

**Submission to the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise Inquiry  
vis-à-vis the rail-sea corridor from Ireland to the cities of  
South Wales and London Paddington via the Rosslare-  
Fishguard sea route, September 2013.**



*Express boat train departing Fishguard Harbour's integrated rail-ferry terminal. © B. Allan.*

**1. Personal introduction**

- I write as a citizen (private & non public representative) of Éire with family and friends in West & South Wales.
- I am a longstanding user of this sea-rail route.
- I have an interest in public transport and am the author of a website, [www.southtipperaryrailandbus.com](http://www.southtipperaryrailandbus.com) (which includes a section on the sea-rail route) but have no connections with any transport company.

**2. Rail-sea corridor overview**

- The Fishguard-Rosslare sea route opened in 1906.
- For many years rail & sea predominated as the main mode of travel between Ireland and Britain (and vice versa).

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- The advent of the car ferry and latterly the budget airlines saw significant attrition of sea-rail traffic.
- The privatisation of Sealink (a division of British Rail) and of British Rail seem, at the time, to have resulted in a certain loss of focus and co-ordination.
- These problems however are generally a thing of the past and the sea-rail corridor is operated quite efficiently.
- In very recent years there has been something of a resurgence in usage of the classic rail and sea way of travel around Ireland and Britain and this has been formally documented by a number of ferry companies.

*p.t.o.*

### 3. The sea-rail corridor in operation:

**3.1: sailings:** Two sailings operate in each direction daily between Rosslare and Fishguard Harbour with a passage time of 3 h 15 to 3 h 30 minutes. The route is operated by Stena Line, the vessel being the superferry *Stena Europe* which offers a very high standard of facilities and service to passengers.

**3.2: connecting trains at Fishguard Harbour:** each of these sailings has a connecting train to/from the ship at Fishguard Harbour. These connecting trains are operated by Arriva Trains Wales and offer onward connections into First Great Western high speed trains to London (usually the connection is at Cardiff/ Swansea but there are some weekend variations). The daytime boat train is usually a Class 150 whereas the night boat train is often a Class 153.

**3.3: connecting trains & buses at Rosslare:** At Rosslare the overnight sailing each way has a rail connection (Wexford-Wicklow-Dublin Connolly *InterCity* line) and there is a Bus Éireann *Expressway* coach connection to/from Waterford city connecting to/from every Fishguard sailing. The rail service from Waterford city to Rosslare via South County Wexford was suspended by Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) in September 2010 and the replacement bus (Bus Éireann route 370) offers a connection from the overnight sailing ex Fishguard to South County Wexford locations as well as a connection into the evening sailing from Rosslare to Fishguard.

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**3.4: integrated timetable:** an integrated timetable is offered and this is documented publically in several places. Online e.g.

<http://www.stenaline.ie/ferry/rail-and-sail/fishguard/>

Offline e.g. in book 3 (West Wales) of the Arriva Trains Wales printed timetable suite.

**3.5: integrated ticketing:** integrated ticketing is offered (exemplified in the Stena Line online material and at:

<http://www.irishrail.ie/index.jsp?p=118&n=249#SailRail> ). Through ticketing was reintroduced in June 2013 between stations in Wales & England and stations on the Rosslare-Dublin line via the Fishguard-Rosslare sea route.

**3.6: integrated terminal:** the ferry terminal and railway station are integrated at Fishguard Harbour. This is a significant advantage and facilitates ease of transfer between rail and ship modes at Fishguard.

Unfortunately the corresponding integrated facility at Rosslare is now trackless as the station was relocated to a site on the periphery of the port complex in April 2008, around seven minutes' walk in the open along a signposted footpath from the ferry terminal.

*p.t.o.*

#### **4. Going forward:**

**4.1: what lessons can be learned from the current franchise?** for users of the sea-rail route the franchise is a model of good practice in that it is prescriptive and protective of connectivity between ship and train at Fishguard Harbour.

**4.2: how the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience?** In terms of ship-rail connectivity at the very minimum the existing connectivity between ship and rail at Fishguard Harbour should be retained as a prescribed element of the franchise's Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). The five additional trains to/from Fishguard

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introduced in 2011 should also be prescribed in the PSR, with flexibility to alter timings as appropriate.

A range of optimisation measures should be pursued in an incremental and structured manner to maximise the benefits of this sea & rail corridor to residents, visitors and the broader economy in both Wales and Ireland. Such measures could include:

- (i) A review of the existing connectional windows between ship & rail to see if slight improvements in journey times can be achieved.
- (ii) A review of the existing boat train timings to see if timings could be accelerated or otherwise improved a little. For instance could the 13.29 ex Fishguard connect at Cardiff with the 15.55 to London (rather than the 16.25). Another example is on Sunday afternoons where Ireland-bound passengers have a tight connection for the ship but passengers arriving from Ireland have to wait almost two hours for the train.
- (iii) The deployment of a Class 158 (or Class 175) on the daytime boat train.
- (iv) The retention of rights for a through service to be operated by First Great Western (or as a partnership) between Paddington and Fishguard Harbour.
- (v) Significantly aside from its key *raison d'être* the daytime boat train offers a fast service between Fishguard & Goodwick, Whitland, Carmarthen & Llanelli and Cardiff. Improvements to the boat trains to/from Fishguard Harbour are therefore wholly compatible with enticing more rail users from these locations.
- (vi) It is imperative that the local trains (as distinct from the boat trains) introduced to/from Fishguard in 2011 are made a permanent feature of the rail timetable.
- (vii) In tandem with points (v) & (vi) above the potential of the Swansea District Line to facilitate a fast service to West Wales should be developed fully. A fast service between Fishguard and Cardiff (and vice versa) should be retained post-electrification.

*p.t.o.*

**5. Concluding comments:**

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The sea-rail corridor via the Rosslare-Fishguard sea route is an international surface transportation corridor interlinking Ireland (principally parts of Munster & the eastern seaboard) to West Wales, the cities of South Wales and onwards to Bristol and London (with connections to numerous other locations available).

While it is true that Holyhead-Dublin/Dún Laoghaire will likely remain the primary surface transportation route to Ireland and that improved rail connectivity is desirable at Rosslare, the Fishguard-Rosslare route lends itself to catering for a significant catchment area on both sides of the Irish Sea and it is important that this rail-sea corridor is accorded every opportunity to benefit the wider economy and that the experience of using it is optimised for users, whether leisure, business, student or otherwise. By generating additional usage the burden on the taxpayer can be reduced.

Diolch yn fawr - thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Bernard Allan.

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*Daytime boat train prior to boarding at Cardiff Central (& prior to the arrival of the connecting high speed train from London). This train also serves as an express service from Cardiff to Llanelli, Whitland and Fishguard & Goodwick utilising the Swansea District Line. While the Class 150 Sprinter is a good train, given the international nature of the “boat train” to Fishguard Harbour rolling stock offering superior comfort levels (i.e. Class 158/ 175) should be deployed, at least on the daytime link. Photo © B. Allan.*