

Evidence from Growing Mid Wales Partnership

Introduction

The **Growing Mid Wales Partnership** is an inclusive regional economic partnership and engagement arrangement between the public, private and third sector, one of four that cover Wales. Established in 2015, it seeks to represent the region's interests and drive forward priorities for improvements to our local economy. The partnership's core purpose is to enable the region to fulfil its role as the rural powerhouse of Wales.

This Partnership builds on the long term relationship that evolved and continues to work together for the development of regional transport policy and planning (TraCC) which provides updates to the Partnership and acts as its Connectivity and Infrastructure Working Group, working under an Inter-Authority Agreement between Ceredigion, Powys and Gwynedd Councils.

In recent years the work has focused upon strategic corridor work, working with the Marches LEP, Midland Connect and Welsh Government to develop our Joint Marches and Mid Wales Freight Strategy and its appraisal framework. This has highlighted the need to assess wider economic benefits that can be achieved from investments in transport infrastructure.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee inquiry into the future development of Transport for Wales.

Response to questions

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

Transport for Wales is a new organisation and its development has been followed through The Senedd. It is understood that its structure and the recruitment of personnel is still taking place.

Their web site identifies a Board of Directors and an Executive Team together with its outlined business plan for two years. It is described as a not-for-profit company, wholly owned by the Welsh Government and its remit as is to provide technical advice to allow the Welsh Government to develop policy and to deliver on their behalf.

There is also an indication that that organisation is expected to grow and take on further responsibilities subject to business case approval.

Resources are increasing from 2018/19 to 2019/20 (from £102m to £181m and from £55m to £148m).

The web site now contains information relating to governance and management which appears transparent. This is in contrast to when it first became into being, when we needed to search out information and piece together its purpose, and the unravelling of what the rail franchise delivery actually means is still evolving, as the detail behind the headlines has yet to unfold fully.

How TfW will grow is also still hazy, however it would appear that there is an ambition around a further role with buses, and as regions we have been involved in working groups to develop a wider understanding of the current provision, and contribute to work as part of their business case development for some services such as back office arrangements, which are currently being delivered locally. Until a full business case is proposed it is not possible for local authorities to assess fully the implications.

The delivery of Transport infrastructure across Wales has been in partnership with local authorities and the Welsh Government for a number of years. It is still unclear how the new relationship will work, when agreeing on projects and funding and what TfW future role will be. What local authorities do not wish to see is any duplication in process and that decisions are communicated quickly. Welsh Government has confirmed an indicative five year funding plans for TfW and we would also welcome a similar indicative allocation for local authorities for transport delivery.

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

Transparency of the organisation's arrangements is needed. An organisational plan would be helpful to understand accountability and reporting mechanisms.

The accountability to local democratic process should be crucial going forward. Decisions about highways and transport delivery within the Mid Wales region have an impact on our residents and businesses and surrounding areas along our key corridors. Our current local government process enables our locally-elected members to express and pursue projects and services in the interest of our

communities, and their engagement in the development and decision making of policy is vitally important, in ensure ownership and relevance going forward.

It is our process of governance and scrutiny that ensures public accountability and acceptance regarding decisions, and therefore the delivery on our local transport networks should remain as part of the local government remit, and our future working relationship with TfW needs clarification in order to ensure accountability and scrutiny continues at a local level.

The regions continuing involvement in developing these emerging processes, of updating and of identifying how any new role might work in the future requires a commitment to continue to be fully engaged in these processes.

Currently the Welsh Government public consultation “Improving Public Transport” asks questions around the role of “Regional Transport Authorities” and whether local authorities should have the powers to form them. It is important going forward that accountability is considered and agreed at all stages of these processes, and a full and considered response is currently being discussed.

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?

Until a business case comes forward for consideration it is not possible to evaluate and make recommendations. We would hope that Welsh Government will engage and consult with local authorities ahead of publication of final business case.

With the current decline in local authority’s budgets our resources are continuing to be reduced and with this our capacity with our highways and transport teams. Therefore an opportunity to overcome these capacity issues could be a key step for local authorities, but without a business case it is not possible to comment further.

It is important that the future model needs to be fully considered and co-produced between local authorities, regions and TfW, and not imposed on us.

Our regional chair has already indicated a willingness to discuss opportunities for working together in future and we welcome this engagement and will continue to engage in the development of future joint working arrangements.