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Dear Ms Morris,

## **Inquiry into Tourism - Consultation**

Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation structured in England as twelve regional branches, and two national branches in Wales and Scotland. We are completely independent of all political parties, trades unions and commercial interests, funded almost entirely from our membership. We campaign for improved rail services for passengers and freight. Whilst pro-rail, we are not anti-car or aviation.

Railfuture Cymru Wales wishes to comment on those aspects, which relate to rail travel by tourists in and to and from Wales. Railfuture has recently published the third edition of 'On track for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century- A Development Plan for Wales and the Borders ' a copy of which is attached.

### **To assess the suitability and effectiveness of the structures and support the Welsh Government has in place for the tourism industry in Wales, and its future plans for regional support**

1 Railfuture acknowledges that an integrated passenger transport system in Wales will provide for increased usage by all types of user both local and long-distance travellers. An integrated system will encourage inward tourism to many parts of Wales. It will reduce the use of cars by tourists and in turn reduce road congestion and carbon emissions. Railfuture believes that a great amount of work is still required to provide a fully integrated system in Wales and that there must be greater control from Welsh Government. This is stated in detail in the in the third edition of 'On track for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - A Development Plan for Wales and the Borders ' a copy of which is attached.

2 Wales has a network of rail lines that traverse many of the scenic areas of the country. These lines were once defined on the annual maps produced by Thomas Cook Travel and provided an incentive for visitors to travel by rail in Wales. The publication of these maps has now ceased and there has been no replacement publication. These lines include the Pembrokeshire Coast, the Cambrian Coast, the Heart of Wales, Marches and Conwy Valley. There are however other sections of line which could be included. The development of these sections of lines for all types of traveller but especially the leisure traveller was provided for grant funded development officers who provided support to tourists by providing publicity and line guides. Recent cutbacks by councils and other funders have seen these officers withdrawn from most lines and there is now no mechanism in place to provide support. ATW have attempted to plug the gap with a number of leaflets by these are unlikely to be as effective as the earlier publications.

3 It is difficult to identify any recent improvements to rail travel to increase the development of tourism by rail. However Railfuture has welcomed the announcement for improved services on the Heart of Wales and Cambrian lines, which could lead to improvements in the future. It is essential however that these lines have the continued capacity to allow the running of charter trains. The Heart of Wales line is an important destination for these trains both steam and diesel with many spending time at Llandrindod Wells.

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4 It is important to have direct services to airports to encourage visitors from overseas. The reopening of Vale of Glamorgan line improved accessibility to Cardiff Airport but this has been undermined by the introduction of an underused direct coach service from Cardiff. Railfuture in its Development Plan suggests service improvements that will improve accessibility to Cardiff airport. Railfuture has advocated the extension of Cambrian and North Wales line services to and from Birmingham New Street to Birmingham International (which was subsequently implemented) and to and from Manchester Piccadilly to Manchester Airport (which has been partially introduced off peak but could be withdrawn as part of the Northern Hub proposals).

5 Welsh stations need to be brought up to a higher standard to be customer including tourist friendly. Good improvements have been made at Swansea under the control of ATW but Newport station has been made user-unfriendly by Network Rail developments. Llandrindod Wells and Llandovery on the Heart of Wales line provide attractive facilities for tourists that could be replicated elsewhere. Cardiff Central station needs considerable investment to bring it up to present day standards. Many stations have inadequate facilities for rail interchange with bus and rail replacement services. Railfuture's Development Plan includes a section 6 on station facilities.

6 A higher standard of rolling stock is required for most rail services in Wales. It is important that the trains used on the scenic lines of Wales afford the opportunity to view the magnificent Welsh scenery. In some countries, especially Switzerland, observation coaches and vista cars are used but none used on the railways of Wales. The class 150 and class 153 trains used on some of the scenic lines of Wales are not appropriate for tourist use. The refurbishment of class 153 (including higher seats) and 158 units has maintained the provision of most seats aligned with the windows. This is not the case with the FGW high-speed trains, which provide services between London and West Wales with seating not aligned with the windows. Increased passenger numbers with no increased accommodation on many of the services results in more standing passenger and this deprives passengers including tourists of views of the Welsh countryside.

7 Adverse developments include. The decline of conductivity between ferry services from Dublin at Holyhead. A bus service between the rail terminal and the ferry terminal is required for all services to and from Dublin. There are no onward rail services connecting with the evening services from Dublin. More tourists are now flying to Dublin and thus North Wales is bypassed. The Welsh Government financially supported these ferry terminal alterations. However conductivity at Fishguard Harbour is excellent although here increased air travel by tourists not using a car has had an impact.

8 A successful steam tourist train ran for many years between Machynlleth and Pwllheli. This has not run in the last three years because of the inability of Network Rail to produce a suitable signalling system for these lines. Welsh Government should be urging Network Rail to resolve this signalling issue. It is important that the Welsh rail network should be open to tourist/charter train including steam hauled. The signalling issues have precluded the use of steam on charters from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, which ran on a regular basis and were well used by tourists. The signalling issues have reduced the number of locomotives available to work charter trains on the Cambrian to a small pool of four identical locomotives owned by Network Rail, which frequently are being used for other duties.

9 An improved service was introduced from Fishguard Harbour funded by Welsh Government. Although the new service provides new opportunities for local residents it does not provide for inward travel from South Wales as there is no mid morning arrival or early evening departure. A suitable timetable as outlined in Railfuture's Development Plan would have provided for inward tourism and opened up circular tour facilities encompassing St David's and Haverfordwest and Cardigan and Carmarthen.

10 FGW provide two Summer Saturday HST trains to and from Pembroke Dock. These have adequate space for luggage although luggage handlers are not now provided on these trains. However these trains are not included in the forthcoming direct award franchise that will replace the current franchise. ATW have commendably provided 2 coach class 150 trains on the Pembroke Dock branch replacing the one coach class 153 trains. This has helped to relieve overcrowding on the Pembroke Dock services but it is unlikely that additional stock will be available to replace the HST services.

11 The removal of run round loops at Fishguard Harbour and Milford Haven require charter trains to have a locomotive at each end adding to the cost of the operation and precluding steam haulage in both directions if only one steam locomotive is used.

### **The effectiveness of Welsh Government attempts to maximise the value of the domestic tourism market**

12 The Government has provided grants to several tourist railways in Wales including a recent one to the Snowdon Mountain Railway. However this is limited in its effect to raise the profile of rail travel on the complete rail network in Wales.

13 The train operating companies have used their own resources to provide encouragement for increased tourist travel by rail but these opportunities have not been coordinated by Visit Wales with the exception of the All Wales travel Pass.

14 Independent tour operators such as Railtrail and Inside Track provide short and long break holidays in Wales which depend on rail rather than coach travel. Charter operators of steam and diesel hauled specials on the main line also bring tourists to Wales but do not appear to be supported by Visit Wales.

15 Bus links need to be developed from railway stations to tourist locations. At Chepstow bus links have been suggested by 'Better trains for Chepstow' from the railway station to the Wye Valley to provide connectivity for tourists thus avoiding the ten-minute walk between the bus and railway stations. HOWLTA has suggested bus links from Llandrindod Wells to the Elan Valley.

16 The work of the Ramblers Association and other rambling groups to provide walks between railway stations is to be commended and requires continued support from Welsh Government. However this is limited and other walking activities should be encouraged to combine with rail travel eg All Wales Coastal Path, walks on former railway lines, walks in National Parks and walks involving historical sites. An annual programme of walks in Wales should be published.

17 There is no National Railway/Transport Museum or National Railway/Transport archive in Wales. In other countries they provide a considerable attraction for tourists e.g. York in England and Mulhouse in France.

### **The success of Visit Wales marketing activities**

18 Railfuture considers that Visit Wales does not adequately promote the Welsh transport network. The rail network is covered very well by a series of five timetable booklets produced by ATW but availability of printed road transport is limited and not always found at railway stations.

19 Visit Wales has concentrated recently on high value tourism based on high quality hotels. These visitors usually use car and not rail or bus transport. Visit Wales has reduced its marketing to young travellers especially those from abroad who are more likely to use rail and bus transport. These young visitors are more likely to be the visitors of the future and should be catered for.

### **The work of Visit Britain as it relates to Wales, and the extent of coordination between Visit Britain and Visit Wales**

20 It is important that Visit Wales works closely with transport providers. It is important that there is connectivity between rail services from and to Wales from England. Although it is important to have direct fast services to and from London it is also important that there are connections with cross country services. The removal of the Bristol Parkway stop from Swansea to London services will remove the opportunity for tourists from many parts of Britain to access Swansea and West Wales from most of England except from London and the South East.

21 The combined rail and bus map that was issued annually has not been issued in recent years supported by the Welsh Tourist Board. This was well distributed to accommodation providers.

### **The use made of opportunities for funding and other support from the EU**

22 Railfuture has noted the extensive use of EU funds to improve the transport infrastructure in the Irish Republic including the replacement of older rolling stock by new rolling stock that is more energy efficient. There are other European examples of extensive railway and rolling stock investment using EU funds. There has been limited use of EU funding for rail schemes but in some cases schemes have not been fully developed by Welsh Government and Network Rail to use the full potential of these grants.

### **The extent to which the marketing and development of tourism in Wales makes the most of Wales's cultural, historical and natural assets**

23 Rail transport serves the three National Parks of Wales and other submissions to the inquiry will highlight the importance of these protected areas to tourism in Wales. The railheads for the National Parks should have adequate facilities to encourage the transfer from rail to road transport together with adequate information facilities. We are concerned that the Beacons Bus will not operate in 2014 except for one route from Cardiff and none from the railheads at Abergavenny and Swansea. The Pembrokeshire Coast services do not always link with rail travel especially at Pembroke Dock and the additional services to Fishguard have been of no benefit. The Snowdon Sherpa has been watered down and the North Snowdonia Transport plan to reduce car travel in the area did not

materialise. It is important to maintain links at the railheads such as Bangor, Betws Y Coed and Bleanua Ffestiniog to which Portmadoc should be added.

**The impact of major events on Wales's tourism economy, and the success of Welsh Government attempts to maximise this**

24 Major events need to be supported by good transport links for those attending. Events at Cardiff Millennium Stadium place an immense pressure on rail services and their needs to be a number of improvements to provide for capacity crowds by all rail operators to Cardiff. ATW are to be congratulated on their innovative use of rolling stock on match days from their limited fleet of trains. Races at Chester and Chepstow also require additional rail capacity, as do other events in Wales. Rail operators can attempt to provide additional services when advised in advance but it is important that the coordination of events is important.

We trust these suggestions will be of use.

Yours sincerely,

*R Pittard*

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Railfuture Cymru Wales