

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 10	WRI 10
Great Western Railway	Great Western Railway

## **Priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure**

### **Submission by Great Western Railway (GWR)**

Mae Great Western Railway (GWR) yn falch o gael gwahoddiad i gyfrannu i'r ymchwiliad hwn ar flaenoriaethau'r strwythwaeth rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru, gan Bwyllgor Menter a Busnes Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru.

Mae GWR yn rhan o First Group, un o gwmnïau trafniadaeth mwyaf y byd, sydd yn darparu gwasnaethau trenau a bysus drwy Brydain. Mae gweithgaredd y cwmni yng Nghymru yn cynnwys gwasnaethau trenau GWR a hefyd gwasanaethau bysus FirstCymru, yn Abertawe a Gorllewin Cymru. Mae GWR yn darparu 127 o wasanaethau bob diwrnod gwaith i mewn ac allan o Gymru, yn cynnwys gwasnaethau i Lundain a Bryste.

Nid does unrhyw wrthwynebiad gennym i'r ddogfen hon fod yn gyhoeddus, ac oes bydd angen unrhyw wybodaeth neu eglurhad pellach, byddem yn falch o helpu.

Great Western Railway (GWR) is pleased to be invited to contribute to this inquiry on priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure by the National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee.

GWR is a part of FirstGroup, one of the largest public transport operators in the world, providing rail and bus services across the UK. In Wales, the Group's activity includes GWR train services and also FirstCymru bus services in Swansea and west Wales. GWR operates 127 services every weekday in and out of Wales, including services to London and Bristol.

We have no objection to placing this submission in the public domain, and we would be happy to help if any further details or any clarification are required.

### **Our Response to the Questions Posed:**

#### **High level priorities for the development of rail infrastructure to provide the capacity and connectivity necessary to support the social and economic well-being of Wales;**

Cardiff and the Cardiff Capital Region play an important role in the economic well-being of Wales. As such it needs a transport infrastructure that allows growth to take place and for that to happen Cardiff needs a rail station that befits a capital city. The Rugby World Cup highlighted the deficiencies for passengers circulating around the station and waiting on platforms along with the infrastructure not being suited to an intensive train service required for a major event

To deliver a step change in passenger movement from the station post-event significant changes need to be made to the station to improve passenger flows and to the track to allow more frequent departures. In addition, the regular passenger flows are anticipated to increase significantly due to the expected growth in modal shift to rail following electrification of the Great Western mainline and the replacement of the High Speed Trains with new modern Super Express Trains as part of the Intercity Express Programme which together will deliver faster journey times. Passenger numbers are forecast to rise from 13m to 22m by 2023 (Wales Route Study 2014/15 pg27). The new trains with greater

capacity will encourage more people to travel by train for events in Cardiff; particularly as the City, and South Wales, continues to attract world class events.

Rail has demonstrated its ability to move large crowds, over long distances quickly, effectively and safely. Changing the layout of Cardiff Central would transform the experience of fans and visitors to Cardiff, as well as protecting Cardiff's commuters and business travelers.

Such improvements are important to allow the full benefits of the Great Western Main Line Electrification Programme (GWEP) to be utilised. This programme will see GWR operating Super Express Trains, which can run in 9 or 10 car formations. In addition each carriage is also longer than those in the current High Speed Train fleet enabling more people per train service to travel. In addition, the electrification programme supported by improvements in infrastructure, will allow GWR to use its new fleet of four-car Class 387 electric trains provided for the London Thames Valley to provide additional capacity during major events in Cardiff.

Each of these Class 387 trains can run in 12 car formations and seat 675 passengers in a 2+2 seating layout with scope for many more to stand for shorter distances. Given this potential GWR has sought to ensure that these trains will have route clearance to Cardiff and, once the line is electrified, we can bring these trains to the City on match days. In the near future, GWR will have a significant uplift in ability to transport large volumes of people quickly; the restricting factor will then become the station capability.

The benefits of our Super Express Trains and occasional use of Class 387 trains will be enhanced with the proposed increase in line speed improvements between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel.

Underpinning all these schemes however is electrification of the Great Western Main Line to South Wales, and although it is now clear that full electrification will take place later than Network Rail originally planned, Sir Peter Hendy's initial report does confirm that the work will go ahead, albeit over a longer period. It is however important to note that expected delivery of our new long distance train fleet for South Wales from 2017 is not affected by Network Rail's new timescale, and we are working hard with the Department for Transport to look at ways we can deliver the full package of jointly promised benefits we want to deliver for our customers in Wales, despite the challenges Network Rail faces.

Journey time improvements to and from South Wales are key, particularly given that the capability of the new trains being introduced by GWR will be held back by line speeds. The infrastructure should be updated to match the opportunities provided by electrification reducing the time taken between Cardiff and London, including central London through Crossrail, Heathrow, Gatwick and HS2.

### **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;**

In broad terms we felt that the National Transport Plan and subsequent Finance Plan set out a comprehensive range of rail infrastructure projects. It was also supported by a comprehensive range of data and analysis and we recognise the role that the rail industry and GWR has to support the Welsh Government's development and delivery of its rail infrastructure programme. Key to this is a process for development phase of projects to give that flexibility in the programme should any new funding opportunities emerge during the relative short timescale of the National Transport Plan.

Therefore, we see the creation of the new Transport for Wales company, which will take forward the re-letting of the next Wales and Borders franchise and delivery of the Cardiff Capital Region Metro, as being crucial to developing a rolling programme of rail projects. We look forward to working with the new body on schemes in South Wales.

We also welcome the opportunity to work in both the development and implementation stages of the Cardiff City Deal which again provides an opportunity to provide a significant step change to rail infrastructure in South Wales.

**How the development and exploitation of rail infrastructure in England affects Wales, and vice versa;**

Schemes such as expansion of capacity and capability through Reading Station redevelopment; redoubling of a significant section of the North Cotswold line and reinstatement of double line between Swindon and Kemble on the South Cotswold route have helped unlock previous constraints on maintaining the train service between Wales and England. Moreover, the ongoing work to electrify of the mainline from London to South Wales and of Crossrail to Reading will allow the new Super Express Trains to bring Wales closer to London and the South East in terms of journey times.

Similarly, the proposed four-tracking and electrification of the Filton Bank, north of Bristol, will provide additional infrastructure capacity needed on the Cardiff-Bristol route, which continues to see year on year passenger growth. This scheme will not only provide for the planned additional London to Bristol services, but will also improve reliability of all services, including the Anglo-Welsh commuting, business and leisure services that we operate. This infrastructure also opens the possibility of providing new rolling stock strategies for South Wales to Bristol and beyond, something which we are committed through our new franchise agreement to investigate.

The importance of international links to Wales is well known and we continue to support the proposed new Western rail access to Heathrow; when delivered this will bring South Wales closer to Heathrow by around an hour, through connections at Reading and/or Slough improving access to and from the international market which Wales wants to attract.

The likely electrification of the route from Birmingham to Bristol is also worth noting. This creates further opportunities to provide connectivity from South Wales to HS2 at Birmingham and on to the North of England / Scotland.

All these infrastructure investments highlight the need to ensure Cardiff Central station has the capability to create a positive, lasting impression of the city both day to day and during major events.

**The impact on Wales of key planned developments in England including High Speed Rail, electrification, Northern Power House / Transport for the North, and wider devolution of responsibility for rail within England;**

GWR works closely with Local Enterprise Partnerships across England. The likes of the West of England Partnership leading on the development of the Metro West rail network in the Greater Bristol area, and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, along with Cornwall Council's commitment to a series of rail improvement programmes funded by European funding have shown how decisions and a momentum at a local level has helped develop the infrastructure business and councils see as crucial to the economic growth in their communities. We are keen on developing this level of partnership in South Wales to benefit local communities along the route

In terms of High Speed Rail, there will be a direct opportunity and impact of HS2 – London to the North via the West Midlands – with the planned creation of an interchange on the Great Western Main Line at Old Oak Common two miles outside Paddington. This will help release the potential for journey time savings between London and the North of England (and beyond) on HS2, although in so doing it underlines the importance for the competitiveness of South Wales of introducing route electrification and other infrastructure improvements as quickly as possible.

**How Welsh Government can best engage with and influence infrastructure developments in England and the development of passenger and freight services using the network;**

It is important that as the electrification programme develops and rail franchise negotiations take place that the Welsh Government continue to press the case for Welsh schemes with the Department for Transport and Welsh Office. We are part of a Wales Rail Industry Leaders group lead by the Welsh Government, where senior officials from rail companies and senior civil servants share dialogue and understanding of the strategic directions being taken by all parties. This group is linked to the national Rail Delivery Group and the planning process for investment in the railway through the development of the Initial Industry Plan and Strategic Business Planning process. This shows the extent to which the Welsh Government is committed to working with others to develop the rail network outside of Wales.

Both the UK and Welsh Governments are aware of the challenges we have in accommodating growth against the funding constraints that we have; and both Governments are supportive of our drive to do the right things in terms of improving performance and customer satisfaction, and in running an efficient rail network.

**Whether the periodic review process meets the needs of Wales and takes account of the needs of Welsh passenger and freight users, and how this should be developed;**

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

**The effectiveness of the Network Rail Wales Route and whether the approach to delivery of network management, maintenance, renewal and enhancement functions are effective in delivering value for money, capacity, frequency, speed, reliability and handling disruption for passengers and freight users in Wales;**

The Periodic Review Process overseen by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) fits within a group of processes and systems in the rail industry. As Periodic Reviews have evolved, however, we have pressed the case for the setting of outputs and efficient levels of expenditure at a route level supporting the devolution that has occurred within Network Rail.

There remains potential for future efficiencies to be realised from closer cooperation between TOCs and NR routes in finding cost effective ways to deliver locally agreed outputs. Such a situation exists within the GWR area and our involvement in Network Rail's Western Route programme of rail infrastructure and alliance, and where both at director level and at key levels throughout both organisations we work together on finding ways to deliver locally agreed outputs. The evidence from work undertaken by NR at Reading in 2014 and 2015, and around Bath in 2015 shows the benefits of this alliance and we feel there is no reason why the same could not be achieved in Wales, particularly around key schemes such as Great Western Main Line Electrification to Swansea.

In terms of devolution of funding rail infrastructure to Wales, we would again support the view that there should be greater clarity on the level of funding, in terms of operations, maintenance, renewals and enhancements of the infrastructure at a Wales route level. That need not necessarily require full devolution for funding rail infrastructure to Wales. The Metro West project in Greater Bristol is funded through UK Government as part of an Enterprise Zone, and the Cornwall Rail Improvement Programme uses European funding to lever Central UK government funding; both schemes are possible within the current system of responsibilities for rail infrastructure at a regional and UK level. The focus for that level of government with their rail infrastructure schemes has been the need to influence and prescribe their outputs to Network Rail, and that has been achieved without full funding responsibility for the rail infrastructure.

So far as our involvement with Network Rail's Wales Route is concerned, we work closely with them at both a strategic and daily operational level. As evidenced by the efforts during the Rugby World Cup and regular challenges faced on Wales rail network.

However we are concerned that the lessons learned from the Rugby World Cup and the general day to day increase in patronage expected in the coming years are not being incorporated in the plans for Cardiff Central station. This is an opportunity to create a world class station to support a world class event location in a world class city – this opportunity should not be lost.

We welcome the agreement between the UK and Welsh Governments that will see the next franchise let by Welsh Government and the formation of the new Transport for Wales body that will oversee this process.

The nature of the railways in Wales is similar to that in Scotland and, through FirstGroup and our tenure of the ScotRail franchise between 2004 and 2015, we have seen the benefits that local governance has had in this context. This model also enabled us to work closely with Transport Scotland and Network Rail to deliver additional benefits to rail users, including infrastructure schemes such as electrification of Paisley Canal to provide improved services, efficiently, effectively and for reduced cost.