

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 23 May 2001
Time: 2.00 to 5.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

POLICY REVIEW OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

1 We take our evidence to the Committee dated 10th October 2000 as read.

2 We note the report to the committee of 9th May on "Policy Review : Vision and Quality Standards" and the attached report from the Expert Adviser. We specifically note and are encouraged by these points in the report and annexes.

- i The proposal to develop quality standards (§4) and a monitoring regime to check on their effectiveness (§A32).
- ii The specific proposals in §6 of the report, which we agree have the potential to bring about improvement.
- iii The suggestion that local authorities prepare regional public transport strategies by within 2 years. (§7.1)
- iv The strategies and individual local authority's investment plans should be complementary. (§7.2)
- v The importance of bringing into the public transport debate a wider range of services (§A8).

vi The debate of funding levels (§A.11)

vii The "PT Vision for Wales" in §A13 and the principle of time related targets in §A15.

viii The success of the Greater Manchester area wide partnership (§B16)

ix The recognition given to successful consortia led projects in §B33.

3 We presume that the Committee intends to consider organisational structures at its meetings of 23rd May and possibly 13th June and we respond accordingly.

4 The Association's position on improved public transport provision is:

i We support the integrated transport policy and believe that local authorities, working in tandem with each other through regional partnerships as appropriate and with operators are best able to deliver the improvements everyone wants to see.

ii That "horses for courses" must be accepted as the answer. What is appropriate to Caersws is not appropriate to Cardiff and vice versa. Arrangements must be flexible enough to recognise both regional and local differences and issues.

iii Public transport will only improve if effort is put into parallel investments as well. Adequate maintenance of the transport infrastructure is essential.

iv It will take a long time and a substantial increase in budgets to achieve change. There are no quick fixes; there are no cheap fixes.

v Aims have to be realistic. The travelling public in PTA areas have better services than most of Wales because expenditure per head is much higher there and the character of the areas they cover are markedly different from most of Wales.

5 We share the view of Assembly members that there is a need to improve regional and national co-ordination of the effort to improve public transport. The Association considers that the introduction of one or more PTA's in Wales would not achieve the improvement that some have suggested. A PTA would take many years and be costly to set up, be expensive to run and distant from its customer base, and perhaps most importantly lose the integration of public transport with other local services. At a time when we are beginning to succeed in presenting and delivering the concept of integrated transport it would be a nonsense to separate out public transport from other means of transport and from land use planning. It would be a mistake to believe that centralised and separate management arrangements are the best way of improving public transport services. They are not.

6. Only Local Authorities have the combination of highways, public transport and land use powers which are essential to the delivery of the full integrated transport agenda.

7. The Regional Partnerships established by Local Authorities are already demonstrating their ability to address public transport issues as part of the wider integrated transport agenda. They have developed in different ways reflecting the diverse nature of the transport and economic issues facing Wales but all are totally committed to the concept of a regional transport strategy delivered by well-co-ordinated partnerships between Local Authorities, the Assembly and other key players. They have local ownership, local knowledge and local democratic control and fully reflect the key linkages with the local economy and land-use planning, whilst having the flexibility to reflect local circumstances in different parts of their regions.

8. We consider the public transport can be improved by the following:

i National commitment.

The Assembly must commit long term to its intention to improve public transport. Such a commitment, supported by the necessary funding would ensure an increase in the quality of public transport provision across Wales and maximise the value of the investment made by the Assembly and its partners in public transport. Equally local authorities must deliver their commitments to public transport as set out in their Local Transport Plans.

ii Regional partnerships.

SWIFT has established a national reputation. Many in the private sector see it as a model they want to see adopted across the UK. The other regional partnerships (TAITH, SWITCH, TIGER and the Mid Wales Partnership) have been going for a much shorter period but have already shown how they can achieve effective regional cooperation at minimal cost.

The regional consortia in the urban areas of Wales also need to address staffing issues, how to manage the increasing sums of money coming into public transport and assurance of political objectives within a regional context. In other areas where transport issues are more wide-ranging and less geographically focussed a flexible approach is appropriate to reflect the need for regional strategy and local delivery by Authorities individually or in partnership with others.

iii Quality standards.

The Transport Act, with its proposals for quality bus partnerships and quality bus contracts, provides the opportunities needed to improve services on a contractual basis.

iv More money.

We have said it before and we must say it again. Substantial increases in revenue and capital spending are needed if public transport is to be improved.

v. Local and regional transport plans.

The Assembly has promoted LTPs as the means that specify the improvement of public transport and how those improvements can be maximised through coordination with other processes. They should see that process through for the full 5 years before considering any reorganisational changes, but supplemented by a requirement for Regional Transport Plans to ensure 'joined-up thinking' across Authority boundaries.

WLGA

May 2001