

## The Future Of The Wales And Borders Franchise

The line between Shrewsbury and Chester suffers the Wales & Border Franchise worst Pinch Point on its entire network; this is due to the 9.5 miles of single line railway between Chester (Saltney Junction) and Wrexham, this line between Saltney Junction and Wrexham was originally constructed as a twin track railway and subsequently rationalised, it is believed in the late 1980s, to provide the single track that exists today.

Due to the building of the A483 at a then saving of less than half a million pounds on a new single track bridge at Gresford, in place of a dual track bridge again without consultation. This single track is now running at saturation point, and is unable to allow any further services (max 3 trains an hour), it is also Network Rails main pinch point in Wales, if a unit fails the line is blocked for hours causing passengers great frustration.

During the past 6 years under 2 Welsh Government Ministers whose portfolio included rail, £32 million had been ring fenced to redouble the line between Saltney Junction and Rossett a distance of 7.5 miles plus extra infrastructure at Gresford junction and work on the remaining 1.5 miles which can not be redoubled due to the Gresford single track rail bridge over the A483. Extra capacity is urgently needed especially for the new franchise due to the building of the super prison to be built on Wrexham Industrial Estate for 2000 prisoners whose families many of which have no option but to travel by rail. This has been proven by the building of the new prison at Addiewell in Scotland which is a 500 place prison located close to a station with an hourly train service and the station passenger usage has increased from 10k per year to 25k per year since the prison has opened. So looking at what has happened in Addiewell, it can easily be estimated that for a 2000 place prison on Wrexham Industrial Estate that the growth in extra passengers using the Chester to Wrexham hourly service can easily be increased by 60k passengers per year and with this additional capacity that there will be a need for the line to be redoubled and an extra station at Wrexham North to take the extra passenger capacity.

The North East Wales rail task group funded by Welsh Government recommends an interchange hub at a new north Wrexham Station to cater for extra numbers and service Wrexham industrial estate the second largest in the UK.

2/06/12 The Welsh Government has prioritised the National Transport Plan and this was published December 2012 where the Plan includes a commitment to deliver the North to South Wales rail capacity enhancement project. This project will include redoubling the majority of the single track between Wrexham and Saltney Junction, and associated track and signalling work. This circa £45m project is fully funded and the construction phase of the project is expected to commence in 2013, and be completed in 2015.

WelTAG Stage 1 study - the North East Wales Area Based Transport Study (NEWABTS) - was commissioned jointly by Welsh Government and Taith the North Wales Regional Transport Consortium to address the NTP commitment and the overview from the June 2012 report under Package 7 includes a number of major capacity enhancements across all transport modes which seek to improve connections between Wrexham and Chester. The rail elements of this package include a new station at Wrexham North (Ref.71), shuttle services between Chester and Wrexham and a fast service between Llandudno and Manchester, which connect, into Wrexham. Many of these service enhancements will require significant additional rail infrastructure. Requires doubling of track between Wrexham and Chester (Saltney Jct), plus turn back facilities at Wrexham. 7.8.2 Short-term Strategy Progressing plans to double track the line between Chester (Saltney Jct) and Wrexham, will enable future service enhancements and a new station to be provided at Wrexham North in the medium-term. 7.8.3 Medium-term Strategy Studies undertaken in the short-term will also enable provision of additional services between Chester and Wrexham CBC stations and a new station at Wrexham North to offer a significantly improved rail capacity along this corridor.

The current Minister Edwina Hart whose portfolio includes delivery of passenger rail services through the Wales and Borders franchise on July 8 2013 spoke at Gowerton railway station when she officially launched the new services that was part of £48m programme to deliver more trains and a more reliable service to passengers in South West Wales. Mrs Hart said: "The Welsh Government's priority is to ensure that we have a transport system that helps improve the economic competitiveness of Wales and that provides good access to jobs and services and reducing poverty for the people of Wales. "Better links between communities

mean better access to employment, education training and leisure opportunities which is a key aspect of tackling economic and social deprivation, and I am pleased that we have been able to support this important project.”

Without the redouble of the line between Wrexham and Chester, no extra services can be accommodated, the line between Shrewsbury and Wrexham enhanced to 90mph working, will give a few minutes increase in speed and comfort but the passenger experience will be lost, should the line remain single North of Wrexham, preventing the new franchise from running any extra services.

Bob Hargreaves