

1. This is a personal response from a rail user starting or ending journeys on the Cardiff to Cheltenham line and this response does not represent the views of any particular organisation or group.
2. Having responded to the online questionnaire it was felt some of the questions were too broad (such as views of staff on trains and stations – the requirement for trains is different to that on stations) and required breaking down or further explanation.
3. As a user this response will concentrate more on the priorities for the specification than effectiveness of the Welsh Government.
4. This response will also concentrate on local issues in this area (Monmouthshire) as global averages and generalisations tend to overlook highly relevant issues specific to one area or line.
5. This is best explained by looking at the improvements of the suburban services into Cardiff over the first ten years of the Wales and Borders Franchise from 02/03 to 12/13. The details below were produced a couple of years ago so fares etc. will have changed but the comparisons remain valid.
6. Comparison of the Arriva Trains Wales Franchise outer suburban services to Cardiff in the 10 years since the start of the Franchise. The Line description defining the stations which are included in the line calculations are given in the table. The 'line' extends up to the point it joins a converging line.

..	Merthyr Tydfil	Aberdare	Treherbert	Rhymney	Maesteg	Ebbw Vale Parkway	Chepstow (Cinderella Line)
Distance to Cardiff	23¼ miles	23¼ miles	23 miles	23¼ miles	23½ miles	28¾ miles	29¼ miles
Journey less 50 min	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓
Av. journey time	1Hr 5m	1Hr 5m	1Hr 5m	1Hr 3m	54m	57m	39m
Fare Single	£5.50	£5.50	£5.50	£5.50	£5.50	£5.50	£9.30
Anytime Day Return	£7.70	£7.70	£7.70	£7.70	£7.70	£7.70	£12.40
Annual Season	£1052	£1052	£1052	£1052	£1052	£1052	£2176
Change in the number of ATW Trains	+27	+15	+6	+1	+5	N/A	-2
Trains per Weekday	59	57	61	36	32	34	24
Hourly or better	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Incl. Half Hourly	✓	✓	✓	✓*1	X	X	X
Line Description – Stations From -To	Merthyr to Quakers Yard	Aberdare to Penrhiwceiber	Treherbert to Terhafod	Rhymney to Heath H L	Maesteg to Wild Mill	Ebbw Vale Parkway to Rogerstone	Lydney to Caldicot
Average footfall per station on the line*	131,355	149,034	127,029	204,882	49,534	130,592	151,589
Line growth based on station footfall figures for stations on the line	+39.04%	+31.27%	+12.96%	+39.73%	+49.63%	N/A	+131.31%.
Inc in Electrification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Inc in Metro Rail	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

* = Footfall as at 2012/13

✓*1 = Rhymney Peak service

N/A – Line opened after start of Franchise

7. The point about the averages is that the Chepstow line is the only one of the seven not to even have an hourly service. In fact four of the Valley lines already had a half hourly service. So the point about a 'fast and frequent' service is highly important regarding a more frequent service on the Cardiff to Cheltenham service but would be lost in the overall average responses where a majority already have an hourly and many already have a half hourly service.
8. Conversely despite Chepstow being only six miles further out from Cardiff compared with the other Heads of the Valleys towns; the journey time to Cardiff is 39 minutes compared with an hour and a quarter from the Heads of the Valleys. So improved journey time is not an issue on this particular line whereas it would be for the majority of the rest of the suburban lines. In fact the inclusion of the

- opening of additional stations en route to Cardiff such as Magor & Undy Walkway would still keep the Chepstow service well within the 'magical' fifty minutes looked for in METRO services.
9. It should be noticed that despite a growth of over 130% over the first ten years of the franchise compared with a 12% to 50% growth on the other Valley Lines and despite having a fare structure of double the standard Valley lines there has been no increase of services funded or provided by the Welsh Government. Hence the line being locally dubbed the 'Cinderella line'.
 10. Despite arguably being the most financially remunerative and efficient of all these lines in terms of both growth and fares; Arriva Trains Wales has actually reduced the number of trains down to the contractual minimum safeguard level of twelve in each direction. This is in sharp contrast to the additional services contracted and funded by the Welsh Government on all the other lines.
 11. SEWTA the Transport Consortia for South East Wales proposed in its Regional Transport Plan that the Chepstow line should have an hourly service in 2010 and a half hourly service at least as far as Chepstow by 2014.
 12. This would deliver the service level identified as needed following the investigation in the joint DfT / Welsh Assembly Government 2007 Wales Rail Planning Assessment.
 13. There are several reasons why the improvements have not materialised, below are some of them.
 14. The initial assessment for the hourly service was considered by Network Rail in its Wales Route Utilisation Study (RUS). This concluded that the Value for Money was low and did not recommend further action. The reason was the low anticipated growth of new traffic on the line. The growth assumption was included in the RUS "[Section 4.1 Anticipated Changes in Demand –The Wales RPA was developed on this basis and forecasts all day growth of approximately 23 percent in eleven years to 2018/19 for all journeys, within, to and from Wales](#)".
 15. With the knowledge of hindsight this estimate of growth was severely underestimated at 23% by comparison with the actual 130% growth recorded over ten years on the Chepstow line as confirmed by the officially published ORR Station Footfall Statistics.
 16. Having missed out in the first five year plan it was re-evaluated By SEWTA. To great surprise this also determined that it had a low Value for Money and so was not high on the list of projects recommended to the Welsh Government for consideration for inclusion in the next five year National Transport Plan.
 17. It was not possible to initially investigate this as the details had been redacted out of the Report based on confidentiality issues because the organisation that would be paid to deliver any services that would be authorised was party to the various evaluations used in the recommendation report.
 18. Eventually after a lot of lobbying it was possible to talk to the consultants involved and it revealed that they had used the wrong figures which were immediately evident as the cost of providing the service in their report was just under five times what Network Rail had calculated just five years earlier for the identical services.
 19. It also transpired they had developed a unique specific model for the Valley Lines into Cardiff for SEWTA. As will be seen from the Table above this average would mean the growth figures would have been half the actual for the line concerned. In addition the revenue from each ticket if evaluated on the Valley Line Fares would deliver only about half the financial return. So with overestimated costs and under estimated benefits it was no surprise the services only appeared as low Value for Money. Three months after tabling the over 100 page Report and after the errors were pointed out to SEWTA, a short nine page report was tabled and authorised by the SEWTA Board acknowledging the wrong estimation but as far as I am aware this second Report was never submitted to the ultimate deciding and authorising Body – the Welsh Government. So the improved services did not appear in the next five year National Transport Plan issued by government.
 20. The third also was a result of confidentiality issues and the loss of public scrutiny of important evaluations. Again in this case because Private companies were involved it had been decided to exclude the public from sitting in on the Council meetings discussing the report and also not to publish a DRAFT for public consultation before finalising. This was the "South East Wales Integrated Transport Task Force - Report to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport - Proposals for the delivery of the future public transport network".
 21. This Report evaluated options on a different criterion and was based on predominance of existing and proposed population densities.
 22. There are many different models to determine costs and benefits and to provide the comfort blanket demanded by decision makers by producing a so called scientific evaluation of 'Value for Money'.

The classic was the reopening of the Ebbw Vale Line. The original assessment was based on the "Trip end" Model. A couple of years later in finalising the Value for Money for authorisation a revised model the "Trip Diversion" model was used and this predicted only half the passengers that the original method had suggested. The scheme was dramatically trimmed back to save costs and the long passing loops that would allow a half hourly service were stripped out of the authorised scheme. It always appeared strange to me that for a part of Wales that based on the official census had the highest proportion of houses without access to a motor vehicle that it would be calculated using the 'Trip Diversion' method rather than the 'Trip End' model. Hindsight has shown twice the number of passengers compared with the authorisation proposals resulting in the unexpected need to allocate additional carriages and also the costly going back and building in the extended passing lines to allow an increased future service level. The Point is the actual numbers heralded as a great success are in fact almost exactly what the original model predicted. So far from being a great success the use of the different model resulted in shortage of rolling stock, overcrowding and greater cost of the Infrastructure compared with if it had all been included in the original build.

23. The Task Force Report stopped short of any transport proposals coming east from Cardiff crossing the boundary into Monmouthshire. Again within one day of the Report coming into the public domain it was apparent that a mistake had been made when considering the urbanised belt between Newport and Chepstow. The population density had been calculated on the total population of the large mainly agricultural County of Monmouthshire divided by the total area of the whole County. It would be a bit like calculating the population density of the City of Cardiff by taking the population of the whole of Wales and dividing it by the geographical area of the whole of Wales.
24. A quick calculation of the actual and proposed population densities of the belt through Magor, Rogiet, Caldicot, Portskewett, and Chepstow revealed that the value would put it well within the areas being considered and higher than many already proposed for improvement in the Report.
25. This was reported to the CEO of the Council but he decided that as the public issuing of the Report was more than three months after the Minister had received it and presumably acted on it, there was no point in him approaching the Minister to point out the error. There was also the fact some of his own Officers and Councillors were involved in the Task Force and should arguably have picked up on and dealt with the mistake before the report was ever finalised and issued for action.
26. The local MP for Newport East - Jessica Morden managed to arrange for us a quick meeting with Mark Barry whose own Metro Consortium Report on the Metro was due to be delivered to the Minister in a couple of weeks time. His Report equally excluded the whole of Monmouthshire as he had taken the base information calculations from the Task Force statistics. He immediately saw and accepted the mistake and made a last minute modification to his own report reinstating Metro proposals as far as Severn Tunnel Junction at least. That is why Monmouthshire only appears in the Metro Consortium Report and not in the South East Wales Task Force Report.

Service Improvements requested for the new Franchise

27. Half hourly local all stations stopping service between Cardiff and Cheltenham – This would meet the identified requirements in the joint DfT / Welsh Assembly Government 2007 Wales Rail Planning Assessment. The detail above explains the background and why it has not been achieved before now.
28. I will also quote from the Railfuture Cymru 'On Track for the 21st Century – A Development Plan for the Railways of Wales and the Borders' as this supports this proposal and also provides a wider perspective :-

4.1.2.2 Chepstow line (Cardiff - Newport – Chepstow – Gloucester)

[.1] There should be an enhanced limited stop west Wales - Cardiff - Birmingham – Derby (and beyond) service at hourly intervals, with all trains calling at Severn Tunnel Junction and Chepstow.

[.2] An additional hourly local service should operate between Cardiff, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Worcester, giving onward connections.

[.3] As well as this, the existing Cardiff to Cheltenham service should operate each hour, without the current gaps

[.4] This would result on the Gloucester line in Severn Tunnel Junction and Chepstow having three trains an hour, with Caldicot and Lydney being served half-hourly.

[.5] The stopping services in [.2] and [.3] should also call at new stations at St Mellons, Celtic Lakes / Coedkernow, Llanwern and Undy/ Magor. This would help to reduce road congestion in and around Newport and on the eastern side of Cardiff.

[6] We further suggest that, in addition to the currently proposed park-and-ride facilities at Severn Tunnel Junction and Chepstow, similar provision should be made at a new park-and-ride station at Newnham (Elton Corner), between Lydney and Gloucester, to give better access to the rail network for the Cinderford, Ross on Wye and Forest of Dean areas.

29. The item [1] refers to enhancing the present Cross Country service between Cardiff and Nottingham.
30. The item [2] extends the “half hourly” additional service to provide the much needed onward connection through Gloucester and Cheltenham to Worcester and also fills the gap in the services to Ashchurch for Tewksbury. This along with the item [6] highlights the difference in the ability of Railfuture Cymru to look at the Railway in totality rather than just being constrained and blinkered by the historical Franchises defined twenty five years ago and by country boundaries.
31. It raises an interesting point both politically and financially. The much needed station at Newnham is in England but the only rail service would be Welsh Government funded and managed Cardiff to Cheltenham. So what is the mechanism for such a station to be opened and how do you get the Welsh Government to put as much interest, backing and support into it as it would for say a new station in West or North Wales?
32. The new Franchise should mandate that the service goes through to Cheltenham where onward connections can be made. The present Franchise only specifies the service to go as far as Gloucester which is idiotic as almost all of the West of England to the Midlands and North services through Bristol do not call at Gloucester but only at Cheltenham.
33. The extension from Gloucester to Cheltenham is in the gift and at the discretion of the Operator on purely commercial grounds. You can see this by looking at the existing timetables that the last train of the day terminates at Gloucester on Saturdays so there is no return service starting from Cheltenham and on Saturdays there is no onward connection out of the Edinburgh Cross Country services. The reason is simple the Operator has anecdotally admitted that it does not want the hassle of providing Bus replacements and as Engineering work is usually at weekends starting late Saturday night they simply do not provide the service in order to avoid having to put on replacements in case there happens to be engineering work that weekend. The service needs to be specified so the operator cannot just opt out for their own convenience of providing this connection.
34. Another Cross Border and ‘which Franchise’ issue is the much requested commuting service from Lydney, Chepstow and Caldicot reversing at Severn Tunnel Junction to Filton Abbey Wood and Bristol. The passenger reversing facility was installed as part of the recent Newport Area Signalling Renewal a couple of years ago, but at present is only used for occasional engineering diversions.
35. This was identified as a ‘Gap’ in the Great Western RUS but unfortunately was evaluated as an all day Gloucester to Bristol Service which according to Network Rail required two additional trains, six sets of crew and it assumed only a 3.2% annual growth rate. This all day service from Gloucester failed to meet the DfT Value for Money requirement. What had been asked for was purely a morning and evening commuting service from Lydney, Chepstow, Caldicot and Severn Tunnel Junction.
36. What is required is a service from Lydney to Bristol departing at around 07:07 arriving Bristol Temple Meads at 08:10 and ideally a second departing at 07:29 arriving at Bristol at 08:27. (The timings are designed to pick the maximum demand and also to slot between all the existing services into Bristol without the need to alter the timings of any other service in either direction in any way).
37. These would relieve the severe overcrowding at Severn Tunnel Junction as the first would pick up at 07:39 mid way between the two busiest trains the 07:25 Cross Country Voyager Cardiff to Manchester via Bristol at 07:25 that daily picks up approx. 75 at the Junction and the 07:55 Great Western Cardiff to Portsmouth that picks up approx.120 at the Junction. This is the train that every year there are recorded instances of morning commuters being left behind on the platform unable to squeeze onto the severely overcrowded train. The Severn Tunnel Action group STAG can provide documented evidence of days and numbers when this occurs as they record these daily problems.
38. The second train from Lydney would pick up at 08:05 between the busiest and the third busiest the Great Western Cardiff to Taunton at 08:25 that picks up around 50 passengers every day.
39. The growth of Interchanges at Severn Tunnel Junction between the Chepstow line and the Bristol line has been one of the largest growths in rail usage in Wales. Starting at 5,373 in 2000/01 it has reached 40,054 by 2015/16 equivalent to a compound growth rate of more than 14% per year (c.f. the Network Rail assumption of 2.3% in their Value for Money Calculation and this greater than 14% growth is without even having the additional direct services that would tap into the latent demand.)

Staff on Stations and Trains

40. At all unstaffed stations there should be CCTV supervision of the platforms, real time train running information including audio for those with poor eyesight, a means by which passengers can contact and talk to a member of staff if problems arise, appropriate covered waiting accommodation and adequate lighting on both the platforms and access positioned so Notice Boards can easily be read and at all times there should be the provision of up to date timetables.
41. With hundreds of small stations it is not realistic to consider that every station could be manned. I would turn again the Railfuture Development Plan that in my view defines exactly what should be provided:-

6.3 Interchange stations (rail/rail or rail/ other modes) must have all of the above and:

**a "dispatcher" on duty for the whole period of the day when connections are possible at that station;*

**clear announcements of the necessity to change and for which main destinations, together with clear signs directing passengers to connecting bus services;*

**toilet facilities, including provision for the disabled;*

**at least basic refreshment facilities, even if only a snacks/drink machine (commonly provided even at local stations in such countries as Switzerland).*

All of these facilities must be available throughout the period in which the train service is operating.

42. The above would enable the Operator to identify when and where staffing should be provided.
43. On trains there should always be a member of staff who can be contacted. It is noted that in 2015 when the woman was trapped in the closing doors of the Driver Only Operated Train at Hayes and she was pulled along the platform tripped and was dragged; it was the on board revenue collection staff who managed to initiate the emergency stop before she was killed. If a passenger had simply operated the passenger emergency button the train would not have stopped so quickly with a potential fatal outcome. A trained competent member of staff on trains should be specified.
44. On all new and refurbished trains on board CCTV should always be provided.

Other Items

45. Because of the local situation connections are vital. While I may start or finish my journey on the Cardiff to Cheltenham service it is used to connect into other services and less than 5% are probably completed on the one train. As demonstrated above connections at Severn Tunnel Junction have grown by 645% over the last fifteen years equivalent to an annual growth rate of over 14%
46. We negotiated with FGW and they put on an additional stop on their evening service to specifically provide a connection into the ATW service for Chepstow an hour after the last bus of the evening from Bristol to Chepstow (18:00 Bristol Bus Station X7 Severnside Express) The connection had only been in operation for six months before ATW withdrew the outward and return service and severed the connection reverting to more than an hour's wait for the next onward train. ATW's response was that it had only attracted a regular half dozen passengers in the six months and they needed to save money due to the declining annual subsidy. As such it was in their gift as they were operating one train in each direction above the contracted minimum and they could chose which train to withdraw and this one made the best financial savings for them.
47. I hope the above will provide the local requirements needed and the factual reasons behind the request. It also demonstrates the advantage of open management and allowing public consultation on Draft proposals to pick up detailed aspects that can easily be overlooked in the volume and magnitude of the larger proposals. ~end ~