



# Regional Committee – 7th Meeting

## Minutes of Meeting

2pm, Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June

Building 20, Global Centre of Rail Excellence Site

### Attendees:

- **Kirsty Williams – Chair of GCRE Community Committee**
- **Simon Jones - Chief Executive, GCRE Ltd**
- **Craig Whitney – Business Development Officer, GCRE Ltd**
- **Andrew Johnson – Head of Strategic Communications, GCRE Ltd**
- **Cllr Steve Hunt – Leader, Neath Port Talbot Council**
- **Cllr David Thomas – Leader’s representative, Powys County Council**
- **Nicola Pearce – Director of Environment and Regeneration, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**
- **Diane Reynolds - Director of Economy & Community Services, Powys County Council**
- **Rachel Thomas – Office Manager, Jeremy Miles MS**

### Item 1: Welcome and Minutes

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting, the seventh GCRE Regional Committee session, and welcomed attendees. Apologies had been received from Catrin Lloyd, Debra Williams, 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 to members on the latest work to secure private investment for the project.
- 2.2 He noted that GCRE has taken longer to move towards a final investment decision than had originally been intended and that in recent weeks that had led to some challenging headlines about the delay to the project and questions about the ultimate viability of the project.
- 2.3 Simon indicated that discussions with potential investors were ongoing. Now with the support of Welsh Government, GCRE was exploring potential, additional ways in which GCRE can secure investment and that work will continue over the Summer. That included looking at ways to further de-risk the capital construction of the project and underpin the early years revenue risk of the facility.
- 2.4 Cllrs Hunt and Thomas asked for an update on what work UK Government could contribute towards a funding solution. Simon outlined that UK Government could play an important role, most immediately through policy levers that could capitalise on the industry opportunity of the GCRE development.
- 2.5 Nicola Pearce asked about discussions with the National Wealth Fund (NWF) and offered to make a link between GCRE and David Gwyn, who had played a positive and constructive role in the Celtic Freeport developments.
- 2.6 Members discussed the wider ways in which the group could support, particularly in raising the profile of GCRE with individuals able to influence Welsh and UK Government. Simon agreed to circulate to members a briefing outlining the key points to members of the group following the meeting.
- 2.7 Diane Reynolds discussed an upcoming opportunity at the Royal Welsh Show and it was agreed GCRE would utilise Powys Council facilities at the show for discussion and project promotion.

- 2.8 Cllr Thomas noted the recent change in leadership at Powys Council, with Cllr Jake Berriman taking over as Leader. Simon Jones put on record his thanks to previous leader Cllr James Gibson Watt for his support and that a letter had gone to the new leader with an invitation to visit the site. It was noted that Cllr Thomas would continue as the leader's representative on the GCRE Regional Committee.
- 2.9 Simon gave an update on work needed to update GCRE planning permissions in order to respond to community feedback and embed resulting changes to the projects design. Simon indicated that a new planning application would need to be submitted, offering opportunities for further community feedback.
- 2.10 Simon outlined progress with the new 'Access to Rail Engineering' programme. Using funding from the Tata Transition Board, the first cohort were due to begin their training at the GCRE site.
- 2.11 Members noted the oral update.

### **Item 3: Innovation in Railway Construction Programme Update**

- 3.1 Andrew Johnson introduced the paper. Over the last two years, GCRE has been working with government and industry partners to host a £7.4m 'Innovation in Railway Construction' competition at the GCRE site. The competition had been funded by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) in the UK Government and delivered by Innovate UK.
- 3.2 The programme has focused on what greener, more affordable and more reliable railway infrastructure looks like and began with an open call to the industry for ideas. An initial 24 projects (involving 50 teams) were funded through a first stage of the programme to develop their ideas to a business case. From this list, the best 12 were then supported through to prototype stage at the GCRE site, with a demonstration day on the GCRE site on 20<sup>th</sup> March. GCRE had over 200 individuals from across industry, government, academia and the supply chain attend the event, which was a 'live' showcase of the ideas funded through the competition.
- 3.3 Andrew indicated that while the private investment raise for the larger GCRE project has not concluded, the project has helped to demonstrate in a tangible and relevant way how GCRE can operate on a much larger scale once the full infrastructure at GCRE has been developed – through faster and more cost-effective net zero innovation.

- 3.4 The project has already had a positive economic impact. In the very short-run teams involved in the IIRC projects had reported that 20 new jobs have already been created, with the prospect of another 5. In total, 24 new partnerships were formed, of which 6 new partners are based in Wales.
- 3.5 Companies like Universal Signalling had already gone public with equity investment in their company as well as a separate announcement of a first new contract, all a result of the programme.
- 3.6 Members noted the update.

#### **Item 4: Rail Reform Opportunities for GCRE**

- 4.1 Andrew Johnson introduced the paper. He said that as GCRE takes forward its search for private investment, the team are keen to show where and how the development can actively support government policy ambitions, linked to the four missions of GCRE.
- 4.2 Recently, GCRE has begun to take part in policy consultations being held by the UK Government around rail reform. The purpose of the recent GCRE submission has been to show the ways in which the GCRE facility will help the industry enable faster innovation and the development of stronger, greener and more reliable transport infrastructure, as well as charting the place-based economic impact the GCRE project can have as part of a wider approach to economic development.
- 4.3 Policy suggestions in the document included the mandating of a new 'Test-British Grow-British' approach to rail innovation; the introduction of a new policy approach that seeks to end disruptive testing on the operational UK mainline railway and the introduction of new operating standards requiring all major rail infrastructure projects to be required to undertake quality, pre-deployment systems integration testing prior to delivery phase that will minimise the delays and cost overruns that have impacted major rail projects in recent years.
- 4.4 Andrew said that though the primary focus of the GCRE team is on finding investment, the next year will be an important one in relation to a number of policy developments. Major work is being done, not only on related areas of rail reform, but in a number of other fields from the future of research and development funding and UK industrial strategy at a UK level to net zero energy planning and Tata transition regionally.

4.5 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 in September.

5.3 The Chair brought the meeting to a close.