

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes	Enterprise and Business Committee
Ymchwiliad i'r Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer dyfodol Seilwaith y Rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru	Inquiry into the Priorities for the future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure
WRI 14	WRI 14
Cyngor Gorllewin Sir Gaer a Chaer	Cheshire West and Chester Council

1.0 Background and purpose of this document

1.1 The Enterprise and Business Committee of the National Assembly for Wales is holding an inquiry in to the future priorities for Welsh rail infrastructure. The committee has invited comments on issues relevant to the rail infrastructure in Wales, to inform decisions on Welsh rail infrastructure in and beyond) the Network Rail (NR) Control Period 6 (CP6), which is the period 2019 – 24. Details are available within the following link:

<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=207>

1.2 The Welsh Government (WG) has powers to fund rail infrastructure investment, although primary funding for NR comes from the United Kingdom Government. The scope of this inquiry includes the relationship and planning between the Welsh and English rail networks how this can be further co-ordinated to deliver two way cross border benefits.

1.3 Cheshire West and Chester Council welcome the opportunity to input to this inquiry. This document provides comments on behalf of the Council, and is based upon the specific topics mentioned within the consultation document in addition to the role of cross border rail in terms of wider transport and connectivity priorities.

1.4 This response is submitted specifically in the context of the north Wales (including links with the Marches and mid Wales) and cross border areas.

2.0 Priorities for rail infrastructure investment

2.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaCC) recognizes the full value of efficient multi directional cross border connectivity with Wales as being essential for prosperity of the region's competitiveness, building sustainable local and regional economic prosperity whilst generating employment opportunities. The Council places high importance of collaboration with Welsh stakeholders including membership of the Mersey Dee Alliance (Mersey-Dee cross-border region generating £17bn GVA per annum), collaboration with the WG, NR and Merseytravel on the Halton Curve scheme and work with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. It is therefore important that the scope of the Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry is broadened to include assessment of cross border investment priorities as well as within Wales.

2.2 Strategic planning of rail infrastructure needs to form part of an integrated multi modal approach, recognizing the importance of the north Wales cross border corridors serving Ireland, north Wales, north west England and beyond, with the existing enterprise and labour market of this shared economy providing significant potential to help deliver the objectives of the Northern Powerhouse. The Leader of CWaCC Councillor Samantha Dixon spoke at the North Wales Economic Ambition Board Rail Summit held in November 2015, with a communique being issued on behalf of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Mersey Dee Alliance and the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership offering a combined co-ordinating group that will seek to work together with the UK Government and the WG to commission research and studies that can: -

- Guide investment in the rail services and infrastructure serving the areas.
- Underpin the proposed growth plan for submission to the UK and Welsh Governments and the submission to the Northern Powerhouse Minister

2.3 Business cases for rail infrastructure investment (Freight and passenger) need to embrace the full cross border extent of immediate and ongoing environmental, social, health and wider economic benefits of schemes and to link those across schemes. Limiting evaluation purely to the route based transport benefits will not be truly representative of the return of the investment. In a number of cases, the geographical location of infrastructure investment requirement will have implications across a number of other local transport authority areas and across the Wales border. One example of this being the work of Merseytravel, WG and CWaCC to reinstate regular passenger rail service using Halton Curve. Although investment by the WG to fund doubling a section of track between Rossett and Chester to reduce north / south Wales journey times is a significant commitment, if the section of double track is extended beyond Rossett to Wrexham, this would also enable two way improved links to Helsby / Frodsham, Runcorn and Liverpool South Parkway, (For Liverpool John Lennon Airport) whilst reducing construction costs through economies of scale.

2.4 A commitment is needed for electrification beyond Crewe and Warrington through Chester to Holyhead (also Wrexham / Shrewsbury) to avoid isolating the areas from an increasingly electrified rail network in England. This investment is an essential element to maximise benefits of HS2 towards enabling classic compatible services to / from the high speed network in addition to electric trains serving the West Coast Main Line. – The latter enabling continuity of direct services to intermediate stations to London such as Stafford and Milton Keynes. The business case for electrification needs to fully embrace these wider network and socio economic benefits as opposed to being restricted to a more limited route cost benefit basis. The business case also needs to include the subsequent benefits that electrification of this line will achieve in future control periods, such as enabling an incremental approach to electrification of neighbouring lines.

2.5 The Wrexham – Bidston Borderlands line (Serving Neston within Cheshire West and Chester) is a further example of the importance of cross border scheme appraisal. In collaboration with other partners (Including Merseytravel) CWaCC funded a study demonstrating the growth potential that could be achieved through infrastructure investment such as increasing service frequency, extension beyond Bidston and ultimately electrification. Although a number of entities recognize the potential overall achievable benefits from their individual perspective, an holistic funding mechanism is needed that recognizes the overarching benefits and “places” outcomes.

2.6 A WG Task Force was established in 2013 by the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport consisting of a wide range of stakeholders which agreed a series of objectives necessary to create a rail network fit for purpose. These include improvements to local services; access to key markets; integrated services; and international access. One example being the need for improved rail (and bus) infrastructure access for employment opportunities at Deeside Industrial Park from Hawarden Bridge and Shotton Stations, which are essential to unlock a vast labour market including from Cheshire, Merseyside, Warrington north Wales and beyond, acting as a catalyst for increasing inward investment.

2.7 Improving direct access by rail between Manchester and Liverpool John Lennon airports, North Wales and Cheshire West needs to be addressed. The two airports provide a comprehensive and complementary portfolio of flights, collectively representing the major airports of choice from this region. Although Arriva Trains Wales have submitted a track access application to extend north Wales coast services to Manchester Airport from May 2016, even if this is granted, there are capacity issues at Manchester that may jeopardise continuation of that link in favour of services from elsewhere. Whilst CWaCC acknowledges that there is strong demand for direct rail services for Manchester Airport from elsewhere, it is important that this Inquiry (The Enterprise and Business Committee Welsh Rail Infrastructure) provides fully inclusive supporting evidence and funding commitment for the direct link with Cheshire West and north Wales. This similarly applies to providing supporting evidence for welsh rail infrastructure investment that would enable a direct rail link between the north Wales coast line, Wrexham, Chester, Helsby and Frodsham and Liverpool South Parkway for Liverpool John Lennon Airport using Halton Curve (Please also see paragraph 2.3).

2.8 An opportunity to significantly increase capacity for direct rail connectivity with Manchester Airport from North Wales, Cheshire West, Chester and the Wirral would be to develop the “Manchester Airport Western Link” This is a 3.5 mile new rail link between the airport and the Mid Cheshire Line (Chester – Northwich – Manchester) at Mobberley which would enable a major reduction of journey time (therefore making employment opportunities at the airport more accessible) whilst not being constrained by the limited availability of rail paths through Manchester. The Manchester Airport draft sustainable development plan consultation during 2015 referred to reviewing whether to continue safeguarding this route through the airport

site. Within its response to this consultation exercise, Cheshire West and Chester Council opposed withdrawal of safeguarding this route in recognition of the importance of this strategic transport investment to lead further growth of the cross border region and the Northern Powerhouse proposition whilst maximising the benefits of HS2.

2.9 Transport for the North (TfN) have commissioned a pan regional freight and logistics strategy leading to a transport network that will enable the logistics sector to drive growth and job creation across the north of England, supporting the vision of the Northern Powerhouse. Through this work stream which is led by Merseytravel (Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership representation is by Alan Dickin, Warrington Borough Council), the Welsh Government is developing formal arrangements for these benefits to be enhanced and extended to include north Wales. The draft strategy will be produced at the end of January 2016, with the final strategy being presented to the Chancellor in spring 2016.

3.0 Relating Interdependencies

3.1 CWaCC is a member of Rail North Ltd (RNL), which will be jointly managing the Northern and Trans Pennine Express (TPE) rail franchises with the Department for Transport (DfT). Through effective collaboration and collation of robust evidence bases, significant customer improvements will be delivered within these franchises to be introduced in April 2016, reflecting prevailing growth patterns and unlocking the potential for further patronage growth. This work forms one element of the wider objectives of Transport of the North (TfN) to prioritise multi modal transport infrastructure investment across the north of England to significantly improve the economic competitiveness of the region, creating sustainable growth and improvements to quality of life. The combined roles of RNL and TfN demonstrate a need to ensure that a similar joined up approach to prioritising multi modal transport infrastructure and rail franchise renewal is essential for Wales, whilst ensuring a seamless approach across borders through engagement with RNL and TfN. It is by focusing upon how the pooling of resources across organisations (such as NR, DfT and WG) can best ensure that these and relating outcomes are timely achieved, that should inform the governance arrangements and co ordination of investment, as opposed to being derived from considering the issues / opportunities of devolvement of Welsh rail infrastructure.

3.2 CWaCC continues to highlight the urgent need to take forward dialogue in respect of informing renewal of the Wales and Borders franchise which is to be fully devolved to the WG. This franchise will need to be growth orientated and at least match the magnitude of improvements of the Northern and TPE franchises (This has recently been discussed within a recent meeting of the Marches Strategic Rail Group attended by Dorothy Higginson, Commercial Manager, Wales & Borders franchise the from the DfT) to meet current and potential growth, recognizing the need for shared commitment to investment within Wales and England based on the passenger journey patterns. Relating this to the priorities for the future of Welsh rail

infrastructure, there is clearly a need for these to be aligned to the preparation of the specification for renewal of franchises, particularly Wales and Borders, to enable implementation of a significantly strengthened rail service within and beyond Wales. This is equally important in respect of the West Coast Main Line franchise and HS2. i.e. Whilst having a periodic review process has merit, this needs to have more flexibility to improve alignment with franchise renewal processes to make sure that infrastructure investment is matched by service delivery.

3.3 An important element of Welsh rail infrastructure investment is to review the capacity and configuration of Chester rail station to identify and implement any infrastructure requirements needed to meet future growth projections. This is one important example of the location of infrastructure outside Wales which has a significant impact on delivery of (rail) transport services within Wales, demonstrating the need for cross border commitment and collaboration.

3.4 The priorities of CWaCC for Welsh rail infrastructure are included within an emerging Transport Strategy for the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership. This strategy prioritises the transport infrastructure investment schemes that will have the greatest impact on job creation. In addition for schemes to show their job creation impact once delivered, it is important that management of the construction and supply chain processes are structured to maximise benefits for the local labour markets, developing skills and supporting business development. Opportunities need to include third sector as well as the commercial sector.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 CWaCC greatly welcomes having an opportunity to comment on the priorities for the future of Welsh rail infrastructure through the consultation exercise of the National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee. The Council wishes to proactively further develop existing two way collaboration with the National Assembly and other agencies in Wales, reflecting the shared cross border economy and the interdependencies of key decisions.

4.2 Welsh rail infrastructure investment needs to include improving the overall passenger experience; providing safe and comfortable stations that meet or exceed expectations; improving the quality of the journey; reducing travel times; improving punctuality and reliability. Similarly, the investment also needs to facilitate increased use of rail for freight transport, including “the last mile” terminal / siding facilities.

4.3 Although this consultation response contains comments on a number of issues relating to Welsh rail infrastructure priorities, CWaCC would greatly welcome an opportunity to meet with the Enterprise and Business Committee, and provide any relating additional supporting information that would help the committee.

Councillor Brian Clarke

Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, Cheshire West and Chester Council