

# THE FUTURE OF SWWITCH AND THE SWANSEA BAY CITY REGION

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Joint Committee has debated the future of SWWITCH over the last few meetings, in the context of both the Minister's stated views on the value of the consortia and also the development and emergence of the Swansea Bay City Region Board as a focus for delivering change in South West Wales.
- 1.2 SWWITCH has been supportive of the reasons for, and the development of, the City Region and has taken action in the last six months to more closely align the Regional Transport Plan programme with the City Region and the Economic Regeneration Strategy that underpins it.
- 1.3 This paper provides an update of actions since the last meeting and seeks Members views on an appropriate way forward.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014, the Minister wrote to the Chairs of each transport consortium and to All Council Leaders and also issued a statement on the future of transport planning in Wales. A copy of the Minister's letter to the SWWITCH Chair and her statement are attached as Appendix A and B for information.
- 2.2 In summary, the Minister confirmed that:
  - Regional Transport Consortia Grant (capital funding for RTP projects) would cease and be replaced by new Local Transport Fund and Road Safety Grant funding which would be paid via Local Authorities
  - Regional Transport Services Grant (revenue funding for bus and community transport support) would cease and be replaced by Bus Services Support Grant which would be paid via Local Authorities
  - Revenue funding for consortium staff (with the exception of the Travel Plan Co-ordinator post which is retained) will cease at the end of March 2014
  - Regional consortia are no longer required to oversee or co-ordinate funded projects or services
  - The City Region Boards (where they exist) will be asked to advise the Minister on priorities in their areas
  - A new National Transport Plan (NTP) will be published by the end of March 2015 and the City Region Board will be asked to highlight priorities in their areas for the NTP and to assist the Minister in her review of further improvements to transport planning and delivery
  - Local transport Authorities will be issued with guidance on meeting their statutory duty in relation to transport planning (Local Transport Plans)
- 2.3 SWWITCH Directors held an emergency meeting within a week of the announcements to plan a way forward, especially in view of the staffing implications implicit in the withdrawal of revenue funding.

- 2.4 It was seen as a priority by all four Directors to continue work collectively on the bus funding and so the Regional Bus Funding Officer post was maintained (see also Item 4).
- 2.5 The Chair responded to the Minister on 28<sup>th</sup> January and confirmed the SWWITCH support for, and willingness to work with, the City Region Board and in particular in terms of providing advice on transport issues. A copy of the chair's letter is attached as Appendix C.
- 2.6 The letter also confirmed the intention to continue to work together on bus funding. On a more practical note the letter sought some additional funding in recognition of the fact that insufficient notice had been given of the change of funding regimes to allow the affected staff to be given notice before the end of April, which in effect meant costs accruing back to the four Councils for pay and redundancy payments.
- 2.7 With the exception of the Travel Plan Co-ordinator and the Regional Bus Officer the remainder of the SWWITCH team were given formal notice.

### **3.0 CHANGES IN LAST TWO MONTHS**

- 3.1 At the Swansea Bay City Region Board meeting on 30th January 2014, Richard Workman as Lead Chief Officer for SWWITCH presented a paper on future arrangements for transport in the City Region. This paper set out:
- The changes to the organisation of strategic transport announced by the Minister
  - The Minister's expectation that it would be the City Region Board which would determine transport priorities and provide advice on transport issues
  - The SWWITCH alignment with the City Region agenda
  - The draft 2014/15 transport programme, based on City Region principles
  - An offer of pump priming to provide a senior level transport resource to the Board for a year to facilitate the discussion on options, determination of priorities and the development of a programme for the future
- 3.2 The Board endorsed the report including the draft 2014/15 programme and agreed to the future arrangements proposed. The notice served on the SWWITCH Co-ordinator was rescinded and the Co-ordinator will provide advice on strategic transport issues to the City Region from 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- 3.3 The Co-ordinator prepared a paper (for information) to the 25<sup>th</sup> March City Region Board meeting providing some background to strategic transport decision making to date and outlining how the Board could seek to influence decisions in the future. A verbal update will be provided to Joint Committee.
- 3.4 At SWWITCH Management Group at the end of February there was an outline discussion about the practical impacts of change to the role of the consortium. This included:
- SWWITCH Joint Committee
  - SWWITCH Officer level Groups

- Name, logo and branding

3.5 It is for Joint Committee to determine a way forward and some background and detail in respect of each of the above is set out in the following sections.

#### **4.0 SWWITCH JOINT COMMITTEE**

4.1 Joint Committee was formed in 2005 and its powers and responsibilities are set out in a Legal Agreement signed by each of the Authorities. The Committee directed the development of the statutory Regional Transport Plan which has provided the strategic framework for transport development and delivery for the last five years.

4.2 Joint Committee was also formed at a time when SWWITCH was receiving annual allocations. The allocation (used to fund staff and commissions) was paid to Swansea as host financial Authority. Since 2010/11 SWWITCH has also received capital allocation (again paid via Swansea) from the Regional Transport Consortia Grant funding. In the 2013/14 year SWWITCH has received bus revenue funding for the region.

4.3 As the Minister has now confirmed that no funding will come via the consortia from 31<sup>st</sup> March and responsibilities for future plan development will rest with individual Authorities (Local Transport Plans) or be based on advice on strategic transport issues from the City Region Boards (National Transport Plan) the issue now is whether there is a function for the Joint Committee.

4.4 There are three potential options for Joint Committee to consider as follows:

Option One - Carry on meeting as a formal Joint Committee, but with no decision making powers or budget.

Option Two – continue quarterly or twice yearly meetings but as a Regional Transport Forum, acting as a conduit for the sharing of information and best practice to/from Local Authorities and the City Region Board. This would also provide an ongoing platform for transport organisations to share forward proposals and business plans with the region.

Option Three -Agree to disband the and cease meetings altogether

4.5 Agreement to pursue Option 2 or 3 will have implications on the SWWITCH Legal Agreement. It is likely such proposals would need to be placed before each Individual Authority to seek approval to end the agreement and to share any joint assets that exist.

#### **5.0 SWWITCH OFFICER LEVEL GROUPS**

5.1 Supporting Joint Committee has always been the SWWITCH Management Group (Directors with transport responsibilities and transport strategy Officers from each Authority) and the SWWITCH Officer Working Group (transport strategy Officers from each Authority). It is suggested these Officer level groups are retained as

follows:

- Regional Transport Directors Group
- Regional Transport Planning Group

But that it is for Directors to determine the frequency of the meetings and changes necessary to meet needs as they arise.

5.2 A number of other Groups have developed over the years to address more specific issues and needs. These include:

- Programme Management Group
- Regional Road Safety Group
- Passenger Transport Working Group
- Walking and Cycling Group

5.3 The Programme Management Group was introduced to oversee the Regional Transport Consortia Grant allocation. It has worked well for the last four years, but with funding for RTP projects now directed to individual authorities, it's primary function has been removed and it is no longer needed.

5.4 The other Groups still have distinctive roles to play in supporting joint working and securing the benefits of collaboration across administrative boundaries. It is proposed that the Groups determine the most appropriate frequency of meetings to meet needs and issues and that the Groups report to the Regional Directors Group no less than twice a year, but more frequently where guidance or decisions are required.

## **6.0 NAME, LOGO AND BRANDING**

6.1 There are concerns that the consortia "brands" adopted have now become detrimental to future joint working as they have negative connotations associated with "failure to deliver" and "bureaucracy". SWWITCH has had a strong and consistent brand which is well used, well known and distinctive.

6.2 However, it is proposed that the future regional working and collaboration does not sit under a SWWITCH Banner and that the name, logo and branding associated with the consortium is withdrawn. This does have practical implications as there are a number of documents, proforma and concessionary passes etc which are in use with the SWWITCH logo on them.

6.3 A pragmatic approach would be to continue to use those resources (such as Concessionary bus passes) where there is a clear cost associated with replacement, but to remove the name and logo on any re-issue of materials or circulation of proforma etc.

6.4 More immediate change could be applied to material in electronic form and the SWWITCH website could be withdrawn with any "live" material (RTP, Bus Strategy etc) being accessed via individual LA websites.

6.5 It is proposed that future collaboration could take place under the name of the South West Wales Regional Transport Group or Forum and where appropriate the four Authority Logos are used.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 It is RECOMMENDED that:

1. Joint Committee notes the withdrawal of functions and funding from the consortium with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 and the implications on the SWWITCH team
2. Joint Committee supports the utilisation of the SWWITCH Co-ordinator to provide strategic transport advice to the City Region Board and thus retaining the strong link with the four Authorities in the region
3. Regional Officer Working Groups are retained where a clear role and benefit is evident
4. The name, logo and branding associated with SWWITCH is withdrawn as proposed

A further recommendation will be proposed depending on the outcome of discussion on the future of Joint Committee