

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 08	WRI 08
Cymdeithas Defnyddwyr Rheilffordd Wrecsam - Penbedw	Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users' Association



Representing rail users, potential rail users and the rail transport interests of communities along the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor www.wbrua.org

13th January 2016

Dear Sirs,

As the Chairman of the Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users' Association (WBRUA), representing the interests of users and potential users of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor, I am pleased to be able to respond to the Enterprise and Business Committee's consultation on the Priorities for the future of Welsh rail infrastructure. The WBRUA's response, focusing as it does on the Wrexham-Bidston Line, attempts to identify the issues associated with the rail infrastructure strategies in both Wales and England for cross border services.

1. Overview

It is the WBRUA's view that the focus for future priorities for Welsh railway infrastructure must be towards improving rail connectivity for both population and industry to the benefit of Wales and, in a broader sense, of the UK.

The Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor epitomises both the issues and the opportunities for Welsh rail connectivity. As well as crossing the border between Wales and England it also crosses administrative boundaries in both countries; all of which are potential barriers to a cohesive strategy. With modest investment in infrastructure and an enhanced service, the Wrexham-Bidston line could enable workers to reach employment by rail and effectively connect the people in the communities it serves with the city regions and airports in the north of England as well as with the rest of Wales and the UK. In an area that has congested roads (such as the A550 near Deeside) and many people currently driving to work, a modal shift to rail transport can only be beneficial. Analysis of change between the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census by the Office of National Statistics indicates a reduction in the use of public transport (down by up to 1%) and an increase in drivers (up by up to 3%) in the vicinity of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor.

Investment to introduce incremental improvements to the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor, and to the routes with which it connects, is highly likely to generate significant economic benefit to the immediate area as well as to the broader North Wales / North West England cross-border region and to the UK as a whole. The WBRUA currently sees the following steps as the way forward for the Wrexham-Bidston route:

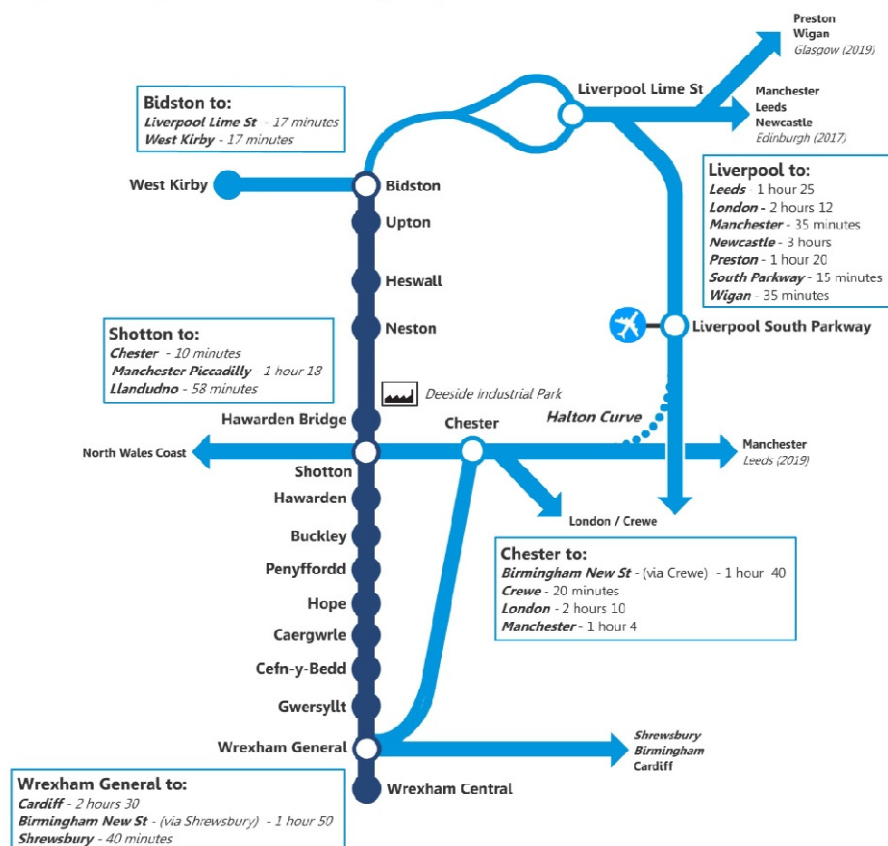
- Improved service frequency (increased from one to two trains an hour) and an extension to current operating hours between Wrexham and Bidston together

with improved interchange with other services (for local and long-distance destinations) at both Shotton and Wrexham;

- The introduction of a new station on the route to serve the Deeside Industrial Park (*Deeside Parkway*);
- The introduction of a through service between Wrexham and Liverpool when suitable rolling stock (such as IPEMUs) can be made available;
- Electrification of the route as soon as a positive business case can be realised.

The connectivity map (*Figure 1* below) shows the potential of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor.

Wrexham - Bidston connectivity map



The connectivity map clearly shows the potential of the Wrexham – Bidston rail corridor. This potential could be unlocked with a more frequent (and reliable) service interconnecting with other services at Shotton and Wrexham General. With a robust half hourly service on the route, a station for the Deeside Industrial Park (*Deeside Parkway?*) and the correct advertising, the Wrexham – Bidston line could become an effective part of the region’s rail network; connecting workers with their employment and used by people in the communities along it to make connections right across the UK.

Figure 1 – Wrexham – Bidston connectivity map

When Network Rail (NR) consulted on its draft Welsh Route Strategy during 2015, WBRUA was pleased to note that NR was proposing to improve the interchange at Shotton during its Control Period 6 (CP6). The significant journey opportunities which the improved interchange at Shotton could achieve can only be realised with an increased service on both the North Wales Main Line and the Wrexham-Bidston Line, for which the draft NR Welsh Route Strategy did not provide.

Across North Wales many people are forced to buy a car to reach their employment and, for young people in particular, the cost of running a car can take a significant element of their salary. Such car usage is also contributing to congestion on the road network. People living in areas of North Wales or seeking to work in locations which are poorly served by public transport, who are unable or unwilling to buy a car, limit their employment opportunities and may not realise their potential. The poor service frequency on the Wrexham-Bidston line, the absence of a station serving the Deeside Industrial Park and the lack of effective connection with other services at Shotton and Wrexham means that the Wrexham-Bidston Line significantly underperforms its potential in providing transport connectivity for the wider region to support jobs, enterprise creation and growth.

Two trains an hour on the Wrexham-Bidston Line with two trains an hour calling at Shotton on the North Wales Main Line timetabled roughly 15 minutes apart will enable effective connections to and from both routes in all directions: Chester to and from the Wrexham direction, Chester to and from the Bidston direction, North Wales Coast to and from the Wrexham Direction and North Wales Coast to and from the Bidston direction. New journey opportunities, such as from Rhyl to a new station serving Deeside, *Deeside Parkway*, would be realised; enabling people from the North Wales Coast to travel easily by rail to access the employment opportunities in the Deeside Industrial Park.

2. WBRUA's response to the eight specific topics identified:

2.1. High level priorities for infrastructure.

- Line speed improvements and route capacity improvements to reduce journey time and increase service frequency for passengers on key transport flows. From North Wales this will be primarily to cities/airports in Northern England (the 'Northern Powerhouse'), the West Midlands, London, South Wales and, in due course, connectivity to HS2 (inputs such as signalling and electrification may be required / could potentially be justified to support a reduction in journey time and increased service frequency with electrification essential for through services onto HS2).
- Capability and capacity to move freight by rail without adversely impacting on passenger service (connections to freight/intermodal terminals, route capacity provision in the form of freight loops and sidings).

2.2. How far Welsh Government's rail infrastructure priorities, including those in the National Transport Finance Plan, and the Ministerial Task Force on North Wales Transport report meet the needs of Wales.

- The WBRUA believes that focusing Welsh rail infrastructure priorities on meeting the needs of just Wales is wrong; Welsh Rail Infrastructure needs to meet the needs of the people and industry it serves regardless of whether those needs are entirely within Wales or pass through the border into England.
- The communities, industry and economy of North East Wales are intrinsically linked with those of North West England. Many people live one side of the Wales-England border and work on the other side.
- Whilst the WBRUA welcomes the elements in the National Transport Finance Plan and the Ministerial Task Force on North Wales Transport report relating

to the Wrexham-Bidston line and the lines with which it connects, neither of the documents develop the potential connectivity of the Wrexham-Bidston route in a cohesive way to support jobs, enterprise creation and growth in both North East Wales and the wider cross border region encompassing North Wales and North West England.

- Priority has to be given to those rail infrastructure projects which support the realisation of economic potential (encompassing enterprise creation and growth). The primary focus has to be on enabling workers easily to reach employment and providing for the effective flow of rail freight. Any modal shift to rail will relieve pressure on congested roads and further assist economic development.

2.3. How the development and exploitation of rail infrastructure in England affects Wales, and vice versa.

- The border between Wales and England should be invisible to both passenger and freight flows.
- The development and exploitation of rail infrastructure must be consistent either side of the border for cross border traffic – there must not be a step change from one side of the border to the other.

2.4. The impact on Wales of key planned developments in England.

- The North Wales Main Line will need to be electrified if through services between North Wales and HS2 are to be realised.
- A rolling programme of electrification could realise electrification from Warrington and Crewe to Chester and trigger electrification onwards to North Wales, Wrexham and possibly the Borderland Line (to realise a through service to Liverpool) with a common feed to both routes at Shotton from the National Grid at Connah's Quay. It is however important to remember that electrification is only an input which may be required to support a desired output of fast, frequent and through passenger services to and from Wales.
- North Wales needs fast and frequent services to connect with the cities in the Northern Powerhouse (ideally by incorporating some North Wales Main Line services into a wider trans-Pennine network).
- More widely devolved powers in England should not be an issue provided that cross border/boundary rail traffic flows are considered as an entity and with a single cohesive strategy for such flows across all the administrative bodies involved.

2.5. How Welsh Government can best engage with and influence infrastructure developments in England.

- By working closely with the UK National Infrastructure Commission and the various regional bodies responsible for developing rail infrastructure.
- Seeking to identify and work with individuals or bodies responsible for championing specific cross border/boundary passenger or freight flow for its entire route in order that borders/boundaries are invisible and do not represent a step change in the route of the traffic concerned.

2.6. Whether the periodic review process meets the needs of Wales.

- The focus has to be on rail passenger and freight traffic flows from origin to destination, regardless of whether such flows are entirely in Wales or across the border to or from England.
- It is the performance and on-going development of rail traffic flows from origin to destination that matters.

2.7. The effectiveness of the Network Rail Wales Route.

- Network Rail Routes could align better with rail corridors and traffic flows on them rather than split them; examples include:
 - The North Wales Main Line and its branches are isolated from the rest of the Wales Route as responsibility falls to the London North Western Route east of Flint.
 - The Wrexham-Bidston Line is split between the Wales Route at its southern end and the London North Western Route at its northern end.

2.8. The fact that funding for Welsh rail infrastructure is not devolved. The advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and risks potentially associated with devolution.

- Advantage: – A limited number of infrastructure issues entirely in Wales and of no concern to English interests will be under Welsh Control.
- Disadvantage: – Potential difficulty in securing an equitable share of funding from sponsoring bodies for infrastructure association with cross border traffic flows when infrastructure is devolved.
- Opportunities: – Ability to focus on traffic flows (both within Wales and Cross Border) and promote Welsh interests in them.
- Risks: – Devolved powers may result in local interests being promoted to the detriment of UK national interests – the border should not be an issue for cross border traffic flows.

Yours sincerely,

John Allcock

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Chairman of WBRUA