



**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, 8 Mawrth 2006

Wednesday, 8 March 2006

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi 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.

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

Eraill yn bresennol: Yr Athro Stuart Cole, Cyfarwyddwr Canolfan Ymchwil Trafnidiaeth Cymru, Prifysgol Morgannwg.

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

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

Others in attendance: Professor Stuart Cole, Director of the Wales Transport Research Centre, University of Glamorgan.

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 5.48 p.m.
The meeting began at 5.48 p.m.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

[1] **John Marek:** I welcome everyone to this committee. I particularly welcome Stuart Cole, but I will do so more fully later, when we come to the item upon which he will address us. I ask everyone to please switch off mobile phones and BlackBerrys completely, and not just switch them to silent mode, because that still interferes with the electronics. In an emergency, ushers will direct everyone to the nearest safe exit. I have not received any apologies. Does anyone wish to make a declaration of interest under Standing Order No. 4.6? Now is the time to do that.

[2] **Eleanor Burnham:** If we have made a declaration before, we do not need to make it again. Is that so?

[3] **John Marek:** No, we do not.

[4] I ask Members to confirm that they are content for item 4 to be taken in private session under Standing Order No. 8.24, on the grounds that the committee is deliberating on the conclusions or recommendations of a report. Are you content with that? I see that you are.

5.49 p.m.

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

[5] **John Marek:** Have the minutes been agreed out of committee?

[6] **Mr Reading:** They have been circulated, but we have not had any comments.

[7] **John Marek:** So, they have been circulated, and the clerk has had no comments. The word that I have here is to ratify the minutes as an accurate record. Can I take it that they are accurate? I see that Members agree.

[8] Are there any matters arising that Members wish to raise? I see that there are none. In

that case, please note the actions outstanding that the clerk has nicely presented to us, and we will see what happens in due course.

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

5.50 p.m.

**Canolfan Ymchwil Trafnidiaeth Cymru, Prifysgol Morgannwg
Wales Transport Research Centre, the University of Glamorgan**

[9] **John Marek:** I welcome Professor Stuart Cole, who is the director of the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan. We have all read your paper, Stuart, and I thank you very much for coming here to present your evidence. I will just say that this is not a scrutiny committee, which is why, before we started the committee, I changed a few things around so that you were not at one end of the table while the rest of us were at the other. This is a collaborative effort. We want to get a comprehensive and achievable list—and I do not know yet, but we may decide to order that list—of railway infrastructure improvements that could be made in Wales. We also want a list of any passenger service improvements.

[10] **Leighton Andrews:** I hear what you say, John, but I would not want to state, at this stage, that there is necessarily any commitment to an agreed report.

[11] **John Marek:** No. I said that we could make a report. We are all aware of the procedures and if, in due course, you want to propose anything, Leighton, which no doubt you will, you will have my full support in being able to do so.

[12] As I said, this is a collaborative effort. We have been charged by the National Assembly to present this list. That is certainly what I will try to do. So, the time is yours, Stuart.

[13] **Professor Cole:** Diolch yn fawr iawn, **Professor Cole:** Thank you very much, Gadeirydd. Chair.

[14] Thank you also to the committee for the opportunity to present what evidence I might be able to today, and particularly for agreeing to hold this individual session, because I will be unable to come to your main session in a week's time as I will be in Poland.

[15] I will quickly summarise, within a minute, what I have said in the paper. I have tried to put the railways in the context of an integrated transport policy. I have set priorities for improvements. This is a framework, which the other papers that I read in the last session had not considered. I felt it useful for the committee to have a formal framework within which you might choose to select your criteria and your priorities when you come to deliberate the evidence, which you have. I included criteria in there for setting priorities; it is an integrated approach. There are assessment criteria for passenger service upgrades. That is the essence of the infrastructure and the passenger service improvement issue.

[16] I have taken those criteria from my recent book, which I shall invariably mention, *Applied Transport Economics*. It brings out a set of fairly straightforward criteria, such as optimising existing capacity and making best use of that, having longer trains, modifying carriage layout to get the increased capacity, changing crowding standards, changing the fare level and the structure of fares, and increasing capacity. So, to get that, you have a combination of infrastructure upgrades. That means that you can increase the frequencies and

speeds of trains, have major interchange stations perhaps en route—and exactly where those interchange stations might be might be one area to examine—and refurbish what is called ‘cascaded stock’. Much of the stock that has recently arrived in Wales is older, which is what cascaded stock is, although we have newish trains on the north Wales mainline and will soon have them on the Carmarthen-to-Manchester service.

[17] What I have tried to set out in the paper is slightly different from the lists of some of the earlier evidence presented to you, because many of those lists had many similarities and it seemed that perhaps I could try to give some kind of framework within which those lists might be judged. There is, in the paper, a more detailed set of criteria, should Members wish to look at those. However, I have tried to break that down so that there is a fairly straightforward approach to how some of the ideas might be developed. Of course, there is a whole set of other criteria that Members might like to consider. In terms of common sense, if there were some ideas that the committee was intent on putting forward, then dovetailing those into any work being done by Network Rail would clearly make sense in terms of timing.

[18] The other issue to think about is peak-period demand, which I know from listening to the evidence at the earlier committee meeting was very much in evidence. It was very much a discussion of the fact that there are problems in the mornings and evenings on the Cardiff/Newport metro services, and Valleys lines services, and I think that those problems need to be looked at in the context of the overall picture of the railways. That is a serious problem, but there are also other issues to do with the railways. If there is limited funding, the priority that you might wish to set will take that into account. So, it is not just the problem of overcrowding on Valleys lines into Cardiff in the morning that is at issue here.

[19] There is a series of alternatives to the railway. I am not for a moment suggesting any railway closures; I am just saying that there may be alternatives to building new railways in some circumstances.

[20] We must also keep in mind the fact that the growth rates on Wales’s railways have been quite extraordinary over the past five or six years. We have seen growth rates of 10 per cent per annum, so, over the next few years, we will, effectively, have doubled the number of people travelling by train in Wales. Between 1996 and 2006, we will have doubled that number.

[21] In addition, rather than pick on particular station schemes, which were mentioned in much of the other evidence that you had—although I am more than happy to discuss them, Chairman—I have tried to identify routes rather than stations, to see where the key routes, the big flows, and the population densities are. I have taken more of a big-picture view perhaps, but I am trying to help the committee to determine where it might see the priorities as lying.

[22] **John Marek:** Thank you very much. If you will take questions, the first one is from me. You have a table in part 4, under ‘Routes/Schemes—Suggested Priorities’, and then, later on, under point 5, you have a table of alternative expenditure levels. First, is the table that you have in part 4 something that you recommend for us to start with as a structural base from which to order the schemes that are put before us?

[23] **Professor Cole:** On what page is this table, Chairman?

[24] **John Marek:** It is on page 8 and has the headings ‘Priority’, ‘Route’ and ‘Actual or Potential Traffic Volumes’. Your order is ‘High, High, High, Med, Med (in Wales), Low, Low, Low’, with Heart of Wales on the bottom and metro services at the top.

[25] **Professor Cole:** In that table, I have tried to set out the routes in order of the criteria,

which I mentioned a moment ago—actual volumes of traffic, potential volumes of traffic, sizes of populations, passenger flows on both rail and road where there is a high potential attraction of people onto the railway. So, yes, I am suggesting that those are the routes that would get a funding priority on the basis of that set of criteria.

[26] **John Marek:** What is the ‘metro’? Is it the Valley lines?

[27] **Professor Cole:** It is Cardiff. I try to avoid Cardiff Valleys, because there is the Newport issue in there with the development of the Ebbw Vale line and so forth. So, I have called that whole set of services ‘metro’—Newport, Cardiff and the Valleys, down to Barry and up to Ebbw Vale.

[28] **John Marek:** Would you include in ‘metro’, for example, the north-east conurbation and the Wrexham-Bidston line?

[29] **Professor Cole:** No. I was specifically talking about Cardiff-Newport.

[30] **John Marek:** Just Cardiff. That is okay. Fine. Thank you.

[31] **Rosemary Butler:** On that, does NWML stand for the north-west metro link?

[32] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is main line.

[33] **Rosemary Butler:** It stands for main line rather than metro link. Okay.

[34] **John Marek:** NWML and SWML are the north Wales main line and the south Wales main line.

[35] **Rosemary Butler:** I am sorry. I just thought that ML might have stood for ‘metro link’. Thank you.

[36] **John Marek:** We will take questions from Eleanor, Janet, Lisa and then Leighton. Off you go.

6.00 p.m.

[37] **Eleanor Burnham:** My first question was on that figure. Why have you not taken Flintshire into that? I was on the Economic Development and Transport Committee a few weeks ago and the figures for commuting, morning and night, seemed to be as high in Flintshire and that area of north-east Wales as they are in this area.

[38] **Professor Cole:** Yes, and that is what the north Wales main line implies—any of the stations on the north Wales main line, between Bangor and Chester, will be included in that.

[39] **Eleanor Burnham:** I beg your pardon.

[40] **John Marek:** Just to be clear on that, because we want to avoid being parochial and we must make that clear, where would you put the Wrexham-Bidston line, for example?

[41] **Professor Cole:** I think that the Wrexham-Bidston line has to be considered separately because its function is attempting to change. It was a line that was due for closure not so long ago, as you know, Chairman, and I think that it is now being looked at in a new light. I have not put it in here for that reason. There are opportunities on that line that should be considered separately to the general picture.

[42] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why do you say that, because with the Liverpool metro going native and changing its structure, it seems to me that we are opening up huge possibilities that could take in the conurbation of Chester and Wrexham? Reopening Rosset station would fit in nicely, with a park and ride to the north to take in all of that area or to the south into Wrexham. Or am I being parochial?

[43] **Professor Cole:** If you are looking at the Wrexham-Bidston line as a commuter line, which takes in parts of the Wirral as well as the part in Wales, you have to start to look at issues such as having an interchange station between the north Wales main line and the Wrexham-Bidston line, at Shotton, for example. It would be somewhere where the lines cross, of course. The reason that I did not put it in was because I think that it is new and developing and it has a lot of potential, but we do not really know enough about what it can do yet, and it will be an expensive development, whatever you do, if you electrified it, for example.

[44] **John Marek:** Do you have any views on building a curve between the north Wales main line and the Wrexham-Bidston line at Shotton?

[45] **Professor Cole:** I have heard you mention this on previous occasions, Chairman. It has advantages in terms of the journey time between Bangor and Cardiff, for example, on the north-south services. One of the issues is that if you take out Chester, although it is a delaying factor on that line in terms of the overall journey, it is an important destination for people in north Wales and an important source of revenue for Arriva Trains, which is running the service. Therefore, putting a curve in would be tempting, to exclude Chester. The secret to improving journey times on the services between north and south Wales is increasing line speeds rather than cutting out somewhere such as Chester.

[46] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have just a couple of questions. Looking again at the same figure, I am surprised to see that you have designated the north-south service as 'medium', given the amount of people who are travelling out of necessity on Assembly business from north to south daily. Given that potential, could you ever envisage having a double decker, for instance, on that line rather than a longer train? You cannot have longer trains because the platforms are not big enough.

[47] **Professor Cole:** There is a technical reason for not having double-decker trains, which is that the bridges are too low for them. I know the type that you mean: the French trains. We do not have the loading gauge that they have in France to take that.

[48] In terms of your question about the north-south service being in my 'medium' category, it is one of those cases of having to stop somewhere. They can all be set as 'high' in different sets of criteria, but the criteria that I chose were actual, current and potential usage, then the three biggies are the Valleys lines/Cardiff/metro/Newport, the south Wales main line and the north Wales main line, and then you get onto the next one.

[49] **John Marek:** Your view is valuable on that.

[50] **Eleanor Burnham:** The other question was about the security of stations and priorities. Do you have a view on how we get around that in view of the fact that we perhaps do not have the money that we would like?

[51] **Professor Cole:** Interestingly, the Wales Transport Research Centre is about to undertake a study on this issue for Arriva Trains. Arriva Trains has commissioned a study to look at the impact of introducing an extra 21 community police officers onto the network. Associated with that are the various investments that have already been made in terms of CCTV and improved lighting. Our task is to see whether people think that this is a good idea

and what their perception of personal security is as a result of putting these additional officers in. I think that we will find that a combination of factors, such as CCTV, plus very good lighting, are what will start to dissuade the ne'er-do-wells who hang around some of our stations.

[52] **Eleanor Burnham:** But security would be about disability—

[53] **John Marek:** I will jump in very quickly, if I may. What about extra staffing—where do you place that? Do you place these things higher than extra staff?

[54] **Professor Cole:** The staffing issue depends on what you are trying to achieve and over what period of the day. There is a significant cost implication—by staffing, I assume that you mean ticketing staff, for example, on stations. There is that issue, because people then have an information source, particularly if there is no electronic information source. My local station, which is Llandaf station in north Cardiff, has a large movement of people but no electronic information and there is a ticket office that is open for a number of hours, in the morning and evening peak hours. To what extent that kind of presence relates to personal security is a different question from to what extent it provides a service to the travelling public. The ticket collector is not the person whom we are looking at to provide personal security reinforcement to the travelling public. That is the role of the security/police service, which is what the study is about. There are two different issues here.

[55] **Eleanor Burnham:** Having said that, I have an example from Wrexham station last year. It was the middle of the day, and the ticket guy was having to do 40 things at once, including seeing to someone who was having an emergency, and helping a disabled person to get on the train. That is bad enough during the day, but if you are talking about accessibility and security for disabled people, for instance, they cannot possibly use the railways, because if staff are not on duty later on, they cannot use the lifts and so on, so they cannot get on the train. There was a stupid story in our paper that disabled people had to go to Chester to come back to Wrexham to get on the right side of the platform to get off the train without having to use the lift, which makes nonsense of the arrangement. Are you concerned and do you have any views about how we can move forward on those kinds of issues?

[56] **Professor Cole:** Again, it depends on what and where you want your priorities to be. It is a sad situation that the railway has not received sufficient investment over the years in a whole range of things. So, you must decide whether you put particularly small stations into a category where facilities for people who have movement difficulties are poor. I can speak from personal experience of taking my elderly father by train, and it is very difficult for people who have difficulty walking to make journeys by train. On the bus side, moves have been made to try to deal with this issue, but it is an expensive proposal if you try to do it on every station. So, perhaps it is again a matter of prioritising those key stations where you might want to do it, and maybe the apocryphal tale that you gave, Eleanor, is one which is more common than perhaps we think it is, but it is a matter of deciding where the money should go. Whatever happens, there is only a limited pot of money from which to determine what the expenditure should be.

6.10 p.m.

[57] **Janet Davies:** First of all, Professor Cole, thank you for the paper. It is beginning to address some of the questions that we must look. Turning to the table on page 8, I am not quite sure what criteria enabled you to arrive at these figures. I am concerned, looking at the situation on the Valleys lines going north and south, and the different needs of people on the Heart of Wales or the Cambrian, about how you arrive at these traffic volumes of high, medium and low. Are social factors included in what you are talking about here? What weighting is given to different elements? This is crucial. It may be that you have got it right,

but I have some concerns in that I do not feel convinced that I have seen evidence that would enable me to say, 'This one should be higher or that one should be a lower priority', and that is the crunch of what this committee is supposed to be about.

[58] On page 11, you talk about the implications for rail freight if we increase the passenger trains. Clearly, getting freight, particularly long-distance freight, off the roads and on to rail is important. So, how will we deal with that? We have a situation with the moving block signalling being tried out on the Cambrian line in the next few years; does that have the potential to ensure that the trains run closer together? If you stand in Brussels Central Station, you see the darned things going through every two minutes. We cannot do that in this country: we have to have a much longer time between trains.

[59] Finally, this all comes back to money—well, not all of it, as we can do some things for a reasonable cost, but to make a real difference, as you say in another table, demands an awful lot more money. Something that worries me is the amount of subsidy that we have to put in. Can you tell me whether the more passengers you get, the more subsidies you will have to be put in? In other words, are passengers not self-supporting? Every time we get 100 more passengers, will it cost the Assembly or somebody else that much more? That is a huge issue because, if that is the case, we are really up against it when we are trying to increase usage of the lines.

[60] **Professor Cole:** Taking the first point, on the criteria for setting the priorities in the table on page 8, the key priorities are those that I have listed on page 6. I have taken the economist approach. Whether that was the right approach to take or not is a matter for you to judge. I tried to come up with some kind of formal layout or framework by which particular routes could be judged. Very often, we can look at individual stations, and that is what the South East Wales Transport Alliance rail strategy does, and the listings that the committee received from the Assembly Government do. I do not particularly differ from those; they are similar in that similar stations have been picked and so on.

[61] I have tried to take those particular routes and apply to them the criteria set out on page 6, which were the ones that I mentioned earlier. That is, optimising existing capacity, places where running longer trains would make a difference, modifying the layout of carriages, changing the crowding standards, changes to fares to try to shift demand from the peak to the off-peak if that is possible—however, there is a secondary issue, which I might mention in a moment—and, lastly, how we increase capacity. That is all based on a whole series of potential demand patterns and existing demand patterns and using those criteria to solve the routes on which the demand figures are highest. That is really what I have done—it is a combination of actual and potential traffic, plus the range of options that could be adopted on those lines.

[62] Some lines, such as the Heart of Wales, have very low numbers of passengers and the issue is probably more to do with marketing and promoting that line as a tourist attraction rather than changing the service, particularly, because most people on that line, apart from the commuters into Shrewsbury—and possibly commuters into Llanelli and Swansea in the mornings, but in the main those going to Shrewsbury in the mornings and coming back in the evenings—have plenty of time and enjoy the fact that the train does not go through at 150 mph, but is a nice, stopping train, and that they can get off to go and look around Llandrindod Wells, perhaps, and then get back on the next train. It is that kind of experience that people are looking for there. So, we are not looking for a massive investment there; it is about trying to get more people to make that kind of trip.

[63] I will answer the third question first, if I may, because I think that it is linked to that. Janet's third question was about money and subsidy: if you had more passengers, would it mean more subsidy? More passengers on the Heart of Wales line would not mean more

subsidy; if anything, it might mean less, provided that you have the capacity. As we have had more passengers on the Valleys lines, that is where we start to have to acquire new trains. The Assembly has put £50 million into leasing trains. The discussion going on now is about buying new trains, which is probably the more sensible way of doing it. That was not available to the Assembly when the discussions on this franchise were being put about, as the Strategic Rail Authority was looking after the franchise and, in my view, it did not look after us as well as it should have. The Assembly would have had the opportunity then to spend that £50 million—which it subsequently spent to try to meet the increased demand for trains—on brand-new trains that it would own permanently, not trains that it would lease for 10 years. That was no fault of the Assembly or Assembly Government; it was just the situation that we were faced with at that time.

[64] So, in the case of Valleys lines, as the number of passengers has increased, so the number of train units and carriages that have had to be leased has gone up and that has cost more money as a result. There is also an issue in terms of revenue collection on Valleys lines. In some cases that is due to the passengers; in some cases it is to do with the impracticality of collecting fares on overcrowded trains. That, again, is being addressed by Arriva and I am happy to say that Arriva has commissioned us to do a study on what it likes to call ‘ticketless passengers’, that is, passengers who do not have tickets for whatever reason—it is not necessarily about fare evasion, as some will have not paid their fares because it has not been possible for them to do so. That is a serious issue on Valleys lines, in particular. The revenue is not being collected there and, therefore, the subsidy is being affected by that. Hence the claim by, I think, the SRA in evidence to the Economic Development and Transport Committee and the committee of the House of Commons that Valleys lines are the most highly subsidised lines, per passenger, in Britain. Much of this is to do with that, but there are two quite different circumstances.

[65] Similarly, increasing passengers during off-peak periods must be an objective that the railways go for, because there is plenty of capacity in off-peak periods. One of the issues that faces First Great Western in terms of matching up to the financial targets that it has now agreed with the Government, is to increase off-peak travel, and Arriva clearly has to strive for that. It is leisure travel in the main, but there may be an opportunity to get some business travel from road onto the railway. If that is during the off-peak period, there is capacity there and it does not require investment in the infrastructure and investment in new trains, then there is no need for further subsidy. It is when you start to say, ‘I want faster trains; I want trains that have more capacity because they are overcrowded’, then, potentially, the subsidy goes up, because there may not be any more revenue; all you are doing is reducing overcrowding on the trains, and not necessarily generating more revenue as such.

6.20 p.m.

[66] Moving block signalling is the other issue that follows on from that. The desire to make trains go faster is one of the objectives that, in my view, we should strive for in order to reduce journey times, for example, from Bangor to Cardiff. I remember evidence from Chris Green, who is now a director of Network Rail, that the cost of increasing journey times on the Bangor to Cardiff service by increasing line speeds was somewhere in the region of £30 million to £50 million. That sounds like an awful lot of money, but you have that investment for the next 35 years.

[67] **John Marek:** I am sure that they have done some of that.

[68] **Professor Cole:** They have done on the north Wales main line, yes.

[69] Technical issues such as moving block signalling can make a difference to journey times and speed. However, there are implications for the freight railway. Every time that we

decide that we want more passenger trains on the railway, fewer paths are available for freight trains. Every time that we increase the speed of passenger trains on the existing railway, we have to start either having moving block signalling or we have to extend the length of the signal block, that is, the distance between one signal and another. That means that there are fewer paths available for freight trains, particularly during the day.

[70] The final point, I think, that Janet made, was about the central station in Brussels. It is possible to move trains through quite rapidly at the central station in Brussels; it is also possible to do that now at Cardiff Central station, because of the new signalling system there; you can get three trains onto a platform, for example.

[71] Did I cover your issues?

[72] **Janet Davies:** Yes, except that in Brussels the trains go through without having three trains to a platform.

[73] **Lisa Francis:** I refer you back to page 6, Professor Cole. You say that capacity could be increased through having larger trains, and you also talk about the importance of a higher service frequency, and that one way of doing that might be through infrastructure upgrade. Has any audit of potential infrastructure upgrade been undertaken in Wales? If not, how could that best be undertaken? It is important for relieving overcrowding problems and frequency issues. It is difficult to know whether a line is more of a tourist line, or whether it is a commuter line; it is rather like falling rolls in schools—if you do not provide a service, people do not use it. It is difficult to judge growth potential in that respect. That is the first question.

[74] Secondly, you talk about improving one large interchange station. Could you give an example of one that would fall into that category, and give us more of a visual idea of how that would work?

[75] I am fascinated by your paragraph about trams and bus ways—that is worth considering. Perhaps it is not for this committee to consider. However, I recently read a report about how disused railway lines in Cambridgeshire had been used as bus ways. Is there any potential for that in Wales? I had thought about the Conwy valley line, say from Blaenau Ffestiniog to Trawsfynydd, which, I understand, is disused. It is quite a straight piece of track, I would think, from just that particular section. What about the potential there?

[76] On staff on trains, and in railway stations, there are issues about people using a service if they have mobility problems or if they are older, and platform heights, and so on. Arriva says that it carries a moveable set of steps, but I understand that passengers have to alert the authorities beforehand if they intend to make a journey and they need to use those steps. It is an awful lot of hoops to jump through—you should just be able to turn up at a station and find that staff could perhaps be more service-orientated and help out with that. In surgeries, people have said to me that, because they failed to notify the authorities of their need to use the steps on the train, they could not make their journey, which is a dreadful pity.

[77] On rail freight, I know that timber trials have been undertaken on the Cambrian line, which were quite successful. Can you give us any idea as to which lines in Wales would lend themselves particularly well to freight? I know that the problem with freight is that you need a lot of it to make any sense, and that it all has to start and end up in the same place. However, I just wondered what your thoughts are on that.

[78] **Professor Cole:** I will take those one by one. On the audit of infrastructure upgrades, there have been a number of examinations of what has been done and what could be done. Network Rail has carried out its own examination of various parts of the network in Wales.

The route utilisation strategy is probably the most comprehensive of those currently being carried out. A national route utilisation strategy for Wales will begin its consultation in January next year, and will be completed by spring 2008. That will examine all of the train routes in Wales. The Assembly Government is about to carry out a rail assessment plan study to examine the potential for the railway, what aspects of infrastructure and service exist at the moment, and which have potential for development. That is currently in hand by the Assembly Government. You will have seen the evidence from the Assembly Government; I believe that the committee has a copy of the letter from Robin Shaw to the Strategic Rail Authority in May last year. That replied to the initial ideas of Network Rail in terms of what the Assembly Government was looking for. It was looking at issues such as maximising the existing use of capacity on lines like the Great Western main line. Most of these investments, as I am sure that the committee is aware, are not instant investments. Investment in the railways can take up to 10 years to achieve, simply because of the planning process, the design process and the process of finding the engineers, who, sadly, are not as much in evidence as they were 20 years ago, as you know from your experience on the railways, Chairman.

[79] The draft route utilisation strategy has elicited comments from the Assembly Government to the effect that it does not want to see any significant reductions on the Great Western main line. It wants to see improved service to south-west Wales, particularly direct services from Paddington to south-west Wales. It is looking at the demand for rail services in south-east Wales, and to ensure that the improvement in those services is consistent with the increase in demand and with the increase in wealth in south-east Wales. This particular commentary was about the original route utilisation strategy for the Great Western main line, which was the one that Network Rail initially produced for Wales. The new route utilisation strategy is for the whole of Wales, so we will get a comprehensive picture. That in itself is a move that we should welcome, because it is now not looking at just particular main lines that emanate from London. Our traditional network is London-centric, wherever you happen to be on the mainland of Great Britain, and Wales is no exception to that. What we now have, and Network Rail has fortunately taken this on board, is the opportunity to look at the whole of the network, not just in terms of how Wales links into England, but also how Wales links to other parts of Wales. Both are important, of course.

6.30 p.m.

[80] I apologise to those Members from north Wales that what I am about to say is largely about south Wales, but that was the commentary on the south Wales route utilisation strategy. The developments that the Assembly Government has already put into things such as the Vale of Glamorgan line and the Ebbw Vale line, which is now being rebuilt, are part of that issue. It is not just the Great Western main line that we are talking about, we are talking about the commuter lines and the branch lines into the main line, as well. We are also talking about the stations along those lines, so it is not just the track, the rail speed and capacity that we are talking about, but also the kind of stations.

[81] This may, in itself, answer the fifth point that Lisa made about mobility and the position at stations where the train is not flat against the platform. Much of it is to do with the fact that a lot of the stations in Wales were built in the 1850s and, therefore, even the access and egress to the stations are not particularly friendly towards people with mobility problems, because, in those days, it was not something that people thought about terribly much. We are now running trains that were built between 1970 and 2000, and maybe we should say that those trains should have been built to fit the platforms, but often the platforms were built by different companies, at different heights, over 100 years ago. It would not be possible to try to match those trains to each of those platforms.

[82] Your second point, I think, was one large interchange station, Lisa—

[83] **John Marek:** Stuart, we need to speed up, if we can. I am not going to constrain anyone, but some Members want to catch the 7.20 up north, and so we have to get on with it. However, I do not want to cramp your style in any way. This is a friendly committee.

[84] **Professor Cole:** If I throw in some names of interchange stations, then Members can either agree or disagree with me. Clearly, Cardiff is a major interchange station, Shrewsbury, though it is in England, is a major interchange station, and places like Chester could be major interchange stations for us, or Carmarthen, if the decision is made that Carmarthen is to be a feeder station, where mainline trains go to Carmarthen and shuttle trains come in from Pembrokeshire. We have an argument with Pembrokeshire County Council, but that is one option for that kind of interchange train station. There are different kinds of stations. Cardiff is clearly a big interchange station, with mainline commuter and local services. Shrewsbury is an important station for us, because it links north Wales with south Wales, links us into Chester and it also links to Aberystwyth. The shape of our network is in a reverse E, if you like.

[85] **John Marek:** You can come in briefly on that point, Eleanor.

[86] **Eleanor Burnham:** I just wanted to ask why is Wrexham not—

[87] **Leighton Andrews:** What about south Wales Members?

[88] **Eleanor Burnham:** He has been talking about south Wales, he apologised for not talking about north Wales.

[89] **John Marek:** Eleanor, do not get distracted by people who want to make you miss your train.

[90] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why was Wrexham not one of the stations that you named?

[91] **Professor Cole:** Wrexham is a through station; only one line goes through Wrexham. Interchange stations, by implication, have more than that—Bidston could be an interchange station, or the point where the Wrexham-Bidston line crosses the north Wales main line.

[92] **John Marek:** Have you finished answering Lisa's points?

[93] **Professor Cole:** No, she had two other points. One was on trams, and I agree entirely, I think that trams are a brilliant idea, although not too many people agree with me, because they are, in the words of the Minister, very expensive to build in the first place. However, it seems to me that there are opportunities to examine or re-examine the light-rail option in Cardiff again.

[94] On bus ways on the Conwy valley line, that particular line is a difficult one. I have no doubt that there are opportunities for some disused parts, and I guess that you are talking about the disused part from Blaenau to Trawsfynydd. One assumes that Trawsfynydd will not be used again for its existing purpose, and maybe there are opportunities there to either have cycle ways or bus ways. I would not look towards buses replacing trains where there are existing operations, and, certainly, on the rest of the Conwy valley line, the desire or the plan to move large quantities of slate waste along that line is an admirable one. Clearly, the funding for that has to be found, which is another freight issue.

[95] **John Marek:** Are you happy with that, Lisa?

[96] **Lisa Francis:** I was aware of the Conwy valley slate freight project, but do you have

any other ideas of where freight could be used in Wales or have you been approached about that?

[97] On the bus way idea, I just used the Blaenau Ffestiniog to Trawsfynydd line as an example because the forest is there, along with the mountain biking centre and so on, which I thought could link into tourism. Are there any other stretches of disused lines that might lend themselves to a bus way?

[98] **John Marek:** Perhaps you could let that clerk know. That would be useful.

[99] **Leighton Andrews:** I want to follow up one or two of the points that Janet Davies made. I am glad that you touched on revenue collection, which I have taken up myself with Arriva, and I think that it has some measures in place to look at that. However, trying to work out rail subsidies and what lines and stations are subsidised is very difficult. In every conversation that I have been in, including in the Economic Development and Transport Committee, I have tried to narrow this down to get a clear answer, and I keep being told that the train companies themselves, even in their franchise applications, find it very difficult to break down subsidies on the basis of lines or stations. Is that not the case?

[100] My second question is on the prioritisation of routes. I am glad you clarified that the Metro includes the Valleys lines, as that was not initially clear from the table. In your report, you say that there have been many ways of looking at priorities. You referred to the evidence from the train companies, the Assembly Government's work, SEWTA's work and so on, but at the end of the day, in terms of the table on page 8, you have proposed a ranking process, which is fair enough, but it seems to me that whatever judgment is made at the end of the day, it will be a political judgment.

[101] The reality is that we can sit around this table and assess whatever criteria we like and look at the rankings that have been made by bodies such as the Assembly Government or SEWTA, but trying to balance judgments—which, as Janet said earlier, may effectively involve a whole series of different social questions and so on—is a difficult set of choices. There is nothing simple about this process is there? So, you have gone for a particular prioritisation, and I might welcome that if it means that the Valleys lines are at the front of the queue, but that may cause problems for colleagues in other parts of Wales. It seems to be very hard to get a process unless you are looking to make very clear judgments about passenger utilisation and about, ultimately, quite crude utilitarian judgments about the use of subsidies.

[102] **Professor Cole:** I agree entirely that the decision at the end of the day—and I make that point in the report somewhere—will be a political one. I judged the eight primary routes, and I mentioned earlier why I excluded the Wrexham-Bidston. I tried to divide Wales into those eight routes. The approach that I took was one of economic benefits. Clearly, you can build on top of that issues relating to a greater emphasis on environmental factors and social inclusion, which would be quite justified. However, at the end of the day, the decision has to be made by the National Assembly for Wales or by Ministers on where they would like to see the money go. That is the decision that has to be made, and it is often a difficult one. So, I would not dispute that at all. The democratically elected Government has to decide how to spend public money.

[103] Therefore, I drew on years of experience of advising public bodies in putting forward a formal structure based on a set of formal criteria, but the ultimate decision must lie with you, the politicians, in terms of spending priorities in any area.

6.40 p.m.

[104] Returning to revenue collection, there is an issue in relation to Valley lines, which I

explained earlier. I saw your report some weeks ago on Valley lines, which I found very interesting. That revenue collection issue is one that it is trying to deal with, and it is very much a matter of the company's staff and the public working together.

[105] In terms of the calculation of rail subsidies, you put your finger on the key issue of trying to identify how this money is spread around. Before we had the kind of franchise structure that we have now, we tried once to identify how much subsidy was coming to Wales, let alone to particular routes. That was seven or eight years ago. Denzil Jones, who was the head of policy at the Assembly Government at the time—or it was the Welsh Office then—the SRA and I separately tried to work out what it was. We came up with more or less the same figures, as I recall, which was just under £100 million, based on factors such as passenger numbers, passenger kilometres, and kilometres of railway distances.

[106] When money is being allocated to a franchise that partly runs in England and partly runs in Wales, it is difficult to split that up, even within a route. It is possible to do it; it is not an impossible task. If Arriva has said that it cannot calculate it, that is not quite what it means. I think that you said 'difficult to calculate', Leighton. It is difficult to calculate, because you have to try to work out which tickets are going where, which passengers are going where, and whether there are particular costs on a particular length of railway. Railway bridges and tunnels, for example, are a lot more expensive to run than railways on open land. Therefore, it is a difficult process to try to deal with.

[107] We have also had difficulties in terms of certain aspects of the railway. Trying to allocate labour costs is not that difficult. Even trying to allocate train operational costs is not that difficult. You can do it on a mileage basis and you can split up the costs of maintenance and drivers' time.

[108] The difficulty, I think, comes with infrastructure, where first, you have a separate company, and, secondly, as I said, you have the different kinds of infrastructure that cost different amounts. Also, you have the legacy of Railtrack, whereby the basis on which the railway was managed and the asset register disappeared effectively. Railtrack handed out the asset register to the contractors, whereas a company such as Glas Cymru, which has exactly the same kind of situation, keeps its asset register very much within its own control. Every piece of piping, every reservoir and every other asset that it has is closely monitored by its engineers, because they hold the asset register. That asset register, now having to be rebuilt by Network Rail, will eventually be able to tell us exactly what costs what and where. Glas Cymru can tell you exactly what every bit of piping costs to operate. We cannot do that in relation to the railways. In railway terms, the infrastructure is around 60 per cent of total operating costs. You cannot correctly predict that at present. That presents us with a big problem as regards the kind of figures that you would like to see in terms of subsidy payments.

[109] **Leighton Andrews:** To what extent is it reasonable, or is it valuable, to look at the growth in certain services over recent years? You went back to 2000 earlier, and if we went back to the days when you were writing papers for the 'Yes for Wales' campaign before we had an Assembly, I think that we have seen a considerable change. You have expressed the growth per annum on the Valleys lines, for example, and on other lines. One would get something of an impression that things were being done right if you are starting to see that level of double-digit growth in passenger usage.

[110] **Professor Cole:** Certainly, part of that growth has been an improvement in rail services, an improvement in rolling stock. We have not necessarily seen that in Wales, but there is a lot of new rolling stock around the Great Britain system. The other reason for growth has been congestion on the roads. People have not been able to make effective journeys by road. Cardiff is the microcosm of the London situation—growth in London has

been because of jams, from our point of view on the M4, causing the kind of problems in Reading that reverberate right down the Great Western main line. Similarly, we have problems in Cardiff and, increasingly, problems in Swansea, where we are seeing traffic jams at 7.30 a.m., which never occurred before. People are switching to the railways simply because it is the only effective way of getting into the centre of somewhere like Cardiff in a reasonable time. There are a number of reasons for the increase in usage. Going back to an earlier question, I think that the off-peak demand pattern is the one where the biggest potential lies for increasing usage by passengers in general.

[111] **John Marek:** Leighton, you can come back in afterwards, but would it help you, Carl, if I called you to speak next, so that you, and Eleanor, can get away if you want to?

[112] **Leighton Andrews:** I am finished for now.

[113] **John Marek:** Rosemary, are you happy for Carl to go next so that he can get away? I see that you are. Carl, you may begin.

[114] **Carl Sargeant:** Thank you, Chair. May I thank you for your paper, Professor Cole? I must say that you made some interesting points regarding the heavily subsidised Valley lines. It is difficult for me to say that because I have a south Wales Member sitting either side of me. One of my disappointments was that you did not mention the Wrexham-Bidston line. I think that your criteria was based on current and potential usage, and I just wondered how you measured potential usage within the spatial plan, which is a living Government document, with regards to interactive working with the north-west economy in Liverpool, Cheshire and so on? I am being very parochial. Deeside has one of the largest industrial estates in Europe, which has huge potential for the whole of north Wales, not just Deeside, if it could have some sort of rail structure to support it, offering rail, freight and passenger services. I expressed my disappointment because that does not seem to be highlighted in your document. If you could do a paper on that, it might be helpful to the committee, but, initially, I would welcome your thoughts on that.

[115] Secondly, you compared Cardiff and London as being the capitals where people want to go. You can get to London easily from north or mid Wales, in wonderful comfort and in a shorter time than you can get to Cardiff. You are also usually guaranteed to get there. I have concerns about the comments that you made regarding travelling time on infrastructure other than rail. It takes as long to travel in a car to Cardiff from the north as it does to travel on the train, so there are no real benefits. The benefits of the car are that you can go as and when you want to, whereas you are stuck to a timetable on a train, but you are not driving. Do you have any thoughts on that?

[116] **Professor Cole:** As I mentioned earlier, the reason that I did not consider the Wrexham-Bidston line was because the development of that line is changing, and I did not feel happy that I had enough information on it to include it in what I hope was a reasonably robust paper for the committee. I am more than happy to see what has been done on that, if the committee wishes me to do so.

[117] **John Marek:** You could send a note in on that point; it would be helpful.

[118] **Professor Cole:** I will do that. In terms of the spatial plan, you are absolutely right, because one of the key issues in the spatial plan is the cross-border movement between north-east Wales and the Wirral and Cheshire. In fact, it is defined as one of the sub-regions within the plan. Clearly, Wrexham-Bidston, and not only that line, but services into Cheshire and the electrified services from Chester to Birkenhead, similarly form part of the process. Just to illustrate how long it takes to develop a new service in an area, I can tell you that, in 1976, when I worked for Cheshire County Council, I worked on the economic evaluation of the

modernisation and the electrification of the Chester to Rock Ferry service, which only actually happened about four or five years ago. So, here we are, 25 to 30 years later. That gives you some idea of how long it takes to develop some of these schemes. That scheme was No. 1 in the transport policy and planning programme of Cheshire County Council at the time.

6.50 p.m.

[119] On the journey time from north Wales to London, I am not sure whether it takes less time to get from north Wales. It depends where you are coming from.

[120] **John Marek:** I did Wrexham to London in 2 hours 29 minutes the other day.

[121] **Professor Cole:** Okay. On what ought to happen on the north-south service, my view is that I would be looking for the kind of trains that we are running on the north Wales main line—the 175-unit, three-car sets. There is a demand for a small premium class on those trains, which generates revenue. On the improvement in the railway infrastructure on the north Wales main line, the Marcher main line and the south Wales main line, to get the speeds up to 90 mph to 100 mph, we are talking about £30 million to £50 million or thereabouts. We are talking about amounts in that kind of region. It is not an enormous sum of money over the period that it would last, and that can bring the journey time from Bangor to Cardiff down to three hours.

[122] **John Marek:** Eleanor and Carl, it is 30 minutes before your train leaves if you want to go. I hope that I speak on behalf of the committee that we will not make any decisions if you decide to go, so you will catch the train if you go now. If you do not go now, you will be here for the night. I am sorry for interrupting you again, Stuart—I am not doing very well as a Chair. Rosemary, it is your turn.

[123] **Rosemary Butler:** The subsidy issue has been explored. Can someone remind me when the railway assessment study that WAG is doing is due to finish?

[124] **Professor Cole:** The Assembly Government, do you mean? That has only just started. I will have to look it up to be certain, but we are talking about six to nine months.

[125] **Rosemary Butler:** So it is in the near future, and not the distant future?

[126] **Professor Cole:** No. The Wales Transport Research Centre and Halcrow are working on that project.

[127] **Rosemary Butler:** It is just that it links up with this report, and so it would have been nice if we could have had that first. I have said this before, but it might be helpful if we could have a map, so that we can look at which bits are electrified.

[128] **John Marek:** I think that the clerk could organise that.

[129] **Rosemary Butler:** Yes. We have all this technology, so I am sure that Chris could knock something out. If you could do that in publicising the Heart of Wales line, for example, it would get far more use. I know of a group of people who tried to book a tour. They wanted to get a coach and get off and get on a train, and so they wrote to try to arrange it but they were told that they could not do it. If 60 of them had turned up as individuals, they could have got on the train, but because they turned up as a group, they could not book them on. Sixty may not be the right figure, but the point is that if they had all turned up as individuals, they could have got on. So, it is about trying to utilise those lines.

[130] The issue about the north-south line is not just to do with the length of line but the sheer comfort. People do not mind travelling for a longer time if they travel in comfort. The idea of a premium section for business people or better conditions on the train would certainly help.

[131] You said that around 60 per cent of the total cost is infrastructure. Is that correct?

[132] **Professor Cole:** Yes. It varies a little, but the bulk of the expenditure on the railways is on capital expenditure. Around 60 per cent is infrastructure and train operations. It is almost the opposite in the bus industry, where labour is the bigger chunk of the costs, and capital expenditure is the lower. So, you have something like 60 per cent for infrastructure, capital and trains and so on, which are capital assets. Around 20 per cent goes on labour, and the rest goes on materials, fuel and so on. However, if the committee would like me to, I can supply something more detailed.

[133] **Rosemary Butler:** To come back on one small point, the issue of people being driven onto trains, this morning, to come just 19 miles, I left home at 7.30 a.m. and I got here at 9.15 a.m. and that was just coming from Newport to Cardiff.

[134] **John Marek:** By car?

[135] **Rosemary Butler:** Yes, by car. It is now getting gridlocked, so the more convenient stations we can have, the better.

[136] **Professor Cole:** With regard to that issue, one thing that I might recommend to the committee is the development of more park-and-ride facilities where people can be sure that both they and their cars are secure. So, stations like that would be covered by good lighting, they would have closed circuit television, as well as an increased presence of community police officers, which is now promised by Arriva and the British Transport Police, who would visit these sites regularly. That would encourage people, I think, even if it was only to encourage them to drive part of the way—a railway can never serve everybody by being within walking distance. If you have that facility, it would mean that the crowded bits of the road network in Cardiff and Newport may be alleviated. Although people might drive to park-and-ride stations further out, on Valley lines or perhaps when the new line is built to Ebbw vale, we have really good, well planned park-and-ride sites. I know that land is expensive, and double-deck car parks are even more expensive, but that is one way in which we can encourage more people to leave their cars at home or at least to drive them to a station.

[137] In terms of publicity, I do not know what this year's figures are. The last time I looked at the figures was in 2001-02. Public transport spent £50 million on publicity. The car industry spent £450 million. You will never see a glossy magazine without an advertisement for a shiny car; you rarely see a glossy magazine with an advertisement for a shiny train. You will see some train advertising in some of the newspapers, but there is not a lot of television advertising and there is not a lot of glossy-magazine advertising. That is part of the problem: people are getting an image of the railway that is not the image that I see all the time. I would like to see new trains on Valley lines. I would like to see the recently acquired class 150 trains have a deep-cleaning exercise, and I notice that some are going through that. On the main line, First Great Western trains are in better condition because of the way in which it has historically operated its trains. It now has the challenge of having to deal with some of the local trains coming in and out of Cardiff going to the west country. We will see how it performs with those.

[138] There are big differences in the quality of the network, between what was once called 'intercity' and local services, and we still have that, sadly—at least, in Wales we do. However, we have seen in other areas that that does not necessarily have to be the case.

However, publicity is a key part of trying to persuade people, first, that the image that they get from some parts of the media is not correct throughout, and, secondly, that it is just the sheer quantity of publicity for the motor car that persuades people that that is what they should have. We just do not have the aspirational aspects of car advertising for public transport in general and the railways in particular.

[139] **John Marek:** Does anybody else have a question? I must say that I do not have one for the very good reason that I have read your paper, Professor Cole, and I have listened to your remarks, and I now have a feel as to how we should go forwards when we do. I see that Members do not have any further questions, and so I thank you for coming.

[140] **Professor Cole:** Thank you for the invitation.

7.00 p.m.

[141] **John Marek:** It is a pleasure to have you here. You are an expert and you have given us your advice for free, and it is good of you to do that. We appreciate it.

[142] **Professor Cole:** Thank you for the invitation. If you want anything else, perhaps Chris will contact me with any other bits of information that I could provide.

[143] **John Marek:** We will not be long: about five minutes. If you want to stay outside, I would not mind having a word with you afterwards. We will now go into private session.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 7.00 p.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.*