

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Masnachfaint Rheilffyrdd a chyflwyno Metro / Rail Franchise and the Metro

Ymateb gan West Coast Rail 250 / Evidence from West Coast Rail 250

WCR 250 is a national campaign group lobbying for improvements to Inter City West Coast (ICWC) services. In addition to having an extensive network of local authority and other key members, WCR250 also has an All Party Parliamentary Group. WCR 250 attaches great importance to development of the ICWC network on a joined up basis with other franchises. The common geographical areas shared by the Wales and Borders (W&B) franchise and ICWC services are:

- North Wales Coast, Chester – Crewe.
- Wrexham, Shrewsbury – Birmingham

WCR250 welcomes the emerging opportunities of the recently announced West Coast Partnership (WCP), and hopes to build upon the regular dialogue WCR250 has with the Department for Transport (DfT) and the franchise operator.

WCR 250 emphasises the importance of using its members' local knowledge to help develop the prioritised outcomes of the W&B franchise. This approach worked successfully by Rail North Ltd, making a transformational difference towards the Northern and Trans Pennine Express franchises introduced from April 2016. There has only been limited scope to engage with Transport for Wales (TfW) for this to date, and it is hoped that this can be swiftly addressed. This matter was referred to within the recommendations of the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry on the Wales and Borders rail franchise which state that "it is vitally important that the local authorities and regional bodies whether in Wales or England have the opportunity to shape the next franchise specification".

TfW have stated that franchise bidders can only meet with officers and not councillors to hear of priorities for the franchise. We consider that having the option for joint officer and councillor representation can be important to help ensure that bidders receive an informed presentation of the context and priorities such organisations.

TfW must ensure that the next Wales and Borders (W&B) franchise will meet current and future growth projections, ensuring that a programme of infrastructure works to enable capacity growth is accelerated. There are important opportunities to co-ordinate development of the WCP and W&B services Service improvements to improve capacity and connectivity improvements between Crewe, Chester and North Wales in addition between Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Wrexham.

Improvements to service frequency on Sundays and Bank Holidays, are needed, including Boxing day services, and improvements to the times of first and last trains. – Particularly allowing connections with ICWC services.

The W&B franchise operator must be able to adopt a more practical approach to holding connecting trains when it is known that passengers will be transferring, particularly if late at night and without being penalised for late running.

Performance monitoring of the W&B franchise should include positive performance measures such as commitments to increase measured passenger satisfaction and evidence of how the franchise operator is actively engaging and supporting local communities and economies in each region.

The operator must have minimum requirements to manage planned and unplanned service disruption (affecting any franchise at W&B stations) including full use of technology, social media; availability of staff who are able to help; ensure that clear announcements at all stations and easy processing of compensation claims, including automation where possible.

The fare structure (and supporting technology) must always give the passenger the best value fare for their journey(s), including giving value for money to make travel by families or small groups by rail more viable. Fares to make rail travel by young adults and those on low income more affordable are required and be suited to a variety of travel patterns.

The franchise operator needs to be committed helping passengers to make increased use of technology for ticket payment, particularly mobile devices. As well for convenience, this provides scope to better understand passengers' travel patterns, direct and real time journey information and reduces cash handling. Commitments should also be made to introduce two way through ticketing with a prioritised network of bus services (and community transport) that are commonly used at either end of the rail journey.

All stations must meet requirements of the broadest range of needs for people with any mobility or sensory impairment. Toilet provision must be fully accessible, and be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis and be available for use free of charge. Platform length and height need to provide easy access with trains.

Minimum criteria should be applied for all stations based on passenger number categories, recognizing the needs of long distance passengers (e.g. trolleys to carry luggage). This should include specifying minimum opening hours (and days of operation) of staffed ticket offices, directions to nearby bus stops, sheltered waiting accommodation, contact details for taxi operators, provision of CCTV, live journey information including audible messages to each platform and welcoming waiting facilities

TfW needs to make available to the franchise operator, a residual value funding mechanism to enable and commit major station improvements schemes. This would allow payment of major schemes (such as improving the facilities and overall passenger experience within Chester station) to be made beyond the franchise duration.

WCR250 also recommends that the franchise operator is committed to making prioritised improvements to station car park facilities and capacity to meet rail travel growth.

The Welsh Government must make minimum contractual commitments for the franchise operator to make community rail development a strong feature of the franchise, giving financial security to existing community rail partnerships and enable expansion of the community partnership model. The community rail concept should be broadened to also include bus services / operators and community transport, as well as strengthening engagement with small and medium enterprises to encourage use of station buildings, to increase use of the public transport network and to help prioritise investment.

W&B rolling stock investment is essential to respond to the continual passenger growth and must keep pace with the commendable standards and capacity improvements being made in other franchises. Passengers using W&B services at either end of their journey on

ICWC service expect to have confidence of being able to travel in a comfortable seat with adequate leg and elbow room, luggage accommodation and in a clean and well ventilated environment with free Wi Fi availability and plug in sockets.