

Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

Evidence from the South East Wales Transport Alliance

1. The South East Wales Transport Alliance is a joint committee of the ten local authorities in the region, charged with preparing and co-ordinating regional transport policies, plans and programmes on behalf of its constituent councils, including the statutory Regional Transport Plan (RTP). Our comments are limited to the transport aspects of town centre regeneration. For the purposes of this document, the term “town centres” include city centres.

Town centres and transportation

2. Town centres are important transportation hubs. They are the most important trip attractors (in terms of trip ends by area). The majority of public transport services are focused on town centres, and as a consequence town centres also function as key interchanges for many trips with different trip ends.

3. A substantial portion of trips to most town centres are made by car. This has a number of negative consequences for town centres. Roads into town centres are generally the most congested urban streets, slowing down buses and essential traffic (business, deliveries, etc) as well as private cars (and thus undermining the attractiveness of the town centre itself). They are also often the streets with the least amenity for residents, pedestrians and cyclists.

4. In other words, while some trips will always be made by the private car because there is no reasonable alternative, successful and growing town centres cannot be primarily dependent on access by the private car.

5. As the key determinators of modal choice of trips to town centres are availability of car parking and (quality of) provision of alternatives, the number of car parking spaces needs to be managed, and the improvement of access by rail, bus, cycling and walking must be made an integral part of any town centre regeneration plan. Not doing so is likely to undermine the regeneration objectives in the long term; it would also conflict with the social inclusion and environmental objectives of the Wales Transport Strategy and Wales Spatial Plan.

6. As Sewta has proposed to the Welsh Government in its input into the Nation Transport Plan (NTP) prioritisation process, there is a danger that transport facilities are overlooked on town centre regeneration schemes, especially if there is no pressure from the funding bodies or policy frameworks that these facilities have to be provided, safeguarded or enhanced. The NTP should identify city and town centres as a priority for improving interchange, and good quality interchange facilities should be required as a component of regeneration / redevelopment schemes, and not as an afterthought. Issues of this nature have the potential to arise in a number of centres in South East Wales over the next few years.

Public transport, walking and cycling provision

7. Town centres themselves need to have quality bus access facilities (bus stops). Because of town centre interchange functions, there also need to be good quality bus interchanges (bus stations). Local authorities in South East Wales have delivered a number of quality interchanges in recent years (e.g. Bridgend, Blackwood), and through making use of Sewta RTP funding are developing and delivering further interchange upgrades. However, improvements in integration with town centre regeneration / redevelopment schemes need to be a continuing priority.

8. Furthermore bus access should be provided to where people want to go – a single bus station on the fringe may not be good enough. Where relevant, buses should be crossing or even going through pedestrianised areas. A good example is Newport, where bus-only access across lower Stow Hill enables passengers to get off the bus right in the middle of the city centre prior to arriving at the bus station. There are also many examples of buses crossing or going through pedestrianised streets in continental Europe.

9. Town centre regeneration plans should also include bus priority (bus lanes, traffic light priority) along the key bus corridors leading into the town centre to ensure reliable access and short journey times.

10. In town centres that are served by rail, station upgrades should be considered to ensure that visitors get a good first impression. Good walking connections from the rail station into the town centre must also be provided.

11. To ensure that residents from nearer residential areas have good access there is a need to ensure that high quality walking access arrangements (broad pavements, including good crossing facilities) are provided. Town centre regeneration plans should also provide facilities for cyclists, in particular cycle corridors into the town centres and ample cycle parking within them.

Impact of out-of-town development sites

12. The Wales Spatial Plan states that “out-of-town retail development risks undermining the regeneration and viability of town centres, as well as contributing to unsustainable traffic patterns.”¹ This statement is reflected in the Regional Transport Plan. Similar risks can also arise from out of town office development. The development of sites near the motorway and strategic road network over the last couple of decades has clearly strongly contributed to the congestion currently experienced on these routes, particularly along the M4 Corridor. Furthermore poor accessibility of out-of-town sites by walking and cycling (because of their distance from residential areas) and by public transport (because of the *relative* small number of trips to individual sites and wide distribution of trip origins and the common lack of consideration of buses in out-of-town retail sites layouts) makes access difficult for people other than by car.

¹ Wales Spatial Plan, 2008 Update, page 35