

## Written evidence submitted by Professor Mark Barry (RWB0004)

My name is Prof Mark Barry of Cardiff University and I have given evidence previously to the Transport Select Committee – as long ago as 2011 (on behalf of the Cardiff Business Partnership) as part of the Committee’s review of High Speed Rail [House of Commons - Transport Committee - Written Evidence](#).

My views on rail funding in Wales, constitutional issues thereof, etc are well known in Wales. I have also discussed such with Rail Ministers in London over the last decade including Jo Johnson, Huw Merriman and Peter Hendy. For more details of my work – and especially the South Wales Metro please see: [About Prof Mark Barry](#).

I now want to comment briefly on the GB Railways draft bill.

### ***In reference to matters under “C-Devolution” of the Committee’s review***

In short, for *Wales, see England!* The bill, which is good on overall rail industry ecosystem simplification, vertical integration, etc. does not address the fundamental issues impacting the rail network in Wales. It’s not the just the need for vertical integration and simplification (which is self-evident), it’s decades of relative underfunding that can be counted in the £Bns vs the rest of the UK. A dysfunction locked into the current constitutional arrangements and specifically the lack of devolved powers over rail.

I am going to brief here as I have covered much of this elsewhere (including evidence to earlier committees). So, for further data, evidence in support of my case, please see the references at the end of this article, and take time to read these first two if you are interested:

From my 2024 book “How to build a Metro” ”[The rail industry, Wales & HS2 – and the Barnett Formula \(Oct 2024\)](#).

A 2025 blog [Post CSR, Rail Investment and Wales \(updated!\) – Mark Barry’s blog site](#)

### **#1 The South Wales Metro**

From my [spark of an idea in 2011](#), to a fully flamed metro by the end of 2026 is a testament to senior WG officials and politicians (esp. Edwina Hart, Carwyn Jones, Mark Drakeford, Ken Skates, Julie James, Lee Waters, etc), who held their nerve on this challenging and potentially transformative project. One also has to applaud the efforts of the team at TfW led by James Price in delivering this programme.

The circa £1Bn+ of capital investment, mainly by Welsh Government ([I estimate circa £150M each from UK Gov and European funding](#)) makes the case for properly and fully devolving rail. There is no doubt in my mind that this project would not be happening without the existence of a Welsh Government and Senedd. The UK Government had little interest in such, often seeing Wales as a peripheral distraction from “more important” and bigger projects in England.

Starker still, as rail is not devolved, the WG funding for the Metro has to come out of a block grant that has no provision for such expenditure and so is drawn from funds intended for

devolved areas like health and education. When you add this often-unnoticed feature to the long-term UK Government underspend, one must ask why Westminster/Whitehall has allowed this funding anomaly to persist to Wales's disadvantage. Surely, the advent of GBR would see this constitutional and funding anomaly addressed?

## #2 Calls for devolution – long standing and fully evidenced

The calls to address this dysfunction are not new; I raised it in [my evidence and presentation to the Westminster Transport committee for the Cardiff Business Partnership in 2011](#) – and highlighted the likely impact of HS2 in that regard.

In 2018, the Welsh Government Transport Minister, Ken Skates published, "[The Rail network in Wales – The Case for Investment](#)" and in 2019, "A [Railway for Wales Meeting the needs of future generations](#)"

The opening statement of the 2019 report by the Minister was "Our vision for full rail devolution will enable us to deliver a transformative railway development programme across Wales that meets the needs of future generations."

Going even further back, the [Senedd Enterprise and Learning Committee found in 2010](#),

*This inquiry has left us with the distinct impression that Wales is not getting its fair share of investment in rail infrastructure or getting it fast enough: programmes to electrify track, to improve stations and to upgrade rolling stock seem destined to reach Wales well behind other parts of the UK.*

However, today, the Minister seems a little more circumspect in his views. I suspect because those views have had the edges knocked off them by dealing with Labour HQ in London and a general disdain of Whitehall bureaucracy toward this Welsh issue.

## #2 The GB Railways Bill does not address the fundamental issues

As I have written before much of the bill is to be welcomed. The industry simplification and vertical integration is long overdue. But for me, it's still very much "for Wales, see England", and the fundamental funding issues and need for more Welsh control over its own rail network and services is unresolved.

I have pulled out some excerpts from the bill to exemplify the difference between the powers and influence of the Scottish Ministers Vs Welsh Minister (whose powers of direction are subsumed into those deployed by the London Westminster Secretary State for Transport)

<b>7</b>	<b>Directions by Secretary of State</b>	
(1)	The Secretary of State may give directions to Great British Railways as to the exercise of its statutory functions.	30
(2)	A direction under this section may provide, in particular, that a function is only to be exercised – (a) after consulting the Secretary of State, or (b) with the Secretary of State's consent.	
(3)	The Secretary of State may vary or revoke a direction under this section.	35

<b>8</b>	<b>Directions by Scottish Ministers</b>	
(1)	The Scottish Ministers may give directions to Great British Railways as to the exercise in Scotland of its statutory functions so far as relating to Scottish railway activities.	
(2)	A direction under this section may provide, in particular, that a function is only to be exercised –	35
	(a) after consulting the Scottish Ministers, or	
	(b) with the Scottish Ministers' consent.	
(3)	The Scottish Ministers may vary or revoke a direction under this section.	
(4)	Before giving, varying or revoking a direction under this section the Scottish Ministers must consult the Secretary of State.	40

<b>9</b>	<b>Guidance by Secretary of State</b>	
(1)	The Secretary of State may give guidance to Great British Railways as to the exercise of its statutory functions.	30
(2)	The Secretary of State may vary or revoke guidance given under this section.	
(3)	Subsection (4) of section 7 applies to the power of the Secretary of State to give guidance under this section as it applies to the power of the Secretary of State to give directions under that section.	
(4)	The Secretary of State must publish –	35
	(a) guidance given under this section, and	
	(b) any variation or revocation of the guidance.	
(5)	Great British Railways must have regard to guidance given under this section.	

<b>10</b>	<b>Guidance by Scottish Ministers</b>	
(1)	The Scottish Ministers may give guidance to Great British Railways as to the exercise of its statutory functions in Scotland so far as relating to Scottish railway activities.	
(2)	The Scottish Ministers may vary or revoke guidance given under this section.	5
(3)	The Scottish Ministers must publish –	
	(a) guidance given under this section, and	
	(b) any variation or revocation of the guidance.	
(4)	Great British Railways must have regard to guidance given under this section.	
(5)	In this section "Scottish railway activities" has the same meaning as in Schedule 2 (see paragraph 16).	10

EXERCISE OF RAILWAY FUNCTIONS		
	<i>Strategies and target</i>	15
<b>15</b>	<b>Rail strategy</b>	
(1)	The Secretary of State must prepare and publish a document that sets out the Secretary of State's long term strategy for –	
	(a) the development and use of the railway network in Great Britain, and	
	(b) the railway services that the Secretary of State wishes to see provided in Great Britain.	20
(2)	That document is referred to in this section and section 16 as "the rail strategy".	
(3)	The rail strategy may not contain provision about functions of the Scottish Ministers.	25
(4)	The Secretary of State –	
	(a) must keep the rail strategy under review, and	
	(b) may revise or replace it.	
(5)	If the Secretary of State revises or replaces the rail strategy the Secretary of State must publish the revised or replacement strategy.	30
(6)	When preparing, revising or replacing the rail strategy, the Secretary of State must consult the Welsh Ministers and the Passengers' Council.	

<b>21</b>	<b>Duty of ORR to have regard to Secretary of State's guidance</b>	
(1)	The Secretary of State may give the ORR guidance as to the exercise of its functions relating to railways and railway services.	30
(2)	But guidance given under this section may not contain provision as to the exercise by the ORR of—	
(a)	the functions exercisable by it by virtue of section 67(3) of the Railways Act 1993,	35
(b)	its functions as an enforcing authority for the purposes of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, or	
(c)	its functions relating to the licensing or certification of persons who drive trains used to provide railway services.	
<hr/>		
12	<i>Railways Bill</i> <i>Part 1 – The new regime for the railways</i> <i>Chapter 2 – Exercise of railway functions</i>	
(3)	The Secretary of State may vary or revoke guidance given under this section.	
(4)	Before giving, varying or revoking guidance under this section the Secretary of State must consult the Welsh Ministers.	
(5)	The Secretary of State must publish—	
(a)	guidance given under this section, and	5
(b)	any variation or revocation of the guidance.	
(6)	The ORR must have regard to guidance given under this section.	

<b>22</b>	<b>Duty of ORR to have regard to Scottish Ministers' guidance</b>	
(1)	The Scottish Ministers may give guidance to the ORR as to the exercise of its functions—	10
(a)	relating to railway services wholly or partly in Scotland, or	
(b)	otherwise relating to railways in Scotland.	
(2)	But guidance given under this section may not contain provision as to the exercise by the ORR of—	
(a)	the functions exercisable by it by virtue of section 67(3) of the Railways Act 1993,	15
(b)	its functions as an enforcing authority for the purposes of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, or	
(c)	its functions relating to the licensing or certification of persons who drive trains used to provide railway services.	20
(3)	The Scottish Ministers may vary or revoke guidance given under this section.	
(4)	The Scottish Ministers must publish—	
(a)	guidance given under this section, and	
(b)	any variation or revocation of the guidance.	
(5)	The ORR must have regard to guidance given under this section.	25

The following from the recent DfT announcement, [A railway fit for Britain's future: government response – executive summary - GOV.UK](#), exemplifies the differences in treatment between Wales and Scotland.

*GBR will be steered by the objectives and outcomes set by the Transport Secretary via a new long-term rail strategy (LTRS) and by Scottish ministers within the Scottish Government's rail*

*strategy. The Railways Bill will set out a new Periodic Review (PR) funding process, under which the Transport Secretary and Scottish ministers will set a statement of objectives and will sign off GBR's integrated business plans. The Transport Secretary (as the funder of GBR's infrastructure in Wales) will be required to consult Welsh ministers in the preparation of both the LTRS and her statement of objectives to ensure Welsh ministers have an opportunity to influence GBR's objectives in Wales and promote alignment with their objectives for Transport for Wales (TfW).*

The bill is limited to requiring the UK Government and DfT Ministers to consult Wales (we have had 30 years of that to little effect). However, without substantive statutory underpinning, this is just empty and leaves Wales without sufficient levers and funding to shape and implement its own transport policy.

Whereas Scottish Ministers can prepare their own version of a Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS) produce a statutory High-Level Output (HLOS) specification for Network Rail (as they have since rail powers were devolved to Scotland in 2005), Welsh Ministers can have a chat with the London Transport Minister to request he/she considers Wales's requirements in an "England and Wales" LTRS and HLOS.

This frankly is not good enough.

More alarming it leaves Wales exposed to the real possibility of a 2029 Secretary of State for Transport in Whitehall from a party that has little interest in Wales and even less in public transport. This is an unacceptable risk that can only be mitigated by a more substantive constitutional change.

A [further piece of PR from DfT](#) sets out some welcome tinkering re: the role of Welsh Government, the Wales Rail Board, and its oversight of enhancements in Wales. These will be set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between WG and DfT and a partnership agreement that will be developed between [Great British Railways](#) (GBR) and Transport for Wales (TfW) for the Wales and Borders area.

Whilst this manifests a welcome recognition of some of the issues we face in Wales, it is not, as I stated above, an effective statutory basis to progress. Anything in an MOU or a partnership agreement can be ignored and does not address the long-term funding issue. Furthermore, we don't want a GBR in Wales that is just a small business unit lost and marginalised in a much bigger England focussed organisation.

According to the timelines set out in [Accessible railways roadmap - GOV.UK](#), this bill may receive Royal assent next summer. For Wales, much needs to change and I hope this becomes a political issue in advance of the Senedd elections in May 2026.

### **A reminder of the funding issue**

Wales voted for devolution 1997.... why has rail stubbornly resisted this democratic mandate. The funding issue is inextricably linked to this democratic deficit. You can follow my links to see evidence of £Bns of historic underfunding by UK Government of Wales rail network that has resulted (Including [WGs 2021 analysis of historical underspend](#)); I also devoted a whole [chapter of my book setting out the issues and evidence](#).

To focus and just looking ahead from the recent *Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)* and documents like *Treasury Statement of Funding Policy* etc one can see the persistence of the problem. For example:

- In June, the [CSR set out](#) to 2029/30 commitments to rail enhancements in England of over £34Bn. In contrast, Wales is getting circa £300M for enhancements to the NR asset on the Wales Route over the same period (which I welcome). That's a circa 100:1 ratio, despite the best efforts of Jo Stevens, Eluned Morgan, Mark Drakeford and Ken Skates, as well as some sympathetic Whitehall officials.
- To 2040 there will likely be £80Bn of rail enhancement in England (finish HS2, TRU, East-West Rail, etc). However, Wales (*despite TfW having circa £4Bn of enhancement in development*) has only circa £500M on the DfT *To Do* list. A population share should be more like £4Bn. *Scotland and NI benefit appropriately given their block grants reflect the fact that rail is devolved with the Barnett formula providing ongoing adjustment*).

If, as it should be, rail was devolved, then [out of the DfT annual budget](#) of ~£37Bn, of which circa £23Bn is for rail (with NR costs of ~£16Bn pa and HS2 ~£7Bn pa), then this should trigger a block grant adjustment to Wales of circa £1.1Bn pa, and leave the DfT Barnett comparability factor for Wales back at a healthy 90+% (like Scotland and Northern Ireland )

Whilst this figure would have to cover the circa £400M for NRs Wales Route OMR, Core Valley Lines (CVL) etc, it still leaves plenty of headroom to invest much more in Wales rail network than is the case under the current arrangements. This is the issue that needs resolving.

### **What needs to happen?**

Time has long since passed for debate, but sadly, evidenced argument presented to Whitehall and Westminster continue to fall on deaf ears. Wales needs nothing less than full devolution of rail, the statutory right to prepare its own LTRS (consistent with other WG Transport Policy via [Llwybr Newydd](#)) and issue its own HLOS and an appropriate block grant adjustment.

Furthermore, delivering coherent Welsh Government (WG) [transport policy](#) (*which unlike in England is much more focussed on multi-modal integration – especially rail and bus*) is almost impossible given a major component of transport service delivery (the Network Rail asset) is the responsibility of the UK Government. A situation exacerbated by the fact (exemplified by the data) UK Government has overlooked WG rail investment priorities for decades.

Furthermore, in Wales, GBR needs to be a separate corporate entity responsible to Welsh Government working much more closely, and more vertically integrated with TfW (in fact in time they should probably merge, as is the case with the TOCs and NR in England) and with appropriate cross border arrangements (*see below – as is common around the world!*).

Without these constitutional and organisational changes in place, a cross-border MoU and partnership agreement cannot work.

## **Finally, a metaphor for the “foot dragging” in addressing these issues**

I have often been challenged with the “but the border” reason to argue against devolving rail powers to Welsh Government. As I explained to Evan Davies on his PM radio show last year, this is a nonsense. Such an argument reflects poorly on that person’s knowledge of the issue and especially their ignorance of how other countries manage cross border rail infrastructure and services. Such talk suggests no one has been on a train in Europe which can only work with sophisticated and equitable cross border arrangements for managing infrastructure and services! PS the Basel tram-system straddles three countries - one of which is not even in the EU. How on earth do they manage!? But of course, we can’t do that here in Wales! Such patronising and clearly ill-informed hand waving dismissal of Wales’s issues, reflects poorly on Westminster and Whitehall.

As an example, let’s look at the Marches Line (which straddles the England and Wales border), which those resisting change often quote. This is a vital connection for Wales and supports, even in its current constrained status, among TfWs most profitable services. However, from a London/Whitehall perspective (who are responsible for the asset and enhancement thereof) it is at best of marginal interest and probably invisible to many officials. This line has some of the oldest signalling in the UK which at Shrewsbury are over 100-year-old! If I was in Hereford or Shrewsbury, I would much prefer WG to be responsible for this vital asset, as they are far more likely to invest/enhance it (because of its strategic importance to north-south rail connectivity in Wales) than the DfT/UK Government ever will.

*PS I also address the “but the liability” foot dragging in my book [“How to build a Metro”](#).*

*The UK needs a fair method of dealing with the historic liabilities associated with economic infrastructure, including the rail network (and coal tips), which pre-date devolution, go back decades, if not centuries and which are a UK Government issue; treatment of liabilities should not be conflated with discussion of where powers and funding over rail enhancement investment reside.*

### **To conclude...**

This persistent and festering issue, and Westminster indifference to it, will ensure that Wales continues to be sub optimally treated and funded in respect of rail. This can’t continue, can it?

### **PS - The wider UK capital funding issue**

As many others have found, the UK’s major city regions are undercapitalised in terms of Public Transport when compared to their European counterparts? This impacts the economic performance of places like Leeds, Bristol Manchester, etc as well as the Cardiff Capital Region, Swansea Bay, etc.

The reason seems fairly clear to me. UK Governance, powers, funding decisions and accountability thereof, are far too centralised in and around Whitehall and the Treasury. I am sure the decision to value-engineer the Portishead line project down to 1tph was made not in Bristol, but in London. And yet had Bristol been in France it would have had a tram network 30 years ago.

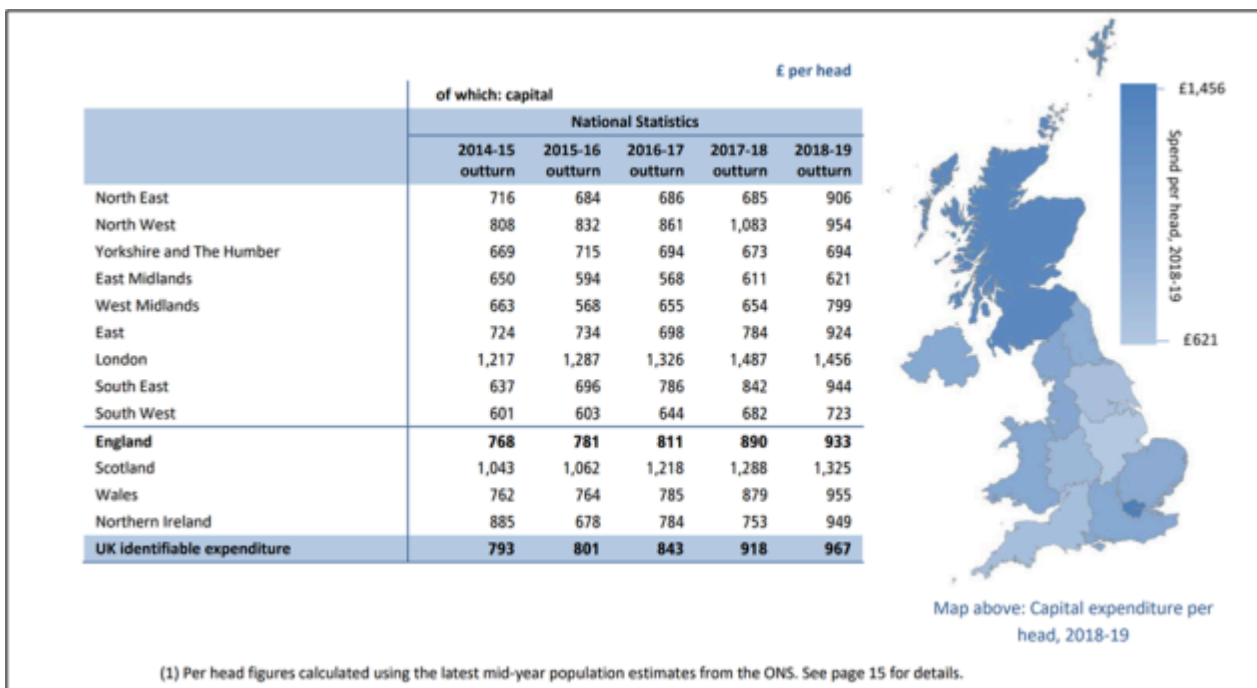


Figure 1 UK spending per capita 2014-2019

This reason is manifest when one looks at capital investment per capita across the UK (see figure below – which also overstates Welsh number given HMT allocate some capital investment in HS2 to Wales!). It is clear that London has been in receipt of far more capital investment per capita than anywhere else in the UK – at least double in most cases. So, it's no surprise that higher GDP/capita has followed that investment, with everywhere else in the UK appearing to lag behind, so exacerbating national and regional imbalances in the UK economy.

The UK's economic problems are at their root, constitutional and need to be addressed if we want to see a more equitable and balanced economy. You can't level up (or whatever we are calling it now) through a little more cash being dispensed through politically compromised Westminster largesse. A handout economy and a handout constitution based entirely around Westminster and Whitehall, has not and can never really work for everyone and every place on this island, especially in Wales. We have to formulaically invest equitably in economic infrastructure across the UK's major urban areas.

This assertion is consistent with the key findings of the Eddington Report, commissioned by the UK Government in 2006, which was that:

- *“there is clear evidence that a comprehensive and high-performing transport system is an important enabler of sustained economic prosperity”*
- *“transport networks support the productivity and success of urban areas and their catchments, by getting people to work, supporting productive labour markets and allowing businesses within the area to reap the benefits of agglomeration.”*

The over centralised nature of UK government bureaucracy and the power of the Treasury in London is part of the problem. The current arrangements have resulted in the devolved governments, especially in Wales with more limited responsibilities, being generally more administrative rather than strategic. They have responsibility for spending functions (like Health, Education, etc which generally have a higher per capita need than the UK average), rather than having full access to the more fundamental levers of power, especially fiscal, and

for Wales, economic infrastructure like rail, energy, water, The Crown Estate, etc. Whilst Scotland has a little more freedom and leverage, the regions and major cities of England are even more constrained than Wales.

### **Further useful background....**

[2010 Senedd Enterprise and Learning Committee - Rail infrastructure in Wales](#)

[Mark Barry/CBP, 2011, Evidence to the Transport Committee Review of HSR](#)

[Welsh Government 2020 Analysis of Historic Rail enhancement underfunding by UK Gov in Wales](#)

[WG 2018, The Rail Network in Wales - The Case for Investment](#)

[WG, 2019, A-railway-for-wales-the-case-for-devolution.pdf](#)

[Mark Barry, 2011, A Metro for Wales Capital City Region](#)

[From "How to build a metro", 2024: The rail industry, Wales & HS2 – and the Barnett Formula](#)

[Welsh Rail Funding – Ministerial Correspondence \(December 2024\)](#)

[The UK Govs GBR Consultation – my initial thoughts... – Mark Barry's blog site](#)

[Post CSR, Rail Investment and Wales \(updated!\) – Mark Barry's blog site](#)

[Cardiff West Junction... –Letter to DfT & WG Ministers 2024](#)

[Why UK City Regions need Metros \(like the South Wales Metro\) \(Dec 2024\)](#)

[GBR – WISP Consultation. My response...\(Jan 2022\)](#)

[The Rail White Paper – some quick reflections... \(2021\)](#)

[Wales and the Williams Review \(2019\)](#)

[Wales's Rail Network – The Case for Investment – \(2018\)](#)

[Rail Reform in the Wales and Borders area | Department for Transport | Official Press Release](#)

[Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)



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