

NTP 04

Reprioritisation of the National Transport Plan and Scrutiny of the Minister for Local Government and Communities

Rail future welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Enterprise and Business Committee's request for information. We will concentrate on rail transport but will comment on other aspects of the Scrutiny where appropriate

What are the key issues currently affecting transport in Wales and how far are they addressed by the change in priorities within the National Transport Plan?

Consultation

Railfuture was able to respond to the consultation prior to the publication of the National Transport Plan in 2010. Railfuture also was consulted by the four transport consortia when they prepared their initial Regional Transport Plans in 2008 which were used to inform the National Transport Plan.

Railfuture was also consulted by SEWTA for their Rail Strategy Review but was unable to make a fully informed response because of much of the background statistical evidence was not published as it was deemed to be confidential.

The publication of the Reprioritisation of the National Transport Plans is not accompanied by an appendix giving information of the evidence on which the reprioritisation was based. There have been no recent reports of the success of the Welsh Government's interventions in funding public transport improvements. There was an early report on the North to South Wales air service but this has not been repeated. There has been no report on the two additional weekday rail services introduced between North Wales and Cardiff. This lack of detailed information makes it difficult to respond to your following questions.

Cross Border Issues

The reprioritisation does not address cross border issues. Railfuture responded to the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into Cross Border services but few of the committee's findings have been incorporated into the reprioritisation. Railfuture is concerned at the quality of Cross Border rail services (for example Shrewsbury to Birmingham and Cardiff to Bristol capacity problems and Cardiff to Cheltenham service frequency) and the poor connections between services at such interchanges such as Bristol Parkway, Severn Tunnel Junction, Hereford and Shrewsbury. Cross Border bus services frequently do not meet the needs of local residents.

There are cross border service issues within Wales with regard to bus services that cross the border from one local authority to another and where one authority will not subsidise a service for part of its route. This creates a greater problem where evening services essential for hospital visits and educational purposes have been withdrawn. Some bus services which gave and onward connection from rail services have been withdrawn. Of even greater concern is the withdrawal of some of the Rail Link bus services.

Railfuture is concerned that there has been no consultation within Wales with regard to the replacement of the Great Western franchise which could have a significant effect on the quality of rail services in South Wales and the delivery of the National Transport Plan.

No cost or minimal cost enhancements

The Reprioritisation does not propose non cost or minimal cost enhancements. We give the examples of the additional rail services that have been provided at Severn Tunnel Junction and

Chepstow where there is still the opportunity for further enhancements. There is also the opportunity for improved connections between rail and rail services and between bus and rail services. Railfuture previously suggested the extension of rail services further into England such as Gloucester to Cheltenham, Manchester Piccadilly to Manchester Airport and Birmingham New Street to Birmingham International and these have been partially or fully been introduced.

Sunday services should be introduced where they are not at present provided ie to Maesteg and Coryton also to Llandudno and the Conwy Valley line winter. There are no additional infrastructure costs to provide these services.

Expenditure

Railfuture welcomed the announcement in 2010 that Wales was spending less than 50% of its transport funding on road schemes- the remainder being spent on public transport, rail transport and walking and cycling. No costs are shown in the Reprioritisation and there are no indications that this trend is continuing- we would have welcomed a statement in relation to the percentages of expenditure anticipated.

We consider that the key issues affecting transport in Wales are

The lack of progress to provide an integrated transport system within Wales- in fact disintegration is taking place in some cases.

The uncertainty of the amount of the Welsh rail network that will be electrified.

The uncertainty with regard to the type of rolling stock to be provided for the Welsh rail network in terms of suitability, quantity and sustainability. There are hints of cascaded older rolling stock from the London area which will be more expensive to operate in Wales and therefore less sustainable.

The lack of Sunday rail and bus services in some areas.

The decrease in rural bus services and also services in some urban areas together with a decrease in funding for community transport.

The decline in ferry services to Ireland and a decrease in commercial flights from Cardiff Wales airport.

A large number of consultant's reports over a number of years on the implementation of new rail schemes that have not yet been delivered.

How far does the change in priorities within the National Transport plan address, and strike the appropriate balance between, the strategic priorities stated in the Wales Transport Strategy, namely reducing greenhouse gas emissions

The reduction in green house gas emissions will only be achieved by providing an alternative integrated affordable transport system for car users. A policy of progressive rail electrification will achieve this reduction. Railfuture published its document for the progressive electrification for the railways of Wales in and was the first organisation to advocate the electrification of the Cardiff Valley lines. We advocated progressive electrification of the railways of Wales to:-

A reduce carbon emissions

B reduce costs electric trains have lower maintenance and fuel costs. They have less wear and tear and are more energy efficient. With less units under maintenance they have a higher availability.

C provide opportunities for an integrated transport system for Wales. Joint heavy and light rail running is possible using tram- trains.

D enhance international conductivity with England, Scotland and Europe (via the Channel Tunnel). Railfuture's proposals will link with lines already electrified in England

E provide a security of energy supply and move away from complete dependence on oil. The price of oil is volatile but increasingly upwards as world supplies diminish. Electrification uses a variety of energy sources including renewable energy from tidal, hydro and wind, from coal including the use of indigenous coal, gas that is being imported at Milford Haven and nuclear power from Wylfa. Wales is rich in the opportunity for energy production.

F improve air quality and the health and well being for those travelling by rail and living near to railway lines by the reduction of emissions. There will also be a reduction in noise levels.

G support Welsh industry. Many of materials required for the construction of the electrification infrastructure are produced in Wales including steel, cement and transformers

H provide, urgently needed, replacement rolling stock. The High Speed Trains on the London South Wales route were built in 1976 and the Pacers now used in the South Wales valleys which do not meet current disability criteria will soon require replacement.

I be more efficient. Electric traction has more rapid acceleration and thus journey times can be reduced and track capacity increased.

J reduce signalling costs The recent re signalling in South Wales is compatible with electrification and thus further signalling costs will be reduced

K provide more capacity trains formed of multiple units can be divided to provide seating capacity appropriate to the service.

We do not support the concept of bi mode trains (especially the five coach version) for use in Wales as these have higher construction costs, more expensive running costs and higher maintenance costs compared with electric only or diesel only trains. However there are some versions in France that are worth considering for outer suburban route such as Cardiff to Carmarthen.

integrating local transport

The reprioritised plan gives no indication of improvements to provide a more integrated transport system in Wales. The valleys rail network should be integrated with the local bus network with suitable interchanges at hub stations. At Caerphilly bus and rail are integrated but at Pontypridd the bus station is not adjacent to the rail station. In Cardiff less city buses use the bus station since services were reorganised in 2011 and in Swansea the new bus station is at the opposite end of the town centre to the railway station. The recently introduced Traws Cymru services do not always give reliable convenient connections with rail services. The timetable for Carmarthen to Aberystwyth has not been brought inline the improved rail services and at Newtown the service to Brecon does not call at the rail station. These trends do not confirm the statement 'continue to plan (not construct) additional strategic modal interchanges'

We do not see how investment in Sustainable Travel Centre is integrating transport in fact it is concentrating investment on areas which already have better transport facilities than other parts of Wales

The inter availability of bus and train tickets between Newtown and Shrewsbury has been discontinued

improving access between key settlements and sites

We assume that key settlements are those referred to in the Spatial Plan. At a local level villages with facilities required by the public could be considered as key sites but frequently there are no suitable well lit routes for walkers and cyclists between these settlements.

Railway stations could be considered a key site but frequently there is no provision of suitable

safe well lit paths linking communities to their nearest railway station.

enhancing international connectivity;

Again we see no real evidence in the Reprioritised plan to improve International connectivity. Ferry services to Ireland have been reduced and the Swansea to Cork ferry withdrawn. Stenna at Holyhead is now using a berth even further from the railway station than the previous two it has used at the port.

Links to Cardiff Airport are limited but the hourly bus service from Rhose station is welcomed. There is no direct link to London Airport and the other airports in the South East and proposals for an international airport in the Thames estuary will be of little use to Wales.

There are no proposals for through rail services via the Channel Tunnel and even on a domestic basis there is no mention of reintroducing the two hourly International rail service from Cardiff to Edinburgh.

addressing safety and security.

We welcome the improved security at railway and bus station, in station car parks and on trains and buses. Access to rail and bus stations is not always safe and improved lighting is required at some locations. We are concerned that the safety of road users appears to be higher than that for walkers and cyclists.

The Minister has stated that the National Transport Plan has been prioritised to “tackle poverty, increase well-being and assist economic development”. How far does the change in priorities within the National Transport Plan contribute to achieving these objectives and are they consistent with those included in the Wales Transport Strategy?

We fully support these objectives but to achieve these objectives a considerable improvement is required to the Welsh transport network.

There are communities and individuals that are suffering transport poverty and this can be linked to poverty because of the high cost of transport, the lack of convenient transport, no evening transport and no transport at weekends. These factors all isolate communities especially the young people and older people.

Convenient transport to access educational and leisure facilities will increase well-being as will the development of footpaths and cycleways. A reduction in road transport will also reduce pollution and noise and also improve well being.

Are the priorities contained in the Minister’s statement the correct objectives for Welsh transport policy?

The priorities are not laid out in order of importance and while we agree with the objectives we consider that an affordable integrated sustainable transport system is the most important objective. We also consider that there should be more expenditure on public transport rail and bus than on roads and motorways. Rural rail services need to be enhanced for example the Heart of Wales line. There is a need for national and international priorities as well as local priorities. There must be greater control of the expenditure of Network Rail in Wales and schemes delivered without excessive expenditure. There have been some good examples such as the station lengthening programme

How far does the prioritised plan meet the Welsh Government’s obligations in relation to sustainability and equality?

Investment in public transport must be sustainable but to serve the communities of Wales transport both road and rail must be subsidised from public funds. Railfuture would like to

see a greater shift of funding from road to rail schemes together with improved transport integration. Transport poverty should not be created for residents in Wales who live outside the main conurbations.

Yours faithfully,

Rowland Pittard

For Railfuture Cymru/Wales

The following publications are available on the Railfuture web site

Development Plan for the Railways of Wales

Progressive Electrification of the Railways of Wales