



Cross Party Group for North Wales Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Gogledd Cymru

Note of the Meeting of the Cross-Party Group for North Wales in the Port of Holyhead, Friday 7th February 2020

Present

Llyr Gruffydd AM (in the Chair), Sian Gwenllian AM, Rhun ap Iorwerth AM, Hywel Williams MP, Cynghorydd Dyfrig Siencyn, Cynghorydd Llinos Medi Huws, Councillor Ian Roberts, Councillor Sam Rowlands.

Stephen Jones (WLGA) Secretary and Sponsor Representative, in attendance.

Speakers: Wyn Parry, Stena Line, Dewi Rowlands Welsh Government, Lee Robinson, Transport for Wales. William Calderbank, Stena Line and Lowri Joyce, Transport for Wales in attendance.

Annual General Meeting

Election of Officers

- Llyr Gruffydd was elected Chair.
- Mark Isherwood was elected Vice-Chair.
- Stephen Jones was elected Secretary to work under the supervision of the Chair and Vice Chair(s)
- It was agreed to ask the Labour Assembly Members to nominate one of their members (Ann Jones AM or Jack Sargeant AM) as a co-vice chair

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 15th February 2019

The Minutes of the Previous AGM held on the 15th February 2019 were agreed as printed. The Group's Constitution adopted at the last AGM was noted.

Business meeting

1. Notes of the Previous Meeting held on the 18th June 2019

The notes of the previous meeting (18th June 2019) were agreed as printed.

2. Improving Transport Infrastructure and Services in North Wales

a) Holyhead Port Re-Development

There was a presentation from Wyn Parry, Head of Stena Line's UK Port Operations. Will Calderbank now has day to day management responsibility for Holyhead Port.

Holyhead Port is one of the busiest for RO/RO lorry movements in the UK along with significant traffic flows. The Port serves Stena Line and Irish Ferries which between them run 10 crossings a day. The Port's RO/RO traffic is 75% of lorry movements to and from Wales.

The Port is: -

- A significant asset for the UK and North Wales.
- One of the few privately owned ports
- A unique port which owns the seabed (normally the Crown Estate owns the seabed).
- A deep water port without tidal restrictions
- A significant local employer with the potential to expand and employ more people (Currently 350 are employed directly and indirectly plus jobs on board the ferries, taking the total to over 600).
- The best placed port to offer services to Ireland
- Attracting cruise ships to the old Anglesey Aluminium Jetty with 38 ships due to dock in 2020 with 12500 passengers. Passengers who disembark spend around £75 per head locally (i.e. just under £1m into the local economy)

The Port can do more for the local economy if it is able to expand.

Stena is a multi-national conglomerate with interests in ferries, recycling, oil and renewables. It is supporting new investment in Holyhead. The Port Masterplan was refreshed in 2018 to plan for expansion.

The key opportunities are: -

- Expanding the current business based on more traffic, warehousing and storage (logistics facilities)
- Meeting the needs of energy companies in the renewables and marine energy sectors for maintenance facilities – e.g. Hitachi, Minesto and Morlais
- Improving facilities for Cruise Ships, enabling more and larger cruise ships to dock at Holyhead. It is aimed to accommodate the largest ships that accommodate up to 5000 passengers. This will require some initial dredging to create a channel for the bigger cruise ships to reach their proposed new berth

To deliver these opportunities the Port plans to reclaim land from the sea to expand current operating areas: -

Salt Island – Area A	Nuclear, Cruise and general port uses
Pelham Patch – Area B	Nuclear and other uses including a new exit road from the port
East Dock – Area C	Not currently being taken forward
East Dock Re-development	Renewables (marine offshore energy uses).

These developments will enable the port to offer more berths and support more activity.

The offshore wind sector will expand due to a new round of leasing (round 4). There are still likely to be opportunities from the renewal of nuclear facilities at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd.

The proposed development must be supported by the improvement and re-enforcement of the breakwater, which is a listed building constructed in 1851. This will be achieved by concrete chevrons being placed along the breakwater.

The existing Orthios Jetty which currently hosts cruise ships will continue to be marketed for a wide range of commercial uses.

Stena is behind the development. The Isle of Anglesey County Council are also working with the Port to help deliver its expansion. The Welsh Government is working with Stena to protect and upgrade the Breakwater.

The NW Growth Deal is supporting the development with funds allocated for smart energy and the port's redevelopment.

Stena are working through licensing requirements based on environmental impact studies (on the seabed and land) for Natural Resources Wales permissions and a Harbour Order. The Breakwater is also in the consenting process with Cadw.

It is hoped to get all the necessary permissions during 2020 with an 18 month construction period thereafter.

Questions and Discussion

The main issues of concern were: -

- The performance of NRW and their approach to development. NRW is widely seen as an over-zealous regulator, too slow at reviewing studies/proposals and with an unsupportive attitude to development.
- This is the Welsh Government's first Harbour Order. Therefore WG is being cautious in their response to the Port's application.

There was discussion of the restoration of the Marina which was destroyed by Storm Emma in 2018.

There were positive comments on the need for the Marina and its restoration along with a new (Marina) breakwater. The owner and developer are committed to the scheme and are likely to deliver progress in 2020 contingent on the resolution of insurance cases.

There is a need for a residential development partner to support the restoration and redevelopment of the Marina.

There was discussion of the opportunity to include the production of hydrogen into the energy island concept for Anglesey: -

- There are renewable energy sources which could produce hydrogen. That could then be piped out of the region using the old pipeline from the former Shell facility at Amlwch.

- The Port could pilot hydrogen as a fuel for its bus fleet, fork-lifts, cranes and possibly ships. (Buses ferry passengers from the terminal to the points of embarkation and provide services for the workforce).

b) Rail and Bus

Lee Robinson, Transport for Wales gave a presentation (Attached).

The work of TfW is guided by “Prosperity for All” which talks about connecting people with transport that supports the economy, enables access to jobs, leisure and service opportunities, reducing isolation.

Key Messages: -

- Lee and his team are the voice of North Wales in Transport for Wales. Assembly Members, Leaders and Members of Parliament should contact him where they have issues with TfW sponsored services. His Contact Details are: -

Lee Robinson

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(Lee also looks after Mid Wales)

- TfW have some challenges in delivering rail service improvements in North Wales that arise from timetables and rolling stock.
- The UK-wide shortage of rolling stock means that there are delays to upgrading stock on the Wrexham Bidston line and more generally in North Wales.
- There is a timetable issue regarding new services that do not stop along the NW coast and South of Wrexham. It is to be hoped that the new May timetable will address the problems highlighted by rail users and articulated by elected representatives.
- Late delivery of rolling stock is leading to temporary use of refurbished stock for a number of service improvements.
- There are considerable challenges around frequency of services and timetabling that arise from trying to deliver a service from Bangor to Cardiff in 4.5 hours. There will be consultation on the May timetable to try and resolve the issues identified after the December 2020 timetable was introduced. TfW plan to use engagement to shape future plans for the May 2020 timetable.

North Wales Metro

The North Wales Metro is a customer focussed initiative that has a strategic, cross border context. It aims to improve connectivity for people and places.

<https://trc.cymru/north-wales-metro>

The NW Metro will focus on the North Wales coast, Deeside, Wrexham and their links with Merseyside and Cheshire West and Chester.

It will seek to enable modal shift from the car to bus and rail because the share of public transport in these areas is very low compared to other areas and what can be achieved by “good”, frequent public transport.

There is a need for radical improvement in bus services.

The Metro will seek to integrate and plan for public transport that can get people to and from where they live to jobs. Hubs will be critical to this aspiration.

Work is ongoing to identify strategic corridors, the best hub locations and the separation of short haul and long haul commuting.

The Metro will need partners to work as a cohesive, mass transit system across administrative boundaries.

TfW is now working to a transport hierarchy of: -

- Rail
- Bus
- Active Travel
- Road

Questions and Discussion

There was discussion of: -

- The utilisation of the UK Government Fund for re-opening lines lost in the Beeching cuts e.g. Anglesey – Gaerwen, Llangefni to Amlwch. These proposals will depend on substantial increases in funding, from the DfT as rail infrastructure is not devolved.

An alternative to re-opening old rail lines may be light rail or rapid bus lanes utilising old rail track beds. This would require WG backing and good business cases. TfW is likely to prioritise buses.

- Buses need to be of good quality to increase patronage. There will also be a need for regional working to engage with partners and to persuade operators to invest and join with aspirations to improve services. Councils need to think about working together and with TfW to achieve this.
- Devolution of rail infrastructure from UKG to WG. The case for this may well be strengthened by the Williams Review of the rail industry’s structure which is likely to recommend devolution of infrastructure functions to English Regions.
- Funding for Cross Border investment where it is expected that investment in England will be paid for by English Authorities. It was reported that Merseyrail have paid for projects of benefit for North Wales e.g. Wrexham to Bidston and the Halton Curve. The NW Metro includes participation from Merseytraavel and Cheshire West and Chester who would be required to co-ordinate, invest and support cross border services with TfW and Welsh authorities.

- The current TfW timetable for trains along the NW Coast is damaging Bangor University by making it more difficult for students and teaching staff to use the railway for accessing work and study. Lee Robinson undertook to meet with representatives of the University.

The meeting supported the contribution of Cllr. Ian Roberts seeking: -

- The new Cardiff (loco-hauled) service stopping at stations along the N Wales Coast and South of Wrexham
- The new timetable (in May) should put customers first rather than abstract time targets
- Delivery from TfW to implement the new franchise promises for improved services

Cllr. Siencyn reported: -

- Improving rural connectivity is the priority of his Council (Cyngor Gwynedd) and for his area (Meirionnydd)
- The bus network is critical in rural areas. Rail is not as relevant as it is on the coast. The Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury line needs radical speed and frequency improvements if it is to compete with the car. It is quicker to drive to Chirk for a Cardiff service than take the train to Shrewsbury.
- Bus services in Gwynedd rely on subsidies and there is a need for substantial capital and revenue investment in bus services.
- There is summer congestion related to tourist car use and in the context of EVs this is not sustainable and therefore there needs to be planned with investment in summer bus services from parking hubs to key attractions in rural settings.
- TfW must work with the NWEAB on these issues and particularly the trialling of electric and/or hydrogen buses. There is an opportunity to link NWEAB Smart Energy and Transport change projects.
- Welsh Language Service “upgrades” need to be applied to rural and urban/semi-urban areas. The language needs to “grow” beyond its current areas of usage.

Lee Robinson advised that: -

- He is the National Lead for Buses in TfW
- Demand Responsive transport is the best way forward to improve rural bus services
- TfW are looking at trialling hydrogen buses and he is aware of the Growth Deal programmes. Germany is trialling hydrogen trains.
- There is concern that EVs and buses will be expensive and require a lot of carbon generation to charge them. Leasing and recycling of batteries will be critical.

c) Welsh Government transport Policy

Dewi Rowlands gave a presentation.

Key Points:

- The Welsh Government (WG) will soon publish a National Transport Plan. The Plan will be relatively short and focussed on outcomes. Transport for Wales will then publish a Delivery Plan to realise the outcomes prioritised by the WG.

- Decarbonisation of transport is a critical objective for the Transport Plan.
 - Low emissions vehicles and alternative fuels
 - Car sharing
 - An investment Hierarchy (rail, bus, active travel and road)
- Modal shift from cars to rail and bus and decarbonisation (EVs etc.) will require additional revenue spending. It cannot be achieved by capital alone.
- Radical solutions need to be debated, like road pricing, which would enable revenue for investment in public transport
- There are models of change for urban areas from English and European Cities but we lack thinking for change in rural areas and this “gap” needs to be addressed as a priority for Wales.
- Improving Rail needs a national approach (buses may well need a regional approach). Mark Barry has supported the development of national rail strategies and investments.
- The WG is looking for devolution of rail infrastructure with fair funding to go with it. This will align with the UKG Williams Review recommendations.
- The WG will present a Buses Bill to the Assembly. This will enable: -
 - Better collaboration with the industry/operators and local authorities
 - Better quality buses by enabling investment in vehicles
 - Infrastructure Investment (bus lanes etc.)
 - Joint working on bus corridors with Councils
 - Integrated ticketing and services
- Journey reduction will be an objective of most political parties in the future.
- The Buses Bill will also have clauses on taxi regulation and accessible transport

Discussion

- It was reported that journey reduction could be seen as anti-rural. How could governments justify reducing journeys in a rural area where travel is necessary to work, see the doctor, shop and visit hospital.
- Technology and infrastructure is not yet in place for decarbonisation
- There was debate about reducing movement: -
 - The need to reduce congestion
 - Moving employment and services closer to the people who need them

There was discussion of HS2 and its potential to work against economic growth and rail investment in Wales as currently planned.

The WG believes there is a good case for £5bn Barnett Consequentials from HS2 for Wales. This aligned with devolution arising from the Williams Review would enable meaningful and effective investment interventions for Railways in Wales. There should be a fair share of rail improvement monies for Wales (which is not currently being achieved).

There was also discussion of the appraisal processes for rail schemes (including the Beeching Cuts Reversal Schemes). There is a need for a recognised process of appraising the benefits and costs of rail investment proposals so that schemes with the best business cases are supported. The current green book is too biased to existing areas of rail usage and there is a need for greater recognition of economic growth, social benefits and rebalancing of the economy as appraisal criteria for rail.

Moves within the UKG to review and recalibrate the “green book” guide for appraising investment projects should be supported.

3. SAIL

Carl Clowes and Robat Idris gave a presentation.

They advocated a community based model of economic development because traditional models of development and local policies are not serving the communities of North West and rural Wales well.

Their work has been stimulated partly by the area’s experience of the nuclear industry for creating jobs both in the past and the future. They oppose Wylfa Newydd and SMRs at Trawsfynydd. They advocated investment in alternative industries: -

- Renewables generate more jobs than the civil nuclear industry.
- The civil nuclear industry is an offshoot of the UK’s military industrial complex, producing the uranium for the UK’s nuclear weapons. A link was suggested between the current proposals to renew the civil nuclear industry with the ongoing need for military grade uranium
- Nuclear energy produces dangerous waste
- Nuclear is the most expensive form of energy (RABs will demonstrate that)
- SMRs are unlikely to be viable due to the number (the fleet of SMRs) that will be needed to generate significant amounts of energy
- Nuclear takes a long time to develop and build. Tidal and biomass will be better bets.

WG and Councils should look to build economies from the bottom up and abandon the pursuit of large, external investments. Social enterprises will be crucial to this alternative vision. They will keep profits in the community.

Discussion

Rhun ap Iorwerth reported that he has been working with the Council (in Anglesey) to develop a community based model of economic development that will sit alongside developments like Wylfa Newydd.

Tidal Energy, M-Sparc and ideas to develop hydrogen from renewables are all related to developing an economy that has high value jobs from locally based companies with roots in the community. Communities need to take the opportunities offered by changes in energy production and support for small business.

Cynghorydd Siencyn made a robust defence of his Council’s commitment to sustaining local communities and supporting locally based enterprises, including Cyngor’s Gwynedd’s approach to procurement.

He also reported that Wylfa and Trawsfynydd had enabled well-paid jobs for their Welsh Communities. The linkage of the nuclear industry to the public sector is a reason why the employers recruit the bulk of their workforce with Welsh as an essential competence.

4. Any Other Business

There was no other business.