

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - WEDNESDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2022

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3
HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2022 AT
09:30**

Present

Councillor JPD Blundell – Chairperson

N Clarke
RMI Shaw
JE Williams

P Davies
JC Spanswick

DG Howells
G Thomas

JR McCarthy
MC Voisey

Apologies for Absence

LM Walters

Officers:

Joseph Cassinelli	Principal Planning Officer - Strategic Transportation
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Kwaku Opoku-Addo	Policy, Development and Transport Team Leader
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development

Invitees:

Councillor Stuart Baldwin
Councillor Huw David

146. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

147. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES

The Corporate Director - Communities introduced the report that provided an overview of the current and potential future strategic transport projects and schemes, which had been reported and endorsed by Cabinet in December 2021. She advised that they had been discussed at length with Welsh Government, Transport for Wales, and Network Rail before they had been put forward, so they were in line with national policies, plans and objectives as well as being key to being part of their local transport plan.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services presented a summary of the projects listed in the report, which included:

- the Active Travel Programme;
- Brackla Halt Railway Station;
- Bridgend Railway Station Enhancement;
- Ewenny Road (Maesteg) Interchange;
- Ford Branch Line;
- Garw and Ogmere Valleys Rapid Bus Infrastructure;
- Junction 36 (M4);
- Penprysg Road bridge;
- Porthcawl Metrolink;
- Porthcawl to Pyle/Bridgend Bus Priority Enhancements;
- Pyle Railway Station Relocation and Park and Ride.

The Chairperson thanked the Officers for the presentation of the report, following which Members of the Committee asked the following:

A Member referred to Brackla Park and Ride and the length of time it had been on the agenda and expressed that it was positive that there was movement on the active travel footbridge, however disagreed with the car park element being completed first due to the Section 106 agreement funding. He had also understood there was funding for the Singleton Junction. He commented that if Brackla station was to happen it would be 10-15 years away and the car park would have disintegrated or would not be fit for purpose. He felt that there were many good schemes but when it came to active travel, Brackla still appeared to be cut off from Bridgend Industrial Estate, there being no clear routes.

The Cabinet Member for Communities offered to discuss these matters with the Member outside of the meeting, as this report was regarding strategic transport projects.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services advised that the Singleton junction had not fallen off the radar and they were potentially looking at it as an active travel scheme. He explained it was not on the list of projects as it was mainly a road project but had not escaped their attention in terms of active travel.

A Member referred to the proposed Brackla Halt Railway Station and asked about Network Rail's attitude to it, as they had previously opposed the setting up of a station there. He referred to the former arsenal and munitions factory located there previously and that the Cardiff to Swansea line had a passing loop, but the Swansea to Cardiff line hadn't and whether there was possibility of a feasibility study to look at this.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services advised that he was aware of the passing loop and the history of the area and that they could certainly look at that as part of any feasibility, but that funding was needed to start that process and hopefully they could draw down funding to look into it in more detail. He advised that Network Rail, Transport for Wales, and Welsh Government were all part of this transport, although Network Rail's priorities may be slightly different as they were fundamentally involved with rail bed, rail track and infrastructure and they needed to keep the service running. He advised that the Schemes needed to be pushed up the political agenda so they were recognised at Welsh Government level so the appropriate Ministers in Welsh Government could prioritise them. He advised that priorities nationally had changed significantly over 22 years, and they now had planning guidance and transport plans that they hadn't had prior, with more emphasis on sustainability, carbon reduction and ecological enhancement, so those national changes needed to be reflected in the schemes that went forward.

A Member stated that it was fundamental for the prosperity of the County that strategic transport was taken a view of, and they had to bear in mind that of the three valleys in the county only one had a railway line, but there were several restraints on valley communities that needed to be looked at considering that strategic view. He referred to paragraph 4.3 in the report regarding active travel, and that there was a tarmacked stretch of 4.5 miles that only needed to be linked to Route 4 to make it a viable active travel route and for leisure travel, that hadn't progressed. He also referred to paragraph 4.8 regarding the rapid bus system, as the Garw Valley had only one route in and out so there were no places where they could have bus priorities, so there were problems getting transport into the Garw and Ogmore Valleys and they also didn't have trains. He also added that the frequency of public transport services in the valley meant that people could not travel to employment based on the bus timetable. Lastly, he referred to Tondy Railway Station which he said was meant to be a station to link the valleys but there was no bus link to it, as the valleys bus went through Bryncethin and across Junction 36 of the motorway.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services advised that they needed to investigate what could be done but needed more resources and funding to do that which was why they had raised it as a priority. He advised they were aware of the constraints but where they could make enhancements and priorities, even if only for short stretches of those roads, that would certainly improve the network. He advised that there was no resource at that time but bidding to fund this as a project could hopefully draw down a resource in the future, and that that part of that project would be to look at the railway stations in the Valleys Gateway area and improve connectivity to those stations. This would be the start of a project which hoped to see some improvement and it needed to be moved up the Regional and National agenda.

The Member responded that they needed keep these issues and agendas on the strategic level so they don't disappear due to not being part of any strategic plan, and that perhaps there may be a possibility of immediacy for the active travel route identified to open up 4.5 miles of community route.

A Member asked where in the Levelling Up Fund would the Penprysg Road Bridge be, as she suspected that some projects would not materialise depending on where they were on that list. She also queried whether the moratorium that existed west of the line in Hendre would remain in place should the crossing be closed, and new road bridge provided.

The Corporate Director - Communities explained that they had monthly meetings regarding the Levelling Up Fund, which was a UK Government fund, with the Welsh team who had been put together to undertake and assist with the grant funding. The Authority could submit a bid for each MP that it had, so there were two bids for schemes around Bridgend, but they were also allowed to submit one strategic transport scheme for up to £50M, which was for Penprysg Bridge Scheme. She advised that the Levelling Up Team had advised that this was highly regarded as a transport scheme that would make a significant difference regionally and not just in the Borough but in the adjoining areas around due to the importance of that rail line that went through Pencoed. She advised that they were being encouraged to submit where they get to with the design this summer, and that an infrastructure scheme such as this one would take at least eighteen months to design out which was underway, and it would also take time to implement as it was on a live railway, which they had asked to be taken into consideration, to enable funding timescales to go further than the timescales for the Levelling Up fund.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services explained that the moratorium had been in place for quite some time and had been in numerous iterations of the Authority's Development Plan including the current one and would be likely to be in the next replacement development plan and the reason for that was due to the traffic issues in Pencoed. He explained if the bridge was replaced, and the level crossing closed it was then possible they would look at the evidence to lift the moratorium, but they would need to review when the infrastructure was complete.

It was clarified that the projects had been included in alphabetical order rather than in priority status as funding would be taken from whichever avenues, they were able to access to deliver those projects.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.13 of the report regarding Pyle Railway Station Relocation and Park and Ride, which she believed fed into paragraph 4.11 the Porthcawl Metrolink, and asked whether they would be investing in point B before they had sorted out point A and also asked how the cost had gone up from £850k to £2M.

The Cabinet Member for Communities replied that that £2M was being invested into a new Metrolink for Porthcawl which would provide enhanced bus service which would still connect to other trains at the bus stations therefore still providing the link. He advised that the enhancement that had been planned for Pyle would not have delivered the required additional parking spaces at the current train station, which was why the money had been redirected to provide an enhanced provision in Porthcawl. The original project had been an open structure and had not been fitting of the regeneration it was part of, so it had been re-evaluated and the facility was going to be closed in and have green roof, so a conscious decision was made to invest more money into the Metrolink in Porthcawl by diverting it from the Pyle Park and Ride scheme. He advised they would still have that connectivity to come through the bus routes and hopefully in the future could deliver on a more effective and better Park and Ride in Pyle that would improve the connectivity as well to Porthcawl.

The Member queried whether residents in the redeveloped Salt Lake area in Porthcawl would want to live by a bus terminus and also asked if there was any guarantee that the Park and Ride facility would take place at all.

The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that transport links go through and around residential areas to make it easier for people to travel and this would improve their ability to move around Porthcawl and the surrounding communities. Additional funding to deliver Pyle Park and Ride would continue to be looked for, and the strategic transport projects included in the report showed the intention and ambition.

The Leader advised there was a perception that the Metro was just about rail, but it was an integrated public transport infrastructure system for South East Wales. He explained they knew from all the evidence and studies that having high quality waiting facilities would impact in terms of encouraging more people to use public transport.

The Member asked whether bus shelters in John Street would be removed from the street scene once the new facility was in operation rather than being left to deteriorate.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services responded that he was not sure what would happen to the bus infrastructure once the facility went into operation. He knew that the bus operators had worked with the service quite closely when they had designed the facility and they were fully on board with what they saw as an improvement and enhancement to the current situation. He advised they did not see any fundamental impact on the routes that they operated on and whether they would put on any extra services was outside their control.

The Strategic Transportation Planning Team Leader advised that no firm decision had been taken yet on whether the John Street stops would be retained as a layover, as they would need to consider the maintenance implications.

A Member asked if they looked holistically at which projects would have the greatest impact and socioeconomic benefits, what were the priorities and if they could choose one project to get over the line, which one would it be.

The Cabinet Member for Communities advised there was no priority amongst them as they were looking at all of them as strategic transport authorities. He explained they could not put them in order as they had to consider the whole County to make sure they were addressing the needs of everybody that lived there. He advised that all of the schemes could provide socioeconomic and environmental improvements and benefits to the whole of the County.

A Member asked how they saw the integrated bus and train station developing as a transport hub. He referred to there being no bus links to Ogmere and Garw Valleys to Tondy Railway Station and suggested that they could look at the potential feasibility of an integrated hub there for buses linking to the train and exploring an option of using the Ogmere Vale extension line from Tondy Station to Pyle via Cefn Cribwr and a potential link to Pyle station. The Member advised he knew Welsh Government had talked about having more control over bus companies and directing them with how they provide bus routes, but he wished to know what work they were doing through Welsh Government or through colleagues in the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal in relation to getting more support and influence on bus companies.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services asked which project the Member was referring to regarding the integrated hub.

The Member explained that there was land near Tondy Railway Station and thought they should be exploring as a feasibility study a transport hub there which would link in if they had any integration of public transport whether it was active travel, buses, or trains. Looking at an integrated approach across the County Borough.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services advised they could look at that as part of the study into bus priority and enhancements in the valleys and how they could enhance the facilities of their gateway stations.

The Strategic Transportation Planning Team Leader advised it would be raised as part of the stage two study taking place on the Maesteg line. He explained the stakeholder engagement had been postponed but work was still taking place as information had been requested in terms of location of land users and future component proof to fit into the whole study.

The Leader agreed it was a good point around the capacity as it was an operational railway line that was used infrequently and had been since the end of coaling operations at the former Margam opencast mine. He advised it had been something they had raised with Transport to Wales and asked for it to be explored. He thought there were some exciting opportunities around Bridgend Railway Station as a hub and that there were more opportunities to encourage park and ride and create more vibrancy at the railway station in terms of alternative commercial uses. He concluded that the distance between the bus station and the railway station in Bridgend could be a barrier for people, so they were keen to re-establish direct bus links to the railway station. The aspiration of Transport for Wales being to establish integrated single tickets so people could be traveling from all over the County Borough using a Metro ticket as they were keen on recognising the strategic importance of Bridgend Railway Station.

The Cabinet Member for Communities advised in relation to the connectivity between bus and rail it was not just their region, less than 10% of bus routes visited train stations across the Southeast Wales region, so there was a lot of work to be done. He explained they needed to make sure all their bus routes were getting their residents to the train station so that they could create that better connectivity which Welsh Government and City Deal were looking at.

A Member commented on the possibility of a more frequent rail service to and from Maesteg, not just to Bridgend but to Cardiff and exploring the possibility of links to travel west towards Pyle which linked to his earlier suggestion of having an integrated hub at Tondy. He also stressed the importance of public transport for valleys communities to have sufficiently frequent reliable services for people to travel to work.

A Member commented that if a hub was to be set up in the Ewenny Road site, due to the lack of buses it would lead to more cars being used around the area. He asked had there been any contact with Welsh Government as they had made a manifesto commitment to take control of buses and routes.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services advised that work through the Regional Transport Authority and the Regional Transport Officer Group was looking at bus enhancements and proposals for having greater control over buses. He advised they were aware in the Region that there were issues with bus services and knew that the pandemic had also had a major influence on bus services and operations. He explained that as a strategic organisation they had to start looking to build those facilities and allow the operations then to make their own enhancements.

A Member referred to Junction 36 and an Inquiry around 2003 regarding infrastructure there and discussions about a potential bypass for Bryncethin due to congestion there over the years.

The Cabinet Member for Communities advised that although a bypass may have been mentioned years ago, infrastructure and road planning had moved on and Welsh Government would not necessarily issue funding for a new road build now and due to change in policy it was now about how they could improve the infrastructure through train and bus but recognised that there were issues with Junction 36.

The Member replied that there was no money in the Council for the bypass previously or then and he felt it was a bottle neck with congestion and pollution.

The Leader explained that one of the projects they were looking at with Welsh Government was the Well Tag Assessment of motorway junctions in Bridgend, inevitably as part of that review it would include junction 36 and a consideration of the immediate highway network which would include the main arterial roads to the junction. He advised other places had introduced bus priority measures which they would consider but also looking at effective active travel routes, as junction 36 was often congested by people undertaking very short journeys and there were no safe walking routes there, so establishing an active travel route would be important as well.

The Chairperson advised that there were no further questions from Members of the Committee for the Invitees for this report, thanked the Invitees for their attendance and advised that they may leave the meeting.

RESOLVED: That having regard to consideration of the content of the report and the responses to the questions asked, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. The Committee recognised the importance of a strategic themed meeting and ensuring they continue strategic discussion on this topic, across the County requested that a future report be considered for inclusion in the Forward Work Programme for the following year on transport throughout the whole County, embracing all forms of transport, including active travel, public transport, and the road network
2. Having regard to the aspiration with the South Wales Metro integrated transport system, the Committee recommended that the Authority be requested to press the Welsh Government in relation to more direction with Bus companies on bus routes.

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The Committee recommended that the possibility of a Transport Hub for the Valleys at Tondu Railway Station be explored to see what can be done to improve accessibility for people from the valleys to wider public transport, and also whether there could be potential for light rail coming down the part of the line that remained in the Garw and Ogmore Valleys.

148. **URGENT ITEMS**

None