

Regional investment funding and decisions must not be stripped from Wales post-Brexit – First Minister

Launching the Welsh Government's latest Brexit paper, the First Minister will also warn against the UK government using our exit from the EU as an opportunity to take money and funding decisions away from Wales.

The paper, 'Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit' proposes a new, simplified and less bureaucratic way of supporting Welsh communities and driving economic development.

It calls for every penny of the £370m that Wales currently receives from the EU each year to be replaced by the UK government and added to the Welsh Government's annual budget.

The paper rejects the idea of a Westminster controlled UK Prosperity Fund and calls for regional investment decisions to continue to be made in Wales. The proposals include:

- simplifying the rules, administration and systems for regional investment funds
- developing plans for the regions of Wales led by partnerships involving local authorities, businesses and communities in those areas
- regional investment focused on places where it is needed and in line with the Welsh Government's Economic Action Plan (EAP)
- continuing the ability to provide state aid to businesses
- the 4 national governments of the UK agreeing rules on regional support to avoid a race to the bottom that could damage communities
- creation of a Council of Economic Ministers from all 4 nations to ensure co-ordination of policy across the UK.

The First Minister said:

"The decades of Wales' partnership with the EU leaves us a legacy upon which we can build our economic future.

"However, the vote to leave the EU was also a call for change and so we are proposing a way forward for regional investment based on local knowledge, which does away with unnecessary bureaucracy and focuses on the needs of businesses and communities.

"A way forward which improves our roads and railways, improves broadband networks, gives people the skills they need, boosts entrepreneurship and promotes innovation to support economic growth across Wales.

"The people of Wales are best placed to make those decisions and to

create a new system for the future. We have the local knowledge, the people and the networks to deliver this. Any move to a system where unelected officials in Whitehall can veto much needed investment in our local communities would be completely unacceptable and a betrayal of devolution.

“We will also not stand for any loss of funding as a result of Brexit. During the referendum campaign, we were promised Wales would not lose out on a penny if we left the EU. This promise must now be honoured or the people of Wales were misled.”

£10 million boost for Wrexham transport plans

The significant investment and working with Wrexham Council will see a multi-model integrated transport system established which will be a major boost to the area.

The Cabinet Secretary shared the news following a visit to Wrexham General Railway Station where proposals for a transport hub are currently being developed. The plans at Wrexham General include better bus and active travel access as well as park and ride opportunities.

There will also be improved connectivity between Wrexham General and the main bus station. A review of the bus network to improve connectivity to key locations within and beyond the town centre will also take place and Welsh Government funding will be allocated to improving passenger experience at Wrexham Bus Station.

The Cabinet Secretary also announced a commitment to progressing with the development of solutions to improve Junctions 3 to 6 on the A483 to address congestion issues in the area.

Developments are continuing in Deeside too on plans to integrate the high and low lines at Shotton stations and develop a new Deeside Parkway. In partnership with Flintshire County Council, measures to improve bus and active travel connectivity are being advanced to actual delivery.

The developments are part of ‘Moving North Wales Forward – Our Vision for North Wales and the North East Wales Metro’ which details the Welsh Government’s commitment to improving the transport network across the region.

A further important development is the commitment to establish a Transport for Wales business unit in North Wales to support the delivery of these projects.

Funding has also been secured from the UK Government to develop a business case to look at improving journey time and capacity along the North Wales main railway line and the Wrexham-Bidston route.

Ken Skates said:

"I'm delighted to announce £10 million of Welsh Government funding is being invested in Wrexham which will improve transport links and connect people to jobs and services.

"Work on modernising transport services and infrastructure in Wrexham and Deeside is moving at pace and our focus is now shifting from planning and development into delivery.

"I am committed to seeing an integrated transport system in the region that works for everyone. A system that will better connect people, improve the journey experience and provide a boost to the North Wales economy.

"My vision is about spreading prosperity and supporting economic development across all parts of the region including maximising opportunities from the Northern Powerhouse. It will not only deliver growth in our economy, but also achieve social, environmental, health and cultural benefits.

"Of course, better connectivity is a matter which goes beyond our boundaries as each day thousands of people cross either side of the border for work. As a result, I set up the Transport Steering Group which has brought key partners together from North Wales, Merseyside and Cheshire, and has already proved vital in ensuring our vision becomes a reality. I am also proposing to strengthen our presence in the region by establishing a Transport for Wales business unit to support with delivering our planned transport investments.

"The North East Wales metro is a significant part of our plans which will make it easier for people to travel using public transport and break the barriers which currently faces them doing so. Early next year I will be focussing on our investments in North West Wales.

"Over the coming years, the Welsh Government is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in transport infrastructure in North Wales which is a clear demonstration of our commitment to the area."

Cllr Samantha Dixon, Chair of Growth Track 360, the campaign for rail improvements for North Wales and Cheshire, welcomed today's announcement and said:

"This a huge step forward in bringing our ambitious plans to

improve rail and access to rail services to fruition. These improvements will help deliver real benefits to residents and businesses and help unlock our cross-border economy. We will continue to make the case for Cheshire, Merseyside and North Wales to attract investment in our transport system.”

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Fall in absenteeism from primary schools over the last decade

[Official statistics released today](#) show that in 2016/17 overall absence remained at 5.1% and has been falling since 2006/07.

Kirsty Williams said:

“These figures are to be welcomed as they show absenteeism from our primary schools has fallen over the last decade.

“Once again, I want to thank pupils, parents and teachers for their hard work in achieving this. The fact is if our young people are going to achieve their full potential, going to school regularly and consistently is crucial.

“Despite the progress we have seen, we can’t afford to be complacent and we will continue to take action to improve attendance in our schools.

“Understanding the needs of individual learners and providing the right support at the right time is what can make all the difference. Indeed, the Pupil Development Grant evaluation published yesterday highlights the benefits of improved attendance for our disadvantaged learners.”

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