

Introduction

Herefordshire council is a unitary authority in the West midlands region. Herefordshire has two stations that sit within the Wales and Borders franchise. The two stations area Hereford and Leominster. The stations themselves are also managed by Arriva Trains Wales. These stations sit on the Marches Rail line and provide connections to Shrewsbury, Manchester, Cardiff, Newport and South Wales.

In April 2015 Herefordshire Council adopted its Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS). The LPCS sets out the 15 year vision of development and improvements within the county. Some key developments include proposals for an additional 6,500 new houses and 15ha of employment land in Hereford. It is proposed that Leominster receive a further 2,300 homes and an additional 10ha of employment land.

The LCPS includes major infrastructure projects, which will shape Herefordshire, including the Hereford City Centre transport package (HCCTP). The HCCTP includes a new city link road linking Commercial Street to Edgar Street and a new transport hub fronting Hereford railway station. The other packages include the South Wye Transport Package and Hereford Transport Package, each offering major developments in infrastructure for Hereford. Leominster will also be subject to new infrastructure with the southern link road and associated active travel measures. The LCPS has been supported by the adoption of the Council's Local Transport Plan 2016-2031 (LTP), which was adopted in March 2016. The LTP sets our priorities and policies for the next 15 years. Some policies relating to rail travel to improve services and capacity within Herefordshire.

There are further proposals to establish a new university within Hereford and is currently in the process of setting up. This will bring major new investment into the City including a major student population. The continued development of the Rotherwas Enterprise Park is also attracting new investment into the county.

Herefordshire provides a key link from Wales into the Wider West Midlands. Hereford railway station also has services that run to Birmingham and London and could be utilised as an interchange for services from Wales.

The response to this consultation is framed with the needs of supporting the Council's approach to economic development in mind and making the best use of the rail network in achieving the goals of the Herefordshire LCPS and LTP.

1. Have NIL detriment to any of our existing service provision and preferably deliver betterment. The current service levels should be seen as a base to build upon.

Herefordshire Council's view is that the current rail services provided by Arriva Trains Wales should be maintained into the next Wales & Borders Rail Franchise. This should include the additional trains on the Marches line.

The Wales & Borders Rail services provide valuable connectivity to Herefordshire allowing residents access to health, education, leisure, employment, retail and tourism destinations. For businesses the rail services allows them to access markets and bring in new employees. The rail service is an important asset to the Herefordshire area and additional services, for example during Sundays, would strengthen this and the associated benefits.

2. Maintain and improve rail connectivity to international gateways.

The existing rail timetable for Herefordshire includes rail services to Manchester and Cardiff. Herefordshire Council supports the retention and development of these services. Connectivity to major urban areas brings visitors and business to the area.

3. Reflect the passenger demand for services that link cross border access to health provision, academic institutions and business.

The cross border rail services operated by the Wales & Borders Rail franchise are of importance to people living in Herefordshire with many people travelling across border for school, college, to hospitals and for employment. Many people travel to the holiday towns on the Welsh coast.

The rail services allow this cross border travel to happen but the services provided do not often reflect the realities of the travel demand created. Additional capacity is needed on services to the coast during the summer, to the University towns at the start and end of term.

The new Wales & Borders Rail franchise needs to be let with sufficient rolling stock capacity to allow the operator to provide the capacity for day to day flows on cross border route but also to allow the operator to respond to the additional demand created by seasonal fluctuations and special events traffic.

4. Provide connectivity to future HS2 agglomeration benefits.

Improved transport connectivity generally means the ability to reach a wide range of places in a short amount of time. The development of High Speed Two in coming years will bring high quality transport infrastructure to the West Midlands.

The next operator of the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise should be a position to deliver connectivity to High Speed Two. This will allow businesses from Herefordshire to benefit from sustained economic growth and maintain competitiveness in a developed economy.

There has long been recognition of the link between connectivity and economic growth. International competitiveness is driven by productivity growth which is underpinned by trade, foreign investment and innovative activity, all of which are facilitated by connectivity. The most innovative and productive firms tend to be those that are competing at a global level. Connectivity to High Speed Two will help business across the Herefordshire County to progress further.

5. Increases in train service frequencies to meet passenger demands.

Higher train service frequencies to Hereford and Leominster would bring a valuable addition to the rail services and would support planned increases in housing and support economic growth in Herefordshire. It would attract investment to outlying areas and support the national Industrial Strategy bringing development to deprived areas.

6. Connectivity with intercity rail services including services to London.

The conurbations of Greater Manchester, Cardiff, Bristol, Newport and the West Midlands are within easy reach of Herefordshire and are therefore significant destinations for rail passengers from Herefordshire.

These centres also act as interchange stations for onward travel to other regions of the United Kingdom and these centres have international airports.

The county currently has some direct rail services to London but there are opportunities for changing to rail services to London at Birmingham New Street and Wolverhampton so connections with the Wales & Borders rail franchise at those stations should be maximised.

The improvements to rail services to the conurbations should include enhanced evening services and Sunday services. The cities are open 24 hours and with varied events throughout the year at the National Exhibition Centre and continued attraction of the Birmingham Christmas Market, the services to the conurbations are of importance to the people and the economy of Herefordshire.

7. Increased and appropriate rolling stock.

Steps should be taken with the new Wales & Borders Rail franchise to order new rolling stock for the franchise. The older trains in the fleet need replacing and the fleet also needs to be increased in size.

Whilst we are aware that the older trains have been upgraded in recent years the Council still considers that there is a need for new rolling stock on the Marches routes with appropriate room and facilities for passengers with luggage, cyclists and disabled passengers. In addition to air conditioning the new trains should also come with new passenger information systems, 4G wi-fi, USB charging points and toilets adequate for long distance journeys. Some thought should be given to other luxury features or innovations such as sofas in group seating areas.

Herefordshire Council welcomes the installation of wi-fi by Arriva Trains Wales and looks forward to further improvements to the trains operating on the Wales & Borders Rail franchise lines.

8. The Wales & Borders Franchise should have appropriate governance arrangements allowing meaningful engagement, cross border and representative of the area it serves.

The next Wales & Borders Rail Franchise needs to continue and strengthen the work that Arriva Trains Wales has done in areas of stakeholder liaison particularly in England, as there is no direct link between the English authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Herefordshire Council would welcome the involvement of the rail franchise in the Marches Strategic Rail Group's meetings to assist the group with information on franchise issues and progress.

The terms of reference for the existing Cross Border Forum involving the Department for Transport and the Welsh Assembly Government should be adjusted to allow representation from relevant Welsh and English Councils (and consortia) and Department for Transport, so the

forum can cover other cross border rail franchises and so the forum is able to have strategic input, including dialogue with Midlands Connect and Transport for the North. The forum should meet quarterly.