

Response to EIS Rail Franchise and Metro Scrutiny

Railfuture Cymru/Wales made a substantial input into the information gathering at the start of the process for awarding the franchise. Railfuture attended a seminar organised by Welsh Government in Cardiff on 11th May 2015 but this was more an information providing rather than information gathering exercise. Railfuture attended meetings organised by Welsh Government at which it was able to input what it would like to see delivered by the new franchise. The report of the breakout sessions of these meetings 30/06/15 indicates the improvements attendees would like to see for Wales and Borders rail services. There was no prior indication from Government as to what it would expect to be provided by the new franchise. Railfuture also met with representatives of the four companies making bids for the franchise at which it was able input its ideas of what should be delivered by the new franchise. At no stage was the total amount of finance required for the new franchise or any subsidies for operation mentioned however the complicated operational financial agreement with DfT has been published by DfT. Knowledge of the amount of finance available would have given an indication as to what could be expected of the franchise especially in the future. It would also have helped to explain the reasons for the curtailment of the introduction of the Metro throughout all of the Cardiff City region. Railfuture also presented Welsh Government/Transport for Wales and the four bidders with its Development Plan for the Railways of Wales and the Borders.

Railfuture was not consulted as a stakeholder by the Transport Focus the organisation representing rail passengers. This did not allow Railfuture to give a view on issues being highlighted by Transport Focus. Railfuture is especially concerned about facilities at interchange stations where passengers have to wait long periods for connecting services a feature which is likely to continue into the new franchise. The types of improvement suggested by Railfuture such as full time staffing, heated waiting rooms, toilet and refreshment facilities which should be available throughout the period the station is open. In many cases facilities are not available or only available for part of the day. We are also concerned that in Cardiff there are few facilities at the west end of platforms 3 and 4 where most trains depart and at Newport platforms 2 and 3 where the facilities are at the east end but the footbridge and train departure points are nearer the west end. Railfuture has no way of knowing whether the station upgrade funding of £192m will identify the station issues identified in this paragraph.

Railfuture Cymru/Wales also consulted the Railfuture branches served by the Wales and Borders franchise in England. There was concern that services in Wales could be seen as more important than those in England and also how individuals in England could make representations about the franchise. It is important that Transport for Wales is mindful that it also serves rail travellers in England. We note that the refund section of Complaints Handling Procedure Booklet published by Transport for Wales states that refunds can only be given to Welsh charities.

Railfuture welcomes the statement in the Passenger's Charter booklet of quarterly key stakeholder meetings and would wish to be considered a key stakeholder. We also welcome the establishment of an accessibility panel, a customer insight panel and in the Customer Report booklet customer panels. Railfuture considers that the series of six booklets issued by TfW have a number of statements that will require further clarification including delay repay and cheapest fare promise.

The award of the previous franchise to ATW saw an uplift in services across all parts of Wales by 20% when the Standard Pattern Timetable was introduced. Railfuture saw this as the bottom line for weekday service increases in the new franchise with the expectation that services across Wales and the Borders would increase by at least 20%. Unfortunately this is not to be the case with services to Rhymney increasing by 150% and other core Cardiff Valley lines by 100% whereas other lines in Wales are not promised any increase in weekday services. Railfuture considers that the plans for increases in new services are unfairly spread across Wales and the Borders and bears little resemblance to population and economic needs. A study of the population totals for each Welsh and each border county could be used as a basis for the provision of rail services especially for services to Cardiff, Chester and Swansea. However we cannot find a correlation between population and future rail services.

This raises several questions. Why does the growing population in the southern part of Rhondda Cynon Taff and in Bridgend not have any weekday increase in train services whereas Merthyr, which is also connected to Cardiff by a two lane road have 100% more services? Why does the South West Wales population west of Swansea which is over 300,000 have no increase in services whereas Flintshire population 155,00 has a 75% increase. Why does Ebbw Vale have an expectation of two services an hour while Merthyr which is the same size have 4 trains per hour to Cardiff? The Welsh Government's statistic division has published station footfall statistics for each station in Wales and these should have been a consideration for determining service increases. For example Bridgend to Maesteg with a less frequent service than Bargoed to Rhymney remains at one train per hour whereas Bargoed to Rhymney the service increases by 150% yet footfall is similar.

Expectations for better integrated services have been raised by announcements by some academics of proposed developments that cannot realistically be provided short term including higher speeds to Swansea and on the Marches line. This is not helpful for Transport for Wales and its partners. Better integrated Rail and Bus services should be delivered in the future but integration with Traws Cymru services must be achieved first.

Other promises made many years ago have come from Welsh Government of half hourly services to Ebbw Vale and Maesteg which have still to be achieved. This results in present day traffic congestion in those areas and increased pollution as well as little flexibility for those who wish to work or study in Cardiff. These improvements should be a priority over the development of the core valley network. However it is good to see an improvement in the service promised between Barry and Bridgend.

Railfuture for Wales advocated a two hourly interval service as a minimum on all lines in Wales on both Weekdays and Sundays. However one additional weekday train pair has been promised for the Heart of Wales line and to Fishguard Harbour.

The opportunity to provide adequate services to reduce car use and pollution has not been maximised. We are concerned that although the Rhondda Valley is to have a 15 minute interval train service there are plans to build a new road in the Valley to reduce congestion. The valley also has a 12 minute interval bus service. There are plans for a new road from Miskin to Barry to serve Cardiff Airport with a new station at Miskin whereas better rail service to Rhoose could remove the need for the new road and station. Finally there has been much talk about the M4 relief road and the removal of the Severn Bridge tolls. This will inevitably result in South East Wales becoming part

of the Bristol commuter belt but there are no plans for additional rail services between South Wales and Bristol. We consider the amount of funding available for car park improvements and an increase in spaces is inadequate if road traffic is to be reduced and the number of rail passengers increased. Many rail car parks are now used to capacity and plans should be made to increase the number of places available and at the same time provide provision for bus links and active travel routes. We are concerned that in its recent announcements of grant aid for active travel routes to stations has not been made a priority.

In its Development Plan for Wales and the Borders Railfuture proposed light rail networks based on Cardiff, Bridgend and Swansea but did not propose splitting off the Core Valley from the rest of the network. Transport for Wales did not announce what mix of heavy and light rail was proposed for the existing Valley routes before Railfuture made its input to the four bidders. Railfuture is concerned that a journey on a tram with no toilets and minimal seating is unsuitable for the longer journeys from the heads of the Valleys. Railfuture wished to see through journeys from the Taff Valleys to Penarth, Barry Island and Rhoose for Cardiff Airport retained. We were surprised that the only announcement of progress within the franchise dialogue period was the proposal not to provide toilets in the tram/trains for the core Cardiff Valley services. Railfuture saw the provision of trams as a way to serve the expanding Cardiff and Swansea suburbs especially those to the northwest and northeast Cardiff. It will be interesting to see how the Core Valley network develop as there will be a number of challenges including landslides and bridge replacements.

We have presented to Welsh Government a very detailed paper explaining the complexities of maintaining a rail network. We were not consulted on the contents of our document before the franchise was let, so at present we do not know if it had any effect on Transport for Wales' plans. We note four major problems. The first is the interface with Network Rail at Cardiff Central including signalling control and electrification implications. The second is the delay in the handover of the assets from DfT/Network Rail which we assume will only be fixed assets. A third is the recruitment of and assessment of competent staff by Amey in the face of additional demands for staff from Network Rail and HS2 and finally decoupling the signalling systems for Cardiff Queen Street and the Rhymney line from those at the Cardiff regional Control Centre.

We note in the proposals for the new franchise there is no reference to the Future Generations Act, the Environment Act and the Planning Act although we realise that some of the improvements are in the hands of Network Rail and DfT. We trust that the present environmental practises will continue including water conservation for train washing. Grants awarded under the Active Travel Act should be prioritised for routes to railway stations.

We welcome the increase in Sunday services which it is hoped will provide for present day need of earlier more frequent and later services on Sundays One hour gaps in the service between Cardiff and Swansea is unacceptable for present day needs and to attract students to Swansea University. The major conference centre of Llandudno has no services on a Sunday in winter and only a connecting service with main line trains at Llandudno Junction in Summer. Welsh Government promised some Sunday services would start in December 2018 but it appears that this promise will not now be kept. It is important that there is good quality consultation about Sunday services and not an imposed inadequate interval service. It is also important to agree with Network Rail new Sunday rules of the route and with rail staff new agreements for increased Sunday working.

We limit our comments on fares to the following. An explanation is required of the term flattening of fares. It is important that all commuters travelling to their workplace are treated the same, for example the same fares continue to apply from Ebbw Vale and Maesteg to Cardiff as from Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr and Rhymney although the latter will have an improved frequency of service. Our members are concerned that the club50 offer ended at the end of the ATW franchise and did not continue into the new franchise. We hope it will be reinstated in the New Year.

Details have been published of the new rolling stock that has been ordered with precise figures giving the impression that services have already been planned. The previous franchise did not acquire any stock in its last 10 years and we are concerned that this situation could arise again. There is no indication of stock increases to match future passenger growth and in the case of articulated stock increases in train size could be difficult. There are services that are now worked by 3 coach trains which are full and standing yet more three coach not four coach trains have been ordered.

We note there are frequent delays and disruptions to GWR services in South Wales and also short formed trains. The problem will persist with lack of electrification west of Cardiff. We consider that it will be difficult to provide interval services in Wales that incorporate services operated by GWR and Virgin West Coast. A true interval service depends on time running, no re timings when engineering work is taking place outside Wales and no cancellations by GWR and Virgin West Coast.

There has been little mention of a speed up of services in fact there have been calls for trains to stop at more stations and consequently journey times become slower and less competitive. Additional stations at Miskin and Cardiff Parkway will also significantly reduce capacity and slow down services on the South Wales main line. These stations were not included in our Development Plan

We have compared the services proposed by TfW against those in our Development Plan. Whilst there are welcome service improvements, Railfuture's target of a minimum of two hourly services on all lines in Wales has not been achieved. There does not appear to be any correlation with population densities or current station foot fall.

In conclusion, whilst Railfuture recognises the franchise award will result in a significant investment in the Wales and Borders rail system, it is concerned about the unequal service provision across Wales with massive increases in service in the Core Cardiff Valleys but smaller or no increases elsewhere including the other lines in the Cardiff City region. There is little in the way of improvements for lines west of Cardiff especially in South West Wales and in North Wales west of Llandudno Junction. Stations on the main line between Swansea and Cardiff appear to have no service improvements although this is an area of increasing population where a positive effort should be made to relieve traffic congestion on adjacent roads and motorway especially following more 50 mph sections on the M4. There are no new proposals for Swansea Bay where a Metro system could be justified. We are concerned that many major developments including hospitals, housing estates, educational establishment developments, commercial centres are being given planning permission with no regard to the availability of transport services. An example of such a development is the plan to build a new station at Nantgarw to serve recent developments.