

## Petition: The Ghost Train

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 27 Medi 2016

Petitions Committee | 27 September 2016

### Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-5-696

Petition title: The Ghost Train

Text of petition:

We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the Arriva Trains Wales northbound 7pm train from Mach should stop at all stations on request.

### Background

Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) will continue to operate the current Wales and Borders rail franchise until 2018 including services on the Cambrian Lines. The Cambrian Lines comprise two lines:

- The country (or mainline) connecting Aberystwyth with Shrewsbury and beyond; and
- The coast line from Machynlleth up to Pwllheli.

While rail franchising is not currently devolved, the Welsh Government is responsible for the day to day management of the franchise, including the funding of services within Wales ("Wales only services"), and those which start or finish in Wales ("Welsh services"). The *Railways Act 2005* empowers the Welsh Government to invest in rail service enhancements.

The Welsh and UK Governments have reached agreement on devolution of executive powers to procure the next Welsh rail franchise from 2018. Powers are expected to be devolved from 2017, and the Welsh Government has begun preparations for the next franchise.

The Welsh Government is currently working with the rail industry and other stakeholders to develop the next franchise. In anticipation of devolution of powers to award the next rail franchise, the Welsh Government launched a public consultation, [Setting the Direction for](#)

[Wales and Borders Rail](#), in January 2016. This consultation sought views on rail services themselves, including the “range of future services”. A [summary of consultation responses](#) has now been published.

The Cabinet Secretary of Economy and Infrastructure made a statement giving an update on the [Wales and Borders Franchise and Metro Programmes](#) on 12 July 2016. In outlining the next stages in the process the Cabinet Secretary referred to a further public consultation:

The process will include a programme of engagement activities with stakeholders and, after we have a clear set of proposals for a new contract early next year, there will be a further formal public consultation. Subject to a successful process, we will award that contract at the end of 2017.

## Welsh Government action

### The National Transport Finance Plan

The Welsh Government’s [National Transport Finance Plan](#) covers the period 2015–2020, as well as “medium term” objectives for 2020 and beyond. This includes a number of schemes related to rail services, including a commitment to “a review of currently proposed service enhancements” between 2016–17 and 2018–19, and proposals for “Introduction of new services on the Cambrian Main Line and Heart of Wales Line”.

### Enhancement of Cambrian Line Services

The Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee comprises a range of stakeholders including local and community councils, rail passenger groups, ATW and Network Rail, and political / government representatives.

In October 2013 the Liaison Committee commissioned a survey to assess the potential impact on passenger numbers of an improved timetable on the Cambrian Lines. The Committee subsequently reported to then Minister for Economy, Science and Transport and additional services were introduced from May 2015, including 4 additional return services between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury, and an additional service on the coast line from Machynlleth to Pwllheli in May 2015. The Welsh Government committed to evaluate these services over three years. Further information can be found on the Welsh Government website [here](#).

Unlike services earlier in the day, the additional 7pm service departing from Machynlleth to Pwllheli does not stop at all stations north of Barmouth, stopping instead at 7 of 17 stations.

The [January 2016 report of the Liaison Committee](#) reports an increase in passenger numbers of nearly 90% since the introduction of the new services. However, the report noted the results of a 2015 survey which noted “the Coast Line train ex 1900 Machynlleth should call at all stops as per the usual running pattern”.

The Cabinet Secretary's letter to the Chair on this petition says that Welsh Government officials are encouraging ATW to work with Network Rail to overcome current timetable restrictions. The nature of these restrictions is unclear. He says trials of alternative arrangements have been undertaken recently.

## **National Assembly for Wales action**

The Enterprise and Business Committee in the Fourth Assembly undertook an inquiry into [The Future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise](#) which reported in December 2013. The reported included a "charter for the next Wales and Borders Franchise" which included recommendations that the Welsh Government should undertake extensive consultation and should:

base the development of routes, service levels and future infrastructure requirements on a detailed understanding of the socio-economic drivers of rail traffic flows within the Wales and Borders Franchise area, and the potential market and future demand scenarios, including cross-border flows.

While there has been much discussion in the Assembly of enhancements to the Cambrian Lines' services, there has been no discussion on the specific issue raised by the petition.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.