

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail](#)

Evidence from Forest of Dean District Council – WBF 25

**Comments by Forest of Dean District Council to The Enterprise and Business Committee regarding the future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

**Introduction**

This note has been prepared at an informal (officer) level and relates to the importance of the service to the Forest of Dean as a whole and to Lydney in particular. It has the support of the Cabinet Member for the environment.

The Cardiff to Gloucester railway line is the only one running through the District with one station in Lydney, although Chepstow is also accessible especially to the residents in nearby Tutshill/ Sedbury.

Lydney is one of four towns in the district and is covered in the recent planning policy document, the Core Strategy. It is the location selected for the largest amount of growth and is expected to grow by about 1900 dwellings between 2006 and 2026. The great majority of these have planning permission and the first phase of 200 is under construction. Some developer contribution to Lydney station is expected and is contained in current planning agreements.

Notwithstanding the above, passenger usage at Lydney has more than doubled since 2002/3 when about 61586 entries or exits were recorded to 156 648 in 2011/12. During this time there have been some improvements to the service and some physical improvements to the station itself. It is understood that there will be some additional minor service improvements shortly and the station itself is the subject of a current masterplanning exercise being conducted by Network Rail which is designed to show short and long term improvements.

Given the planned increase in population in Lydney, there is a need for further improvements to the station and a capacity for increased patronage of both the existing and an improved service. This is expected to primarily come from the demand for travel to work from Lydney but also leisure trips from the town, although the capacity is there to

provide for leisure and work trips to the town. The mainline railway station is close to the Dean forest Railway which is a popular tourist attraction in the district.

Access to a variety of means of travel is promoted by government and is supported by the Forest of Dean District Council. The use of the services has grown as improvements to both the station facilities and the services themselves have expanded. There is almost certainly scope for increased use from the existing population as shown by the peak passenger figures which were recorded during a spell when there were major highway works at Gloucester. These works caused severe delays on the main road access for commuters from the Forest of Dean (A 40 (T)). There was a considerable diversion of travel to rail (evidenced by entries and exits at Lydney 167000 2008/ 09 falling to 135994 in 2009/ 10).

There are times when the existing trains are full, and the available parking at Lydney is at or above capacity every weekday. Additional train accommodation along with increased parking is needed to meet the apparent present demand and naturally this is expected to increase as the new neighbourhood and other minor developments are occupied (the 1900 additional dwellings= 4370 persons approx).

Although the majority of journeys from the Forest of Dean are probably short, there are difficulties with some longer trips due to the lack of stopping trains. It is especially frustrating to have to catch an earlier connecting service for example to Gloucester in order to catch a train which has passed through but not stopped in Lydney. This has been addressed to a degree but remains an issue that any new franchise should consider.

In conclusion the growth of traffic at Lydney is evidence that there is scope for continuing improvements both to the service and the station itself, and the planned growth will generate more potential custom too.

Estimates of station usage from <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529>

Comments in relation to questions asked.

What lessons can be learnt from the current franchise?

- What priorities can be identified to ensure that rail passenger services in Wales and the borders provide the best possible service for passengers from 2018? Maintain and preferably enhance the present service and station facilities, develop Lydney Station to one appropriate for the level of usage now and expected in the future.
- How can service delivery after 2018 deliver connectivity and value for money for passengers while reducing the burden on the tax payer?

Key issues

Issues that the Committee is considering as part of these terms of reference include:

- Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs and what lessons should be learnt from it; Some potential service enhancements have been identified, and additional consideration should be given to connectivity for longer trips, for example increase of longer distance services stopping at Lydney/ Chepstow. In addition some improvements to connections (eg at Severn tunnel Junction) are desirable.
- How passengers should be involved in the franchise development and delivery;
- How communities and local government / Regional Transport Consortia should be involved. Could they be involved in specifying the franchise or perhaps even in delivering services? Local Authorities can provide supporting information and co ordinate some infrastructure (eg station improvements paid for by S 106 contributions, bus services servicing stations)
- The management model to be adopted, including the Welsh Government's proposal for a not-for-dividend franchise;
- How the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience, including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and the core service standards which should be included;
- The routes, particularly cross-border routes, which should be included;
- The rolling stock needed for the new franchise. What factors need to be considered and how this should be procured? Will new rolling stock be required?
- Whether additional lines, enhancements to existing lines, new stations or other infrastructure are needed; and see above
- Whether the franchise can support an enhanced relationship between Network Rail and the franchise operator and the benefits this might bring.