



**A virtual meeting of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise
Partnership
Cheshire and Warrington Local Transport Body
held on
Friday, 26th March, 2021**

PRESENT

Councillor C Browne (Chairman)
Councillors K Shore and H Mundry

Officers in attendance

Sarah Baxter, Cheshire East Council
Chris Hindle, Cheshire East Council
John Hope, Highways England
Stephen Hunter, Warrington Borough Council
Kristy Littler, Cheshire West & Chester Council
Josie Lloyd, Cheshire East Council
Roy Newton, C&WLEP
Andrew Ross, Cheshire East Council
Jamal Saddique, Department for Transport
Sam Wheelan, Network Rail

42 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor C Browne be appointed as Chairman and Councillor K Shore was be appointed as Vice Chairman for the meeting.

43 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2020 be approved as a correct record.

46 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

47 DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT UPDATE

Jamal Saddique from the Department for Transport attended the virtual meeting and gave an update in respect of the following matters:-

- **Budget** – this had recently been set with focus on four main themes: Covid-19 measures, measures to protect jobs, public finances and investment based recovery;
- **Levelling Up Fund** – this was aimed at schemes delivered within two to three years. A number of questions had already been received which required further discussion with government partners but were being responded to. Further DfT guidance would be published in due course;
- **Bus strategy** – this would have a significant impact on partners and whilst it was being backed by funding, the DfT would be asking for a commitment from local authorities by 30 June to indicate whether they would be pursuing an enhanced partnership or a franchising arrangement. It was anticipated that by 31 October local authorities would have published a bus service improvement plan;
- **Covid-19** - work was being undertaken to look at the impact of the pandemic and review social distancing measures. News was expected in April on recovery planning and what support could be put in place if social distancing was not lifted as expected. There had been reports of overcrowding on buses in some urban areas which could become an issue as restrictions were eased although this was being monitored;
- **Northern Transport Acceleration Council (NTAC) meeting** – a meeting of the NTAC had recently taken place and a further one was scheduled for June but it was noted that there may be a series of topical sessions aimed at officer level which would be set up in the interim.

A question was asked as to when the Levelling Up Fund would become available and what the timescales were. The Board was advised that, while not much detail could be provided on this now, guidance would be coming soon to address these queries. Further to this, a question was raised querying whether the funding would be subject to a bidding process. The Board was informed that the forthcoming guidance would address this, but that the current understanding was that this would not be subject to a bidding process.

RESOLVED

1. That the update be noted.
2. That guidance on the Levelling Up Fund be shared when available.

48 HIGHWAYS ENGLAND UPDATE

John Hope, representing Highways England, attended the virtual meeting and gave a verbal update which included information on the following:-

- **Current traffic levels on the strategic road network** - had reduced by 25% compared to the same month in 2020 although there had been a 3% increase in the past week which showed a general upward trend;
- **M6 Junction 19 scheme** – was preparing to open up to traffic in August 2021 with two more weekend closures planned in April;
- **Route strategy process** – major scheme improvements were being developed for the next road improvement period which would be 2025 – 2030. Problem areas were being identified in each county and an external engagement phase would begin soon;
- **Smart motorway stocktake and action plan** – had gained considerable media coverage. Recommendations had been made for improving safety on smart motorways and a motorway development group had been established to accelerate the delivery of key actions from the stocktake, such as reducing the distance between emergency stopping areas and speeding up the rollout of stopped vehicle detection technology;
- **Highways England's net zero carbon plan** – strategy was expected to be launched in May 2021;
- **M62 Junction 10-12 scheme** – was now complete;
- **M56 Junction 6-8** - work was progressing well and expected to open for traffic in May 2022;
- **M6 Junction 19 scheme** – was expected to open for traffic in August 2021. It was noted that this was opening earlier than planned which was positive. Two more weekend closures were expected in April

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

49 NETWORK RAIL UPDATE

Sam Wheelan, representing Network Rail, delivered a verbal update to the Board on behalf of Network Rail, including information on the following areas:-

- **Covid-19** – had impacted rail travel with passenger numbers significantly reduced since February 2020. There had not yet been a recovery although there were plans in place;

- **Manchester recovery task force** – was developing a more robust timetable for travel through Manchester with the intention to implement in 2022. A consultation on this had recently closed and the task force was considering the responses. It was noted that the time taken to develop a timetable was approximately one year so a decision on which option to take would need to be made quickly;
- **‘Restoring Your Railway’ project** – looked at lines which were previously closed. Beeston Castle and Tarporley had been successful and would be progressing. It was noted that the LEP had agreed to provide a financial contribution to this re-opening work;
- **Chester Station** – work was being undertaken to understand the future forecast demand and what needed to be done to accommodate it, including capacity analysis and timetabling solutions. A number of concept options would be developed and potential funding opportunities were being looked into.

Questions were asked as to when service reductions may improve and what funding opportunities may be available. It was agreed that Sam Wheelan would take these questions away and provide an update.

RESOLVED

1. That the update be noted.
2. That responses be provided to the questions raised.

50 HS2 AND CREWE HUB UPDATE

Chris Hindle, representing Cheshire East Council attended the meeting to provide a verbal update on HS2 and the Crewe Hub.

The Board was advised that HS2 phase 2A had gained royal assent on 11 February and a subsequent planning application was expected in April. A consultation on the impact on road traffic as a result of the works on phase 2A and other implications, such as on the natural environment, had been undertaken and closed on 26 February.

Network Rail had been commissioned for design work on Crewe Hub station and a planning application was expected in early 2022. A response from the government on the business case for the hub was awaited. Network Rail and the HS2 design team were anticipating a major investment decision from the government to support the work in October.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

51 NORTHERN POWERHOUSE RAIL UPDATE

The Board received a report on the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR). Stephen Hunter, representing Warrington Borough Council advised the Board that considerable progress had been made on the business case. The strategic outline case was due to be submitted by the end of March 2021 but a decision was taken to delay the publication to reflect the integrated rail plan expected in the spring.

The strategic outline case would present a confirmed option for the NPR network across the north of England.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

52 TRANSPORT FOR THE NORTH UPDATE

The Board received an update report on Transport for the North (TFN). TFN had been informed of its funding settlement for 2021-22 which was a substantial reduction in the core funding although most of the reduction had been able to be mitigated. The budget had now been set for this period.

Future funding had been withdrawn for integrated and smart travel and this programme would be wound up by the end of March 2021.

There was a board meeting scheduled to take place later in the week where the main items discussed would be the confirmation of the business plan for next year, budget setting, confirmation of the corporate risk register and a governance report.

It was also noted that TFN was currently in the process of recruiting a new Chief Executive Officer.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

53 BUS STRATEGY UPDATE

It was noted that the LEP had provided funding to develop a sub-regional bus strategy with the aim to work out what the issues were across the sub-region and what measures local authorities could look at to support bus services. This work would look at the situation prior to Covid-19 and also the impact of the pandemic in considering how to get people back on buses. A national strategy had also been published and, following this, a meeting had taken place with consultants to look at what implications the national strategy would have on sub-regional work. The consultants would be providing suggestions in the next couple of weeks and it was agreed that Roy would circulate this for comments when available.

RESOLVED

1. That the update be noted.
2. That the consultants' suggestions be circulated for comments when available.

54 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATES

Updates were provided for each local authority. Highlights included:

Cheshire West and Chester

- **Bus Strategy** – draft recommendations, aligning with the national and regional bus strategies, had been sent to the scrutiny panel;
- **Local Growth Fund Schemes** – work was currently ongoing on a number of schemes, including: A51 Tarvin to Chester Improvement Scheme, A5117 Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements, Chester to Ellesmere Port Canal Towpath Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements;
- **Chester E-Scooter Trial** – had been operational since 21 December 2020 and was being introduced in a phased approach.

Warrington

- **Centre Park Link** – was now open to traffic;
- **Omega area** – good progress was being made and was due to be completed this summer;
- **Access Fund allocation** - currently in the process of delivering schemes through this, including a sustainable travel package and a bus depot with provision for electric buses.

Cheshire East

- **Congleton Link Road** – due to open 19 April. Opening was expected to be low key due to Covid-19 restrictions and the Purdah period, although there would be an official opening later in the year;
- **Poynton Relief Road** – work was underway and due to open in summer 2022;
- **NW Crewe Package** – work was commencing and construction was due to start in 2022;
- **Middlewich Eastern Bypass** – construction was due to start in summer 2022;
- **A500 Dualling** - site works were scheduled to start in summer 2022 subject to CPO progress.

RESOLVED

That the updates be noted.

55 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Roy Newton informed the Board that LEP funding would be available to support business case development and it was noted that he would provide the Board with suggestions for bidding into the fund for comments.

56 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

That the date of the next meeting take place on Friday 25 June 2021.