

Briefing for Evidence of West Midlands LGA**Economic Development and Transport Committee and Welsh Affairs Select Committee****Draft Transport (Wales) Bill****24th June 2004****Introductions**

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to highlight our concerns regarding this draft Bill.

We in the West Midlands recognise that transport issues do not respect administrative boundaries and have long been working in partnership within the region and with neighbouring regions to deliver improvements. Within the West Midlands, the County's of Herefordshire and Shropshire border Wales and, because of their sparsely populated rural nature, experience similar transport problems to those experience in mid-Wales, such as rural isolation and lack of public transport.

Overall Reason for Our Interest

We are concerned that the draft Bill does not provide sufficient safeguards to ensure partnership working between the Welsh Assembly and Local Transport Authorities in Wales with neighbouring regions and transport authorities in England.

Need to ensure partnership working in relation to strategy development

The requirement for a Wales Transport Strategy to be prepared by the Assembly could be a basis for inter-regional partnership working. The draft would require the Assembly to "consult any persons it considers appropriate in preparing or revising the Strategy". However, to ensure effective partnership working between regions, we feel that the Bill should include a requirement to consult neighbouring Local Transport Authorities and Regional Assemblies in England both in the preparation of the Wales Transport Strategy but also in the revision of Local Transport Plans in Wales. Without this there is a risk that inconsistencies could arise with English Regional Transport Strategies and Local Transport Plans. This is particularly important when planning bus services that need to cross the border and when considering highway improvements that may affect traffic flows across the border. In addition, it is important to consider jointly issues regarding the capacity of the A49 which provides a key north / south route and also the use of east / west road links connecting mid-Wales to the West Midlands region and conurbation.

Need for joint working on Subsidised Passenger Transport Services

Herefordshire Council and Shropshire County Council already have a number of agreements with Powys County Council and Monmouthshire County Council in relation to the provision and subsidy of bus services that cross between England and Wales. If the Assembly are to be given powers to directly subsidise services that may cross into England, the Bill should recognise the need for joint working and require consultation and agreement on such services with affected Local Transport Authorities in England.

Need to involve and secure agreement with neighbouring English Regions and Transport Authorities in relation to directions and advice given to the SRA

Whilst I understand that the Assembly's role in relation to rail will be influenced by the outcome of the Secretary of State's Rail Review, the draft Bill gives new stronger powers to the Assembly to give directions

and guidance to the SRA in relation to rail services that start or end in Wales. This power could well lead to improvements to the benefit of both England and Wales where services cross the border. However, without proper partnership working, the power to enter into binding agreements in respect of particular services or facilities could have implications within the West Midlands. For example:

- Amendments could be made in relation to services provide along the Marches Line as part of the Wales and Borders Franchise without the agreement of stakeholders in the West Midlands.
- Inconsistencies could develop between services on the Aberystwyth/Shrewsbury/Birmingham route that are through services and those that technically start and finish at Shrewsbury.

We would argue that it is essential that the Assembly work in partnership with neighbouring regions to make best use of these new powers. The draft Bill should require the Assembly to work in partnership with all relevant organisations such as English Local Transport Authorities, Centro and Train Operating Companies to agree the content and detail of any directions and guidance in so much as it may affect services in England. This is important to ensure consistency in relation to through services and to avoid any adverse effects upon services in England.

Conclusion

The West Midlands has a strong tradition of partnership working and we are keen to continue this tradition with the Assembly and neighbouring Local Transport Authorities in Wales. We feel that the draft Bill does not sufficiently recognise the importance of joint working on transport issues across the border with England and would urge that amendments are made to require greater involvement of neighbouring regions and transport authorities in England in relation to the development of transport for Wales.