

North Wales Regional Committee

Date: Friday 2 July 2004

Time: 10.00 am to 1:00 pm

Venue: Theatr Colwyn

Title: North Wales Regional Committee: Sixth report: Economic Development and Transport in North Wales

Introduction

1.1 The North Wales Regional Committee is one of the Assembly's four regional committees. It covers Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Isle of Anglesey, Wrexham and the area of Gwynedd made up of the former districts of Arfon and Dwyfor.

1.2 The role of the regional committees, as defined by Standing Order 10.2, is to advise the National Assembly on matters affecting their regions, the effect of Assembly policies in those regions and the work of public bodies there.

1.3 At its meeting on 21 May 2004, the Committee sought to raise awareness and to hear the opinions of the people of North Wales about Economic Development and Transport. The points raised by the public of North Wales are summarised in this report.

Key messages

1.4 The key messages to arise from the meeting were as follows:

- Good work is being done in North Wales to bring in capital investment and reduce unemployment.
- Transport is a key issue in overcoming unemployment.
- Core funding for community transport would provide stability and ensure the scheme's future.

- Affordable housing is a problem in North Wales. The Assembly should commit to affordable housing schemes to prevent an exodus of quality labour from the area.
- More could be done via careers officers in schools to educate children as to the range of job opportunities available and help them make informed choices.

Presentations

1.5 At the meeting the Committee heard short presentations as follows. Copies are reproduced in the Annexes.

- Chris Farrow on the work of the North Wales Economic Forum in reducing unemployment in North Wales since its establishment in 1996;
- Ynyr Roberts on the introduction of BT broadband across the UK but especially Wales and its potential impact on the economic development of regions;
- Ian Dickson on the work of Deeside College and its approach to economic development in North Wales via partnerships with employers in the area.
- David Blainey on Flintshire County Council's public transport initiatives and in particular the Deeside shuttle bus service, providing a demand responsive service for those travelling to work in the Deeside area.

Views of the North Wales public

1.6 Points raised by members of the public were as follows:

- Huw Edwards, Caernarfon Town Council, said that whilst he

was glad to see the rise in employment in North Wales as a whole, there were still blackspots of unemployment, Caernarfon, included and he asked that more be done to help these areas.

- Councillor Armstrong Braun, Flintshire County Council said that

whilst global companies were important to the economy, local businesses should also be focused on to create local jobs. There was also a shortage of skills based jobs, for example, plumbers and carpenters, in the local area.

- Brian Jones, Ysgol Cymru, Bangor gave an overview of the rail

system in Stuttgart, where freight travelled by road and people travelled by rail, to free up the roads for freight. He suggested a similar decision be taken in North Wales, given the extensive rail network available.

- Cathy Cook, community development worker, RAF Sealand

commented on local transport issues on Anglesey. She said that the RAF Sealand area was in need of an improved bus service and improved footpaths to and from the RAF base itself to allow people to travel to and from employment.

- Chris Thomas, member of the public, Connahs Quay, urged the

Committee to consider concentrating on affordable housing to allow young people to remain in the area.

- Rhiannon Evans, Community Council agreed with Chris Thomas on the issue of affordable housing. She also questioned the value of the minimum wage in the present climate of high housing prices.
- George Johnson, Councillor, Colwyn Bay spoke about skills shortages and suggested that more funding needed to be put into colleges of further education to provide courses for skilled jobs such as plumbing and carpentry.
- A Councillor for Holywell urged the Assembly and local authorities to promote the development of social enterprise and questioned whether the payment of volunteer drivers may create a more reliable transport service.
- John Watkin, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council suggested that funding could be ringfenced for community transport schemes.
- Mair Williams of Caernarfon Town Council said that not enough was being done by school careers departments to advise young children of their career options.

Written comments

1.7 Written comments were submitted prior to, at or following the meeting, and are reproduced in the Annexes.

Next steps

1.8 This report will be submitted to the First Minister and the Minister for Economic Development and Transport, calling on them to respond to the points raised. Copies will also be made available to the respective committees.

Carl Sargeant AM
Committee Chair

A copy of this report is available on the National Assembly website www.wales.gov.uk If you would like a hard copy, please email NWales.regcomm@wales.gsi.gov.uk or contact Silvia Ricondo on 029 2089 8018.

Annexes

A) Presentations and related documents

Chris Farrow – North Wales Economic Forum

Ynyr Roberts – British Telecom Broadband

Ian Dickson – Deeside College

David Blainey – Flintshire County Council

B) Written comments and questions

(responses to questions will be provided in the final report)

North Wales Regional Committee - Questions 21 May 2004

1. Mr Paul J Wainwright, 32 Malwyn View, Connah's Quay, Deeside, Flintshire, CH5 4NB
 - a. Why when we are trying to get freight off the roads are we having problems when we want to use the river Dee. Surely this is a natural resource that we should use. Aerospace and Corus both use the port of Mostyn.
 - b. Skill shortages are because of 25 years of the demise of manufacturing industry and the training/apprenticeships they provide. What is being done to safeguard these jobs?

1. Mr Alexander Ian Dunbar, 1, Wepre Hall Crescent, Connah's Quay, Deeside, Flintshire, CH5 4HZ

With the impending closure of RAF Sealand and the problems with the environment over dredging in Mostyn. In the worst scenario, can we be assured, the economic funding for North Wales would be paramount? Also with the dredging of the Dee, would as we all know be able to carry freight? By the use of ships? As in the past? That's why it is vital for the Assembly and partnership push for a lifeline to airbus.

2. Mr Neil Taylor, FSB North Wales, 76, Rhuddlan Road, Rhyl, LL18 2PS

As more and more of us have to travel to Cardiff for meetings, what steps are being taken to reduce the travel time 4½ hours by road at 39-44 mph and to introduce through trains via Wrexham stopping only at Newport and/or Abergavenny?

3. Mr Peter York, Ty Coch, Rayon Road, Greenfield, Flintshire, CH8 7EY

- a. How do Members feel the Assembly's policies on social enterprise can be improved and given greater impetus?
- b. What role do Members feel the Communities First programme can play in developing social enterprise?
- c. How can the contribution of so called voluntary car schemes to integrated transport be improved - for instance do Members feel there is an argument to remunerate drivers to help create a more reliable service?
- d. Do the Members feel that, in suspending the indicative financial allocations for Objective 3 funding WEFO, although the important contribution of local partnerships was acknowledged, local interests have been undermined? When will the next bidding round be called and will Members ensure that the local knowledge of Partnerships is acted on effectively?
- e. What support and encouragement are Members giving to the Wales based community enterprise organisation, Community Enterprise Wales, particularly in ensuring aid and advice to Community Enterprise in North Wales gains maximum benefits from CEW's length of experience, large membership, and excellent track record?

1. Mr Ian Smith, 27, Normanby Drive, Connah's Quay, Flintshire, CH5 4JX

The future of the Wrexham - Bilton railway line: there seems a distinct lack of investment in the maintenance of the track and infrastructure. In particular bridges are showing signs of not being maintained; Shotton bridge has a lot of corrosion, lack of paint, etc.

2. Mr Malcolm James, Business North Wales, EEF Cymru Wales, Glascoed Centre, St Asaph Business Park, St Asaph, LL17 0LJ

The future economic development of North Wales is dependent upon the private sector as well as the public sector. The key words being consultation, participation and engagement between the sectors, but at all consultation meetings, workshops, seminars and development strategy committee meetings, the public sector attendance outnumber the private sector by at least 5 to 1! Why does the Committee think this is? What can be done to ensure equal participation and partnership, which is essential for effective economic development.