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Metro rail for south east Wales task force appointed

A task force is being set up to drive forward plans for a metro-style rail system in south east Wales.

Supporters are calling for fast "turn up and go" services across the region to boost growth and social inclusion.

The group will meet before Christmas and will make recommendations by early 2013, also looking at the north Wales rail network.

Transport Minister Carl Sargeant said it was important to maximise the benefits of rail electrification.

In a written statement, Mr Sargeant said the setting up of the task force builds on discussions with the head of South East Wales Transport Alliance (Sewta) whose membership includes all 10 local authorities across south east Wales.

Their Sewta Metro Plus idea envisages passengers being able to travel across the region, stretching from Bridgend to Monmouthshire, in 45 minutes from either Cardiff or Newport.

"Good transport is critical for both economic growth and social inclusion and the reduction of poverty," said Mr Sargeant.

Employment prospects

"Our absolute priority as a government is to create jobs and enable growth - and it is clear that transport services have an important role to play in that."

The minister said he wanted an integrated transport system that links the most economically developed areas of the region with the populations in the most deprived communities.

"This will improve employment prospects and thereby reduce poverty," Mr Sargeant said.

"It will allow a truly regional approach to the planning of transport that links into wider plans for economic development, housing and regeneration and improving the environment".

The minister will be asking partners including Network Rail, CBI Wales, train and bus operators, Wales TUC and Sustrans to join the task force.

Ticketing

He said the task force will be asked to provide recommendations for:

A clear identity for the integrated transport initiative reflecting its fully pan-region purpose

A timetable that supports unified integrated transport and that sets clear aspirations for maximum journey times and minimum frequencies to and from key points

A set of minimum standards for ticketing, accessibility, affordability and accountability, with integrated ticketing a key aim

An appropriate governance arrangement to drive this forward

In north Wales, Mr Sargeant said a modernised railway could form the spine of an integrated transport system.

"We can build on discussions that I have already opened with the UK government on the case for rail modernisation for north Wales and its key routes.

"This includes the North Wales Coast Main Line between Holyhead, via Chester, and Crewe, the north-south routes to/from Wrexham, Manchester and Cardiff and direct connections between North Wales and Liverpool."

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