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Datblygu Trafnidiaeth Cymru yn y
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Ymateb gan Frederick Chandos

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee
The future development of Transport
for Wales
Evidence from Frederick Chandos

Thank you for inviting comments to your inquiry into the future development of Transport for Wales. My reply will focus on the three substantive questions you asked, and I will also add an additional comment of my own.

Whether the current governance, structure and funding of Transport for Wales are effective and transparent.

What action should be taken to develop these aspects of the organisation? And what other governance models and good practice are available?

I will answer these two connection questions together. As Transport for Wales was set up in 2016, it was slightly disconcerting to observe how long they took to recruit staff into their structure and appear to be doing so. Furthermore, it is of concern at the low level of direct transport experience amongst the non-executive board and the senior management level compared to other transport authorities, such as Transport Scotland and Transport for London. It is potentially challenging that the current Chief Executive has no direct experience in the transport industry at a senior level, and is also one understands only on secondment from Welsh Government to the Transport for Wales organisation.

Outside of the civil service in Wales, there exists a great deal of expertise and knowledge amongst transport operators, local government and private consultancies and looking at the structure and staffing it is not clear as to how much of that Welsh understanding and expertise has been drawn upon. As the organisation grows, develops and matures its experience will undoubtedly increase but as recent evidence sessions to Committees of the Assembly has shown, the lack of knowledge and experience in the field of transport operations does have the potential to create challenges and hurdles to Transport for Wales ability to deliver on its objectives as set by the Welsh Government

Nonetheless, the publication by Transport for Wales of their board meetings are to be applauded and I hope they continue to publish them along with documentations such as business plans and consider proposals for some form of public facing meeting of Transport for Wales to allow better public understanding of their work. One note, on which I have no strong view, is that the last meeting

minutes suggested Welsh Government will no longer attend Transport for Wales Board Meetings. One can presume that dialogue between Transport for Wales and Welsh Government officials will continue, and I would hope that that dialogue is open, transparent and which can be scrutinised as schemes and policies are developed.

One of the major challenges facing the former regional transport consortia was in how they received funding, it was always on a yearly basis, sometimes confirmed late by Welsh Government. It was also like Transport for Wales dependent on the one source of funding – Welsh Government. Some English and Scottish transport authorities have a mechanism which allows them to develop a funding source through a collection of a local levy from the public or local businesses. I am not sure if Transport for Wales is able to do under its conditions; regional consortia under the purview of local authorities however could through the many mechanisms available to local authorities available to raise funding. Council tax levy, business rates, use of car parking revenue surpluses. Having another regular and increasing source of funding would be enormously useful for Transport for Wales, and especially for regional transport consortia if reconstituted to begin to develop longer programmes and a pipeline of schemes in the three stages of a good project, concept, detailed development, build. Moreover, such a funding source could be used to support a wider range of train and bus services, offer cheaper travel for example. The opportunities are manifold. However, the opportunities will only be realised if there is a funding route available and I would support Transport for Wales given the powers to do that.

The future role of Transport for Wales in delivering transport policy. What additional responsibilities should it take on and how should these integrate with the role of the Welsh Government, local government and emerging regional transport authorities?

Transport for Wales officials have publicly said on a number of occasions that they do not develop transport policy – that is the role of Welsh Government. That is a reasonable position, although again I would hope that Transport for Wales is strong enough to challenge any policy proposed by Welsh Government that is unrealistic and undeliverable. For example, it has been shown with some of the recent pronouncements by Welsh Government and Transport for Wales have led to the raising of unrealistic expectations amongst passengers and shown a lack of circumspection, or lack of real understanding of how railway operations work. Before taking on additional responsibilities, Transport for Wales should focus on more regular, transparent and more honest engagement with all stakeholders, and the travelling public. If needs be that may necessitate challenge to unrealistic political expectations and demands put upon what is as I say a complex logistical operation of running thousands of services a day. Moreover, and I understand this is being addressed it would be good to see more direct experience of operating

bus or rail services visible across the organisation, and possibly in Welsh Government as well.

There is both a sense of frustration, irony and excitement that regional transport authorities are back on the agenda. One frustration observing transport in Wales over the last 20 years has been in the uneven relationships between National and Local Government. The forced demise of the regional transport consortia (which were in effect quasi regional transport authorities and good at their job) - left a vacuum, in terms of not just policy and project development, but also in maintaining that local democratic link with communities which at the moment Transport for Wales clearly does not possess. I understand that Transport for Wales is developing its regional coverage, although at the moment it is not clear how that is being progressed. I would hope that we have addressed some of the tensions between local government and Welsh Government, and now Transport for Wales that permeated through the last 20 years.

I would conclude with a final observation about the nomenclature and how it has the potential to lead to confusion amongst many not involved in transport directly, about what Transport for Wales is, what Transport for Wales Rail Services is, and who are Keolis Amey Cmyru.

Some were never convinced about giving another brand name to the Wales and Borders rail franchise: indeed it was one of the running issues with the last franchise operated by Arriva that the good work that had been developed in creation and recognition of the Wales and Borders and Valley Lines brand was lost in handover to Arriva. That decision cannot be reversed sadly, but it has left us with unnecessary opportunities for confusion and obfuscation as to who is responsible for what aspects of delivery of transport services and projects in Wales. For example to some it will be seen that Transport for Wales will potentially be able to fine Transport for Wales Rail services, should the latter fail to deliver on the contract. I am not convinced that possible perception will be helpful for Transport for Wales, and would require strong management and the setting out of clear lines of demarcation between the client side of Transport for Wales and customer side of Transport for Wales.