



North Pembrokehire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

News Briefing – July 2011

Transport in the 4th National Assembly for Wales

This News Briefing will highlight key points made during the first meeting of Carl Sargeant AM, the new Minister with responsibility for transport, with the Enterprise and Business Committee, the committee that will be dealing with transport in the new Assembly. The following link to the Committee's website, www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=228, provides full information about the meeting, held on 13th July 2011.

The Transport Department is now located within the Local Government and Communities Directorate. The Minister informed the Committee that 'transport could sit in any portfolio, as it is a cross-cutting issue, in that transport impacts on many proposals...The main reason why it sits in the local government portfolio is that local government transport schemes comprise the majority of the transport portfolio'.

Questioned about the difference between previous Government priorities and where we are now, the Minister stated that the main significant change is to do with the National Transport Plan. He will reprioritise the National Transport Plan over the summer, and will make an announcement in the autumn on a reprioritised programme of planned transport infrastructure works.

The Minister's submission includes a table listing the new Government's transport commitments. These will be provided in the following Briefing sections.

Buses

Government Commitments
Retain free bus travel for pensioners and disabled people and their carers
Work with partners to enhance the quality, reliability and safety of local transport bus service provision
Continue to improve services such as the TrawsCymru Network and the popular on demand Bwcabus scheme
Extend eligibility for the concessionary fares travel scheme to seriously injured war veterans and armed forces personnel living in Wales
Examine the best options for providing local bus services for rural communities to have access to facilities

Responding to members' questions about bus problems, the Minister noted that while bus services are generally more effective in urban areas, where running those services is more cost-effective, there is a delivery problem in more rural areas, where they are not that viable without subsidy. That is why they have targeted some areas for the Bwcabus service and are provided funding streams for the TrawsCambria route. He has asked his team to bring him a submission on the nationalisation of some bus service routes, which could offer an opportunity for packages of travel, which could include the less profitable routes. If schemes are large enough, travel scheme funding is available.

Community Transport

Government Commitments
Continue to encourage and support the development of community transport schemes that meet the needs of rural areas

Cycling and Walking

Government Commitments
Legislating to provide a duty to provide cycle routes in key areas

An Assembly Bill will place a duty on highway authorities to develop and maintain a network of traffic free routes across Wales for walkers and cyclists. The First Minister has already identified this as a legislative priority. An announcement on the legislative programme is due shortly.

Trains

Government Commitments
Examine the feasibility of the Wales and Border franchise being run on a not-for-profit dividend basis
Make the case to the UK Government for the Assembly Government to have greater accountability of Network Rail
Argue for the electrification of the South Wales - London Paddington line through to Swansea and develop the business case for the electrification of other parts of the local rail network in Wales

The Minister stated that the Government will invest in the franchise, but the issue is how the franchise holders can invest back into the system. The Government will have to establish what it wants before the scheme is developed. They are starting work on this now because they recognise how significant a development and change this could be.

Tim James, Deputy Director Networks & Planning, stated that currently the majority of trains in the franchise are leased, and the contracts come to an end with the end of the franchise. From 2018, the choice to be made is between purchasing or leasing rolling stock. The key to unlocking that decision is electrification. If the UK Government funds electrification between Swansea and Cardiff and on the Valley lines, they will know what sort of rolling stock they need to start thinking about, post 2018.

The Minister stated that both gaining greater accountability of Network Rail and operating the Wales and Borders Franchise on a not-for-dividend basis will require the support of the UK Government and would require a UK Act of Parliament. He has already written to the Secretary of State for Transport pressing the case for electrification to Swansea.

Accessibility Issues

Questioned about the training of drivers and conductors on trains and buses to deal with disabled customers, the Minister acknowledged that the quality of service in this regard varies considerably. That means that a joined-up transport option is a non-starter for many people with disabilities.

Tim James reported on work that has been done on audio-visual announcements on buses and with Guide Dogs for the Blind and Bus Users UK to produce a best-practice guidance for bus operators, to be published at the end of this month. This will enable providers to train staff on the needs of people with visual impairments.

Integration

Regarding the interface between rail and buses, the Minister noted that 'We have some pockets of really good practice, where there is good integration of transport packages from bus to train to local cycle routes. However, it is not consistent across Wales. I have been driving the question of how we should share this best practice through local authorities. If they do it well, they should share it with others. That is why we go back to the joint transport authorities or the regional transport consortia. It is a fundamental part of their role to take this beyond their local environment, on a national scale'.

Jeff Collins, Director of the Infrastructure Group, noted that the implementation of park and ride schemes allows for a modal shift away from cars, reducing the capacity demand on the roads and facilitating the exploitation of the capacity provided by rail. They are rolling out these schemes under the sustainable travel centres initiative. They are also working with Arriva Trains Wales on a Wales transport entitlement card that would enable people to take the bus, train or anything else, providing convenience of choice. Pilot schemes will be trialled in Bangor and south Wales.

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum is an independent voluntary group that works for the provision of an effective integrated transport system in the North Pembrokeshire area, promotes the benefits of public transport and works towards the greater use of public transport systems.

The Forum is a member of Bus Users UK Cymru, the Environmental Network for Pembrokeshire and the Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association.

The Forum's work is supported by:

Individual Members (£5 p.a.), Family Members (£8 p.a.) & Corporate Members (£12 p.a.)

(Corporate members include town and community councils, transport operators, and groups, organisations and associations with a transport interest)

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