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Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Masnachfrait Rheilffyrdd a chyflwyno Metro / Rail Franchise and the Metro

Ymateb gan Cymdeithas Defnyddwyr Rheilffordd Wreccsam-Bidston / Evidence from
Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users' Association (WBRUA)



Representing rail users, potential rail users and the rail transport interests of communities along the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor

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President: The Rt Hon Lord Jones PC

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Submission to: the National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Wales and Borders rail franchise priorities

1. Introduction and Overview

1.1. As the Chairman of the Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users' Association (WBRUA), representing rail users, potential rail users and the rail transport interests of communities along the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor, I am pleased to submit a short paper on behalf of the Association.

1.2. In this paper the WBRUA recommends that the new Wales and Borders Franchise prioritises early improvements to service frequency together with a station for the Deeside Industrial Park, better service reliability and improved ticketing/fares on the Wrexham-Bidston line alongside improvements to communication with passengers during disruption across the Franchise. A brief rationale for each of these recommendations is provided below.

2. Wrexham-Bidston Service frequency / Station for Deeside Industrial Park

2.1. The current hourly daytime service between Wrexham and Bidston on Monday to Saturday falls back to a less frequent service during the evenings and on Sundays. The first train into Wrexham Central from stations on the Wrexham-Bidston line arrives after 08.30; too late for many workers. Although there is a significant population, together with employment centres and leisure opportunities directly served by the line, the currently infrequent (and unreliable) service fails to attract many potential users.

2.2. The potential for connectivity between the Wrexham-Bidston line and other routes at Shotton and Wrexham General is lost because of tight connections (which will be missed with even a slight degree of late running) or excessive waiting times. For example the rail travel time from Chester to Hawarden is a respectable 13 minutes but the wait between trains at Shotton during most of the day is 52 minutes.

2.3. Rail connectivity linking communities and employment locations in North-East Wales and across the border into North-West England is poor, forcing many to drive to work on heavily congested roads and denying work opportunities to those who can't afford, or who are unable to drive to work. Young people are at a particular disadvantage if they need to drive

because the cost of running a car can represent a significant element of their salary which many may not be able to afford.

- 2.4. About 30% of the Welsh economy is in North-East Wales alone. There is also significant and growing economic activity immediately over the border in North West England which employs many Welsh residents. The 2011 census however shows rail's share for travel to work as 1% in Flintshire and 0.9% in Wrexham; both less than half of the overall Welsh average of 2.1%.
- 2.5. The WBRUA also notes that 1 in 5 applicants for work on the Deeside Industrial Park are subsequently turning down interviews or job offers due to inaccessibility; the Deeside Industrial Park is one of the largest and most successful parks of this type in Europe, yet there is an unattractive, infrequent service and no convenient station on the adjacent Wrexham-Bidston railway line.
- 2.6. *The WBRUA believes that the new franchise must prioritise, for introduction as soon as possible, a more frequent service on the line which starts earlier, runs later and connects effectively with other services at Shotton and Wrexham General together with a suitable station for the Deeside Industrial Park (a new station, 'Deeside Parkway' near the A548?).*

3. Wrexham-Bidston Service Reliability

3.1. Service reliability on the Wrexham-Bidston line is recognised as being poor by the communities it serves in North East Wales and North West England. In terms of the rail industry's Public Performance Measure (PPM), in recent years that for Wrexham-Bidston has usually been lower than the overall PPM for ATW and has been consistently lower than that for Merseyrail, which operates a similar stopping service on other nearby lines (albeit running much more frequently). See Figure 1 below for details of the PPM.

Railway Industry Reporting Period	From	To	Overall ATW PPM	WXC-BID (Borderlands) PPM	Average difference between overall ATW and WXC-BID PPM over last 13 reporting periods	Merseyrail PPM (for comparison)	BID-SHT trains not run (www.recentraintimes.co.uk)		
							Mon-Fri	Sat	Sun
17/11	08/01/2017	04/02/2017	93.0%	92.9%	1.0%	97.0%	1.92%	3.57%	0.00%
17/10	11/12/2016	07/01/2017	88.3%	90.6%	0.8%	95.6%	4.51%	5.56%	0.00%
17/09	13/11/2016	10/12/2016	86.8%	86.4%	0.7%	92.2%	2.50%	0.00%	4.17%
17/08	16/10/2016	12/11/2016	88.6%	77.6%	1.5%	94.5%	5.36%	8.93%	0.00%
17/07	18/09/2016	15/10/2016	94.0%	89.8%	1.2%	96.3%	4.64%	5.36%	0.00%
17/06	21/08/2016	17/09/2016	92.6%	94.3%	0.9%	95.6%	1.82%	7.14%	0.00%
17/05	24/07/2016	20/08/2016	90.2%	90.9%	1.1%	96.2%	3.93%	5.36%	8.33%
17/04	26/06/2016	23/07/2016	91.1%	91.5%	1.3%	96.1%	2.50%	3.57%	0.00%
17/03	29/05/2016	25/06/2016	92.4%	91.5%		95.7%	1.09%	3.57%	0.00%
17/02	01/05/2016	28/05/2016	93.8%	96.4%		96.6%	1.09%	1.79%	0.00%
17/01	01/04/2016	30/04/2016	94.4%	92.3%		97.0%			
16/13	06/03/2016	31/03/2016	92.6%	92.1%		97.1%			
16/12	07/02/2016	05/03/2016	91.9%	91.0%		94.0%			
16/11	10/01/2016	06/02/2016	92.2%	94.7%		95.4%			
16/10	13/12/2015	09/01/2016	89.9%	92.7%		95.4%			
16/9	15/11/2015	12/12/2015	87.8%	77.7%		89.7%			
16/8	18/10/2015	14/11/2015	90.1%	81.9%		93.4%			
16/7	20/09/2015	17/10/2015	92.7%	93.0%		96.0%			
16/6	23/08/2015	19/09/2015	93.2%	91.8%		96.1%			
16/5	26/07/2015	22/08/2015	91.5%	90.5%		96.1%			
WXC-BID PPM BETTER than overall ATW PPM									
WXC-BID PPM WORSE than overall ATW PPM									

Figure 1 – Comparison of Wrexham-Bidston, ATW and Merseyrail PPM by period

- 3.2. The PPM figures in Figure 1 do not however fully reflect the impact of unplanned, short notice cancellations which occur throughout the year. Such cancellations deter many potential users who know, after experiencing such a cancellation, that the service can not be relied upon.
- 3.3. With little recovery time available in the timetable (the working timetable is so tight that the public timetable shows many trains arriving in Wrexham Central xx.32 but leaving at xx.30), any late running will accumulate with each successive service until control terminates late running northbound trains at Shotton and turns them back to Wrexham. With two trains working the route on weekdays, when conditions are such that late running develops with both of them, this results in two consecutive trains being turned back in Wales. Such trains do not reach Bidston to connect with Merseyrail services to Liverpool and a gap of three hours or more between trains at the intermediate stations in England (Neston, Heswall and Upton) frequently occurs.
- 3.4. There has been no significant vegetation management on this steeply graded route in recent years; indeed vegetation overhangs the track and brushes against trains at many locations. When poor rail conditions develop during the leaf fall season the Class 150 units (which currently operate the service) are physically incapable of maintaining the timetable; late running then develops resulting in some services being cancelled at short notice or, in extreme circumstances, the entire service can be suspended (as happened in 2016).
- 3.5. *The WBRUA believes that performance on the Wrexham-Bidston line could and should be better and that the new franchise must seek to achieve a comparable performance to that of Merseyrail for the line.*

4. Ticketing / Fares

- 4.1. On the Wrexham-Bidston line it is only possible to purchase tickets at Wrexham Central, Wrexham General, Shotton and Bidston stations. Passengers joining at any of the 11 other stations without a ticket have to buy tickets from the conductor after joining the train. As the conductors have to operate train doors at all station stops, it is sometimes impossible for them to sell tickets to everyone boarding the train (owing to the volume of passengers and proximity of stations on some sections) and revenue is lost. It is also not possible to buy tickets on rail replacement 'buses. The resultant lower ticket sales have a consequential adverse influence on rail industry passenger flow data, which is partially derived from an analysis of recorded ticket sales.
- 4.2. Owing to franchise and political boundaries, the cost of a through ticket to stations in Merseyside from stations on the Wrexham-Bidston line stations located outside Merseyside is higher than that on Merseyrail's Wirral line, which runs out of Merseyside to Chester and Ellesmere Port. For example Merseyrail's off-peak Day Saver fare available from Chester for £5.10 will cover a return journey to Liverpool or even as far as Southport whereas the cheapest Neston to Liverpool return fare is £6.50 (off-peak) and that to Southport is £13.50 (anytime) even though the distance by rail from Neston to both Liverpool and Southport is 4 miles less than that from Chester.
- 4.3. Notwithstanding the current deficiencies with both the service and ticketing identified above, patronage of the Wrexham-Bidston line service, as shown in Figure 2 below, is steadily increasing with an overall growth of around 75% between 2006/7 and 2014/15. These

figures have been abstracted by the WBRUA from the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR's) Station Usage Data, which is again partially derived from ticket sales. This level of increase on those sections where the conductor has historically struggled to collect fares between stations indicates that further revenue is being lost and that passenger estimates are increasingly likely understate the true number of people travelling.

All stations except interchange stations.

Station Name	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Growth from 2006/2007
Bidston										
Upton	12,976	15,477	20,842	21,036	22,720	24,118	23,750	27,960	31,460	142.45%
Heswall	23,409	24,670	44,592	45,180	48,660	54,628	51,820	58,408	55,860	138.63%
Neston	32,716	35,922	36,960	36,230	44,598	46,546	48,476	51,886	53,702	64.15%
Hawarden Bridge	3,652	2,932	9,750	6,632	4,540	4,472	5,422	4,088	4,872	33.41%
Shotton										
Hawarden	30,987	30,407	36,778	38,066	37,896	39,140	38,156	39,932	36,422	17.54%
Buckley	36,328	40,658	43,038	48,364	51,472	52,404	52,100	50,544	51,684	42.27%
Penyffordd	16,910	14,980	16,606	18,700	21,082	21,856	21,212	22,156	24,582	45.37%
Hope (Flintshire)	20,148	22,525	23,800	22,648	24,186	25,522	27,652	54,052	27,470	36.34%
Caergwrle	20,065	21,056	19,780	23,778	22,186	21,886	24,264	24,438	23,034	14.80%
Cefn-y-Bedd	6,616	7,795	8,526	8,492	9,284	8,898	9,372	9,388	8,918	34.79%
Gwersyllt	22,433	23,883	28,234	32,036	34,026	35,524	37,386	40,172	39,938	78.03%
Wrexham General										
Wrexham Central	20,457	19,736	19,680	23,338	31,952	33,098	41,746	53,142	73,444	259.02%
	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	
	246,697	260,041	308,586	324,500	352,602	368,092	381,356	436,166	431,386	74.86%
Growth from 2006/2007		5.41%	25.09%	31.54%	42.93%	49.21%	54.58%	76.80%	74.86%	

Figure 2 – Wrexham-Bidston Line Patronage (From ORR Station Usage data)

4.4. The WBRUA believes that the new franchise should seek to improve revenue collection by the provision of smart-card and credit/debit card compatible ticket machines at all stations (or possibly on the trains), introduction of a penalty fare system for those who fail to buy tickets and consider Driver Controlled Operation (to free the conductor from door duty and thus improve revenue protection).

4.5. The new franchise must also address fare anomalies so that the communities it serves have comparable fares to other communities in the region which are served by other franchises.

5. Communication with Passengers during Disruption

5.1. Key issues to note:

- Although trains run until much later, Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) Customer Service Centre (CSC) closes at 20.00. The National Rail Enquiries (NRE) call centre in India is the only accessible telephone number for ATW passengers at unstaffed stations when ATW's customer service centre is closed.
- The Customer information screens (CIS) on the Wrexham-Bidston line's stations are usually on automatic (with any late running train not showing shortly after its expected departure time) and often not providing adequate information when disruption occurs.
- The Public Address (PA) system on the Wrexham-Bidston line's stations has rarely (if ever) been used to make announcements during disruption.
- There is no visibility of the location of rail replacement 'buses or the time that they will arrive at intermediate stations.

5.2. The WBRUA believes that the CIS and PA systems need to be used effectively when disruption occurs, that the franchise operator's CSC should be operational at all times that there are passengers on the network and that rail replacement 'buses are tracked so that the CSC can identify where they are and when they can be expected to arrive at stations.