

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 32	WRI 32
Siambwr Fasnach De Cymru	South Wales Chamber of Commerce

Submission to National Assembly for Wales Enterprise & Business Committee Inquiry on Priorities for the Future of Welsh Rail Infrastructure

Thank you for your invitation to submit our thoughts regarding what needs to be done to improve the rail infrastructure in Wales.

The South and Mid Wales Chambers of Commerce are modern, innovative, membership-based business support organisations run by businesses for businesses. We are local, independent, not-for-profit organisations, funded by member subscriptions and a long-standing part of a network of national Chambers, quality-accredited by the British Chambers of Commerce.

The South Wales Chamber of Commerce covers both city regions in South Wales while the Mid Wales Chamber of Commerce covers Powys and Ceredigion. Our membership consists of businesses of all sizes and from all sectors.

We regularly survey our members and the wider business community on issues that affect them and improving Wales' transport network is regularly mentioned as one of the top priorities for Welsh businesses. Here are some statements made by members in a recent survey that typifies why our members believe that something needs to be done:

“All major roads are gridlocked at peak times of the day. Trains are full to bursting at peak times.”

“Time in traffic jams, sat on railway platforms, bus stops or in stopped trains costs money.”

This paper outlines what small and medium businesses would like government and the rail industry to focus on over the next decade.

Increasing Capacity

Our members feel that the priority for infrastructure improvements should focus on increasing capacity on the existing network. Most commuter trains in Wales are full to bursting already and we need to not only ease this but build space for more people to travel by train in the future.

Increasing platform length to accommodate longer trains and making sure that stations are able to accommodate more people is therefore crucial.

Many of our members however state that one of the reasons that they do not travel by public transport is the infrequency of services or that timings of trains do not fit in with when they need to travel. We therefore need more frequent

trains. While many factors influence the frequency of trains, from an infrastructure point of view every line needs to have sufficient passing points etc. to allow the train operators to maximise the efficiency of the lines.

Another issue around line capacity is to make sure that there is enough space for freight trains. As well as the obvious advantages of moving freight off roads, freight has the potential to generate substantial income for the rail industry.

New Stations

Our members would also like to see a strategic review of railway stations in Wales which would focus on making sure that places where a large number of people live or work near a railway line are served by a station or can easily access the network.

An example given is the Waterton Industrial Park in Bridgend which has a mainline running past it but the nearest station is an hour's walk away.

On a more strategic level a review of stations should also look at where there is space for residential or business development near existing stations and that these areas are targeted for development before land further away.

Reducing Travel Time

While increasing capacity is a priority for businesses in South East Wales, in West Wales our members are keen to see a reduction in travel time. Many complain of the comparative slowness of trains west of Swansea, making commuting by train in the region impractical. It also affects the travel choices of people from the region who want to travel to the rest of the UK and of visitors to West Wales.

Throughout South Wales there is support for the electrification of the Great Western mainline between Swansea and Paddington and we hope that this will take place as soon as possible. Reducing the travel time between South Wales and London is key to enabling businesses in the region to access markets in the rest of the UK and in attracting businesses in to the area.

New Routes

When it comes to introducing new routes members have raised a few which they would like to be considered. These are:

- The link between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen which we believe will have a major impact on business, tourism and social travel between the two towns, and with stations located in appropriate places could open up business opportunities in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion.
- Many businesses, particularly tourism businesses, in Brecon raised the need for the town to have a link in to the wider rail network as they believe that Brecon currently suffers.

- A connection between Caerphilly and Taffs Well to complete a 'circle line' with a new station for the Cwrt Rawlin/Castle View area of Caerphilly.
- A line between Caerphilly and Newport by providing a viaduct link between Energlyn and Bedwas.

In addition to this we fully support the work going in to the South East Wales Metro and look forward to seeing it develop over the coming years.

Our members have also expressed support for the rail link between Reading and Heathrow. While it is not in Wales, and therefore probably outside the scope of the inquiry, improving rail access to the UK's major hub airport will have major benefits to the Welsh economy and support for the project from Chamber members is worth noting.

Infrastructure around Railways

In addition to improvements to railways themselves our members have raised suggestions regarding the infrastructure around stations themselves.

Rail travel should be considered as part of a wider sustainable transport network and ensuring that every station has bus stops, facilities for safely parking bicycles and for taxis to stop is vital. We must also acknowledge that some people will need to use their car to connect to the rail network and therefore adequate car parking facilities are required. This is particularly the case in rural areas where other forms of public transport are insufficient and on commuter routes.

We also need facilities at railway stations that fulfil the needs of business travellers. Some business people choose to travel by train as they can get work done on the train which they can't in a car. However, the time spent waiting on a cold, wet platform is wasted time. The very minimum expectation is an enclosed waiting area with seats and tables where people can work but extra facilities such as toilets, refreshments area etc. would also make it more likely that business travellers will choose to use the train.

Delivery

We have already set out the hopes and expectations of our members when it comes to improving rail infrastructure and services in Wales. However, our members have expressed a lack of confidence in the ability of government (at all levels) to deliver the major transport infrastructure projects that we need to see.

We would urge everyone elected to the fifth Assembly, whether they form the government or opposition, to focus on delivering improvements to the rail and wider transport infrastructure in Wales.

While there are some contentious projects there is consensus around the vast majority and we would urge the committee in the next Assembly to focus on encouraging the Welsh Government to share best practice where projects are delivered and scrutinise them when projects are not.

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