

Welsh Route Study Consultation
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Dear Sir,

Response to Network Rail's draft Welsh Route Study

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight. It is a voluntary organisation to which many rail user groups are affiliated and the organisation is independent both politically and commercially.

This response is made by Railfuture and the routes in Wales run through the area served by the Cymru/Wales branch, while the routes in England have implications for the North West, West Midlands and Severnside branches which have also been consulted. The response includes some of the recommendations included in Railfuture's Development Plan for the Railways of Wales' 2014, a copy of which is attached. We appreciate the inclusion, in the draft study, of the plans of the former Transport Consortia which Railfuture in general supported. The comments made are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website and you are welcome to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be happy to enlarge on any of the points made or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

Yours faithfully

Rowland Pittard
Railfuture Cymru

**www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk**

Response to Network Rail's draft Welsh Route Study

1. Scope and Objectives of the Study

Railfuture welcomes the philosophy of expansion and upgrading embodied in the document. It is an uplifting change from the philosophy of controlled decline which has characterised much of the last few decades on the railways, especially in the post-Beeching era. We are pleased that this draft Route Study looks ahead over a 30 year period which is the lifespan of many industry assets and reflects the lengthy lead-times necessarily involved in planning, funding and delivering significant development of the railway. In that context we also welcome the more focussed view over the next decade and the needs and opportunities arising in Control Period 6.

The study is comprehensive, we welcome the inclusive process which has allowed a wide range of stakeholders to contribute, and our comments are offered in that positive spirit. We express some reservations below, and we suggest some additional outputs. In particular, we would underline the need improved connectivity especially from South Wales to English and Scottish destinations other than London and the South East. However, these comments are offered in the spirit of creative, constructive challenge between fellow advocates of shared strategic goals and aspirations.

2. Strategic Planning Process

We believe that considerable latent demand for non-London services exists from South Wales to Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool in particular. In the past, demand has been sufficient to support through services to destinations including Edinburgh via Sheffield and York, Liverpool and Penzance. We believe further work is needed to look at this demand to consider the case for their reinstatement.

There must be good links to HS2 at Birmingham and Crewe with direct services from Wales where appropriate. A fast direct link from South Wales to Birmingham is required in addition to the present Cardiff to Nottingham service.

We believe that demand in the Cardiff – Bristol/Gloucester corridor in particular is understated, and that the potential is even greater than the forecast demand. This is driven by demographic changes which are uniting South Wales and Severnside and, because the presence of congested and tolled estuarial road crossings, offers an exceptional advantage for rail.

3. Starting Point for the Welsh Route Study

The study correctly shows that in Wales there has been a significant growth over the last 10 years with 46 per cent more journeys. However it is important not only to consider the averages but to address the peaks. For example the Chepstow line has grown by more than 130% over this period. Failing to consider this deviation from the average would result in the need for specific local interventions to be overlooked.

The map should show Severn Tunnel Junction to Cheltenham as a Primary not Secondary route.

South Wales and the Marches to Bristol and the South West should be listed as a potential long distance route. We believe that there is a market for a regular service from the Marches to Bristol and possibly further west

We propose a number of changes to the freight section. The importance of scrap metal, automotive, and aggregates should be stated in the initial sentence. The North Wales main line now only carries nuclear waste on an infrequent basis. The Swansea District line's major traffic is petroleum not steel. It also carries coal. Petroleum trains also run to Bedworth.

This section needs to highlight the importance of the Welsh docks where Birdport, Newport and Cardiff docks still receive steel traffic for export. Swansea and Mostyn Docks still retain rail facilities. In the long term, there may also be opportunities for landbridge container traffic between Ireland and mainland Europe via Holyhead, Fishguard or Cardiff so that nothing should be done to the infrastructure to preclude such development.

Depot and stabling arrangements will have to be reconsidered for the post electrification period. FGW have a major depot at Landore for servicing HSTs which could be subsequently considered for servicing Wales and Borders DMUs instead of at Cardiff Canton thus releasing room for stabling and servicing electric stock. ATW has recently increased their stabling at Pwllheli which is omitted in the list in the draft study.

We note the plans for signalling renewal. We consider that performance and flexibility could be improved with more bidirectional signalling, especially west of Cardiff and on the Marches route, with crossovers where appropriate. There should be a facing crossover east of Bridgend to improve the resilience of the lines through Bridgend station for which there is no diversionary route.

We would like to see more increases in line speed when track improvements take place. Line speeds between Swindon and Newport appear to have decreased. Line speeds on the Marches line could be improved to match the capability of the class 175 units which provide most services on this line. We note that FGW propose a six minute acceleration between Cardiff and Swansea.

We are keen to see advantages taken of resignalling and the consequent reduction in cost of opening lines on Sundays, to provide a Sunday service on all lines in Wales to meet the considerable demand that now exists on that day.

4. Future Demand

General. While the five primary factors listed have been used to determine future demand, the reality is more complex with other factors that can significantly over ride them. For example the macro economic factors that resulted in a one to two percent decrease in patronage in 2011/12 compared with the previous year at stations like Treherbert, Rhymney, Bridgend and Ebbw Vale would tend to have predicted a similar decline at Maesteg and Severn Tunnel Junction with similar other primary factors. Far from a decline those stations saw a growth approaching seven percent.

Table 3.1 gives percentages not actual numbers and thus only gives part of the picture. The table omits South Wales to the West Midlands which has major passenger flows and should be included.

Peak Hours. Our experience in south east Wales is that the true high peak hour is 07.30 to 08.30 rather than the times shown. For example many commuters are unable to use the 08.00 service from Maesteg to Cardiff which arrives, if on time, at 08.48 because they

cannot get to their working places for a 09.00 start which is important for many businesses and call centres. This also applies to other services into Cardiff which only run once an hour.

The evening high peak now appears to start at 16.00 rather than 17.00 and this is not fully recognised by operators other than ATW.

South Wales to Bristol Temple Meads. Commuter flows are 5 times greater from South Wales to Bristol in the morning as compared with Bristol to South Wales with passengers often left behind and this should be acknowledged with the provision of adequate capacity. In our view morning peak capacity from Bristol to Cardiff is not an issue, with spare seats on most trains. So while the Bristol to Cardiff appears in the Western Route study, the major issue in the AM peak is from South Wales to Bristol and we do not think this is adequately addressed in the Welsh Route Study.

We would strongly support the provision of interurban electric suburban services between Bristol and Cardiff once electrification arrives in 2017 and further extended to Swansea in 2018. The Electrification RUS and also the Great Western RUS indicated that the suburban services were to be converted to electric operation but the Western Route Study does not appear to reflect that. This implies an earlier introduction of these additional services to Bristol as the Cardiff – Portsmouth service will need to remain in place, as well as a second service between Cardiff, Bristol and beyond, which currently runs to Taunton.

We would endorse the plans to improve connectivity at Severn Tunnel Junction and would encourage the development of the park & ride potential at this station, given its location and the potential to attract passengers off the motorway network who are travelling to Cardiff, Newport, Bristol or Gloucester. This would need to be developed in conjunction with the plans for additional local stations in the area (see below).

Cardiff – Gloucester. The potential here is considerable and the route remains an important alternative when the Severn Tunnel is closed as well as the only route for certain types of freight, including the substantial flows of oil. For this reason, we believe it should be included in the review of electrification to follow the main line via the Severn Tunnel as soon as possible. The lack of loops on the 19 mile section between Lydney and Gloucester is a significant constraint on the route and needs to be addressed in view of the increased level of passenger service required, and for reasons of timetable planning and resilience. The stopping pattern on this route has now been improved, but the Forest of Dean is served only by one station at Lydney, at its southern tip, and we believe there is a case for a second station to serve the eastern part of the forest at Newnham (also serving Cinderford) or in the area between Newnham and Grange Court. Such a station would also help to address the chronic road congestion on the A40 and A48 approaching Gloucester.

Bristol Parkway. Of all the principal stations between London and Cardiff, Bristol Parkway has the highest percentage of Interchanges over Entrances and Exits. Its role as an interchange is arguably the most important on the route. In fact the percentage of interchanges at 30% is double either Cardiff or Bristol Temple Meads that are both in the 14-15% mark. It is important that trains from South Wales call half hourly at this important interchange. A fourth platform is needed at Bristol Parkway and in addition a westward facing indented bay is required as a turn back. Improvements in journey time should come from greater acceleration, reduced dwell times (where possible), quicker turn rounds and increased line speeds rather than suggesting fewer stops and thus fewer connectional opportunities.

South West Wales. The only remaining cross border service from South West Wales is to Manchester and a daily service from Carmarthen to Paddington. Railfuture believes there is a market for faster services from West Wales to Cardiff and beyond. To meet this, we would recommend the routing of additional trains via the Swansea District Line and would see these as offering an hourly frequency throughout the day between Carmarthen and Newport. Some of these could be provided by starting Cardiff – Paddington services at Carmarthen and some by extending Cardiff - Portsmouth trains to start back from Carmarthen. Associated with this is the potential of improving access to the network by parkway stations north of Swansea and serving the Swansea Valley (see below). The opportunity would also exist to improve connectivity from the Heart of Wales line to Cardiff and beyond. Within the timeframe of the plan, the potential improvements here require further evaluation, but the potential prize is considerable.

Electrification. The electrification proposals are very welcome and we comment on future extensions below. However, electrification of part of the network raises the problem of the current pattern of through services at least for an interim period, and this will require careful handling to avoid imposing interchanges or truncating services at the boundaries that will be created.

The next tranche of electrification, we believe, should include Swindon – Gloucester – Severn Tunnel Junction as an alternative route to the Severn Tunnel, and also the Vale of Glamorgan line. We would like to see Chester – Crewe included here too. Third rail electrification of the borders line would allow the extension of Wrexham trains to Liverpool.

At an early stage we should like to see plans brought forward for the Chester – Holyhead line, as well as the Swansea district line to Carmarthen. Within the time frame of the plan, electrification of the remaining principal routes should be undertaken, including Chester/Crewe - Shrewsbury – Hereford – Newport.

Level Crossings. We note and endorse the proposals to reduce the risk at level crossings and to eliminate a number of them. We believe, however, that this is a shared responsibility between the rail industry and highway authorities, and indeed road users. We are concerned that the great efforts being made by Network Rail to reduce risks and eliminate problems are not matched by equivalent commitments from the other parties, and that the high cost of the level crossing programme may squeeze out other important investments which would encourage a shift from road to rail, with significantly higher safety benefits.

5. Conditional Outputs Capacity and Connectivity

Cardiff – Bristol. Whilst this looks at general frequencies between Cardiff and Bristol and Cardiff and Swansea, for the reasons referred to above, this needs to consider seating capacity which is related to type of traction. It also needs to take account of the new station proposals listed in paragraph 7 for this line.

Maesteg line. The route capacity charts on page 23 do not reflect observed reality on trains. For example, the charts show no shortage of capacity between Maesteg and Cardiff whereas there are services which are full and standing from Tondur and Sarn to Bridgend and many services are full and standing from Pencoed. Passengers have been left behind at Llanharan and Pontyclun even on Sundays. The same applies westbound from Cardiff between 16.00 and 18.30 even though an additional all stations service is provided to Bridgend and a three coach train (which is inadequate for the demand) at 17.17. As mentioned above, the use of averages is inappropriate and peak hour flows must be addressed as in other areas of Great Britain. The Maesteg line enhancement is urgently needed at the present time and should not be postponed further.

Cardiff Central Station. We agree that this requires major improvements. Passengers may have to wait for up to 50 minutes for onward connections and platform facilities need considerable upgrading -waiting room and toilets are not fit for purpose. The subway and ticket barriers are inadequate especially on event days.

Freight services. We see no evidence of need for a major increase in infrastructure requirement on Valley Lines for freight services. Improved signalling should produce the two paths required for coal trains from Tower without affecting the interval passenger service to Aberdare. Freight operators are looking to operate longer trains. There should be defined paths to and from Margam Yard in each hour to fit in with an increase in passenger services.

Conditional Outputs. We note the large number of suggestions. Railfuture would like to see frequent interval services ranging from half hourly in well populated areas and a minimum of two hourly on rural lines including Sundays. Sunday services should be available on all lines in Wales and some existing Sunday services require improvement. Last trains on Saturdays should be at the same time as on weekdays. We set out detailed proposals on levels of service for all lines in our 'Development Plan'.

There is only a brief mention of station improvements other than for Cardiff Central, and we would expect to have seen a rolling programme of improvements, particularly to meet the forecast levels of growth and the requirement at some stations for improved interchange.

We believe it is essential that North Wales should have direct links to Manchester and Liverpool airports, while recognising future capacity constraints at Manchester. This issue has to be addressed and it is essential that such a link should be made available during the time frame of the study.

We consider that there is room for line speed improvements especially on the North and South Wales main lines and the Marches line using in full the capability of the class 175 trains.

6. Choices for funders in CP6 Conditional Outputs delivered

Our comments are added at the end of each line below, numbered to correspond with the options in Table 5.1.

1. Provision of additional passenger capacity on Cardiff Valley Lines services during peak periods and associated platform lengthening.
This must also include Ebbw Vale and Maesteg lines upgraded to half hourly services
2. Phased programme of further network enhancements on Cardiff Valley Lines and development of Cardiff Capital City Metro proposals for rail.
Agreed, but the needs of the South and North Wales main line (non metro) stations should be of similar priority.
3. Line speed upgrade on Relief Lines between Severn Tunnel Junction and Cardiff
Supported
4. Enhancement of Cardiff Central Station to create a station fit for a capital city.
Supported
5. Programme of level crossing closures in west Wales
Supported, but see comment below.

6. Continuation of additional peak services on Heart of Wales line.
Supported. Two hourly service required
7. Train lengthening on selected Marches Line services between Cardiff and Manchester.
Supported.
8. Modernisation of the North Wales Coast Main Line between Crewe and Holyhead
Supported
9. Improved line speeds on North Wales Coast Main Line.
Supported
10. Development of new interchange station at Shotton.
Supported, but this must not be at the expense of a direct link to Liverpool via the Halton Curve.
11. Further network capacity enhancements between Wrexham and Chester.
These should be completed.
12. Improved line speeds between Wrexham and Bidston.
Electrification would also improve journey times and, by allowing through trains to Liverpool, further improve connectivity to Deeside as well as reducing operating costs.
13. Continuation of additional peak services on Cambrian line.
Supported.

7. Longer Term Strategy

New rolling stock associated with electrification will be welcome, and we consider that rolling stock plans for the future must provide the most appropriate stock for the services for which it is to be used, and this particularly includes the remaining diesel worked lines after electrification. There is a need for new stock which will encourage rail tourism in Wales (as in Scotland and South West England). We note the proposal for 3 car electric trains but these are already inadequate on some services. We suggest that a combination of 2 and 4 coach sets would be more appropriate and many platforms have been designed for 4 and 6 coach trains.

Given the importance of tourism in Wales, it is important that new rolling stock for tourist lines should be attractive for visitors with space for luggage and cycles as well as good alignment between seats and windows. On the Cambrian and Cambrian Coast lines, the control system should have the capability to accommodate visiting steam locomotives on scheduled or charter tourist trains.

New Stations. In some cases the business case for these is well understood while in others it has yet to be established. In a document looking forward thirty years, we believe it is important to recognise the potential, and the effect this might have on the infrastructure required, even if more work remains to establish value for money and priority for individual schemes.

We believe that it is important to make the railway more accessible, particularly where demographic changes have established new communities near the railway, but remote for an existing station. Our proposals are:

- St Clears (serving Laugharne and Pendine Sands) and the wider hinterland at the point at which the A40 dual carriageway ends.
- Stations between Gloucester and Severn Tunnel Junction to serve the Forest of Dean and Cinderford in the Newnham/Grange Court area.
- Cwm on the Ebbw Vale line
- Carno on the Cambrian line.
- Whittington, Cefn Mawr and Rossett on the Shrewsbury – Chester line.
- Stations between Chester and Flint to serve Chester Business Park, Deeside Industrial Park, Broughton, Queensferry, Connah's Quay, Bagillt, and Greenfield (Holywell Junction). This would require a study into station location, service pattern and rolling stock to serve this significant industrial belt.
- Pontarddulais, Morriston and Llandarcy on Swansea District line to give access to towns in the Swansea Valley in connection with new Carmarthen service described above.
- Stations between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction at St Mellons, Coedkernew, Newport West, Lanwern, Magor and Undy, to meet growing population and demand. The density of these stations would need careful consideration in the context of increasing the signalled capacity and line speed on this section of the main line, as well as in the light of electrification and the opportunities that would create for fast local electric services.

New Lines. We note that the study indicates that new lines have not been considered except where they are required to meet the outputs described. However, we believe that they need to be identified and recorded, partly because they do meet some of the outputs sought (in particular by improving access to the network), and partly because provision needs to be made for their subsequent addition to the network, in the work currently proposed or outlined in this study.

The addition of Ebbw Vale Town to the network is welcomed, but within the 30 year time frame of the plan we would expect to see links added to Abertillery and Hirwaun while there may be a case for reconnecting Llangefni as well.

We would also suggest using the link from Pontarddulais to the Swansea District Line with a new station on this line called Pontarddulais Interchange and then reinstatement of the line from Grovesend Colliery Loop Junction through Gorseinon to connect with the main line at Gowerton thus providing a direct route to Swansea. New stations should be built at Grovesend and Gorseinon . A new local service could then be provided between Swansea and Ammanford Town and possibly Glanamman or beyond.