

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 12	WRI 12
Grŵp Defnyddwyr Rheilffyrdd Gogledd Sir Gaer	North Cheshire Rail Users' Group

North Cheshire Rail Users' Group



**Monitoring rail services
from Chester & Ellesmere Port
via Helsby, Frodsham & Runcorn
to Liverpool & Manchester**

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES – RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE INQUIRY PF: 0008724

NCRUG are pleased to have been given the opportunity to submit their comments against the above inquiry.

We note the consultation is in preparation for rail control period 6 and beyond, namely CP6 (2019/2024) and beyond and includes both passenger and freight.

We should preface our remarks by stating that we attended the Rail Summit promoted by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, (NWEAB), in Llandudno on 12th November 2015. This event left us with the clear message that future rail infrastructure enhancements in Wales should ignore political, geographical and national boundaries if the economic and social benefits of the 'Northern Powerhouse' and 'Transport for the North' initiatives are to be realised. We heartily agree with this philosophy; our campaign to re-open the Halton curve to bi-directional traffic has been our main project for many years and the connectivity of North East Wales and the North Wales Coast to Merseyside, including Liverpool Airport, has played a significant part in building the Business Case for Halton curve re-instatement.

The importance of the recognition that the economy of, for instance, Wrexham and North East Wales is strongly orientated towards Merseyside, is an important first step towards promoting growth in both areas, provided the infrastructure reflects this fact. Likewise the North Wales Coast, and easy access to Liverpool Airport, with its preponderance of budget airlines, presents an ideal opportunity to expand tourism.

Borderlands Line:- In addition we are supportive of improvements in both service and infrastructure on the Wrexham to Bidston line. Better connectivity at Shotton High and Low level stations and a new Deeside Parkway station would be a vital first step in progressing the synergy which exists in the economies of North and East Wales and Merseyside and the whole area covered by Transport for the

North, especially when the Halton curve is opened. A half hourly service would greatly improve connectivity at both Shotton and Wrexham.

Saltney/Rossett redoubling:- The re-doubling of the Chester/Wrexham line between Saltney Junction and Rossett is welcomed and is further proof of the need to increase capacity on this line not only to benefit Holyhead/Cardiff services but also, and perhaps more importantly, to allow new services northwards from Wrexham to Merseyside and Liverpool Airport via the Halton curve. Re-doubling of the rest of this line, south of Rossett, should be considered for urgent execution in CP6, if not earlier, in order to realise the full potential of this line in developing economic growth in the Wrexham area. We note the new prison on Wrexham Industrial Estate is due to open in 2017. Easy public transport to/from the prison is essential to dissuade the use of cars and the congestion and pollution which follow.

In addition to the prison, we understand, there are approximately 7000 employed on Wrexham Industrial Estate many of whom could be persuaded to use rail and a dedicated bus either from Wrexham General or from a new station at Bradley. This would allow a direct and dedicated bus service to access the Trading Estate via the A5156/A534 and thus avoid the town centre.

Electrification:- Whilst some less expensive schemes for smaller gains should not be dismissed or delayed, there is no doubt that electrification of Holyhead to Crewe, Runcorn, (via Halton curve), and Warrington are essential if the full benefits of the Northern Powerhouse and HS2 initiatives are to be gained.

Not only will line speeds and dwell times be improved, thereby giving faster journey times and improved connectivity, but rolling stock and infrastructure maintenance costs and pollution will also be reduced.

Electrification of the North Wales Coast Main line would present an ideal opportunity to re-instate sections of four tracking and passing loops to increase capacity and allow freight movements from Holyhead to be developed thus relieving the congestion on the A55 Trunk Road, (see our comments on 'Freight' below).

HS2:- It is essential that Welsh infrastructure and services are designed in such a way as to exploit the advantages which will be available when HS2 reaches Crewe. Classic Compatible rolling stock would permit through running to London and the West Midlands without having to make connections.

It is important, therefore, that steps be taken to ensure Classic Compatible stock can run through to Holyhead and Wrexham with any necessary gauge enhancements and track layouts undertaken before the arrival of HS2 at Crewe.

Northern Powerhouse:- The planned opening of the Halton curve during CP5 (2014/2019) and electrification from Chester to Warrington Bank Quay and to Halton Junction will provide the vital links required to connect North and East Wales to the Northern Powerhouse area thereby promoting growth throughout Wales and northern England.

The Welsh Assembly Government should maintain constant discussion with Transport for the North in order that the full economic benefits of close integration of rail infrastructure and services permeate throughout the whole of Wales, particularly North Wales, and the north of England.

Connectivity:- This is a most important consideration as poor connectivity can be a barrier to rail travel and thereby have an adverse effect on economic and social growth. Conversely good connectivity encourages rail travel and helps to influence modal shift from road to rail. This, in turn, improves the environment and reduces congestion on the road system, particularly the A55 Holyhead/Chester Trunk road, which is often subject to delays.

We are concerned that the new Wales & Borders franchise and the possible advent of partial electrification, could lead, at least temporarily, to existing services, such as Manchester/Llandudno, being truncated at Chester. We would strongly advocate that this well used and profitable service be maintained as a through service between Manchester and Llandudno without the burden of changing at Chester.

Freight: - The A55 Trunk Road is the main artery for freight traffic to and from Ireland and the UK and Continental Motorway networks. Consideration should be given to transferring much of this traffic to rail. Facilities at Holyhead need to permit easy transfer of container traffic from and to the ferry from a rail terminal. To the best of our knowledge such facilities do not currently exist at Holyhead although, in the past, such facilities did exist.

The rail infrastructure will require enhancement by provision of passing loops and some four tracking using existing alignments which, in turn, will require enhancement to bring them up to present day standards.

Looking ahead to the opening of HS2 it should be noted that this will be built to Berne Gauge standard thus permitting whole trailers, without tractors, to be loaded onto special low-loader wagons. This method is widely used on the Continent and helps to reduce HGV movements. Whilst current plans for HS2 do not include freight movements this could change, particularly as HS1 does accommodate freight to and from the Continent as far as Barking.

Considerable work was done in the 1990's by the 'Piggy-back Consortium' to develop the transport of trailers, (plus containers) by rail on specially designed low-loader wagons but this was not pursued. It may be time to re-consider this concept as a way of relieving HGV congestion on our roads.

Retrograde step:- We understand Network Rail are planning to remove the centre track at Abergele & Pensarn station as this short section of track is currently not used. Presumably this is to save maintenance costs on the two sets of points.

This is a retrograde step and should be resisted as future demands upon the railway will inevitably mean this small section of track will be required to increase capacity. Re-instatement at some future date will, we believe, cost considerably more than the saving in maintenance costs.

Eight specific topics identified in your inquiry:- With regard to the eight specific topics identified in your inquiry we endorse the comments made by the Wrexham/Bidston Rail Users' Association, (WBRUA), and for the sake of brevity have not repeated them herein. We trust, however, you will take our endorsement of them into account in your forthcoming deliberations.

We hope you find our comments useful and would be grateful if you would keep us informed on future developments and consultations.

Cedric Green, 13/01/2016