



Railfuture Wales Comments on the North Wales Transport Commission Interim Report June 2023

Railfuture, an organisation which campaigns for bigger and better railways, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the interim report and we would be happy to engage further with the next stage.

Firstly, we would like to comment on Annex 1 regarding the **Menai Bridges** as we felt that more could have been done to utilise rail to address the recent congestion issues whilst the old bridge was closed. We note that rail is mentioned in the context of Park & Ride. TfW did arrange for more trains to call at local stations on Ynys Mon and there was some free travel for students but even with the current capacity restraint of a single track on Britannia Bridge more could be done to entice people out of their cars. Even with the current basically hourly rail service there are a lot of spare seats on trains west of Bangor. A quick win could be to introduce free or very cheap rail travel west of Bangor with an improved interchange at LlanfairPG. If all trains called at this station and there was a large car park with convenient bus interchange this would reduce pressure on Bangor Station and reduce car traffic in the town. For this to work the platforms need to be long enough for 10 car trains and ALL trains need to call there, including those for London and Cardiff.

One thing that is not mentioned in the context of the bridges is the possible effect of **Road User Charging**. This itself could smooth out the peaks in demand and would have the added benefit of bringing in some income from Irish and European HGVs, some of which make little or no contribution to fund the UK road network.

Regarding the main report we note that there is little mention of through trains to/from London along the **North Wales Coast Line**. London is mentioned in the context of interchange with HS2 but it is vital that our through trains continue to operate as changing at Crewe would have a very detrimental effect on demand, even if the overall journey time were slightly quicker. This was demonstrated following the service cuts due to covid when Avanti said that North Wales passenger traffic had declined more than their other routes. It is significant that most other Avanti routes still had through trains to/from London, albeit at reduced frequencies, but North Wales had none, passengers having to change at Crewe. London trains have always been a vital part of the service along the North Wales Coast and we feel that there should be a through train at least every two hours throughout the day. The current long gaps during the middle part of the day severely restrict the number of seats available thus leading to overcrowding on some TfW services as well as making access less attractive for visitors. There is currently no through train from Euston beyond Chester between 0902 and 1502. Using the 0902 means an early start and peak journey into London for most people living in SE England whilst using the 1502 means not arriving in North Wales until the evening.

Regarding the lack of any **HS2 consequential money for Wales** we feel that this is totally unfair, particularly as Scotland are getting it even though they will eventually have HS2 trains going there! Unless HS2 includes Electrification to Holyhead (& Caernarfon - see below) and through trains from HS2 we cannot see any justification for Wales not having any HS2 consequential funding. If we end up having to change at Crewe and no through trains between North Wales and London HS2 will have a negative effect on North Wales not a positive one. One way of ensuring that through trains continue could be to transfer the North Wales - London service to another operator. This would then hopefully be an important 'flagship' service rather than the one that is cut first when anything goes wrong. With the issue of Old Oak Common being the HS2 terminus for several years it could be that the HS2 operator will struggle to attract people to use it and thus be tempted to force North Wales passengers onto HS2 by withdrawing their through trains.

Regarding service improvements in North Wales the busiest station in North Wales has always been Bangor and TfW propose to improve the service as far as Bangor to two per hour from 2024. The introduction of an hourly Liverpool - Llandudno service will enable the current Manchester Airport - Llandudno trains to be diverted to Bangor. Prior to Covid Llandudno had two trains per hour with the Manchester trains supplemented by shuttles to Llandudno Junction connecting with Holyhead - Cardiff/London/Birmingham trains. We note that whilst the trains from Liverpool will have sufficient time to work a shuttle between Liverpool journeys TfW only propose to run these at certain times thus there will be times of day when there is only an hourly service for Llandudno. We therefore endorse your proposal to enhance services to Llandudno and hope that TfW will start by ensuring that it is at least half hourly as soon as possible.

Regarding the Conwy Valley Line this now uses the same class 197 stock as the main line and thus there is an opportunity to interwork with the Llandudno - Llandudno Junction shuttles to improve the Conwy Valley service from every 3 to every two hours. This should be possible without any infrastructure improvements and thus could be another 'quick win'.

Regarding the Borderlands line we feel that the aim should be to provide a through service half hourly between Wreccsam and Liverpool via Merseyrail using battery propulsion south of Bidston.

Regarding The Cambrian Coast Line whilst additional passing loops could help there is currently an issue with Network Rail not allowing trains with more than two coaches on this line. This issue needs to be addressed urgently with whatever infrastructure improvements that are needed to facilitate longer trains as overcrowding is a current problem, the only solution on offer being supplementary bus services.

Regarding **re-opening of railway lines** we are disappointed that Bangor - Caernarfon has been lumped in with a possible reopening south to join the Cambrian Coast Line rather than being considered in its own right. Re-opening the 7 miles from west of Bangor to Caernarfon has been included in the Wales Transport Strategy for many years. There was Transport Grant funding for a feasibility study ten years ago, but this disappeared when the regional consortia were scrapped. Had this study gone ahead the line could well have been open and attracting many more visitors to Caernarfon by now as well as improving access to jobs along the coast for local people. There is undoubtedly a very strong business case for this line, Lee Waters the Deputy Minister referred to this at a recent meeting with Trawslink Cymru. The North Wales Metro 'Light Rail' proposals have muddied the water here, but Caernarfon needs through trains from Manchester Airport, London etc to attract visitors and such services could well be provided at marginal cost with the rolling stock already available. Whilst almost all of the track bed still exists, some in use as a footpath, there is an option to route it alongside Felinheli Bypass and provide a station very close to the walled town in Caernarfon. This would provide very convenient interchange with the network of local buses radiating from Caernarfon as well as with Trawscymru and Sherpa buses. Such a station can be designed to facilitate through operation south of Caernarfon in the future and it could offer much more convenient interchange than Bangor can. The recent report regarding the Amlwch Line highlighted the current capacity issues regarding extra trains terminating in Bangor and the limitations of the site for providing convenient interchange. I hope that the Commission will look at Bangor - Caernarfon in the next stage of your work and that this can lead to progress on this. Currently the public transport offer to Caernarfon is poor with passengers having to cross a footbridge then wait for a bus on the main road. This then takes 30 minutes to reach Caernarfon calling at numerous bus stops. A dedicated fast bus link would still take around 20 minutes and need at least 5 minutes to change at Bangor compared with arriving in Caernarfon around 12 minutes after passing through Bangor on a through train and the bus would face unpredictable delays due to congestion at times whichever road it used to/from Bangor.

Email: wales@railfuturewales.org.uk

Website: www.railfuturewales.org.uk

Twitter: @RailfutureWales

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Registered in England & Wales no. 5011634

Registered office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, N Somerset, BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only)