

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT: NOTE BY THE ASSOCIATION OF TRAIN OPERATING COMPANIES

FIRST GREAT WESTERN

First Great Western is one of two rail franchises operating in Wales that are part of the First Group. This group is a diverse organisation, which has a total of 3 rail franchises (the other being First Great Eastern). It is also responsible for bus and airport companies in Britain, America and the Far East.

Welsh Operation

First Great Western provides high quality long distance inter city services between South Wales and London/Thames Valley. This broadly provides an hourly service from Swansea /Cardiff throughout the day and half hourly during the peak hours. A small number of services penetrate west off Swansea to serve Carmarthen and Fishguard, these are further augmented during the high summer to meet increased holiday traffic.

The company is the station facility operator, i.e. holds the lease from Railtrack and operates particular stations, for the principal stations in South Wales: Newport, Cardiff, Bridgend, Port Talbot, Neath and Swansea.

The specific objective of the company is to continue to develop services to meet the growth in demand and passenger numbers. A key objective is to increase the level of service between Cardiff and London to a half-hourly clock face service. This service will be introduced in the May 2001 timetable.

Franchise Plan Investments

A fleet of 14 125 mph trains is currently under construction, these new trains will be used to operate the new time-table from Cardiff to London and the existing High Speed Trains continuing to provide the service from Swansea to London. Accelerated timings will be achieved on that service by removing certain stations from its routes – for example fewer calls on the journey.

The partnership improvements undertaken with Railtrack include the magnificent refurbishment of Cardiff Central Station. This is now a fitting gateway to the capital of Wales and a new first class lounge will be installed in the near future.

Customer Services

Customer information services will be completely renewed at Cardiff Central and all other FGW leased stations in South Wales. This will provide a modern more reliable system that will give real time information, automatically updated by links to the signalling system. A similar public address system is being installed simultaneously and is due for completion in the first half of 2000.

Future Aims.

One of the main challenges facing FGW is the Severn Tunnel. Railtrack are in the process of investigating methods to provide an additional signal section to increase the number of trains that can be "pathed" through this

well known bottleneck. Higher speed lines, in particular between the Severn Tunnel and Cardiff will help improve reliability and punctuality. Re-modelling the approach to Cardiff Central would also allow faster approach and departure speeds.

VALLEY LINES

Valley Lines, formerly known as Cardiff Railway Company, is one of two rail franchises in Wales, who are part of the Prism Group. It is the smallest train operator in Wales and its network of 86 miles encompasses Cardiff and the surrounding valleys. As a busy urban commuter network its average journey length is 9 miles and the average fare is £1.14. The company is responsible for 67 stations and operates 360 trains per day. It is the sole user on much of the rail network.

Prism Group has a total of four rail franchises. These include West Anglia Great Northern and LTS Rail.

Operations

90% of passengers do not use any other rail networks and the company is perceived as friendly and provides a service for peak commuter hours.

Franchise Plan Investments

- Refurbishment of class 142 trains is completed 143 trains will be next.
- Transport Grants have helped fund improvements to the Taffs Vale signalling and the next stage of signalling improvement will be undertaken at Rhymney.
- Project Inform will be installed at all Valley Lines stations, this will provide real time information for passengers.
- Better marketing and information distribution will provide improved customer satisfaction.
- Installation of CCTV cameras at all stations will increase passenger levels of security and help combat vandalism. Installation has been undertaken at over 50% of stations and the remainder will be completed by June 2000.
- New vandal proof shelters are being installed which in conjunction with the above will meet rising customer expectations.

Partnerships with Local Authorities

These are an important link and are a key part of the development of rail services on the Valleys' network. A focus for this work is the SWIFT consortium, which brings together local authorities and bus and rail operators to develop an integrated transport service in and around Cardiff.

SWIFT

The key objectives of the initiative are:-

- New & Extended park and ride services
- Up to date capacity studies
- ERDF & European Objective One Funding
- RRP bid and reduced journey time
- Vale of Glamorgan Line
- SWIFT Strategy (£61 million over 5 years - 18% swing in mode)

Future Plans.

Valley Lines is heavily dependent on Cardiff Queen Street station. The station approaches are poor and badly in need of upgrading. Additional work is needed on the platforms, ideally they should be lengthened to accommodate modern rolling stock. These improvements will ensure improved services for valley communities and increase track capacity - in and out of the city centre.

The current services provided for valley communities suffer from a poor quality, old-fashioned railway line. Built to accommodate older rail stock, today's modern rolling stock is hampered by the older infrastructure. Line speed improvements and up graded signalling will help increase the number of trains able to utilise existing paths. This in turn will raise standards of reliability and punctuality and provide a more frequent passenger service

The improvement work could be extended on the rail line to Cardiff Bay. The existing approach is an eyesore and the current service does not meet the expectations of passengers. The SWIFT consortium is looking closely at how this line can be developed.

Recruitment of train drivers and conductors has increased and Valley Lines is committed to developing staff training for all employees, with particular emphasis on front line staff.

Over £800k has been spent during the summer months on areas prone to flooding. Research has also been undertaken on evaluating pinch points and improving planning and implementation. The company is vulnerable to delays and signalling improvements by Railtrack.

WALES & WEST PASSENGER TRAINS

Wales & West Passenger Trains are part of the Prism Group, along with its sister company Valley Lines. Its head office is based in Cardiff and all its routes begin and end in Wales. Its network includes routes to London Waterloo and Devon and Cornwall. In Wales it provides services from Cardiff to major destinations such as Manchester, Birmingham Portsmouth and London. It is one of the main service providers for passengers to west Wales and the company is also responsible for the mainly rural Heart of Wales Line.

Welsh Operation

Wales & West provide over 600 trains per day. The majority of these trains, begin and end in Wales and the company is a major provider of rail services from Cardiff to Holyhead. Its rail network covers a total of 1569 miles, which are covered by a total of 300 stations, 206 of which are operated by the company. They are responsible for 67 stations in Wales, which include stations in East, West and Mid Wales. The company is totally committed to a bilingual service. It ensures that all public service announcements and passenger information is provided in both Welsh and English at its Welsh stations.

Passenger satisfaction levels have steadily increased and Wales & West have achieved a grade B in the recent Passenger Satisfaction Report by the SSRA.

Franchise Plan Investments

- £1.4 million invested in Project Inform – a real time passenger information system.
- Additional investment in CCTV cameras at Carmarthen and Llanelli stations.

- An Award from the Welsh Language Board for Passenger Services through the medium of Welsh.
- Refurbishment of all class 153 and 158 trains
- £400k Investment in the Cardiff Canton Maintenance Depot.

Marketing Initiatives.

- Wales & West led on the Freedom of Wales Flexi pass initiative. The only example of such an integrated tourism initiative in Europe.
- A Range of Bus Links in West Wales
- Discounted Winter Fares on the Heart of Wales Line
- A Community Rail Partnership on the Heart of Wales Line
- Joint working with SPARC, a community initiative In South Pembrokeshire.

Line Improvements.

- Working with Railtrack to improve line speeds through the Severn Tunnel and the Cardiff to Manchester route
- Developing Bus Links with the Local Authorities at Haverfordwest, Carmarthen, Llanelli, Maesteg, Porthcawl and Fishguard.

Future Aims.

- Eliminate all regular use of pre 1988 rolling stock
- Introduction of 2 extra Class 158 trains at Christmas
- The proposed re-franchise bid makes provision for additional rolling stock above the current levels of provision.

Possible Areas of Concern

- The reduction of Swanline Services. After a 5 year experimental period of operation, the urban services between Cardiff and Swansea, did not reach the expected levels of patronage. Service frequencies have been reduced to a level above the contractual requirement of the company's franchise agreement.

Franchise Update.

Prism Group has submitted its franchise bid to the SSRA. The group has chosen to submit a bid which includes all four of the Prism Group's current rail franchises and not on an individual basis

Association of Train Operating Companies

November 1999