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**CONSULTATION ON SOUTH EAST WALES TRANSPORT ALLIANCE
(SEWTA) REGIONAL BUS AND COMMUNITY NETWORK STRATEGY**

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for giving Natural Resources Wales the opportunity to comment on the draft SEWTA Regional Bus and Community Network Strategy. From 1 April 2013, Natural Resources Wales brought together the work of the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, as well as some functions of Welsh Government. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and in the future.

Natural Resources Wales welcomes this Strategy, which enables further integration in public transport service planning and delivery. Natural Resources Wales is supportive of those initiatives that prioritise, provide, promote, integrate and improve sustainable forms of travel. As such, we value the intention of the Strategy to identify priority outcomes, ensuring that maximum benefit is achieved from investment.

While broadly welcoming the Strategy, we do have some comments which we hope you will find useful.

Natural Resources Wales would welcome future liaison with SEWTA, for example to identify the potential for linking bus routes to outdoor recreation facilities. To organise this liaison, and for clarification about any of the points made in the response, please do not hesitate to contact Helen Fletcher at our Llandarcy office in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



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1. *Creating an Active Wales*, Welsh Government 2011.

DETAILED COMMENTS ON SEWTA REGIONAL BUS AND COMMUNITY NETWORK STRATEGY

Objective 1 – to provide and promote safe, attractive and accessible bus and community transport links to key regional centres and destinations

It is not clear what is covered by ‘key destinations’. Natural Resources Wales would welcome widening the scope of ‘key destinations’ to include consideration of prioritising transport to locations that offer significant opportunities for outdoor recreation. Passenger transport has an invaluable role to play in opening up access to the countryside and the resulting potential for enhanced health and wellbeing, as recognised in the Welsh Government’s *Creating an Active Wales Strategy*¹. It should also be recognised that linking public transport to outdoor recreation can also contribute to tackling social exclusion, by giving car-less households access to the benefits of the natural environment.

Natural Resources Wales would also welcome integration between this Strategy and Local Development Plans within the SEWTA region. There is a need for Local Development Plans to align sites for development with existing passenger networks, as well as to plan to improve facilities where current passenger transport accessibility is poor. This type of integrated development is vital to achieve reduced demand for travel, to help underpin behaviour change and to support a modal shift from the private car to passenger transport.

If not already part of the stakeholder engagement process, we suggest that it would be very helpful to involve relevant Local Service Boards (LSBs) in discussions about the development of the Strategy. LSBs, made up of leaders of key public and third sector organisations, focus on delivery of public services and access to transport is often a recurrent theme. Monmouthshire’s Single Integrated Plan, for example, has a priority for ‘good access and mobility’.

3.5.25 Route development

We are encouraged by the recognition that all agencies need to work together to identify route opportunities that reflect changing travel patterns. As part of network integration, Natural Resources Wales would welcome the opportunity to input into discussion about the strategic development of new routes that link to outdoor recreation facilities where appropriate. Opportunities for outdoor recreation can play a key role in delivering the Welsh Government agenda for mental and physical health and well-being. Such opportunities include public rights of way, National Trails, the Wales coast path, bike trails, cycleways, nature reserves and visitor centres. In addition, we would encourage SEWTA to consider opportunities for bike transport facilities on some public transport routes in order to enable active recreation.

1. *Creating an Active Wales*, Welsh Government 2011.

3.6.10 Interchanges

Natural Resources Wales supports access and parking for cycles at bus interchanges. We would encourage integration here with the Active Travel (Wales) Bill, which seeks to encourage Local Authorities to improve facilities and routes for cyclists (and walkers).

3.6.40 Tourism transport

BCT44 – Natural Resources Wales would welcome the opportunity to engage in discussions about public transport provision that enables people to access outdoor recreation and sustainable tourism facilities.

3.7.7 Environmental issues

Natural Resources Wales welcomes the consideration of environmental issues. We suggest that the scope could be extended to include the consideration of 'green infrastructure' in the design process, that is design that both works with and benefits the natural environment.

Additional comments

It would be beneficial to include information about SEWTA's involvement in any partnership work to promote behaviour change relating to transport, in particular a modal shift from the private car to bus transport.