Mid Wales 02-00(min)

Minutes of Mid Wales Regional Committee

Date: Friday 7th April, 2000

Time: 10.30 am

Venue : Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan

Attendance:

Glyn Davies, Chair	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire
Nick Bourne	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Elin Jones	Plaid Cymru	Ceredigion
Alun Michael	Labour	Mid and West Wales

Committee Secretariat:

Delyth Thomas	Committee Clerk
Brian Duddridge	Deputy Committee Clerk

Apologies: Nick Bourne, Cynog Dafis and Kirsty Williams

Substitutions: None

Declarations of Interest: None

Agenda Item 1: Mid Wales Integrated Transport Strategy

1.1The Chair welcomed the Mid Wales Partnership Working Group on Integrated Transport and invited its Chair, Steve Burgess to address the Committee. Mr Burgess introduced Peter Wight, Gwynedd County Council, John Williams, Head of Regional Development, Welsh Development Agency, Phil Jackson, Transport Manager, Powys County Council and David Cooke, Community Transport Development Officer.

1.2Mr Burgess outlined the aim of the Mid Wales Partnership which was to provide a strategic framework to ensure continued economic growth. The presentation was supported by slides which are attached at **annex 1**. In summary the key issues were:

The White Paper - 'A New Deal for Transport'

1.3Some of the solutions outlined in the White Paper were partly flawed in that they were urban focussed and did not address the rural perspective, but in general the move to a longer-term strategy was welcomed.

Journey Distances in Mid Wales

1.4The geographical profile of the region meant that journey times and distances were longer than journeys travelled over comparative distances in more rural parts and areas with better road systems.

Population and travel

1.5The Mid Wales population was one of low density which had meant over time that he move to centralise services had resulted in the need for longer car journeys in order access them, these services included health care, education as well as retail outlets.

Car Ownership

1.6 The measure of car ownership as indicative of social exclusion was not relevant in rural Wales. A fact of life was that many families had to run two cars in order to access public services, education and to travel to work. This in itself caused difficulties given the expense of running two cars and the fact that petrol costs in rural areas were higher than those in urban areas. A better measure of poverty and social exclusion needed to be found when looking at rural communities.

The Economy of Mid Wales

1.7 Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism were the main industries. Wage levels were some 80% of the national average. The key industries were transport dependent, vulnerable to cost fluctuation and disadvantaged through low investment in infrastructure. Manufacturing was concentrated to the east of Powys where there was good road access to the national, and consequently European, road network. Manufacturing was a significant employer in Powys with some 20% of the economic sector compared to 8% in Ceredigion and 3% Meirionydd. There was a direct correlation between these figures and the accessibility of manufactures to their markets, poor road access did not encourage inward investment.

Mid Wales Strategic Road Network

8. Although this appeared fairly comprehensive, low and narrow bridges

coupled with poor road alignment and restricted overtaking opportunities hampered journey times for all users. In recent times improvements to the A55 and the M4 had taken precedence to the detriment of the rural network. The trunk road capital programme had fallen from £195m in 1995/6 to £90m in 1998/9, outturn for 1999/2000 was anticipated at £75m.

The Rail Network

1.9There were strong community ties to the rail network but neglect had heightened isolation and a sense of peripherality. An estimated 40% of the Mid Wales population were within 10 kilometres of a rail station or line; infrequent services which did not matching workday peaks were unhelpful. The last freight trains ran in 1993, a report on how to encourage freight in North and Mid Wales would be provided to the Mid and North Wales Regional Fora on 20 April.

Transport by Bus

1.10This offered the most widely available alternative to the private car, however most bus services survived only through local and central government support. For many routes there was only one return service per day, few supported travel to work journeys.

1.11The Mid Wales Partnership had structured its Transport Strategy to address three main issues which affected transport in rural Wales, taking into account the principles of the Government's Transport Policy.

- **Social Inclusion** - a difficult problem in rural areas where a car or other accessible and regular transport already impacted on choice, lifestyle and employment opportunities;
- **Economic disadvantage** - inadequate roads and transport costs influenced business

confidence and investment potential;

- **Environmental impact** - although poor air quality and traffic congestion were of little direct concern, there was an adverse effect of traffic on towns and villages that were not by-passed e.g. Builth Wells, especially when traffic was projected to increase by up to 30% before 2010.

1.12 The Mid Wales Integrated Transport Strategy sought to address transport in three ways:

- **By considering how future developments could be achieved without undue transport implications** - these include the need to reduce transport demand by siting future residential and retail development within reach of public transport and strategic transport corridors, and encouraging the processing of raw materials near source.
- **How new technology could reduce overall road travel or improve the experience** - to utilise new information and communications technologies (ICT) in order to improve public information systems;
- **By identifying improvements to all forms of transport infrastructure to gain efficiencies -** a clear road hierarchy to help focus future investment would help improve transport efficiency. The development of a flexible, community transport system would help reduce social exclusion and provide a feeder system to the mainstream public network. Air transport could be improved by extending the runway at Welshpool and improving public service access at RAF bases at Llanbedr and Aberporth. The strategy also addressed the need to improve cycling and walking facilities, and supported the 'Safe Routes to School' initiative.

1.13 The Partnership hoped that the Strategy would inform the National Assembly's understanding of the rural dimension and of the need for an investing in a strategic integrated transport system that would attract investment and help indigenous industries develop.

1.14 Points raised in discussion included:

- what inter-community transport networks existed between the large number of local communities;
- was information on transport services easily accessible;
- were the Partnership trying to educate potential investors of the east-west route across Wales;
- what priority should be given to developing air services and what would be the impact on the environment;
- if the air facilities at Aberporth were opened up to commercial and public use what connectivity would need to be established to support it;
- was there any merit in re-establishing the rail link from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen, if not could a bus link be established;
- where were the strategic footpaths in Ceredigion and who was responsible for designating them as such;

- to be relevant to the considerations of the National Assembly comparisons between Mid Wales and other parts of Wales would be of more relevance than comparisons with the United Kingdom;
- to what extent did existing bus services meet the needs of travel to hospitals, had health authorities been consulted about the effectiveness of local bus links and how had the Partnership taken forward their views;
- the move by the National Assembly to three year indicative budgets should help voluntary organisation plan in the longer term and benefit such projects as community transport links.

1.15 Steve Burgess advised that the A45 east/west trunk road had been

removed from the core European network and that the Partnership had written to the National Assembly asking for it to be reinstated. The improvement to the A483 link to the A470 and on to the M4 was vital.

1.16 David Cooke said that community transport operators were active in remoter areas of the region and that PAVO were currently looking at four areas and trying to encourage communities to form groups to put forward schemes. Where good bus routes existed between towns community links could be used to facilitate travel to those services and not directly compete against them. There was a need to understand what the passengers needs were and often these were to attend for health appointments. The provision of information was a key requirement, an integrated information service had been established in Montgomeryshire, with an all Wales passenger transport information service becoming available in April. Powys County Council also provided an information service.

1.17 Steve Burgess agreed that an increase in the use of airport facilities would contribute to CO_2 emissions but corresponding road and rail traffic should decrease to compensate. He was not advocating increased passenger travel but more on freight being moved to all parts of Europe and beyond. The high quality industries that the Partnership were targeting favoured this form of quick freight travel and improved air access could open up mid Wales to better quality jobs and opportunities for local people.

1.18 John Williams estimated the cost of providing a rail link between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen as between £250m and £500m. Provision of an effective bus service would offer better value for money for an onward rail link to Cardiff and elsewhere. Phil Jackson advised that with the availability of grants competition on the few commercial routes e.g. Aberystwyth to Carmarthen would be acceptable.

1.19 David Cooke confirmed that PAVO had liased with local health groups to ensure that the community transport service provided a means for hospital visits from remote areas. Unfortunately it had not proved possible to establish a dialogue with the health service.

1.20 Steve Burgess undertook to write to Elin Jones about strategic footpaths in Ceredigion.

1.21 The Chair thanked all concerned for a detailed and helpful presentation of the Mid Wales Transport Strategy.

The Rail Users Consultative Committee

2.1 The Chair invited Mrs Vinita Nawathe, Deputy Secretary of the RUCC, to present the viewpoint of rail users.

2.2 Mrs Nawathe endorsed the Mid Wales Integrated Transport Strategy. She pointed out that passengers wanted to go wherever and whenever they needed to, they wanted a seemless journey from start to finish, people wanted to think-go-arrive.

2.3 The Mid Wales document talked about social exclusion, it spoke of the spatial, temporal and fiscal, also about the lack of provision in services in certain areas; some people couldn't drive, take trains or buses; what not may have been highlighted was the cost of car ownership - devaluation, road tax, insurance, petrol and maintenance costs probably amounted to about 35p per mile. Public transport was expensive; to travel long distances by train it was possible to book in advance to get a cheaper fare. The aim of a transport strategy should be to provide public transport that was adequate, affordable and accessible to all.

2.4 The RUCC supported the principles behind land use policies and the location of transport industries near to the rail network. Dependence on road transport also pushed up petrol prices in certain areas. The WDA was putting together a study of the transfer of haulage from road to rail. The British Rail Property Board announced in November 1999 the first tranche of land sales, the aim being to dispose of all unused land as quickly as possible. RUCC put forward a list of sales it wanted postponed until the study was available. In seeking to promote transport links between rail and bus the Strategy should not forget the private and public links and ensure secure park and ride facilities.

2.5 With regard to its support for IT and various new technologies, it should be remembered that people could use IT to work from home and at work-stations other than at an office. Even Internet based commerce needed efficient access to good transport requirements for the delivery of goods ordered over it. RUCC recognised that there were various projects in Wales to get information to the public on 'one number calls'. She had spoken to DETR who were working towards a one stop call centre for travel information but the lack of computerised databases from bus companies was an inhibiting factor. Currently unless a ticket was pre-booked over seven days in advance, to allow time for the ticket to be sent through the post, it was not possible to capitalise on any savings. Very often the point of departure would be unmanned and no one would be available to hand over the ticket. It was possible through the use of IT for people to pre-book travel tickets by credit card and to collect them from a point at the station by using the credit card as a swipe facility. The technology was being used for the purchase of cinema tickets

in large multiplex arenas. The RUCC will be campaigning for it to be available in the smaller rural stations.

2.6 There was a big emphasis on buses, in rural areas there were increased numbers of buses available but this was because local authorities had pushed for this. RUCC welcomed the holistic approach advocated in the Strategy. She reminded the Committee that Government subsidies to pensioners was geared towards providing a bus pass at 60 but travellers had to pay for a rail pass.

2.7 RUCC believed that rail use should be the backbone of a co-ordinated system supported by buses and scaled to need. Need might be one bus per week or the community car or whatever according to passenger need. If buses were required they should ensure that the timetable reflected the needs of passengers and provide services for travel to work and for health appointments etc. Partnership and co-ordination would prevent this.

2.8 With regard to fares and the aim of getting people out of their cars and into public transport, transferring car users to rail was easier than getting people to use buses rather cars. RUCC had pointed out to Chris Green of Virgin Rail that their fares didn't actually feature in Wales apart from the eastern border. He had since agreed that from May the super-saver and saver restrictions on services west of Shrewsbury would be abandoned from London i.e., it used to be that the last train from London to Machynlleth would be in peak time from London and with a super-saver ticket a passenger wouldn't be allowed on the train.

2.9 The information in the Strategy document might be a little out of date in that the SRA was currently in shadow form and was made up of OPRAF and the residual British Railways Board, the new objectives and guidance for the franchising director involved the re-negotiation of existing franchises. RUCC pointed out that there were two all-Wales bodies with an influence on transport provision - the National Assembly and the RUCC itself, which was the statutory passenger watchdog. RUCC had a legal right to recommend change; they held meetings in public three times a year in North, Mid and South Wales. Train operating companies and Railtrack representatives came along and with the RUCC members addressed issues referred to RUCC by passengers. RUCC saw the need for a fully integrated network as a natural extension of its remit.

2.10 The Chair thanked Mrs Nawathe for her presentation, he asked the Clerk to prepare an 'extended minute' of the presentation. The PowerPoint presentation is at **Annex 2.**

Agenda Item 2 : The Environment Agency

3.1 The Chair invited Roger Thomas to make his presentation.

3.2 Mr Thomas introduced David Walker, Area Manager South West Wales, Peter May, Upper Severn Area Flood Defence and Water Resources Manager and John Harrison, Environmental

Protection Unit in SouthEast Wales. The PowerPoint presentation is at **Annex 3**.

3.3 Roger Thomas opened by giving a brief resume of the Environment Agency's structure and key objectives. He advised that the Agency employed over 930 people located at various sites around Wales. The Agency's role was to support economic activity and social well being through sustainable management of environmental resources. It also addressed the legacy of environmental damage resulting from past mismanagement. It did this through primary activities of regulation, raising awareness, improvements to the environment and responding to emergencies. Its functions included monitoring water quality, waste management, fishing, recreation and conservation.

3.4 The key achievements of the Agency included preparing and issuing its corporate plan/ annual report, its Advisory Committee for Wales Report, setting up its Wales web-site, tackling the October '98 floods, supporting the National Assembly's Sustainable Development Conference, the prosecution of the Sea Empress and setting up the Dee Water Protection Zone.

3.5 Funding was provided by Flood Defence Levies and Precepts (22%), grants from the National Assembly (30%) and Charging Schemes (48%). Mr Thomas suggested that the Assembly should have as its priorities securing Objective 1 funding, an integrated transport scheme, waste and energy strategies and promoting sustainable land use.

3.6 David Walker spoke about the Agency's work in the Mid Wales region and Cardigan Bay. This included the improvement of water quality through sewage treatment works at Cardigan and the quality of bathing water at Poppit Sands; securing funding from the Department of the Environment and the Regions (DETR) to tackle mine water pollution. The Agency's management of the River Teifi as a source of potable water was being used as a national pilot study. In its management of fresh water fisheries it had produced a salmon action plan and set up a collaborative project on a brown trout fishery.

3.7 The Agency had successfully set up a five year plan to eradicate Japanese knotweed which had badly affected the Rheidol Valley; secured and used European funding, for the first time, to install a tidal defence scheme at Aberystwyth; established 'partnerships in action' through the Cardigan Bay candidate SAC and the Teifi Estuary Management Plan. Mr Walker described future opportunities as improving its management of waste including better recycling provision and securing Objective 1 funding to set up a waste infrastructure and the remediation of contaminated land.

3.8 Points raised in discussion included:

- did the Agency develop partnerships for example with the Wales Tourist Board;
- what did the Agency see as a priority area for Objective 1 support;
- what added value did the Agency consider it brought to Objective 1 proposals;
- how would the Agency use Objective 1 funding;

- the recycling of plastics was a welcome initiative which had been tried locally in Ceredigion in the past and had failed, were the Agency taking on board the lessons learnt from this venture;
- was the Agency intending to approach local planning authorities about their policy on planning permission to build on flood plains;
- as the Environmental Agency was a statutory consultee for planning applications how did it liase with other planning bodies; and
- what new forms of environmental control the Agency wished to see introduced.

3.9 Mr Thomas said that the Agency worked in partnership with a number of bodies and had met with the Wales Tourist Board on 6 April to identify common interests and ways in which they could support each other. The Agency saw that Objective 1 funding was a key resource for developing environment schemes, for example the establishment of a plastic recycling scheme targeted primarily at farmers. Mr Thomas was not aware of the previous plastic plant in Ceredigion but would make enquiries about it. There was a need to change public buying practices and perceptions of waste as a raw material, people tended to produce less waste if they participated in a recycling scheme which required them to separate their household waste.

3.10 The Agency provided a framework for environmental and sustainable

appraisal and had prepared a document on how to apply for Objective 1 funding from the sustainability viewpoint. It was not seeking funding for itself but rather looked to initiate and support schemes, which had potential to attract Objective 1 funding.

3.11 Flood defence schemes were designed to tackle the dangers of building

on flood plains, but there was still a need to liase closely with strategic planners to minimise the dangers. The Agency in Wales had access to a great deal of research material by being part of the larger Environment Agency and it linked with other research institutes and funded its own research. The Agency also had a role in disseminating good practice and an example of its work here was the Agency's attendance at a seminar last year to explain the development of flood plain planning.

3.12 The Chair thanked presenters for a comprehensive view of the role of the Agency.

Agenda Item 3: Public Presentations

4.1 The following presentations were made:

Subject   **Organisation/Speaker**

Improving the A470 in the Ffestiniog area	Cyfle Ffestiniog - Chair, Bryn Williams and Dylan Griffiths
Improving the A470	Dolwyddelan Community Council - Gwyn Roberts, Clerk
Work of PAVO in relation to Community transport	Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations - David Cooke
The Market Town Initiative	Menter Aberteifi - Gareth Rowlands

4.2 Copies of the presentations as delivered are attached as **annexes**

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the last Meeting

5.2 These were ratified.

The Chair thanked Alun Michael for his contribution to the Mid Wales Regional Committee and wished him all the best for the future. Mr Michael thanked the Chair and said that he believed in the merits of the Regional Committees and his experience as a Member had strengthened this belief.