

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales

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

Masnachfaint Rheilffyrdd a chyflwyno Metro / Rail Franchise and the Metro

Ymateb gan Growth Track 360, Tasglu Rheilffyrdd Gogledd Cymru a Merswy Dyfrdwy / Evidence from Growth Track 360, the North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Task Force

Response to the National Assembly for Wales Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Inquiry into Rail Franchise and Metro Delivery from Growth Track 360, the North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Task Force.

The North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Task Force (RTF) is a partnership of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership, the Mersey Dee Alliance, Merseytravel, the North Wales Business Council and the Chester and North Wales Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the RTF is to campaign for better rail services in the cross-border North Wales and Mersey Dee area and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry.

Growth Track 360 sets out an ambitious programme that demonstrates how improved rail services can contribute to economic growth and job creation in the region. The prospectus sets out how improved network connectivity can help increase economic activity by £25bn and support the creation of up to 70,000 jobs.

www.growthtrack360.co.uk

It is noted that the Committee's inquiry is focused on the following issues:

- The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to the development, procurement and delivery of the rail franchise and South Wales Metro, including key risks and how they can be mitigated; and
- Priorities for the franchise specification and Metro delivery to ensure rail services meet the needs of current and future passengers throughout the franchise area, and deliver value for money for both passengers and the taxpayer

The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to the development, procurement and delivery of the rail franchise and South Wales Metro, including key risks and how they can be mitigated

The current rail franchise was let in 2003 on the basis of a zero growth in passenger numbers basis. This has left the area served by the franchise with inadequate rail services and in our view also suppressed passenger demand. The refranchising offers an opportunity for transformational change over the next franchise period. The new franchise must improve the frequency of rail services to key destinations, reduce key journey times and offer better quality services through improved rolling stock.

The Welsh Government (WG) must ensure that the next Wales and Borders (W&B) franchise will meet current and future passenger growth projections. Growthtrack 360 has stressed the importance of local authorities and the business sector using their local knowledge to help develop the prioritised outcomes for this franchise. This approach worked successfully with Rail North Ltd, making a transformational difference in the renewal of the Northern and Trans Pennine Express franchises from April 2016. It is

appreciated that the bidding process is different for this franchise, but nevertheless the level of stakeholder involvement to date has been disappointing.

It is essential in our view that cross-border arrangements for consultation and stakeholder representation are in place before the franchise is let and then subsequently. There should be cross border compliance and a strategic forum established, with appropriate representation from the Welsh Government, Department for Transport, the franchise operator, Network Rail and Transport Focus, lead officers and portfolio local transport authority Councillors throughout the franchise duration.

The RTF wishes to see a flexible approach to the new franchise that will allow improvements to services to be delivered in an incremental way that also allows for changing circumstances to be addressed. We would wish to see the franchise operator work closely with stakeholders so as to maximise the potential of our network and to be rewarded for initiatives that drive increased usage of the network. Because the bidding process has the outcomes identified some way into the process, it is not clear at this stage whether the outcomes sought by Growthtrack 360 will be incorporated in the franchise.

We have a positive working relationship with the Welsh Government and have been able to articulate our priorities clearly to key decision makers. It has been more difficult to engage with other key players involved in the franchise renewal.

Priorities for the franchise specification and Metro delivery to ensure rail services meet the needs of current and future passengers throughout the franchise area, and deliver value for money for both passengers and the taxpayer

The WG must ensure that the next Wales and Borders (W&B) franchise will meet current and future growth projections. Additional and more frequent services, better quality rolling stock and reduced journey times are at the core of our case. This will require funding for new services and also improvements to infrastructure. The WG and the Department for Transport (DfT) need to accelerate the implementation of a prioritised programme of critical infrastructure works.

Infrastructure Improvements

Wrexham General Station: Track and signalling improvements, creating a train turn back facility and provision of an additional platform.

Chester Station: One additional through platform with track and signalling improvements increasing the capacity for the number of trains to simultaneously approach or leave the station.

Crewe Station: Capacity, track and signalling layout to accommodate at least three trains per hour (in each direction) between Crewe and Chester, with a hub station to enable close proximity for transfer of passengers between HS2 and rail services to Chester, North Wales and Warrington.

Line speed and Signalling Improvements: especially along the North Wales Coast line

Service Improvements

Improved service frequencies and reduction of journey times. Having the ability to connect / split trains would maximise efficient use of capacity and improve connectivity. The current service provides poor peak time journeys for commuters to Chester. This needs to be addressed to serve unmet demand and investment being made within the city and surrounding areas.

The new committed service to Liverpool via Halton Curve must extend beyond Chester to Wrexham and along the North Wales coast.

Our work recommends that the following minimum connectivity requirements are needed, provided by a combination of connecting and through services:

GT360 has proposed a North Wales / Chester 4 or 5 per trains (including ICWC services to London) per hour minimum service providing connecting or through services to:

- Warrington and Manchester (some to airport) 2 trains per hour
- Crewe 3 trains per hour
- **Liverpool via Halton Curve 1 trains per hour**
- Birmingham International or Cardiff alternate hours

In addition improved services on the following routes are sought

- Wrexham – Bidston 2 trains per hour
- Llandudno – Blaenau Ffestiniog 2 trains per 3 hours

Importantly, links to the main airports serving the region at Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool John Lennon need improving with regular through rail services. Improvements to services **on Sundays and Bank Holidays**, are needed, including Boxing day services, to service frequency and the times of first and last trains. TfW should work with other franchises to improve connectivity for example, by assessing extending the Arriva Northern Connect service (from Leeds) beyond Chester along the North Wales Coast, and considering options for extending the Crewe service to Stoke / Stafford.

The franchise operator must adopt a better approach to **holding connecting trains** when it is known that passengers will be transferring, particularly if late at night and without being penalised for late running.

The WG must ensure that **performance monitoring is enforced**, with punctuality performance measured at all stations as opposed to the final destination station. This should also include performance in providing the correct type of rolling stock (and seating capacity), timescales for repairing defects at stations, revenue protection and management of disruption.

Performance monitoring should include positive performance measures such as **commitments to increase passenger satisfaction** and evidence of how the franchise operator is actively engaging and supporting local communities and economies in each region.

The operator franchise must have minimum requirements to **manage planned and unplanned service disruption** including full use of technology, social media; availability of staff who are able to help; ensure that clear announcements at all stations and easy processing of compensation claims, including automation where possible.

The **fare structure** (and supporting technology) must always give the passenger the best value fare for their journey(s), including giving value for money to make travel by families or small groups by rail more viable. Fares to make rail travel by young adults and those on low income more affordable are required

The franchise operator needs to be committed **helping passengers to make increased use of technology for ticket payment**, particularly mobile devices. This provides scope to better understand passengers' travel patterns, direct and real time journey information and reduces cash handling. Commitments should also be made to introduce two way through ticketing with a prioritised network of bus services (and community transport) that are commonly used at either end of the rail journey.

Income generation (from fares or other sources) above a predetermined amount by region or line should be reinvested in to services or facilities.

Station facilities

All stations must meet requirements of the broadest range **of needs for people with mobility or sensory impairment**. Toilet provision must be fully accessible, and be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis and be available for use free of charge. Platform length and height need to provide easy access with trains.

Minimum criteria should be applied for all stations based on passenger number categories. This should include specifying minimum opening hours (and days of operation) of staffed ticket offices, directions to nearby bus stops, sheltered waiting accommodation, contact details for taxi operators, provision of CCTV, live journey information including audible messages to each platform and welcoming waiting facilities

The WG should make available to the franchise operator, a residual value funding mechanism to enable major station improvements schemes. This would allow payment of major schemes to be made beyond the franchise duration.

Growthtrack 360 also proposes that the franchise operator is committed to delivering **improvements to station car park facilities and capacity**.

Community rail and delivery models

The Welsh Government should encourage the franchise operator to make **community rail development** a strong feature of the franchise, improving financial security to existing community rail partnerships and enable expansion of the community partnership model. The franchise operator must collaborate with other franchise operators on overlapping schemes such as the emerging North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership with Arriva Northern.

Growthtrack 360 would like to work with the WG and DfT to broaden the community rail concept to include bus service operators and community transport, as well as strengthening engagement with small and medium enterprises to encourage more use station buildings, to **increase use of the public transport network** and to help prioritise investment.

A Growthtrack 360 working group has prepared a draft proposal of an **alternative management model for the Wrexham – Bidston route**, setting out the benefits of a dedicated customer focused team building interest and involvement from communities and businesses along this largely self-contained line.

Rolling stock

We are concerned that little progress is evident of WG addressing the urgency of **introducing new rolling stock**, bearing in mind potential delivery lead times. This investment is essential to respond to the continual passenger growth and must keep pace with the quality and capacity improvements being made in other franchises, notably the Northern and Trans Pennine Express. Other options for funding rolling stock investment in addition to the current practice should be considered.

New diesel powered rolling stock should be capable for **adaption for potential powering from overhead electrification and stored electrical power** as those options become available.

Comfortable seat availability with adequate leg and elbow room in a clean and well-ventilated environment accompanied by welcoming (and visible) staff, free Wi Fi availability and plug in sockets are basic expectations for passengers.

Rolling stock should be designed for the varying needs of passengers on individual routes. Examples include the demand for luggage accommodation, catering options, capacity for cycles and toilet provision.