

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 25	WRI 25
Caer Yr Amwythig Partneriaeth Rheilffordd	Chester Shrewsbury Rail Partnership



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14th January 2016

Re: Enterprise & Business Committee Inquiry into the Priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure

On behalf of the Chester - Shrewsbury Rail Partnership we would like to express our full support to the submissions below from both Wrexham County Borough Council and the Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Committee (SCRUA).

Sheila Dee Partnership Officer

Copy of Wrexham County Borough Council Submission)

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;

In planning its long term rail infrastructure Wales needs not only to look to developments within Wales but those cross border in England and also to Ireland which can bring social and economic benefits to Wales. Connectivity to international gateways such as Holyhead and its links to Ireland, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham with their airports is vitally important to north and mid Wales. With the plans to have a HS2 hub at Crewe we need to ensure we are ready in Wales with infrastructure that can maximise any opportunities and benefits that HS2 will bring.

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;

Wales is not an island and the rail network used by the passenger needs not to see any boundaries. We need to be aware of infrastructure developments in England so that we may be part of the bigger picture and not isolated and unable to take advantage of the greater network benefits. Electrification is a just one case in point. Plans for electrification in the north of England and in the West Midlands may only yield benefits if we are planning electrification to link in with their timescales. Electrification noted in RI12a should include the Chester - Wrexham - Shrewsbury line (which also carries freight traffic) and not just the North Wales coast. This would provide Wales with a valuable link through to the West Midlands as well as to the North West.

Service enhancements noted in RS4 following the journey time enhancement project are still not clear as to how and what can be achieved and with the project delayed are we aware that capacity enhancements are possible?

This is important as there are opportunities in this area to achieve greater network benefits than the journey time enhancements foreseen. Work is being undertaken on the Halton Curve which would provide an important link from Wrexham to Liverpool and the airport via Liverpool South Parkway but capacity on the single track in the section Saltney Junction to Wrexham may restrict the running of such services or in addressing the aspirations of the region to see a 30 minute interval service between Wrexham and Chester.

The growth potential of the Wrexham Bidston Liverpool line has for too long been unexploited. Future electrification must be considered but in the meantime an enhanced interval diesel service should be implemented.

[Chester-Shrewsbury Rail Partnership / Partneriaeth Rheilffordd Caer i yr Amwythig](#)

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Wrexham Industrial Estate Wrexham LL13 9PW

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Regarding RS2 the next franchise needs to ensure that all stakeholders are able and encouraged to provide meaningful, local feedback into the specification. We need a franchise that is passenger driven and not driven from a transport operators perspective.

At present there appears to be no structure whereby valuable local rail knowledge is captured and fed back for consideration. Local cross border knowledge is vitally important in planning long term strategies both in England and Wales to ensure the optimal network benefits are seen and enjoyed by all.

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

The Wales rail infrastructure relies in part on English rail hubs such as at Chester and Shrewsbury where North/South Wales services and those cross border to Manchester and Birmingham connect. The future capacity of these stations needs to be examined as capacity constraints may well impact on future growth potential. At Shrewsbury the use of Platform 3 for connections from the Birmingham to Aberystwyth service for onward journeys to Holyhead mean passengers having to leave the station and re-enter via the subway and barriers to continue their journey. This is inconvenient for those who do not have to struggle with luggage but difficult and stressful for those with prams and buggies or for the less able or disabled.

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 of rail within England:

As mentioned previously devolution is developing quickly in England and there is an urgent need for a structure to be established so that meaningful consultation and information sharing can commence. Without this cross border vision we will not be in a position to influence future plans to ensure the priorities bring maximum benefits to all concerned. This could well lead to us to prioritising any infrastructure developments in Wales which may if carried out in tandem could bring in cost savings through economy of scale. Disruption to passengers could also be better managed with through route work and maintenance being carried out in parallel.

The impact on Wales of key planned developments in England include:

- High Speed Rail,
- Electrification, Northern Power House / Transport for the North, and wider devolution of responsibility for rail within England,
- Halton Curve development

It is important to be part of the wider network benefits that rail can bring. Devolution can bring benefits but it can also lead to the wider benefits not being understood or catered for. We need a structure that will allow us to convey our local or regional needs and requirements to these devolved areas to ensure we continue to have access to major international gateways.

High Speed Rail implications have already been mentioned and accessibility both to Crewe and Birmingham will be vitally important in the future to connect to the HS2 network.

How Welsh Government can best engage with and influence infrastructure developments in England and the development of passenger and freight services using the network;

It is vital that Cross border developments are understood and indeed influenced. There are a number of groups with specific cross border remits but rail needs to be seen in both a local/regional and network context.

Currently separate route plans are produced by region but in certain areas and in Wales we need to look both to the West and Ireland and also to the East to England. Important developments in those countries may also lead us to re prioritise our plans to ensure the right investment is made. The Market Studies currently carried out are complex and cover a considerably long timeframe and at a time when devolution of rail is evolving quite quickly. A long term network wide plan is needed to show how, where and why investment is being undertaken and the potential benefits.

Whether the periodic review process meets the needs of Wales and takes account of the needs of Welsh passenger and freight users, and how this should be developed;

Whether the review process reflects the current Wales passenger needs is difficult to comment on except that it is apparent that the latent untapped demand is seemingly never addressed. Poor connection times (many over 30 minutes) are often seen to major conurbations which can deter people from what would be a viable commute by rail. We need to analyse far more closely the connectivity that could unlock economic benefits and prosperity and also better access to learning, training opportunities and in some cases access to cross border health services.

The effectiveness of the Network Rail Wales Route and whether the approach to delivery of network management, maintenance, renewal and enhancement functions are effective in delivering value for money, capacity, frequency, speed, reliability and handling disruption for passengers and freight users in Wales;

Recently confidence in both on time and on budget delivery has been undermined with projects almost doubling in costs and unforeseen problems delaying completion. Short notice possession, (not for emergency engineering) has also been experienced and these instances cause unnecessary passenger inconvenience.

Confidence is also low in what is being expected from certain projects with value for money overall being questioned.

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

With no devolution it is possible that smaller scale schemes that deliver great network benefits are overshadowed by the high profile major schemes of work. An advantage of devolution can be that there can be a greater mix of schemes but even in a smaller devolved area there will always be the threat that the priority schemes will always be seen in the city regions. Sadly that leads to a two tier railway with those often travelling the furthest suffering with poor infrastructure or rolling stock. Devolution does not take away the need to look outside the devolved area to maximise the potential benefits of any scheme. Indeed it adds to the list of priorities.

Current devolution plans do not address the issue of Cross Border liaison/consultation and route planning.

Copy of SHREWSBURY-CHESTER RAIL USERS' ASSOCIATION (SCRUA) submission

Response to Consultation by National Assembly for Wales, Enterprise and Business Committee, re:
Inquiry into the Priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure

SCRUA believes that the key strategic priorities for the improvement of capacity and connectivity (Topic 1) must be:

Firstly, relentlessly to create and sustain pressure on DfT, Network Rail, and all other relevant bodies to provide fit for purpose infrastructure – track, signalling, new/upgraded/re-opened stations, enhanced and re-modelled junctions, and doubling/re-doubling where necessary – so as to provide a minimum half-hourly service between all major and as many as possible smaller communities within Wales, as well as all communities and destinations from the South-West of England, through the West Midlands, to the North-West, where such connectivity is demonstrated to be of mutual economic, social and environmental benefit to Wales and the communities across the border.

Secondly, to press for a defined and guaranteed timetable for electrification of, in addition to the South Wales Main Line to Swansea and the Valleys network, Newport-Shrewsbury-Chester/Crewe, Crewe-Holyhead, Wrexham-Birkenhead, Oxley (Wolverhampton)-Shrewsbury, and all routes connecting Chester/North Wales with Manchester and Merseyside. The target for completion should be no later than 2032, to coincide with the full opening of HS2.

Thirdly, to seek UK, EU and other appropriate funding to assist the transfer of at least 90% of all medium and longer distance freight traffic from road to rail, with particular regard to traffic to Ireland and beyond via Holyhead, and bearing in mind the continuing aspirations of the government of Ireland for an eventual undersea rail tunnel connecting North Wales with Ireland, as part of a land bridge to ports on the Irish Atlantic coast.

Fourthly, to seek the reinstatement of the former Welsh regional transport consortia or similar, with appropriate terms of reference and a mature relationship with each other and with the Welsh Government in order to increase the provision, attractiveness and usage of fully integrated public transport systems throughout the nation and its neighbouring parts of England.

We feel that the Welsh Government's rail infrastructure priorities (Topic 2) are not necessarily ambitious enough, nor perhaps seen sufficiently in relation to each other rather than as individual projects. We feel that the whole network, as it is now and particularly as it should and probably eventually will be, should be seen as an integrated entity, and as a priceless national asset. We are concerned that there is not necessarily the collective vision to recognise this, and particularly that huge amounts are proposed to be spent on major road projects which do not appear to have been analysed and tested nearly as rigorously as many much smaller rail projects, and that if much of this money were diverted to upgrading the rail network, the economic benefits would be greater by several orders of magnitude.

On Topics 3 & 4, How the development and exploitation of infrastructure in England affects Wales and vice versa, and the impact on Wales of planned developments in England such as High Speed Rail, electrification, devolution of responsibility for rail from central government, and so on, we believe that in this context national boundaries are just lines on a map, and largely irrelevant to the reality of mutual economic and social benefit to all those who become better connected to each other as a result of practical action and co-operation between those who are in a position to make this happen.

The above leads on to Topic 5, how the Welsh Government can best engage with and influence infrastructure developments in England and the development of passenger and freight services. We believe that the key here is pursuing above all else the building of coalitions of common interest with the devolved groupings such as South West Rail, Rail North, West Midlands Rail, as well as the Local Enterprise Partnerships, the passenger and freight operators, groupings of interested local authorities, consumer and users' groups and well-briefed MPs, for example, to create unstoppable momentum for diversion of a much greater proportion of total public infrastructure investment towards rail, which will in turn offer far better returns.

This in turn leads towards Topics 6 & 7, the effectiveness and relevance of the periodic review process and the appropriateness and benefits to Wales of the current Network Rail "Wales Route". It is clear that there is insufficient scope and incentive for Network Rail to engage sufficiently with and respond to the priorities of the Welsh Government and the

people it serves. It should be borne in mind that the future structure of NR and/or other possible infrastructure owners/operators is under consideration in many forums, and that the picture may have changed considerably in due course. This should be seen as an opportunity to bring the infrastructure and its users, beneficiaries and stakeholders closer together in commonality of understanding and purpose, by seeking an outcome that aligns the objectives of all more closely and reduces the fragmentation of the railway system which has held back growth and initiative, to the disbenefit of all, in one way or another.

This of course leads to the final Topic, the potential for the devolution of funding for the Welsh rail network. Clearly, the UK government has, and will presumably continue to wish to have, a strategic overview of all “national” infrastructure, but as a clear willingness has now been demonstrated in principle, and in some cases in practice, to devolve considerable funding responsibility from the centre to those arguably best placed to specify the best possible outcomes, the Welsh Government can make a strong argument that, working in close partnership with groupings of similar size and significance such as the aforementioned Rail North, South West Rail and West Midlands Rail, much more overall benefit can be obtained from properly targeted and assessed investment than when distant purse strings are tugged or slackened by those with, perhaps, less transparent agendas.

The success and benefits of the devolved regional transport policies in France, Spain and Germany, for example, where there is also much more of a spirit of mature trust and co-operation between the regional administrations and the national or federal governments, suggests that this model is viable and advantageous, and that the regional administrations welcome the increased responsibility, not viewing it as a risk, but an opportunity to do worthwhile things for their citizens.

The above represents a broad summation of a consensus of views across the membership of SCRUA, which as an organisation is apolitical, and seeks only a better future for the railway and its users.

We emphasise the uniqueness of our position in representing a line which passes from England to Wales and back again, and believe that we are thus well-placed to present a broadly-based understanding and vision of what can and should be done.
