

RAILFUTURE WALES SUBMISSION TO SENEDD CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

1 Delivery of the rail franchise and metro:

The Welsh Government had no experience of rail delivery when it started the process to procure an operator for the new franchise starting in 2018.

It adopted an innovative process (compared to DfT) when selecting the winning bid.

The requirement for operators to pair up with an infrastructure provider to deliver the SE Wales Metro was a good idea. This led to more innovation in the design of the electrification scheme with a potentially lower cost.

Covid arrived just over one year into the operation of the new franchise and threw everything off course: the TOC withdrew and Welsh Govt took over responsibility for passenger services (TfW Rail). Sensibly, it retained the infrastructure partner to deliver the metro electrification.

Delivery since the formation of TfW Rail is covered in section 3 below.

2 Rail infrastructure priorities – UK and Welsh Government's

UK Government's priorities have recently greatly changed as a result of the increased costs of High Speed 2 line. and cancellation of phase of this project.

It now wishes to spread the infrastructure upgrades over a large geographical area. This includes North Wales. If the second phase of HS2 is to not be built, Railfuture Wales welcomes the electrification of the North Wales main line but is wary that this scheme might not be delivered, partly because it has not been fully costed and the allocated sum of £1bn may be insufficient.

The Welsh Government's rail infrastructure priorities have focussed on creation of the SE Wales metro. Electrification of these routes will deliver a significant decarbonisation gain and possibly the greatest gain compared to the alternative options for electrification of Welsh rail requiring a similar level of investment. The metro project is also likely to provide the largest opportunity for increasing passenger numbers. However, the passenger growth on the metro will be less than anticipated when the franchise was created as a result of more people working from home.

3 TfW rail performance and passenger impact

TfW Rail's performance since the majority of passengers returned to rail post Covid has been poor in terms of cancellations and punctuality. This is borne out by an examination of the performance statistics of all GB rail operators.: TfW Rail has been in the bottom half of the table with regard to these two measures for the first half of 2023, the latest period for which data is published

However, TfW Rail has done more to restore services suspended since Covid than many operators in England and is now providing services which have not been operated in recent times, eg Ebbw Vale to Newport.

The poor quality of timetable related performance appears in part due to weaknesses in managing locomotives and rolling stock. The introduction of new trains has been slower than expected (although this has no doubt also reflected manufacturer problems). Seasoned rail managers know that new trains rarely work properly 'out of the box', and delays to their introduction into service are almost inevitable. TfW Rail's managers seem to have been over-optimistic in this respect. Issues have also arisen with the maintenance of existing trains where TfW has taken over maintenance responsibility.

It is difficult to know the impact on passenger numbers and perceptions of the above issues. However, as the majority of passenger in Wales are travelling for 'leisure' purposes, it is likely the deterrent effect of poor performance experience on a journey will be greater than where journeys are work related as 'leisure' journeys are more likely and able to switch to alternative modes.