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Dear Madam

National Assembly for Wales: Inquiry into the Wales and Borders Franchise

Thank you for inviting Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) to comment on the above matter. I have the following comments to make. The County Council officer level comments mainly refer to the Maesteg/Cardiff to Gloucester/Cheltenham route. It is understood that the current franchise only covers the route up to Gloucester. The service on to Cheltenham is run by Arriva Trains Wales on a commercial basis.

- **Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs and what lessons should be learnt from it;**

My only experience of the franchise is derived from the route up the Severn Estuary into Gloucestershire. It is appreciated that additional stops have been added to Lydney in recent years in response to increased demand. Passenger growth along the route is strong and I understand grew by 9.3% last year. The entry/exit figures for Lydney for 2011/12 were 156,648 and have grown considerably in recent years.

Stops at Lydney are also provided by Cross Country trains. There are a number of gaps in the timetable which ideally need to be filled by either franchise, or a revised new franchise arrangement. See below.

- **How passengers should be involved in the franchise development and delivery;**

Regular passenger fora could be held at various locations along the route to allow for issues to be discussed. Alternatively officers from the franchise could attend parish/town council meetings so that elected members could raise issues on behalf of their constituents.

- **How communities and local government / Regional Transport Consortia should be involved. Could they be involved in specifying the franchise or perhaps even in delivering services?**

Gloucestershire County Council is represented at the twice yearly Cross Boundary Issues group meetings, hosted by the Welsh Government specifically for local authorities. They are a very useful forum to exchange views and receive updates from a range of bodies including DfT, Arriva Trains Wales and Network Rail.

There is certainly scope to involve parish/town councils along the route in specifying the service as well as local authorities. Parish/town councils have a good local knowledge of the area and the

requirements of people who they represent. Delivery of services would be a matter for larger authorities.

- **The management model to be adopted, including the Welsh Government’s proposal for a not-for-dividend franchise;**

No comment.

- **How the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience, including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and the core service standard**

Longer franchises would allow for more investment from the train operating companies as they would be more likely to see a return on it. However, there would need to be a mechanism for the franchise to be terminated if performance levels were below agreed standards. Establishing an agreed core service level is critical to achieving a level of service that is acceptable to all parties. Therefore the Welsh Government and DfT need to specify this at the start of the process. It is important to build flexibility into the franchise to allow for the increase in demand that has occurred in recent years.

Connections to and from Swansea are poor. The Cheltenham service continues to or from Maesteg and the Cross Country service is timed to miss First Great Western journeys.

Currently the first journey runs empty from Cardiff to Gloucester when it could run in service and open up opportunities for shift workers arriving into Gloucester and Barnwood Business Park before 7 am and Cheltenham / GCHQ for 7.30am. This needs addressing in the next franchise.

- **The routes, particularly cross-border routes, which should be included;**

It may be worth considering including the service from Cardiff to Gloucester/Cheltenham in a different franchise e.g. Great Western or Cross Country. Cross Country already operate from Cardiff to Birmingham/Nottingham, some of which stop at Lydney. It may also make it simpler in terms of receiving funding from DfT direct and for specifying the service level. Alternatively, the current route could be extended to Birmingham in the new franchise.

- **The rolling stock needed for the new franchise. What factors need to be considered and how this should be procured? Will new rolling stock be required?**

Some of the rolling stock used on the Maesteg – Cheltenham route has recently been refurbished whilst the rest is due for a refresh. In line with other routes, passenger usage is increasing so additional carriages will be required as there are already issues with crowding at peak times. Additional rolling stock will need to be purchased in time for the new franchise.

- **Whether additional lines, enhancements to existing lines, new stations or other infrastructure are needed; and**

Lydney station, currently run by ATW, is the only station within the Forest of Dean and as such it forms an important gateway into the area. The Forest of Dean District Council Core Strategy identifies Lydney for considerable development up to 2026 and beyond. It is recognised as having the greatest potential for growth of the four Forest towns:

'The Core Strategy depends on Lydney as the town with the greatest opportunity for change and the scale of new development planned will reflect this. It is able to offer a range of services, including access to the rail network which can in turn be further supported and improved by new employment and housing.'

It is therefore critical that the new franchise is capable of delivering a good service to enable passengers to commute into the area and also out to centres such as Newport, Cardiff, Gloucester, Bristol etc. In terms of the infrastructure of the station it is important that the station reflects the level of demand that can be expected over the coming years. There are no facilities at the station and as a minimum it should have toilets, ticket office and a retail outlet as well as increased parking. It currently gives a poor first impression of the town and the wider Forest area.

- **Whether the franchise can support an enhanced relationship between Network Rail and the franchise operator and the benefits this might bring.**

An example of enhanced working is taking place in Gloucestershire. A number of partners including Network Rail, Arriva Train Wales, GCC, Lydney Town Council and others have commissioned consultants to produce a masterplan for Lydney Station and the surrounding land. This will allow stakeholders to be involved in setting out a vision for Lydney Station that improves connectivity to the wider area and physical improvements to the fabric of the station to improve facilities for passengers.

Clearly, enhanced working is beneficial to all concerned in delivering benefits to passengers across the franchise area.

If you would like to discuss any of the officer level points raised in this letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Rob Niblett
Planning Officer