

Evidence from North Wales Economic Ambition Board

The North Wales Economic Ambition Board is a partnership of the six Local Authorities in North Wales along with The two FE Colleges, the two Universities and the North Wales Business Council.

The Board was established to support the development of the economy of the region and has placed considerable emphasis on the development of transport and connectivity links since its establishment. More recently the Board has become the governance body for the emerging North Wales Growth Deal, which includes proposals for improved transport integration supported by the establishment of a Regional Transport Body.

Response to questions

Are the current governance, structure and funding of Transport for Wales effective and transparent?

Transport for Wales is a relatively recently formed body, which to date has largely focussed on the procurement of the replacement of the Wales and Borders rail franchise.

The franchise renewal having been successfully delivered it appears that its role is changing and expanding quite rapidly to cover other aspects of transport delivery in Wales.

We have noted the rapid growth and development of the organisation and in particular its role as a delivery body for Welsh Government.

The following issues are relevant to the NWEAB.

The structure and governance arrangements for TfW as a delivery body for Welsh Government appear clear and funding arrangements appear to have been defined within the Business Plan for the organisation. Its structure is evolving rapidly, from a body largely responsible for procurement of a rail franchise to a more delivery-focussed organisation.

It is not yet clear what the full organisational structure for TfW will be, as its role is rapidly evolving.

Although some regional consultation and awareness raising has taken place, there remains some uncertainty about how the organisation governance processes will

develop and the opportunities for local influence and input. Some north Wales Local Authorities have concerns about the remit and governance arrangements for TfW and the lack of senior level engagement to date.

There is support for the general principle of having a skilled and capable delivery organisation working to deliver integrated transport in Wales

It is not clear at the moment how working relationships between other partners such as Local Authorities, potential regional transport bodies and any Joint Transport Authorities created in line with the WG White Paper on Transport published in December 2018. Neither is the relationship with the recently established National Infrastructure Commission as yet clear.

There has been limited discussion to date about how a whole system governance model for transport could be established. Although both Welsh Government and TfW have been willing to engage in open dialogue about future working relationships, some on-going uncertainty remains.

Many posts in the current structure appear to be short term appointments, this is reasonable given the rapid growth and specialist nature of the rail procurement work. As a permanent structure is established, there could be issues where existing scarce skills are consolidated into TfW leaving other partners with skill gaps that are hard to fill.

What action should be taken to develop these aspects of the organisation? What other governance models and good practice are available?

The appointment of the Board and Directors of TfW by Welsh Government appears appropriate given its role as a delivery body acting on behalf of Welsh Government.

A clear explanation about how the delivery and prioritisation of transport interventions and projects in Wales should be available. This should clearly set out the respective roles of the various national and regional bodies with responsibility for transport and infrastructure and how they inter-relate.

Other bodies such as Transport for the North and Midlands Connect have a different role and remit to TfW, being regional bodies comprised of the local authorities in their areas and intended to provide advice on strategic transport prioritisation for DfT and UK Government. Whilst there may be some benefits from reviewing their structures at this time, their roles are significantly different.

It is not clear what if any mechanism there are to ensure local democratic accountability for strategic decisions taken by TfW.

The future role of Transport for Wales in delivering transport policy. What additional responsibilities should it take on and how should these integrate with the role of the Welsh Government, local government and emerging regional transport authorities?

Our understanding is that Welsh Government will continue to have the primary responsibility for delivering transport policy, albeit with advice from TfW as appropriate and based on their technical expertise. It is not clear how any feedback or comments from Local Government will be factored into transport policy.

The NWEAB has agreed to establish a Regional Transport Sub-Committee of the NWEAB, which will be a formal delivery body for transport on a regional basis. This will be established within the governance arrangements for the delivery of the North Wales Growth Deal. Having a clear and effective working relationship between this body, TfW and Welsh Government will be essential if integrated transport solutions are to be delivered.

Should such an integrated structure be established, there are clear opportunities for joint work to ensure Wales has the transport infrastructure it deserves. There has been a significant reduction in the skills and capacity for transport delivery within local authorities. This has led to a fragmented delivery of transport interventions with interventions often based around the location of individuals rather than a uniform quality of delivery across Wales. Having specialist technical centres of excellence, supplemented by a pool of suitably skilled and expert staff within TfW could be a useful resource.

There are some significant challenges facing transport networks over the next decade.

- Increasing Congestion on key networks
- Over-reliance on the private car and heavy goods vehicle
- Increasing journey times by road, rail and bus.
- Reductions in bus usage, especially fare paying users
- Over crowding, inadequate infrastructure, long journey times by rail
- Being ready for the decarbonisation of transport networks
- Inadequate and fragmented active travel infrastructure
- High transport costs

A successful and effective TfW will have a key role to play in identifying and delivering solutions to these issues, working in partnership with local authorities, regional transport bodies and with Welsh Government. An effective partnership will ensure that the best use of scarce resources and skills is achieved and that

strategic transport solutions are identified and delivered. Importantly, it could offer an opportunity to ensure that the right projects are those prioritised for delivery

It is essential however that the shape of any future collaborative structures is jointly developed and not imposed. The development of future roles in an integrated way, could offer some real solutions to the challenges Wales faces for transport.