

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

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

Evidence from YHA Cymru/Wales – WBF 8 8

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10/09/13

Submission on behalf of YHA Cymru /Wales to Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry

YHA is a charitable not for profit organisation which operates in England and Wales. It is an affiliated member of Hostelling International which has Youth Hostels in over 150 countries. The charitable objective of YHA is-

“To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, and appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities, particularly by providing youth hostels or other accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote their health recreation and education.”

YHA has 31 Youth Hostels in Wales and these provide for over 150,000 bed nights each year. YHA has over 8,000 members in Wales and many of these are young persons who depend on public transport for their travels. A healthy successful YHA in Wales contributes to the Welsh economy in both employment and visitor spend. A large number of members from other parts of Britain and from overseas visit Wales and over 65% depend on public transport to access Welsh Hostels and visitor attractions. It is important to YHA and its visitors that Wales has an excellent integrated transport system with excellent transport information provision.

YHA members form one of the largest transport user groups in Wales and the Association has built up strong relationships at both local and national levels with Arriva Trains Wales and bus operators in Wales. YHA has been a promoter of the all Wales Rover tickets and provides transport information at all its hostels.

What lessons can be learnt from the current franchise?

Franchise owners can change and there can be takeovers by foreign companies. Profits go to shareholders and are not ploughed back into the business

A no growth franchise is inappropriate.

What priorities can be identified to ensure that rail passenger services in Wales and the borders provide the best possible service for passengers from 2018?

An integrated transport system, seven days a week, both in Wales and to all parts of Britain and not just London is essential. Overseas visitors are accustomed, in their home countries, to find rail and bus stations adjacent to each other, this is not always the case in Wales. Also in Europe rail services on Sundays are similar to weekdays. This is not the case in Wales where major tourist areas especially the National Parks have reduced or no services on Sundays.

It is important to provide adequate accommodation at all time for passengers and their luggage including bicycles. The limited accommodation provided on some services especially in summer and on Saturdays is a deterrent to rail travel.

Accurate information is essential and there has been a high standard achieved by rail operators except at times of disruption. However this is not achieved by all bus operators providing connecting services. Travel line Cymru is not fit for purpose and needs improving if it is to continue to provide transport information and the information sites of many Unitary Authorities are either nonexistent or out of date. Travel information rail and road in the National Parks is very good.

The purchase of tickets can be confusing for visitors from abroad hence the importance of Rover tickets and rail/bus tickets. We support the ability to purchase advance tickets up to the previous day and e tickets should be available for all rail journeys.

The rail operator should be able to provide as part of the franchise rail link bus services.

How can service delivery after 2018 deliver connectivity and value for money for passengers while reducing the burden on the tax payer?

The existing subsidy was not sufficient to provide a franchise that could be enhanced. Enhancements to the present franchise have had to be paid from Welsh Government funds and not by money from Westminster Government. The existing franchise was a no growth franchise and consequently has been less of a burden on British taxpayers than other franchises in Britain. It is important that Wales receives a fair share of subsidy paid by Westminster Government and not be given a cheap franchise as has been the case with the present one.

It is not in the national interest to have high fares which deter visitors and young people from travelling by rail

The key issues to be considered are:-

Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs and what lessons can be learnt from it.

The present franchise does not meet fully passenger needs in the following areas -insufficient capacity on many trains, poor or nonexistent Sunday services, poor conductivity between train

services especially with other operators, inappropriate rolling stock for some longer journeys, inadequate station facilities including shelters and toilets, poor station design e.g. Newport,

How passengers should be involved in the franchise development and delivery.

This can be achieved by the continuation of rail partnership schemes and also the expansion of these schemes with funding from the franchise.

Consultation with stakeholders including rail user groups both national, including YHA and local, also community and town councils, with regard to services and facilities.

Continuation of station adopters and customer panels including disabled representation.

By continuing to support for community projects and sponsorship, where appropriate, to charitable organisations.

Consultation of plans proposed by Welsh Government ,Network Rail , other rail operators in Wales and Transport Consortia

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

Commuters are only one section of travellers. Visitors including those from overseas and young persons must also be considered. Local government is now part of the Transport Consortia and if they continue to exist they should have a role in franchise development but do not have the expertise to deliver rail services. There must be joined up planning by the Consortia.

The management model to be adopted including the Welsh Government proposal for a not for dividend franchise.

This would retain control in Wales and provide additional funds for investment.

How the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and core service standards which should be included.

This requires a long and detailed response. If the not for dividend model is used the franchise length is not important but if this is not the case a longer term has advantages but only if the franchise term includes growth and investment.

Core service standards must include improved rolling stock, more frequent regular services and greatly improved services on Sundays

The routes, particularly cross border routes, which should be included.

It is important that penetrating routes into England are not lost to another 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?

The standard of rolling stock used in Wales is below the standard of that found in the South East of England and many other overseas countries. Visitors from South East England and overseas could be

deterred from visiting Wales if there is not a step change in the rolling stock provided. The standard of the rolling stock should be the same throughout Wales and equivalent to the best in England. It is important that Wales is not seen by visitors as a second rate nation.

The rolling stock should have adequate capacity for passengers at all times and for their luggage. It should have adequate toilets, luggage storage (people wish to stay close to their luggage), air conditioning, adequate accommodation for disabled and bikes, the fitting of power points and wi-fi, corridor provision, disabled access and information screens. There must be the facility to make announcements including the approach of the next station and side to leave the train. The single unit trains used in Wales are not suitable and four coach trains would provide more accommodation than the three coach trains which are provided for longer journeys in Wales.

Whether additional lines, enhancements to existing lines, new stations or other infrastructure are needed.

We would like to see improved provision in tourist areas. A rail link from Bangor to Caernarvon or even further south to Portmadoc would improve the provision in Snowdonia. New links to serve the Brecon Beacons National Park and Brecon could be considered. Line improvements for reduced journey time should also be included

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

This is essential

Your faithfully

YHA Wales Cymru

Submissions are to be made by Friday 13th September 2013 to
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