

RESPONSE BY RAILFUTURE ON CROSS-BORDER ROAD AND RAIL CONNECTIVITY

Railfuture is pleased to submit this consolidated national response on Cross-Border Road and Rail Connectivity, jointly prepared by Railfuture Wales, the Railfuture Policy Committee, and with contributions from individual branches.

Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation structured in England as twelve regional branches, and two national branches in Scotland and Wales.

1. The extent to which cross-border public road and rail services are currently provided for and accessed by the Welsh population.

1. There has been no increase in the total of Cross Border rail services since your previous inquiry with the exception of Sundays. The following changes have taken place.

- the introduction of additional services by Virgin West Coast from London to Holyhead. Virgin however, has not reintroduced the service they previously provided from Holyhead to London as a connection from the evening ferry services from Dublin.
- the Wrexham to Marylebone service has been withdrawn.
- a daily (weekdays) additional service from Wrexham to Euston.
- an increase in the Sunday service from Cardiff to Manchester from two hourly to hourly by Arriva Trains Wales. Unfortunately there are poor connections into and out of these new services for places west of Cardiff.
- additional stops at Chepstow by Cardiff to Nottingham services on weekdays but the withdrawal of one daily Cardiff to Gloucester and return service.
- there has been an increase in capacity between Cardiff and Bristol Temple Meads but this has not solved the overcrowding problems on services between these two cities.
- the capacity between South Wales and London has remained static but there has been a decrease in capacity on Saturdays and Sundays whenever trains are diverted via Gloucester or Newbury and this is likely to increase in the future as upgrade work continues on the Great Western main line for Crossrail, Reading improvements and Electrification.
- capacity continues to be reduced between Swansea and Paddington when events such as the Glastonbury and Cheltenham festivals take place and this leads both to overcrowding and poorer services for passengers especially to/from places west of Cardiff where journey times can be substantially increased.
- the poor connections (55 minutes) between West Wales to Manchester and Hereford to Birmingham services continue to exist at Hereford.

2. The following change is anticipated- Railfuture welcomed the ATW decision to extend their Maesteg/Cardiff to Gloucester service to and from Cheltenham. This has provided connections with half hourly Cross Country services all of which do not call at Gloucester. We now understand that ATW wish to terminate one of the extended services at Gloucester from May 2012 thus leaving a gap in excess of two hours in the late afternoon.

3. Railfuture has observed an increase in the number of passengers using cross border services with capacity problems on some services. The additional Sunday services between Cardiff and Manchester are well used, including passengers from the Bristol area who join the trains at Newport.

4. Railfuture is concerned about the decline in connectivity between rail services and ferry services to Ireland. The Summer Stena High Speed ferry service from Fishguard to Rosslare has been discontinued from 2012, as has the winter service between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire from 2011. The terminal building adjacent to the station at Holyhead is not now used in winter and all ferry (Stena and Irish Ferries) passengers at Holyhead are now transferred from the station to the ferry by bus. This can place constraints on the number of foot passengers carried if a system of pre booking is not in place. We appreciate timetable adjustments by ATW from May 2012 to provide improved connections from the rescheduled morning ferries from Dublin Port

5. We provide more detail below for the various cross border rail services in South East Monmouthshire to illustrate the problems that exist. A more detailed transcript is available.

a. South Wales to Bristol Temple Meads - Overcrowding continues not just at the weekday peak but also at weekends especially in summer, pre Christmas and when events are being held in Cardiff. First Great Western have done a great deal to reduce overcrowding over the last couple of years with 50% increase on coaching stock on the Portsmouth services throughout the day and 50% increase in coaches on the peak time Cardiff - Taunton services. The heaviest loaded train is the 07:30 departure from Cardiff, which is now diagrammed as five-car train, after campaigning by a Monmouthshire County Councillor at the SEWTA Board meetings. The present demand is not provided for and there is no provision for considerable anticipated growth.

b. Chepstow to Bristol Corridor - Connections for passengers living in Caldicot and Chepstow are basically acceptable in the peak by changing at Severn Tunnel Junction into Cardiff to Portsmouth services, which were removed in December 2006, but gradually reinstated following local campaigns. Connections are effectively non-existent off peak due to the poor frequency of service on the line and lack of connecting Bristol line services. Chepstow is the same distance in rail mileage to Bristol Temple Meads as Trowbridge. During the day journey times from Trowbridge to Bristol are about 40 minutes, from Chepstow the majority are 100 minutes and this involves going all the way north to Cheltenham to change to come all the way back south again through Parkway to Temple Meads some 80 miles almost four times the distance compared with changing at Severn Tunnel Junction if suitable services and connections were provided.

c. South Wales to Birmingham. The slow all stations ATW service from Maesteg to Cheltenham provides good connections at Cheltenham. Unfortunately as this service runs every two hours at certain times, there is an urgent need for this service to be upgraded to hourly throughout the week. Chepstow has seen considerable improvements with seven additional Cross Country trains each way giving a through service via Birmingham. This is trial for one year only and does not serve Caldicot or Severn Tunnel Junction.

d. Services via Gloucester to London - via Kemble The problem is lack of connections during the day in the London direction, often a wait of half an hour to an hour at Gloucester though there are reasonable connections into the two hourly ATW service coming back the other way.

e. Services to London via Newport. Passengers from South East Monmouthshire have to first travel west to Newport where the half hourly service to Paddington (Mondays to Fridays only) from Newport provides a good service. The problem for South East Monmouthshire passengers is getting to Newport from Chepstow and Caldicot with their two hourly service. The additional Cross Country services from Chepstow do not help much in this direction as they arrive at about the same time as the London departures at Newport so in addition to the twenty minute journey the 'wrong way' passengers have the half hour wait for the next service.

f. Services to London via Bristol - In theory Severn Tunnel Junction has a reasonable service to London i.e. hourly and an overall journey time of just over two hours but it involves changing twice, once at Filton Abbey Wood with a six minute connection and then a nine minute connection at Bristol Parkway. It's not a very reliable service and very few passengers' risk using it for this reason and the need for a double change. This lack of reliability plus the need for two changes results in most passengers using Newport for the London service, adding at least an extra half hour to the overall two hour journey time.

g. Bristol Parkway - There is no direct service from South East Monmouthshire to this important north south interchange hub. There is also a lack of connectivity between Chepstow and the South Coast and West of England with at least two connections being required.

6. We provide comments on the Crewe to Shrewsbury line which although completely in England is worked by Arriva Trains Wales. It is an interesting case inasmuch as it starts in Shropshire and ends in Cheshire, so crosses an English regional boundary. We would like to see an increased service into and out of Shrewsbury. However, we understand the main flow is in and out of Crewe, particularly from Nantwich. The slowing of the Manchester to South Wales service is illustrative of the point that both the needs of long distance travellers (mainly journeys starting or finishing in Wales) and those who are only travelling locally (mainly just within England) are equally valid. There is a need to maintain a fair balance between these competing but valid aims. There is concern that a strong lead from the Welsh Government could be detrimental to purely English issues Conversely there is a need for DfT to provide the resources and finance for ATW to fulfil the requirements outlined. An improved local service is the responsibility of DfT and not Welsh Government. There is concern

that this part of England does not have a strong regional lead on transport issues; services along this line being within three separate English counties, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire East.

2. The arrangements currently in place to co-ordinate cross-border road and rail transport service provision.

1. Welsh Government has bi annual meetings with adjoining counties served by Arriva Trains Wales. We are not aware of any meetings between the DfT and stakeholders in Wales with regard to services provided by FGW, Arriva Cross Country and Virgin.
2. Some passengers commence their journeys in England travel for a section of their journey in Wales, perhaps making a connection at Newport, and terminate their journey in England. Conversely other passengers connect their journey in Wales travel for a section of their journey in England, perhaps making a connection at Shrewsbury, Crewe or Chester and terminate their journey. This illustrates the need for cross border coordination between the providers of rail transport.
3. The coordinating role of Passenger Focus has diminished and it now does not perform any cross border functions. In addition in England it has responsibility for the effectiveness of bus services but in Wales this function is performed by Bus Users UK. Passenger Focus does not have any staff based in Wales.
4. Travel Line Cymru does not provide information on bus services in England but passes on requests for bus service information to Travel Line offices in England. Travel Line does not provide fare information. However NRES provides cross border rail service and fares information.
5. Whereas meetings were held in England early in the year to discuss the Great Western Franchise no parallel meetings were organised in Wales. A further sequence of meetings was organised in England in March 2012 to discuss the consultation document but none were planned to be held in Wales. Railfuture drew this to the attention of both Welsh Government and Passenger Focus and subsequently a meeting was arranged for late March.
6. The newly created Public Transport Users Committee for Wales has not taken a lead role in coordinating the views of stakeholders with respect to the consultation.
7. We are concerned about that the needs of travellers wholly within England using ATW services are not discounted or passengers disenfranchised as sometimes happens with the English based operators First Great Western and less frequently Arriva Cross Country with their services in Wales. We note, for example, the increase in local traffic between intermediate stations on the Marches line within England. There is a need for a two trains per hour service (not 3 trains every two hours) between Newport and Shrewsbury but there appears to be no method by which DfT can contribute to such an improvement. We need to ensure that such needs are canvassed and considered along with those of wholly within Wales and cross border passengers. Conversely a similar process is required for changes in England that affect passengers in Wales. Structures need to be in place to deal with this especially at stakeholder level.

The reference to First Great Western refers to the complete or partial withdrawal of the Monday to Friday Cardiff to Paddington service (which provides connections out of the Milford Haven service at Cardiff) to provide stock for other events and at times of disruption caused by infrastructure failures or engineering work. There are also occasional problems caused by stock shortages. Arriva Cross Country sometimes provides two coach trains instead of three coach trains on the Nottingham to Cardiff route. Conversely ATW has provided additional stops in Manchester to South Wales at stations in England especially between Crewe and Shrewsbury and an additional Sunday service between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton.

3. The potential impact on Wales of the plans for a High Speed 2 (HS2) Rail Service between London, the Midlands and North of England.

1. It has been proposed that South Wales to Paddington services stop at a new station at Old Oak Common to provide access to HS2. We do not support this proposal, as it will add to journey time to Paddington.

2. The Cambrian Coast to Birmingham services could benefit from the plan for a forty-seven minute HS2 link from Birmingham to London especially if there are direct connections at Birmingham International. The benefit will be reduced if passengers have to change from Birmingham New Street to Birmingham HS2 station. The same could apply to some stations at the northern end of the Heart of Wales line.

3. The North Wales Coast now has direct services to London that use the newly upgraded West Coast Main Line. These take four hours from Holyhead to Euston. The present services from Holyhead to Birmingham take over four hours so it is unlikely that there will be a significant improvement in journey time to encourage passengers to use the HS service by travelling via Birmingham.

4. The funding of cross-border transport infrastructure.

1. Railfuture is concerned about the low level of Network Rail expenditure in Wales compared with England and Scotland. Recent figures quote an expenditure of £250m in Scotland compared with £2.5m in Wales. The large expenditure in South East England compares unfavourably with that in Wales.

2. We welcome moves to improve journey times between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury and between Wrexham and Chester but the latter improvement is being paid for by the Welsh Government and not by Network Rail. We are not aware of any other cross border proposals to increase line speed compared with proposals within England including HS2.

3. The improvements to the Great Western route will not significantly decrease journey times. A more reliable infrastructure is required. We do not advocate reducing journey times by reducing the number of calling points as this reduces connectivity. For example Bristol Parkway is an important connectional point at which all services should call and additional platforms at the station would improve the connectional opportunities and could reduce the pressure on facilities at Bristol Temple Meads.

4. We view with concern the proposals for the Northern Hub and plans for Manchester, which could affect services from North Wales, which use the through platforms at Manchester Piccadilly. Railfuture has long advocated that all these services should continue to Manchester Airport and the new proposals should provide the infrastructure to enable this to be implemented.

5. Railfuture is concerned that the average age of rolling stock used on Cross Border services especially those operated by Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western does not compare favourably with that used in the Midlands and South East. There is no cross border electrified service. There are two electrified routes to Scotland but these used only by a maximum of four passenger trains per hour the same number that use the non electrified Severn Tunnel route. We do not support proposals just to electrify to Cardiff instead of the obvious destination Swansea. The use of bi mode trains will increase production and operating costs, reduce flexibility and the ability to provide for peak demands, create operational problems of joining and splitting sets and will create a poor relation environment for destinations beyond Cardiff which will influence economic and social development.

5. The progress made on improving co-ordination between the Welsh Government and Department for Transport on cross-boundary issues and matters of strategic importance.

1. There is no obvious improvement in coordination between Welsh Government and the Department for Transport. The proposals for electrification to Cardiff and not Swansea again indicate a lack of coordination and integration especially when electrification costs are not devolved. There is a similar situation in North Wales with regard to the Borderlands line

2. The various station improvement programmes appear to be uncoordinated with funding coming from a range of sources including NR, DfT, local government and Welsh Government.

3. There is a lack of consultation in Wales with respect to developments in England that could affect connectivity with Wales e.g. the Manchester Hub and a possible recast of Centro services in the Midlands.

4. We note the lack of coordination between franchises. Six London Midland sets stable at Shrewsbury on Sunday whereas ATW has provided additional trains on Sundays to provide for increased demand. We would have thought that DfT would have amended the London Midland contract.

5. Proposals to continue to provide cascaded rolling stock for Welsh services and not new build as in many parts of England give the impression that Wales is a poor relation of any coordination partnership. This could result in the provision of toilet less EMUs replacing DMUs with toilets. It is important to have rolling stock that is fit for purpose and economical to use for the services that are operated. The dual use of HST's for commuter trains in the Thames Valley and also as long distance trains to the West of England and Wales is not compatible.

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