

Regional Committee – 6th Meeting

Minutes of Meeting

2pm, Friday 28th March

Building 20, Global Centre of Rail Excellence Site

Attendees:

- **Kirsty Williams – Chair of GCRE Community Committee**
- **Simon Jones - Chief Executive of GCRE Ltd**
- **Craig Whitney – Business Development Officer – GCRE Ltd**
- **Cllr Steve Hunt – Leader, Neath Port Talbot Council**
- **Cllr David Thomas – Leader’s representative, Powys County Council**
- **Ceri Morris – Head of Planning, Neath Port Talbot Council**
- **Gwilym Davies - Head of Planning & Regulatory Services, Powys County Council**

Item 1: Welcome and Minutes

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting, the sixth GCRE Regional Committee session, and welcomed attendees. Apologies had been received from Catrin Lloyd, Debra Williams, Nicola Pearce (Ceri Morris was attending in place), Diane Reynolds (Gwilym Davies was attending in place) Jeremy Miles MS, James Evans MS, Carolyn Harris MP and David Chadwick MP.

- 1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed without amendment. The Chair indicated that the minutes of the committee would be published on the GCRE website as set out in the Terms of Reference.

Item 2: GCRE Oral Update

- 2.1 GCRE Ltd Chief Executive Simon Jones gave an oral update, beginning with the latest work to secure private investment for the project. He said that GCRE had announced in January 2025 that it was in discussions with a potential funder for the development.
- 2.2 Since that time, while progress had been made on due diligence, the identification of risks and mitigations as well as the future corporate model, the process was taking longer than anticipated.
- 2.3 Simon outlined the work being done to make the GCRE proposition as commercially attractive as possible, including through the development of energy partnerships. Simon indicated that the 'Four Missions' for the GCRE development – to rebuild local prosperity, make transport better, pioneer a Net Zero railway and renew an amazing place – continued to be the guide for the private investment search and development of the project.
- 2.4 Members noted the progress made in recent months and asked Simon to ensure that should there be a development before the next meeting, that members were kept informed.
- 2.5 Simon outlined some of the recent progress being made at the GCRE site. On 20th March GCRE showcased projects that had come through the £7.4m 'Innovation in Railway Construction' competition, organised by Innovate UK and funded by the Department for Business and Trade in the UK Government. The competition was first launched in 2022 and since then twelve teams had been funded to take their projects to prototype stage at the GCRE facility.
- 2.6 Simon said the event was well-attended, with around 200 visitors to site, and had received positive feedback. He indicated that some companies involved in the project had secured significant investment as a result of their involvement in the competition, with the event highlighting the GCRE project's potential to support startup companies.
- 2.7 Members noted the oral update.

Item 3: Planning and Design Update

- 3.1 Simon introduced the paper. The GCRE team have continued to develop the design behind the project to reflect feedback from local government as well as the public and its local representatives through forums such as the Regional Committee and the GCRE Local Liaison Group. Input has also been sought from regulators as well as future customers and clients of GCRE.
- 3.2 Simon outlined the planning design changes being considered by the GCRE project team as a result of the feedback received to date. In particular, they focused on changes to address community concerns, including adjustments to the northern embankment to reduce noise and proximity to homes.
- 3.3 Simon indicated that the track will be lowered to create a cutting, reducing noise transmission. A new planning application will be submitted to incorporate these changes and address outdated biodiversity requirements.
- 3.4 Simon indicated his thanks to planning officers in both host local authorities for their ongoing advice and said the GCRE team would continue to engage with both teams.
- 3.5 Cllr David Thomas indicated the need to engage with the community when it was time to submit a planning application, in order to demonstrate where changes had been made to address community feedback.
- 3.6 Cllr Steve Hunt reinforced how important forward planning was so that both local authorities could provide appropriate support. Simon acknowledged this was very important.
- 3.7 Members discussed concerns about the impact of the new design on public rights of way. Simon said that new bridges will be part of the public rights of way network, ensuring good access across the site.

Item 4: GCRE Economic Impact Assessment

- 4.1 Simon Jones introduced the paper. He said that in order to quantify some of the headline economic benefits of GCRE, work was undertaken by PwC in 2024 to update its original 2020 assessment of the jobs and spend impact of the first decade of the project's life, covering both the construction phase and the early years of GCRE operations. Their report was presented to the committee.

- 4.2 Simon Jones said that GCRE has the potential to create more than 1,100 long-term, high-quality jobs over the first ten years. The report highlighted that GCRE was a 'very high' value for money project that will contribute £300m GVA uplift to the local economy over the next decade and a total of £1,210m of benefits to the economy over its lifetime. It outlined that for every £1 invested in GCRE, £15 is returned in benefits to industry, the local area and the environment.
- 4.3 Simon said that it is important to note that while the headline impacts in the document are impressive, they do not take into account some of the wider possibilities at the site, beyond its first ten years. For example, GCRE plans to develop a technology park as part of the facility that can help innovators and companies capitalise on the new technologies and products being developed at the site and to commercialise them into new export and business creation opportunities.
- 4.4 Members welcomed the report and discussed the opportunities beyond the first decade. Simon Jones said that the report also does not account for the economic opportunities that could be developed through supportive policy levers aligned with the UK government's new Industrial and Infrastructure strategies. Nevertheless, the report is a good basis for beginning to understand the true economic potential of the opportunity now ahead.
- 4.5 Simon also highlighted the opportunities during construction. GCRE had recently made a successful application for funding to provide training for people affected by the Port Talbot Talbot steelworks closure. The training will focus on basic railway skills, with guaranteed interviews for participants with Transport for Wales and Network Rail. Simon expressed his optimism about the project's potential to deliver significant economic and social benefits.
- 4.6 Members noted the update.

Item 5: Any Other Business

- 5.1 Members did not raise any further items.
- 5.2 The Chair indicated that the next meeting of the group would be: **27th June 2025**
- 5.3 The Chair brought the meeting to a close.