



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 06	WRI 06
Merseytravel	Merseytravel

Dear Sir / Madam

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES' ENTERPRISE & BUSINESS COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF WELSH RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

I am pleased to set out Merseytravel's response to the above inquiry, on behalf of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. This response was considered and endorsed by the Merseytravel Committee on 7 January 2016.

Merseytravel is the Combined Authority's lead advisory body and executive body on transport issues across the Liverpool City Region (LCR). The LCR comprises the local authority districts of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral with a combined population of 1.5 million. This response is also consistent with responses being developed by Transport for the North and Rail North and by our cross-border partners.

Our response to the questions posed is as follows:-

1. The Liverpool City Region is pleased to engage with the National Assembly for Wales on this important inquiry. The city region has a long history of working jointly with Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities on issues of cross boundary transport importance, recognising that transport networks rarely recognise administrative boundaries.

Cont/....

-2-

North East Wales, West Cheshire and parts of the LCR form part of a common, recognisable economic and travel-to-work-area, which necessitates east-west movements and enhanced cross-boundary multi-modal links.

2. Merseytravel's Long Term Rail Strategy from 2014 sets out the LCR's aspirations for rail over the next 30 years. From a

Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair of Merseytravel Committee



cross-border perspective, the strategy sets out the rationale for the development of two key routes:-

- i. new routes between Liverpool and Chester, Wrexham, North Wales and Cardiff / South Wales via the reopened Halton Curve; and
- ii. an incremental approach to the enhancement and long-term electrification of the Borderlands line between Wrexham and Bidston, to better connect areas of population and employment, linked to a new station at Deeside Industrial Park.

The full strategy is available at the following hyperlink-

<http://modern.gov.merseytravel.uk.net/documents/s12878/Enc.%201%20for%20Long%20Term%20Rail%20Strategy.pdf>

3. As key partners in the Transport for the North governance structures and workstreams, Merseytravel and the LCR are working with authorities across the North of England to improve transport connectivity and ultimately, to rebalance the country's economy. The Welsh Government's desire to engage with Transport for the North, in recognition of its natural economic links and significant cross-border flows of both passengers and goods between England and Wales is warmly welcomed. The Welsh Government has been recognised as a key stakeholder in the process, and a Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between the Welsh Government and Transport for the North, to support the sharing of information and collaboration between parties on both sides of the border.
4. Merseytravel is also a long-standing member of the cross-border Mersey Dee Alliance, recognising the interdependence between the economies of Flintshire, Wrexham, Cheshire West and Chester and Wirral. A Communique from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Mersey Dee Alliance sets out shared aspirations for investment and improvement in the rail infrastructure and services of the North Wales, West Cheshire and Mersey-Dee Alliance area. This follows the North Wales Economic Ambition Board's Rail Summit on 12 November 2015. Merseytravel supports the principles set out in this Communique.

Cont/....

-3-

5. Looking in more detail at the Committee's terms of reference, it is noted that rail infrastructure arrangements in Wales are complex; infrastructure is the responsibility of the Department for Transport, but

Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair of Merseytravel Committee



the Wales and Borders rail franchise being the responsibility of the devolved administration. Infrastructure and service quality are intrinsically linked and both contribute equally to creation of a quality rail product that can support modal shift. Whilst franchising is out of the scope of this inquiry, the intrinsic relationship between rail infrastructure and the specification of the franchise(s) that operates on the infrastructure need to be better aligned. Indeed, unless improved franchise specifications lead to improved service quality, in terms of frequency, capacity and rolling stock quality, the benefits of infrastructure enhancements will not be realised. Future Welsh franchise specifications need to fully factor in cross-border movements and associated future demand, with enhanced direct cross border links from key Welsh destinations to the Liverpool City Region.

6. More specifically, the need to improve direct access by rail from North Wales to Manchester Airport and Liverpool John Lennon Airport needs to be recognised as a priority. The two airports provide a comprehensive and complementary portfolio of flights, collectively representing the major airports of choice from the North Wales and borders area. It is noted that capacity issues at Manchester may jeopardise the development of a proposed Arriva Trains Wales service from the North Wales Coast line to Manchester Airport in May 2016. Similarly, reinstatement of the Halton Curve, together with capacity enhancements in the surrounding area are needed to support a rail link from the North Wales Coast Line, Wrexham, Chester, Helsby and Frodsham to Liverpool South Parkway for Liverpool John Lennon Airport (points 8 and 9 below refer).
7. Cross-boundary rail infrastructure issues are invariably complex, in terms of aligning different funding sources, delivery partners and responsibilities. For example, many Welsh rail capacity constraints are situated in England (e.g. Northern Hub constrains or pathing constraints on the West Coast Main Line). This can lead to complexity in terms of planning enhancements, in terms of apportioning costs and aligning funding sources, not least given the differing approaches to funding on both sides of the border. Equally, many decisions on Welsh rail are significant from a cross border or English perspective. As such, the wider cross-boundary implications of infrastructure priorities that are located physically in Wales need to be routinely considered in this context, rather than solely in a Welsh context.
8. As an example of the above, the single track railway track between Saltney Junction and Wrexham on the Chester-Shrewsbury line is a barrier to the development of new rail services from North Wales to Liverpool via the Halton Curve.

Cont/....

-4-

Merseytravel is promoting the

Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair of Merseytravel Committee



reinstatement of the Halton Curve as a priority scheme within its Growth Plan, and has provisionally allocated £10.4million of capital funding for these works from its Growth Deal funds. The £44 million scheme promoted by Welsh Government to redouble the track in the Rossett area is clearly welcomed, and its role in improving north-south journey times in Wales is fully appreciated. However, as the line will remain singled between Rossett and Wrexham, it is unable to enhance rail access from a cross-boundary perspective (e.g. facilitating improved rail links to Liverpool John Lennon Airport and supporting modal shift to rail from the congested cross-border trunk road network). Merseytravel would strongly urge the Welsh Government to recognise the completion of the re-doubling works in the Wrexham area as a very high funding priority, in order to release much needed rail capacity to support growth.

9. Furthermore, had the limitations of the remaining section of single track been better understood from the outset, particularly from a cross-border perspective, English transport bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships may have been in a stronger position to collectively lobby for an enhanced solution. This could, potentially, have extended to the identification of local funding to 'future proof' the works more effectively. A better appreciation of the scope of the partial redoubling project would also have helped manage expectations with cross-border rail service aspirations.
10. Merseytravel is working closely with the Welsh Government to improve service quality on the Borderlands line between Wrexham and Bidston. Strong and effective partnership working between the Welsh Assembly Government, Merseytravel and other partners to date has supported the development of a robust demand study. However, solutions will be dependent upon funds being aligned from the separate administrations for enhanced rail infrastructure works, whilst service enhancements ultimately need to be negotiated as part of the Wales and Borders refranchising process, which is the responsibility of the Welsh Government.
11. The clear priority is to improve the existing hourly diesel service to two services per hour, with electrification forming a longer-term aspiration. Notwithstanding the complexity of aligning different funds, the Borderlands line should be recognised as a high priority by the Welsh Government in terms of its economic importance in linking three mutually supportive Enterprise Zones (Liverpool Waters, Wirral Waters and Deeside) and in supporting access to education, leisure and retailing. It will also serve an increasingly important social and economic role in the context of the new prison being developed in Wrexham.

Cont/....



12. These examples highlight the importance of effective joint working and planning between Welsh and English bodies on such issues. More formal working with English border areas should be encouraged by the Committee, as should opportunities to align funds, which are increasingly devolved in both England and in Wales. For example, funds for major transport schemes are now devolved to Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England, as part of the Local Growth Deal process.
13. The planned High Speed 2 rail hub at Crewe is vitally important from a cross boundary point of view, and strengthens the case for the enhancement and electrification of the North Wales Coast line from Crewe westward. This is considered important to avoid any need for Welsh passengers to change onto diesel trains at Crewe, and to ensure that the benefits of HS2 are felt equally across the Mersey-Dee area.
14. The issue as to whether Department for Transport (DfT) should devolve rail infrastructure responsibilities in Wales is not straightforward, and Merseytravel would not wish to comment on an issue that is ultimately for Welsh partners to reach a view upon. It is noted that most rail services in Wales have origins or destinations in England, or else pass through significant parts of England, which highlights the complexity of devolution in a practical sense. The key to maximising success, irrespective of whether infrastructure decisions are devolved by DfT or not, is to emulate the approach taken with Transport for the North. This is in terms of developing a strong and meaningful partnership across logical economic geographies, putting administrative boundaries to one side, and assessing issues and problems in a strategic context across the network as a whole. In addition, the Welsh Government should remain able to fund additional infrastructure enhancements, as local transport authorities in England are also able to do.
15. Looking at electrification, then decisions on rail electrification in Wales are reliant on 'feeder' section from English networks being electrified too. It is noted that a longstanding problem concerns the issue that electrification business cases in Wales can be weaker as a result of the lower passenger flows and associated economic benefits. This highlights the importance of decisions being taken at a strategic level, rather than on a route-by-route basis. This is to facilitate seamless cross-border links and avoid any need for passengers to change from electric to diesel trains at border stations, which would present a significant barrier. It also highlights the importance of pursuing enhancements to existing diesel services as a priority, in order to build patronage and help strengthen future business cases for electrification.

Cont/....

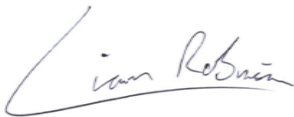


Furthermore, it is essential that the electrification of the North Wales Coast line is viewed in the context of its wider network, and includes a phased approach to electrifying its branches, such as the Halton Curve, the Wrexham-Chester line and Borderlands line. This is to create a seamless network from a rolling stock and customer satisfaction point of view.

16. Finally, whilst outside the scope of the inquiry, it is noted that a common cause for concern from an English and Welsh perspective concerns Network Rail's ability to deliver rail infrastructure projects to time and to budget, and the lack of control that local authorities have over the cost and timing of many rail schemes, despite being the principal funding partners in many cases. These issues are the subject of separate reviews and inquiries, and it is assumed that the Welsh Assembly Government will be submitting evidence in response to these.

I trust that this response is self-explanatory but should you have any queries then please don't hesitate to contact me on the above telephone number, or alternatively, my Policy Development Manager, Huw Jenkins, on 0151 330 1110.

Yours faithfully



Cllr Liam Robinson
Chair, Merseytravel Committee

Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair of Merseytravel Committee

