

**WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT**

**ENTERPRISE AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

**THE FUTURE OF THE WALES AND BORDERS RAIL FRANCHISE**

**INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION BY DAVID MAWDSLEY**

**Introduction**

1. This submission is made in my private capacity as an individual, although I do hold the position of Acting Secretary in the North Wales branch of Railfuture. This submission is not made in the name of that branch of Railfuture, as in the time available it has not been possible to convene a meeting to discuss the consultation paper. Nevertheless, in so far as appropriate, this submission broadly adopts the submission previously made by the South Wales branch of Railfuture on behalf of all three branches within the Principality, together with the conclusions in the current edition of Railfuture's Development Plan for Wales.
  
2. This submission is only intended to address issues of specific relevance to the rail network in North Wales, comprising –
  - the North Wales coast line from Holyhead via Bangor and Llandudno Junction to Chester
  - the line from Llandudno Junction to Llandudno
  - the line from Llandudno Junction to Blaenau Ffestiniog
  - the line from Chester via Wrexham to Shrewsbury
  - the line from Wrexham via Shotton to Bidston.

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3. In compiling this submission the writer has had regard to the North East Wales Integrated Transport Task Force Report dated June 2013. That report records that the Task Force has identified that the potential for growth is hampered by capacity issues in the infrastructure of the region, an issue that also poses risks for existing businesses. Against that background, the report makes a number of recommendations in relation to the rail network in North Wales, as appears later in this submission.

**Key Issues**

**Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs and what lessons should be learnt from it**

4. There are shortcomings in the services which the current franchise requires to be provided. Those of most concern in North Wales are set out in Appendix 1 to this submission, and can broadly be classified as –
  - the lack of through services to key destinations such as Manchester Airport and Crewe,
  - irregular service patterns which fail to adopt a clock face system of departures, and
  - poor or non-existent connections between rail services or with other modes of transport, notably ferry services from Holyhead.

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

5. A representative passengers' panel should be established to comment upon a draft of the services which any franchise agreement required to be provided, and to provide feed-back on an ongoing basis during the period of the franchise agreement.

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**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?**

6. The regional transport consortia (which already represent the various local authorities) should certainly be involved in specifying the services which any franchise agreement required to be provided and in monitoring the delivery of those services during the period of the franchise agreement. Nevertheless, the proposals of the several transport consortia would need to be carefully co-ordinated, bearing in mind that by their very nature rail services cross the boundaries between the areas of the several transport consortia. Each part of the rail network depends upon other parts of that network for their mutual success.

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

7. The current franchising system provides little or no scope for the Welsh Assembly Government to influence the direction of the franchise (otherwise than by paying for negotiated improvements). Equally the current system provides little or no incentive for the franchise holder to re-invest profits into the provision of better services (particularly if the franchise is of short duration), as understandably profits need to be distributed to the company's shareholders. A not for dividend franchise would not only provide a greater prospect of profit being reinvested for the benefit of passengers, but would also be likely to afford the Welsh Assembly Government greater control over the development of the franchise.

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

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8. If a commercial franchise were to be retained, what length of franchise would be appropriate is a difficult decision. If the franchise were too short, there would be no incentive for the franchise holder to be innovative or to take risks, as the prospects of recovering any outlay within the franchise term would be remote. On the other hand, if the franchise were too long, it would be difficult to predict the long-term economic risks, with the result that (as has happened in several cases) the franchise holder might incur financial difficulty and threaten to “hand in the keys” unless more favourable terms could be negotiated. Those potential problems would be avoided if a not for dividend franchise were established.

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

9. Given the geography of Wales it is essential that the franchise should include all routes and connections across the border which are necessary to enable residents of Wales to enjoy an adequate service. In addition to the main border route from Chester via Shrewsbury and Hereford to Newport, the franchise should clearly cover the connections to major commercial centres such as Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, and to the major railway hubs of Crewe and Shrewsbury.

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

10. Given that existing services are in many cases already over-crowded, and given also that considerable enhancements are required to infrastructure, stations and services, it is inevitable that additional rolling stock will be required. So far as possible, additional rolling stock should be compatible with existing fleets of rolling stock which have proved “fit for purpose”. Further, rolling stock should where possible be acquired directly by the Welsh Assembly Government, so as to reduce its long term cost.

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

11. With rail passenger traffic continuing to grow significantly, it is undoubtedly the case that enhancements will be required to existing lines, that former lines will need to be re-opened, that new stations will be required, and that new services will be needed. Some of the more pressing enhancements required in North Wales are listed in Appendix 2 to this submission.

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

12. The most satisfactory way of establishing an enhanced relationship between Network Rail and the franchise operator would be to establish vertical integration between the infrastructure owner and the franchise operator through the establishment of one or more not for dividend companies owned by, but operated at arms' length from the Welsh Assembly Government.

**Conclusion**

The writer hopes that these comments will assist the Committee, and looks forward to expanding upon or explaining the matters raised in this submission at the meeting with the Committee scheduled for Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2013.

**DATED** the 13<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2013

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## APPENDIX 1 – SHORTCOMINGS IN EXISTING SERVICES

### PART A – NORTH WALES COAST LINE

#### 1. Irregular service patterns

A service which operates to a standard “clockface” pattern is of great benefit to passengers, who can be assured that a train will depart at the same time past each hour without having to consult a timetable. While there are a number of services which at first sight appear to operate to a standard pattern, closer examination reveals that there are numerous exceptions. For example, there is a broadly hourly service between Llandudno and Manchester, but –

- there are gaps in the standard pattern
- there are some services which depart earlier or later than the standard pattern (in some cases by a significant margin)
- there are services which originate from or terminate at stations other than Llandudno (in many cases without even a connecting service to or from Llandudno).

#### 2. Lack of through services to Manchester Airport

Although the timings of the Llandudno to Manchester service have been designed to allow through services to operate to Manchester Airport, only three services a day do so. Those through services which do operate are at times of the day unlikely to be of much use to intending passengers: Manchester Airport arrive 0504, 2018 and 2118; Manchester Airport depart 0533, 2032 and 2132. In consequence, rolling stock stands idle outside Manchester Piccadilly station for 53 minutes in nearly every hour throughout the day. The opportunity should be taken to correct this situation as part of the development of the Manchester Hub.

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### **3. Connections at Crewe**

As Virgin Trains now operate an hourly service between Euston and Crewe, Arriva Trains Wales operate very few through services from the North Wales coast to Crewe. For passengers travelling to London this makes no real difference, as only one change (at Chester, rather than Crewe) is required. Passengers travelling to other destinations, however, now normally require to change twice – at Chester and at Crewe.

### **4. Connections at Chester**

Connections to and from Liverpool are generally reasonable during the working day, when Merseyrail Electrics operate a 15 minute service, but are generally less convenient in the evening when that frequency reduces to 30 minutes and there are many examples of connections being missed by 2 minutes or less.

Despite the fact that the Arriva Trains Wales timetable booklets for the North Wales coast and Shrewsbury to Chester lines contain a line to show connections to/from Liverpool, connectional times are not in fact shown.

### **5. Connections at Shotton**

Many of the standard connections between services on the North Wales coast line and services on the Wrexham/Bidston line (both of which operate on an hourly basis) involve an unacceptable wait of in excess of 30 minutes –

- 51 minutes for passengers travelling from the Chester direction towards Wrexham
- 56 minutes for passengers travelling from the Chester direction towards Bidston



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- 37 minutes for passengers travelling from the Wrexham direction towards Chester
- 42 minutes for passengers travelling from the Bidston direction towards Chester
- 64 minutes for passengers travelling from the Wrexham direction towards Rhyl  
(a connection of only 4 minutes being impracticable at this location)

**6. Connections at Llandudno Junction for Llanduno**

Numerous services on the North Wales coast line have no connection to or from Llandudno. In particular –

- the first departure from Llandudno is at 0634, by which time seven services with no such connection have left Llandudno Junction towards Chester; and
- the last arrival into Llandudno is at 2146, after which time four services with no such connection arrive at Llandudno Junction from the Chester direction.

**7. Connections at Llandudno Junction for Conwy Valley line**

Given that there are only six trains a day in each direction on the Conwy Valley line, good connections are of even greater importance than might otherwise be the case. Accordingly, it is unacceptable that –

- one train to Blaenau Ffestiniog (admittedly at 0535) has no connection from the Chester direction
- two trains to Blaenau Ffestiniog have poor connections (67 and 49 minutes) from the Bangor direction, and
- one train from Blaenau Ffestiniog has a poor connection (44 minutes) towards Bangor.

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## **8. Ferry connections at Holyhead**

Many of the ferry services between Holyhead and Ireland have no rail connection at all or a connection involving an unacceptable wait of more than 90 minutes –

- there is no rail connection for passengers arriving from Ireland at 0020
- there is no rail connection for passengers arriving from Ireland at 0045
  
- there is a poor rail connection for passengers arriving from Ireland at 1045 (107 minutes)
- there is a poor rail connection for passengers arriving from Ireland at 1150 (98 minutes)
- there is a poor rail connection for passengers arriving from Ireland at 1840 (117 minutes)
  
- there is no rail connection for passengers departing for Ireland at 0855
  
- there is a poor rail connection for passengers departing for Ireland at 0230 (102 minutes)
- there is a poor rail connection for passengers departing for Ireland at 0240 (112 minutes).

## **PART B – CHESTER TO SHREWSBURY LINE**

### **1. Irregular service patterns**

Northbound services generally leave Shrewsbury at 24 minutes past the hour, although several fail to comply with that standard clockface pattern, which is particularly regrettable in cases where services leave earlier than that standard pattern.

Southbound services generally leave Chester at 19 minutes past even hours and 30 minutes past odd hours, although again several fail to comply with that standard pattern; of greater concern is that entirely different patterns apply in alternate hours.

### **2. Requirement to change trains at Wrexham**

There are several instances where a change of train is required at Wrexham, presumably as a result of inadequate line capacity on the Wrexham to Saltney Junction section of single track.

### **3. Connections at Wrexham**

The standard connection for passengers travelling from the Bidston direction towards Shrewsbury varies between 7 and 19 minutes, which is not unreasonable. For passengers travelling from the Shrewsbury direction towards Bidston, however, the standard connection involves an unacceptable wait of 30 minutes.

### **4. Connections at Shrewsbury**

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Many of the standard connections between services on the Cambrian main line and services on other routes radiating from Shrewsbury (most of which operate on an hourly basis) involve an unacceptable wait of in excess of 30 minutes –

- 33 minutes for passengers travelling from the Aberystwyth direction towards Crewe
- 50 minutes for passengers travelling from the Crewe direction towards Aberystwyth
- 58 minutes for passengers travelling from the Aberystwyth direction towards Chester (as services consistently fail to connect by 2 minutes with earlier services).

## **APPENDIX 2 – ENHANCEMENTS TO INFRASTRUCTURE, STATIONS AND SERVICES**

**Note: The items marked with an asterisk are recommended in the North East Wales Integrated Transport Task Force Report dated June, 2013**

### **PART A – INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **1 \* Wrexham to Saltney Junction (see note)**

The long promised redoubling of the single line section between Wrexham and Saltney Junction should be completed without delay, so as to enable a service of increased frequency to be operated between Wrexham and Chester, allowing the introduction of through services between Wrexham and Manchester Airport and/or Liverpool South Parkway.

#### **2 \* Halton Curve (see note)**

The connection between the Chester/Warrington and the Crewe/Liverpool lines to the north of Frodsham, known as the Halton Curve, should be re-opened to regular traffic, so as to enable through services to be operated from the North Wales coast line and/or the Shrewsbury/Chester line to Liverpool South Parkway (for Liverpool Airport).

#### **3. Bangor to Caernarfon**

This former line should be re-opened to a new station on the quayside at Caernarfon, so as to provide direct access to one of the nation's greatest tourist attractions and cross-platform interchange facilities with the Welsh Highland Railway.

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**4. Gaerwen to Llangefni**

At least the first section of the mothballed Amlwch branch should be re-opened, so as to provide commuter services from Ynys Môn to Bangor (and beyond) and solve the congestion on the Menai road crossings.

**5. Salt Island, Holyhead**

The line of the existing railway at Holyhead should be extended to a location adjacent to the berths at Salt Island used by ferry services to/from Ireland, so as to enable direct transfer from rail to ferry passenger terminals without the need for bus transfers.

**PART B – STATIONS**

**1. New stations** are required at some or all of the following locations –

- Saltney Mold Junction \* (see note)
- Airbus \* (see note)
- Queensferry \* (see note)
- Connah's Quay
- Bagillt
- Greenford (to serve Holywell)
- Chester Business Park
- Rossett
- North Wrexham (to serve Wrexham Industrial Estate and the new prison) \* (see note)
- Johnstown
- Cefn

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- Deeside Industrial Park or a remodelled Hawarden Bridge station to serve the industrial park, with in either case a dedicated bus link to the estate \* (see note)

2 \* **Improved rail/rail and rail/bus interchange facilities** are required at Shotton, so as to provide a satisfactory connection between services on the Chester/Holyhead line and the Wrexham/Bidston line (see note), and to provide satisfactory connections between all rail and bus services.

3. **Improved rail/bus interchange facilities** are required at numerous locations, including –

- Wrexham (where bus routes tend to serve the hospital rather than the station) \* (see note)
- Flint (where the existing interchange facility is no longer served by bus routes to Mold and Wrexham)
- Ruabon (where the existing interchange facility is no longer served by bus routes to Llangollen and beyond)

### PART C – SERVICES

1 \* **Express service from North Wales to Manchester Airport (see note)**

The existing “all–stations” service between Llandudno and Manchester Piccadilly should be replaced by an express service from North Wales to Manchester Airport, serving only principal stations in North Wales, Chester, Warrington, Manchester Oxford Road, Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport, so as to reduce journey times, to reduce over–crowding on services east of Chester, and to provide a direct service to Manchester Airport.

2 \* **Stopping service from Rhyl to Crewe (see note)**

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An “all–stations” service should be introduced between Rhyl and Chester, so as to serve the proposed additional stations between Rhyl and Chester and to reduce over–crowding on existing services; from Chester this service should incorporate the existing Chester to Crewe shuttle service.

**3 \* Increased frequency between Wrexham and Chester (see note)**

The frequency of the service between Wrexham and Chester should be increased to at least half–hourly, with the additional services going forward to (or providing cross–platform interchange at Chester into services to) Manchester Airport and/or Liverpool South Parkway.

**4 \* Increased frequency between Wrexham and Bidston (see note)**

Pending electrification of the line between Wrexham and Bidston (which would enable through services to Liverpool), the frequency of the service between Wrexham and Bidston should be increased to at least half hourly, with all services calling at the new Deeside Industrial Park station or a remodelled Hawarden Bridge station.