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Dr Sian Phipps
Clerk, Enterprise and Business Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay. CF99 1NA

Dear Dr Phipps

National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Franchise

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Franchise.

STAG (Severn Tunnel Junction Rail Action Group) was founded about seven years ago by commuters concerned at a cut made to their cross-border service to Bristol. Since that time we have represented the views of regular travellers from both Severn Tunnel Junction and Caldicot Stations.

Our aim is to work with others to ensure the public Transport interests of all in this area of Monmouth are fairly considered. During the period since we started we have seen a growth in the use of Severn Tunnel Junction of fifty-eight per cent (2005-06 to 2011-12. Source: ORR.

The use of Severn Tunnel Junction has also doubled in use as an interchange station, and we believe this will increase much further with an extra 1,700 homes currently being built up the line at Lydney in Gloucestershire! Closer to home, many more houses are planned.

At Severn Tunnel Junction we also have a site now planned to become a 'Park and Ride'. Situated close to both M48 and M4 motorways it is well placed to relieve traffic congestion both locally, and around Newport and Cardiff.

We trust you find our response helpful. We would be pleased to meet and discuss our thoughts if that would be of help.

Yours sincerely

David Flint
Chair
STAG

The Future of the Wales and Border Franchise

The following is a response by STAG (Severn Tunnel Action Group) representing passengers that could or do use Severn Tunnel Junction and/or Caldicot Stations.

What lessons can be learnt from the current franchise?

1. The franchise specification and method of funding discouraged flexibility, and growth in the provision of rolling stock. More importantly the need for additional trains within the timetable where there has been a sizeable escalation in passenger use.
2. Services and timetable haven't changed to reflect the needs and the times. For instance witness the number of young unemployed in Caldicot and the lack of trains at key times to get them to, or from, places of employment or education. Witness to the growth in the use of Severn Tunnel Junction: fourteen years ago only approximately twenty five cars parked at the station during weekdays: today over 150 cars are regularly recorded as parking in the station Car Park: yet the provision of trains hasn't changed. Today there is a greater daily commute away from Monmouthshire than people coming to work or for education into the county. This situation is not helped by a lack of trains at key times.

What priorities can be identified to ensure that rail passenger services in Wales and the borders provide the best possible service for passengers in 2018?

3. To meet the Welsh nation, and Capital Region's needs for access to employment, education, tourism and leisure pursuits such as shopping, sport, entertainment, social gatherings, etc.
4. To meet the economic (including tourist) needs of the Wales and Capital region. Good transport integration is vital. To this end good and regular rail access across the border is essential: and from Monmouthshire the Bristol and South West area play a major role in the local economy and education.
5. To encourage the travelling public away from road use, in particular cars.
6. To recognise that car use has peaked in many parts of Britain, and that the elasticity of car travel is closely influenced by fuel prices. With fuel prices forecast to rise (see: <http://www.parliament.uk/Templates/BriefingPapers/Pages/BPPdfDownload.aspx?bp-id=sn04712>): and the cost of car insurance likely to remain high relative to incomes, particularly for those males age less than thirty, there is real evidence that train use will continue to grow steeply (see also 'Has Car use Peaked?' by Henry Small, Transport Statistician Welsh Government.
7. To encourage flexibility with pricing and delivery to meet peak seasonal and economic demands and needs, e.g. rugby internationals in Cardiff and the overcrowding of trains before they even reach Welsh Stations.
8. To stimulate non Welsh rail tourists to Cardiff into visiting other parts of the Capital Region
9. To encourage more use of trains in off-peak periods.
10. To gain transparency on fare setting (reference the Scottish Government's system see: <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/strategy-and-research/publications-and-consultations/j231424-06.htm>)

How can service delivery after 2018 deliver connectivity and value for money for passengers while reducing the burden on the tax payer?

11. By using trains that don't currently stop at smaller towns or rail junctions, to improve delivery and connections.
12. Fares and fare increases, if they can be influenced, to relate to cost of travelling by car including the infrastructure required to support road users.
13. The cost to the taxpayer has to relate to the benefits provided such as reducing the number of unemployed, and facilitating travel to places of higher education.
14. A programme of supporting the rail provision to be evident with improved parking and integrated bus provision at rail stations. Also, encouragement of cycle use through better cycle storage at rail stations, and cycle hire at key locations particularly in major cities.

Key Issues

Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs etc..... already answered

How passengers should be involved in the franchise development and delivery:

15. The new franchisee must be subject to a regular quantitative and qualitative market research including 'Personal Shopper Programmes'. This will be adjudged against a rigorous number of key factors seen by the Welsh and other (tourist/business) public as key to their willingness to travel by rail in or to/from Wales, and themselves ascertained by market research and delivery statistics.

How communities and local government / Regional Transport Consortia should be involved in specifying the franchise or perhaps even in delivering services?

16. Need more transparency and inducement at local level. In particular by engaging with local government at Town Council and Community Council level to ascertain how they're communities might be better served by rail transport.
17. The Regional Transport Committee membership needs to be structured in such a way that local issues are not lost.
18. Reports must be totally transparent, including any appendices, and open to scrutiny and questioning by persons outside the committee.
19. All public consultations must be properly advertised, and held in line with National guidelines.
20. Proposed timetable changes should be open to public comment before implementation.
21. Service delivery issues should be made public and open to public consideration.
22. An independent Consumer Tsar or Transport Commissioner should be appointed to oversee that the way the franchise is run is fit for purpose and transparent.

The management model to be adopted, including the Welsh Government's proposal for a 'not-for-dividend' franchise

23. Wales Government to learn from the experience of 'The Liverpool City Region' which has undertaken a Governance Review to further strengthen the delivery of strategic economic development, regeneration and transport to increase economic growth and jobs, and provide greater transparency. The transport part is commonly called 'Mersey Travel' and further details about this found at <http://www.merseytravel.gov.uk/Pages/Welcome.aspx>

24. The management operation and maintenance of all stations and station car parks in Wales deserves separate consideration and away from the operation of trains. STAG would like to see a separate authority running these facilities, and one that takes into consideration all the local, regional and national development plans for buses/coaches, trains, ferries and any other form of public transport. All public transport, as part of this authorities remit, must be encouraged to publicise encourage the use of trains, buses, ferries and any other modes of public transport.

The management model to be adopted, including the Welsh Government's proposals for a 'Not for dividend' franchise.

25. STAG advocate that Wales Government take a hard look at Transport Scotland and the way in which public transport is operated in that region of Britain. We also advocate a study of the benefits that regional trains offer to countries elsewhere in Europe. Examples of local and regional train types:
- France: TER
 - Germany: Regionalbahn (RB), Interregio-Express (IRE), Regional-Express (RE)
 - Italy: Regional (R), Express (E)
 - Spain: Regional, Catalunya Exprés, Cercanías
26. Care must be taken given that the current franchise includes several towns and cities in England, and consideration given to the regional plans outside of Wales for new stations (e.g. Eltham Corner/Newnham in Gloucestershire, and on the Cheltenham to Cardiff route).
27. We advocate that in the longer term Wales Government should manage the railways using the Common Concession approach as per Transport for London.

How the transport specification should improve the passenger experience, including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and the core service standards which should be included.

28. Core service standards should include:
- First and last train times to be agreed and measured against
 - Minimum number of seats
 - Frequency expectations stated (during peak periods and off-peak; weekdays, weekends and public holidays: all to be considered)
 - Maximum journey times agreed
 - Definition of overcrowding
29. Targets / Incentives
- The Current system of targets and incentives appears to work really well, but the monitoring and rewarding must be across the whole length of the route and not just main stations.

The routes, particularly cross-border routes, which should be included

30. Allowance has to be made for new routes to be established, and for the inclusion of new situations such as the Metro proposed for the wider Cardiff area, and for integration with bus routes that serve towns not otherwise connected to the rail service (e.g. Usk and Monmouth in Monmouthshire).
31. Allowance also for integration with routes of other operators - such as Chepstow and Caldicot to Cardiff services connecting with those currently operated by First Group from Cardiff to Bristol at Bath – to ensure minimum

journey times. So, in the case given, interchange at Severn Tunnel Junction rather than Newport.

The rolling stock needed for the new franchise. What factors to be considered and how this should be procured? Will new rolling stock be required?

32. The need to project Wales as a modern Twenty-first century economy through the provision of rolling stock that meets the needs of a travelling public, for instance:
 - That needs to communicate while travelling,
 - Be able to enjoy the experience with cleanliness, quiet, comfort, facilities for food and drink refreshment, and washroom conveniences
 - Be assured by efficiency, professional service standards and good on-board communication compatible with the best elsewhere in the world
 - Provide WiFi and three pin facilities, sufficient luggage/push-chair/wheelchair storage, and cycle storage compatible with growing cycling trends.
33. The rolling stock planning must take into consideration eventual growth in the use of electric units.

Whether additional lines, enhancements to existing lines, new stations or other infrastructure are needed;

34. The Cardiff to Cheltenham service to be extended to Ashchurch and Worcester.
35. Chepstow line to have half-hourly calls
36. Station management, with car parking, cycle storage and integrated bus service provision, to be compatible with the needs of the travelling public and to provide a 21st Century image for the Principality. Toilets, information/customer care, refreshment provision, car hire availability, etc. Needs more research to determine consumer expectation.

Whether the franchise can support an enhanced relationship between Network Rail and the franchise operator and the benefits it might bring.

37. At Severn tunnel Junction we certainly need better passenger communications: for instance tourists late at night having no idea that there is a replacement bus service to get them to Chepstow; nor where to have to go to catch the replacement bus. Increasingly Severn Tunnel is being used as an interchange station: this should increase once the planned new passenger footbridge has been installed (under DfT funding for disabled access).