

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT: NOTE BY THE SOUTH EAST WALES TRANSPORTATION FORUM

1. Background

1.1 The South East Wales Transportation Forum is a local government member led body. It represents the transport interests of 50% of the population of Wales and its area is also the gateway to south west Wales and Ireland beyond. The Forum welcomes the opportunity to talk to the Committee on matters of common interest. It is hoped that this meeting is the first of a series of developing contacts to improve the transport system in south east Wales. This paper identifies an initial series of issues of joint interest; more should follow. The Assembly Committee will have its greatest interest in those aspects of the Forum's work which affects regional development.

1.2 South East Wales has special characteristics with respect to transport in Wales:

- * it has the heaviest traffic flows;
- * it has the greatest incidence of major traffic congestion;
- * it has the most extensive suburban rail network in the UK outside the metropolitan PTE areas;
- * it has the greatest opportunities to achieve modal shift.

2 Strategy

2.1 Transport is a critical issue for this region. The South East Wales Transportation Forum is developing a transport strategy for the region. This will build on a framework issued by the DETR for similar strategies in the English regions. The strategy will provide a framework for local transport plans and will build on:

- * the SWIFT and TIGER initiatives regarding public transport;
- * the need to maintain and improve the highway network;

- * the rail strategy being developed by the South Wales Rail Forum;
- * the national cycle network and its proposed regional network;
- * the needs of our ports and airport;
- * transport demand as affected by land use management;
- * policies for car parking;
- * the optimum investment balance between different modes of transport.

2.2 With respect to local transport plans, the expectation to improve the transport system will only be realised if the resources to deliver the strategies are made available. Maintenance of existing assets is a growing problem, exacerbated by cuts in the level of total expenditure on transport; these concerns will feature in the local transport plans produced by each authority.

2.3 The Commission for Integrated Transport has recognised that current transport policy is targeted on the major conurbations in terms of achieving a modal shift. The needs of small towns are different. Government pronouncements to date concentrate on conurbations and inter-urban transport; they provide little guidance on implementing integrated transport in smaller towns.

2.4 The vitality of these towns, of which there are many in south Wales, is important if opportunities for travel by public transport are to be maximised and the drift to out of town shopping (by car) is to be halted. An integral component of the success of these small towns is an adequate supply of suitably priced parking for shopping trips. Thus, whilst a parking policy to reduce commuting trips by car will be appropriate, these towns will need to provide attractive parking if they are to be sustainable. Charges for parking at out-of-town shopping centres needs also to be considered.

2.5 Traffic reduction is to the forefront of Assembly Members' thoughts. Local authorities are keen to help reduce traffic levels but it has to be recognised that they, by themselves, are limited in what they can achieve. Government fiscal, budgetary and legislative policies have a key role to play in reducing traffic. The local authorities await with interest the Assembly's proposals for reducing road traffic in line with the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998.

3 Finance

3.1 "Best value" seeks rational and sustainable policies. Assessment of priorities, both against the revenue and capital accounts, concern local authorities on a daily basis; the Assembly is no different. We seek to ensure the best use of the total budget allocated to south east Wales for transport. The private

sector will also be interested in this debate.

3.2 Objective 1 provides a major funding opportunity for the transport network within the Valleys area of the region. It is vital that maximum advantage is taken of this to enhance the various elements of the network. The Valleys with their low car ownership and low economic base have much greater potential for traffic growth than elsewhere and the success of the Objective 1 programme will cause major transport problems in the region if it is not accompanied by focused capacity improvements in both the highway and rail network. Objective 1 presents a one-off opportunity to invest in the transport systems and the match funding issue must be addressed urgently.

3.3 Assembly proposals to offer free concessionary bus travel to all pensioners is one noted with interest by the Forum. The policy has its roots in a policy to improve social equity and as such should be funded from 'social' rather than 'transport' funds. Additionally the policy should be funded directly by the Assembly, and only administered through the local authorities. Local authorities are represented through the WLGA on a Welsh working party on this subject. The Forum supports the requests of the working party to establish the cost of the concessionary fares proposal, which could be as high as £50M pa., depending on operational and traffic generating effects. Rail travel concessions must also be considered for inclusion in this scheme.

4 Liaison arrangements

4.1 Local authorities are required to ensure consistency between their corporate goals, their Unitary Development Plans and their local transport plans. That requires "joined up thinking" in different areas of policy. All levels of government need to recognise the relationship between transport on the one hand, and economic development, planning, land use and health on the other. The opportunities for this approach are greater in south east Wales than elsewhere in the country. Examples where an holistic approach is needed are in planning health facilities and the wider provision of rail freight access points. The Forum wishes to work with the Assembly to see that approach working across all levels of government.

4.2 Local authority personnel have significant expertise in transport planning, particularly in bus and rail; these are not areas in which the Welsh Office traditionally had expertise. However it is acknowledged that the Assembly is likely to want to become more involved in these areas of development. The Forum wishes to emphasise its desire to work with the Assembly to assist it in developing its policies and projects, especially with regard to the new integrated transport agenda.

5 The way forward

5.1 The South East Wales Transportation Forum requests an on-going dialogue with this Committee so that the many transportation issues facing the region are addressed in a co-ordinated way and through a spirit of partnership between us.

South East Wales Transportation Forum

November 1999