

RAILFUTURE CYMRU

House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee Inquiry into Welsh rail infrastructure

Responses based on discussion at Branch Committee meeting 16.01.21

Railfuture Cymru/ Wales is part of Railfuture GB which campaigns for a bigger and better railway. We seek to represent the interests of all rail users in campaigning for Wales to have a rail service which people can be proud of and would recommend that everyone uses. We are submitting evidence to this inquiry because the appropriate management and funding of Welsh rail infrastructure is fundamental to achieving a high quality rail service in Wales.

Q1. Where does responsibility lie for rail infrastructure in Wales?

All responsibility lies with the UK Government, other than that the infrastructure on the Core Valley Lines has been transferred to the Welsh Government

Q2. How effectively do the UK and Welsh Governments co-operate with one another in the management and funding of rail infrastructure in Wales?

It is difficult for an external body such as Railfuture Cymru to judge this, but it appears to us that the Welsh Government is far from satisfied with the degree of co-operation which currently exists. An example is the cancellation of the electrification of the Cardiff to Swansea section of the South Wales Line, a decision which was not supported by the Welsh Government

Q3. Should responsibility for rail infrastructure in Wales be fully devolved?

It is well-established Railfuture Cymru policy that infrastructure should be fully devolved. Our current Development Plan states that “a Welsh not-for-dividend, vertically integrated rail company, set up by and responsible to the Welsh Government (should) take over the current operations of Network Rail...in Wales and the Borders” and “where section of routes run through England, decisions as to ...track maintenance... would be subject to liaison and agreement with the appropriate English-based authorities or companies”

Q4. What share of investment has Wales secured in its rail infrastructure since privatisation came into effect in 1994, and how sufficient is that level of investment?

The population of Wales is c5% of that of the UK, but rail infrastructure investment has been significantly lower than 5% of the total invested in the rail network as a whole. This has led to important infrastructure schemes being delayed or cancelled, for example:

- > electrification between Cardiff and Swansea
- > resignalling schemes on the Marches Line (Newport/Shrewsbury), the North Wales Line west of Llandudno Junction and the Heart of Wales Line (Pantyyffynnon > Llandovery > Craven Arms)

In addition, new schemes which we believe need to be funded include:

- > realigning the South Wales Line to allow faster trains between Cardiff and Swansea
- > reopening of the lines between Llangefni and the North Wales Line, Caernarfon (or possibly Afon Wen) and Bangor, and possibly Carmarthen/Aberystwyth

There seems to be little chance of any of these schemes going ahead without Wales getting a higher proportion of UK rail infrastructure investment

Q5. How is funding allocated to rail infrastructure projects across the UK and how are the different infrastructure needs of the regions and nations of the UK assessed?

Traditional cost benefit ratio analysis of projects (as operated by the UK Treasury) appears to us to have led to areas with the highest populations, especially London, receiving more rail infrastructure investment than their population figures merit. This approach is now being questioned in the context of demands for investment in the “Northern Powerhouse” and we feel that Wales should be pushing strongly in the same direction

Q6. What will be the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic for the rail network in Wales (including the sustainability of services and potential impact on investment in rail infrastructure)?

Clearly the effects of the pandemic cannot be certain at this stage, but it is likely that peak travel will fall as home working is found preferable as a long term solution by many employers and their employees. It may well be that off peak travel will not be subject to reductions of the same order

It is vital that any short term service cuts to take account of level 4 restrictions on travel are not used as an excuse for long term cancellation or delays to rail investment, which must be enhanced as part of the national drive towards more energy efficient carbon neutral transport

Q7. What opportunities are there for Wales as a result of the recently launched Union Connectivity Review?

Railfuture Cymru made a number of suggestions for rail infrastructure improvements in its response to the UCR, which are summarised here:

- > Electrification from Crewe to Llandudno and Holyhead, which would allow through running from London via HS2. Any requirement to change trains in Crewe makes rail a much less attractive option than road for journeys to/from North Wales and Ireland
- > Electrification from Chester to Manchester /Manchester Airport via Warrington, coupled with electrification of the North Wales Line, would greatly enhance the rail service between NW England and North Wales
- > A rail tunnel from the North Wales Line under the Dee estuary to link directly with the existing line from West Kirby on the Wirral to/from Liverpool would also be very beneficial for both the business and tourist markets, as this would provide a much more attractive service than the existing routes, which involve changing trains in either Shotton or (more usually) Chester

- > the existing Aberystwyth/Birmingham service should become hourly throughout the day, especially to connect with HS2. A through service to/from London could be provided by linking the Aberystwyth service with the existing Chiltern Line service between Birmingham and London Marylebone. Although this would be slower than changing in Birmingham, a through service would be welcomed by many leisure travellers
- > the existing Heart of Wales Line service should be enhanced to run every two hours between Swansea and Crewe, (rather than Shrewsbury) giving direct connections in Crewe to/from Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland
- > as stated in answer to Q4, the South Wales route should be electrified through to Swansea, which would allow the London Paddington service to be accelerated by several minutes west of Cardiff. Moreover, all trains need to complete the Cardiff/Paddington journey in significantly less than two hours, which we believe is a critical time when businesses are deciding where to locate
- > the existing hourly Cardiff/ Paddington service should be extended to operate to/from Carmarthen via the Swansea District Line, with additional stations near Pontarddulais, Morriston and Jersey Marine, giving a much quicker direct service from north Swansea, Llanelli and Carmarthen than the existing route via Swansea, making the rail service rather more competitive with the M4
- > in addition, a through semi-fast service should be provided between Swansea and Bath Spa via Cardiff and Bristol, to avoid one or two changes of train en route
- > the existing Cardiff/Nottingham service should run to/from Swansea and some trains should run limited stop to make them more attractive to business customers. Furthermore, extension of some trains to/from Sheffield/Leeds/NE England needs to be seriously considered, again on the basis that through services are much preferred to changes of trains by most passengers

February 2021