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**Railfuture Cymru response to consultation:  
Inquiry into the priorities for the future of Welsh rail infrastructure**

Dear Sir,

Railfuture Cymru is a national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a bigger, better railway in Wales, so we welcome the opportunity to provide an informed response to the topics identified for the Inquiry.

We recognise the importance of the provision of a responsive growing railway in contributing to wider economic, employment and skills, social inclusion and environmental issues.

If you require any more detail or clarification on the attached response please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours faithfully,

***Rowland Pittard***

Rowland Pittard  
Secretary  
Railfuture Cymru

## **Response to consultation by the National Assembly for Wales: Inquiry into the priorities for the future of Welsh rail infrastructure**

The Railfuture Wales and the Borders Development Plan 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, which can be downloaded at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/DL702>, sets out a comprehensive vision as to how the rail network in Wales could be improved to play a more important role in the daily lives of people living in Wales thereby improving the quality of life for individuals and giving a boost to business, the economy and tourism. A summary of the plan which has recently been prepared for election candidates is also available.

### **1. High level priorities for the development of rail infrastructure to provide the capacity and connectivity necessary to support the social and economic well-being of Wales**

The Welsh network must not be considered as a series of unconnected local services but must be a catalyst for improved travel opportunities within Wales and to and from Wales. It must be fully connected to the English rail network with through services operated from Wales to all major centres in England and Scotland. Railfuture supports the rail line improvements and frequency enhancements in the National Transport Finance Plan R13, 14 and 15 in relation to the Ebbw Vale Town and Maesteg branches. The rail infrastructure should be improved to provide at least a two hourly service on all passenger lines in Wales. Many lines will require an improved infrastructure for more frequent services. There should be provision for fast services to overtake all stations local services between Cardiff and Swansea.

The double tracking of the lines between Wrexham and Chester and Swansea West and Swansea should be completed, to make timetabling easier, especially in the context of service enhancements, and to make connections between services easier to achieve in the event of late-running.

There should be line speed and signalling headway improvements on the Marches and North Wales coast lines and eventual electrification. Line speeds should be increased on the relief lines between Severn Tunnel Junction and Cardiff. There should be improved signalling at Cardiff Central for bidirectional and permissive working. There is also a need to improve line speeds to make services on the Heart of Wales Line more attractive, partly by modernising the operation of level crossings to remove speed restrictions.

Railfuture welcomes the decision to electrify from London to Swansea and also wishes to see improved links from South Wales to Bristol and beyond. There should be provision for freight traffic to use electric traction. Wrexham to Bidston should be electrified and the train service extended to Liverpool. All lines in the South East Wales metro area should be electrified including the Ebbw Vale, Maesteg and Vale of Glamorgan lines, to give an integrated rail network and to allow a better range of cross-Cardiff services.

As outlined in our Development Plan, light rail should be used to provide inner suburban services within the proximity of Cardiff, Newport, Bridgend and Swansea, especially to serve new housing developments.

Wales must have adequate provision for servicing and maintaining locomotives and rolling stock. At present ATW passenger rolling stock is maintained at two depots in Wales and two

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in England – the latter could be affected if the franchise boundary is redrawn. GWR have a depot at Landore Swansea which is to close and be replaced by an already completed depot for IEP trains. Virgin West Coast has no depot in Wales. Freight rolling stock has heavy maintenance in England with limited facilities at Margam (DBS), Cardiff Canton (Colas) and Cardiff Tidal (DBS).

## **2. How far Welsh Government's rail infrastructure priorities, including those in the National Transport Finance Plan, and the Ministerial Task Force on North Wales Transport report meet the needs of Wales**

The infrastructure priorities included in the National Finance Plan only go part of the way to meet the growing needs for rail travel both passenger and freight in Wales and to and from England and a future development programme is urgently required. It is regrettable that no new stations will be opened in Wales in 2016

Small infrastructure changes can provide increased opportunities and improved services, including bidirectional signalling, including Bridgend to Cardiff and along the Marches line. Moreover, further small-scale infrastructure changes could be needed if the Wales franchise is reconfigured, such as turn back platforms at Chepstow and Abergavenny. New links at Shotton should be investigated.

An increase in the number of passengers requires an improvement in station facilities especially at the heavily used unstaffed stations in South Wales, for example including improved shelters and extended platform lengths. Interchange facilities should be improved at for example Llanelli, Craven Arms, Shotton and Newport. Better facilities for linking rail and bus services should be provided at many stations to improve transport integration: examples include Llandrindod, Newtown and Bridgend. Railfuture's Development Plan lists the facilities that should be provided at stations where passengers need to-make connections. Cardiff Central station is now unfit for purpose following an increase in passenger numbers - new station facilities and an improved track layout are required.

The main line routes in North and South Wales and the Marches line need to have the maximum gauge clearance for containers. The Freight Facilities grant should remain. Intermodal facilities should be provided especially at the Welsh ports, including Holyhead and Fishguard. Railfuture's Development Plan lists proposals for freight depots and opportunities for new freight traffic.

The reinstatement of passenger services on disused and freight only branch lines should be considered, including Gaerwen to Llangefni and possibly Amlwch, Aberdare to Hirwaun and especially new stations the Swansea District line.

Long term consideration should be given to the rebuilding of abandoned routes, for example Bangor to Caernarfon (with a later extension to Afonwen on the Cambrian Coast line), Ruabon to Llangollen, Aberystwyth to Carmarthen and Moat Lane (near Newtown) to Builth Road.

## **3. How the development and exploitation of rail infrastructure in England affects Wales, and vice versa**

Unfortunately there is no provision for a high speed route from London to Bristol and South Wales. There is the need for a direct connection (that is without a change of train being

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required) from South Wales to Heathrow Airport and improved links to Gatwick Airport. Bristol Parkway needs to be developed to give cross platform interchanges between the South West to North route and the South Wales to London route. The use of Paddington for the dedicated London Airport service should cease when the BA contract terminates and this will provide more track and platform capacity at Paddington. The Airport service will be provided by Crossrail. Service times from the South to Birmingham are extended by the slow approach to Birmingham New Street following all stations local trains from Barnt Green and in the near future by an increased level of local service from Bromsgrove. Of more concern are the Camp Hill curves proposals which would divert the present Cardiff to Nottingham service to Birmingham Moor Street with the loss of connections to destinations served from New Street and possible truncation of the through service to Nottingham.

#### **4. The impact on Wales of key planned developments in England including High Speed Rail, electrification, Northern Power House / Transport for the North, and wider devolution of responsibility for rail within England**

The development of HS2 with Crewe as a railhead for North Wales may improve journey times to London and the South East. However the overall present journey times for trains from North Wales to London via the existing Trent Valley route are similar to those proposed via HS2 with a connection at Crewe. HS2 will have little effect on journey times from South Wales to the North and the Cambrian lines to London especially with delays caused by changing trains and stations at Birmingham. Delays will be caused by stopping South Wales to Paddington services at the proposed new interchange station at Old Oak Common.

Electrification should provide improvements to services and capacity to and from South Wales and London Paddington, but it is important to retain and indeed improve connectional facilities at Bristol Parkway and Reading. Electrification provides the opportunity for the reinstatement of direct services from Swansea to Bristol Temple Meads and beyond.

A major concern at present is that the size of the new Wales franchise could be smaller than the present Wales and Borders franchise. This has been noticeable with developments in the north of England where there has been a reluctance to allow ATW to operate to Manchester Airport and where the new Arriva Trains North franchise includes a service from Chester to Manchester via Warrington, whereas ATW currently provides the only service on this route. Outline proposals for the forthcoming Midland franchise indicate a possible takeover of the Shrewsbury to Birmingham and Crewe routes which may result in an inconvenient change of trains for passengers to and from Wales at Shrewsbury.

Wider devolution of responsibility for rail in England could bring a more realistic approach to joined-up thinking between the English Regions and Wales, especially by forging links with the Northern Powerhouse, the Midlands and Bristol and the South West.

#### **5. How Welsh Government can best engage with and influence infrastructure developments in England and the development of passenger and freight services using the network**

This should be at high level between Welsh Ministers and the Department for Transport, with the backing of Welsh businesses and passenger organisations and passengers themselves. UK level-organisations can help, such as the Rail Freight Group, Transport Focus and Railfuture. For example, Railfuture is campaigning with Cross Country for the restoration

services from Swansea, Cardiff and Newport to the North East of England and Scotland and would like to have the support of Welsh Government.

**6. Whether the periodic review process meets the needs of Wales and takes account of the needs of Welsh passenger and freight users, and how this should be developed**

Railfuture considers that Welsh Government should, if it does not at present, have a direct input into this review using statistics compiled by the Welsh Statistics office. There should be periodic reviews throughout the passenger franchises serving Wales and passengers need to be able to comment at break points in the franchises.

**7. The effectiveness of the Network Rail Wales Route and whether the approach to delivery of network management, maintenance, renewal and enhancement functions are effective in delivering value for money, capacity, frequency, speed, reliability and handling disruption for passengers and freight users in Wales**

There appears to be no system to draw out the costs of looking after and developing the Welsh rail network, which makes it difficult to comment on delivering value for money.

Railfuture has noted delays with a number of maintenance renewal and enhancement projects in Wales, for example:

- Track and signalling developments at Cardiff Station and East of Cardiff, where renewal work was not completed in time and other work has been postponed to Christmas 2016
- Track reductions East of Cardiff created a not fit for purpose layout which resulted in train delays and was a major factor in clearing passengers from Central station during the Rugby World Cup and resulting delays of up to two hours to incoming services. However three additional crossovers were installed at Christmas 2015 which when commissioned will improve the situation
- The delay in commissioning the reinstated double track section between Rossett and Saltney Junction led to severe delays to diverted trains when the Shrewsbury to Crewe line was closed in the Autumn for signalling renewal at Crewe
- The new station bridge at Newport continues to receive many adverse comments including the small lifts and poor position which has resulted in lack of shelter on platforms, and the inconvenient positioning of station facilities.

The apparent present policy of replacing like for like has restricted the number of speed enhancements. Large sections of the Cardiff Valley network have been relaid but in some cases there was no provision for speed enhancements. In some cases there has been a reduction in both track and signalling provision, such as east of Cardiff. At Newport connections to the Ebbw Vale branch were reduced and the opportunity for a turn back siding east of Newport removed.

Nevertheless, there have been successful projects, such as:

- The reconfiguring of the junction and station at Severn Tunnel Junction
- The redoubling of the line between Llanelli and Swansea West (including a major viaduct replacement)
- Re-signalling of the Rhymney branch and provision of loop at Tir Phil.

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- Christmas/New Year work at Cardiff 2015-6.
- Repairs to sea defences, bridge replacement and track restoration during winter 2014-5.

Many enhancements of rail facilities in Wales have been sponsored by Welsh Government (including some by the former transport consortia) and this process should continue including full use of available EU funding.

## **8. Funding for Welsh rail infrastructure is not devolved. What are the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and risks potentially associated with devolution**

It is important that the Welsh rail infrastructure receives its correct proportional allocation of funding for maintenance, development, administration and major contingencies including that consequential from spending on HS2, Transport for London and English light rail schemes.

The potential advantage of devolution is that it should provide complete control and the ability to define priorities for the defined Welsh network that could be different from those at present. This, however, could be disjointed as many parts of the network link Wales with England resulting in different priorities and uncoordinated planning of improvements along these routes.

Welsh Government has been able to develop and implement local rail improvements without delay when funding has been put in place, but this has been dependent largely on funding from the European Union which is now in doubt in view of the Brexit campaign in relation to the forthcoming referendum

There is a large pool of on and off track equipment used in the maintenance of railways and it would be difficult to establish a comprehensive pool of equipment to serve the railways of Wales. There is no major rail infrastructure base in Wales and all equipment is manufactured outside Wales.

There are major risks to the infrastructure from flooding and sea level changes, not only along the coast but by river flooding inland. This is a substantial risk along the North Wales and Cambrian coasts. There is also the issue of the maintenance of cross border features such as the Severn Tunnel and the Wye and Dee bridges. A further risk is the ability to attract suitable staff with a wide range of expertise to oversee the planning of maintenance and developments to the Welsh Network.

Railfuture Cymru has available a more detailed paper (already presented to Welsh Government) on this topic listing most, if not all, of the requirements needed for a devolved infrastructure in addition to the contents of the Railfuture Wales Development Plan which is attached.