

Written evidence submitted by Transform Cymru (RIW0011)

Transform Cymru is a coalition of organisations campaigning for a sustainable, accessible and affordable transport system for Wales. We seek a transport network which meets the needs of people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities and encourages them to travel more sustainably. We are submitting evidence as we believe decisions on the management and resourcing Welsh rail infrastructure have a major impact on the ability of Wales to provide a transport system which is able to deliver the above goals.

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

The responsibility for rail infrastructure in Wales sits with the UK Government and the management of this infrastructure is carried out by publicly owned Network Rail. The only exception to this is the infrastructure on the Valley Lines north of Cardiff Queen Street which has been recently transferred to the Welsh Government to enable delivery of the Metro project.

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

The amount of co-operation between the two governments appears from the outside to be limited and therefore not as effective as it could be. As responsibility for infrastructure management and funding is largely in the hands of the UK Government, it is by nature an unequal relationship and therefore perhaps inevitable that friction will sometime arise between the two parties.

There may be scope for developing the role of the Cross-Border Strategic Rail Forum – currently chaired by Transport Focus and attended by Transport for Wales and Department for Transport, alongside bordering English authorities – which scrutinises performance and service delivery in the Borders region, from a user perspective.

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

Transform Cymru seeks the provision of a sustainable transport system in Wales accessible to all. It is inevitable that rail will play an important role in achieving this goal given it is an integral part of public transport provision. The Welsh Government has strategic responsibility for all aspects of transport from trunk roads to footpaths and responsibility for rail passenger services was devolved in 2018. To enable the Welsh Government to comprehensively and effectively manage the transport network requires that body to have all responsibility for rail services including the infrastructure on which trains operate.

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 around 5% of the total for the UK. Although Transform Cymru does not have precise figures on the actual spend since 1994, the share of its budget that Network Rail has allocated to Wales for major improvements/capital works is accepted by most observers to be significantly less than 5%, even as low as 1%. This has led to potential improvements to passenger rail services being deferred or cancelled, such as the dropping of the scheme to electrify the railway between the two largest cities in Wales, Cardiff and Swansea, in 2017. The current level of investment is insufficient if Wales is to move forward

to a zero carbon economy with a transport network which meets the needs of all its citizens, as rail must inevitably be part of this future vision.

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?

It is believed that large capital investments in rail are assessed using benefit -cost ratio analysis and the projects which are forecast to have the largest return receive top priority for funding. This method of appraisal tends to favour projects in areas with higher population densities and larger total numbers of people. When Welsh projects are assessed and compared to projects in the more densely populated regions of England, especially London and the South East, the 'return' on investment is seen to be less favourable and Welsh projects are consequently not funded.

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)?

It is difficult to forecast the effects of the pandemic at this stage, but some broad trends are becoming clear. It is likely that demand for peak travel on Monday-Friday will fall as home working is found preferable as a long term solution by many employers and their employees. Off peak weekday and weekend travel will not be subject to the same level of reductions and may increase in the medium to long term as the use of cars for 'optional' leisure journeys falls out of favour and is replaced by active travel and public transport.

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

If Wales received adequate funding of its rail infrastructure, this would enable quicker and more frequent rail services to connect many parts of South Wales, together with the North Wales coast and the larger mid Wales towns, with the major cities of England. This would improve the prospects for investment in Wales by businesses based in England, and also increase its attractiveness to overseas investment as connectivity was improved.

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