

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Ymchwiliad i'r Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer dyfodol Seilwaith y Rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru	Inquiry into the Priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure
WRI 13	WRI 13
Cymdeithas Teithwyr Rheilffordd Yr Amwythig Aberystwyth	Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA)

SARPA is the rail users' group for the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth railway running from the English border through Montgomeryshire and Ceredigion to Aberystwyth.

Web:- <http://www.sarpa.info>

1) High level priorities for the development of rail infrastructure to provide the capacity and connectivity necessary to support the social and economic well-being of Wales;

1.1 Development of rail infrastructure must be complimentary as regards the different operational sectors (passenger/freight etc.) . It is no use enhancing passenger infrastructure when that for freight is neglected as it will lead to bottlenecks and disruption for all. We cite as an example, the proposal to remove the track at Platform 3 in Shrewsbury in order to extend the platform outwards, utilising the present dedicated through freight line as the passenger platform road. This will have the effect of tying up valuable resources and creating dislocation in an increasingly busy station. We remain concerned that in the Welsh Route Study, Network Rail have not given enough priority to the future potential of freight.

1.2 The Welsh Government's policy on new rail infrastructure is unclear. It is surely time to examine the opportunities for internal North-South links, which thus far have been neglected. We would presume that this is mainly on the grounds of cost but if Wales is not to become an economic backwater, renewed internal links become a necessity. We note however, that there are encouraging signs with regards to the Aberystwyth Carmarthen route. Even if this is rebuilt, there will still be significant Welsh places without access to competitive public transport. Welsh Government needs to take a holistic vision as to the future economy of Wales and how an enhanced rail network might contribute to this.

1.3 The importance of English regional centres to the Welsh economy should not be

underestimated. The long border means that inevitably, cross border traffic is of much greater importance than is the case in Scotland. In the case of the Cambrian lines, the connectivity to Birmingham with direct services serving the international airport has been a vital ingredient to success, with increased patronage and improved timekeeping being key features.

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2) How far Welsh Government's rail infrastructure priorities, including those in the National Transport Finance Plan, and the Ministerial Task Force on North Wales Transport report meet the needs of Wales

2.1 We are concerned that both central and regional governments throughout the UK may have concentrated too heavily on fixed infrastructure investment at the expense of new rolling stock. It is clear from travelling around the UK network that in terms of passenger numbers, capacity is almost at breaking point unless there is considerable investment in new vehicles. The "pausing" of various UK electrification schemes by the Westminster government will only exacerbate this. There is opportunity for the Welsh Government to consider innovative ways of financing new trains for use on the Welsh network.

3) How the development and exploitation of rail infrastructure in England affects Wales, and vice versa;

3.1 Devolution of rail to the English regions in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester has the potential for negative impact for Welsh through services to England unless efforts are made to safeguard them. We are concerned that devolved rail in the West Midlands and electrification from Oxley to Shrewsbury will lead to the curtailment of Cambrian Line services at that border town for operational convenience. The success of the railway depends on how well it serves the public and not how convenient it is for the operator.

3.2 There is unlikely to be much effect on England caused by developments on the Welsh rail network owing to the much greater population and economic weight east of the border. Nevertheless, the ability of the railway to bring tourists and holidaymakers into Wales is significant and a potential which should not be ignored. Likewise, the route along the Marches is of vital importance to both communities giving connectivity between Cardiff and the North West of England. Better connectivity would be ensured by linking those services into Manchester Airport.

4) The impact on Wales of key planned developments in England including High Speed Rail, electrification, Northern Power House / Transport for the North, and wider devolution of responsibility for rail within England

4.1 We have already indicated fears regarding the future of through services in connection with electrification schemes. Potential risk exists here between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton for Cambrian Line trains and west of Cardiff/Swansea for services from Manchester. As is well known, in 1967, through services between Birmingham and the Cambrian Coast were curtailed in the wake of the London Midland Electrification, requiring a change at Wolverhampton and another at Shrewsbury to reach Aberystwyth. We do not wish to see a return to such unenlightened thinking.

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4.2 The construction of HS2 will require the development of good connectivity between the hub at Crewe and North and Mid Wales. In turn, this will help to develop better links to the North of England and even Scotland.

4.3 The Welsh Government needs to take a more inclusive view of links towards England and be more pro-active in their promotion and development. We note that the various stakeholders involved in the West Midlands Rail Devolution have been very positive in attempting to build links with neighbouring authorities and the Welsh Government needs to do likewise to get its message across.

4.4 We learn that under the Barnett Formula, the construction of HS2 could lead to a very substantial windfall for Wales. However, we are concerned that this money may not find its way into rail investment. We feel that the possibility of it being diverted to other purposes instead is unacceptable.

5) The fact that funding for Welsh rail infrastructure is not devolved. The advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and risks potentially associated with devolution.

5.1 We believe that fully devolved rail offers opportunity and should be embraced. Indeed, we said as much during the consultations being held by the Richard Committee in 2003. It offers the possibility of Wales creating a different model to the UK wide one which resulted from the 1993 Railways Act. However, the challenges posed by the importance of cross border services should not be underestimated.

5.2 We are concerned that the current Westminster Government may seek to make

political difficulty from any attempt by the Welsh Government to devise an alternative model for railway management to that favoured by themselves viz. a franchised structure operated by large business corporations within a false market. This would be an unwarranted interference with Welsh democracy.

Angus Eickhoff
SARPA Chairman.

January 2016