

New Transport for Wales Headquarters part of wider work to unleash the potential of Welsh regions

The news comes ahead of a major speech by Ken Skates in which he will say that Wales must grow its regional economies and unleash their potential to drive balanced economic growth across the country.

The Economy Secretary will be addressing a business audience at Coleg y Cymoedd later today and will set out his vision for a prosperous and secure Wales.

Speaking ahead of his speech, Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m incredibly proud that during the last Assembly term the Welsh Government directly supported almost 150,000 jobs across the country, with many more in local supply chains.

“That has helped us secure a lower unemployment rate than England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and a faster rate of employment growth than the UK average.

“However as an economy we still face major challenges, particularly in addressing the regional differences in our economy and ensuring that the benefits of economic growth fall more fairly across Wales.

“Since 2010 our approach has focussed on developing key sectors of our economy on a national basis. This has resulted in some stunning successes, particularly in advanced manufacturing areas like aerospace and in the creative industries.

“However, the growth of those sectors and the skilled jobs they have created have not fallen equally across Wales and so now is the time to write the next chapter of Wales’ economic story.

“As we approach the challenges of the future I believe we need to take a new approach by developing the competitive edge of each region of Wales more fully. This will mean empowering each region to develop its own specialised sectors and more distinct economic identities.

“Allied to this we need to change our economic development structures in government to work in closer partnership with those regions, utilising drivers, such as skills, transport connectivity, procurement and digital infrastructure to accelerate economic growth in those areas.

“The way to address these regional differences is not to turn one area against another, but to work together to ensure the fruits of growth are shared by everyone. It’s a question of fairness and that’s why I want to grow the regional economies of Wales and unleash their potential to drive more balanced growth across the whole of the country. Only that way can we make real our promise of better jobs closer to home and ensure every area of Wales becomes more resilient to the economic challenges we face over the next few years.

“Today I am delighted to announce that the new Transport for Wales headquarters will be located in Pontypridd bringing hundreds of high quality jobs to the area.

“This is great news for the town but it needs to be the start of something bigger. We need to work with partners in the local authority, the private sector as well as local colleges and universities to ensure this injection of jobs becomes a spark for wider local regeneration and prosperity.

“Later today I will meet young people training at the rail engineering centre at Coley y Cymoedd, a £3m partnership between Welsh Government and the college and a great example of the partnership working and forward thinking that is key to regional economic success.

“By looking ahead to the opportunities arising from the £1bn plus we will spend on electrification, Metro and rail infrastructure, we must work together to ensure more of the benefits of that spend remain in our local communities and benefit local supply chains.

“We face major economic challenges which will only be increased by our exit from the EU, global instability, welfare cuts and UK Government austerity.

“Our response must be to work together and to develop more resilient regional economies if we are to build a stronger and

fairer economy for everyone in every area of Wales.

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The international crude oil price of Indian Basket as computed/published today by Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas was US\$ 50.44 per barrel (bbl) on 17.03.2017.

[Another election?](#)

I have seen no need for another election any time soon. The Conservative party has the endorsement of the electorate from 2015 for its Manifesto for a Parliament. All the time Mrs May is happy with that Manifesto, which she supported at the time, there is no lack of mandate. The government also has a major mandate from the referendum to get on with Brexit. There would be little benefit from fighting the referendum again by proxy in a General Election, where the polling shows the pro Brexit Conservative party is likely to win. If the Election simply confirms the referendum it adds little. Were parties against Brexit to do better it creates difficulties in implementing the wishes from the referendum. Anti Brexit forces would claim the public had modified their mind on Brexit. The pro Brexit forces would say the election result was mainly about non Brexit matters. It may not be clear in a multi issue election. Many people in the public just want their government to get and do the things that need doing, without any short term need for a new public discussion and vote about the direction of the country. There is plenty to do, and the government has plenty of ideas and Manifesto/referendum commitments to carry through.

Some of those who wish Brexit ill favour an early election. It might slow things down a bit, create new uncertainties. Some who favour Brexit want an

early election, thinking it would lead to a good win by the pro Brexit forces, making it easier to pilot through the Repeal or Continuity of laws Bill which the House must take up as soon as the Article 50 letter has gone. The government's critics delight in pointing out a favourable comment about the single market in the last Conservative Manifesto. That was of course superseded by the decision of the people in the referendum. Both sides in that campaign said leaving the EU meant leaving the single market, which electors then voted to do.

The case for an early election would have to rest on an inability for the government to get through this Parliament what it needs to get through to carry out the wishes of electors from 2015 and from the referendum. Alternatively Mrs May could seek a new mandate if she wished to make material changes to the 2015 Manifesto. I would be interested in your views.

[UN aid 'pushed to limits' as 320,000 more civilians may flee west Mosul](#)

20 March 2017 – Humanitarian agencies are bracing for the possibility that in coming weeks about 300,000 to 320,000 civilians may flee the western districts of Iraqi's Mosul city where Government forces are fighting to oust the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists, a senior United Nations aid official in the country has said.

That is in addition to some 180,000 civilians who have already fled the fighting in western Mosul since mid-February.

“The humanitarian operation in western Mosul is far larger and far more complex than in the east” said the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Lise Grande, in a news release issued yesterday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The main difference, she explained, is that tens of thousands of families stayed in their homes in the east, but in the west, tens of thousands are fleeing.

“We've been planning and preparing for the Mosul operation for months. But the truth is that the crisis is pushing all of us to our limits. We're going to be doing the best we can to ensure the people who need assistance receive it.” said Ms. Grande.

Humanitarian agencies are deeply worried that civilians are at grave risk in western Mosul. The use of explosives in the densely populated Old City is likely to cause extensive damage, and people fleeing are telling humanitarian workers that it's very difficult to enter or leave the Old City, said Ms. Grande.

“Families are at risk of being shot if they leave and they are at risk if they stay. It’s horrible. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped and they are in terrible danger,” she said.

RELATED: Relief operations in western Mosul reaching ‘breaking point’

The main supply route into western Mosul has been cut since mid-November. Families fleeing the city are reporting that shelves are empty and that the only food available is what they already have at home. Water and electricity supplies have been cut and medicines are running out.

Under the leadership of the Government of Iraq, a massive national effort is underway to address the crisis. Civilians fleeing the western districts in the city are being accommodated in 17 camps and emergency sites near the city. The Government and partners are rushing to construct and expand 10 of these.

“Every day, more space is becoming available,” said Ms. Grande. “It’s a race against time. So far, families are receiving support and being sheltered. But if the number of people leaving the city increases faster than we can construct new plots, the situation could deteriorate very quickly.”

Since 17 October, over 330,000 people have been displaced by the Mosul crisis, over 70,000 of whom have returned to their homes. Humanitarian agencies have been working around the clock to provide life-saving support to more than 1.3 million people from eastern and western Mosul including families who have stayed in their homes, and those who have fled.