



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021-22

COUNCIL - 19 JANUARY 2022

SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the findings and recommendations agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Working Group at its final meeting held on the 16th November 2021;
- 1.2 The Working Group was established to deal with 'The development of future transportation infrastructure in Rhondda Cynon Taf' following the Notice of Motion considered by Council at its meeting held on the [18th September 2019](#).
- 1.3 The recommendations were ratified at the hybrid meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the [9th December 2021](#).

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group as set out at paragraph 6 as ratified by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 18th September 2019 Council considered the Notice of Motion standing in the names of County Borough Councillors G.Davies, K.Morgan, P.Jarman, D.Grehan, H.Fychan, J.Williams, A.Cox, D.Macey, J.Cullwick, J.Davies, M.Weaver, S.Rees Owen, L.Jones E.Stephens E.Griffiths, E.Webster, S.M. Evans, and A. Chapman.

"With the advent of the approved Metro in 2022; coupled with the aspirations as set out in the Council's proposed Tourism strategy the time is now right to push for future rail development in the County.

This Council therefore calls on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Cabinet and Transport for Wales to commit to extending the Aberdare passenger line to Hirwaun

subject to full consultation with the public and other stakeholders on the location of the station so that it is accessible and fully utilised.

This Council further calls on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Cabinet and Transport for Wales to also extend the Treherbert line to Tynewydd. subject to its inclusion in the reviewed RCT Local Development Plan.

- 3.2. At the Council meeting and in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure 12.7 the mover of the motion moved an alteration to the Motion to include:

"And that the matter be referred to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration, with a widening of the Motion to include the wider County Borough footprint".

- 3.3 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed that a Working Group would be established to consider the Notice of Motion. The Working Group Members consisted of County Borough Councillors L M Adams (Chair), H Boggis, J Bonetto, G Caple, A Cox, M Griffiths, W Jones and L Walker. The Working Group was also privileged to have both County Borough Councillors G R Davies and K Morgan, initial mover and seconder to the Council's Notice of Motion as key stakeholders/observers to assist the Working Group's review.
- 3.4 At its inaugural meeting on the 25th November 2019, the Working Group agreed the scope of its work, its terms of reference and received a comprehensive Power Point presentation from Transport for Wales. (Members noted that since the terms of reference had been agreed, the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP) Members Steering Group had been established which would provide an effective mechanism for discussion and consultation between Members and LDP officers on the content of the revised Plan).
- 3.5 The Working Group learned that as part of the Wales-wide rail franchise, Transport for Wales (TfW) (a wholly owned arms-length company of Welsh Government) had let the 15-year rail franchise to Keolis Amey, operating as Transport for Wales Rail Services. The initial investment secured full electrification of the Valley lines within Rhondda Cynon Taf (and to Merthyr) together with new rolling stock. Once complete, high frequency fast trains will run four times an hour each way on the lines north of Pontypridd and 12 times an hour each way between Cardiff and Pontypridd, with upgrades to stations and facilities also being delivered.
- 3.6 With information provided around the range of complimentary improvements to stations with potential for additional stations and park and ride opportunities as well as specific projects such as a new rail depot to be developed at Taffs Well which would also accommodate the control centre for these rail services, Members agreed that Metro must be more than rail and would need to integrate all forms of transport to create a comprehensive, joined-up and coordinated network of routes and services across; rail, tram, bus, cycling, walking, whilst promoting more sustainable ways of fuelling private cars, freight and service vehicles.
- 3.7 In order to progress its considerations as to how future rail and transport infrastructure and services could develop and build on the early stages of implementation of the South Wales Metro in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Working Group agreed to seek submissions from local Members and stakeholders. This would enable the Working Group to explore the concerns, points and questions raised further during the course of their work.

3.8 The Working Group sought views on a range of proposals such as:

- How the Council maximises opportunities to add value to current Metro investments across RCT
- Resident and stakeholder views on improving the reach and efficiency of our transport network and services for all modes of travel, especially sustainable transport solutions, in order to improve the social and economic well-being of the County Borough and
- How such proposals might compliment and contribute towards the impending LDP review by the Council and the development of a Strategic Development Plan for the region.

3.9 Eight submissions were received in total from Local Members and other stakeholders such as Community Councils and the Rhondda Tunnel Society, which were due to be considered and discussed at its second meeting in early 2020.

3.10 On the 23rd March 2020, and in response to measures implemented by the UK and Welsh Governments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council's committee meetings were temporarily suspended. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook a more streamlined approach towards its work programme and in effect undertook its role to identify the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that all Scrutiny working groups were suspended to allow officers to concentrate their time on business-critical matters.

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

4.1 On the 7th July 2021, the Working Group received a report from the Service Director Frontline Services which presented the summary of the submissions received in response to the call for evidence (as set out below) and the subsequent response of the Council to each individual submission (attached at Appendix 1):

Councillor G. Caple – Local Member for Cymmer
Councillor G. Thomas – Local Member for Rhigos
Councillors D. R. Bevan & L. M. Adams – Local Members for Tylorstown
Councillors G. R. Davies & W. Jones – Local Members for Treherbert
Hirwaun & Penderyn Community Council
Rhondda Tunnel Society
Welcome to Our Woods/Create Your Own Space
Ynysbwl & Coed Y Cwm Community Council

4.2 Members considered the responses to individual, specific queries raised such as the extension of the rail line from Treherbert to Tynewydd to capitalise on the benefits of the improved services as well as the 'wider County Borough footprint' which had been moved as an alteration to the original Notice of Motion. They also considered the wider transport context such as legislative, environmental and economic factors and also reflected on the developments that have taken place since the original call for evidence in 2020.

4.3 The Working Group acknowledged that a number of WG funded studies have potentially significant impacts for RCT are also progressing via the CCR Transport Authority and TfW with regard to the North West Transport Corridor project from Cardiff into RCT, (details of which had been presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the [15th June 2021](#)), extending passenger rail services

beyond Aberdare to Hirwaun, Strategic rail-based park and ride proposals to serve the eastern end of the A473 corridor near Upper Boat and improving regional east-west transport connectivity across the mid-valleys (i.e. Usk – Pontypool – Newbridge – Ystrad Mynach – Abercynon – Pontypridd – Pontyclun – Bridgend – Porthcawl).

- 4.4 The North West Transport Corridor Cardiff Project, a £300 plus million scheme which was commissioned in July 2019 has now identified short and long-term public transport options from Pontyclun, Talbot Green, Llantrisant, Beddau, Creigiau and Plasdwr towards Cardiff City Centre. The short-term interventions will consider Bus Rapid Transit and bus priority measures, alongside active travel, to alleviate bottlenecks on the existing network between RCT and Cardiff. The longer-term measures will focus on rail-based options mainly utilising former mineral lines. It is possible that the wider economic benefits could extend northwards into the Rhondda Valley and Gilfach Goch areas as the creation of new employment in Talbot Green and planned reduction in journey times to/from Cardiff will offer residents in these communities with improved access to new jobs, training and learning opportunities.
- 4.5 RCT has successfully secured funding via the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund towards the following transport schemes; A4119 Coedely Dualling, Porth Transport Hub.
- 4.6 The Working Group considered that as a number of studies are being undertaken by TfW, via the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority it would be timely to consider the re-evaluation of plans, feasibility reports and costs for the Council's pipeline of road schemes to feed into the Welsh Government review of road schemes and which could be reported to Scrutiny in due course.
- 4.7 On a local level, RCT is also developing and delivering proposals to complement the Metro such as the investment in Porth Transport Hub and working closely with TfW to facilitate delivery of the new £100m rail depot at Taffs Well. Options are also being explored with Transport for Wales to develop a new railway station that serves Treforest Industrial Estate in the vicinity of the new DWP offices. It is also promoting its active travel and in partnership with a number of organisations and bodies such as Sustrans and Public Health Wales, is raising awareness of the health, economic and environmental benefits of cycling and walking. The Council recently undertook a public engagement exercise into its future Active Travel plans which has informed the required formal consultation (now underway) and this will establish the aspirations for investment in Active Travel over the next 15 years. The updated proposals will be submitted to Welsh Government during December 2021. The 695 responses to the initial consultation were reported to Cabinet on the [17th June 2021](#)
- 4.8 It was noted that Welsh Government has initiated a review of all road schemes under the Climate Change agenda including projects that are subject to the Welsh Government's Business Case Process. Aspirations for a phased road scheme in the Rhondda Fach in the form of a 3 section extension of the Rhondda Fach Relief Road to Ferndale, to the Salisbury Hotel to Maerdy and link from Maerdy to the Heads of the Valleys would be subject to the legislation and policies governing climate change and alternative measures that will improve public transport provision along the Rhondda Fach.
- 4.9 The Working Group acknowledged that opportunities to extend the rail line towards Tower Colliery, which would improve connectivity with Zip World, are being considered without prejudicing extensions further west beyond those areas in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Members recognised that that the essence of the Notice of Motion needed to be considered in the wider context and against progress of the new Welsh Transport Strategy; Llwybr Newydd, South Wales Metro, WG funded studies and many local projects.
- 5.2 Whilst considering the eight submissions and key queries raised by local Members and stakeholders, Members noted the benefits of undertaking further feasibility studies and analysis of each submission to understand any potential financial costs which will only become known following more detailed study and analysis.
- 5.3 Members proposed that, in view of the wider remit of the working group a report is presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate that the broader scope has been captured.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Members proposed the following recommendations:
- The Working Group acknowledges that the integrated transport map of South Wales is swiftly changing and evolving;
 - As a result, the Working Group recommends that the Council/ And RTA (Regional Transport Authority) reviews all potential infrastructure, including rapid transport and active travel in the wider context of the revised LDP;
 - This Working Group recommends that all pipe-line projects are fully evaluated, and that priority is given to integrated public transport to support greener means of travel across the region;
 - The Working Group also recommended consideration continues to be provided to the extension of the Rhondda Fach Relief Road, while recognising that the recent 'moratorium' by Welsh Government upon the funding of future highway developments would prevent progress of this scheme into reality, the development of enhanced integrated transport networks, should be a key objective in improving the economic well-being of residents.
 - When considering the wider development of transport infrastructure in future years, in the context of tackling climate change, the Working Group was of the view that selected roads schemes remain important and justified, where they support economic growth and compliment wider transport behavioural change being undertaken.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on this report, however, creating sustainable communities, transport and long- term employment opportunities are of benefit to all RCT residents regardless of background.

8. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 8.1 Consultation was undertaken with the stakeholders and local Members who responded to the call for evidence as set out in the submissions at Appendix A.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no financial implications directly associated with this report, but detailed consideration of the capital and revenue implications will be required in order to inform a preferred strategy. It should be noted that many of the submissions set out in Appendix 1 will have a financial implication for the Council. However, at this stage, the potential financial cost will only become known following more detailed study and analysis of each submission.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT

- 11.1 Supporting the development of a more sustainable transport solution will allow the Council to meet its stated objectives covering health and prosperity set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. For example, the planned, new public transport and active travel proposals will help address air quality and congestion issues and improve connectivity and access to new employment opportunities.
- 11.2 Many of the submissions in Appendix 1 will also meet a number of the goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. For example, a prosperous Wales, a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS

| NAME OF RESPONDENT | DETAILS OF SUBMISSION | RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Councillor Gareth Caple | <p>Many railway stations are in a poor state of repair.</p> <p>Trehafod station Park & Ride is unwelcome, badly signposted and underused. The northbound platform does not have disabled access and the station has poor drainage.</p> <p>Transport for Wales should work with the Council and transport providers in order to promote tourist attractions in the valleys.</p> <p>Concern about the lack of toilets on new Metro rolling stock.</p> | <p>Responsibility for stations located along the Core Valley Lines north of Cardiff has been transferred from Network Rail to Transport for Wales. Maintenance and upgrade is being undertaken as part of the investment in the South East Wales Metro. These works will cover improved access for cyclists and people with reduced mobility as well as addressing the condition and capacity of Park & Ride sites.</p> <p>The Council liaises closely with transport operators and local tourist attractions and in the publicity, the local bus and rail services serving these attractions are highlighted.</p> <p>Transport for Wales is procuring the new rolling stock and is aware of this issue. Rolling stock (PACERS) fitted with toilets which are not accessible to people with restricted mobility have very recently been phased out. It is understood that when the new Metro rolling stock is introduced, passengers may have to disembark at certain stations with toilet facilities and rejoin a later journey.</p> |
| Councillor Graham Thomas | <p>Additional frequency, as part of the Metro investment, along the Aberdare line will be welcome. The extension of passenger rail services to Hirwaun will be of benefit to the residents of Rhigos and could be extended further to Hirwaun Ind Estate. This could enable more goods to be carried by rail.</p> <p>Current rail fares are prohibitive for employees earning the minimum wage.</p> <p>There should be a close analysis of an integrated transport system that includes links to bus services.</p> | <p>Comments are noted. A Transport for Wales study, with input from the Council, is currently being undertaken into the feasibility of extending passenger rail services from Aberdare to Hirwaun. This proposed scheme will also involve the construction of new intermediate stations and facilities along the extended route. The Council has recently secured the "Chicken Factory" site at Trecynnon which could serve as access and P&R for a new station. The Council has also submitted a bid to the UK Government, under its "Levelling Up" Fund, to fund the construction of a 127 space Park and Share (potentially future P&R) facility at Llwydcoed as part of a first phase – this will include complementary elements such as a new Active Travel bridge over the A4059.</p> |

| | | <p>TfW Rail has reduced season ticket prices from stations located in the Heads of the Valleys for commuters travelling southwards to Pontypridd and Cardiff.</p> <p>The development of the South East Wales Metro will include the integration of ticketing and co-ordination of bus and rail services, including better orbital services between valleys. The Welsh Government is currently examining changes to the existing legislation governing the operation of local bus services. It has launched an updated Wales Transport Strategy which reflects these proposals.</p> |
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| NAME OF RESPONDENT | DETAILS OF SUBMISSION | RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL |
| Councillors Robert Bevan & Mark Adams | Extend the Rhondda Fach Relief Road to Maerdy (Phase 2) and to the Rhigos Mountain Top (Phase 3). | <p>Both Phases can be classified as major road schemes, with Phase 2 included as a long term aspiration in the current South East Wales Valleys Local Transport Plan. If progressed further, both Phases will be subject to the Welsh Government's Business Case process, prior to any planning and design being undertaken and alignment identified.</p> <p>The Business Case process would provide evidence of the economic, social and environmental cases for developing these particular road schemes. However, any decision to proceed further must take account of the legislation and policies governing climate change, alternative measures that will improve public transport provision along the Rhondda Fach and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Welsh Government has recently placed a moratorium on proceeding with new road schemes, pending a full review.</p> |
| Councillors Geraint Davies & Will Jones | <p>Welcome the development of the South East Wales Metro including the increase in frequency and reduction in journey times.</p> <p>Extend the rail line from Treherbert to Tynewydd to capitalise on the benefits of the improved services.</p> | <p>Comments are noted.</p> <p>The potential extension of rail services from Treherbert to Tynewydd has been included for consideration as part of a wider study looking at improved transport links to/from the Mid Valleys areas. Subject to funding, this study is expected to be commissioned in the current financial year</p> |

| NAME OF RESPONDENT | DETAILS OF SUBMISSION | RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Hirwaun & Penderyn Community Council | <p>Sets out the potential benefits of improved rail frequency and capacity on its residents.</p> <p>Important that adequate funding is available for schemes; ticket costs are affordable; improved services do not undermine local town centre economies.</p> <p>Puts forward a number of measures and schemes to support the South East Wales Metro.</p> <p>There are a number of opportunities that exist to enhance transport accessibility and connectivity in the County Borough. For example, reinstating the rail line between Neath and Merthyr via Hirwaun and making new road developments suitable for a cross-section of users.</p> <p>Puts forward a number of measures to reduce travel demand in RCT whilst encouraging economic growth and tackling climate change.</p> | <p>Comments are noted.</p> <p>All infrastructure schemes will be subject to the Business Case process which identifies whether a scheme is affordable and represents value for money. TfW Rail has reduced season ticket prices from stations located in the Heads of the Valleys for commuters travelling southwards to Pontypridd and Cardiff. It is envisaged that development and 'place making' opportunities will be identified around stations located on the South East Wales Metro network.</p> <p>Comments are noted. Measures and schemes are being looked at by Transport for Wales, in collaboration with the Regional Transport Authority, local authorities and transport operators. For example, the co-ordination of bus and rail services at key interchanges; improvements to stations in terms of making them more accessible and providing better facilities for passengers; extending passenger rail services to Hirwaun. The planned increase in frequency on Valley lines north of Cardiff will increase capacity. Where constraints exist along the single track sections, the provision of double tracks is being examined by Transport for Wales. Significant Sections of dual tracking are proposed as part of the Metro transformation of Core Valley Lines.</p> <p>As the highway authority, the Council has been investing in improvements along the principal bus corridors in RCT. These improvements cover roadside waiting facilities for passengers and tackling delays to local bus services. The Council has also been exploring the widespread provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure throughout RCT, both in residential areas and at key facilities.</p> <p>Requests for local bus services are brought to the attention of the local bus operators who determine the times and coverage of their commercial network. The role of the Council is to determine whether a social need exists for a local bus service, that is not being met by the commercial network. This is in terms of the availability of alternative</p> |

| | | <p>services, the level of access to key facilities and destinations and financial costs to the Council.</p> <p>Under current legislation, all new highway schemes must ensure that active travel provision (walking and cycling) is incorporated in the design of the scheme.</p> <p>The proposal to re-open the rail line between Neath and Merthyr Tydfil would be subject to the Welsh Government's business case process. Most of the existing rail alignment has not been safeguarded from development and this would have a substantial and negative impact on the engineering feasibility and financial costs of re-opening.</p> <p>The Council has implemented a number of measures across RCT to promote social distancing and accommodate changes to travel patterns as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The Council continues to promote homeworking for the majority of staff that are able to do so, thereby reducing travel demand, congestion and carbon footprint.</p> <p>With the support of the Council, local bus and taxis operators are investing in new fleets of modern, fully accessible, low emission vehicles.</p> |
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| NAME OF RESPONDENT | DETAILS OF SUBMISSION | RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL |
| Rhondda Tunnel Society | <p>The rail service will be a key resource bringing a large number of visitors to the Tunnel. An increase in service frequency will be important. The provision of a shuttle bus service and bike hire facilities is envisaged at the terminus station.</p> <p>It is important that the seating arrangement of the new rolling stock is flexible to accommodate cycles as well as wheelchair users and pushchairs.</p> | <p>Comments are noted. See response above.</p> <p>Transport for Wales is procuring the new rolling stock for use on the Core Valley Lines network. The carriages will be fully compliant with existing design standards and the internal layout will ensure sufficient capacity is provided to meet different passenger needs.</p> <p>The Council has commissioned a study to investigate a possible alignment for an active travel route along the Rhondda Fawr. A number of sections have already been constructed to serve key facilities which will eventually form part of a continuous route between Blaencwm and Porth.</p> |

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| | <p>A traffic free cycle path is essential to the Tunnel.</p> <p>There is inadequate Park and Ride facilities at some stations.</p> <p>There is a need to promote sustainable travel to the Tunnel which will have health benefits and relieve traffic congestion.</p> | <p>Responsibility for stations located along the Core Valley Lines north of Cardiff has been transferred from Network Rail to Transport for Wales. Maintenance and upgrade is being undertaken as part of the investment in the South East Wales Metro. These works will cover improved access for cyclists and people with reduced mobility as well as addressing the condition and capacity of Park & Ride sites.</p> <p>The Council, in partnership with a number of organisations and bodies such as Sustrans and Public Health Wales, is undertaking a number of measures to promote active travel and raise awareness of the health, economic and environmental benefits of cycling and walking. In addition to promoting the network of existing active travel routes. Full details are on the Council's website.</p> <p>A formal consultation exercise covering the development of active travel routes in Rhondda Cynon Taf will commence shortly, building on the recent online engagement which attracted 695 responses.</p> |
| Welcome to our Woods Create Your Space | Are supportive of the idea to restore a rail service to Tynnewydd village. | The potential extension of rail services from Treherbert to Tynnewydd has been included as part of a wider study looking at improved transport links to/from the Mid Valleys areas. Subject to funding, this study is expected to be commissioned in the current Financial year. |
| Ynysybwl & Coed y Cwm Community Council | <p>Construct a new rail station near Glyncoch with a Park & Ride facility. This will benefit residents who commute from the Ynysybwl area.</p> <p>YCC are fully supportive of investment and enhancement to the current transport system.</p> | <p>Responsibility for existing stations and the development of new stations along the Core Valley Lines network north of Cardiff lies with Transport for Wales. This proposal will need to be subject to achieving a satisfactory business case under the rail industry's GRIP (Governance in Rail Infrastructure Protocol) process.</p> <p>Comments are noted.</p> |

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972
as amended by
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL
19th JANUARY 2022

List of Background Papers

Report of the Service Director Democratic Services & Communication

Item - Overview & Scrutiny Working Group- The Development of Future Transport
Infrastructure in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Appendix 1 – Summary of Submissions

