

# Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

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## OVERVIEW

This paper looks in particular at the role transport might play in the regeneration of town and city centres. It concentrates also on the integrated approach to passenger transport provision (bus, train, car, cycle, walking) and takes into account the need for such modes to be sustainable in the long run.

Sustainability does not relate only to environmental issues but also to the financial and economic elements of town and city centres.

Cardiff, our capital city, has a projected growth in population which will exceed the capacity of the existing road network and one which could be extended within the constraints of available land and environmental / congestion penalties derived from increased car usage.

While this is the largest scale transport problem facing towns / cities in Wales the concepts and solutions may be applied to many other locations referred to below.

## TRANSPORT AND CNTRAL AREA GROWTH – THE PREFERRED APPROACH TO TRANSPORT

So how are towns and cities in Wales approaching this issue?

In Cardiff, business travel, commuting and retail tourism are important aspects of economic travel and the question currently being posed is how sustainable approaches to urban travel and the 'sustainable city' objectives set by the Government can be reconciled with regeneration of town and city centres.

Aberystwyth has a primary hub for bus train and taxi services. One is planned at Bangor railway station. Swansea has two hubs one, brand new, for buses and one undergoing major refurbishment, for trains. This latter example is not ideal but with further infrastructure changes and frequent bus connections the two can be linked.

Over twenty years ago when advising the English Tourist Board, Professor Stuart Cole put forward an integrated public transport approach to tourism through the **4I's**, **Information + Interchange + Investment = Integration** which has become a basis for such policy development. The underlying principle is to make travelling by bus

and train *easy* through an operating 'hub' for trains, buses and taxis, thus tempting people away from their cars.

There might now be a fifth 'I' – imagination. Putting these characteristics together then leads to one conclusion summarised in the word '**easy**'. A well-known and successful airline adopted the name because it gave the traveller what they wanted.

The approach to our travellers in Wales must also encapsulate that one simple concept – **easy**. It is through making public transport and non - motorised forms of transport more accessible and more attractive to the car user that the combined sustainable / economic regenerative processes may be compatible – an objective to which the Committee's issues for discussion pointed.

### **Information**

This has to enable travellers to interchange easily between bus and rail at Cardiff Central Station has to be a priority. Departure information for buses, similar to that for trains, is provided at, for example, Reading station with destinations, times and location of bus stops or platforms.

The decision to extend the locations for electronic bus departure boards at Cardiff is to be welcomed – Professor Cole has suggested locations such as the Wales Millennium Centre, Central Library, the National Assembly, St David's 1 and 2, and other major central area buildings in private and public ownership. That part of the private sector to whose buildings the public have access (e.g. retail, entertainment) has an important part to play here.

It is also essential to extend rail services departure information (in the format found in Ty Hywel) to these locations. The information also needs to be real time – provision which is possible in at least Cardiff and Swansea and should be extended to other major towns and cities

At other locations throughout Wales information provision is often basic and often not provided for by the local authorities. In Swansea, bus information at bus stops is provided by the dominant operator First Cymru. The practice has been to include only that company's information, mainly because other operator's timings are not available directly.

Provision in the adjacent Carmarthenshire is provided by the County Council in a clear and consistent format with all departures boards specific to each stop shown no matter which operator is involved. It might be appropriate for the Welsh Government has to set, with the Regional Consortia, a consistent format. This would make reading the information easier for travellers crossing county and consortia boundaries.

In many counties however there still remains a very basic time table showing all stops in a format reminiscent of the 1930's and little changed since then.

With a considerable number of the buses now moved from Cardiff bus station to adjacent streets information provision is even more important. Bus maps are available at the railway station's new information centre. However it has no bus timetables though these are available in easy to read format at Cardiff Bus inquiry office in Wood Street. However neither have 07.00 to 19.00 opening times as for example does a retailing facility. The new finger posts throughout the city centre are undoubtedly stylish but unreadable at night.

The basic concept of the *bus box* is not at fault. It has extended services to parts of the Central Business District (CBD) which were not previously served. However, it excludes the Central Station 'hub' which has made Cardiff an iconic city for integrated public transport in terms of physical interchange. One argument put forward for reduced use of the bus station was that it cannot be used on 'event' days. This however can also be applied to Westgate Street and lower St. Mary Street, key parts of the bus ,box,, which have the same limitation.

With an estimated forty per cent of the buses now moved from Cardiff bus station to adjacent streets information provision is even more important. But no new bus timetables, electronic information or maps are available for these 'bus box' services on exiting the railway station.

It would be an interesting challenge, if one might suggest it, where members of the Committee took part in a travel cameo with only the destination available to them. This would illustrate the need to provide easy information sources in many parts of Wales' public transport network

### **Interchange**

The single hub as a concept is there to facilitate interchange between bus and train, bus and bus and those modes with the motor car and taxi.

Providing integrated timetables and tickets for all bus and rail services can be achieved through the Government's planned national and regional public transport cards.

In a transport discussion at Leeds University, the transfer of bus services from a rail adjacent bus station to a street [Westgate Street] which is shared with other vehicles was not seen as typifying a sustainable integrated transport plan. (Leeds converted adjacent roads into bus priority routes because no land was available adjacent to Leeds Station to create a bus and rail hub).

### **Investment**

Investment in a high quality integrated central bus and rail station, buses facing the station frontage and comprehensive real time information for bus and train travellers would make it a part of Cardiff's CBD and a very attractive means of travel to and from the capital.

Consequently the large area north of Central Station is a valuable development site. For the maximum convenience of tourists, shoppers and commuters the City Council has determined that bus station will continue to be located there. But to be clear about this it was a long and difficult route to achieve that and prevent its location to the south of central Station. Such a location would have put the bus element of the interchange away from the CBD whereas it has to be as core part of it. The decision now is exactly where in the new CBD plan the bus facility will be located.

In transport interchange terms the only location would be adjacent to the railway station. Any other suggestion for example towards the current Vue cinema complex would not be consistent with easy interchange. Indeed one might envisage the bus element of the central public transport hub being a part of any proposed building development. The footprint of the bus facility has also to have sufficient capacity to enable all terminating services, long distance and regional 'calling services' and operations within the bus box to be able to access the hub

This doesn't preclude development of the air rights above a bus station for apartments, an hotel, shops restaurants or offices. All have successfully located in the surrounding area. The site might even become St David's 3. A development large enough to extend over the railway lines and be open to the public at all times might make a south side bus station acceptable but that would inevitably be long term.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A PUBLIC TRANSPORT HUB**

- A central interchange should promote and lead sustainable transport objectives;
- High quality access and legibility for all users;
- Establishment of a connection to all operations (e.g. in Cardiff , the bus box; in Llanelli. Llandudno Junction and Swansea, the bus and rail stations);
- Minimise distance, barriers and level changes between different transport modes;
- Division of the interchange and a significant number of services is unattractive to passengers and potential public transport users;
- Creation of a logical transport network;
- A transport sub should create a destination which has a range of uses: transport, commercial, leisure, etc.;
- Creation of a gateway to the city/town centre whether that be Aberystwyth,

Cardiff, Llandudno, Newtown or Llanelli. In the case of Llanelli the bus station creates that, but the railway station will not until bus links to the town centre are improved.

- Swansea provides an interesting example where the railway station once did provide a gateway from the north directly into the town centre while the then coach station provided the link for buses from the south. Today the city centre business district has moved southwards. There are direct and frequent bus links from the railway station to the ultra - modern bus station. A single hub is not possible but the restructuring of the rail station should be accompanied by a clear and easy interchange between bus and rail services. These are physically adjacent but signage and waiting facility location has worsened for all services other than the Metro. An adverse move for through inter-lining passengers.
- The new bus station at Swansea is a model for future developments. Attached to a retail centre it has electronic information boards showing all departures and at gate information. While it is not real time it is nevertheless the quality standard to be taken as a minimum for passenger information, comfort and ease of interchange
- Interchange between bus services in Swansea is a model of integration where all services pass through the bus station with the exception of the Metro which runs alongside but is nevertheless integrated into all other local regional and National Express or FirstBus Greyhound operations
- Minimisation of barriers between Transport Hub and City Centre where this is possible either by location or by good bus links;
- In Cardiff the creation of north-south rail routes connecting all suburban destinations to the City's Central Business District;
- In Cardiff car parking provision primarily situated to the south of rail station to avoid the need for private vehicles to access the core area;
- Separate private car and bus movement to minimise delays and conflict;
- Reflect centre of gravity of the town or city centre (e.g. Swansea);
- Enhance social inclusion;
- Transport led development that gives development potential rather than development led construction plans;

## **A VIEW OF SERVICE STOPS / CARDIFF CENTRAL HUB SERVING LONG DISTANCE AND REGIONAL BUS / COACH PASSENGERS.**

The key issues to consider for these passengers are:

- A strategy for such services requires the use of bus and coach stations, where these are available, and offer customers decent waiting facilities
- About 12% of National Express customers in Cardiff get to the coach by rail.
- Around 30% of passengers in Cardiff connect off local buses
- These percentages of bus and rail arrivals have to be increased if the 'sustainable cities' objectives for reduced car usage are to be achieved. To say that the relatively low current figure of arrivals by public transport should

provide the basis for future passenger levels is not an acceptable policy or expenditure position.

- A quite high percentage of passengers also walk to the stop from the university etc.
- Therefore connectivity with other modes is essential.
- Splitting service facilities between north and south of Cardiff Central Station (as considered in the original plan) would have been inconvenient to passengers making any service interchange. Worse it would have made bus passengers second class travellers given the pedestrian links from the front to the rear of the Central Station.
- The pedestrian link in any event given the location of the bay car service stops requires a rethink by the transport operators of the pedestrian access from north – south of the railway station
- There needs to be some certainty on the short to medium term proposals if operators are to invest in ticket offices and other facilities for passengers.
- The bus station is currently in the right location to offer integration but needs serious updating. Deep cleaning and repainting would be a starting point until something better can be done.
- Long distance public transport by road must be able to operate when there are events at the Millennium Stadium
- Access to and from the station must be as easy as possible.
- The closure of St Mary Street has added up to 10 minutes to journeys at some times of the day.

These issues are not confined to Cardiff:

- Plans for bus stations in Llanelli, Bangor, Aberystwyth should be examined in terms of the protection from the elements and comfort for waiting passengers. Compare most bus stations with railway stations and certainly with airport waiting facilities. How can such variations in comfort and convenience for travellers with disabilities, with children or with luggage be justified?
- Other bus stations require painting or deep cleaning (e.g. Newport, Newtown)

## **CASE STUDY: RATIONALE FOR CARDIFF CENTRAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT HUB TO FACE NORTHWARD**

The existing site of the bus station site would be used with a radically redesigned layout. Buses would face the railway station and state of the art information systems installed. The exact location of the bus station to give access to the railway station and the CBD is the key to this plan. The need to provide for the re-development of this very valuable site as an integrated part of the bus station has to be a transport led plan and not developer led if it is to succeed as a basis for a sustainable travel city.

There are two land occupation issues:

- the continued vision of a central square which in itself has no travel function
- Development potential for the valuable site in front of the railway station. This has been a discussion point for some time. The current view of the City Council should be ascertained

The advantages of a site on the north side of the railway station for the bus / taxi element of the interchange are:

- It achieves the criteria and elements set out in '*Characteristics of a Public Transport Hub*'.
- it directly faces the Central Business District (CBD) based around St David's 2, Queen Street and the government and academic quarter at Parc Cathays
- it provides direct access between all the modes and between various bus / coach services
- it facilitates a run through route for Bus Box services to interchange easily with long distance and regional bus and rail services and with taxis
- it enables the development of public transport in central Cardiff to be seen as directly linked to other new developments
- it provides an option for car set down at the north or south sides of the railway station

The façade could match the art deco of Cardiff Central Station with easy interchange. The possibility of an overall roof covering the railway station (with its listed status) and a new bus station might also be a possible option. A roof of the type recently built at Leeds Station might be seen as an example

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