

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 30	WRI 30
Trenau Arriva Cymru	Arriva Trains Wales

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

## **1. Introduction**

Arriva Trains Wales has been operating the Wales and Borders Franchise since 2003 which delivers over 950 train services per day in Wales and the Borders. Arriva have overseen a transformation of the railway in Wales since commencing the franchise in 2003. With a new timetable delivering hundreds of new journeys each day, a focus on driving punctuality and reliability and the highest levels of customer satisfaction seen on the network we have seen passengers returning in ever increasing numbers to our services. This evidenced by journey growth from 18m in 2003 to in excess of 31m in 2015.

In order to accommodate this growth it is timely that the Enterprise and Business Committee has requested evidence on a number of key issues to define the strategic approach to provision of rail infrastructure in Wales. Arriva Trains Wales is pleased to give our views from a passenger train operation perspective.

## **2. Rail infrastructure priorities**

Arriva Trains Wales view of rail infrastructure priorities to provide capacity and connectivity, necessary to support social and economic wellbeing of Wales is about maximising timetable flexibility in infrastructure to allow improvements to timetables to meet changing priorities and demands.

Many parts of Wales still have long signalling sections, low speed profiles, short platforms and single lines with passing loops (passenger and freight) which makes it difficult to change and improve timetables without having a negative impact in other areas. We recognise that there are schemes seeking to address some of these issues. However, there is still much work to do to achieve flexible infrastructure and maximise track and signalling layouts and to provide track quality where we can utilise the full potential of our trains so to improve end to end journey times for customers.

We very much support the proposed electrification of the Valleys Network and hope that the funding can be found for the whole of the current system in this area to benefit. We are also supportive of further electrification in other areas such as the North Wales coast. There is for us, a clear rationale of linking the North Wales coast both to the West Coast and electrification in Manchester. Electrification has proven benefits both in terms of long term system costs but also in improved journey times and reliability of the rolling stock. We would also note that while the Marches route is a key strategic link for Wales rail, bridging North and South, the main passenger flows are east/west in both North and South Wales. We would like to see modern infrastructure (electrification, stations, track and signalling) supporting these key flows.

However, infrastructure improvements/enhancements may not always be the answer to solve the capacity challenge, as for example, value for money maybe better tackled through longer trains.

It is important that all aspects of the rail system are considered so we believe it is important that Government has a clear rolling stock strategy linked to infrastructure improvements to ensure funded improvements can have timely and maximum benefits.

In terms how far infrastructure priorities go for Wales, it is encouraging to see the additional funding from both Governments in respect of stations, particularly in important areas such as improving accessibility and the environment for customers. However, there are still many stations that still exist which could benefit from further investment. For example, only approximately 50% of the number of stations in Wales are fully accessible albeit by footfall we have over 80% accessible. Rail plays a vital role in social and economic inclusion and “how accessible” the system is (stations and rolling stock) should form an important consideration for Government. We have previously made recommendations in this respect in evidence given to the communities and local government committee.

We were pleased and encouraged to see the report into the Rugby World Cup making a key recommendation for the need to modernise Cardiff Central station so that it can be fit for purpose for when Cardiff hosts special events. However, it is not only the station that needs improving but also the track and signalling capacity needed on the infrastructure into and out of Cardiff. Funding for such a scheme is for us a high priority.

We welcome the Welsh Governments ambitious plans for the Metro in South Wales which at its heart will likely involve substantial and prolonged infrastructure works in order to make the ambition a reality.

Arriva Trains Wales engages with Network Rail on their Wales Route Study which identifies infrastructure opportunities for funders. We are supportive of the work undertaken by Network Rail and believes it essential that funding is provided to meet the current and expected rise in demand of passenger numbers in Control Period 6 and beyond to 2029. ATW understands the draft study is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

We would like to comment on the impact to Wales regarding the development of infrastructure in England. Certainly in this Control Period (5) we have seen and experienced significant poor delivery from project teams brought into the Wales Network Rail route. It is clear that Network Rail have been active in addressing project delivery issues and some improvement has been seen. However, problems remain and it is regrettable that this history of poor delivery may jeopardise future 3<sup>rd</sup> party funding or lead to increased Network Rail costs (and hence less delivery for the funds available) as they become even more risk averse. There is also a key question for Network Rail as to whether as part of its route devolution that each route should have the resources available to deliver large scale

infrastructure changes. If perhaps for economies of scale this doesn't happen then Wales will remain beholden to Network Rail central project teams for delivery of critical Welsh projects.

In this sense we would observe that Network Rail resources, which are managed centrally place a low priority on Welsh based schemes. So for example the Great Western and Crossrail take precedence over critical Welsh projects such as Cardiff area Signalling Renewal. This both delays the Welsh programme (and benefits), imports risk and means Wales has sub optimal time for delivering the works with least disruption.

### **3. Impact of key planned developments in England and vice versa**

When considering the impact to Wales on the planned developments such as High Speed, Electrification and Northern Hub, there is a risk schemes in England do not fully consider cross border opportunities which as mentioned above is a key passenger flow for Wales. Northern Hub for example has increased platform capacity at Manchester Airport which ATW are now fighting to utilise due to a bias towards English train companies. The knock on effects of delays against programmes in England can also have implications in Wales.

It's important from a UK perspective any development of rail infrastructure either side of the border is consistent and "joined up" to enable seamless and efficient cross border services.

Welsh rail passengers do feel the "pain" during planned developments in England and it may be difficult for customers to see the benefits. For example, Virgin Trains not running through to North Wales due to engineering works in the Watford area dis-benefits Wales and the benefits may not be realised by the local market.

As the major schemes in England develop such as HS2 it will be important that Wales Government continues to engage and influence infrastructure developments with both Network Rail and the Department for Transport and ensure there is benefit for Wales.

### **4. Periodic Review Process**

We believe that the natural extension of rail powers being devolved in the future to Welsh Government, is that Wales (like Scotland) should have its own funding and High Level Output Specification agreed with the Regulator. This will protect investment in Wales and ensure key priorities for Wales are funded.

## **5. The effectiveness of the Network Rail Wales Route**

As part of devolution the Wales Route was created in 2011 from the LNW and Western Routes. We work closely with NR Wales identifying opportunities for infrastructure improvements. In general it does feel Wales route has the right strategy but is often restricted in what it can deliver by the funding it is allocated from its centre. There is much more we would like Network Rail to deliver but funding constraints restrict this. We are unclear on whether the funding allocated to the Wales Route is sufficient to meet its needs. We understand how the route apportions its budget as it sees best to meet local conditions but this is based on a top down allocation rather than a bottom up assessment of need. The recent autumn season and failure to tackle a number of areas were a good illustration of this point.

In terms of structure, many of the infrastructure projects in Wales currently sit outside the route and is managed by a central project team. This does have issues with the different needs and priorities of the route and project team.

We have seen significant investment in the network recently by both Network Rail and Welsh Government which is welcomed and will assist the long term development of the network. However, this does have a detrimental short term impact on customers during delivery which may be difficult for some customers to understand as the benefits are manifested later. A clear strategic delivery plan for all infrastructure improvements will be beneficial for both customer communication and certainty.

## **6. Devolving funding for Welsh rail infrastructure**

We believe devolved funding will bring decision making closer to the point of need. In principle this would seem to be sensible. However the key risk is whether sufficient funding will be devolved in order to allow the sustainability and more importantly the growth of the rail system in Wales. It will thus become even more important that with the constraints on the public purse that infrastructure change is delivered on time and to budget.