

# West of England



[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

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[Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail](#)

Evidence from West of England – WBF 59

Dear Dr Phipps

## **West of England response to the inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Assembly for Wales' inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise. Several of the issues under your terms of reference are not for us to comment on but we would like to respond on the following.

### **Cross-border routes**

- 1.1 We are keen to see improved services between South Wales and the West of England area. Commuting from Chepstow, Severn Tunnel Junction and Newport into the West of England already occurs and with major growth planned, see Figure 1 attached, this will increase. Our five Enterprise Areas and an Enterprise Zone based around Bristol Temple Meads station are all served by the rail network and there is the opportunity to provide greater connectivity, capacity and job opportunities by enhancing cross-border services. Although current services on the Newport to Bristol Temple Meads corridor come under the Great Western Franchise we request that the new Wales and Border Franchise includes proposals for additional services to enable this to happen.
- 1.2 We would also like consideration to be given to new inter regional routes. In particular with the electrification of the Great Western Main Line there is the opportunity to run an overlay stopping service on the busiest parts of the Cardiff to Portsmouth route running from Cardiff to Bath Spa with possible extension to Chippenham, Swindon

and Oxford using new/cascaded electric rolling stock. This would help to provide much needed capacity to meet commuter demand from South Wales to the MoD at Filton Abbey Wood. From Oxford connections could be made to the planned East West Rail Link to Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge. Electrification, however, should not be used as a reason to delay implementation of this service using diesel units.

- 1.3 The existing Cardiff to Portsmouth service is important to the West of England providing links to and from the South Coast, South Wales and the West Wiltshire towns and any new train service proposals must ensure there is no detrimental impact on it for example on vital train paths through the Severn Tunnel.
- 1.4 We have previously supported the South East Wales Transport Alliance's proposals for an additional hourly service Ebbw Vale - Newport - Severn Tunnel Junction to Bristol Parkway. Potentially this could call at Patchway to serve its existing and developing employment area and provide a better frequency overall from Severn Tunnel Junction and its catchment area. We are mindful of the operational challenges presented by the Severn Tunnel but the provision of better links between South Wales and the West of England area should not be frustrated by these constraints.
- 1.5 Both the above proposed services formed part of the West of England's submission of evidence in March 2012 to the now terminated Great Western Franchise process.
- 1.6 Whilst future IEP Swansea to London services may not be part of the Wales and Borders Franchise we are concerned over the service not stopping at Bristol Parkway thus missing key interchange opportunities for services to the Midlands, the North and the South West as well as a reduced service to Cardiff, Swansea, Swindon, Didcot and Reading.
- 1.7 A minor but nonetheless important point for passenger comfort is that trolley facilities should be provided daily on inter-regional routes between South Wales and England. We would support the assembly on this.

## **Rolling Stock**

- 1.8 We are increasingly concerned about the age of the rolling stock fleet and its ability to meet future demand. Much of the existing Diesel Multiple Unit fleet is 30 years old. Our understanding in discussion with train operating companies is that there is very little in the way of additional rolling stock available. This may improve with the cascade of rolling stock following electrification elsewhere but our worry is this will simply lead to the replacement of old vehicles with slightly less old ones. The issue of age and of capacity is not addressed. From our own experience we have witnessed over 100% growth in rail passengers in the West of England over the last ten years and despite the recession we still saw a 6.9% growth between 2011 and 2012. We are concerned that overcrowding caused by a lack of capacity will for example act as a growth constraint on the Cardiff to Portsmouth route.
- 1.9 The new Wales and Border Franchise must plan for and provide sufficient rolling stock to meet future demand.

## **Enhancements and infrastructure**

1.10 The West of England has its own MetroWest proposals for half hourly services to local stations and the reopening to passengers of the Portishead and Henbury Lines. We see these as complementing proposals from the National Assembly with the potential in the future to extend local services to South Wales providing new travel opportunities.

### **Passenger Involvement**

1.11 We would support greater public involvement in the Wales and Border Franchise. Ideas put forward by Passenger Focus, see the Network Rail Local Government Conference on 13 July 2013, should be considered as a starting point. Passengers should have more opportunity to input into the franchise process to gain better understanding and take account of future needs and priorities. With passengers expected to meet more and more of the cost of rail travel they should have a greater voice.

We trust you will find our response of use.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and 'W'.

James White  
Transport and Rail Co-ordinator

Figure 1: MetroWest (Greater Bristol Metro) and growth areas

