



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**  
**The National Assembly for Wales**

**South West Wales Regional Committee**  
**Pwyllgor Rhanbarth De Orllewin Cymru**

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA  
Eich cyf / Your Ref  
Ein cyf / Our Ref SWWR

Richard Edwards, AM  
Chair  
Environment, Planning & Transport  
Committee

28 August 2001

*Dear Richard*

#### **POLICY REVIEW OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Thank you for your letter of 25 July 2001 and copy of the Committee's consultation report. I am afraid that the South West Wales Regional Committee will not be meeting again until 26 October, so will not be able to submit views before the closing date. However, as you will know, at its meeting on 16 June 2000 the Committee did consider the issue of public transport in some detail and received presentations from a number of interested parties. I attach a copy of the minutes of that meeting for your information.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas  
Chair  
South West Wales Regional Committee

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**MINUTES**

Date: Friday, 16 June 2000  
 Time: 10.00 am to 1.10pm  
 Venue: Penlan Social Club, Penlan, Swansea

Attendance: Members  
 Peter Black South Wales West  
 Alun Cairns South Wales West  
 Andrew Davies Swansea West  
 Richard Edwards Preseli Pembrokeshire  
 Val Feld Swansea East  
 Brian Gibbons Aberavon  
 Christine Gwyther Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire  
 Edwina Hart Gower  
 Helen Mary Jones Llanelli  
 David Rhys Lloyd South Wales West  
 Gwenda Thomas Neath  
 Rhodri Glyn Thomas Carmarthen East & Dinefwr

Presenters: Denys Morgan South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium and South West Wales Economic Forum.  
 Paul Thomas City & County of Swansea  
 David Walker Environment Agency Wales  
 Simon Halfacree Environment Agency Wales  
 Kathryn Timothy Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers  
 David Watts Railway Development Society  
 Milford Haven Rail Passengers Association  
 Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association  
 Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association  
 Swansea Access for Everyone  
 Gillian Jones First Cymru  
 Brendan Campbell Prism Rail plc  
 Phil Collier  
 Chris Gibb  
 Jane Westlake Clerk  
 Claire Morris Deputy Clerk

**Item 1: Apologies and Substitutions**

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Nick Bourne	Mid & West Wales
Cynog Dafis	Mid & West Wales
Glyn Davies	Mid & West Wales
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Delyth Evans	Mid & West Wales

1.2 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Penlan Social Club and thanked them for coming. He advised that the Mayor of Swansea had been invited to open the meeting but a previous engagement had prevented his attendance. Donald Anderson MP had also said that he would have liked to attend, but had a previous engagement.

1.3 The Finance Secretary made a brief statement on the Corus announcement of 3,000 job losses throughout their British plants and the impact this could have on local communities and the economy.

## **Item 2                    Open Microphone Session**

### Introduction

2.1 Members of the public were invited to put questions to the Committee. Assembly members gave the following answers to questions from the public gallery:

2.2 Mr Ffred Ffransis commented on the recent decision to close Bwlchygroes primary school and the message this conveyed to other rural schools, and asked whether the Committee would organise an investigation into the matter.

### Response

2.2.1 The decision to close the school had been taken by the local education authority (LEA) Pembrokeshire County Council.

2.2.2 The Assembly had not overturned the decision as it was felt that the LEA had acted reasonably and within its powers.

2.2.3 Assembly intervention in LEA decisions would compromise local accountability.

2.2.4 The Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee would shortly be looking at surplus places. This was a problem affecting not only rural schools.

2.2.5 The importance of the wider role of rural schools in the community was recognised, as centres for life long learning.

2.2.6 Thought needed to be given to how the use of technology, e.g. video conferencing, could improve links between rural schools.

2.2.7 There was an increased demand for Welsh medium education and LEAs needed to have appropriate policies to deal with this demand.

2.2.8 It was suggested that pre-16 education be discussed at a future meeting and members of LEAs be invited to speak to the Committee.

2.3 Dominic Edg!ell asked how bus transport had contributed to improving the environment and what further improvements were planned.

### Response

2.3.1 The Environment, Planning and Transport Committee was about to undertake a major policy review of public transport in Wales, and developing an integrated, sustainable and accessible transport system throughout the whole of Wales was high on its agenda.

2.4 Lynne Thomas commented that the current requirement for wheelchair users to notify bus and rail providers 48 hours before travelling restricted spontaneity and meant inequality in service provision.

#### Response

2.4.1 The Equal Opportunities Committee was working with the Disability Rights Commission to try and resolve such issues of inequality.

2.4.2 One of the key targets of Objective 1 was to reduce economic inactivity and this should include disabled people who did not have the facilities to participate in the labour market.

2.5 Peter Parker of the Leisure and Transport Sub-group 2000 asked why the Hafod bypass had been rejected at least twice since its proposed development in 1999, whereas the Gowerton new bypass development had been considered more than once; and whether members thought pedestrianising small roads in the city centre was a good idea.

#### Response

2.5.1 The Hafod bypass was one of many major road projects across Wales competing for funding. As the last link in a major road network into Swansea, it had been put forward for approval at a time when emphasis was moving away from roads towards public transport.

2.5.2 A number of Assembly Members were pressing for approval for the scheme. There may be a better opportunity to go ahead after the comprehensive spending review.

2.5.3 Pedestrianisation was thought to play a valuable role in shaping communities but was essentially a decision for local authorities.

2.6 David Watts asked if anything could be done about the high cost of travelling by bus which, he felt, was discouraging people from using public transport.

#### Response

2.6.1 This needed to be addressed if people were to be encouraged to use public transport.

2.6.2 From April 2001 bus passes would be issued free of charge to pensioners and the disabled and from April 2002 free bus travel introduced for these groups.

2.6.3 The " Fair Fares " campaign in London had been a good example of how people could be encouraged to use public transport if the service provided was reasonably priced and met their needs.

2.7 Mrs Janet Davies asked why Penlan Police Station was not open to the public, particularly in light of the increasing crime rate in the area.

#### Response

2.7.1 Whilst members shared the concerns expressed regarding response times and increasing crime figures, responsibility for policing had not been devolved to the Assembly but remained the responsibility of the Home Office.

2.7.2 South Wales Police were currently holding a series of public meetings and people were strongly urged to attend these meetings and voice their concerns.

2.7.3 The important role of community policing was emphasised and it was felt that not enough status was attached to this area of police work.

2.8 Carolyn Harris asked for members' comments on the transport problems facing young people and whether they agreed that such problems were perpetuating a culture of social exclusion.

#### Response

2.8.1 it was agreed that this was an issue that affected social inclusion. The problems raised fell within the remit of review being undertaken by the Environment, Planning and Transport Committee and was also of interest to the Equal Opportunities Committee.

2.8.2 Young people were sometimes forgotten when public policies were being drawn up and a far broader approach was necessary.

#### Item 3 Public Transport

The Chair of the Environment, Planning and Transport Committee explained that the Committee would shortly be carrying out a policy review of public transport in Wales focusing on key areas of concern. The review would look firstly at short term action and any changes that could be made within the Assembly's existing powers, before addressing the longer term issues. The Committee would be inviting a wide range of views and all Regional Committees were being consulted.

South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium & the South West Wales Economic Forum

#### Presentation by Denys Morgan, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

3.1 Denys Morgan outlined some of the areas of concern to SWEF and SWITCH. The key points were:

- The Forum's main concern was declining public transport.
- Their approach was based on a coherent strategy related to the economy.
- SWITCH was a consortium of the four South West Wales local authorities: Pembrokeshire; Carmarthenshire; City & County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. Four sub-groups covered "Second Generation" road based public transport; rail/sea/ports development; local transport plans including links with other regions; and rural transport initiatives.
- Rail, sea and port development did not receive sufficient attention.
- South West Wales contained two distinct areas - the Swansea travel to work area and the rural western area - with different problems. It would be necessary to adopt a twin track approach to address both sets of issues.
- In association with the Welsh Development Agency, two rail studies were underway, one of which was for a freight link with Wentloog..

- Following receipt of a Transport Grant settlement for feasibility work, Oscar Faber had been appointed to look at two aspects of second generation public transport and a range of innovative, rural schemes.
- SWITCH believed that conventional buses running on conventional roads had a finite life. Over time it would become necessary to segregate primary routes for buses and guided buses (a bus modified to operate along a track on the road) were seen as a possible way forward.
- Oscar Faber had also been commissioned to provide advice on the introduction of a pan South West Wales SMART card scheme for transportation purposes, and it was suggested that this could, in time, be expanded to cover car parking, bus and rail travel, ferries, leisure, etc - the "electronic purse" concept.
- Greater integration between bus and rail facilities was needed.
- There was currently a gap between conventional bus transport and community transport and greater flexibility was needed.

## **City & County of Swansea**

### Presentation by Paul Thomas

3.2 Paul Thomas outlined the transport vision for Swansea. The main points were:

- Swansea needed a transport system that met the needs of residents and visitors, which people felt safe to use and which promoted economic growth but also reduced the level of congestion and pollution.
- The majority of bus services in Swansea operated commercially, with First Cymru being the dominant operator.
- A recent public consultation exercise suggested the main issues of concern to passengers were:
  - cost of travel
  - frequency and coverage
  - reliability
  - the needs of young people, the unwaged and disabled were not being met.
- The authority operated a concessionary fare scheme which offered a 50% discount to pensioners and people with certain physical and mental disabilities.
- Local authorities were prohibited from negotiating an integrated network of services with commercial operators.
- Bus operators found it hard to provide a service that could compete with cars in terms of speed and economy.
- With assistance from a Transport Grant, a scheme had been designed for the construction of an Express Busway, which would significantly reduce journey times from the Swansea Valley area.
- A Quality Partnership was being developed with First Cymru for the Morriston to Swansea corridor, and it was planned to implement a Real Time Passenger Information System at key bus stops. The tracker and roadside information units were being funded as part of the Transport Grant allocation.
- In partnership with Railtrack and Great Western Trains, improvements were being made to the access at the railway station to allow better bus-rail interchange.
- A review of the current provision of community transport was being undertaken and Transport Grant funding obtained to carry out a feasibility study into rural accessibility.

### Main Points of Discussion

#### Members of the public commented:

- Bishopston had a community bus service supported by the local authority, community council and Chamber of Trade;
- Wales needed a passenger transport authority;
- Swanline did not meet the needs of people living in Llansamlet and working in the centre of Swansea.

#### Committee members made the following points

- The National Assembly was currently seeking the power to set up a Passenger Transport Authority.
- Lessons could be learned from other Western European countries.
- Consideration should be given to the potential for using rivers and the sea for transport.
- Adequate freight rail line was essential for West Wales

The presenters' responses to points raised included:

- Congestion was increasing at the rate of 5% a year.
- Transport issues would not be resolved without a fundamental review of resources.
- Initial indications were that the freight gauge enhancements could be achieved at modest cost.
- It was acknowledged that there had been problems with Swanline.
- Consideration had been given to reintroducing the Mumbles train but it had been concluded that the number of people who could access it would not justify the cost involved.
- The difficulty of linking job strategies to public transport strategies was acknowledged. Discussions were ongoing with the WDA, First Cymru and large companies situated on the Enterprise Park to try and tie in shift patterns with the provision of public transport when it was needed.
- City & County of Swansea could be disadvantaged by the large number of people who travelled with concessionary fares to the Gower via Swansea. Local authorities were expected to fund the cost in their area, and a scheme that reimbursed local authorities for any losses incurred was currently being investigated.
- Consideration was being given to a park and ride scheme into the maritime area that was serviced by water bus.
- Cycling and walking were being promoted as alternative modes of transport, as a large number of journeys made were within one mile of the home.

## **Environment Agency Wales**

### Presentation by Simon Halfacree

3.3 The main points of the presentation were:

- Extreme weather events were becoming more evident and greater effort was needed to reduce greenhouse gases.
- A recent Department of Health report estimated that 24,000 premature deaths occurred each year in the UK as a result of poor air quality.

- Whilst integrated transport was central to sustainable development, central to integrated transport must be an effective public transport system.

### **Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO)**

#### Presentation by Kathryn Timothy, Carmarthenshire Count' Council

3.7 The main points of the presentation were:

- ATCO was involved in all aspects of transportation but in general worked closely with bus and train operators to improve current service provision.
- Local authorities and public transport operators were unable to compete with cars for speed and convenience of journeys.
- Quality Partnerships directed improvements to areas of perceived poor quality.
- Generally, people using public transport were a captive user, there was a need to encourage people who had other options available to them.
- Role of local authorities was central to addressing issues of national policy. It was important to assess the local needs.
- ATCO welcomed the financial provision given via the Bus Subsidy Grant.
- A public transport network that was accessible, inclusive and overcame environmental and social problems would be an asset and a community resource. Local authorities would play a central role in that process.

### **Wales Pensioners Association**

#### Presentation by Gordon Carruthers

3.5 The main points of the presentation were:

- Public transport had declined since regulation.
- Park and ride schemes needed to be developed.
- It needed to be recognised that roads could not accommodate increased traffic.
- An integrated transport system would need to be well funded and include all means of transport
- Provision of free transport for pensioners was of little use if there was no suitable service for them to access
- Better public transport between North and South Wales was needed

In response to comments from Assembly Members the presenters said:

- Industry and businesses need green transport plans and should have systems in place which enable employees to travel to work with minimal impact on the environment and congestion.
- Road transport contributed to air pollution.
- Air pollution was carried from its source and contributed to environmental as well as health problems
- Attempts had been made to attract users to the Heart of Wales Line but the service available was limited with restricted opportunities for bus/rail integration.
- It was proposed to take forward a a bid for Transport Grant to look at stations being used as gateways.



- The Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line had ceased to operate in the 1960's and had been dismantled in places and the ground built upon. It would therefore be too costly to reinstate but other options for a link were being considered.
- Dedicated commuter buses that operated a straight-through service to the workplace could relieve rush hour congestion.

### **Railway Development Society**

#### Presentation by David Watts

3.6 The main points of the presentation were:

- In general, rail usage had increased all over the country except in South Wales.
- The passenger train service between Swansea and Cardiff was inadequate
- High costs of travel deterred people from using public transport, particularly families.
- Trains should operate on the European model of rigid clockface departures, i.e. always the same time past the hour.
- There should be an all-Wales rail franchise with improved north south routes.

### **Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association (HOWLTA)**

#### Presentation by Gillian Jones

3.7 The main points of the presentation were:

- The Heart of Wales Line was one of only two rail routes that linked North to South.
- The line connected rural communities with each other and the outside world, and was an important means of sustainable transport.
- It provided a link with a number of important tourist attractions.
- The present level of service was inadequate. HOWLTA would like to see a two hourly service, with better links to bus services, more capacity, better visibility for travellers and better facilities for cyclists.

### **Swansea Access for Everyone**

#### Presentation by Brendan Campbell

3.8 The main points of the presentation were:

- New low floor buses did not provide easy access and depended on the ability of the driver to pull close up to kerb. This also created a problem in rural areas where often there were no kerbs. If buses were unable to stop at scheduled places there were problems for visually impaired passengers.
- Regulations had been introduced on 1 January that new buses must be fitted with ramps or a lift but because of the working life of a bus it would be 2012 before this would be achieved.

- Government was encouraging disabled people back to work so accessible public transport was needed to help them travel.
- A voucher scheme operated in England for subsidised taxi travel.
- Community transport should not be seen as an alternative to fully accessible public transport.

### Main Points of Discussion

Members made the following points:

- The Assembly did not have direct control over bus and railway services, but had the ability to discuss, comment on and support proposals for improved transport services
- The National Assembly should put pressure on Westminster for the necessary primary legislation to establish a passenger transport authority
- Local authorities should consider making more innovative use of their social services buses for disabled people.
- People would use public transport if it were cheap and efficient.

### **First Cymru**

#### Presentation by Phil Collier

3.9 The main points of the presentation were:

- A Quality Partnership with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was in place.
- The introduction of new low floor vehicles had resulted in an increase in passengers of approximately 10%.
- 80% of late buses were as a result of traffic congestion, therefore buses should be given greater priority over other vehicles on the road. Roadworks were a problem on the Swansea to Cardiff route.
- The Rural Bus Grant initiative was welcomed.

### **Prism Rail plc**

#### Presentation by Chris Gibb

3.10 The main points of the presentation were:

- Wales & West Trains were the third best performing Train Operating Company in the UK and the best improved in the last year, with 30% reduction in delay minutes and 59% reduction in passenger complaints.
- Recent investments included CCTV at Carmarthen and Llanelli and all stations now had constantly updated bilingual passenger information systems.
- Prism had just agreed to surrender its franchise two years early which had provided the opportunity for the company to negotiate an all-Wales franchise.
- The new franchise would lead to improved services with capital investment in the track, more evening and Sunday services, longer trains and better integration with bus and coach services.
- 80 train drivers were being recruited in Wales

### Main Points of Discussion

Members of the public raised the following points

- Mrs Eileen Bound, pointed out that First Cymru buses passed the Penlan Estate travelling from the Depot to other parts of Swansea but did not stop on the estate.
- The rail service to North Pembrokeshire was unsatisfactory. Trains were slower than a 100 years ago, connections were poor and stations unsafe at night. It was not possible to buy rail tickets in advance.

Members made the following points

- The concerns about the rail service were endorsed.
- It was necessary to reconcile the investment of public funds with risk and profitability.
- There was a need to address the needs of those who could not afford or were not able to drive a car

The presenters made the following responses

- Phil Collier would provide a written response to Mrs Bound.
- Proposals are being developed with Stenna Line for the provision of a ticket office at Fishguard railway station.
- Carmarthen Station was staffed 24 hours a day and closed circuit television cameras had been installed. Rail travel was 18 times more safe than car travel.
- Prism had proposed to operate the franchise on a capped profit - management fee basis but the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority preferred a market approach.
- The Swanline service had been established as a result of an overly ambitious consultants report. The contract had not provided for basic facilities, combating vandalism or marketing.
- Public Transport in Britain had the second lowest subsidy in Europe.

**Item 4: Minutes of last meeting (17 March 2000)**

**Paper:** SWWR-02-00(min)

4.1 The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

4.2 The Chair outlined the committee's agenda for the next meeting which would take place at Newcastle Emlyn Leisure Centre on 14 July:

Welsh Water - Five Year Investment Programme;  
and the South West Wales Economic Forum - Objective One Funding  
Election of new Chair