



north wales economic ambition board

bwrdd uchelgais economaidd gogledd cymru

REPORT FOR:	North Wales Economic Ambition Board – Transport Sub-Board
DATE:	23 September 2019
TITLE:	Transport Update
PURPOSE:	To provide an update for member on a range of transport issues including Bus Network Issues, Rail Update and Decarbonisation
RECOMMENDATION:	The report to be noted
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The report provides an update for Members that will include the following areas of activity

- Regional Bus Network
- Rail Update
- Transport Decarbonisation and Air Quality.

2. REGIONAL BUS NETWORK DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 This section of the report provides an update on (1) Regional Bus Network Review (2) The programme to replace Concessionary Passes across Wales (3) The changes to Public Service Vehicle Regulations.

Regional Bus Network Review

2.2 In line with discussions at previous meetings and the work plan above, proposals have been developed to start reviewing options for delivery of a regional strategic bus network. The work plan set out below has been prepared in order to seek additional support for the work, which is necessary due to capacity problems within existing local authority transport teams.

2.3 It is proposed to utilise funding provided by Welsh Government for Regional Bus Coordination to procure some specialist and experienced support to deliver the programme set out below.

- Review the Bus and Community Transport Network Strategy developed in 2015 to update in the light of changes in networks since then and to revise the action plan to take account of current issues.
- To develop proposals for a regional strategic bus network including identification of strategic corridors and local networks. The proposals should include identification of key hubs on the network and mode change points.

- To develop an action plan for the roll out of Quality Partnerships on the identified strategic network, negotiating potential solutions with bus operators and other partners. Proposed solutions could be partnerships based on routes, corridors or networks, dependent on the best-identified solution. The programme should assist with evaluating proposed legislative solutions that could emerge from Welsh Government legislation and potentially pilot some aspects of the legislation.
- To consider potential solutions to the lack of transport operators in rural and peripheral parts of the region and propose alternative solutions to meeting transport needs affordably. Solutions could include proposals for local authority bus operations or solutions developed using community transport regulations.
- Provide technical support for the programme to deliver low or zero carbon public transport networks / solutions as part of the NWEAB smart energy programme.

Free Concessionary Travel Re-issue

- 2.4 There are some 150,000 free concessionary travel bus passes in circulation across North Wales. All such passes will expire at midnight on December 31st, 2019. Between then and now, concessionaires will need a new pass. Transport for Wales is responsible for the re-issue and, unlike the previous 2009 process, TfW requires all users to re-apply. TfW has planned for this event for some considerable time. By far the preferred method is for users to renew online. For those unable to do so, TfW sign-posts applicants to their local council contact or customer service centres or lending libraries for help to get online.
- 2.5 TfW had intended a “soft-launch” on and from September 9th, 2019, though this was delayed till September 11th. Publicity was designed to follow this, from mid- to late-September. From September 9th, word of mouth, however, including via social media, resulted in considerable problems both on the online portal and in local customer service centres. TfW was forced to take down its portal temporarily but pressure remains on local government across the region, to where the public tend to gravitate in seeking help and information. This has proven to be a considerable drain on limited resources and it has resulted in local authorities being drawn into complaints as being part of the problem.
- 2.6 Pending a strengthened portal, TfW has from September 17th relented in offering widely available paper application forms and guidance. This in part is because of pressure from the general public, many of whom insist on applying in writing even where they have access to an online computer or a smart phone.
- 2.7 The position at the time of writing is that the message that applicants have over three months in which to apply continues to be made at every available opportunity by all staff in the system, including by front-line staff (and TfW have repeatedly stated that they wish to handle communications) but a large number of people are frustrated at not being able to get a new pass straightaway. As a result, staff resources at the local level remain under strain, both in transport departments and in contact centres.

Changes to the Public Service Vehicle Regulations (PSVAR)

- 2.8 These regulations are responsible for setting targets for the mandatory introduction of accessible transport. Members will know, for example, that since 2017 all single deck vehicles over 22 passenger seats on local bus services and from 2018 all double decks were required to be fully accessible.
- 2.9 From January 1st, 2020, the requirement extends to all coaches used on scheduled services, the most common of which are provided by National Express. Another suite of services now requiring accessible vehicles will be rail replacements. Coach operators' core activities such as private hire and closed home to school contracts lie outside the PSVAR requirements.
- 2.10 There is, however, one issue regarding learner transport and this is where an authority sells a seat on a coach provided under contract. Authorities in Wales as elsewhere have argued that for various reasons they would be exempt from the January 2020 requirement. The Department for Transport, however, has now confirmed that this category of learner transport requires full accessibility from January 2020.
- 2.11 All authorities across the region sell such seats and, largely, will be unable to do so after Christmas 2019. The impact of this will be dependent upon the scale of income received. Some, for example, charge post-16 students as part of their policy and others intend to do so. In such circumstances, significant income offsets some of the costs in providing this discretionary element of transport. Others simply sell handfuls of spare seats at below market rates to assist parents who might otherwise struggle to get their children to education. Whatever the financial position, there is likely to be a political impact.
- 2.12 Authorities cannot currently comply with the January 2020 requirement. There are simply too few accessible vehicles available and in any case they are newer and therefore more expensive for suppliers to buy and for councils to hire. Through the WLGA and LGA, local government had hoped for a derogation but this now seems highly unlikely. The January 2020 requirement therefore jeopardises both income and some parents' ability to get their children to education. Authorities may, if they wish, continue to offer the concession but without a charge. Although most authorities have the ability to remove concessions quickly (e.g. when an eligible learner requires the space) there is a debate within at least one authority as to whether concessions should continue because of course continuity at GCSE and A levels.
- 2.13 PSVAR will also affect a small number of private, parental or school arrangements where operators use or plan to use coaches.

3. TRANSPORT UPDATE

3.1 The following items provide a generic update on a range of current issues. These items are mainly for information.

Growth Track 360 campaign – Rail Update

Rail service improvements - Wales and Border Franchise

3.2 Many of the improved rail service aspirations of Growth Track 360 were achieved with the award of the new Wales and Border franchise. Key wins for Growth Track 360 to be implemented by 2022 include:

- New direct services North Wales to Liverpool
- Wrexham – Bidston (Dec 2021): Increase from 1tph to 2tph, 1tph of which will be a limited stop
- Complete fleet of new trains
- New Liverpool Lime St Services
- True 7-day service. New Sunday services will begin in 2019 with an immediate 22% increase in Sunday mileage
- Station upgrades including passenger amenities, security, retail offer, Accessibility + step free access, parking ticketing, Wi Fi etc.
- Reduce walk-up and season fares to, from and within North Wales by 10% to encourage travel.
- Investment in Shotton Station and Wrexham General from April 2024, to enable North Wales Metro capability.
- Wrexham General: - multi-modal interchange
- Investment in Chester station concourse & interchange

Rail Service improvement - West Coast Partnership Franchise

3.3 Growth Track 360 met the bidders for the new West Coast services to ensure the aspirations of Growth Track 360 were fed directly to the potential service operators. Bids were submitted to DfT in July 2018 and we are awaiting the outcome of the franchise award, which was due in May 2019.

3.4 The announcement that First Group / Trenitalia were finally awarded the franchise was made in August 2019.

3.5 There is comparatively little information available on what the full range of proposals will be and we are seeking to meet with the proposed operators to flesh out some of the detail. Information available in the press release provides some information about improvements. These are generally modest in scope. They include:

- Replacement of the current Voyager trains with new (unspecified) bi-bode trains
- Extending the current 1 train per day to Wrexham to Gobowen
- Later weekday trains to Euston from NW Coast from 2020
- Earlier and later trains to / from Euston from NW Coast on Saturdays from 2022
- Earlier and later trains to / from Euston from NW Coast on Sundays from 2022
- A summer Saturday direct service between Euston and Llandudno from 2021

No other proposals are included to date and some of the detail behind those commitments is also fairly scarce.

In particular there is no information whatsoever about any commitments post 2026 when the HS2 project was to be complete.

Rail Infrastructure Investment

- 3.6 Building a case for investment in infrastructure improvement a key outcome of GT360, there has been some success in securing development funding to enable specific business cases to be undertaken. The unique nature of Growth Track 360 working cross-border in partnership has enabled funding to be secured from both Welsh Government and the Department for Transport with additional funding forthcoming from local councils and Merseytravel. This collaborative funding has helped move projects forward.
- 3.7 Development funding has been secured for:
- Two new stations in North Wales, Deeside Parkway and Shotton Interchange,
 - Studies on North Wales Coast Line-speed and Wrexham to Bidston capacity
 - Strategic Outline Business Case for Chester station capacity
 - Funding for TfW to deliver capacity improvements in the Wrexham area linked to the development of a Wrexham Transport Hub.
- 3.8 Securing this initial investment in project development is a successful step to achieving project allocation within the new tail funding approach.
- 3.9 During this time the rail network has also seen the completion of the Halton Curve and the introduction of new services between Chester / Wrexham and Liverpool Lime Street, enhanced North Wales Coast signalling and capacity Improvements between Chester & Wrexham as part of rail industry investment. The new Northern service between Leeds and Chester also commenced operation in May
- 3.10 Feedback from the initial few months of operation on the Chester to Lime Street and Chester to Leeds services has been positive, with passenger numbers being good, despite the fact that neither is currently operating at their full potential.

Crewe Hub – Connectivity to HS2

- 3.11 Delivering the right solution at Crewe for HS2 and enabling such a large population to benefit from the major national infrastructure investment of HS2 is critical to Growth Track 360 and the economy of the wider region. In coordination with colleagues from Cheshire East, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and the Constellation Partnership, Growth Track 360 has been lobbying for more trains stopping at Crewe; (up to 5-7 trains per hour). The HS2 Phase 2a announcement in Spring 2018 positively acknowledged this service pattern and Growth Track 360 continues to support this position as the hybrid bill passes through Parliament. This recognition of Crewe hub is a very positive outcome for the campaign.

- 3.12 We understand that work continues to develop solutions at Crewe that will not require platforms to be built on the freight avoiding lines, a proposal we support as long as the agreed solution allows easy cross platform connectivity to HS2 services from the MDA area.
- 3.13 The recent delays and cost increases associated with HS2 and the review promised by Government is a real concern. It is possible the project could be significantly de-scoped or even partly cancelled as a result of the review. We will continue to monitor the situation.

West and Wales Strategic Rail Prospectus

- 3.14 Many of the key barriers to running improved services in the MDA area are at key hubs on the rail network in England. Solutions at Crewe, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham that add capacity for additional services are crucial to our area.
- 3.15 Articulating the aspirations of the region in a broader strategic context was necessary to gain northern and national support. Working closely with colleagues from Cheshire East, Warrington and Network Rail a West & Wales Strategic Rail prospectus was developed to feed directly into the work on the TfN West and Wales Development Corridor. This was an important coordination to create a strong vision for the wider region with 4 main hubs identified: Crewe HS2 hub, Warrington NPR touch point, Manchester airport and Chester. A successful Parliamentary launch was held in February 2018 with 3 Ministers speaking including Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport, and Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Economy.
- 3.16 More recently it was encouraging that when TfN produced their West and Wales corridor proposals, some key projects including capacity at Chester Station and between Wrexham and Liverpool, were highlighted as priorities for project development in the period to 2027. This is an important first step to securing further investment for project development.

Transport Decarbonisation and Air Quality

- 3.17 The decarbonisation of transport is a significant issue that will impact on all transport networks in the next decade. Government commitments to reduce carbon emissions from transport, including that all private cars are to be zero carbon by 2040 and significant reductions in emissions from all other vehicles, will have a profound impact on connectivity.
- 3.18 Concerns about air quality, especially from traffic on congested parts of our road network are already causing impacts. The recent imposition of 50mph sections of road on the A483 and A494 trunk roads are among the first examples of actions to reduce the impact of pollution from carbon fuels. In many of our urban areas and along busy and congested roads, it's likely there will be increasing pressure from residents, supported by legal action, seeking to improve air quality. This is likely to become a significant issue for local authorities in future years.
- 3.19 A number of initiatives and opportunities for joint work have emerged in recent months.

SPEN Charge Project - Distribution network operator SP Energy Networks has partnered with a number of technical consultants for an £8.5 million EV charging project. Project Charge, as it has been dubbed, is funded through Ofgem's Network Innovation Competition and aims to find ways to overcome EV charging challenges. The project will develop solutions for charging at homes without driveways, charging at public venues such as shopping centres and tourist attractions, and charging at filling stations and motorway services. The project will be delivered across the whole of the SPEN network including the MDA area.

Liverpool City Region Low Carbon Passenger Transport Project – The LCR has recently announced a £6.4 million project that will see 25 hydrogen – electric buses introduced on the network in the city. The project will include a hydrogen fuelling station. It is intended that the vehicles will be in use from 202 onwards.

NWEAB Transport Decarbonisation Project – Funding has been obtained to assess the feasibility of up to three projects to consider low / zero carbon transport projects in North Wales. Locations under consideration include Deeside, Holyhead and the Snowdonia National Park. The final draft report from Steer has recently been made available and work has now commenced on briefs to provide detailed business case development for the projects identified.

3.20 There have been positive recent discussions with Halton BC about the possibility of joint work, sharing expertise and joint procurement to help reduce the unit cost of introducing new technologies.

3.21 In view of the availability of infrastructure, some innovative projects under consideration such as Hynet etc, there are strong opportunities for cross-border collaboration on the use of emerging technologies to reduce the environmental impact of transport.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Members are invited to note the update report and the issues highlighted.

4.2 Members may also wish to consider commissioning more detailed update reports on any of the issues highlighted.