

## **Telford & Wrekin Council Aspirations for the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise**



### **Introduction**

Telford & Wrekin is a unitary authority in the West Midlands region. Telford is a new town designated in the 1960s but the borough also includes the towns of Dawley, Madeley, Newport, Oakengates and Wellington and unparalleled environmental assets in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The population of the borough is circa 167,000 people.

During 2016 Telford & Wrekin Council along with the Telford Business Board created an Economic Development Strategy to promote growth and prosperity in the borough. Going forward the Economic Development Strategy looks to extend and support the diverse range of businesses represented in the borough and continue to be a major contributor to the region's economy.

The Economic Development Strategy recognises that transport connectivity and infrastructure underpins economic growth and efficiency. Telford & Wrekin Council has agreed a growth deal with the Homes & Communities Agency that has identified 400 acres of employment land and sites for close to 3,000 new homes. As part of this there is a commitment from Government to invest over £44million into site preparation to deliver this land to market.

Strong domestic demand is boosting production levels across a wide range of manufacturing activities and investment in new facilities, machinery, research and recruitment by Telford based manufacturers is creating a solid outlook for growth.

The attractiveness of Telford & Wrekin as a place to invest is also enhanced by the expansion of the two Universities with sites in the borough – Harper Adams University and the Telford Innovation Campus of Wolverhampton University. The Ministry of Defence in Donnington has also committed to expanding its facility with a £70million fulfilment centre that is a major enhancement to Telford's position as a centre for the logistics sector.

Telford's central location and connectivity to both the wider West Midlands and beyond is a strong part of our offer to inward investors. Transport connectivity plays an essential role in supporting economic activity and growth: it enables access to markets nationally and internationally; improves labour market efficiency; unlocks employment and housing sites; reduces the costs of doing business and stimulates business investment and innovation.

To support this Telford & Wrekin Council is involved in the Midlands Engine initiative to grow the combined economy of the East Midlands and West Midlands creating 300,000 jobs and boosting the national economy by £34billion. Telford & Wrekin Council is also involved in developing the vision and strategy to transform transport connectivity across the Midlands Engine area through Midlands Connect, the cross-region transport group, which is working towards better integrated transport systems across the Midlands.

Telford & Wrekin Council now needs to work with partner agencies such as the

Wales & Borders Rail franchisee to improve the quality and reliability of connectivity to, from and within the borough, to further enable people to access employment sites.

The response to this consultation is framed with the needs of supporting the Council's approach to economic development in mind and making the best use of the rail network in achieving the goals of the Telford & Wrekin Economic Development Strategy.

**1. Have NIL detriment to any of our existing service provision and preferably deliver betterment. The current service levels should be seen as a base to build upon.**

Telford & Wrekin Council's view is that the current rail services provided by Arriva Trains Wales should be maintained into the next Wales & Borders Rail Franchise. This should include the additional trains on the Cambrian line introduced during 2015 and trains to Birmingham International.

The Wales & Borders Rail services provide valuable connectivity to Telford & Wrekin allowing residents access to health, education, leisure, employment, retail and tourism destinations. For businesses the rail services allows them to access markets and bring in new employees.

The rail service is an important asset to the Telford & Wrekin area and additional services, for example during Sundays, would strengthen this and the associated benefits.

**2. Maintain and improve rail connectivity to international gateways.**

The existing rail timetable for Telford & Wrekin includes rail services to Birmingham International and Holyhead.

Telford & Wrekin Council supports the retention and development of these services.

Connectivity to airports and ports brings visitors to the area, for example to the Ironbridge World Heritage Site and gives impetus to economic development.



**3. Reflect the passenger demand for services that link cross border access to health provision, academic institutions and business.**

The cross border rail services operated by the Wales & Borders Rail franchise are of importance to people living in Telford & Wrekin with many people travelling across border for school, college, to hospitals and for employment. Many people travel to the holiday towns on the Welsh coast.

The rail services allow this cross border travel to happen but the services provided do not often reflect the realities of the travel demand created. Additional capacity is needed on services to the coast during the summer, to the University towns at the start and end of term and to Birmingham during late November and December.

The new Wales & Borders Rail franchise needs to be let with sufficient rolling stock capacity to allow the operator to provide the capacity for day to day flows on cross border route but also to allow the operator to respond to the additional demand

created by seasonal fluctuations and special events traffic. In the Telford area this can include the Air Show at Cosford and the V Music Festival at Weston Park.

#### **4. Provide connectivity to future HS2 agglomeration benefits.**

Improved transport connectivity generally means the ability to reach a wide range of places in a short amount of time. The development of High Speed Two in coming years will bring high quality transport infrastructure to the West Midlands.

The next operator of the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise should be a position to deliver connectivity to High Speed Two. This will allow businesses from Telford & Wrekin to benefit from sustained economic growth and maintain competitiveness in a developed economy.

There has long been recognition of the link between connectivity and economic growth. International competitiveness is driven by productivity growth which is underpinned by trade, foreign investment and innovative activity, all of which are facilitated by connectivity. The most innovative and productive firms tend to be those that are competing at a global level. Connectivity to High Speed Two will help business across the Telford & Wrekin borough to progress further.



#### **5. Increases in train service frequencies to meet passenger demands.**

Higher train service frequencies to Telford Central and Wellington would bring a valuable addition to the rail services and would support planned increases in housing and support economic growth in Telford & Wrekin. It would attract investment to outlying areas and support the national Industrial Strategy bringing development to deprived areas.

#### **6. Connectivity with inter city rail services including services to London.**

The conurbations of Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands are within easy reach of Telford & Wrekin and are therefore significant destinations for rail passengers from Telford.

These centres also act as interchange stations for onward travel to other regions of the United Kingdom and these centres have international airports.

The borough currently has limited direct rail services to London but there are opportunities for changing to rail services to London at Birmingham New Street and Wolverhampton so connections with the Wales & Borders rail franchise at those stations should be maximised.

The improvements to rail services to the conurbations should include enhanced evening services and Sunday services. The cities are open 24 hours and with varied events throughout the year at the National Exhibition Centre and continued attraction of the Birmingham Christmas Market, the services to the conurbations are of importance to the people and the economy of Telford & Wrekin Council.

## **7. Increased and appropriate rolling stock.**

Steps should be taken with the new Wales & Borders Rail franchise to order new rolling stock for the franchise. The older trains in the fleet need replacing and the fleet also needs to be increased in size.

Whilst we are aware that the older trains have been upgraded in recent years the Council still considers that there is a need for new rolling stock on the Birmingham routes with appropriate room and facilities for passengers with luggage, cyclists and disabled passengers.

In addition to air conditioning the new trains should also come with new passenger information systems, 4G wifi, USB charging points and toilets adequate for long distance journeys.

Some thought should be given to other luxury features or innovations such as sofas in group seating areas.

Telford & Wrekin Council welcomes the installation of wi-fi by Arriva Trains Wales and looks forward to further improvements to the trains operating on the Wales & Borders Rail franchise lines.



## **8. The Wales & Borders Franchise should have appropriate governance arrangements allowing meaningful engagement, cross border and representative of the area it serves.**

The next Wales & Borders Rail Franchise needs to continue and strengthen the work that Arriva Trains Wales has done in areas of stakeholder liaison particularly in England, as there is no direct link between the English authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Telford & Wrekin Council would welcome the involvement of the rail franchise in the Marches Strategic Rail Group's meetings to assist the group with information on franchise issues and progress.

The terms of reference for the existing Cross Border Forum involving the Department for Transport and the Welsh Assembly Government should be adjusted to allow representation from relevant Welsh and English Councils (and consortia) and Department for Transport, so the forum can cover other cross border rail franchises and so the forum is able to have strategic input, including dialogue with Midlands Connect and Transport for the North. The forum should meet quarterly.

