

COMMUNITY COUNCIL LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE - 18TH OCTOBER 2006

SUBJECT: IMPROVEMENTS TO THE RAILWAY SYSTEM IN THE CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH

1. As part of a regional programme to enhance rail facilities in south east Wales, the county borough is benefiting from significant investment in its rail infrastructure. The development of rail services in south east Wales is led by the regional transport consortium – Sewta (South East Wales Transport Alliance) with core funding from the Assembly Government through Transport Grant, with supplementary funding from other sources such as WEFO (Objective One) and the Corus Regeneration Fund.
2. The Sewta rail improvement programme covers the period up to 2010 and was developed over many years through rigorous assessment processes and consists of a range of measures including new passenger lines and stations, increased service levels, capacity and line speed enhancements and improved stations. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to the Sewta rail improvement programme and it is a key element of the Assembly Government's vision of an integrated transport system and will deliver a strategic fit between their transport objectives and their vision set out in Wales: A Better Country - the Spatial Plan for Wales: People, Places and Future and the emerging Wales Transport Strategy.
3. The Rhymney Line is currently experiencing the highest growth on the Valley Lines network and will receive a significant proportion of the funding available. Implementation is in three phases and these are summarised below:
 - Phase 1 - to develop and implement the works needed to permit the increase of the train service frequency on the Rhymney Valley Line to four trains per hour between Cardiff and Bargoed to facilitate the operation of the Standard Pattern Timetable, introduced by Arriva Trains Wales in December 2005. The scheme included the provision of axle counters between Aber and Ystrad Mynach and the provision of two new signals at Llanbradach; axle counters between Ystrad Mynach and Bargoed and the repositioning of an existing signal; the provision of additional track at Bargoed Station to facilitate more flexible train working. Phase 1 cost £2.8million and works were completed in March 2006 on schedule and within budget. For passengers, this means a train every 15 minutes to Cardiff from stations at Bargoed, Pengam, Hengoed, Ystrad Mynach, Llanbradach, Aber and Caerphilly. Many trains have four carriages, so available seats have increased, particularly during peak times. The extra seats and improved frequency means that there are plenty of seats available at off peak times. From Bargoed, the journey time to Cardiff (Queen Street) is 37 minutes; from Caerphilly it is only 14 minutes and latest figures show that reliability in respect of timetable is over 90%. Park and Ride facilities are available at many stations, including Rhymney, Pengam, Hengoed, Ystrad Mynach, Aber and Caerphilly.
 - Phase 2 – The lengthening of existing station platforms on the railway line between Rhymney and Penarth. To address the current capacity constraints on certain journeys, station platforms will be lengthened where possible to accommodate six carriage trains. The Council has recently signed a legal agreement with Network Rail to undertake the works, which will be carried out by a contractor appointed by Network Rail. The project covers the extension of 24 platforms at 15 stations, signage works at Caerphilly Station

(which does not require platform extensions), modification of the siding arrangement at Rhymney, signalling and accommodation works at 8 stations (Bargoed, Pengam, Hengoed, Llanbradach, Aber, Lisvane and Thornhill, Llanishen and Heath High Level). At Rhymney, the modification of the siding arrangement at the Station is necessary to provide the level of stabling required for 4 x 6 car trains and 1 x 4 car train and the associated relocation of Arriva Trains Wales crew accommodation. Physical works are expected to commence in February 2007, with completion expected by the end of 2007, with a total expected cost of around £7million.

- Phase 3 - comprises a number of discrete rail infrastructure improvement projects, which are being taken forward through Network Rail and include alterations to the track and signalling to facilitate a doubling of the train frequency between Rhymney and Bargoed. This will allow a half hourly service to operate from Rhymney through to Cardiff and Penarth, with the frequency between Bargoed and Cardiff remaining as the existing (every 15 minutes). The scheme also includes the provision of a simple station facility at Energlyn, consisting of two new platforms, an improved underpass, with ramped access to the south bound platform, passenger waiting shelters, passenger information boards, real time passenger information displays, CCTV and passenger help points and improved lighting to all approaches. This phase is programmed for completion by 2010 and more detailed costs are currently awaited, although an indicative cost of £20million is included in the Transport Grant bid.
4. The other major rail scheme for Caerphilly is the reopening of the Ebbw Valley Railway line. The project involves upgrading the existing Ebbw Valley Line (comprising the Western Valley Line and Ebbw Branch) to accommodate passenger services from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff and Newport. The project includes the construction of six stations to serve the communities along the line – in Caerphilly these are at Newbridge, Crosskeys and Risca / Pontymister. The main construction works started in September 2006 and services are planned to commence with an hourly passenger service from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff in summer 2007, a later phase will introduce an hourly service from Ebbw Vale to Newport. The capital cost of the project is estimated to be £29.2million and the Assembly Government has confirmed its support for the first three years revenue support for the project.
 5. In parallel with the improvements to the rail service, the Council has developed park and ride provision in the county borough. Since 2000, there has been a significant expansion of car parking spaces at Caerphilly and Ystrad Mynach Stations, whilst new facilities have been provided at Aber and Pengam stations, together with improved security measures at most sites. On the Ebbw Valley Line, car parking will be provided at Newbridge and Risca / Pontymister stations.
 6. The significant investment to improve the capacity of the rail network will contribute to the development of a more sustainable transport system by increasing its attractiveness to a wider section of the community, improving travel choice and providing an acceptable alternative mode of travel to the private car. The associated reduction in car usage will lead to a reduction in vehicle emissions, and noise and vibration along the roads surrounding the rail corridors.
 7. The package of improvements will also assist the economic regeneration of those areas of high unemployment within the upper valleys, by enabling local people to access education and training opportunities, as well as by extending the catchment of the labour market to access jobs in the major employment locations within Cardiff.
 8. Sewta has published a Rail Strategy for 2009 to 2018 to build on the current and ongoing investment in the capacity and performance of the rail network. It includes consideration of the provision of additional train units and the the renewal of existing train stock; station improvements, including new park and ride provision; reliability and capacity improvements to reduce train delays and improve operational performance; further frequency enhancements on existing lines; network extensions and additional Rail-Link bus services. The Strategy will

be developed and implemented through Sewta in conjunction with the Assembly Government and should lead to further improvements in the rail services within the county borough during the next decade and beyond.