

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Thursday, 3rd December, 2015

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston and McGimpsey; and
Councillors Attwood, Beattie, Craig,
Dudgeon, Graham, Howard, Kyle,
Magee, McAteer, McDonough-Brown,
Ó Donnghaile, O'Hara and Walsh.

Also attended: Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Boyle, Brown, Copeland
and Johnston.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

BCCM - Request to Present

The Committee agreed that Belfast City Centre Management be invited to present at the meeting on 9th December.

Presentations

Transport NI - Autumn Report

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. K. Monaghan, Eastern Divisional Manager, Mr. B. O'Neill, Belfast North Section Engineer, and Mr. G. McKibbin, Belfast South Section Engineer from Transport NI were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. Monaghan provided an overview of the main strategic transportation issues for the city, namely the York Street Interchange and Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT). He outlined that a public inquiry had taken place, between 10th and 12th November, on the York Street Interchange. He advised the Committee that inspectors were now considering the issues raised and that a report would be due by the end of January 2016.

He then provided the Committee with an update on the progress of the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme, where work had taken place in both the east and west of the city. He reminded the Members that Transport NI had implemented a temporary embargo on work over the Christmas period to refrain from causing any unnecessary traffic disruption but that work would recommence in January.

During discussion, a Member had raised a query regarding residents parking schemes. In response, the representatives from Transport NI advised that they would like to see them introduced in a number of areas as they would integrate into the city's overall transportation strategy but that, despite considerable efforts, it had not been possible to secure community consensus to implement a scheme in any of the proposed locations yet. In response to a further Member's question in relation to the Belfast City Centre Ring - South Section, Mr. Monaghan explained that the scheme would be reduced in scale from what had previously been proposed in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP). He explained that it would focus on the needs of public transport, pedestrians and cyclists, as well as general traffic, and take cognisance of potential redevelopment opportunities.

Another Member advised that a number of the streetlights were no longer working on the Sydenham bypass, between the Connsbank Road and the Belfast City Airport, and there had been three accidents in the last few weeks. The Transport NI representatives advised that they were aware of this and that it was a Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) issue. They advised also that there were 15 lights which needed repaired and that they had been programmed for repair but that they would liaise with NIE again to see if the repairs could be expedited.

A further Member outlined to the Transport NI representatives that he had been in contact with Transport NI in relation to a number of accidents at the pedestrian crossing at the junction of the Ravenhill Road/My Ladys Road. Mr. Monaghan advised that Transport NI would carry out an inspection and that it could be repainted if it was deemed necessary

A number of Members raised the following issues with the representatives from Transport NI:

- budget cuts;
- issues with a number of speed humps;
- plans to widen the Sydenham by-pass;
- plans to expand the safe cycle network into residential areas outside of the city centre;
- a number of unadopted alleyways in the city;
- proposed new pedestrian bridge at the Gasworks (different branch in the department – will come back to you)
- visual improvements for the bridge at Finaghy Road North;

Before the representatives retired from the meeting Mr. Monaghan advised the Committee that Mr. O'Neill would be retiring from his position in Transport NI at the end

of January 2016 and a number of Members paid tribute to his work with the Council over the years.

Translink - Transport Hub

The Committee was advised that Mr. C. Conway, Group Chief Executive of Translink, Mr. L. McComb, Programme Director for the Belfast Hub, and Mr. F. Panayides, Project Architect from John McAslan and Partners were in attendance to present on the new Belfast Transport Hub and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. Conway advised that the current Great Victoria Street Bus and Rail Station currently handled 12million passenger movements per year and that that was expected to double in the future. He outlined that the Belfast Hub, on the same site, would be a transport led regeneration project which would seek to support sustainable economic growth. He explained that the Hub would act as a gateway not only to Belfast but to Northern Ireland as a whole and that the aim for the architect was to create a high quality arrival experience into the city.

He explained to the Committee that Translink had been working closely with the Council during the proposals for a Transport Hub and that it was keen to continue to work together to make the most of such an opportunity for Belfast. The Members were also reminded that, in order for the Hub to be a success, policy decisions in support of public transport would be required.

Mr. McComb explained to the Members that new transport hubs which had been built in large cities had played a valuable part for city investment and had played a significant role in the growth of the economy. The Committee was advised that there was wide evidence to show that new stations similar to the one proposed for Belfast had acted as a catalyst for broader development and regeneration.

During discussion, a Member asked how the Sandy Row area would be affected by the new Hub. In response, the Translink representatives explained that they would work with the local community and, through the layout of the regeneration scheme, were seeking to encourage footfall to Sandy Row. In response to a further Member's question, Mr Conway stated that Translink did not intend to sell off any assets in order to pay for the Hub.

Mr. Panayides outlined the three options for the design of the new Hub and explained that all options included:

- double the number of rail platforms;
- an increased number of bus stands;
- the Enterprise service relocated from Belfast Central;
- integration with Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT);
- an attractive arrival experience; and
- a mixed use regeneration scheme
- impact on the retail offer in the surrounding area

A number of Members suggested that they would like to see a joined up public transport network, with connections between the two Belfast airports and Dublin airport, an extension of the rail network across the city and a new rail station to service the Ulster University in York Street.

In response to a Member's question, Mr. Conway advised that Translink was investigating an integrated ticketing system for all public transport and that a tendering process would be undertaken in the next few weeks.

Members were supportive and could see the benefits of Option 1 in linking the arrival point to Great Victoria Street, opening the regeneration project up to the surrounding communities and maximising the commercial attractiveness of the regeneration land.

After further discussion the representatives from Translink retired from the meeting.

SONI

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. R. McCormick, General Manager of SONI, and Mr. S. Brennan, North South Interconnector Project Manager, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. McCormick explained to the Members that the role of Systems Operator Northern Ireland (SONI) was to organise and develop the transmission network, enabling large amounts of electricity to be moved from one area to another and ensuring that there was adequate power to meet demand. The Committee was advised that this role had formerly been undertaken by Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) but that SONI had now been licensed to carry out this critical function. The representatives from SONI outlined the locations of the generators throughout Northern Ireland and explained that the increasing number of wind farms on private land had ensured a decrease in the wholesale price of electricity.

Mr. Brennan explained that a large number of businesses, especially those involved in renewable energy, were keen to see a second interconnector between the north and south of Ireland, because the northern grid was often overloaded. Members were advised that, at present, cross-border electricity suppliers were not able to share electricity at peak times in the volumes that they would like and that a second North South Interconnector would allow cheaper surplus energy generated on one side of the border to be shared by customers on the other side. The Committee was advised that the Interconnector would cost around £204million but that it was vital given Northern Ireland's low surplus.

After a number of questions from Members, the Committee was invited to visit the SONI headquarters at a future date and the SONI representatives outlined that they would appreciate a letter of support from the Council in relation to the timely establishment of a second North South interconnector as outlined.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they left the meeting.

Water Infrastructure

The Director of Property and Projects outlined to the Committee the Living with Water Programme (LWWP) which aimed to protect the city, enhance existing drainage infrastructure and allow the city to grow in economic terms. He explained that the DRD was fully aware that the Belfast drainage infrastructure was inadequate in terms of dealing with flood risk, pollution of the Belfast Lough which could lead to contravention with EU standards and a lack of capacity in the main Waste Water Treatment plant at Duncrue.

The Committee was informed that, in order to address these issues and to ensure that the city could grow both in terms of business and residential development, the DRD had developed the LWWP which aimed to create a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan.

The Director explained that there were a range of key stakeholders addressing water related issues, including the DRD, Rivers Agency, the DoE as well as subsidiary organisations such as NI Water and Transport NI. The Committee was advised that the Council also had a key role given that it would produce the Local Development Plan, it owned large areas of open space which were suitable for drainage relief, and it was the direct point of contact for a large number of citizens through the elected Members.

The Members were advised that a group of officers from across these organisations had been working to produce a coherent plan and that, currently, estimates to undertake a suitable programme of works ranged from £350m to £750m and would take an estimated 10 years to deliver. The Director highlighted to the Members that, not only would the funding have to be found for the significant upgrades to the infrastructure, reminding Members that water charges were payable in England, there would also be a period of disruption when these works were being undertaken and that clear communication would be vital throughout the process in order not to have a significant impact on the city's economic growth.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to invite NI Water to a future special meeting in order to discuss the City's infrastructure.

Chairperson