

**Submission to the**

**Enterprise and Learning Committee**

**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**

**National Assembly for Wales**

**Inquiry into Future Railway Infrastructure in Wales**

**Response to the Terms of Reference**

**and a Note on Delivery**

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# Inquiry into Future Railway Infrastructure in Wales

## Response to the Terms of Reference

### **1. The case for a high speed rail link between London and South Wales (in addition to the recent announcement that the existing mainline is to be electrified)**

The case for a high-speed line between London and 'South Wales' is strategic, and not dependent on some dubious economic nostrum or formula.

There is a case for linking Heathrow in the rail network more directly but the present scheme is flawed and ignores a better option.

Provision of western rail access to Heathrow ought to be strongly supported by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Vernon Murphy supports a 'full-speed line' – an upgrade of the GWR to eliminate speed restrictions below 200km/h.

An additional line built to high-speed standards (<400km/h, <350km/h) but with only current or full-speed rolling stock is another option which may have a stronger safety and environmental case than one with high-speed .

A Newport avoiding line would enable London – Cardiff in 86minutes with high-speed.

An alternative option would be to guarantee 2h by strengthening command and control procedures, on-board signalling and communications management and upgrading track.

As I have previously suggested, a new direct (high- or full-speed) line to South Wales could be constructed within and below a barrage close to the Second Severn Crossing.

There is no transportation case for a highway or rail connection along the proposed Brean Down to Lavernock Severn Barrage, which would be too environmentally damaging and costly to be seriously considered as an option.

In terms of a sustainable industrial policy, Wales would be advised to avoid any barrage in favour of a solar-based economy that would produce and maintain, for example, wind turbines, wave and tidal generators, plasma energy machines (fuelled in part by waste), Light Rail Vehicles etc.

The proposed electrification of the mainline from London Paddington to Cardiff is a very welcome and responsible development.

Careful consideration should be given to embedding energy supply within any upgrade programme.

Reliance on the National Grid would be misplaced in the long-term as regional energy sufficiency offers greater economy and efficiency. Large-scale production units have less resilience and major environmental impacts.

A low-energy future, forced on us by global warming and mounting public concern, will require us to question all energy use. The use of fossil fuels (coal, uranium) is unsustainable. Prompt action should be

taken to ensure that Wales has the production capacity to deploy renewable energy technologies.

While electrification could potentially reduce our carbon footprint, travelling less – especially commuting – would have a larger impact. Most people will prefer to use their future carbon ration for ‘elective’ travel rather than routine and ‘compulsory’ journeys (work, supermarkets etc).

Considerations of scale ought to temper potential over-investment in infrastructure, especially that which engenders high energy use.

All high-energy using industries should be challenged to reduce their energy use, including those in the transportation sector. Their sustainability ought to be critically assessed.

There is an equally strong case for major parts of the Valleys Lines to be electrified.

## **2. The case for an improved north-south line**

The case for an improved north-south line on grounds of Welsh national interest is incontrovertible.

But its main value would be to improve access along an alternative and functional alignment to support regional development and decrease social exclusion and isolation in a sustainable manner.

A long-term plan might release some short-term gains for community rail, tram-train or LR, between town pairs, say (eg. Builth Wells – Llandrindod Wells) as construction proceeded at an affordable rate.

A substantial shift of resources to north-south axes and away from the albeit important east-west links would help reinforce national identity and culture and diminish the colonial status of Wales *vis-a-vis* England.

A coastal route from Bangor to Aberystwyth and onward to Carmarthen/Cardiff could provide some early quick wins in terms of access and tourism in the northwest. My submission on the National Transport Plan refers.

## **3. The case for electrification of other railway lines in Wales, including the Valleys Lines, the Severn Tunnel diversionary route via Gloucester and the North Wales Mainline**

Refer to 1.

Four-tracking the GW mainline (with an additional full- or high-speed line, plus ‘slow’ lines between Bristol and Cardiff) would reduce the pressure on the Severn Tunnel diversionary route via Gloucester.

## **4. The need for speed upgrades and capacity improvements across the network in Wales (looking beyond Control Period 4 – 2009-2014 and the Wales Route Utilisation Strategy to 2019)**

Reduced speed variation would be a realistic and attainable objective medium- to long-term.

Refer to 1.

## **5. The state of the Severn Tunnel and the need for a second Severn rail tunnel/crossing**

For strategic reasons, four-tracking the Severn is essential (refer to 3.).

This could be achieved a simple duplication of the existing line, or by constructing a new high-speed and probably Newport-avoiding line, either possibly via a barrage at Shoots..

Once this new route were available, the tunnel could be closed for up-grading, re-dimensioned and waterproofed for all future uses including freight and high-speed.

The extent of any excavation of the tunnel floor, if required, for overhead or deep-sea containers, would be minimised by the use of TramPower's low-profile LR55 rail (details available on request).

## **6. Further use of light rail in urban areas**

This is the subject of a separate submission.

## **7. The case for new stations and new/reopened lines**

All low-impact alternatives to motor vehicles and their inefficient use should be carefully considered. LR offers a lower-cost sustainable option, even at the cost of electrification.

Access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users should be prioritised in expenditure allocations.

## **8. How to increase the use of the railways for freight, including freight transfer facilities**

A level-playing field on which all modes pay their full costs (including external costs) is a pre-requisite.

Energy costs and localisation will reduce freight volumes and encourage a shift to rail away from road. Government policy should operate to encourage that shift.

Peripherally-located freight consolidation centres would provide significant efficiency gains in the logistics sector and environmental improvements.

Further information is available on request.

## **9. The role of the Welsh Government, Regional Transport Consortia and Regional Transport Plans in future railway planning**

The continuing subsidy for rail operations in Wales requires an appropriate *quid pro quo*. The Welsh Assembly Government should positively consider taking an equity stake in any new rail development or rolling stock purchase.

A partnership with Network Rail is proposed.

Rail requires a national perspective with an international dimension. But it has an important local constituent as well – LR.

While consortia input on (HR) rail network issues should be enhanced, the RTCs should be more focused on the rationalisation of their bus networks and their potential conversion to LR.

**10. Whether or not the Welsh Government should be seeking additional powers and associated funding that would allow to them to directly fund railway infrastructure in Wales, in the same way as the Scottish Government does in Scotland.**

The Welsh Government should progressively enhance its powers in respect of transportation as in all things towards full independence provided sufficient expertise is available to support it.

Closer relations with Europe through regional bodies and the 'Celtic Arc' and beyond should foster inter-dependence politically, culturally, socially and economically on a global basis.

## **Note on Delivery**

There will be a strong tendency to develop a programme of *les grands projets* in transportation and energy to meet apparently pressing needs. This would be a serious and time-wasting mistake.

The funding is simply not available for such a programme to be considered either realistic or affordable.

However, there is a need for *la grande vision strategique*, and careful incremental programme that would achieve that vision over time.

Wales, like all countries, will have a sustainable carrying capacity – a population that may be sustained in reasonable comfort and quality. This limit may already have been exceeded.

Facing climatic disaster on a global scale – which is a real possibility – Wales should be able to transition to a steady-state economy within 20 – 30 years.

Careful consideration should be given to how population size may be managed to ensure the natural limits of our environment and resources are respected. There is a huge reservoir of ingenuity, enterprise and knowledge in Wales that could be deployed to move our country towards a sustainable future.

Future emphasis should be on personal, educational, cultural and social growth – the hallmarks of sustainable, stable and equitable societies in history – rather than the gross economic growth that has undermined our life-support systems since the Industrial Revolution and now threatens all life on Planet Earth.

It is unlikely that the current economic models will enable delivery of a sustainable society.

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