



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor ar Seilwaith y Rheilffyrdd a Gwella
Gwasanaethau i Deithwyr**

**The National Assembly for Wales
The Committee on Rail Infrastructure and Improved
Passenger Services**

**Dydd Mercher, 22 Mawrth 2006
Wednesday, 22 March 2006**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau o'r Cynulliad yn bresennol: John Marek (Cadeirydd), Leighton Andrews, Eleanor Burnham, Rosemary Butler, Janet Davies, Lisa Francis, Carl Sargeant.

Eraill yn bresennol: Michael Beswick, Cyfarwyddwr, Uned Bolisi Swyddfa Rheoleiddio'r Rheilffyrdd; David Blainey, Swyddog Gweithredol Dros Dro Taith—Consortiwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Cymru; Malcolm Cowtan, Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru; Phil Jackson, Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru; Gareth Roberts, Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru; Trevor Roberts, Cadeirydd, Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru a Taith—Consortiwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Cymru; David Sandy, Swyddog Strategaeth Gludiant, Cyngor Sir Benfro a Gweithgor Swyddogion Consortiwm Cludiant Integredig De-Orllewin Cymru; Bob Saxby, Taith—Consortiwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Cymru.

Gwasanaeth Pwyllgor: Chris Reading, Clerc; Sarah Bartlett, Dirprwy Glerc.

Assembly Members in attendance: John Marek (Chair), Leighton Andrews, Eleanor Burnham, Rosemary Butler, Janet Davies, Lisa Francis, Carl Sargeant.

Others in attendance: Michael Beswick, Director, Policy Unit, Office of Rail Regulation; David Blainey, Acting Executive Officer Taith—North Wales Transport Consortium; Malcolm Cowtan, Mid Wales Transportation; Phil Jackson, Mid Wales Transportation; Gareth Roberts, Mid Wales Transportation; Trevor Roberts, Chairman, Mid Wales Transportation and Taith—North Wales Transport Consortium; David Sandy, Transport Strategy Officer, Pembrokeshire County Council and South-West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium Working Group; Bob Saxby, Taith—North Wales Transport Consortium.

Committee Service: Chris Reading, Clerc; Sarah Bartlett, Deputy Clerc.

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.00 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.00 a.m.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **John Marek:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this meeting. We have headsets for simultaneous translation and sound amplification. Translation from Welsh into English is available on channel 1, and a verbatim reproduction is available on channel 0. If there are any problems, the ushers will assist. Please switch off your mobile phones, BlackBerrys and pagers, as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment. If the fire alarm sounds, please follow the instructions of the ushers. The assembly point is at the rear of the Pierhead building. Please do not touch the microphones, and please wait until the red light comes on before you speak. Have we received any apologies?

[2] **Mr Reading:** No, there have been no apologies.

[3] **John Marek:** Does anyone wish to make a declaration of interest under Standing Order 4.6?

[4] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am the chair of a little charity called Making Tracks, which works with the British Transport Police and other worthy bodies to help young people who are offending on railway lines, primarily around Colwyn Bay. I have declared this previously.

[5] **John Marek:** Does Eleanor need to declare that every time?

[6] **Mr Reading:** No.

[7] **John Marek:** There you are; you have learned something new.

[8] A briefing has been prepared by the Members' research service, which is available to Members.

9.02 a.m.

Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Blaenorol a Materion yn Codi Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

[9] **John Marek:** The minutes have been circulated out of committee. Are Members content to ratify the minutes? I see that they are.

[10] We will now consider the matters arising. I have none, as we are collecting evidence at this stage.

[11] **Rosemary Butler:** On that point, Chair, the closing date for comments was 3 March, but I am still receiving some. Can we still pass these through?

[12] **John Marek:** We are flexible. The purpose of this committee is to gather the evidence. It would be foolish of us not to accept those comments. However, the clerk is in the process of analysing the evidence and picking out the different points within each piece of evidence to produce a list. Therefore, the time for that is coming to an end. We will have to discuss, at the end of the meeting, how we will produce our report.

[13] Are there any other matters arising? I see that there are none.

*Cadarnhawyd cofnodion y cyfarfod blaenorol.
The minutes of the previous meeting were ratified.*

9.03 a.m.

Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru Mid Wales Transportation

[14] **John Marek:** It gives me great pleasure to welcome Councillor Trevor Roberts. With him are Phil Jackson, Malcolm Cowtan, and Gareth Roberts. I hand over the floor to you.

[15] **Mr T. Roberts:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for your warm welcome. It is nice to see some old faces, or should I say young faces. Sorry about that, Rosemary.

[16] I know that you have had our paper, and I would like to highlight two or three points over the next three or four minutes and then hand over to the three experts, who really are experts in this field, particularly on one matter, which I will highlight later and which I am sure you will want to question them about.

[17] On the first page, under point 2.0, we mention access to educational opportunities for those travelling by train. On the Cambrian coast section, journeys made by those going to the two schools at Tywyn and Harlech, and by the students going to the college in Pwllheli, represent approximately 3,700 journeys per week. You can see the importance of that service and why the timetables are sometimes designed around the traffic flows of the school. It is an

important market.

[18] Moving on, we talk about disused railway lines and potential freight use and so forth. I will touch on that in a few minutes.

[19] Sundays are our big thing, and I come back to the Cambrian coast line. On a Sunday in winter, a train travels southwards from Pwllheli through to Machynlleth and then goes back in the evening. Anyone who lives in my area of Barmouth and who wants to travel northwards can go back only in the evening and therefore they have to stay overnight before they can come back. It is impossible to do one journey.

[20] Seeing that those trains just stand—we are not looking for extra units—the train has time to go from Machynlleth, instead of staying there for four to five hours, do one more quick return trip up the coast, thereby giving opportunities. Car ownership in that part of Wales is quite low. Therefore, it is important. We have found that people use a through bus to Bangor hospital, although it is 60 miles away, to visit patients. Bus companies have suddenly realised that not everyone has a car or did not like to ask someone who had a car whether they could have transport on a Sunday.

[21] However, in terms of train services on the main line, as we call it—the Aberystwyth-Shrewsbury line—we are looking for an hourly service. We can have a regular-pattern timetable, and I know that the standard timetable is the flavour of the month, if you like. This would be important on the mid Wales line because, although we have a two-hourly service on the Cambrian coast line, it would feed in for people waiting two hours, or an hour and three-quarters as they do now. There would be a train every hour for them to catch. It is important in terms of the hospitals that people use. In the Aberystwyth area, you have the hospital there, so you have the flow from south Meirionnydd and from Newtown going that way or going to Shrewsbury the other way. The other important aspect is that you now have this fine, lovely building down here and, to give people easier access, we need more regular train services to Shrewsbury, from where we now have almost an hourly service to Cardiff, which is to be welcomed. We would like to see that added.

[22] In respect of the hourly service, we all know that there is a new company in talks about having a London train from the Wrexham area—for your area, Dr Marek—through to Shrewsbury. We would like to see that extended. One early morning service, such as the Aberystwyth service, could be added to it at Shrewsbury, and you would then have a through train from Aberystwyth to London, and one back in the evening without too much hardship in relation to costs. Perhaps it is easy for me to sit here and say that, but it would be only an add-on to the service. I understand that there is a new service that is an add-on of the Chiltern line services from Marylebone to Birmingham, and perhaps the Arriva Wales train from Wrexham to Chester could join it. We think that it would be a lot easier to add on another unit from the Aberystwyth area.

[23] Moving on to the Heart of Wales line, which is dear to us, I know that it is a slow line with a lot of crossings and so forth. I think that money could be spent to speed up some of the crossings and to perhaps eliminate some of the underused crossings. The service is looking for one more extra train. We have four trains. I understand that it is a single-coach train most of the time, and it is quite full. We are trying to encourage people. There is nothing worse for a service if people have to stand for an hour or more on a journey, because you are never going to get them to come back. I think that that is something that we were looking for there.

[24] In terms of infrastructure work, as I say, although we could do with having all of these small crossings eliminated, not a lot of money needs to be spent in relation to the track. Are you aware that it is a diversionary route for freight trains when the main Hereford line is closed? Therefore, it is what we call a route 9 or 10, which, depending on route availability,

can take the heavier trains. If you like, the track is in very good fettle. Therefore, as far as infrastructure work is concerned, it should not be too much of a pain.

[25] We look for passing loops and so forth. As you know, on the Cambrian coast, we are having this new system, which will be piloted next year, called the European rail traffic management system. We understand that unless we can put into place any changes that we need—a new passing loop anywhere in mid Wales—it will be more difficult. While the system is being trialled, we may not be able to have any improvements carried out for several years. Therefore, we are led to believe—and the officers will come back on this—that if we are to have a loop, we need to identify and start the work in the next 12 to 18 months before the trialling of the ERTMS. Therefore, this is something that we need to keep an eye on.

[26] Going back to crossings on the main line, I know that a lot of you travel along the A470, so you will know that the road crossing at Caersws can often be a bind; we caught it last night. Therefore, it is about things like that that we could do something with our trunk road agencies. Obviously, we are looking to the Assembly on that.

[27] We obviously support the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium because, as is stated in 3.3.2, and going back to the Heart of Wales line, it is looking to eliminate the major choke at the southern end around Gowerton. We fully support that. I know that you will hear from Taith later. We also support its proposals for the Conwy valley line. The end of the line is within the track area of Blaenau Ffestiniog. I will speak about that in a moment with regard to freight possibilities.

9.10 a.m.

[28] To return to the issue of Sunday services, although we would like to see an increase, the other problem, especially on the main line, is the engineering work. I know that people make complaints because people cannot travel until after lunch time. Why on earth can we not persuade Network Rail to use some block possessions? Since Christmas, on the Cambrian coast, there have been two weeks during which the line was closed completely for four days at a time. In that time, they achieved 12 to 14 weekends' worth of work. If they can pick the right times for the work, that would be a lot easier. For some people, Sunday is a religious day, but it is also leisure time, and people like to travel. I think that we are missing many opportunities to attract people to use the railway.

[29] Security at stations is an issue that is near and dear to us. Some of you may not be aware that we had security problems involving youths four or five years ago on the mid Wales line. We formed a committee, which I chair, with Dyfed Powys Police, North Wales Police and the British Transport Police. We have had a great deal of success. We have a station accreditation system, and, thanks to the Assembly, which funded a great deal of this, we have closed circuit television at Barmouth, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth. That is starting to be extended. We welcome the fact that a community rail police officer is going to be appointed. However, we notice that the officer will be based in Shrewsbury. We would ask that that officer be based in the Machynlleth area. This initiative is done through the Assembly, the railways and the British Transport Police.

[30] Shrewsbury has British Transport Police, which polices mid Wales down to Aberystwyth, Barmouth and so on. I think that the officer should be based at Machynlleth. The British Transport Police has been keen to post someone down there and, several years ago, Dyfed Powys Police offered premises. I believe that the offer still stands to use the old police station at Machynlleth. It was quite happy to make a room available for a British Transport Police officer. It is not too late in the day for that to happen. Before an officer is designated for Shrewsbury, we beg that the officer be based at Machynlleth, so that he or she can cover the area. It is about 50 miles from Shrewsbury to Machynlleth if there are any

problems.

[31] On refurbished units, we are not looking for brand new trains, although we would love to have them. The 158 units are air conditioned and could receive a general makeover. With ERTMS, because the trains work with a satellite system, they are going to designate 16 units. So, those could have a major refurbishment. They can be joined up to make units of two, four, six or whatever length you want to cope with summer traffic. If someone were to offer us more money to buy new trains, we would obviously welcome that. However, we are trying to be realistic. If they received a really good makeover, I think that we could get a few more years out of the 158 units, because when they are working properly, the air conditioning in them is superb.

[32] I want to come back on two main issues, one of which is the concessionary fares scheme. The Assembly gave this wonderful free bus travel scheme to Wales for people over 60. We are looking to have that extended to the railways. I understand that, 12 months ago, there may have been some money around. I am not saying this with tongue in cheek, Chair. The money was for some pilot schemes. One was for the border line, the Wrexham to Bidston line, and we also looked at the Cambrian line. It would be only between Pwllheli and Aberystwyth. I want to bring this up, but I cannot speak on it too much because the expert is Mr Cowtan. When I finish, we can ask Malcolm, who can make a case for a way to do that for next to nothing, and at no cost to the Assembly, because it is already paying money to the railway. I will leave Malcolm to deal with the technicalities, because he baffles me sometimes when he tries to explain it. However, he has really convinced us that it can be done. It is an important point.

[33] Turning to freight, a rail freight pilot scheme was carried out on the line from Aberystwyth to Kronospan, the timber place at Chirk. We understand that it was a very successful trial. I understand that the total costs were approximately 1p a mile per tonne more to go by rail than by road. When you think of the environmental benefits of keeping lorries off the road, I think that that is a must. We would certainly like to see that expanded, together with—I come back to the northern area of the track—the Alfred McAlpine Slate Ltd initiative at Blaenau Ffestiniog. I have been involved with the north Wales authorities on that and I would like to see that project given a grant. I know that the Assembly is on our side and I know that the grant came to a stop because the rail facilities grant was stopped in England. I am wondering whether you, as politicians, could apply pressure to try to re-open this, because it would keep hundreds of lorries a day off the roads. Having them on the roads is a worry.

[34] As we are talking about that end of the railway line, we have a meeting tomorrow night, as it happens, in Trawsfynydd, of all places, of a partnership called Trawsnewid. The railway line is still in situ to the old power station and we think that that could be developed and extended. The track therefore exists from Blaenau, from the Conwy valley. We would look at timber markets and we, as officers, are going to talk to the freight association on that.

[35] There is a big cycling adventure centre at Coed-y-Brenin, between Dolgellau and Trawsfynydd, and we think that we can encourage people to come by train, bringing their bikes with them. The other thing that came out of all this is the issue of all the lorries that run from wholesalers in Queensferry and so on. Remembering that we do not have an A55 or another major road, trains could bring those loads to Trawsfynydd. All that you would need is a roadway alongside and a lifter to take containers off and put them onto the lorries to move them from there, which would save a lot of journeys. This has been working in northern Scotland. Safeway tried, 12 years ago, with two trucks from Inverness going up to Georgemas Junction for Wick and Thurso. There is now a full freight train each day, because all sorts of freight use it. I understand that, next month, another trial is starting in Ayrshire, using the same units that we use to take timber from Aberystwyth, which you can put containers on. They are the types of things that we should be exploring. From the environmental point of

view, and being green, it is a matter of using the railway tracks that are still there, but which are not being used. On that point, I will shut up. We have three experts here who are far more knowledgeable than I am.

[36] **John Marek:** Thank you; that was a useful exposition. You have made a lot of points. A verbatim record is being produced, so none of this has been lost. The fact that I have been staring at you or into space, or whatever you think that I have been doing, does not mean that we have not been taking it in. It will all be done and the clerk will produce a list of points raised. I say to everyone that this committee wishes to gather information and all the different points and suggestions that you made are gratefully received.

[37] We may decide to put the recommendations in some sort of order, but we may not; that is something for the committee to decide. You have a slot of 40 minutes and we started early, so out of those 40 minutes we probably have 21 or 22 minutes left. I know that Members will want to ask questions, there are six Members and they all want to ask questions, so we have only about three minutes each. However, would any of your experts like to raise any new points which you have not raised? If they would, that is fine and they can do so now, but, if not, I shall ask Members to ask questions for the elucidation that they want. Is there anything that you would like to add?

[38] **Rosemary Butler:** Could we hear about the concessionary fare scheme?

[39] **John Marek:** Leave that matter for your question, Rosemary.

[40] **Rosemary Butler:** I thought that we were going to move into it.

[41] **John Marek:** I want to give them a free hand first. Is there anything that your chair has not mentioned that you feel ought to be put into the pot? If there is, go on, because I think that we ought to hear it.

[42] **Mr Cowtan:** There is an issue about stations, particularly on the Cambrian coast line. Aberdyfi is the worst, with a difference of 16 inches between the platform and the train doors. There have been accidents at Aberdyfi. Other stations are involved as well and that issue just does not seem to be able to be resolved easily. I am just flagging that up as a matter of concern.

[43] **John Marek:** We now have that on the record. Are there any other points?

9.20 a.m.

[44] **Mr G. Roberts:** The only other point is about the frequency on the Cambrian line, and the developments that are going on in Aberystwyth at the moment, with the relocation of the Assembly buildings. We want to put in place a transport system for the next 20 years that will get people out of their cars. It will be a slow process, because of the problems with Network Rail and providing loops. We want to develop a frequent train service into Aberystwyth, and develop small hubs along the line, if possible, for park and ride. I know that it is difficult to re-open a station, but we are thinking of places like Bow Street or Dyfi Junction where people can use an eco-friendly parking area, where they can cycle and catch the train in, or leave their cars there. Unfortunately, at the moment, Dyfi Junction is totally inaccessible apart from on foot—there is not even room to turn your car around. So, we can build on the strength of the Cambrian line, especially with the hourly service, because Aberystwyth does suffer from congestion, in relative terms to the size of the town, at peak times—it gets very congested. We want to get people onto the trains and buses, and out of their cars, but we must have the base service there initially.

[45] **Mr Jackson:** Briefly, I will just mention rolling stock, which Councillor Roberts touched on when he talked about refurbishment. There is also the question of unsuitable rolling stock, particularly on the Heart of Wales line. The 153 single carriages that are currently being used are not really suitable for either a scenic route or for a long-distance route. In particular, the charges for leasing them could be a disbenefit when it comes to the one additional service for which they are asking along the line.

[46] **John Marek:** Before I ask my questions, I think that there will be some improvement on the Heart of Wales line, because the proposals by the Government, between the draft budget and the final budget, included an extra carriage or some improvement. That is something that you need to take up with the Welsh Assembly Government or with Arriva. The fact that you have one 153 single carriage packed to the gunnels in summer will be somewhat alleviated. You may need to explore that.

[47] My other point was about the Marylebone train, which has extended past Birmingham as a result of Shrewsbury being keen on it. It is stand-alone—no subsidy is required at this stage—but that does not mean that subsidy cannot be given, if it is cost-effective, to extend that service. That point is well-made, and we will take it on board.

[48] I have no other questions. I will go to Rosemary first because she asked about concessionary fares first, then on to Eleanor.

[49] **Rosemary Butler:** You mentioned in the proposal that there is a possibility of free fares which would not cost anything to the Assembly.

[50] **Mr Cowtan:** It might be a naive interpretation from a non-economist, but we believe that, on 1 April, when the Assembly Government takes over the budget from the Strategic Rail Authority for running the railways in Wales, that this is an issue which could be negotiated with Arriva Trains Wales. Given that all the services that Arriva Trains Wales runs are essentially loss-making, and that the Assembly Government has a commitment to running these services, give or take some requirements on the part of Arriva Trains for efficiency, this global amount will have to be paid to Arriva Trains to run the services. Whether the payment comes entirely from a revenue budget or from partially a revenue budget and partially a concessionary-fare budget, the global amount need not necessarily be any different if pensioners are carried for nothing on some local services. So, I believe that this is an opportunity, if discussions are held with Arriva Trains, for extending the scheme to cover some local rail services in Wales where rail is the only form of local transport. Blaenau Ffestiniog to Llandudno is one that springs to mind. However, in other cases as well, it is the only viable means of local transport.

[51] **John Marek:** Is that okay, Rosemary?

[52] **Rosemary Butler:** Yes, thank you.

[53] **John Marek:** Fine. Eleanor is next, and then Lisa.

[54] **Eleanor Burnham:** You will probably know that I am a railway nerd. My first Assembly short debate was about reopening the Barmouth to Ruabon railway line, so I have high aspirations.

[55] I will get back to reality. On tourism, I have been on the Heart of Wales line, and one thing that struck me was, have you ever costed the development of tourism, and how two extra units, perhaps, could help in the summer, with cyclists, for instance? I noticed that you can barely get one bike on, let alone two, but you could have a group of cyclists wanting to travel, because it is a beautiful route. Has that ever been costed?

[56] The other practical issue is, I am always a loo watcher—both on and off trains. Have you costed what are the basic necessities of travelling—all of us who travel on the trains know this—namely loos and cafes, along either the Cambrian line or the Heart of Wales line? We must get the basic necessities right, other than the platform height, which is obviously a basic necessity. Without loos and cafes you cannot bring in tourists; you do not have the room, either, to do this because you have only one stupid unit that you would not travel 10 miles on, ideally, let alone the Heart of Wales. Do you have any costings that you may have done over the years, or recently?

[57] **Mr Jackson:** We are currently running a Sunday service, additionally, with the Assembly's help, which costs about £20,000 for one extra journey in the winter. Through the Heart of Wales line forum, we are paying for a similar additional train, if you like, during the summer. However, that is not one new train all year, which I think is what you have in mind. The Heart of Wales line forum has been talking with the Wales Tourist Board—in whatever guise that will exist—about the possibility of a single new tourist train, which could be used on any number of lines, but including the Heart of Wales line, during the season. That work is ongoing, as I understand.

[58] **Eleanor Burnham:** How many units would that have? Would it have three carriages?

[59] **Mr Jackson:** Yes, that is what we are looking at—a new train, with better visibility, but not quite scenic.

[60] **Eleanor Burnham:** Would there be facilities to bring on bikes, and so on, or wheelchairs, for goodness' sake, for people who are disabled, because that is another issue, is it not?

[61] **Mr Jackson:** Yes. That would go back to the earlier point about the unsuitability of the current stock, ever since the loss of the guard's van.

[62] **Eleanor Burnham:** Exactly.

[63] **Mr Jackson:** The possible danger there is that the reintroduction of the so-called heritage stock, namely the old diesel units, would make good the lack of capacity. However, it might not be quite the right image for a railway line in this day and age.

[64] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about loos and cafes?

[65] **Mr Jackson:** At present, there is only one staffed station on the Heart of Wales line, which is at Llandrindod Wells, where a ticket agency exists. There are no other premises available, as far as I know, other than possibly at Llandovery station, where there is a unit available for hire, where a cafe could be placed. Therefore, the tendency has been to work with the local tradespeople in the towns along the line.

[66] **Mr T. Roberts:** To add to that, a cafe has opened in mid Wales, in Machynlleth, just over 12 months ago. That has been extremely successful, because the station is also an interchange; it is on the platform.

[67] **Lisa Francis:** I know, Trevor, that you outlined the ERTMS pilot, and you say in the paper that it might be a blight. We have always been led to believe that ERTMS would be the catalyst for providing passing loops on the Cambrian line. However, if what you say is correct, do those passing loops need to be in place before the ERTMS starts? Can I confirm that that is what you meant?

[68] **Mr T. Roberts:** That is what we have been told; that is what we understand now, which has come as a surprise to us. Like you, we thought that that was the bees' knees.

[69] **John Marek:** That is a useful point.

[70] **Lisa Francis:** That is very interesting.

[71] Secondly, on the concessionary fares scheme—and I may have asked you about this before, Malcolm—but, in Gwynedd, am I right in understanding that senior citizens have a choice between free parking, free bus travel, or free rail travel, and that they must opt for one of those?

9.30 a.m.

[72] **Mr Cowtan:** No, free parking is not an option at all. The choice is between free bus travel and a senior railcard at a reduced price—essentially, for £5. If they choose the option of the senior railcard at £5, they have to forego the bus pass. If they want both the railcard and the free bus travel, they can buy the railcard for what it costs us to buy them in bulk from the railways, which is about £14.

[73] **John Marek:** But if they were to buy them as individuals, what would they cost? Are they about £20 now?

[74] **Mr Cowtan:** Something like £20.

[75] **Lisa Francis:** On the Conwy valley slate freight project, which is something that I have been interested in for a long time—I put a paper together on it—I wondered why the project had slowed down. I want this recorded for the purposes of the committee, Chair, as I have discovered that the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned WS Atkins plc to produce a cost estimate study report on the possibility of moving slate waste via freight from Blaenau Ffestiniog northwards. That was in April 2004, but Network Rail informed officials that it did not agree with some of Atkins's costings, and Atkins was asked to revisit those costs. At that time, the Welsh Assembly Government concluded that it could not afford to fund this project. After this, Network Rail was supposed to prepare revised costs for the Conwy valley line upgrade. I do not think that we are in possession of those revised costs, and until we are, that project will not really move forward. So, I just wanted to note that for the committee, because it is an important project, and one that we would like to see more of its type happening in Wales. If it were to go ahead, it would be the only freight project in north Wales, so it would be very useful and the spin-off from that could be the Trawsfynydd to Blaenau Ffestiniog connection, which would also be useful from a tourism point of view.

[76] **Mr G. Roberts:** Just for information, the main item in last week's *New Civil Engineer* was on this particular problem. Highlighting the difficulty in getting Network Rail to agree to any form of development has now become a national issue. The whole story has now been pushed out nationally. There was a commission on the Blaenau Ffestiniog to Trawsfynydd proposals two years ago with the Wales timber transport group, where a mapping of the potential of using the Maentwrog Road facility was carried out. The figures that came out were that about 6,000 to 7,000 tonnes a year of timber could be moved. That was purely looking at timber. There are issues there that could be developed, but it is a case of getting these facilities off the ground. So, people are willing to invest, if you can move Network Rail into allowing those things to travel on the network.

[77] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would like to be associated with Lisa's comments.

[78] **John Marek:** We are just gathering evidence at the moment.

[79] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am just saying that I am well aware of this, because I am constantly lobbied on this issue by Tad Deiniol from Blaenau Ffestiniog. However, the impact does not suit everyone down the line, even though there is huge potential there, particularly for Blaenau, which has suffered greatly over the years.

[80] **Lisa Francis:** I will just add that I discovered, in gathering this information, that this project will provide income of approximately £15 million to Network Rail through track access charges. So, I would have thought that it is something that we should be asking it to take seriously.

[81] **John Marek:** We need to put that on our list, and give it consideration when we come to it. Have you finished, Lisa?

[82] **Lisa Francis:** Yes.

[83] **Janet Davies:** Taking that up from the timber market point of view, it is important to get freight on rail, because it does not take many heavy goods vehicles on mid-Wales roads to clog them up completely, does it? However, I have some concern about the timber markets, because I know that the world price for timber is low. Will that have an effect on the viability of moving timber by rail?

[84] I have a few other questions. My second question is on concessionary fares. We have had an awful lot of problems in recent months in being able to get information on what the subsidy costs are for the different services that go through and in and out of Wales. Given that, I do not know whether you know of any way of getting accurate information on the subsidy costs on the Heart of Wales line. Clearly, concessionary fares would be very helpful in terms of getting people to use the service. We have also been told that, on the Valley lines—and this may be different because of the investment that would be needed—the more people you get travelling on them, and it does not matter how high the usage goes, the subsidy actually increases. It struck me when you were talking, Mr Cowtan, that, if the Assembly was seeing that the more passengers there were on a line the more in subsidies it was going to cost, there is a real disincentive there to actually do much about the lines, because you would want to keep the passenger numbers fairly low. I do not know whether you have any comments on that.

[85] I am concerned about disabled access at some of these rural stations and how good it is. If you already have a platform at Aberdyfi that is too low for active people, how on earth are disabled people managing?

[86] Finally, I travelled to and from the agricultural show this year by train, starting from Bridgend. I came back on the diesel-engine train, and I thought that it was absolutely charming when that came around the bend. It had to battle its way through the trees and the overgrowth to get through, but I thought that it was a real attraction.

[87] **Mr T. Roberts:** Before Malcolm comes in, I wish to make it clear what we are looking for in terms of the concessionary scheme. This is not about filling the trains but about giving people an opportunity. If you take the Cambrian coast line—you know the area, Dr Marek—it is a nine-and-a-half-mile journey by train to go around to Tywyn; it is 28 miles by road. We do not have the bus services, and, with due respect, the Valleys have trains every few minutes; we have one every two hours. It is about giving people an opportunity. People are being denied the ability to move from town to town, if you like, over distances of 20 or 30 miles. This would open it up and put more bums on trains, but not quite in the way in which you are looking at it. We are looking at the overall picture of the pilot scheme. The border

line from Bidston to Wrexham is another one.

[88] **Mr Cowtan:** In terms of the lines in south Wales, particularly the Valley lines, we acknowledge that there would be a capacity issue, and we have never envisaged the concessionary-fares scheme extending to those lines, principally because there is a choice of a bus service for most journeys on the south-Wales network. On the lines that we have considered, we do not think that there would be a capacity problem, except perhaps for a few weeks in the middle of the summer on the Cambrian coast line, and perhaps that would need to be managed slightly differently for that period.

[89] **Janet Davies:** Yes, but the point that I was trying to make was about whether it would discourage the Government from making the improvements in services that you are asking for, and, if the scheme were successful, further improvements, if it felt that it was going to cost it more in fare subsidies.

[90] **Ms Cowtan:** I do not see that it would cost it more in fare subsidies. Essentially, the Assembly Government will be paying Arriva Trains to run the train services that it is currently running. If it then asks Arriva to carry pensioners for nothing on some lines, it would not affect the cost of running the trains. So, it should not affect the amount that Arriva requires for running the services.

[91] **Janet Davies:** So, you are not suggesting that there should be a subsidy per older passenger then.

[92] **Ms Cowtan:** I do not know how the sums would be done between Arriva Trains and the Government, but the global amount paid to Arriva should be set for a number of years ahead for the life of the franchise. Whether or not this amount is paid entirely through the revenue budget or partially through a concessionary-fare budget, the global amount need not necessarily be any different. That is the way in which we see it.

[93] **Janet Davies:** I think that it is very complicated.

[94] **John Marek:** I know. Do you want to come in on this point, Lisa?

[95] **Lisa Francis:** No, not on this point.

[96] **John Marek:** Is your question on this point, Rosemary?

[97] **Rosemary Butler:** Yes. What capacity would there be? What is the take-up of passengers at the moment? It is 25 or 50 per cent?

[98] **Ms Cowtan:** For buses?

[99] **Rosemary Butler:** No, on the trains. If we are going to offer this, and we are talking about this free bus pass—

9.40 a.m.

[100] **Mr Cowtan:** Consultants have done some surveys to try to measure the likely take-up. We are expecting a final report from the consultants soon. The answer at the moment is that I do not know until we get the final report.

[101] **Rosemary Butler:** To look at it the other way, how many passengers are there at the moment?

[102] **Mr Cowtan:** At the moment, some of the trains are pretty lightly used, except in the middle of the summer. That is why we do not think that the net result will present a problem to Arriva Trains in terms of capacity.

[103] **John Marek:** Is your question on this point, Eleanor?

[104] **Eleanor Burnham:** No, it is not.

[105] **John Marek:** Let me take Carl's questions first, and then we will have two or three minutes for Lisa and yourself.

[106] **Janet Davies:** Can I have an answer on the disabled access?

[107] **Mr Jackson:** You asked about access in particular, which is a key point for all railways. One of the problems that we come across is that Arriva Trains leases the stations, and Network Rail thinks that it is its responsibility to provide some of the access, and vice versa. With the Assembly transport grant, we have been able to provide improvements on the Heart of Wales line at Knighton and Llandrindod Wells with fully accessible bridges across stations, which is one of the most common points of difficulty in access. There are some arguments that the full standards should not necessarily apply at all halts. That has been brought up along with the community railways designation, which I have some misgivings about, but which we are collectively still happy to look at.

[108] The key problem that we currently have on the mid Wales lines—if I had to pick one—would be the disability access at Machynlleth station. One platform is adjacent to the town and is quite accessible, but the second is not. A number of solutions have been put forward over the years. One simple solution was an improvement to signalling that would allow 99 per cent of the trains to call at the easily accessible platform. That was nearly achieved some years ago for a cost of between £80,000 and £100,000 at the time. However, in the end, that did not go ahead. With so many stations on the Heart of Wales line—so many halts—it would probably be impossible to provide full access at all of the key points. Our discussions with disability groups in the past have led us to believe that, provided there is excellent access at a number of key places, probably where the passing loops are, then that would satisfy the need.

[109] **Carl Sargeant:** I have three points. I was quite excited that you raised concessionary fares, and the potential of a small investment for a big return. However, I am not convinced about the workings of that, although I do not wish to belittle the project. It would be helpful for the committee if you could provide a more detailed paper on that. I think that your reasoning that the global figure paid to Arriva has capacity for additional personnel to be on the trains is probably right, but I am not sure what the capacity is. How would this work if more people are getting on the trains and less people are paying? I soon learned that you get nothing for nothing in this life, and I am a little sceptical about the whole concept. I would, therefore, appreciate a note. This would be helpful for the committee.

[110] **John Marek:** Is that possible?

[111] **Mr Jackson:** We could produce a note within seven days.

[112] **John Marek:** Could you please send it to the clerk? That would be very useful.

[113] **Carl Sargeant:** My second point relates to cross-border working with the other consortia. Could you outline some details of how you do that, if you do that? Thirdly, I think that it is fair to say that you have come with a wish-list of what you would like and what you think is needed to enhance services in your region. For the smallest amount of investment

from the Assembly, what improvement would there be to your region? Is that a fair question?

[114] **Mr T. Roberts:** I will just answer quickly on the other consortia. As you know, I am a Gwynedd councillor and Gwynedd is in a position where we have both camps. The Meirionnydd part of Gwynedd is within mid Wales, hence I am the chairman. I am actually a board member of the Taith consortia. I understand that I may be back in to introduce its officers later on. However, we work extremely closely. Public transport officers take the Gwynedd side, and there is obviously Malcolm, who sits as an officer within Taith. So we have total cross-co-operation.

[115] The situation for SWITCH is the same, because I know that Powys County Council is in talks. Therefore, we are not separate organisations as such. We can be a partnership and we sign up to each other's aspirations and so forth.

[116] On the final point, if the Assembly funded a couple of units—a couple of extra trains—without any further infrastructure work, it would not meet all of our aspirations of an hourly service here and there, but it would certainly provide a major boost. For instance, since December, Arriva Trains has put on one early morning train around 6.30 a.m. from Birmingham to Aberystwyth. It is the first time that you can come to Aberystwyth in the morning well before lunch time. The offshoot from that is that, without there being an extra train, there is a connection with the train at Machynlleth that has been running for years to Pwllheli. We can now get to Pwllheli before lunch time, and all through that one train being put on.

[117] Therefore, if the Assembly had the money and could fund two extra units, we would have a wonderfully improved train service all around and that is without infrastructure improvements. Perhaps the officers would groan, because we want to see speed limits here and there, but a minute here and there makes no difference. If you can get a couple more units, the service would be strengthened in the summer when we are in need of trains, and it would open up a whole range of opportunities.

[118] **John Marek:** I will not ask your officers to contribute, unless they insist, because we are over time. Carl, had you finished?

[119] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. That is fine.

[120] **John Marek:** Okay. I will take two quick points.

[121] **Eleanor Burnham:** These have not been mentioned, so I thought that I would just flag them up. You have your projects and costs in your matrix, which is wonderful, but do you have a timescale on that? You have obviously been in discussions.

[122] Looking at the various points in your paper, you mention level crossings. Would you have a timescale for improving those? Also, on secure stations, there are obviously barriers. What is the take-up? The other issue is about police response times. I note that you say that they are unacceptable. It is obviously a big worry. Do you have that in your matrix and is that a cost that you have to sort out or is it something that can be done fairly quickly?

[123] **John Marek:** It is the type of thing that cannot be answered now. We could ask for a paper on it.

[124] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, fine. That is not a problem. It has not been mentioned before, so I thought that I would raise it.

[125] **John Marek:** If the witnesses could send a note to the clerk, the clerk will circulate it

to Members. Thank you, Eleanor.

[126] **Lisa Francis:** I think that park-and-ride initiatives are a brilliant idea, particularly around the Dyfi junction area. I was interested in that in relation to Aberystwyth, because I know how many people use that train to attend hospital appointments at Bronglais, which serves a huge catchment area. In the past, the problem has been that park and ride in Aberystwyth goes all around the town. Have you had any discussions with Ceredigion County Council about having just one leg from the station to the hospital?

[127] **Mr G. Roberts:** This is ongoing and it is a difficulty that we have with the operator, Arriva buses. The main difficulty is going into the hospital itself: because people are dropped off at the accident and emergency and out-patients departments, buses have to go around to the back of the hospital. It is private property and there is an agreement that the buses are allowed around, but, unfortunately, there are deliveries of oxygen and so forth that cannot be regulated. On many occasions, therefore, the vehicles cannot go around the hospital, therefore they are withdrawing and dropping people off at the entrance of the hospital instead. To make the service at all viable, it has to pick up passengers in town. Unfortunately, the authority has decided that it is no longer subsidising the service, and it has been offered back to Arriva to run on a commercial basis.

9.50 a.m.

[128] **John Marek:** Do you have any idea of the cost of the two extra units?

[129] **Mr T. Roberts:** It would cost £134,000 for a two-car unit.

[130] **John Marek:** Per annum?

[131] **Mr T. Roberts:** Yes.

[132] **Mr Cowtan:** That is for leasing.

[133] **John Marek:** For both?

[134] **Mr T. Roberts:** There are two coaches on the train.

[135] **Rosemary Butler:** What is a unit? Do you mean a train engine?

[136] **Mr T. Roberts:** I mean two trains. It would cost £250,000 for two trains.

[137] **John Marek:** Thank you. We are wiser as a result of your visit. Please send us your notes.

[138] **Mr T. Roberts:** Thank you for the opportunity. It is nice to see our Assembly getting to grips with these issues.

9.51 a.m.

Consortiwm Cludiant Integredig De-orllewin Cymru South-west Wales Integrated Transport Consortium

[139] **John Marek:** It is my pleasure to welcome David Sandy, who is the transport strategy officer for Pembrokeshire County Council and a member of the South-West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium working group. You have about 40 minutes, starting now. [*Laughter.*] Only joking. The floor is yours to address us and then we will then ask you

questions.

[140] **Mr Sandy:** Thank you. I am David Sandy. I am the transport strategy officer for Pembrokeshire County Council and a member of the SWWITCH officer working group. One of my main responsibilities is rail matters across the SWWITCH region. First, I thank you for inviting me, on behalf of SWWITCH, to give evidence to the committee. There are several matters that we wish to bring to your attention. I propose to briefly summarise the background to SWWITCH and how it works and then to set out a couple of studies that SWWITCH has carried out using consultants. I shall tell you about the key findings of those studies, including the main constraints on the development of rail services in the SWWITCH region, and then I shall set out the priorities for investment over the next 20 years.

[141] SWWITCH was formed in 1998. As the Chair said, it is an acronym for the South-West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium. The letter 'h' has been added. It comprises the four unitary authorities in south-west Wales—Carmarthenshire County Council, Neath Port Talbot Country Borough Council, Pembrokeshire County Council and the City and County of Swansea Council. It has always been a general transport consortium, dealing with all modes of transport, unlike some of the other consortia, particularly that in south-east Wales. We have carried out several studies, not only on rail but on freight, with rail freight as a particular aspect of that, and on public transport generally.

[142] How does it work? Since its formation, we have had a steering group, which is now, in effect, a joint committee of the four authorities. It is not a separate body, as it were. The steering group has elected members—usually the cabinet members of the four authorities with responsibility for transport. Under that, there is a management group that comprises the four chief officers with transport responsibilities together with the officer working group. Finally, there is the officer working group, which carries out the work of the consortium.

[143] **John Marek:** Sorry, I do not wish to delay you, but do not worry about that, because it is in your paper, which we have all read. I hope that you do not mind my saying that.

[144] **Mr Sandy:** No. If I am going on too long, please tell me. I just want to point out that SWWITCH covers a very diverse region and it is important to realise that. It has a mainly urban eastern area, although there are rural areas within that, and a very rural western area, particularly beyond Llanelli. It is the second largest of the four transport consortia, in population terms, with 22 per cent of the population of Wales in 2001. The rail routes in the region are set out in figure 1 of my paper and the current services are described on page 2. It is important to realise—as I believe one of the members of TraCC said earlier—that, in all but one case, the rail services in the region are in receipt of net subsidy, therefore, anything that we do will need to attract additional funding.

[145] We have undertaken a couple of studies. The first was a rail study in 2002. The objectives and vision for rail services in the SWWITCH area are set out on page 3 of the paper, and they remain the vision and objectives of SWWITCH. Following that, we launched a stakeholder consultation on that study. We received one comment saying that the study was not quite visionary enough; it did not look far enough into the future. Therefore, we commissioned a further study, using the same consultants because they had the specialist knowledge that they had gained from the first, and that study was completed in October 2005. Subsequently, the findings of that study were adopted by the SWWITCH joint committee in December.

[146] It is important to realise the things that we do in rail. We have an informal partnership with Arriva Trains Wales and its representatives come along regularly to our steering group meetings, and work with me and other members of the SWWITCH working group. There have been a number of improvements since the last study was done and I will mention those.

The SWITCH local authorities have shown their confidence in rail services. There have been a number of investments at key railway stations in the region: Swansea in particular has quite an improved forecourt and there are ongoing discussions about improving the interior of the station. Two or three years ago, Haverfordwest station had its forecourt, bus stops and bus access improved considerably. There have been improvements at Neath, with the park-and-ride car park and a new footbridge and lift over the railway line, and similar improvements, without the lift, at Port Talbot Parkway. Since that study, the Port Talbot panel signal box re-signalling scheme is now under way, which is key to the area, as it controls the signalling between Bridgend and Baglan, near Port Talbot. We understand that the design of that scheme allows for the adding on of improvements, including the use of faster trains, should that become possible in the future.

[147] There have been improvements to the Heart of Wales line timetable, which you heard about from the previous contributor, so I will not go on at length about that. Since then, we have formed a community rail partnership in south-west Wales and we have a partnership officer and much of the funding for that comes from SWITCH and Arriva Trains Wales. As you know, the Welsh Assembly Government has an increased say in the provision of rail services since the recent enactment of the Railways Act 2005.

[148] It is also important to say that there have been improvements to rail services since the new franchise timetable took effect in December 2005. We now have a standard-pattern repeating timetable, which is much more user friendly and gives much faster access to Cardiff and beyond. One of our main concerns was that that should be the main link across the region, particularly on the central line through the region from Milford Haven, Haverfordwest, Carmarthen, Llanelli, Swansea and beyond. The infrastructure there is much better, for example, than on the Pembroke Dock line, where the infrastructure is of a small railway company that was developed in the nineteenth century and it is not of the same standard as the line that I am talking about. Therefore, most of our key improvements have been prioritised along that line.

10.00 a.m.

[149] The study has shown that rail travel in the area, in terms of the number of people boarding and alighting trains and buying tickets from 2001 and 2004, has increased by about 11.4 per cent. Forecasts suggest that with the introduction of the new timetable, which I have just mentioned, and the class 175 trains—although they are not new or very modern trains, they are only four years old, and we believe that the rest of the fleet will be in operation by the end of this year—should make a big difference to the patronage on the line.

[150] The study identifies some key infrastructure constraints in the region, which are barriers to the development of rail services. Perhaps this is the key point that I would like to get across to the committee. In particular, most of the line between Clarbston Road and Swansea is still double track, but there is a missing section of about 5.25 miles long from Duffryn junction, which is just east of Llanelli, through to Cockett, which is just west of Swansea. That includes Loughor bridge and Gowerton station. The study has identified that there is perhaps a case to look at improving services between Carmarthen and Swansea, particularly with commuters and business travellers in mind. However, in order to provide that service, should it prove to have a good business case, we would need to overcome this bottleneck.

[151] Bearing in mind the statement made by Sue Essex before Christmas as part of the budget preparations, she gave an undertaking that the Welsh Assembly Government would fund pre-feasibility studies at Gowerton. I presume this to mean that the single-track section of the line is what they are talking about. SWITCH has therefore allocated part of its budget to carry out parallel or linked feasibility studies on the business case for improving the

services along that stretch of line from Carmarthen to Swansea. We have held preliminary discussions with Network Rail with a view to collaborating on that, as I believe that it may be asked to carry out the infrastructure investigations on that stretch of line. It will obviously involve a look at the signalling, and there are options. It may mean a complete redoubling of the line or something in between with improved signalling.

[152] Until the study has been done, it is difficult to say what the outcome will be and whether the business case would support an additional service. As things stand, the line is at capacity at two trains a day, and, as you are probably aware, the Heart of Wales line trains have difficulty connecting into the mainline services and to other service operated by Arriva Trains Wales.

[153] **John Marek:** That was one of the areas where extra money was provided in between the draft budget and the final budget, because there was concern across the Assembly about that particular area. We are apprised of that.

[154] **Mr Sandy:** That is our main consideration and priority for further investment. We are now investigating that and seeing whether we can overcome that bottleneck and attract additional funding to enable us to do that. We must be very pragmatic in the development of such schemes—we must have a rigorous assessment of the costs, community benefits, the business case and value for money of any scheme that we develop. We regard that as the first priority at the moment, and we are working closely and developing that.

[155] The other thing that we are concerned about is the management of connections between Arriva Trains Wales services and First Great Western services, and, to some extent, the Heart of Wales line. In particular, we are concerned about connections at Swansea and Cardiff between Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western services. We are concerned that the new timetable that is proposed from next December by First Great Western should do nothing to worsen the service; we hope that it will improve the connections between trains. However, we are also concerned, notwithstanding the scheduled arrival and departure times fitting in with one another, that the interface between the management of both companies manages the connections properly, so that passengers are not left standing at stations and that they are taken forward to their final destination, which, as I am sure the committee is aware, has not happened on occasion in the past.

[156] The other thing that we are keen to do, at key stations, is to integrate the rail network with bus services and other forms of transport, including private cars and taxis, and, to some extent, community transport. The investment that we have seen at the major stations, which I alluded to earlier, is an attempt to start that process. I know that we are now looking in Haverfordwest, for example, to ensure that passengers are able to board buses to access the wider bus network in Pembrokeshire via a service that links the railway station with the new bus station, which we completed earlier last year.

[157] Similarly, in Carmarthen, I am sure that you are aware of the scheme to link the town centre with the railway station, with a new bridge across the river. That will change the gateway into Carmarthen, which is a key interchange point on the SWITCH rail network.

[158] I have alluded to the ongoing discussions about Swansea High Street station.

[159] Finally, on rail freight, this is of importance to the region. We have Corus Trostre and the Corus steelworks at Margam, Port Talbot, and several other locations, and there is a limited number of trains from the Elf-Murco oil refinery near Milford Haven. Although there is extra traffic at present, due to the construction of liquefied natural gas developments in the Milford Haven area, we do not believe that there will be an increase in freight train movements in the longer term, once that construction is completed, because most of the

products will go out by pipeline, and, to some extent, by road for local distribution.

[160] However, we understand that there is commercial interest in developing a roll on/off container port on the northern banks of Milford Haven, on what was the old Ministry of Defence armament site. I understand that there are discussions regarding the transfer of the land to the port authority as part of the process being followed at present. However, the plan is to construct a new rail access off the branch line, which currently serves the old Gulf refinery at Waterston, down a slow incline onto the foreshore, involving the excavation of cliff and new quays, and so on. That would also have a road access.

[161] There is a similar development—

[162] **John Marek:** I am sorry to stop you again, but the remit of this committee is the infrastructure and improvements in passenger rail services. I apologise for interrupting you.

[163] **Mr Sandy:** I mention this because it has an impact on the Swansea district line. At present, the Swansea district line carries most freight trains around Swansea. As you know, the number of freight trains from west Wales, until recently, has been declining. There is some concern about the cost of maintaining that infrastructure, with two large tunnels and a few river bridges. If these developments take off in the west of the region, we feel that there is a need to ensure that that infrastructure is kept in place so that there is no conflict between passenger train movements and freight train movements on the other line into Swansea.

[164] **John Marek:** Thank you very much. That was very helpful. Again, many points were raised there.

10.10 a.m.

[165] **Janet Davies:** On the last point, about the Swansea district line, this is a long-term look at rail passenger services, going up to 2030, is it not? While it would not be an issue in the immediate future, has any thought been given to a park-and-ride scheme on the Swansea district line, which could serve both Swansea and Neath? It could be something similar to what is done at Bristol Parkway and Bristol Temple Meads. It seems to me that the service going west is very much delayed by going in and out of Neath and in and out of Swansea, and a park-and-ride scheme could perhaps change that.

[166] You flag up the service to Fishguard as not being sustainable in its present form. Correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that the trains go there in the summer to meet the two ferries a day, but, for the rest of the year, there is a bus connection from Haverfordwest. I can see that that is not sustainable, so, are there any studies about improving that service and therefore getting more passengers on it? I think that, at the moment, the rail service from Fishguard is not one that most people would want to use.

[167] **John Marek:** I do not think that there is one, really.

[168] **Mr Sandy:** I will start with the first point, which was your suggestion about a park-and-ride scheme on the district line. We have not given serious thought to it. There were proposals that were looked at in outline, but no more than that, by the Welsh Development Agency, in the context of developing the old tinsplate works site at Felindre, north of Swansea, which is on the district line, and in conjunction with the Llandarcy urban village.

[169] I outline in my report the key statistics from the original rail study, which are on page 4, paragraph 3.5. SWWITCH's concern is that if one were to run additional services or, indeed, some of the current services, via the Swansea district line, while it would give a faster journey time, and, as you say, perhaps enable the provision of a park-and-ride station, the

statistics show that about a quarter, if not more, of the passengers using the services from south-west Wales wish to go to Swansea, and a fair percentage wishes to go to Neath. We are not convinced that that would be a sustainable option. If we did a business case study, it might show that those services were unsustainable in terms of value for money and would not take people where they wanted to go.

[170] **Janet Davies:** My point is that the present services are so poor that they discourage people from using the rail services. I get letters from people pointing out that people who prefer to go by train will go by car because the service is so bad. I am not looking to the immediate future, but there is such a long timescale to this view that it should be considered, perhaps after things of a higher priority are done. The whole Gowerton-Swansea single-track area is obviously a priority at the moment.

[171] **Mr Sandy:** We are not closing our ears to anything, but looking at this issue is not on our radar at present. We believe that, purely from a pragmatic point of view, if you had a park-and-ride scheme, you would need to make it attractive, and, for one thing, you would need quite a frequent rail service. The cost of operating and leasing, as we have heard, is quite considerable. We do not believe at the moment, subject to further study some years hence, that doing that is a priority, because it would be horrendously expensive.

[172] **Rosemary Butler:** You have two paragraphs on Fishguard, which are paragraphs 11.3 and 12.6. I may not be reading them correctly, but they do not seem to be, if not exactly contradicting each other, saying quite the same thing. Could we have clarification on that, not necessarily now, but in writing?

[173] **John Marek:** That would be useful, and I would find it so. At the moment, there is no service to Fishguard for local people. My simple question would be: is it not worth having a morning service so that you to get out of Fishguard—I am sure that you cannot get here in time for 9 a.m.—and an evening service to get back? Could you let us have a note on that?

[174] **Mr Sandy:** Yes, of course, but to answer the question briefly, what we are saying along with the consultants, and SWITCH agrees, is that the rail service to Fishguard in its current form is not sustainable. It meets only the ferry services. To take up Janet Davies's earlier point, the rail services meet the main ferry services throughout the year. That is to say, they are scheduled to do so, but weather plays an important part in this process. It is difficult to delay trains to meet the ferry service if the ferries are late or if they do not run at all because of severe weather. A similar situation would arise if train services met the fast ferries in the summer. No train services meet the fast ferries in the summer. Those fast ferries are even more unpredictable than the main ferry service because of the type of craft used. We are saying that the current service is designed to serve the ferry traffic.

[175] So, there are those problems and there are also the problems of the declining numbers of foot passengers, which is what the trains are designed to serve, because of competition from air services, people travelling by car and so on. Therefore, although significant numbers of people are using the train during the summer, at other times of the year, very few people use those trains. So, in its current form, it does not appear to be a sustainable option for the long term without looking at how we can improve the situation or what alternatives there are to serving that transport link. We have to agree through the south-west Wales community rail partnership, using the partnership's budget, to consider how that service could be made more sustainable or what the alternatives are and what the costs and benefits are. We hope to do that during the forthcoming financial year.

[176] **John Marek:** You are right in what you said, but it is a service for the ferries, and my question was, what about local people and local travel?

[177] **Mr Sandy:** That would be looked at as part of that study, and I cannot give you more assurances on that until that study is completed.

[178] **John Marek:** But what are your views?

[179] **Mr Sandy:** My view is that it is unlikely to be sustainable, but I do not want to prejudge the findings of the study.

[180] **John Marek:** No, it is useful to know that. Janet, have you finished questioning?

[181] **Janet Davies:** I had one more question. You said that there was no lift in Port Talbot station, so does that mean that disabled access is available in only one direction?

[182] **Mr Sandy:** I believe that there is a problem with getting people from one platform to the other.

[183] **Janet Davies:** It is quite a big station.

[184] **Eleanor Burnham:** Can I ask a question?

[185] **John Marek:** Not unless it is on this point, because Lisa is next.

[186] **Lisa Francis:** I wanted to raise three points. You mentioned in your paper the doubling of the track between Cockett and Duffryn and that that could increase the number of trains west of Swansea. You mentioned that there are five miles of track that would need to be doubled, including over the Loughor viaduct. My question is similar to Carl's. If you were given a sum of money and had to prioritise it, do you think that spending it on that sort of infrastructure would open up traffic to the west more? Do you think that that would be the answer to facilitating that?

[187] **Mr Sandy:** If we were given a sum of money, we would not necessarily spend it on that unless we were convinced that an enhanced train service gave value for money and we could attract sufficient funding. So the two go together. Just improving the infrastructure without any case for improving the services would not, in my view, be a good use of money. However, it would unlock the potential for doing that in the future.

[188] **Lisa Francis:** How far do you think this Gowerton feasibility study will give you any pointers as to whether that is something—

[189] **Mr Sandy:** It is early days yet but, as I understand it, Network Rail hopes to carry out the infrastructure side of the study, although that has not been confirmed yet. It would do that and it has said that it would be most willing to co-operate with us on the business case study for the extra rail service that we would like to develop between Carmarthen and Swansea, so the whole thing is predicated on a positive, or a good business case for an improved rail service.

10.20 a.m.

[190] **Lisa Francis:** Okay. And the timescale on that business case is probably difficult to define at the moment, I suppose.

[191] **Mr Sandy:** We would hope to finish the study certainly during the next financial year, but there is a long lead time, and how you actually implement it is another story.

[192] **Lisa Francis:** Thank you. I wondered whether the infrastructure from Pembroke

Dock was able to cope with freight. You mentioned Milford Haven and I think that you said that a new terminal was being built on the Waterston side. Is Pembroke Dock similar?

[193] **Mr Sandy:** Pembroke Dock is a problem. It used to be rail-connected in the past. The rail line now ends at the railway station some several hundred yards short of the docks. It would have to penetrate the town centre and cross a number of roads that have been developed since the rail lines closed, and a part of a line has been built over it. I suspect that the width of the line would not meet modern safety standards or environmental standards. It would be very difficult to reconnect the docks with it.

[194] **Lisa Francis:** Finally, you talked about the relationship and management of connections between Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western and how the interface between the companies was very important, but that it possibly was not working properly at the moment.

[195] **Mr Sandy:** That is our impression, yes.

[196] **Lisa Francis:** How do you think that that could best be improved?

[197] **Mr Sandy:** I would like reassurance in the form of a process or a protocol, although I have not seen one, for dealing with situations when trains were late or cancelled and connections were no longer possible because trains cannot be held or whatever. I would like to see what process exists, what liaison there is between staff and what the priority decision-making process is to address that issue. If we knew that, we might get more reassurance. I am sceptical as to whether it is left to the staff on the day on an ad hoc basis.

[198] **John Marek:** The responsibilities could be a question for the Office of Rail Regulation and his or her competition. Perhaps you could ask it. Lisa, have you finished? If so, Eleanor is next.

[199] **Eleanor Burnham:** Very briefly, on page 6, I notice that you say that,

‘WAG has however suspended Transport Grant (TG) for new schemes and can give no indication as to when this suspension will be lifted’.

[200] Perhaps you could expand briefly on this, and if WAG was to lift it, what would you do with the money? I suppose that that is a similar question to what your priority would be.

[201] The other issue is whether you have been in discussions with Taith about ferries, because I believe that it runs successful connections with ferries in Holyhead. It is surely not rocket science. Are there similarities, or do you have more difficult challenges? I go quite regularly to Llanelli, and it is quite fascinating because, once you get out of Swansea, you feel as though you are going to the ends of the earth, so God knows what it is like getting to Fishguard. It is a very pleasant trip, however.

[202] **Mr Sandy:** I mentioned the transport grant because, at the moment, all four authorities in south-west Wales have the continuation of transport grant settlements, which were made some years ago, and most of them, if not all of them, are coming to an end in the forthcoming financial year. Those for Pembrokeshire, for example, came to an end last year, and, as I said at the beginning of my presentation, if we are to do anything to the rail service, we need additional funding. For infrastructure, we obviously need transport grants or some form of capital funding, and we also need revenue support if we are to run the services. So, everything is predicated on attracting funding, provided we can find a reasonable business case for what we want to do.

[203] On the question of ferry services, no, we have not had direct discussions, although I speak to a colleague in Taith regularly. We have not specifically looked at the comparison with Holyhead, but I believe that there are more ferry services between Holyhead and Dublin than there are between Fishguard and Rosslare. So, perhaps there is not so much of a problem. I do not know, so I cannot answer categorically.

[204] **Eleanor Burnham:** I apologise if I was being mischievous, Chair.

[205] **John Marek:** Is everyone happy? Okay. That was very useful and a number of points were raised for consideration. I thank you for answering the questions genuinely and for being honest about costs, because one of the things about railways is that everybody wants everything, and, of course, it is not possible. So, I thank you very much.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.26 a.m. a 10.43 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.26 a.m. and 10.43 a.m.*

Swyddfa Rheoleiddio'r Rheilffyrdd The Office of Rail Regulation

[206] **John Marek:** Welcome back. We welcome Michael Beswick. A verbatim record will be produced of this meeting. The remit of the committee is only to gather evidence, so it is not in any way confrontational. We want to draw up a list of improvements for railway infrastructure and passenger services, and I am sure that you will be able to help us with that. It is over to you, Mr Beswick.

[207] **Mr Beswick:** Thank you. I thought that I would say a few words about the Office of Rail Regulation. We are the independent regulator of the GB rail industry and, from 1 April, we will also be the health and safety regulator for it, as we are taking that on from the Health and Safety Executive. We are the economic regulator of Network Rail, which means that we set Network Rail's outputs, funding requirements and charges. We monitor delivery against those outputs and we monitor Network Rail's delivery of the reasonable requirements of train operators and funders of the railway. We also set the terms of some of the key relationships that Network Rail has with the train operators, through the track-access contracts.

[208] We also have other regulatory functions. We are the competition authority for the GB rail industry, and that is concurrently with the Office of Fair Trading. We set the terms of some other industry relationships and we license operators and monitor their compliance with their licences. We look after some of the industry data publications and things like that. In doing all this, we try to achieve some public interest objectives and these are a balance of things like the use and development of the network, efficiency and economy, and having regard to the funds available. Part of our strategy objective now is to have regard to the National Assembly for Wales's strategies and its ability to carry out its functions. That was introduced in the Railways Act 2005.

[209] I emphasise that we are not a funder of the railway; we do not have any money to fund it but we help funders to get value for money from the railway, particularly from Network Rail. For instance, we put a lot of work into the framework for the investment in and the enhancement of the railway. We do not specify or manage franchises; that is done by the Department for Transport and, in the future, by the National Assembly/Welsh Assembly Government. However, we ensure that Network Rail does its bit on the railway, and, of course, that is a pretty important bit because Network Rail is the owner and operator of the rail infrastructure.

[210] **John Marek:** Thank you. That is very good; we now know what you do. We will ask

you questions, and then we will see how it goes. I call on Janet and then Lisa.

[211] **Janet Davies:** I have a very general question, which I hope is not too political. It is quite obvious that Wales, overall, does not have a very good or comprehensive rail system and there are huge problems in parts of England, which we are all aware of, because we read about them in the press, if nothing else. What sympathy do you have with a demand that I think that exists fairly generally in Wales to have not only better services on the routes that we have, but more routes over time? In addition, I specifically refer you to the issue of performance on the Great Western route. I have heard that a lot of work has been done on the West Coast main line in England, which we hope will soon be fairly well sorted out, and that the East Coast main line, Thameslink and, possibly, Crossrail in London will take priority over the Great Western line.

[212] **Ms Beswick:** I will try to answer each of those in turn. On the first point, I think that one of the features of the railway regime following the 2004 White Paper and the Railways Act 2005 is that the specification of what the railway in Wales should be delivering, particularly in terms of improvements to the railway, sit with the National Assembly, but so does the funding. We are very sympathetic to the railway developing, but it is down to the National Assembly/Welsh Assembly Government to work out what they want and how they believe it can be funded. We will facilitate and help that and put a lot of pressure on Network Rail and others to find more efficient solutions and so on, and we will do our bit in that regard. We will certainly put in place things such as the contractual frameworks that we have asked Network Rail to put in place for enhancement to try to make it clearer how they do that. I think that you heard from Network Rail what it is doing in order to be a lot more proactive in terms of enhancing the railway. We can put in place the framework, and we are very sympathetic to that.

[213] We will also ensure that Network Rail recognises that it has to give priority to what people want in Wales and not just prioritise other parts of the network. We have given exactly the same message in Scotland, and I think that that is also working quite well. So, we can help you to get your priorities, but, ultimately, it is down to you to specify them and to work out how you are going to fund them.

[214] We are quite concerned about performance on the Great Western route, because it is now lagging quite badly behind a number of other lines, such as the East Coast and West Coast main lines. We have had some discussions with Network Rail and the operators involved and we are still investigating what the root causes of that are. Clearly, part of the issue is to do with the age of the infrastructure assets. A lot of the kit on the Great Western was put in place 30 or 40 years ago with a 30 or 40 year life, so you begin to see what is happening. Network Rail is putting quite a lot of money at the moment into renewing those assets. One of the jobs that ORR does, when it sets Network Rail outputs and funding, is to look at the long-term sustainability of the entire railway, which includes the Great Western line. We will certainly be looking to Network Rail to address the immediate performance issues and its planning to ensure that it is sustaining the line for the long term. There is a clear message that the issues around the assets on the Great Western line need to be addressed.

10.50 a.m.

[215] **Janet Davies:** I have one point to raise. You are taking over the health and safety duties next month, are you not?

[216] **Mr Beswick:** On 1 April.

[217] **Janet Davies:** I am concerned about the slam doors on the Great Western trains, which are out of date. It is difficult for elderly and frail people to deal with these doors. One

elderly and frail person told me recently that she always travels at peak times so that she knows that there will be someone there to open the door to let her off the train, because she is petrified of going past her station if she goes at a quiet time. Will you be tackling this problem? I know that it is not included in the refurbishment, and that there is talk of these doors lasting another 15 years, but it does not seem acceptable to me.

[218] **Mr Beswick:** It is difficult to see how you would put modern doors on those trains without having new trains, because I do not think that you could put modern doors in those carriages in their current form. The issue is more about what you do in the short term with regard to staff at stations, and what happens in the longer term with regard to replacing the fleet, when I think they will be replaced with sliding doors. It is not ideal, but the trains are now 30 years old, and experience suggests that when you try to do anything as major as that, you will not succeed. Due to the position of the doors and the way that the coaches are built, it is unlikely that you would be able to do anything in terms of more modern doors.

[219] **John Marek:** Is that okay, Janet?

[220] **Janet Davies:** It is not very good.

[221] **John Marek:** That poured a bit of cold water on that one.

[222] **Lisa Francis:** My question leads on from Janet's point, because the last presenter we had was Mr David Sandy from SWITCH, who said that he was concerned about the relationship between Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western insofar as the interface between the companies was not working properly. He said that he would like to see a process or a protocol of dealing with cancellations and liaison between staff concerning priorities. He felt that it was often left to staff to deal with issues on an ad hoc basis; that staff had to cope on the day if a train was cancelled or late. From the evidence that we have heard from various people and the hundreds of letters that I have received from train travellers, there seems to be a huge absence of a service culture in this industry.

[223] With regard to the point that Janet made about the doors, if you cannot change the doors, my answer would be that there should be someone from the rail company to assist people in that sort of situation. As the rail regulator, how do you anticipate improving the relationship between train companies or train operators in that particular respect? That is my first question, and I am sorry if it gives you a broad canvas on which to answer.

[224] **Mr Beswick:** I entirely agree with you, and we strongly encourage train operators and Network Rail to work together to improve the service to passengers. If there are areas where that is failing, then the operators are failing. Some important things are happening on the railway that will help this, particularly the integrated control centres that are being developed. As I understand it, there is an integrated control centre for Great Western in Swindon and a satellite in Cardiff, which should give greater clarity regarding who is running the railway on the day. We should be able to have a set of rules around things like holding connections and so on.

[225] As far as the doors of the Intercity 125 are concerned, if you cannot change the doors, then it is a question of looking at whether the station staffing is adequate and so on. To be fair, I think that the operators recognise that.

[226] **Lisa Francis:** As you will be in charge of the health and safety aspect, which is associated with that, and as you license the operators, you are presumably in a position to revoke those licences if they do not comply. How far will a company have to be misdemeanant in that respect, before it would have its licence taken away?

[227] **Mr Beswick:** A company has to do pretty badly to have its licence taken away. That is how the licences work. Clearly, we have options in terms of taking action under the licences requiring companies to do better in certain areas. At present, there is not a great deal in terms of customer service, but it is an area that we keep under review.

[228] **Lisa Francis:** I do not know, Chair, whether it might be useful to have more details about exactly what a company has to do, or not do, before its licence is revoked. I do not know whether other Members agree, but it seems to me, from the evidence that we have been receiving, that this service provision has to be the way in which a lot of this will move forwards.

[229] **John Marek:** It happened with Connex South East, I think—the Government had to take it over.

[230] **Mr Beswick:** That was not a licence. As I say, the way that licences are structured, and they were originally issued by the Secretary of State 10 years ago, is that, essentially, licence revocation is a nuclear remedy that you just do not take. You tend to deal with customer service issues through the franchise agreement. With Connex, particularly as a result of failings in its finances and its financial management, the Strategic Rail Authority decided that it would revoke the franchise. It took the franchise back and returned control, which it was entitled to do under the franchise agreement.

[231] **John Marek:** Thank you. Lisa, is there anything else?

[232] **Lisa Francis:** Yes.

[233] **John Marek:** Is there anything useful that could be said to us in a note on this? It is a nuclear option.

[234] **Lisa Francis:** I understand that it is a nuclear option. It was interesting to hear what you said about these things needing to be dealt with through franchise agreements, but I think that it is something that we need to look at in this report. Some time needs to be devoted to that in the report.

[235] **Mr Beswick:** I can send you a note on licensing and how that works.

[236] **John Marek:** Could you? That would be good. There is just one thing. For example, Arriva Trains has now lengthened a lot of the journey times, with lots of recovery time built in, so that its trains are very rarely late. Therefore, the company does not have to pay penalty payments and it can boast about its time-keeping record. Would you have any kind of influence over that if the delays at each station, in order to take up recovery time, got so long that the service became inefficient?

[237] **Mr Beswick:** The timetable is planned, essentially, by Network Rail on the basis of the bids by the operators. We are very interested in making sure that they make the best of the network. It is always quite difficult to get a balance between the amount of slack that you have in a timetable and the performance. Given that Arriva Trains Wales's performance in the last 12 months was something like 81.2 per cent on the public performance measure, which I think that we would all find unacceptable, then the fact that it has a timetable in place that is running at somewhat higher levels—it has been around 87 or 89 per cent over the past couple of months—is, I think, good news. The issue now is for Arriva, with Network Rail, to work on identifying tweaks to that timetable, including changes if some of the journey times are wrong. We will encourage them to do that. To be fair, that was the message when we saw Arriva. We raised the issue of the timetable with the company in October. It did say that once it had the basic timetable in place, it would be looking for opportunities to improve it.

[238] **John Marek:** Okay. Sorry, Lisa, please go on.

[239] **Lisa Francis:** Thank you, John. I have a couple more points. In terms of the relationship that you have with Network Rail, you mention in point 14 of your paper that you are looking to develop improvements to stations with it and other industry parties. Janet raised a point earlier this morning about disabled access or access for people with mobility problems at stations in Wales. How much clout do you have to make sure that Network Rail and other parties improve things such as platform heights and so forth, or railway station facilities, especially when a lot of those stations are now leased out to the operators? There seems to be some kind of nebulosity about who is responsible for improvements to such infrastructure.

11.00 a.m.

[240] How far can you push them to ensure that those improvements are made? Similarly, this morning, we heard about moving freight. The Conwy valley system was mentioned, and particularly the Conwy valley project. That project has been slowed because Network Rail has been dragging its feet in coming back with costs. As the regulator, are you in a position to lean on it to say that if it is serious about providing freight, it needs to come back with the costs in the next 12 months or six months? Are you in a position to give it a time limit and to make it do such things?

[241] **Mr Beswick:** As far as accessibility is concerned, as I said earlier, we are not the funder of the railway. The National Assembly and the Secretary of State are the funders. Therefore, we cannot make money available for accessibility measures. However, we can ensure that a framework is in place. We are conscious that there is quite a lot of confusion about who is responsible for what at stations, which is why we drew up the new stations' code. That makes the situation much clearer. Essentially, the customer-facing assets belong to the train operator, and the infrastructure assets belong to Network Rail. We can facilitate that, and we can press the industry to produce value-for-money solutions. However, it is down to the funders—whether the National Assembly or the Secretary of State—to specify what they want in terms of accessibility. It is our job to ensure that the industry is geared up to deliver that, and that it looks for efficient solutions.

[242] On freight, in a nutshell, we can and do put pressure on Network Rail to develop plans to meet the reasonable requirements of freight operators. For instance, we have been very concerned that Network Rail—in several places; not particularly in Wales, but in England and Scotland—did not really know the network's capability for freight. It did not have it accurately documented. We have now received a recovery plan from Network Rail, because we found it to be in breach of its licence. We encourage Network Rail—and we will be harder than that if necessary—to come up with cost-effective schemes for addressing freight needs. Having said that, we must always recognise that, sometimes, it will be very expensive to do things on the railway for objectively good reasons. However, let us at least get the facts.

[243] **Lisa Francis:** Thank you for that reply.

[244] **Eleanor Burnham:** There are so many questions, but I must be brief. There has been such a lot of worry about Network Rail. It has been described, even during the break, as a very difficult organisation to move forward. So, how can we be assured by you that you can make it a much more responsive, can-do organisation, or is that now down to the Welsh Assembly Government, and is it for us to prod the Welsh Assembly Government? It is surprising and perplexing for the general public to note that your key role, as you rightly remind us, does not involve railway franchise enforcement. That is down to us, because the

Welsh Assembly Government now becomes the rail funding authority. However, as a regular traveller on the train, I feel that Wales has been severely underfunded for a long time. Do you believe that we are now capable of improving our railways? In your role as rail regulator, have you costed all sorts of improvements? The equation of who is who in the railway system has become so complex that it is mind-boggling. That is one issue.

[245] **Mr Beswick:** Shall I have a go at answering that first?

[246] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay.

[247] **Mr Beswick:** On Network Rail, let us think back a bit to the time that Network Rail was created three and a half years ago. Expenditure on the railway was out of control and the performance was dreadful. All credit to it, Network Rail has got the railway under control in that time. That was very important; that had to be done and GB-wide performance is quite a lot better than it was. Expenditure is under control and it has a handle on the engineering work, which Railtrack never had. That is good.

[248] It now has to develop. This is the point that we are making with Network Rail, and we will press this on its board—it now has to become a much more proactive and responsive company. In some ways, we are beginning to see that happening. The sorts of things that Paul Plummer and Robbie Burns were saying to you about route enhancement managers and so on are a positive step forward, as Network Rail is recognising that it has a wider role.

[249] Following the rail review, Network Rail has a much wider role in terms of industry planning and performance. It will have to become a much more responsive and innovative company. That is now the challenge for the leadership of Network Rail, to move on from being a company that was about getting the railway under control, to being a company that is about developing the railway. Our board is keen to press Network Rail on that. We will be doing that and, if necessary, we will use our regulatory functions.

[250] **Eleanor Burnham:** Just to press you a bit further, it is rather unfortunate and bad timing for the court case involving—I forget the person's name—a contractor who caused the death of some people, but can you assure us that Network Rail will not oversee as fatal an incident, because that is the worst element of how Network Rail has operated?

[251] **John Marek:** Was it not at Tebay? I think Network Rail took over; I am not sure. Does anyone know?

[252] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am only alluding to it in general. I have not mentioned anyone's name. This is the point that I am coming to: when something so tragic happens because such a vital area of work is sub-contracted out, we want to be assured that you, as the rail regulator, are going to ensure that it does not happen again.

[253] **Mr Beswick:** The safety regulator, whose responsibilities we are taking over in 10 days' time, was involved in the prosecution of the Tebay case. I know that the chief inspector has essentially described the behaviour of the contractor at Tebay as 'wicked', and I think that that is, essentially, what the jury found. That was completely unacceptable. What we are doing, and will continue to do, is to press Network Rail on the issues around the management of contractors. It has taken a huge amount of contract work in-house; it now manages all its own maintenance because it concluded that it needed control of that. However, it still contracts out a lot of renewal work and, tragically, the work at Tebay had been contracted out to someone whose behaviour was unacceptable. It is about Network Rail managing its contractors effectively.

[254] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have a few more questions. There might be implications for

Wales from the application from Grand Central Train Services. Do you have any thoughts on that?

[255] **Mr Beswick:** I cannot comment on its application because we are still in the process of making our decision, which we hope to announce shortly. I chaired the hearing on that. There will always need to be a balance between franchised services, specified by Government, and the options for the private sector to introduce innovative new services. It is the Office of Rail Regulation's job to strike that balance. I can point, for instance, to the success of the services from Hull, which we approved four years ago. We had all the Members of Parliament for Hull in, saying just how good those services are and how important they are to Hull. It is about filling the niches in the market in the most effective way.

[256] **Eleanor Burnham:** Are you confident that the proposal for Wrexham to Marylebone, because it would be in a similar context, is going to come good, as the expression goes?

[257] **Mr Beswick:** We would have to look at that one in detail, because we know that Wrexham does not have particularly good direct links, but, on the other hand, we have to recognise that Wrexham probably is not as big a market as Hull. It is going to be something that we will have to balance. Essentially, our test is whether it adds any value in terms of the passenger or whether it is primarily obstructive, and that is what we would have to look at. At the moment, the key thing is for the people to develop the proposition and work with Network Rail to see whether they can make it work, and they must then come to us for approval and we will have to look at it.

11.10 a.m.

[258] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have a final question, Chair, with your indulgence. On page 3, you mention that stations are a particular area of concern. Are you confident that you will be able to disentangle the mystery that surrounds who is in charge or supposed to be funding railway stations?

[259] **Mr Beswick:** What we have been doing—it may sound rather boring, but it is important—is developing the stations code that tries to make clearer who is responsible for what. We are now in the business of encouraging the industry to build on that and on what we have done on enhancement to look at the way in which we can make stations better and come up with some innovative solutions to doing that. It is very much in line with the sorts of things that you and the Secretary of State in England are looking for.

[260] **Leighton Andrews:** I have two questions. The first is to do with your role in assessing the costings of Network Rail and the charges paid by Arriva and the other train operators for which you have responsibility. The Welsh Assembly Government is funding additional projects and services in some cases through Arriva. One of my concerns is that we should not be facing a situation of double charging for things that may already be provided for. Could you explain your role in relation to any of the schemes in which the Welsh Assembly Government becomes involved?

[261] My second question goes back to stations. There seems to be a perpetual difficulty between train operators and Network Rail in relation to environmental improvements at or around stations. I refer to where Network Rail takes over responsibility for the area beyond the station, which causes immense concern among communities, particularly in Wales, that want to believe that the station is often the gateway into their town or village. They want that to represent their location as tidily as possible, so there must be someone who forces these parties together sometimes to ensure properly that these things are dealt with.

[262] **Mr Beswick:** On your first point, as far as Network Rail is concerned, the key thing is that we are setting Network Rail's outputs—and it is quite a long, but very important, process—and, essentially, the funding that it will have available to it, to run what we call a periodic review from 2009 to 2014. To do that, we need a specification from Government of what it wants from the railway and how much money it has. As I understand it, the Secretary of State will produce what he calls a high-level output service specification for England and Wales, but he will have to consult with the National Assembly before he does so. It will then be for us to identify what Network Rail has to deliver and how much money it will receive in access charges. We are doing a lot of work with Network Rail at the moment to understand exactly where the costs are, and part of that is to understand what it is doing in different parts of Wales, and so on. There is a lot of work going on in terms of understanding what the costs are, because that will help to inform decisions. In particular, it will help to inform decisions by the Welsh Assembly Government on what it wants to specify in addition to what is being funded by the Secretary of State, and, hopefully, it will get out of this whole set of issues around double charging.

[263] We would like to get out clarity of this process, in a Network Rail business plan, as to what is being funded by the periodic review process through access charges. We then want to be able to say to you that there are opportunities here to spend a bit more. You begin to see that, for instance, the periodic review process will no doubt fund the continued work on the south Wales re-signalling. However, it may well be that you will want to add things to it in terms of extra services. However, it is all about getting a much better understanding of the cost baseline in Network Rail and a better understanding of the output baseline. Therefore, that is what we have to do.

[264] I agree with you on the second point. We are aware of this, and, interestingly, Passenger Focus—the rail passengers' council—raised this with us in the consultation on our corporate strategy. The railway is not very good at presenting its face to the community, and that is quite a challenge for it. As I said earlier, the railway is now much more under control than it was. It has had a period of stability, and it needs to start getting better at this again, because it may have lost the plot a little on that. I know of one or two specific cases that we have raised with Network Rail, but I will bear that point in mind.

[265] **Carl Sargeant:** Moving on from Leighton's question, we have raised subsidised transport and subsidised fares again this morning. In order to regulate a service that we have total control or knowledge of, we must have an understanding of funding. From your office, would you say that you have a handle on how subsidised fares are distributed through Wales?

[266] **Mr Beswick:** We would have a handle on Network Rail; we do not really have a handle on franchise costs, and I think that you would need to speak to Robin Shaw's people about that. I think that they are the ones who would take the overview. We are keen to ensure that you and Robin's people have a much better understanding of Network Rail's contribution to the cost of the railway. One thing that was lost in the immediate post-privatisation period was that understanding of the cost of the railway at a local level. For example, Railtrack lost all understanding of its maintenance costs. I believe that that is now being restored by Network Rail. We have put a lot of pressure on Network Rail to do that, and it is now developing a much better understanding of local infrastructure costs. That is the area in which we can help, but I do not think that we can take the whole picture on the fares and subsidy issues, because that is much more in the Assembly's hands.

[267] **Carl Sargeant:** Thank you for that. My second point is related to your new powers. In 10 days' time you will take over health and safety issues relating to rail services and rail infrastructure. I am concerned about station and platform heights, which we have touched on, and Janet mentioned the difficulty of door access. However, I want to talk about disabled

access to stations and trains. While there does not seem to be any breach in health and safety, there must be a measurement of when it is breached or when there is lack of compliance. As the new regulator, do you see yourself having different views on that? On the basis that this committee is designed to establish improved services for passengers and the rail infrastructure, do you have any views on that and on its enforcement?

[268] Dr Marek will be aware that, in Wrexham, you have to go to Chester to get off a train at certain times of the day because you cannot gain access to another platform. That is clearly a breach of service delivery or a service that is not accessible to all. Do you have any views on that?

11.20 a.m.

[269] **Mr Beswick:** I have views on that, but I would emphasise that that is really an issue for the Department for Transport in terms of the rail accessibility regulations and travel for disabled passengers. My experience is that you need to have a clear strategy as to what you want to do in terms of ensuring accessibility to the network and starting to fund it. Safety and accessibility improvements can be funded either through tickets or through extra Government funding. By and large, they are not self-funding through tickets, so they tend to require extra Government funding. The danger is that if you try to do it incrementally, you will never get anywhere. You need to have a coherent strategy over a reasonably long period as to what you want to improve and where you want to improve it.

[270] **John Marek:** Do you want to come in on this point, Eleanor?

[271] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, on this very point.

[272] **John Marek:** I will come back to you, Carl.

[273] **Eleanor Burnham:** I do not mind waiting until Carl has finished.

[274] **Carl Sargeant:** On that point, Chair, I accept it, but there must be a stage at which it becomes, or can be identified as, dangerous or unacceptable. We have talked this morning about a 16 inch gap between the train doors and the platform. If that were not an issue, why would we want to look at it, anyway? However, you, as the regulator, must have a view on health and safety and when this becomes a problem.

[275] **Mr Beswick:** If we take the view that it is generating an intolerable and unacceptable risk, then we clearly have to take appropriate action. The required action could be for the regulator to do something about it or to stop the activity. We would have to take the appropriate action, whatever it was, but, first of all, we would have to identify the safety hazard. Safety hazards that are intolerable have to be addressed. There is, however, a wider picture, which is about having a coherent strategy for accessibility at stations, because, otherwise, what will tend to happen is that you will get into a situation where the only way of getting from A to B is via Chester and so on. You must have a coherent strategy for that, but it is not really a general safety issue. Occasionally, there are safety issues and they have to be addressed.

[276] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is totally intolerable, because the difficulty that you face is that you are not in control of the franchises; we will be in control of the franchises. As I understand it, the issue with accessibility in certain stations is one of staffing, because, when the staff are not on duty, the lifts are not operable and, therefore, disabled people or people with large amounts of luggage, older people or people with prams and so on, cannot use the services. Beyond the point about gaps between doors and platforms, these are issues that must surely be for the funding operator primarily, which will be us. Do you, as the rail regulator

with an overarching health and safety role, have any figures that you have worked on in the past? Or is this something new, because the health and safety authority—

[277] **John Marek:** The Office of Rail Regulation is not taking over the health and safety responsibility until next month.

[278] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, but what I am saying is that the health and safety authority must have looked at these issues. Does it have figures that it will bring to you?

[279] **Mr Beswick:** I do not think that it would have figures on that.

[280] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why not? This has obviously been an ongoing problem for many people throughout the UK.

[281] **Mr Beswick:** I emphasised the point that you have to distinguish between stuff that is essentially unsafe, which the safety regulator has to address, and stations that are just not accessible for people with mobility impairments and so on. It is an issue of what you want to specify from the railway and what you are prepared to pay. You are right to identify that much of the latter is really an issue for franchise management and franchise funding. There are choices for you. If you want to improve the accessibility of the railway materially, then we are in the business of ensuring that that railway does not then try to gold-plate it and give you completely unacceptable bills, but you should look at what you want to achieve and engage with the industry as to how much it might cost.

[282] **Rosemary Butler:** There is some very strong language in this report. For example, in your corporate strategy, you say that you will pursue 'relentless improvements' and there is also talk of 'efficiency'. I used to work for an American company, where managers would say that you can be very efficient, but you must also be effective. So, you can ensure that you are effective, efficient and that improvements are pursued, but how will you monitor that on the ground? I am interested in that.

[283] My other point is on stations. We have talked about infrastructure, but stations are vital and it has already been mentioned by some Members. You talk about innovative solutions. An innovative solution for improving stations would include staffing and staff training. I know that it is probably way down the bottom of your list, but you have mentioned it here, so how will you ensure that the culture is changed? You can have a good station, but if the staff are not helpful, or if there are no staff, then you lose credibility with the public. It is important that, when people get to the station, there are front-line service staff present to help them to get on or off the train, or just to say, 'Good morning' or, 'The platform is over there'. It is as simple as that.

[284] **Mr Beswick:** To take those points in turn, I agree with you entirely about effectiveness and efficiency. The last time we reviewed Network Rail's charges, in 2003, we reckoned that it could take 31 per cent out in terms of unit costs over five years, because costs have been allowed to get completely out of control, particularly during the period of our administration. We are monitoring that carefully. The current indications are that Network Rail will meet those, but we are monitoring that carefully.

[285] One issue that fits into the role of this committee and is very important is that the industry seems to have lost the art of the cost-effective enhancement over the past few years—you know, just looking for simple and cheap ways of bolting improvements onto renewals and such things. I am very pleased that Network Rail is beginning to look at that again. For example, you know of the debates going on now about things like the south Wales re-signalling; that only happens every 30 years or so. So, that is the time to get the railway right.

[286] You are right about efficiency and effectiveness. One of the challenges that we will face for setting the charges in 2009 is precisely what we say about efficiency. Do we just get another 30 per cent out of the unit costs or should we be looking for some more sophisticated measures?

[287] On stations, we have to recognise that we are not the funder, so there is a limit to what we can do. However, we can strongly encourage the industry to look for better ways of levering-in funding. For example, your colleague said that several local authorities were concerned about what messy stations do for their local environment and they may, therefore, be interested in facilitating improvement, perhaps even putting some funding into improvements or that sort of thing. If not, maybe other groups could do so, such as local businesses. Let us try to find some innovative ways of getting some money into stations and of delivering improvements at stations. That is the sort of thing that we are looking at.

[288] Staffing at stations is more to do with how you want to manage the franchise agreement going forward.

[289] **Rosemary Butler:** I am interested in the monitoring and how you will monitor it, because I assume that you are based in London. We are more than 100 miles away from London, so I do not understand how that will happen.

11.30 a.m.

[290] **Mr Beswick:** We do a great deal of monitoring of the data that we get from Network Rail, including disaggregate cost data and things like that, and that will get better. We have independent reporters who can go out and look at the track on our behalf and things like that, so we do a lot of that. One of the interesting things is that, after 1 April, we will have health and safety inspectors out-based, including in Cardiff, so we will be looking at how we can use them to give us a better understanding of what is going on with the railways. I was talking to the principal inspector in Glasgow yesterday about how she would do that in Scotland for us for instance, so we will be looking to do precisely that. We want to get a better understanding of what is going on in the real railway.

[291] **Lisa Francis:** Leading on from the question about platform heights and the 16-inch differential, that obviously impacts on people with mobility problems, but actually anybody would have difficulty in accessing a train like that. In the past, Arriva Trains has said that it carries platforms and steps to enable people to access trains, but it has asked people to give advance notice of requiring them before making their journeys, and that is just not practical. You mentioned that you will have people based in Cardiff for health and safety inspections, and I just wonder whether you envisage having any kind of mystery shopper in future, or a mystery train traveller, someone who travels up and down Wales on the trains looking at all the gaps in service provision. It seems to me that that could be a way to forge ahead on this.

[292] **Mr Beswick:** Our inspectors and staff get about quite a lot but, more importantly, there are passenger representatives. You are going to have a passenger committee in Wales, and we would very much welcome a dialogue with it, for instance, on what the issues are for the passenger. We have a very good dialogue with Passenger Focus in London on some of the issues in England, for instance, and that will continue.

[293] **Lisa Francis:** Do you envisage talking to the consortia, such as those that have given presentations today?

[294] **Mr Beswick:** Yes. Robin Shaw facilitated a meeting, three or four weeks ago, and a number of the consortia were also represented. We talked through a lot of the issues around

how they wanted to achieve their objectives.

[295] **John Marek:** I think that is it. Thank you very much. Again, it is very helpful. I suspect that a lot of us, including myself, did not know too much about how you saw your job, but we have a much better idea now. Thank you very much for coming all the way from London—we appreciate it.

[296] **Eleanor Burnham:** I hope you have a good train journey back.

[297] **Mr Beswick:** I had a good train journey down.

[298] **Eleanor Burnham:** Good. You should pop up to north Wales; it might open your eyes a bit.

[299] **Mr Beswick:** My dad lives in Cardiff, so I am a regular on Great Western.

[300] **John Marek:** Thank you very much.

11.34 a.m.

Taith—Consortiwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Cymru
Taith—North Wales Transport Consortium

[301] **John Marek:** We now move to item 6 to hear what Taith, the north Wales transport consortium, has to say. You may recognise the gentleman on my right, Councillor Trevor Roberts. Welcome again, Trevor. We also have David Blainey, the acting executive officer of Taith, and Bob Saxby. I have only your name, Mr Saxby. Are you an officer with Taith?

[302] **Mr Saxby:** I am with Conwy County Borough Council.

[303] **John Marek:** Thank you very much. We have 40 minutes, so off you go.

[304] **Mr T. Roberts:** I will certainly not take as much time as I took before, but I will make a short statement, which the Taith officers have asked me to put forward. The Taith joint transport board is responsible for strategic public transport issues in the six counties across north Wales. In December 2005, members instructed the officers to produce a bus strategy and a rail strategy to expand on our regional public transport strategy. The work of the rail strategy has been accelerated to meet the timescales of this committee. It is currently in draft form and will be considered by the Taith board at its annual general meeting on 27 April.

[305] There are still some gaps, particularly in the costs of schemes, where information is to be provided by Network Rail and Arriva Trains. The draft strategy will be summarised by Bob Saxby, a public transport officer from Conwy County Borough Council, and David, who is sitting to my right.

[306] Before I hand over, Chair, there are a couple of matters that I think you will all be interested in—and I know that we raised some eyebrows in the earlier presentation on concessionary travel. I understand that Bob will also be able to expand on concessionary travel. I have to say that it is a minefield for me, and I have to listen to it probably twice a week, and I still do not grasp it, so there may be difficulties.

[307] On behalf of Taith, I just want to thank you again; we are grateful for this opportunity. Perhaps this is said a little bit tongue in cheek, but we know that you have only a

short time left and that you will come to an end shortly, but perhaps, at some time in the future, you could consider continuing this committee, as it would be beneficial to the people of Wales to have a rail committee to deal with rail matters.

[308] **John Marek:** I knew that you would say that.

[309] **Mr T. Roberts:** That is just my personal view.

[310] **John Marek:** I have said this to others, and you have heard it before, but this committee is gathering evidence. The committee's remit is to draw up a list—which we may or may not order in priority later on—of railway infrastructure improvements and passenger rail improvements, so you are not under scrutiny or anything. I was just trying to get from you your ideas.

[311] Secondly, there is a verbatim record so, if people do not appear to be paying attention, it does not matter, as it will be printed out for us.

[312] Thirdly, we have all read the paper so, if I may, I gently suggest that you please bring out the important parts of it. That is probably the best way of proceeding.

[313] **Mr Blainey:** Thank you. I would just repeat what Councillor Roberts said about thanking you for this opportunity. In just a few minutes, as you said, we intend to summarise the draft regional rail strategy. We have written the strategy to recognise the vital role that the north Wales rail network has to play in addressing the social inclusion, environmental sustainability and the economic development of the region. We intend it to be an action plan to improve infrastructure and services over the next five years, and I stress the fact that we see it as something realistic that can be achieved. We have not gone for some of the more extreme aspirations that some people hold; we have tried to concentrate on things that can be achieved and are realistic.

[314] Bob will begin by looking at levels of passenger service.

[315] **Mr Saxby:** The first section sets out the levels of passenger services that we consider to be required to meet our strategy of providing a real alternative to the car and attracting business and tourism to the area. Between north Wales and London, we currently have a service of five trains a day, which, to a certain extent, have benefited from the enormous investment in the West Coast main line, although, on some of them, you have to change locomotives at Crewe and lose the 20 minutes that you have just gained. We consider the five services a day to be the minimum level of service that will attract people to north Wales. Visitors just will not come if there is not a through-service, and there is a very large population in the south east that comes to visit north Wales. In considering whether to locate to north Wales, businesses will look at whether there is a convenient business service. Speed is of particular importance to them, and you can now get to Llandudno Junction from London Euston in two hours and 53 minutes, which is just about within the realms of what business people will accept.

[316] The strategy looks at more frequent through-services, with a clock-face timetable that links in with the Arriva Trains Wales standard pattern timetable, so that we have hourly services to Crewe, half of which will go through to Euston—more at peak times. The current arrangement of changing trains is not really sustainable if we want to provide a frequent service, so we need more Voyager trains on the line.

[317] As far as coming to Cardiff is concerned, we welcome the improved service since the standard pattern timetable came in. Having a train every two hours has proved quite attractive to leisure users in particular. I am sure that it has generated quite a bit of extra travel by train

between north and south Wales. It is not particularly convenient for business use, however, as I proved this morning by getting up at 4 a.m. to catch the 4.58 a.m. train from Bangor. I was in the House of Commons yesterday and could not get home until 9.30 p.m., so if I fall asleep, you will know why. So, we are looking for a business train that is faster than the others, which gets us to Cardiff between 9.30 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. and leaves again, going north, at 4.20 p.m., in between the two-hour pattern.

11.40 a.m.

[318] For inter-urban services, our links to Manchester, Crewe and Birmingham are particularly important to us. Much as we like coming to Cardiff, and a lot of our business is here, we are close to Manchester. That is where our nearest airport is, and where we have a lot of business trips. Similarly, many of our visitors come from Birmingham. We would like to work more closely with English authorities to develop those services, particularly through-services to Liverpool, which we have not had before. There is a piece of line called the Halton curve, which is not used at the moment and which could give us a through-service to Liverpool.

[319] The most important thing to us at present is the frequency of trains along the north Wales coast because, west of Llandudno Junction, they are hourly only. Before rail privatisation, British Rail was telling us that there was a good business case for running half-hourly trains as far as Bangor. We believe that that is still the case. I know that the situation has changed with track excess charges and train-leasing costs and so on, but a lot of that is just a circular movement of money within the system, so we still believe that there is a good business case for a half-hourly service to Bangor.

[320] The Conwy valley line is a very important north-south link in the middle of Wales. We believe that there is a case for an hourly service on that. It is not achievable purely by rail in the short term because there are not enough passing loops; it is a single-track line and there may also be demands for freight paths. So, initially, we would like to provide some of that by bus, which would provide a step change in the frequency. Together with the step change in the frequency along the north Wales coast, that would make the line an attractive alternative to the car.

[321] **Mr Blainey:** The second of the local lines in north Wales is the line from Wrexham to Bidston. That line has been the subject of a recent study and the summary of the findings of that study were included in the papers that were sent to you. The recommendations of that report are to have an increase in the frequency and also to electrify the line so that trains from north-east Wales can run direct to Liverpool. That is seen as essential to the future economic development of the sub-region, and it was widely supported by the politicians who were able to attend the launch of that report last week.

[322] Briefly on freight, the strategy supports the development of rail freight services and, in particular, wishes to see further feasibility work done on the potential for using rail to get slate waste out of Blaenau Ffestiniog on the Conwy valley line. There has been a lot of adverse publicity in the press over recent years about the standard of stations in north Wales. We accept that there is an urgent need to improve station facilities across the region. In the strategy, we have produced a series of categories of stations, with a standard of service that meets the demand at each station. We have then divided all the stations into each category and have come up with a programme of work that would be completed by 2012. In addition, the Wrexham/Bidston study recommends a new station at Deeside park to improve access to employment, and a study is also under way on the Chester to Shrewsbury line. Part of the brief of that study is looking at the possibility of having new stations on that line, and we will add any recommendations that that study makes to our document.

[323] We also highlight several places where very simple and, in railway terms, cheap work could be done that could have an impact on the level of service that can be provided.

[324] **Mr Saxby:** Much of north Wales will never be on the rail network; it will be served by buses. So, we have done a lot of work on integrating bus and rail services, both in terms of physical interchanges and ticketing—a ticket called Tocyn Taith has been introduced, which covers bus and rail services. The strategy outlines the actions that we are taking forward on that. We believe that the Taith strategy is realistic and achievable. We have not put anything in there that is just a pipe dream; they are all things that can be done fairly quickly and economically. There are lots of gaps in our figures because we have not had much time to work things out. We have costs from Arriva Trains, but we do not have figures on revenue generation and so on, and that needs to be taken into account when we do further work on it. So, we look forward to further discussions with the Assembly on how we can move forward together to develop a sustainable integrated transport network for Wales, with a modern, reliable and extensive rail network at its heart.

[325] **John Marek:** Before I call in Eleanor, Carl and Leighton, for elucidation only, you talked about getting trains into Liverpool; are you thinking of constructing any curves between Shotton high level and Shotton low level?

[326] **Mr T. Roberts:** No.

[327] **John Marek:** Do you rule out passengers changing at Chester and then going to Rock Ferry and Liverpool that way, as well? Do you want to use the Halton curve?

[328] **Mr T. Roberts:** Yes.

[329] **John Marek:** Okay. That is fine. On the new fast train, I welcome what you said. One change that was made between the formulation of the draft budget this last year by the Assembly and the final budget was a realisation that we needed such a train. I think that Arriva is now doing a business case for it. So, I think that the money is available from the Welsh Assembly Government; it is simply a question of ensuring that it happens. There is still some way to go, but I wanted to pass that on.

[330] **Eleanor Burnham:** I was pleased to be at the Taith presentation. It was very heartening to hear about electrification, and it is a shame that we cannot electrify any more lines. I love your map, because it shows the arc of the old Ruabon-to-Barmouth line, which was the subject of my first Assembly short debate. That is part of my blue-sky vision beyond what we have here. I know about Taith because I have been associated with it, and north Wales is my main remit. I think that you work very well together, because you have a can-do mentality about what is going to happen, which I think is wonderful. Given what is going on here, even if we do not have all the money, surely we will be able to go on in a constructive way. I think that your paper shows that, because you have actual dates. I have asked some of the other people who presented this morning about this, and there have not been concrete dates and matters being put into operation.

[331] **John Marek:** I agree with you. It is quite useful to have costings.

[332] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. I would like to commend you for that, because I think that it is brilliant.

[333] The north-to-south service bothers me, and we should all do whatever we can to help in that regard. I quite agree with you; why on earth would you want to get up at 4 a.m.? This committee started at 9 a.m. today, and you could not be here by 9 a.m.. It is the same for us when we have committee meetings starting at 9 a.m.. It is pathetic, and I feel that we need to

come together to push that. Anything that you can do, we will do it. Let us be honest, the report in 1999 asserted the east-west axis, but you probably have figures showing how many people have to come on a regular basis from the north to the south. Quite frankly, had I been leading the Government in 1999, one of my first political priorities would have been to link the north and south very effectively. As a north Wales regional Member, I feel very strongly about this. I can say here that it will be one of the big no-nos in terms of what the Assembly has done for north Wales when we face the electorate this year. At least we have an improved rail service every two hours going through Wrexham. My only concern is that, as far as I understand—

[334] **John Marek:** Order. You are being rude, Eleanor.

[335] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do not worry about it; I will say what I want to say.

[336] **John Marek:** You need to ask for information.

[337] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am concerned about the fact that, apparently, what we have done in Wales has had a direct negative impact on Arriva's services to Birmingham. I sit on the train, as you can imagine, and it is a long journey, and, on many occasions, people who get on at Shrewsbury to come up north tell me, 'Oh, it is okay for you lot in the Assembly because you got what you wanted'. That is very sad. How can you impact on Arriva to ensure that all the services are seamless and that our pluses are not their negatives?

11.50 a.m.

[338] The graded station standard scheme looks very good, and is commendable. With your indulgence, Chair, I wanted to ask a question relating to the Conwy valley line. I am pleased about the freight possibilities. Lisa has been working on it at her end and I have certainly been in on it. If you have all that freight, do you feel that that would preclude a possible light railway being used on the Conwy valley line?

[339] **Mr Saxby:** It may be that there are different standards, although the community rail initiative is changing things in the rail industry. I think that there may be problems in the other types of vehicle that can go on that line if there is freight on it.

[340] **John Marek:** Do you want to address the other issue?

[341] **Mr Blainey:** We always held, in north Wales, that the standard pattern timetable had a number of disbenefits as well as benefits, including links to Birmingham and Crewe. Connections, particularly at Crewe, are now very poor. They are probably as bad as they could be, because you get off a London train and you see the north Wales train moving out of the station. We are continuing to talk to Arriva Trains, and we have come up with a timetable, negative of cost, which would solve a lot of that.

[342] **Eleanor Burnham:** There are two points that I completely forgot about. What are you doing about the linkage to Manchester and Liverpool airports, or what can we do about that? While we do not want to encourage too much flying—in case I am thought of as not being green—the reality of the situation is that people need to get there, even if their journey is not for business purposes.

[343] **Mr Saxby:** We mentioned the Halton curve, which is an existing curve that would enable us to provide through-services via Chester to Liverpool, calling close to Liverpool John Lennon Airport. That would give us a through-service to an airport. I do not know whether there is much prospect of us getting through-trains to Manchester airport, because we are then competing with everything else in the north west. We did not achieve that with

British Rail.

[344] **Eleanor Burnham:** Finally, there used to be a service to Manchester airport, which was a long-winded affair—and I used it a couple of times—but that was cut completely, so you cannot use that anymore. I think that it went through Wilmslow or somewhere.

[345] **Mr Saxby:** There are good links from Manchester Piccadilly and Crewe to Manchester airport. At one time, the quickest way to get there was to go to Crewe and then up from there. I believe that, over the past year or two, there has been so much engineering work on that line that there have been times when there has been no service.

[346] **John Marek:** On that point, are there any possibilities of extending the spur at the airports through to Altrincham to join up with the loop line from Chester? That is not really a runner at the moment.

[347] **Mr Blainey:** That was an aspiration, which Cheshire County Council was working on, but I have not heard it mentioned for some time.

[348] **John Marek:** I thought so. Thank you.

[349] **Carl Sargeant:** Welcome to the committee. I am excited about the Wrexham-to-Bidston line. It runs through much of my patch in particular. I am very interested in the economic benefits that it brings to the region, and I think that it is accepted that, with Airbus, Toyota and Deeside Industrial Park, there are huge opportunities for the north Wales region. However, we have to get the infrastructure right. You are right to develop a bus and rail strategy that links together; that is the way forward. What can we do, as a committee and as an Assembly, to enhance the Wrexham-to-Bidston project and get it moving? We had evidence this morning from other consortia regarding the interactive working across Wales. Can you give us your take on working with Cheshire and Merseyside as consortia, and the role that you see for the Assembly in that interaction?

[350] We touched on fare subsidies earlier this morning, and I would be quite excited about pilot projects, particularly on the Borderlands line, as I am sure my colleagues in other areas would be. I think that it is feasible to do it on that line, but I would like to know your thoughts on the structures behind the provision of subsidised free travel—basically, the use of a bus pass on the train.

[351] **Mr Blainey:** I will deal with the Borderlands electrification issue first and then Bob will deal with the concessionary travel.

[352] We have a very close relationship with Mersey Travel and with Cheshire. The study was funded jointly by the three parties. We have a meeting next week to decide the best way to take it forward. It will involve funding bids through local transport plans in England and, presumably, through transport grants to the Assembly. Therefore, it is looking to Members for support when those bids are put in. There are very close links with our neighbours.

[353] **Carl Sargeant:** Just on that point, Chair—

[354] **John Marek:** Of course, carry on.

[355] **Carl Sargeant:** You obviously have a costing already, in preparation for your meeting. I would ask—if that is not confidential—that that be submitted to this committee. I think that that would be helpful, as a priority.

[356] **Mr Blainey:** The capital cost of the whole scheme is £59 million, but that would be

split. It should be in the paperwork that you have, but, if not, I can provide that.

[357] **John Marek:** That would be useful.

[358] **Janet Davies:** Could I come in?

[359] **John Marek:** Is it on this point?

[360] **Janet Davies:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. As you probably know, the rules are changing somewhat for Objective 1 funding. I know that not all of your area is in the Objective 1 area but have you thought of trying to tap into any European funding from 2007 onwards? There seems to be more of a scope for spending on infrastructure in the next round than there has been in the present round.

[361] **Mr Blainey:** That is one of the avenues that we will be looking at, because I think that Merseyside is also an Objective 1 area.

[362] **John Marek:** Have you finished, Carl?

[363] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, but I asked about concessionary fares.

[364] **John Marek:** Of course, sorry.

[365] **Mr Saxby:** As far as concessionary travel is concerned, I was on the working group that set up the scheme for bus travel in Wales, of which I think that we can all be very proud. It has worked extremely well. I have also been invited to the working group that is setting up the English scheme. The group has not listened to me when I said that it needs to ring-fence the funding, which is why it is going to be a bit of a mess when it starts on 1 April. As far as the Conwy valley and the Wrexham-to-Bidston lines are concerned, those lines are used by people very much for local travel. In some cases, that is the only way that they can get about. With villages such as Dolwyddelan on the Conwy valley line, during the daytime, mostly, the only way that you can get out of the place is by train. Therefore, it is a little unfair to some of the people on those lines if they cannot use their concessionary bus pass on the line. We are very keen that they should be able to do so. It also makes those lines a little vulnerable, where they overlap with bus services, to losing out to the bus. There has been some consultant work on that. We have included in the document a price for concessionary travel on those lines. However, you need to bear in mind that, again, it is a bit of a circular argument: if you pay that to the train operator, it may mean that there is less need for subsidy in the end for the train operator, and also less need for us to pay bus companies for some of those journeys. Therefore, there are savings to set against the cost.

[366] **Carl Sargeant:** Okay. Again, is it possible for you to provide a detailed paper on what the proposals would be for a concessionary fare system?

[367] **Mr Saxby:** Yes, I believe that TraCC has undertaken to provide some details, so we will work together on that.

[368] **Carl Sargeant:** That is fine.

[369] **Mr T. Roberts:** We do work closely together on that.

[370] **Carl Sargeant:** Okay. I have one final point. This follows up on my first question. You recognise Deeside as being probably the hub of north Wales for economic development. Janet made a very valuable point about using European funding to bring people in. You are not going to move industry out to areas, but you are going to bring people into areas with

industry. I think that it is a huge opportunity that we and the consortium should be looking at. I am particularly interested in the Shotton hub—and I would be, because that, again, is local to me, but I know that Taith is involved in that. Do you have any updates on how we could progress a Shotton interchange or a development whereby we could have integrated rail and bus transport for Deeside industrial park?

[371] **Mr Blainey:** We have transport grant funding for the next financial year that is earmarked to improve the interchange at Shotton. There is an issue in that not all of the trains along the north Wales coast stop at Shotton. Arriva has a view that you can have too many stops, because it puts people off travelling long distances. However, we see a need for more trains to call at Shotton, because of its importance as an interchange and the number of people who work there. We have the Deeside shuttle, which links with trains at Shotton and also at Flint. It provides a good link between the rail network and places of work in Deeside. We hope that funding for that will also be continued.

12.00 p.m.

[372] **Leighton Andrews:** I am interested in the study that you carried out on the Wrexham-to-Bidston line. I want to get a sense of the proportion of the costs of the different options that would fall to the National Assembly on the basis of your proposals. If you cannot answer that today, perhaps you can provide us with a note. Presumably, it would not all fall to us.

[373] **Mr Saxby:** We can provide that.

[374] **Leighton Andrews:** Thank you. Secondly, I would like to understand better the passenger transport distribution that you are responsible for. In other words, where are people travelling to in north Wales? I lived in Bangor for four years, and I spent an inordinate amount of my life in Crewe station, as anyone who lives in that part of north Wales does. Clearly, people are travelling to north-west England, London and south Wales for meetings, holidays and so on. However, do you have figures that would show us where people in north Wales are travelling to—what their ultimate destinations are? It would be useful to know what numbers of people are travelling to which places.

[375] **Mr Blainey:** We had some work done, as part of our discussions on the standard pattern timetable, on where people were travelling to. We can give you a copy of that. It showed that most people were heading for Manchester, Crewe and places beyond.

[376] **Leighton Andrews:** That is what I would have expected. I would like to see that work.

[377] **John Marek:** I think that Bob Saxby said earlier that there had been an increase in north-south traffic.

[378] **Mr Saxby:** That is certainly what Arriva Trains has told us since the standard pattern timetable was introduced. It is very encouraged by the extra traffic that that seems to have generated. Whether those trips have been generated purely by that or whether people are transferring from cars, we do not know.

[379] **Leighton Andrews:** In that case, Chair, in addition to the existing research, perhaps we could have a note from Arriva on what has happened since the SPT was introduced.

[380] **John Marek:** Whether we can do this within the time that we have is the problem. Let us try, and we shall see what happens. In any case, we are not in a position to make up any ordering, should we decide to do so, until the beginning of May, so we may be able to get

something from Arriva.

[381] **Mr T. Roberts:** You will also have the information that you requested from us within seven days.

[382] **John Marek:** Excellent. Thank you.

[383] **Janet Davies:** The questions that I was going to ask have been asked. One was on the border lines and the other was a clarification on concessionary fares, so that is fine. Thank you.

[384] **John Marek:** Yes, it is always like that.

[385] **Carl Sargeant:** On the north-south train, which is very important, as I hope that the figures will show, since the standard pattern timetable was introduced, people are calling it the 'fast train' to Cardiff. It probably takes 15 minutes less than the slow train to Cardiff, so I am not convinced that it is a fast train. I travel down on a Monday evening, and I wonder why we stop at all these stations the other side of Wrexham when the purpose of the train is to get people quickly from north to south or vice versa. Do you have any thoughts on that? Do you have any intentions to make representations on the timetable that would address that?

[386] **Mr T. Roberts:** I shall ask David to speak on this. In the old days, when you changed at Crewe, the overall journey time was shorter because the Manchester to Cardiff trains were faster. You need the semi-express that we had in the old days, which missed out many of the stops. From Shrewsbury, the train stops all the way down. Perhaps it could stop only at Hereford, Abergavenny, Newport and Cardiff. When you are on a four-hour train journey, there is nothing worse than the train stopping every 10 minutes.

[387] **John Marek:** That special train, which I did not go on because I was here, went from Holyhead all the way to Cardiff in three hours.

[388] **Mr T. Roberts:** That is right. It does not stop at all those stations.

[389] **John Marek:** Important time savings can be made if you find the right path.

[390] **Lisa Francis:** I want to go back to the Conwy valley line and the proposal to move slate aggregate. The figures that I have show that over 1 million tonnes a year of slate aggregate could be moved out of Blaenau Ffestiniog and passenger services could work alongside that, with the correct infrastructure. It seems that Network Rail is the organisation that has been dragging its feet on this, but is that your take on it? I know that a group met to discuss this, including Welsh Assembly Government officials and Network Rail, and I just wondered whether you had more information on that than what is getting passed back to me. I know that Conwy council was represented on that group as well, and I just wondered which organisation you saw as being reluctant to push this forward.

[391] **Mr Saxby:** There have been times when it has appeared that Network Rail was not very enthusiastic about it, or was putting obstacles in our way. It has co-operated in coming up with revised figures and so on, but some of them have been very cautious figures, allowing for all sorts of things that will, hopefully, never need to be done, such as completely replacing embankments and so on, which is unrealistic. Network Rail has been more realistic recently, and we are waiting for a report on its latest estimates so that we can move forward.

[392] **Mr T. Roberts:** The ballpark figure from the early days was £200 million and we are well down on that now, probably to about 20 per cent of that.

[393] **John Marek:** That is very useful. Are there any other quick points? I see that there are not. Thank you very much. We appreciate your coming to this meeting. Did you come from north Wales this morning? You did—and you got here, so well done.

[394] **Mr T. Roberts:** I had to come the night before and experienced the delights of Cardiff.

[395] **John Marek:** The first train does not get here until 9.20 a.m.—it is as simple as that. Thank you very much to you and your team for coming.

[396] I have a suggestion from the clerk. I know that we are meeting in public at the moment, but I do not think that that is a problem. We are very tight for time and we have to present the report by the end of the month, which is in eight days' time. We cease to exist on 19 May. I suspect that it will be impossible to present a report that we feel is ours, and is considered, if we have to do it in eight days' time. The clerk's suggestion, which I support, is that he will present an interim report—he has almost done it, if it finds favour. That will satisfy the remit that the National Assembly has given us. The interim report will not contain any politics or Politics, it will simply be an analysis of the evidence that we have received and of the suggestions that have been made, perhaps with an introductory paragraph.

[397] We could then meet again, perhaps in the first week of May, having had all of April to think about the report, to decide whether we wish to include an ordering system or whatever. That extra meeting in May would meet in private, because, obviously, we would be arguing the merits of different suggestions. I have one final point: the interim report, if it is to be laid, can be laid out of committee. The clerk could send the interim report to us—he has told me that he could do it this week—and although there will no doubt be some bits and pieces that will have been left out, they could be put back in and then another e-mail could be sent on Monday or Tuesday. It requires a bit of goodwill, but we would then have a document that could be a report, and that could be laid at the end of next week, or even the week after that. When is 1 April? No, it could not be laid next week; it has to be before then, because it also has to be translated. The clerk thinks that this is a runner, and it is probably the only runner.

[398] **Janet Davies:** I would agree with that approach. Taith has produced priorities for stations, presumably according to their usage. Is it possible to get figures for the usage of the different stations, because I think that that will be quite relevant to what we will want to say about prioritising stations? That would be in May. The figures do not have to be produced before the end of this month.

[399] **John Marek:** That is a good point. We could probably write to Arriva on that. However, I do not think that Cardiff station is managed by Arriva, is it?

[400] **Janet Davies:** All stations are managed by Arriva.

[401] **John Marek:** Yes, sorry, it is only the mainline stations in London, and Crewe, I think, that are managed by Network Rail. Let us try that.

12.10 p.m.

[402] **Lisa Francis:** I am inclined to agree with this interim report. Will you confirm when that will be circulated?

[403] **Mr Reading:** We will try to do it by the end of this week.

[404] **Lisa Francis:** Okay. There are various points. I agree with Janet's point that it would

be useful to get that kind of breakdown of figures for stations in every region. I expect that this is true of all members of the committee, but I have sent a lot of information, which I hope has been circulated to everyone. The most recent piece I have received—although it is not that recent—is from North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum, which wanted to make an addendum to the SWWITCH presentation today. That is quite significant in relation to services relating to Fishguard.

[405] **John Marek:** I think that I have received that one, but please send it on to the clerk.

[406] **Lisa Francis:** It is important that all of these addenda are taken into account, because they may significantly alter the picture of the presentations that we have received. We should not think, just because these people have been at the table, that there are no other groups out there. I mentioned that I had done a bit of research into the Conwy valley line. Would it be permissible for me to circulate this to Members for information and for possible inclusion in the report, depending on what Members think?

[407] **John Marek:** We need to be a bit careful before we include any values in the report, otherwise we will not agree. It needs to be based on pure information if we are to agree.

[408] **Lisa Francis:** I can say where the information has come from.

[409] **John Marek:** If it is suggestions, you can include it.

[410] **Leighton Andrews:** I would be against including anything that has not come to the committee at this point. Subsequently, it might well form something that is appropriate for the final report but, in relation to the interim report, we have not discussed it at committee and its inclusion would therefore be inappropriate.

[411] On the point raised by Janet in relation to the usage of stations, it is useful information, but it would also be useful to look at future projections in relation to stations. That is not an easy thing to do, because Arriva tells me that, given certain variables, there is almost a limitless number of people who might use the Valleys line, for example. So, it is useful to have that data, but projections would also be valuable, as would some understanding of the variables that would condition the projections.

[412] **Rosemary Butler:** It would be useful to have an interim report because we already have a huge amount of information. Could we then consider whether we need to take more evidence or whether we need more detail?

[413] **Mr Reading:** Effectively, today's session is the last evidence-gathering session.

[414] **Rosemary Butler:** Okay. I have received many observations from people, which I have forwarded to the clerk. What will happen to those? Other Members have not seen them, and it would be useful for them to have the information.

[415] **John Marek:** What does Leighton think about this? I would not want to lose them, and perhaps you could put them in sections A and B if they are observations or suggestions.

[416] **Mr Reading:** At the moment, they are physically in a folder called 'late responses'.

[417] **Rosemary Butler:** There have been a couple of late ones, but all the other ones that I sent to you were within the timescale.

[418] **Mr Reading:** If they were within the timescale, they have been included.

[419] **Rosemary Butler:** So, any observations that come in now will go into the other folder.

[420] **Mr Reading:** Yes. May I say something about that?

[421] **John Marek:** Yes, but before you do, let me ask Leighton whether he is happy with that.

[422] **Leighton Andrews:** Is this about Lisa's suggestion and the research that she has done?

[423] **John Marek:** Yes, I am a bit concerned about Lisa's suggestion. Perhaps we should cut her work down to 'suggested improvements'.

[424] **Lisa Francis:** Perhaps I did not specify it, but it was work for the committee to look at and decide whether it thinks that it is something that should be included or not.

[425] **John Marek:** We will circulate it, but we will not put it in the report unless it is something specific about a loop north of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

[426] **Lisa Francis:** I would not presume that it should go into a report without every Member's scrutiny and permission.

[427] **Mr Reading:** With regard to the responses, the consultation ran until 3 March and, inevitably, some responses came in a week or so later. So, we have taken account of all the responses we received up to the week after, around 10 March, and they will be summarised and go into the interim report, which you will see when I circulate it. I will try to produce a table of them all. Those received after 10 March could certainly be circulated to Members; I have just kept them in a folder called 'late responses', and it is up to you what you want to do with them.

[428] **John Marek:** Could that be section B, or something?

[429] **Mr Reading:** Yes, section B—just to simply list them.

[430] **John Marek:** I would have thought that we would want the information before us.

[431] **Rosemary Butler:** If people have taken the trouble to write, then we should include that.

[432] **Mr Reading:** It may be that we cannot get those in the interim report, but we could certainly add them to the final report, if you like. I will try to get them in the interim report.

[433] **John Marek:** If you cannot, you cannot—there are logistics to be considered. However, if you can get them in as section B in the interim report, that would be useful. We would then have a complete document. We would go away for a three-week recess in April, having all the information before us, and that would be better for us.

[434] **Mr Reading:** Okay.

[435] **John Marek:** I believe that Members are generally happy on this. Therefore, just to sum up, Chris will produce this interim report—as you can, Chris; let us know. There will then be feedback—bits and pieces if you do not like them, and suggestions if you do like something. Chris and I will then meet almost immediately, or will telephone each other, and we will send out a second draft interim report, which will hopefully meet with Members'

approval, and a bit of goodwill. We will then have it translated and tabled. We will then have an extra meeting in closed session; we will try for the first week of May when we are back. We are away until Tuesday, 2 May. However, if we cannot have the meeting in that week, it will have to be the week after. Do we want some sort of ordering scheme? If so, how do we want to do it? Any suggestions that Members may have in April—are you working here in April, Chris?

[436] **Mr Reading:** Yes, I will be here.

[437] **John Marek:** Therefore, Members should pass on suggestions to Chris, so that he has some idea of how to play this; he needs a steer. If necessary, we will decide at the meeting in May what, if anything, we do.

[438] Are Members content with that? I see that they are. I do not believe that there is any other business. Thank you very much. That brings the meeting to a close.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.17 p.m.
The meeting ended at 12.17 p.m.