

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 JUNE 2022

Present: Councillor Owen Jones(Chairperson)
Councillors Derbyshire, Gibson, Green, Lancaster, Lloyd Jones,
Jackie Parry, Proctor and Wood

1 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

Noted.

2 : COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Noted.

3 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

4 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Gibson declared a personal interest as her partner holds a private hire licence.
Cllr Owen Jones declared a personal interest as a board member of Cardiff Bus.

5 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th and 16th March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

6 : WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER: ONE NETWORK, ONE TIMETABLE, ONE TICKET; CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The Chairperson advised that this item provided Committee Members with the opportunity to explore and consider the Welsh Government's White Paper consultation on bus services. In addition, it was also an opportunity for Committee Members to consider the Council's proposed response to said consultation.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Dan De'ath, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport, Andrew Gregory, Director for Planning, Transport and Environment and Claire Moggridge - OM for Transport Development and Network Management to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member and Director to make opening statements, after which officers provided Committee with a presentation and Members were asked for any comments, questions or observations.

Members discussed the issue of protecting municipal companies in a competitive process and officers agreed that more clarity was needed on this from Welsh Government as the detail was not yet available.

Members asked how the White Paper impacts the Council's 10-year Bus Strategy, asking if there were any missed opportunities or anything not included in the Paper that should be. Officers explained that to achieve the significant step change that was needed, they have to overcome the fragmented system of buses in the city. Some important routes in the city may not be particularly commercially viable but to get more ridership there needs to be an integrated, systematic approach that aligns bus routes with train, tram, and active travel networks. There was also a need for better connections and single ticketing; this was the foundation of a single system that was managed in an overarching way. The foundation will need to be built on going forward so there would be more work to do.

Members expressed some concern about losing some local control and asked for officer's views on a good balance to keep the networks integrated. Officers explained they were still unsure how the balance would work between the CJC, LA and National Coordinating organisation, again greater clarity was needed on this. Officers considered there needed to be a strong voice for LA's but there were details to work through in terms of Governance arrangements. It was noted that the LA may not have all the skills in-house and may need to have additional resources to provide the level of service needed to support the mode shift.

Members referred to the response to the White Paper and considered that there should be more emphasis on the LA's having a level of control in response to question 3. In response to question 6, Members considered the risks to School Transport could be spelt out more clearly; there could be more emphasis on local accountability for bus networks and that in response to question 12 the risks and financial implications could be made clearer. Officers acknowledged the points made and agreed that the wording could be adjusted. Officers did explain in relation to financial implications that it would take some work to map these out, but that could be done as part of the engagement process with Welsh Government going forward.

Members referred to the franchise system and asked if there was an indication of whether companies would bid for the whole of an area or a single route. Officers Said they would have to find out more information on this and get the information to Members.

Members noted that the White Paper had very little detail on the Metro and officers explained that it has not yet been determined who will be running the Metro, although it was almost certain it would be Transport for Wales. Officers further explained the importance of a rational, joined up and commercially viable model rather than the current system which has competition between transport modes.

Members noted that Covid had played a huge part in numbers of bus patronage reducing and noted that Covid cases were rising again, so asked what contingency plans were in place to make sure people feel safe using the buses. Officers stated that one positive thing that came from the pandemic was the improved engagement with bus companies, Transport for Wales and Welsh Government, so if contingency plans were needed, they now have experience to fall back on in relation to mask wearing and cleaning regimes etc. Officers added that falling bus patronage numbers were also due to people working from home, so there would be a focus on getting them back on buses when then return to the office and it was important that they felt safe to do so.

Members expressed that they would like to see an up-to-date plan of the new bus station. Officers said they would be happy to share this with Committee.

Members noted that the White Paper refers to decarbonisation by 2035 but Cardiff Council's One Planet Strategy aims for zero carbon by 2030. Members considered this should be an opportunity to use the response to the White Paper to go for 2030, noting that a significant amount of funding from Welsh Government would be needed to support this. Officers agreed that this was a good suggestion and that if it is not already flagged up they could definitely highlight the alignment.

Members considered that the essence of the White Paper was to move to a model of municipal bus companies but noted that this option had been available since 1985 and only Cardiff and Newport had operated this way. Members asked why this was now being promoted. Officers stated that it was more of a franchise model with clear quality network guidance and thresholds; aiming to protect Cardiff's municipal company as it was important for the city. Officers explained that municipal companies have to be commercially viable and tend to be in cities as rural areas did not tend to take them up. Officers acknowledged that they needed more detail.

Members referred to the response to question 1 and the ability to encourage growth in bus patronage being limited. Members asked what was being proposed to improve bus patronage. Officers agreed that there are limited LA powers as they are not bus companies and not commercial organisations. The LA is however a major shareholder in Cardiff Bus and as an authority can ensure the physical infrastructure is in place to support bus operation in Cardiff, and to identify key corridors to support the communities and timely bus movements.

Members noted that if the proposals go ahead, there may be a risk of losing Cardiff Bus if they are not chosen as the preferred bidder. They also noted that the aim of the White Paper was to provide a coherent, clean and efficient bus service, so asked if these aims were achieved by Cardiff Bus wouldn't that be more important. Officers explained that effective bus routes have to have social and welfare benefits as well as economic benefits, adding that the people of Cardiff know Cardiff Bus and have had a relationship with them over the years and know their commitment to the city.

Members stated that successful bus services are ones that people want to use. Referring to the £1 bus fare promotion, and that 41% of users said they would continue to use the buses, Members considered it was important to understand why the 59% of users would not and how the reasons could be addressed. Officers explained that there had been a significant change in the demand of bus users with increased competition from Uber/Taxi/Cars etc. Many cities are looking at different marketing options. There was also a need to understand the innovation so that bus companies are not undermined by smaller Uber type options taking over the mobility. There is a need to look at the alternative networks such as the Metro and ensure that bus routes are closely aligned with the stations and stops to meet user needs. The detail was not available on the £1 bus fare promotion, but officers would ask the team to look at the data. The promotion was another instance of trying something different to encourage bus use, to engage with the public and increase customer confidence in the service.

Members referred to the Draft Bus Strategy and the emphasis on the city centre, bus station and central corridors. Members considered that people live differently now and do not necessarily need to go to the city centre. Officers explained that there will be other transport hubs across the city, they were trying to create a network across the city that did not require people to have to go into the centre and back out to get to their destination.

Members considered that the White Paper seemed provider based rather than passenger focussed and asked if there would be flexibility to pilot things in the franchise. Officers said there would be, they would specify certain things but then be open to suggestions too.

Members noted that Cardiff and Newport have municipal bus companies so there would be limited responses on this. The Cabinet Member stated that he had reached out to his counterpart in Newport to see if there was interest in a joint response to the Minister.

Members noted that the aim was to get people out of the car onto the buses, but also noted that some of the increase in patronage on trains for example, was from getting people off the buses onto trains. Officers agree that the focus was to get people out of cars and there shouldn't be competition between public transport and active travel, and that this could be more clearly worded. There needed to be a mode share across the network and there was work to be done on this as people return to work now and in the 5/10 year plans.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

7 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

8 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Environment Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 7th July 2022.

The meeting terminated at 6.00pm