlighted the areas in which work was ongoing across Wales.

Members were informed that there was a bus network planning exercise currently ongoing; in the context of the Regional Transport Plan, this exercise could be of benefit and use for Local Governments. It was mentioned that Transport for Wales was already working with the public transport managers across the region, to tentatively work through this exercise in order for Local Authorities to utilise the findings.

Transport for Wales colleagues stated that there had been a number of inefficiencies that had arisen through the bus network in recent years. It was noted that privatisation had fallen into positions of inefficiency where the competition within the industry had created too much complexity on routes, which then created complex timetables for the public to consume; in which there were different services running alongside each other, often with tickets that did not interchange between services due to them being private operators.

Following on from the above, it was explained that Transport for Wales had undertaken a planning exercise where it baselined the bus network in Wales. The presentation detailed the network that was currently operating, and then how the transport modelling data could be used to identify where passengers were travelling to and from, which would then start to develop bus networks which were intended to be less complex, more direct and efficient. It was mentioned that some of this work could be completed by common cooperation with the bus operators, however the majority would need to be done on a voluntary basis on their part; and some would not be carried out unless the way in which bus was provided in Wales was reformed. Officers added that Welsh Government were also starting discussions around introducing bus franchising and the hope to drive greater efficiency through this.

A discussion took place in regards to the current position of this work; Transport for Wales had developed their initial plan for the network, and were able to explain why they think it would be the best way forward for the network. It was noted that the next steps would be to liaise with the transport managers at each Local Authority, as they understood their locality in greater detail; the conversations with

transport managers would explore the approach, and consider the strong points and weak points for that particular area.

The presentation provided an insight into the work relating to planning bus services in order to create a joined up and coordinated network, and how this could flow in terms of process; however, Officers explained that the focus currently was on setting up those conversations with transport managers.

It was noted that bus decarbonisation was one of the more visible areas of investment in South West Wales presently. Members were informed that the Traws-Cymru T1 service from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth was electrified in the spring of this year; it represented a significant improvement in terms of passenger experience and the facilities provided, and also served to decarbonise that service. Officers explained that this was a contribution towards the targets set by Net Zero Wales, in which Welsh Government had established a target to decarbonise bus public transport by 2035; as well as hitting the top most polluting 50% of those buses by 2028. It was mentioned that there was a lot of work being carried out in the Traws Cymru services across Wales to decarbonise those buses first.

Transport for Wales confirmed that they had been looking at business cases to bring hydrogen fuel cell buses into the Swansea Bay and Pembrokeshire areas; Swansea Bay was currently running ahead of those two areas, and the Deputy Minister for Climate Change had given approval for that project to move on in its development. It was noted that Officers were motivated to ensure that Pembrokeshire would be the next area to obtain the funding for this element of work. The Committee was informed that if both of these projects were to be established, it would create a daily demand for hydrogen; this would not only benefit and service these projects, but allows Councils, as a major fleet operator in the public sector, to also speculate and test hydrogen for other parts of their fleet.

Officers provided an explanation as to why the Swansea Bay area had progressed further with the hydrogen fuel cell buses. It was stated that there were a number of conspicuous centres of academic research based around Swansea Bay which were expected to enable greater learning and partnership around this work. It was also noted that the Gateway 2 Zero site was increasingly proving to become quite an asset as a seed to start the Swansea University project, which was backed by Welsh Government; the project was focused on establishing an electric only forecourt, with an expectation that

hydrogen refuelling will follow along shortly after. Officers added that they were increasingly optimistic that a hydrogen bus depot could be established in this area, and the operators had demonstrated that they were more than willing to work with Transport for Wales on this.

The presentation highlighted the immediate challenges associated with the hydrogen bus element, as well as the proposed project structure. It was explained that the expectation would be that Transport for Wales and Welsh Government would look after the fleet component in terms of depot and the actual vehicles themselves; and work with third sector and private partners dealing with fuel and supply issues. It was added that Transport for Wales would work with the Corporate Joint Committee in the development of the RTP to ensure that the bus priority infrastructure was being delivered, along with the journey time improvements in order to make the most of these considerable assets that will be invested in over the coming years.

6. **Verbal Update from Botanical Gardens Transport Workshop**

The South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee were provided with a verbal update from the Botanical Gardens Transport Workshop.

It was noted that the purpose of the workshop was to formalise discussions between the four constituent Councils in regards to the Regional Transport Plan; the workshop provided as a platform to express views and opinions, and determine how the Councils combine a single vision for the region. It was added that the work surrounding the Regional Transport Plan had to work for the four County Boroughs in order for it to be meaningful.

Officers explained that the discussions centred around the relative rail investment priorities; there were seven total areas of investment, six were in Swansea and one was in Neath Port Talbot. It was added that the workshop also focused on the increased frequency of some of the trains towards the West; colleagues in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire were seeking a collective Corporate Joint Committee commitment and prioritisation for improving journey times to the West.

Following on from the above, it was noted that this could be achieved by pushing for some decoupling; the discussions around this brought up the options of potentially the decoupling of carriages and trains splitting at Port Talbot Parkway, which would allow onward train

movements direct to West Wales to Carmarthen, Haverfordwest and Milford Haven. Although it was recognised that Grand Union trains that will be providing more services to West Wales from 2025, it was expressed that Members at the meeting felt that it would be important to support and collectively push for the metro, as well as the West Wales services.

It was explained that towards the end of that workshop, feedback was provided to Transport for Wales colleagues. Officers were going to identify if there could be an additional priority area for investment on the main line service; this needed to be followed up with colleagues at Transport for Wales, to see if it was possible to model some further actions around whether Pathways could be obtained through to West Wales. It was noted that all Leaders were supportive in that respect.

Those who attended the workshop also discussed the recognition around political advocacy, and promoting and securing national investment; there was a need for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee to push for collective influence and lobbying of Welsh Government, the Wales Officer and Department for Transport. It was also mentioned that it would be important to leverage in the Freeport status and the regional sustainable energy development, particularly as highlighted in Pembrokeshire.

The Members of the Regional Transport Sub Committee suggested that it would be beneficial for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee to receive the summary of discussions and the resolutions from the Workshop. Through the Chair of the Regional Transport Sub Committee, it was agreed that a letter be written on behalf of all Members of the Sub Committee, to request that the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee consider and note the Workshop resolutions.

7. Forward Work Programme

Members were provided with the Forward Work Programme for the Regional Transport Sub Committee.

Reference was made to the need for an additional meeting for the autumn period. Democratic Services would arrange this in liaison with the Transport Leads for the Region.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

8. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items received.

CHAIRPERSON