

City and County of Swansea – Response to the Policy Review of Public Transport

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The City and County of Swansea welcomes the National Assembly's Review of Public Transport and the opportunity to respond to the consultation document. Swansea endorses many of the recommendations contained in the report, and more detailed responses are set out below.

1.2 However, the City and County of Swansea is concerned that these recommendations alone will be inadequate to achieve the National Assembly and local authority aspirations for accessible, affordable and integrated public transport, because of the deregulated and privatised nature of public transport operations. With local authorities (and indeed the Assembly) having very limited control of the provision and operation of public transport services, the opportunities to influence both the quality, quantity and affordability of public transport are less than ideal.

1.3 There appears to be no recognition in the report, or the recommendations, of the significance of the location and layout of new developments, and ultimately the impact these have, particularly on bus service operation.

1.4 Possibly most important of all, any investment in improved public transport must be consistent with action in other major policy areas currently under review by the Assembly such as Economic Development, Planning policy, Spatial Planning Framework etc.

2.0 RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **Recommendation 1 of the Review was that a quality kite mark be developed as part of the work being undertaken on quality partnerships and contracts.**

The City and County of Swansea welcomes the Assembly's commitment to better quality public transport, embracing community transport, rail and other modes, through the development of a quality kite mark. Swansea believes however, that for such an approach to be successful further detailed work needs to be undertaken on an all-Wales basis to establish the following aspects:

- The development of appropriate common quality criteria for each public transport mode that recognise the inherent characteristics of each mode and their applicability to both urban and rural situations;
- How these criteria should be linked to quality partnerships and contracts for bus services and other conventional public transport and codes of practice and service level agreements in the community transport sector;

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- The development of an appropriate organisation for accreditation purposes.

Swansea also believes that improved regulation and enforcement is required to improve the quality of bus services.

2.2 **Recommendation 2 of the review was that the Assembly and local authorities working with bus operators should address the historic levels of under investment in public transport.**

The City and County of Swansea welcomes the Assembly's recognition of historic under investment in public transport. Whilst the Assembly appears to have addressed the issue of capital expenditure through its Transport Grant spending proposals, the following issues in relation to revenue expenditure need to be addressed;

- The need for increased expenditure to maintain public transport infrastructure, both existing and new;
- The need to establish a contingency revenue support mechanism to secure bus services no longer considered by the bus companies to be commercial, but providing social and other needs;

2.3 **Recommendation 3 of the review is that the Assembly and local authorities with operators and other stakeholders should take forward the following priorities as funding allows:**

- **Extend the concessionary fares scheme**
- **Pilot all mode information centres**
- **Feasibility studies for second generation public transport such as light rail**
- **Establish an all Wales passenger group to cover all modes.**
- **Develop interchange between modes.**
- **Develop Park and Ride facilities**
- **Set up a school bus demonstration project**
- **Develop community transport**
- **Improve long distance coach provision**

The City and County of Swansea broadly welcomes the points set out in this recommendation. However the Assembly's attention is drawn to the following projects currently underway in the sub region and some concerns about the development of bespoke school bus fleets and long distance coach provision:

- Concessionary Fares –SWITCH proposes to investigate the possibility of developing the current bus based schemes to include community transport and taxis, possibly using Smartcard technology and the development of taxicard schemes;
- “All Mode” Information Centres & Community Transport – SWITCH is already developing proposals for Demand Management Centres which will embrace all public transport modes including community transport.

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- Interchanges & Park and Ride Facilities – Swansea is already developing Park and Ride throughout the Authority and is seeking to establish bus focal points in rural areas of the authority.
- School Transport Demonstration Project – Whilst Swansea welcomes initiatives that are designed to improve the safety of school children, the provision of a bespoke network of “American Style” school buses will remove opportunities to integrate school and local bus service journeys in the Authority (and potentially damage the viability of rural services) and will be an inefficient use of staff and vehicles as these buses do not comply with the DDA and are thus unsuitable for most occasions.
- Long Distance Coach Provision – The Assembly in partnership with Local Authorities and regional consortia should address the need to develop a national strategy that seeks to clarify the role of coach services as part of an integrated public transport policy.

2.4 **Recommendation 4 of the review is that local authorities prepare regional public transport strategies by 2003 reflecting Bus Strategies and including developments on rail and community transport**

The City and County of Swansea welcomes the development of a regional public transport strategy approach, but considers that it should be developed as part of an overall transport strategy, which will provide a sound basis for the development of regional Public Transport strategies. SWITCH is already developing a regional transportation strategy. Swansea also considers that it is essential that the overall strategy should dovetail broadly with individual Local Transport Plans.

2.5 **Recommendation 5 of the review is that regional transport strategies should guide decisions on funding made by the Assembly.**

The City and County of Swansea agrees that regional transport strategies should guide decisions on funding, but not solely as local needs are also important and reflect local democratic decision making.

2.6 **Recommendation 6 of the review is that each consortium agrees with partners, including the Assembly, how objectives in the regional public transport strategies will be delivered.**

The City and County of Swansea welcomes further discussions with the Assembly on how objectives in its regional public transport strategy will be delivered.

2.7 **Recommendation 7 of the review is that local authorities consider how they would establish more robust regional consortia building on existing arrangements.**

The City and County of Swansea agrees that there is a need to establish more robust regional consortia building upon existing

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arrangements and is already, through SWITCH, involved in the development of a formal partnership constitution, which it is anticipated will be in place later this year. However it is important that these more robust consortia should embrace all forms of transport and not just public transport, in recognition that quality public transport provision is dependant upon many factors.

- 2.8 **Recommendation 8 of the review is that as part of the consideration in recommendation 7, local authorities and the Assembly Cabinet should consider how individual authorities under existing legislation e.g. Best Value, would be affected and whether existing legislation could be used to place consortia on a statutory basis.**

The City and County of Swansea would welcome further consultations with the National Assembly about the possibility of using existing legislation to place consortia on a statutory basis. However it considers that the establishment of a PTA in the SWITCH area, or an All Wales PTA, is not the best way forward. A PTA would be expensive, bureaucratic and have a negative impact on local democracy. This view is fully consistent with that expressed by the Welsh Local Government Association and SWITCH in their response to the Assembly's Transport Framework for Wales document earlier this year.

- 2.9 **Recommendation 9 of the review is that the Assembly Cabinet and local authorities consider how the Assembly should be represented on each consortium.**

The City and County of Swansea welcomes the opportunity to examine with the National Assembly how closer working links with regional consortia could be developed. One possibility is for an appropriate Assembly Officer to sit on the SWITCH Officer Working Group and/or the Management and Steering Groups.

- 2.10 **Recommendation 10 of the review is that consortia raise their profile amongst passengers.**

The City and County of Swansea supports the development of a raised profile for regional consortia and SWITCH has developed its own logo with which it intends to "brand" its publicity in terms of a Newsletter, information leaflets and roadside information.

- 2.11 **Recommendation 11 of the review is that the Assembly and local authorities agree an evaluation framework for measuring the benefits of targeted public transport investment.**

The City and County of Swansea recognises that there is scarcity of financial resources to develop future transport initiatives. Consequently it recognises that there is a need to target available finance where the benefits of investment can be maximised for the community.

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2.12 Recommendations 12 of the review is that evaluation results of public transport policies, programmes and schemes are collated as a body of evidence of what works in Wales.

The City and County of Swansea welcomes the opportunity of both disseminating good practice in terms of project evaluation and learning from experience and results elsewhere both as an individual authority and through the auspices of SWITCH.

2.13 Recommendation 13 of the review is that passengers be involved in drawing up the evaluation framework.

The City and County of Swansea believes, that compared to rail passenger services, bus passengers are poorly represented in the development of public transport policy. It believes that the interests of bus passengers should be given more expression in future consultative arrangements at all levels throughout Wales.

2.14 Recommendation 14 of the review is that all those involved in the planning and implementation of public transport policy in Wales should learn about what does and doesn't work elsewhere.

The City and County of Swansea endorses this recommendation. See also the response to recommendation 12.