

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum (NPTF) is an independent voluntary group, supported by its Individual, Family and Corporate Members. Its key aims and objectives are:

1.1.1 To work for the provision of effective, integrated transport services to, from and within North Pembrokeshire.

1.1.2 To promote the benefits of public transport.

1.1.3 To provide an advice and assistance service to the travelling public.

1.2 NPTF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's Inquiry into the Welsh Government's (WG) plans for the next Wales and Borders Rail Franchise and the next stage in development of the South Wales Metro.

1.3 As NPTF's work is focused on transport associated with the North Pembrokeshire region, our response will be based on the state of transport in this region - in particular with the provision of rail services and their integration with other transport modes. We also acknowledge and value the importance of our transport connections within the broader South West Wales region.

1.4 NPTF was set up in 2000 and immediately took an active interest in the process of setting up the current Wales and Borders rail franchise by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), and then by the Department of Transport (DfT). We watched that process with growing dismay: (a) Beginning with the complete lack of any involvement with stakeholders; (b) Followed by the abandonment of the initial relatively ambitious franchise specification; and (c) the subsequent implementation of the current franchise specification, with all of its acknowledged failings.

2 THE WELSH GOVERNMENT APPROACH

2.1 NPTF is paying close attention to the developments connected to the preparation for the next Wales and Borders rail franchise. From the start we have been very favourably impressed by the WG's approach, as it is in such complete contrast to the approach that was taken by the SRA and the DfT.

2.2 *In particular, NPTF welcomes the following actions in the WG's approach:*

2.2.1 The establishment of Transport for Wales (TfW) in 2015 as a wholly owned, not-for-profit company, to design and undertake the procurement process for the next Wales and Border Rail Service and Metro on its behalf.

2.2.2 Wide-ranging TfW objectives that include: (a) The delivery of the franchise competition and future management of the franchise; (b) The design of rail services that

support the Welsh Government's economic and social ambitions; and (c) Advising on investment options in terms of broader transport integration.

2.2.3 TfW is to inform the WG on the progress against each of the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) on a quarterly basis.

2.2.4 An impressive set of Key Outputs (for 2016/17) with regard to the award of the next franchise and delivery of the Metro programme.

2.2.5 Project procurement priorities that include: (a) New services and increased capacity on existing congested services; (b) Modern rolling stock, complying with modern standards; (c) Improved efficiency realising savings which can extend the service further; (d) Co-operation with other transport providers to provide an integrated public transport service; and (e) A commercial structure which incentivises the right behaviours with fair commercial returns.

2.3 The TfW franchise procurement process Indicative Timetable.

2.3.1 NPTF welcomes the fact that, to date, the following timetable 'elements' have met their target dates: (a) OJEU contract notice - July 2016; (b) Invitation to participate in dialogue - October 2016; (c) Bidders respond with outline solutions - November 2016; (d) Dialogue with the bidders - January 2017.

2.3.2 The Final Tender will be between July to September 2017 and the Contract Award will be made in December 2017.

2.4 TfW arrangements for stakeholder engagement

2.4.1 NPTF welcomed the fact that the four short-listed bidders were expected to engage with stakeholders and that NPTF was on the list of stakeholders that the bidders were provided with. NPTF representatives have held useful and informative meetings with representatives from three of the bidders

2.4.2 NPTF also welcomes the fact that TfW will be holding regional stakeholder meetings at the end of March and beginning of April. NPTF will be represented at the meeting scheduled for 29th March in Carmarthen, and we have begun to circulate information about the meetings to the interested parties on our mailing lists.

3 FRANCHISE SPECIFICATION PRIORITIES

3.1 NPTF's response will be based on the fact that almost all passengers travelling to or from North Pembrokeshire will be making long-distance journeys of over an hour; many of which will include making connections with other transport services.

3.2 Passengers from the area make use of the two Fishguard stations (Fishguard Harbour and Fishguard and Goodwick), as well as the request stops at Clarboston Road and Clunderwen. Ferry passengers travelling to or from Rosslare connect with rail services at the Fishguard Harbour station.

3.3 Rolling stock priorities

3.3.1 Overcrowding has a much greater impact on passengers who are making long journeys, than on those making shorter/commuter type journeys. Consequently, it is vitally important that efforts be made to improve current rolling stock capacity on long-journey services; thereby removing possible disincentives towards travelling by train. All passengers (not just the disabled or elderly) should be able to get a seat on long-journey services, and in seats that are aligned with windows.

3.3.2 Bearing in mind the long journeys referred to above, all carriages should provide sufficient space for a considerable amount of luggage, as well as for prams/strollers and bikes. This space should be over and above the spaces that are reserved for wheel-chair users.

3.3.3 There should be a sufficient number of toilets on long trains, including more than one accessible toilet. All toilets should provide baby changing facilities. There should be well maintained, clean toilet facilities on every train.

3.3.3 Free to use mobile connectivity (including Wi-Fi), as well as at-seat mobile device charging points should be provided on all trains.

3.3.4 On board catering services should be appropriate for longer journeys. If not provided by an at-seat trolley service, catering services for longer journeys should be easily accessible for disabled and elderly passengers and for those travelling with children; and should include a reasonable choice of food and drink that is suitable for those on special diets.

3.4 Information provision on trains, platforms and in station buildings

3.4.1 Information about existing, delayed and/or amended services should be accurate and up-to-date and available on all information modes.

3.4.2 Communication about planned service disruptions should be provided in sufficient time to enable people to make alternative travel plans. Alternative arrangements should be made available for passengers so that they can continue their journeys. If this is not possible there should be an explanation of the rights passengers have to complain or claim compensation.

3.4.3 There should be a commitment to provide national GPS based train location systems, to improve train running real time information, particularly away from multiple aspect signalling areas, and an automatic system to link such real time running information into CIS at stations.

3.5 Service connectivity - Provision of integrated transport services

3.5.1 The importance of effective service connectivity in both urban and rural areas cannot be overemphasised. Current timetables, as well as many of the seasonal timetable changes, do not always provide seamless journeys for travellers.

3.5.1.1 One to three minute connection times are extremely worrying for all types of passengers, and this is compounded when services are running late.

3.5.1.2 Problems occur when tight connections are provided at stations where there are a large number of platforms or where there are significant distances between stations and bus stops.

3.5.1.3 Missed connections are even more worrying for those who are travelling to or from remote rural stations/bus stops with infrequent services and/or inadequate station facilities, as well as for passengers who are travelling late in the evening.

3.5.2 Transport operators should not assume that once a passenger gets off a train or a bus this is the end of their journey; railway stations and bus stops should be regarded and treated as potential transport hubs.

3.6 Service frequency changes

3.6.1 NPTF recommends the following service changes:

3.6.1.1 Additional Sunday services to Fishguard. The current Sunday service frequency for the stations at Fishguard Harbour and Fishguard and Goodwick is 2 per 24 hourly. 'Would-be' rail passengers continue to tell NPTF that this is one of the reasons why they do not travel to/from Fishguard by train. The limited Sunday service is also a major issue for tourism providers in the area.

3.6.1.2 An additional Monday-Saturday mid-afternoon service to Fishguard. This would fill the long afternoon gap in services and provide a later departure to London than is currently provided by the 13:35 boat train service.

3.7 Request stop changes

3.7.1 A review of stations categorised as request stops needs to be undertaken.

3.7.2 Certain request stops have seen large increases in passenger numbers in the last 17 years, and the majority of trains now make regular stops at these stations.

3.7.3 Request stops impact on timekeeping and cause problems with onboard electronic information which often lists only full station stops. This causes occasional passengers to de-train at unstaffed stations prior to the stop they required.

3.7.4 In West Wales, Narberth, Clunderwen, Kidwelly and Johnson would justify having the request stop categorisation removed, while for consistency Ferryside and Clarboston Road should be similarly considered.

3.8 Station facilities

3.8.1 The NPTF considers the following station facilities are in need of improvement at Fishguard and Goodwick station and at the Clarboston Road and Clunderwen request stops:

3.8.1.1 Waiting spaces, as there are only a few, and all are provided in open platform shelters.

3.8.1.2 CIS information screens. There is not enough space on the very small screens to provide real time running information.

3.8.2 NPTF would support efforts by WG to encourage:

3.8.2.1 A continuing programme to improve step-free access across stations.

3.8.2.2 Improvements to facilitate interchange with bus services.

3.8.2.3 Provision of sufficient cycling and parking spaces.

3.8.2.4 Ensuring that pedestrian access to stations is of a high quality.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS – RISK MITIGATION AND VALUE FOR MONEY

4.1 The processes involved in risk assessment and mitigation, as well as in the calculation of value for money, are exceedingly complex, and require access to (and comprehension of) a vast amount of equally complex data, if the results of these exercises are to be credible.

4.2 As NPTF does not have the required expertise to undertake the above-mentioned tasks, we feel it would be best if comments about these matters came from those with the most appropriate expertise.

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