

Strategic Issues:- Rail

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To: Leanne.Wood@assembly.wales

Date: 18/02/2017 03:06

Dear Leanne Wood,

I was sorry to miss your event at Mirrens in Newtown the other day. This owing to other commitments on the day. It would have been good to have had the opportunity to meet and discuss Welsh Railway links.

Subsequent to this on behalf of our group I enclose below the ===== line some thoughts on strategic issues which we believe are limiting the effectiveness of Welsh Railways.

We hope you will find this useful and interesting. Some of this material forms the basis of a submission we made to Mr Russell George's Cross Party Committee on Cross Border Transport.

Kind regards,

Angus Eickhoff

Chairman, Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association (SARPA)

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## **STRATEGIC ISSUES AFFECTING THE WELSH RAILWAY.**

### **1):- Freight**

1.1 Is it possible to achieve a modal shift from road to rail with freight?

1.2 In order to succeed, the railway must demonstrate ways to assist the logistics sector to improve productivity and achieve better margins. For future growth, the railway must run co-operatively with the road haulage sector, rather than in competition.

1.3 What technical innovations would be necessary to bring this about?

1.4 What investment needs to be made to bring about the required technical advances?

1.5 Given the estimated reduction in coal and steel traffic in the near future, how can Wales take a lead in this? There will still be plenty of merchandise of other types requiring to be moved and which could provide an opportunity for Welsh ingenuity and innovation.

1.6 Does Network Rail have a proper understanding of the needs of both railfreight and passenger operators? Previous versions of the Welsh Route Study have indicated NR does not estimate growth in the quantity of freight trains over the next 20 years or so. Already, we have received reports of operational conflicts between passenger and freight trains along the Marches. Moreover, there have been proposals to remove the dedicated goods line through the middle of Shrewsbury Station. This in a rail centre which is getting steadily busier. Both passenger and freight operators will be seeking to grow their businesses.

## **2) Climate Change and Coastal Inundation**

2.1 We have already seen the Cambrian Coast line experience serious problems when it was washed away by exceptional winter weather in 2014. What steps are being considered to protect the railway from further such events?

2.2 In the event of the section between Dovey Junction and Borth becoming permanently inundated, what scheme is there for building a replacement railway to Aberystwyth further inland?

2.3) In the event of coastal inundation, would there be any scheme to replace the railway along the Cambrian Coast or would the route and even the towns themselves be abandoned?

## **3. Ticketing**

3.1 The population of Wales is less than the Greater London area, which itself has the well know "Oyster" travelcard scheme. This is valid on all trains and buses. What steps are being taken to introduce all-Wales ticketing for all land based public transport?

3.2 Consideration should be given regarding the comments in 3.1 as to how all Wales ticketing could assist integration and intermodal transfer.

3.3 Arriva Trains Wales have recently introduced a new type of paper rail ticket across the network which is much more bulky than the card one it replaces. As far as we understand It is not valid for use via the London Underground as it does not have a magnetic strip on the back but relies on a QR code for encryption of journey information. Moreover, difficulty is experienced at large frontier stations (Shrewsbury/Birmingham for instance) as the barriers are not sufficiently equipped with QR code readers. As busy times, queues of passengers build up in consequence.

3.4 Deutsche Bahn group appear to have introduced this ticket across their other UK passenger rail interests as well, though we understand that not all train operators will accept them at the present time.

#### **4. Railway Land:- Network Rail**

4.1 Recently the Westminster Government decided to examine Network Rail's portfolio of land to ascertain whether any of this might be sold off to help with the national debt. Once again a Government is seeking to asset strip the railway, a process which has been going on relentlessly since the days of Dr Beeching in the early 1960s.

4.2 The danger with this is that once land is lost to the railway, it is difficult to re-acquire it again. The railway becomes hemmed in by other developments, which causes difficulty if the railway needed to expand its facilities. As examples, we would offer Newtown (Powys) and Chester. At Newtown, development has encroached on the railway so much that for any new facilities to be provided, they would have to be built on a greenfield site out of town. At Chester and London Marylebone, a similar situation prevails where freight yards have been sold off for expensive housing and the land is no longer available for rail use.

4.3 This poses a sovereignty problem for Wales. The land is a national asset to be used for the economic development of the nation and not sold off, often at a knock down price. Where whole sections of route are disposed of, it becomes difficult to re-instate the railway.

4.4 Wales suffered very badly under the Beeching programme, with the result that there are very few lines left within the central part of the country. The possibility of replacing these would give an opportunity for economic development which would be lost if the sell off goes ahead throughout Wales.

4.5 The situation in the U.K. is radically different from that in France, where we understand there has been a 50 year moratorium on disposing of closed railway land and routes. If carried out in this country, it would mean that lines removed in the 1960's as uneconomic could be replaced more easily if the situation demanded. We would, for instance not have to worry about HS2 as a viable route would already have been available between London and Manchester.

(The former Great Central)

#### **5) Revived Routes Within Wales**

5.1 We doubt that any of the UK governments truly understand the economic benefits brought about by a competent and effective railway, preferring to put the majority of transport eggs in the "Roads" basket. To illustrate, we would cite the huge amount of money which has been spent on the A465 recently; indeed a sum which would probably have re-instated the railway between

Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. We would also ask the question as to what economic profile the South East of England would be like without the extensive network of rail routes radiating from London?

5.2 We have mentioned at 4.4 above that Wales suffered very badly under Beeching. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government has not taken the opportunity to replace rail links which were lost during that period. A sum of £100m spent every year from the year 2000 would by now have paid for a North-South Railway using revived lines. It would now be contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Welsh economy. This in a land where connectivity is notably bad to the extent of being unacceptable for a modern nation.

5.3 Addressing these issues would have been a way for Wales to assert itself and demonstrate an inclusive vision for its own future. Under the status quo, there is clarity about development in the more prosperous South and the North Wales Coastal Region but the situation seems confused and uncertain regarding the large hinterland of Mid Wales, where the problems of rural sustainability are more difficult to solve.

5.4 Whilst new internal routes would probably not pass present day cost-benefit hurdles, which themselves are too onerous, they will lay foundations for a sustainable future for the Welsh nation.

5.5 Revived rail routes would allow the people of Wales to access the benefits of their capital city more easily. At present it is possible for someone to live in Cheltenham or Bath and commute for work to Cardiff. This is not possible from places like Builth or Llanidloes.

## **6) Cross Border Routes**

6.1 We cannot over-state the case for cross border routes. From Mid-Wales these form a vital link between Mid Wales and the English Midlands are an essential support for the local economy.

6.2 Statistically, there are more tickets sold from Welshpool/Newtown to Scotland than to Cardiff at the present. (Though see comments at 5.4 and 5.5 above)

6.3 The market from Mid-Wales to the North West of England has been somewhat neglected in the period since Beeching. Some of this may have its origin in the closure of the more direct routes to Barmouth/Aberystwyth via Ruabon and Whitchurch/Oswestry respectively. However, the introduction in direct services from Aberystwyth to Birmingham and the growth of usage has indicated what is possible. In the period from 1967 to the late 1980s, it was generally necessary to change twice when making this journey

6.4 Nevertheless, improvements in line speeds since that period have meant that there is still opportunity to capture traffic. Links to the northern airports at Manchester and Liverpool are not as good as they could be, with lengthy waits for connections at Shrewsbury, meaning that rail has an uncompetitive journey time when compared to road.

## **7) Rolling Stock**

7.1 Does the Welsh Government have a rolling stock strategy and if so, what is it? We have noticed criticism from various stakeholder sources about a seeming lack of such strategy.

7.2 Some sources believe that the growth in rail travel means that UK network will require between 13,000 and 19,000 extra vehicles over the next 30 years, on top of the present fleet. The UK has been acquiring new trains at the rate of about four vehicles per week over the past five years. In reality, to cope with continuing demand, that figure needs to be more like twelve per week for at least the next 25 years.

7.3 The provisions of the 1993 Railways Act have allowed regional governments throughout the UK to avoid this pressing issue in the face of vastly increased passenger numbers. The present operator's fleet has remained broadly the same size over the period since 2003 and the Welsh Government appears to think that providing further passenger vehicles is beyond its remit. For instance, it has not thus far, commissioned the building of new trains.

7.4 The Welsh government could take a lead by ensuring that new trains are constructed here in Wales. There is still a considerable pool of engineering skills within the country on which to build. The lack of engineering training throughout the whole UK at present is noticeable. This is a potential ticking time-bomb, requiring the training of many thousands of engineers at all levels over the next 20 years as existing practitioners retire. The opportunity exists for Wales to lead in developing the skills we will need throughout the whole UK.