# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **North Wales Metro update** |
| **DATE** | **28 October 2019** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy and Transport** |

The Welsh Government is striving for a more prosperous and equal nation. As part of our Economic Action Plan we are committed to working regionally to help achieve this.

As I set out in my vision for the Metro in North Wales in March 2017, we will invest in all modes to deliver the modern, high quality transport system that is fundamental to achieving our sustainability and climate change objectives and delivering economic growth across North Wales, connecting people to jobs and services and businesses to markets. Demonstrating our commitment to make such an investment will provide businesses in the region and those looking to come to Wales, the confidence of knowing they will be supported by a sustainable and modern transport system.

Around three quarters of our trade is with the rest of the UK and Brexit will mean it is more important than ever to have good connections to markets across the Wales – England border. Brexit brings with it the risk of job losses and a recent study indicated this could be as high as 30% in the Flintshire area. Welsh Government’s role is to address this vulnerability through investing in areas that is within its control. Metro is one of these.

There are strong links between the economy of North East Wales and that of North West England and this is reflected in the significant cross-border commuter flows of around one million journeys per month. The potential for future job growth is substantial in the cross-border area and improvements to public transport systems and the road network will be needed to cater for the resulting increased demand on our transport networks. Public transport on its own cannot deal with current demand let alone tackle the further congestion expected from future growth in traffic.

The major investments planned on the English side of the border such as the Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2, and the improvements to the key strategic road networks means we have a choice of keeping pace in North Wales or fall behind and be less attractive to businesses. This is why investing in the Metro concept is critical if we are to have a vibrant economy.

The Metro is becoming a reality in Deeside where, in partnership with Transport for Wales (TfW) and Flintshire County Council (FCC), we are delivering a green transport system in one of the most important employment areas in Wales. Deeside Industrial Park is home to 260 companies and 9000 jobs but has been difficult to access by means other than the private car, contributing to air quality and congestion problems on surrounding roads. Companies have also experienced problems with recruitment and retention of staff with 1 in 5 would be workers turning down job offers because of the difficulties of getting to work

Our investment in Deeside is guided by the sustainable transport hierarchy.

Active travel paths are being constructed in Deeside Industrial Park that will connect all businesses to active travel routes within the Park and to the wider active travel network across Deeside and into Chester and the Wirral. The active travel paths constructed recently are very popular, not just with commuters but with families and other leisure users too. There are around 10,000 cycle trips per month through the Park demonstrating what can be achieved through investing in high quality, connected facilities.

Public transport is being transformed too. We have funded new buses for the Deeside Shuttle service to the latest environmental standards and the park and ride site being constructed at Deeside Industrial Park that will be served by the Shuttle bus and reduce the number of vehicles needing to travel into the Park.

We are working in partnership with FCC and bus operators to deliver a Bus Quality Partnership covering services along the A548 / B5129 through Flintshire and into Deeside Industrial Park. This seeks to provide a high quality bus service along the corridor, integrate strategic bus services with the Deeside Shuttle with integrated timetables and ticketing. Funding has been provided to FCC to introduce bus priority and traffic management measures along the corridor to reduce bus journey times and improve journey time reliability.

Currently only a very small percentage of people travel to work to Deeside by train. We want to change this. Through the Wales and Borders franchise service frequency on the Wrexham to Bidston line will be doubled to two trains per hour from 2021. Building on this we are developing schemes for an integrated Shotton station, making it easier for people to interchange between the North Wales Coast and Wrexham and Bidston line and for a Deeside Parkway station serving employment on Deeside Industrial Park and served by the Shuttle bus service. Together these schemes will also improve access to the strategic rail network for the residents and businesses of Flintshire and Wrexham.

A successful Metro will require a full integration of transport modes and highways will need to play an important part of the mix providing access to Deeside Park for freight, buses and for trips that are not possible by alternative modes. The A55/A494/A548 Flintshire Corridor Improvement scheme is a key element of the Metro multi-modal integrated transport system. As well as improving connectivity between the economies of North West Wales and North West England, improving traffic flows and capacity on the trunk road network will alleviate the existing rat-running and congestion on local roads. This will not only improve safety, especially in the urban areas, but also free up capacity that will be key in generating greater opportunities for walking, cycling and bus travel on local roads within Flintshire and provide access to the rail network via the proposed Deeside Parkway station. The design of the Flintshire Corridor Improvement will ensure that will be a fully integrated element of the Metro and includes infrastructure to maximise active travel and bus usage.

Poor air quality on the A494 is a major problem which we are tackling. The Flintshire Corridor improvement will play an important part of the solution as well as providing much needed step change in resilience to the network so important to support future aspirations for the region.

Having focused initially on the delivery of the Metro integrated transport hub approach in Deeside, we now intend to roll out this concept to other key employment hubs across North Wales including Wrexham, Rhyl / Prestatyn / St Asaph / Abergele, Colwyn Bay / Conwy / Llandudno and the Menai area.

There is huge potential to deliver economic growth in North Wales. A modern, high quality integrated transport system is fundamental to achieving that potential and I am committed to investing in that work to ensure this region is a competitive and connected component of the UK economy.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns I would be happy to do so.