

**South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee - Overview and
Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

(Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

15 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor R.Sparks

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: D.Howlett, M.John, M.Tierney and P.Black

**Officers In
Attendance** S.Aldred-Jones, K.Tillman, D.Griffiths and
T.Rees

1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Regional Transport Plan - Case for Change**

Officers gave a brief overview to the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members asked for clarification regarding the timescale for the budget spend, and an indication of a final cost to develop the plan.

Officers confirmed that some of the budget had already been spent and there is flexibility on how the money is utilised. Work has already been undertaken around the Metro proposals, it may be appropriate to replace the Metro spend with RTP funding and carry the Metro spend over for development next year. It is ambitious to commission and complete within the current timescale. The outline indicative cost is estimated to be less than £400k.

Members questioned the reference in the report to the use of electric vehicles (EV's) to tackle pollution and noted the difficulties in this approach in urban areas, due to the high cost of vehicles and the limited charging infrastructure. Members asked how ambitions for a pollution free transport system could be achieved taking into account these factors.

Officers confirmed that the principle of the RTP hinged around a transport hierarchy, with priority given to cycling, walking and public transport. How the infrastructure will be provided is challenging and will be included in work undertaken in relation to the development of the metro proposals, and considered as part of the wider RTP. The RTP will be used as a bid document for leveraging funding for delivering transport interventions.

Officers confirmed that a Low Emission Vehicle Strategy has already been produced which will feed into the RTP work. Current focus has included work on converting the council's fleet and identifying any implications. Work is on-going in relation to investigating the use of technology and proposals for on street charging. It was noted that Transport for Wales will be able to help with some of the supporting work related to the plan.

Members questioned if consideration had been given to overnight charging for fleet vehicles to make use of lower cost tariffs.

Officers confirmed that this was not the case in Pembrokeshire and the production of the Fleet Transition Strategy was currently ongoing. Pembrokeshire Council have looked at hydrogen vehicles rather than electric but EV's may still be considered. Officers confirmed that an EV Strategic Plan was available for the region. Welsh Government and Transport for Wales (TFW) are carrying out pilots in other local authorities in relation to options for on street charging; more information will be available following the pilot. The Welsh Government Energy Service have carried out studies with a view to setting out high level strategic infrastructure requirements to support transition. Public Bodies can support their employees with salary sacrifice schemes for EV purchase. Officers from Neath Port Talbot Council, confirmed that EV's will predominantly be charged overnight, but some vehicles may also require daytime charges. There are benefits in having a solar infrastructure alongside charging facilities that can offset to supply power to buildings by day and charge vehicles at night.

Members commented on gaps in the report, there is no reference to the A477, A487, the Traws Cymru bus service or the rail freight service to Milford Haven. In relation to the mention of economic wellbeing on page 16 of the report, members suggested reference should be made to tackling poverty and the difficulties in accessing employment opportunities without transport. Consideration needs to be given in how the night time economy can be developed, particularly in relation to tourism. Members commented that there has been a huge reduction in freight travel since Brexit which has impacted on the ports of Fishguard and Pembroke. In relation to Fishguard, there has been no ferry service in operation since the beginning of January with a limited passenger service operating from Pembroke Dock. It was noted that ports are particularly vulnerable following multi million euro investment into Rosslare. Members questioned why there was no mention in the report of a potential re-opening of the rail line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth.

Officers thanked members for the useful points raised and noted that the Case for Change is a high level strategic document, it does not cover full details and further development is required. It is important that adequate time is given to carry out effective consultation and identify gaps to enable economic viability. The points raised today have been noted and will feed into the future development of the plan. In relation to the possibility of re-opening the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth rail line, a number of studies have been undertaken which will form part of the evidence base for the transport plan. Officers noted that the trunk road and Traws Cymru bus network are driven and controlled by Welsh Government who will be key in inputting to the regional transport plan. From April 1st a new bus contract arrangement will be in place; there will be opportunities through franchising arrangements to expand services and close gaps, especially in late morning and late evening services. The intention is to develop a balanced transport plan, which looks at social, economic and environmental factors. The plan will need to be used as a means of focusing future funding decisions and used as a means to potentially influence revenue decisions which are made in terms of future bus support grants. It was noted that the operation and funding of rail is carried out at a national level.

Members referred to page nine of the report contained within the agenda pack and expressed concern at the difference across the region in terms of private vehicle ownership. It was acknowledged that the public should be encouraged to use public transport, but this is difficult in rural areas without confidence in the availability and

reliability of public transport. It was noted that train services to West Wales are often cancelled.

Officers confirmed that motor vehicles were included in the plan as the lowest priority to reflect Welsh Governments strategic priorities but acknowledged that the use of private motor vehicles in rural areas was still of importance. The point made by members in relation to train transport, particularly in West Wales is an immediate issue rather than a strategic issue and needs to form part of the strategic case in terms of rail improvement. Work has been undertaken with local transport user groups and with Transport for Wales to raise concerns regarding the number of train cancellations and rail replacements, and on times, the lack of rail replacements. Feedback has been received stating that cancellations are linked to development of the new train fleet. It was noted that availability of trains was important to people not just reliability, this is a strategic issue in increasing the frequency of trains which feeds into the regional transport planning process. Officers noted that transport solutions were different across the region due to the mix of urban and rural areas, in some areas, private car ownership will be the only viable option for transport. Alternative methods are not available or are too costly for consideration. The plan is a mechanism to seek appropriate investment relating to the required interventions but keeping in mind the challenges faced by rural areas, here there will still be a dependency on private car ownership with the financial challenges that brings to individuals. The plan will need to focus on sustainability in addition to addressing significant economic challenges

Members commented that the data contained in the report was based on the bus service prior to the recent change and did not reflect the current situation. There is a gap in services in some areas, hindering residents in accessing employment opportunities, particularly, shift workers. Members commented that service frequency is not sufficiently ambitious, to change people's travel arrangements.

Officers agreed with members comments and acknowledged it was important to identify gaps and opportunities to grow and expand services. A benefit of the work undertaken with Transport for Wales is the rich bus data gained. Effective consultation is needed with the Community through the RTP process and through developing the bus strategies, there is an opportunity to work towards improving networks.

Members made an observation in relation to the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth bus link, which is using electric buses and working effectively which demonstrates how services can evolve.

Members commented that there were various committees working towards the development of the EV Charging infrastructure but there were challenges in relation to on street charging for private vehicles.

Officers responded, that as battery technology improves there may be more range and less frequent charging required. There are some specific social challenges in relation to on-street charging and ownership of on street parking spaces. Officers commented that there are opportunities to use electric vehicles as power banks from a reverse charging perspective. It was noted that an extensive off street parking network of EV chargers has been developed in Pembrokeshire, giving residents with no private off street parking the ability to charge vehicles overnight, however, it was acknowledged that some residents may not wish to park away from their home for security reasons. Consideration has been given to developing charging points on housing estates but this is in the early stages of development. Officers noted that some EV fleet vehicles were not the correct specification to carry out the required task due to the payload of the vehicle and battery capacity and this could be an issue going forward. Officers noted that hydrogen is likely to feature in the strategy going forward, there are projects ongoing in the Swansea Bay area and three major producers of hydrogen are expected to come online from approximately 2027. Once hydrogen is more widely available, the cost should be favourable. Another alternative is HBO, replacement diesel which is currently being used on the fleet in Pembrokeshire.

Members agreed with the point made in relation to the potential future use of hydrogen vehicles.

Officers commented that the supply of hydrogen vehicles needs to be taken into account. A hydrogen refuse freighter has been trialled in Neath Port Talbot but the vehicles are not readily available and the technology is still under development. There will be a reliance on a secure source of hydrogen which could take upto 2030.

Members were pleased that the railway data was wider than Swansea and commented that consideration of the Velindre Parkway was important in terms of improving journey times. Members raised concern over investment as traditionally, investment models were

based on population density which negatively impacts less populous areas. Members asked for reassurance that investments would benefit the wider region to address some of the issues raised. Members referred to page 10 of the agenda report pack and the current transport network in the region, it was noted that there is a need for safe pedestrian/cycling routes in rural areas, not just urban areas, which will need investment.

Officers agreed with members comments that investment in walking/cycling routes was needed in rural as well as urban areas. Active travel needs to be normalised. The plan is a regional plan and there is high level representation to ensure interests are spread out and understood across the whole region. Welsh Government may have involvement in relation to the priorities of spend, but this will be addressed on a regional level. Currently, there is an opportunity to bid for funding. Transport demand will need to be managed, as if the plan is successful there will be a shifting mode.

Officers commented that investment in rural communities was important to tackle transport poverty and that members support in lobbying Welsh Government for a bigger sector share to local authorities to undertake investment, was needed.

This item was noted.

4. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

CHAIRPERSON