

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

please reply to:
61 Chantal Avenue
Penyfai
Bridgend
CF31 4NW

rowland.pittard@railfuturewales.org.uk

11th January 2019

Re: Wales and Borders Rail Franchise Inquiry

Dear Sir,

Railfuture 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 questions in this consultation.

Railfuture recognises the importance of the provision of improved rail services offering more journey opportunities to a wider range of travellers in contributing to wider economic, employment and skills, social inclusion and environmental issues.

I submit the response from Railfuture Cymru/Wales to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's inquiry into the future development of Transport for Wales which was established in 2015 as a wholly Welsh Government owned subsidiary company limited by guarantee with the initial purpose of procuring and developing/operating the new Welsh rail franchise and Metro services on the valleys lines. If you require any more detail or clarification please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours faithfully,

Rowland Pittard

Rowland Pittard
Secretary
Railfuture Cymru/Wales

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

Inquiry into the future development of Transport for Wales

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Railfuture understands that Welsh Government has ambitious plans for TfW but has not at the present time made any statement with regard to the additional functions that Transport for Wales may acquire. It is also unclear if these new functions will only be related to the new rail franchise or will encompass other modes of transport including motorways and roads, public road transport, airports and air travel and ports and ferries.

The Transport and Economy Secretary has recently made the following statements which can be seen as the transport aspirations of both Welsh Government and Transport for Wales.

With regard to rail transport “our plans go beyond a traditional transport project – they have to become the spark for wider economic renewal. They have to help individuals, businesses and communities who need a reliable, integrated transport system to help them find a new job, support their business to expand, and bring new investment to their town. It will increase social mobility and widen access, connecting people and communities to employment opportunities, and education, health and leisure facilities.”

“Bus services across Wales provide important access to education, training, work, healthcare and simply enjoying a day out. They are a vital link between our communities and an important tool in supporting a vibrant economy”.

“I see the integration of our transport network as a key priority – we need to provide an integrated public transport system in Wales that is safe, reliable, punctual, environmentally-sustainable and accessible to all.”

“On a practical level, we want to bring uniformity to our public transport and private hire vehicles that will protect passengers, and ensure efficient, clean services.”

“Our aim is to increase the number of people using public transport and encourage travellers to switch from private car use, reducing pollution and congestion. We want to see more people using public transport to get them where they need and want to be efficiently and on time.”

“Our vision is of a high quality, safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network that the people of Wales are proud of - driven forward by Transport for Wales (TFW)”.

Railfuture Wales endorses these statements many of which are included in our Development Plan for the Railways of Wales. We would like to emphasize the statements made in our plan which refer to each railway station in Wales should have having a minimum of a service every two hours for every day of the year except Christmas Day with more frequent services in more populated areas and Wales should have an integrated transport network with good connections between rail services and also between bus/coach and rail services again on seven days per week.

A major element missing from Mr Skates’ comments statements is the need for the Welsh transport network to serve the tourist industry which is one of the major Welsh industries both in terms of employment and the economy. Tourism travel as in Switzerland should be the aim for Wales thus reducing car and coach travel. The provision of a specialist appointment in TfW is suggested as a way

of integrating tourism and leisure transport and developing initiatives. ScotRail is considering improving facilities for the carriage of cycles and the provision of trains with enhanced observation facilities. Railway Rambles are well developed in some areas of Wales

Railfuture would also like to see a transport system which provides faster journey times but at the same time serves all communities. This will require an integrated pattern of express and 'all stop' services for both rail and bus/coach services.

Welsh Transport policy must prioritise integration and not fragmentation. It must not result in a deterioration of services and it must provide for every community, however isolated. It must provide transport for all and not for a selected few.

Whether the current governance, structure and funding of Transport for Wales are effective and transparent

Railfuture Wales considers that there is room for improvement/evolution with regard to the current governance, structure and funding.

Welsh Government should be in charge of transport policy for a number of reasons, some of which are listed below:

1. Transport policy has not been fully devolved to Wales. TFW has no control over Network Rail or the major ports in Wales but this control to be changed to Welsh Government.
2. There is cross border rail transport provision by three other operators which are controlled by the UK Department for Transport. Provision must also be made for other passenger train operators for example charter train operators. There was a successful steam charter train operation by West Coast from Machynlleth to Pwllheli. Provision must be made for the needs of the, at present, four freight train operators in Wales
3. Transport for Wales provides cross border services which have conditions imposed on the by the DfT for the sections operated in England
4. Major transport policy consultations should be undertaken by Welsh Government as is the present case with the development of the new Welsh Transport strategy and the present consultation with regard to Bus Franchising
5. Fare increases are a major government policy in the other parts of Britain and this should also apply to Wales. Welsh Government, through TFW, should be in control of fares policy in Wales which in the case of rail should be implemented by TFW Rail. There have been no fare increases in London or Northern Ireland this year
6. Welsh Government must be more successful in obtaining funding for maintaining public transport services and investing in new infrastructure from UK Government. Studies and comparisons with Scotland and Northern Ireland show that Wales has been substantially underfunded by UK Government both directly and through Network Rail. In fact Wales has not received any money, in the current Network Rail investment period for the Welsh rail infrastructure. Electrification is being completed to Cardiff but the planned extension of

modern signalling to Llandudno has been abandoned and the migration of signalling from Port Talbot Panel Box to the Cardiff Regional Operating Centre appears to have stalled. Welsh Government should lead in obtaining money from developers for example there should have been a levy on house developers in North West Cardiff to provide bus and Metro Rail services which have been suggested in Railfuture's Development Plan. These functions would be inappropriate for TfW. We note that Welsh Government has in the past has developed joint funding of projects with Network Rail, we would have preferred to have seen all funding by Network Rail especially where there is a renewal element in the scheme.

7. Railfuture commented in the consultation for an Infrastructure Commission for Wales that one of its most important tasks will be to ensure that Wales has an excellent transport network. It will be interesting to see how this is tackled by the recently appointed Commission
8. The plans for HS2 are well underway, with Phase 1 to Birmingham expected to be completed in 2026, Phase 2a to Crewe by 2027 and the remainder of Phase 2, completing the extension from Birmingham to Manchester and Leeds, expected in 2033.
The UK and Welsh governments should be working with civic and business leaders throughout Wales to support the extension of the high speed rail network beyond Phase 2 into Wales and in the short term ensure that Wales has excellent links with the HS2 network
9. Statistics for Transport in Wales should continue to be compiled by Statistics Wales. Railfuture considers that this should continue as an independent organisation with Transport Statistics as part of its role similar to the ORR in England with which joint working will be required for services in England. Statistics Wales should provide statistics for transport patterns in Wales to assist TfW in providing adequate services. Statistics Wales should not only produce reports on the success or otherwise of Welsh Transport projects but should also produce reports on projects that have failed or stalled eg Maesteg and Ebbw Vale line service enhancement projects.

It is important that there is a clear demarcation between the functions of Transport for Rail and Transport for Wales Rail Services which is understood by the public. This is not helped by the use of only one web site for both.

It is important that the rail operator takes full possession of the day to day operation, rail services, the design and acquisition of appropriate rolling stock, negotiations with Network Rail for train paths, the day to day maintenance of rolling stock, the operation of on train services and other essential operation elements of the operation of the train service. Railfuture is concerned on train catering is not part of the new franchise and that the day to day maintenance of rolling stock will also move to private operators thus fragmenting what should be a fully integrated operation.

We have seen how the involvement of DfT civil servants resulted in a new generation of rolling stock for the Great Western and Great Eastern main lines which is not fit for purpose and is maintained by a third party and not the operators. This provides many constraints and additional costs on the operators which DfT has had to fund. This situation must not be allowed to develop in Wales but the seeds have already been sown within the franchise acquisition process.

The operator should make statements about the operation of rail functions and not civil servants who are not fully conversant with railway operations and cannot be expected to have up to the

minute information. This is also important with respect to future inquiries carried out by the EIS committee where, if appropriate, it should be the operator and not TfW that gives informed evidence.

We are concerned that there has not been a clear statement of the funding available for the operation of the new franchise and the returns expected. There are many redacted sections in the Grant (franchise) agreement.

Transport Scotland publishes monthly reports showing all items of expenditure over £25,000.

What action should be taken to develop these aspects of the organisation? What other governance models and good practice are available?

There are at present two other transport organisations similar to Transport for Wales Transport for London and Transport Scotland. There is also the developing Rail North an area into which TfW operates. Railfuture considers that the Transport Scotland model would be the closest to what may be achieved in Wales.

Railfuture fully endorses integrated transport services. Full integration is where a passenger can transfer between modes under cover something that is not achievable at many locations. The best transfer location in Wales is the underused facility at Fishguard Harbour where transfer between ferry and train is undercover. Rhyl is the best train and bus rail interchange where facilities are adjacent to each other. We see little evidence in Wales for active integration of bus and rail services especially in the major cities and towns in Wales. We also have noted the road before rail policy at locations such as Colwyn Bay and Welshpool where roads have been built between the station and the town. There appear to be no plans in Wales for future interchange developments except for a small inadequate facility in Cardiff. At Cardiff local bus services required by incoming rail passengers have been distributed at various locations away from the Central railway station thus increasing a greater use of taxis.

The Transport Scotland module

We provide details of the functions of Transport Scotland which manages a comprehensive, multi-modal transport network that helps keep Scotland connected. It works on land, air and water to make journeys across the country safe, reliable and fast.

Transport Scotland's remit covers buses, ferries, rail and air transport. Its aim is to make Scotland more connected, stimulate economic growth across the whole country and make travelling in Scotland a smooth and enjoyable experience.

Transport Scotland has 25.3% (711 km) of the 2,776 km of rail track in Scotland electrified yet in Wales there are still no electrified sections of track. The Scottish Government's rolling programme of electrification forms part of a wider £5 billion investment package in Scotland's railway infrastructure.

Transport Scotland is in charge of maintaining the nation's trunk road network. This involves implementing safety measures, caring for structures and controlling landslides. The Forth

Replacement Crossing was Scotland's biggest project in a generation started in 2008 and completed in 2017.

An important aspect of Transport Scotland's purpose is to support and advise the Scottish Government on strategy and policy options for transport in Scotland, and increase sustainable economic growth through the development of national transport projects.

Conclusions

The Scottish model can be used to establish the skills that will be required for future employees of TfW and the equipment/assets that will be required.

This would be a good model for Wales enabling the Government to be informed by Transport for Wales and able to make well informed decisions. However it is essential that Transport for Wales Rail and its development partner Amey must be involved in all decisions affecting rail transport. Network Rail must also be expected to be proactive in Wales.

Welsh Government has commenced a second strategic review of future investment in all transport modes including the strategic road and rail networks as well as active travel and buses. It has a commitment to a collaborative review that considers the views of other bodies, for example, transport authorities and stakeholders, businesses, community groups and special interest groups. Railfuture Wales looks forward to continued engagement with the Welsh Government concerning this review.

The future role of Transport for Wales in delivering transport policy. What additional responsibilities should it take on and how should these integrate with the role of Welsh Government, local government and emerging regional transport authorities?

In January 2018 Transport Secretary Ken Skates said the Welsh Government planned to create an integrated public transport network, covering bus and rail services. This must be the initial task for Transport for Wales enabling the opportunity for the agency to prove that it is capable that it is capable for taking on additional responsibilities.

Railfuture notes that Transport for Wales already has responsibilities for Active Travel Act but we have been unable to ascertain the extent of these responsibilities but we are concerned that there have been no moves to integrate Active Travel with the public footpath network which is also important to allow the public to access public transport.

Transport Scotland has eight directorates some of which could form the basis of future work for TfW. Railfuture Wales considers that TfW should give advice to Welsh Government in the following areas -

Finance and Corporate Services, Major Infrastructure Projects, Transport Strategy and Analysis (in conjunction with Statistics Wales) and should be actively involved with private operators in providing the following-

Aviation, Maritime, Freight services, Bus, Coach and community transport, Low Carbon Economy (including electric car charging points), Rail and Metro and finally Roads and Motorways The later should enable a better balance between the use of rail and road for the conveyance of freight and passengers.

The operation of the Government owned Cardiff Wales airport is one in which TfW could be involved

However the Welsh Government appears to have u-turned on its intention to make Transport for Wales (TfW) increasingly responsible for bus operations. A White Paper on public transport instead proposes giving local authorities the power to introduce bus franchises.

Railfuture considers that the TrawsCymru bus network should be run by Transport for Wales and further developed including some cross border services to give strategic links between places on the rail network - eg:

Carmarthen - Brecon - Abergavenny - Monmouth – Chepstow

Aberystwyth - Rhayader - Llandrindod – Hereford

Swansea - A465 via Heads of Valleys towns - Abergavenny - maybe Ross and Gloucester.

Extension of the T2 service from Bangor to Llangefni

and Llandudno-Barmouth connecting with the service to Aberystwyth at Oakeley Arms

However there is a need to review some TrawsCymru services such as Cardiff to Cardiff airport.

We have already indicated our concern with the quality of interchange provision between train services and also between bus/coach and train. We consider that TfW should have a major role in providing fit for purpose interchanges. We would not like to see the development of further interchange facilities which are not fit for purpose such as at Newport and to/from platform0 at Cardiff Central.

Railfuture supports strongly the work of the Community Transport Association and suggests that this should continue to be funded by Welsh Government. We are however concerned that community bus services have not been devolved and some unrealistic proposals concerning funding are being made by the UK government.

Welsh canals are maintained by the Canals and Rivers Trust and we suggest that this arrangement continues. Welsh canals are used for tourism purposes and do not form part of the Welsh public transport network

Any relationship between Transport for Wales and local government and the emerging transport authorities could result in an element of conflict. Local government depends directly on Welsh Government for funding for bus services and active travel. The latter is now funded by a bidding process instead of by allocation thus removing most decision making from local authorities. Funding for bus service subsidies has been massively reduced with many areas losing bus services completely or being provided with a reduced level of services over a shorter day span and usually no Sunday services thus isolating many people on a Sunday.

In contrast we have noted an improvement in rail services on Sundays between Wrexham and Bidston, Cardiff and Ystrad Mynach and Cardiff and Aberdare (with more expected in the future) and recent Sunday bus services in Powys by the Welsh Government funded Traws Cymru.

The reduction and withdrawal of bus services is at conflict with the Government's aspirations for an integrated transport network. This creates distrust with Welsh Government and would be inappropriate to transfer this responsibility Transport for Wales. In fact distrust with UK and Welsh Governments will be difficult to remove.

The effective four regional transport consortia which delivered many successful projects during the early years of Welsh Government were disbanded and the expertise of many competent transport officers was lost.

Welsh Government has not delivered its promises of rail capacity enhancements to Ebbw Vale and Maesteg. The doubling of track between Wrexham and Chester has only partly been achieved as has the hourly service from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury. It does not now intend to deliver its promise of electrification of the Vale of Glamorgan line and branches to Penarth and Barry Island and also to Maesteg and Ebbw Vale with an amended scheme in the core Cardiff Valleys. The Marches line speed enhancement project also appears to have been shelved. Welsh Government has produced some questionable schemes which have been resource rich such as the Cardiff to Holyhead Gerallt Cymro service and enhanced services to Fishguard Harbour.

Welsh Government urgently needs more control over Network Rail both in terms of finances, infrastructure improvements and determination of priorities. Railfuture would expect see an expansion of function of Transport for Rail's development partner in becoming an agent for infrastructure work in other parts of Wales. This will make better use of the equipment and assets of Amey.

However cooperation is essential between local authorities especially to ensure that cross local authority border bus services remain. Additionally this cooperation is also required between Welsh and UK governments for cross country services such as Llandrindod Wells Hereford and Shrewsbury to Llanidloes. The latter is essential for access to medical facilities in Shrewsbury.