

Lydney Neighbourhood Development Plan



[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

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

Evidence from Lydney Neighbourhood Development Plan Community Steering Group
– WBF 56

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

13th September 2013

Dear Madam

National Assembly for Wales: Inquiry into the Wales and Borders Franchise

Thank you for inviting Lydney Town Council and the Neighbourhood Planning Community Steering Group to comment on the above matter. We have the following comments to make. The comments mainly refer to the Maesteg/Cardiff to Gloucester/Cheltenham route. It is understood that the current franchise only covers the route up to Gloucester. The service on to Cheltenham is run by Arriva Trains Wales on a commercial basis.

1. Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs & what lessons should be learnt from it:

1.1 Lydney Town Council believes train services should be provided when passengers need them travelling to where they want to go, at a reasonable price and safely in reasonable comfort. Additional stops have been added to Lydney in recent years in response to increased demand. Passenger growth along the route is strong and grew by 9.3% last year. The entry/exit figures for Lydney for 2011/12 were 156,648 and have grown considerably in recent years. This is likely to have grown because Lydney is the main focus of housing growth in the Forest of Dean and although there are employment opportunities locally many new residents will be commuting to the main conurbations of Gloucester, Cheltenham, Cardiff Newport and Bristol.

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1.2 The primary interest therefore is in the franchise from Lydney up the Severn Estuary into Gloucestershire and south into Chepstow, Newport and Cardiff. The Rail Service is a powerful economic link between Lydney and the wider Forest of Dean, Wales and England.

1.3 The primary concern is in the frequency of stops, the connectivity of train and bus services locally and nationally in Wales and England and the quality of the commuter experience. Stops at Lydney are also provided by Cross Country trains. There are a number of gaps in the timetable which ideally need to be filled by either franchise, or a revised new franchise arrangement. See further discussion.

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

2.1 Rail user groups could be established at various locations along the route to allow for issues to be discussed. More routine feedback could be achieved from survey information particularly from users of on-line booking. Alternatively officers from the franchise could attend Lydney Town Council meetings so that elected members could raise issues on behalf of their constituents.

3. 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?

3.1 Lydney Town Council would welcome the opportunity to be included in specifying the service. The town Council has a good local knowledge of the area and the requirements of people they represent. The Town Council and the Neighbourhood planning steering group have been closely involved in planning sustainable transport solutions for the Town. They work in close collaboration with the District Council who can ensure specifications meet the needs of the wider Forest of Dean.

3.2 Dean Forest Railway, a volunteer operated highly successful and expanding heritage railway operator should also be involved to ensure links to its services and synergy in developing tourist traffic.

3.3 Gloucestershire County Council is represented at the twice yearly Cross Boundary Issues group meetings, hosted by the Welsh Government specifically for local authorities. They are a very useful forum to exchange views and receive updates from a range of bodies including DfT, Arriva Trains Wales and Network Rail. This is a mechanism that should be retained.

See the Infrastructure comments for additional observations about community involvement.

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

4.1 There is insufficient evidence about the benefits of either model to comment.

5. How the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience, including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and the core service standard

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5.1 A longer franchise would allow for more investment from the train operating companies as they would be more likely to see a return on it. However, there would need to be a mechanism for the franchise to be terminated if performance levels were below agreed standards. Establishing an agreed core service level is critical to achieving a level of service that is acceptable to all parties. Therefore the Welsh Government and DfT need to specify this at the start of the process. It is important to build flexibility into the franchise to allow for the increase in demand that has occurred in recent years. There is a need for some permanency in the operation; not a hiatus at end of the franchise period. There is a need to build in sufficient flexibility for future changes particularly to allow a response to changing circumstances as at Lydney where there is increased demand. Plans should not be absolutely fixed for the duration of the franchise, with a mechanism on both sides to

review the timetable and other issues on a regular basis with adjustment of payments on both sides. There should be a formal requirement for complaints to be dealt with within a specific time and other qualitative targets that have associated penalties.

5.2 Connections to and from Swansea are poor. The Cheltenham service continues to or from Maesteg and the Cross Country service is timed to miss First Great Western journeys.

5.3 Currently the first journey runs empty from Cardiff to Gloucester when it could run in service and open up opportunities for shift workers arriving into Gloucester and Barnwood Business Park before 7 am and Cheltenham / GCHQ for 7.30am. This needs addressing in the next franchise.

5.4 There is local evidence of a strong demand for an hourly off-peak and half-hourly peak service to Cardiff, Chepstow, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Bristol, Birmingham and London (direct or indirect with single interchange). Where indirect, there should be reasonably planned connections with no more than 30 minutes overall journey delay if any unplanned delays occur. Connections to and from Swansea are poor. The Cheltenham service continues to or from Maesteg and the Cross Country service is timed to miss First Great Western journeys.

5.5 The hours of operation should be 0600-2300 Mon-Fri, 0700-2300 Sat, 0800-2200 Sunday/Bank Hols. The minimum journey time should roughly be as now and if new stations are introduced en-route (eg. Newnham-on-Severn, or local stations between Newport and Cardiff) there is a need to ensure resulting additional journey time for stopping is not so significant to detract from attractiveness of rail for existing passengers.

5.6 The franchise operator should work with Gloucestershire County Council and other transport providers to provide easy access to Lydney Town Centre and other Forest of Dean communities through planned bus routes and timetables and sustainable transport solutions.

5.7 The franchise review should re-structure base fares from scratch ensuring consistency across the network regardless of geography.

6. The routes, particularly cross-border routes, which should be included;

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6.1 It may be worth considering including the service from Cardiff to Gloucester/Cheltenham in a different franchise e.g. Great Western or Cross Country. Cross Country already operate from Cardiff to Birmingham/Nottingham, some of which stop at Lydney. It may also make it simpler in terms of receiving funding from DfT direct and for specifying the service level. Alternatively, the current route could be extended to Birmingham in the new franchise.

7. 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?

7.1 Passenger usage is increasing so additional carriages will be required as there are already issues with crowding at peak times. This is particularly problematic when road works create major

problems in highway traffic into Gloucester. Additional rolling stock will need to be purchased in time for the new franchise to ease pressure on existing stock and carry more passengers. Some of the rolling stock used on the Maesteg – Cheltenham route has recently been refurbished and it is important that there is continuing improvement.

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

8.1 Lydney station, currently run by ATW, is the only station within the Forest of Dean and as such it forms an important gateway into the area. The Forest of Dean District Council Core Strategy identifies Lydney for considerable development up to 2026 and beyond. It is recognised as having the greatest potential for growth of the four Forest towns:

'The Core Strategy depends on Lydney as the town with the greatest opportunity for change and the scale of new development planned will reflect this. It is able to offer a range of services, including access to the rail network which can in turn be further supported and improved by new employment and housing.'

8.2 The Town of Lydney is the focus for delivering new homes in the Forest of Dean and it is therefore critical that the new franchise is capable of delivering a good service to enable passengers to commute into the area and also out to centres such as Newport, Cardiff, Gloucester, Bristol etc. In terms of the infrastructure of the station it is important that the station reflects the level of demand that can be expected over the coming years. There are no facilities at the station and as a minimum it should have toilets, ticket office and a retail outlet as well as increased parking. It currently gives a poor first impression of the town and the wider Forest area.

8.3 The potential for the community to play a role in the maintenance and management of stations (including associated commercial uses such as retail or coffee shops or use of non-operational station building for community activities) and car parks and selling tickets (with commission) should be explored as part of the development of Lydney Station. This would incentivise more local people to rail use the rail service. The operating of services or maintaining track/rolling stock which requires specialist knowledge for safety should remain the responsibility of Network Rail and the operator. The major safety issues at Lydney Station is the closure of a long used underpass followed the installation of an automated crossing. This has created a particular risk and the decision of Network

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Rail to work with Gloucestershire County Council to find a solution and re-open the underpass is welcomed.

8.4 In the future Lydney requires a fit for purpose station that improves access and facilities for commuters.

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

9.1 An example of enhanced working is taking place in Lydney. A number of partners including Network Rail, Arriva Train Wales, GCC, Lydney Town Council a, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering group and others have commissioned consultants to produce a masterplan for Lydney Station and

the surrounding land. This will allow stakeholders to be involved in setting out a vision for Lydney Station that improves connectivity to the wider area and physical improvements to the fabric of the station to improve facilities for passengers.

9.2 The current franchise operators have played an important role in developing this enhanced relationship and the continuing partnership of the franchise holder in such developments is essential.

I hope these comments are useful,

On Behalf of
Lydney Neighbourhood Development Plan Community Steering Group

CC. Roger Deeks
CC. Cllr Alan Preest