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Welsh Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
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**Your ref:**  
**Our ref: 650/07**

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Dear

## **The Draft Transport (Wales) Bill**

The Rail Passengers Committee Wales and Rail Passengers Council Network is pleased to have this opportunity to give evidence on the subject of the Welsh Affairs Committee and the Economic Development and Transport Committee's inquiry into the Draft Transport (Wales) Bill.

### **The Rail Passengers Committee Wales and RPC Network**

The Rail Passengers Committee Wales is the voice of the rail passenger and has been set up by Government to protect their interests. We see our role to be advocates on behalf of all rail travellers and indeed those who would be passengers.

As the official, independent voice of rail passengers, we want to make sure that passengers views are at the heart of the debate about the future of the railways. The RPC network's mission statement reflect the broad range of activities that it undertakes on behalf of passengers to get those views heard.

Our mission statement is: **CHAMPIONING THE INTERESTS OF RAIL PASSENGERS**

1. To understand and represent the views of passengers
2. To be an effective and influential force for change
3. To raise the profile of the RPC Network with passengers, the industry, the media and Government
4. To develop, update and promote a passenger centred vision for public transport.

There is a Rail Passengers' Committee for each of 6 regions in England as well as one each for Wales and Scotland. In and around London, the London Transport Users Committee fulfils the

RPC role for rail users. The work of the Committees is co-ordinated by the Rail Passengers Council. The Chairman of each Committee is a member of the Rail Passengers Council. While the Committees work with rail user groups, train and infrastructure operators and local and regional government in their own areas, the Council liaises with national bodies representing train operators, Network Rail, regulators and Government.

Attached to this note is a brief summary of some of the current rail issues in Wales. The list is indicative and gives a flavour of some aspects of the current rail network in Wales, which a Welsh Assembly Government with powers over rail could look to address.

### **Draft Transport (Wales) Bill**

The RPC Network's submission to the Government on its rail review supported the idea and principles behind the devolution of power and responsibilities to regional administrations and National Assemblies. In summary whilst a single point of decision making should exist to determine strategic investment priorities and overarching rail policy, to underpin the whole rail network, within this strategic context there was scope for more of the non-strategic decision making to be devolved to national and regional administrations. Funding should then follow this process of devolution.

This position was agreed across the whole RPC Network, and was based on research with passengers and non-rail users through a series of focus groups.

RPC Wales and RPCouncil support the ideas outlined in the specific powers (listed below) which could arise from the Bill. It is nonetheless important to recognise that the Bill and the specific powers suggested are still subject to more scrutiny and we can not make a final statement on their suitability for railways in Wales until they reach legislation.

The main powers proposed in the Transport (Wales) bill affecting rail, together with our analysis of how we believe they can secure a better railway for Wales are:

- 1. The Assembly being given a duty to develop and implement policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport facilities and services, and to publish a Wales Transport Strategy setting out those policies.**

This offers greater statutory authority to the Assembly in its exercising of powers over transport. The bill specifically mentions that the transport facilities and services [of any Wales Transport Strategy] are for those "required to meet the needs of persons living or working in Wales, or visiting and travelling through Wales." As the railways serving Wales demonstrate, there is a strong link between Wales and England, and Ireland, in terms of people travelling between the places. An integrated transport network is dependent on those demands being met and properly catered for.

The devolving of powers to the National Assembly provides it with a number of opportunities specific to transport:

1. More local accountability;
2. More help in ensuring that the level of service planned and delivered reflects the actual needs and demands of passengers rather than just replicating what has traditionally been provided;
3. Encouragement can be given to third party investment and facilitate funding from other sources (e.g. economic regeneration budgets like Objective One Funding)
4. Better transport integration (with buses/roads/cycling/air and rail planned as a coherent whole)

Furthermore, devolving powers to the Assembly will make it easier for decisions about railways to be integrated with other Government policies on integrated transport, health, housing and the prevention of social exclusion. These benefits should be of benefit to the passenger.

**2. The provision for joint working arrangements and for joint transport authorities, so as to enable local authority transport functions, including local transport planning, to be carried out on a regional basis.**

The provision for the Assembly to provide for joint working arrangements at local authority level is an extension of the semi-official set ups that exist throughout Wales at present, such as in South East Wales through the South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA). There is value in having a focus to planning rail services in terms of rail corridors and routes, than by strictly defined local government boundaries. Similar to the benefits accrued through devolving powers to the Assembly, planning on a regional basis should help in the planning of the services to more reflect the actual needs and demands, encourage external investment and promote better transport integration.

**3. The Assembly being empowered to secure the provision of public passenger transport services, where the requirement for such services would not otherwise be met.**

**As we outlined earlier, the RPC Network supports the principle that funding of transport should follow the process of devolution of powers over transport. Therefore, we are happy with the principle that the Assembly has powers to pay for extra services.**

The Assembly has already demonstrated (through the policy of offering free bus travel for senior citizens) its commitment to providing public passenger transport services for the elderly something that would not have been previously met. Some commentators have called for a similar facility for senior citizens to be extended to rail services. The power to secure such a provision is important allowing the Assembly to meet its commitment to tackling social exclusion. Many transport services in Wales, and into Wales could be described as being socially necessary and not justifiable on purely commercial grounds. Similarly, other groups and public transport needs could be met through this power.

Clause 7 refers to public passenger transport services, but does not define them. There are associated services which might be usefully included into the bill as they are as much essential for the provision of a transport network as the actual physical bus and train services. These might include:

- Ensuring the integration of timetables and conditions of carriage between operators
- Joint ticketing
- Ordering the acceptance by an operator of for example, the Freedom of Wales Flexi-Pass
- Information provision.

**4. The Assembly's acquisition of an enhanced role in relation to rail services and facilities. This includes a power for the Assembly to give direction, guidance and advice to the Strategic Rail Authority, as well as a power to enter into binding agreements where the Assembly has given financial assistance in respect of particular services of facilities. The Assembly would also become responsible for appointing the Chair [and Members] of the Rail Passengers Committee for Wales.**

The powers proposed for the Assembly to give directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority over services that start and end in Wales, and operated as part of the Wales and Borders franchise will put the Assembly on the same level as those enjoyed by the Scottish Executive and Passenger Transport Executives in England. No mention is made in the draft legislation of powers over Network Rail on the issue of for example any infrastructure enhancements required for such services to run, or to allow an increase in the level of service. For example, the Scottish Parliament has legislative competence over the powers for the promotion and construction (other than on matters of construction safety) of new railways in Scotland. This needs clarification as the Assembly has contributed to the infrastructure enhancements required for a restoration of passenger services in the Vale of Glamorgan line, and proposed plans to restore passenger services to Ebbw Vale, and for possible future infrastructure enhancements relating to the Great Western Main Line and West Coast Route.

With the powers of directions and guidance, the Assembly has to be cognisant of the wider rail network. In the RPC Networks response to the Government Rail review, we raised three specific points on this issue relating to devolution:

1. Greater regional involvement must be planned within a strategic framework.
2. Greater devolution requires greater clarity of roles and funding. Timetable planning, for instance, requires both strategic and regional input. It is crucial that local needs and demands are reflected when building a timetable but this must be delivered within an overall strategy that sets high-level priorities (e.g. maximising the number of seats that can be provided on a heavily congested route)
3. Devolved administrations must not plan in isolation and must take into account – and involve stakeholders in planning for – services that start or end beyond their own boundaries.

The final aspect requiring clarification is in relation to the Assembly's likely powers concerning the setting and control of fares for rail services in Wales and to Wales. This power is currently vested with the Strategic Rail Authority in respect of regulated fares, and with train operating companies in respect of un-regulated fares. As the cost of operating the railways is funded from essentially two sources, the farebox and public subsidy, there is strength to suggestions that railway fares for journeys wholly within Wales should also be set or at the least regulated by the Welsh Assembly Government. This would mirror the position of held by Passenger Transport Executive who can control fares within its boundaries.

For those services which start in Wales, end in Wales or make at least one scheduled stop in Wales but which are not part of the Wales and Borders franchise, the powers allowing the Assembly to give advice to the Strategic Rail Authority are in line with what the Scottish Executive has. However, the number and weight of importance of inter-city services and inter-region services from England serving Scotland are different to the situation in Wales.

In South Wales, the current Great Western inter-city franchise (to be replaced by a Greater Western franchise extending into South West England) provides an essential complement to the services provided by the Wales and Borders franchise between Newport and Swansea. The Wessex trains franchise (which will be absorbed into the Greater Western franchise) provides the majority of services from Severn Tunnel Station. The Central and West Coast franchises, operated by Central Trains and Virgin, similarly provide important links into, and from Wales.

The level of advice that the Assembly is proposed to receive in relation to these services, needs to reflect the importance they have to Wales. The importance of certain cross border services to Scotland, namely the sleeper services between Scotland and England has meant that Scottish Ministers are able to issue directions and guidance in respect of those services. There is an argument for stronger powers to be given to the Assembly in respect to cross-border inter-city services serving Wales (e.g. the ability to fund an additional train from London to Carmarthen).

The Committee notes the intention for the National Assembly to appoint the Chairman, and Members of the Rail Passengers Committee Wales. This puts the Rail Passengers Committee Wales on the same position as our colleagues in Scotland. The key issue within this area, is the principle of independent consumer representation. It is crucial for it to be enshrined in any new sponsorship structure.

### **Comparisons with Scottish Parliament and Executive**

The powers that the Scottish Parliament and Executive have had over railways for four years appears to be working effectively for people living, working and travelling to Scotland. Similar powers given to Wales suggests that Wales would be able to secure similar benefits and improvements for rail passengers. The Scottish Executive does have powers that are extra to those proposed for the Assembly, and one of these “legislative competence over the powers for the promotion and construction (other than on matters of construction safety) of new railways in Scotland” has clearly been of benefit to passengers in Scotland.

### **RPC Wales Business Plan**

RPC Wales is continuing to develop a business plan for the coming period and its main targets will be:

- **Securing a better railway** – by better understanding what rail passengers and non-rail users think of their railway. In order to represent passengers, we need to understand the perception and reality towards the railway from those who use it and those who do not.

- **Improving Wales' railway stations** – with particular reference to integration with other modes – A range of reports and opinions suggest that Wales' railway stations, large and small, serving city and rural areas are not up to the standard required by rail passengers. Inconsistent planning, poor design and a lack of operational care means comparisons are poor with stations in the rest of the UK, and stations found on mainland Europe.
- **Securing an improvement in performance** – The Committee will more closely monitor performance of Train Operating Companies (TOCs) across Wales, calling to account those TOCs which are not providing the current minimum levels of service performance. We will also look at the current performance targets with a view to refining them for the needs of passengers in Wales.
- **Personal Safety/Route Crime** – The RPC Wales will continue its involvement on the issue of route crime - a concern for passengers and staff. The Committee will continue to be committed to a safer railway by seeking continued improvements at stations, safer travel, more staff, better deterrents (sentencing) and a change in the view that the "railway station is not the place to dump your problems". RPC Wales will remain the catalyst and will be an active partner in the ongoing fight against crime on our railways.

COLIN FOXALL  
Chairman

## **PRESENT TOP REAL ISSUES FOR PASSENGERS IN WALES**

### **1. Rolling Stock – Availability, suitability and maintenance of current rolling stock**

The current Wales and Borders franchise did not provide for an increase in rolling stock. Across Wales, with particular peaks around Cardiff, passenger demand is growing and may soon reach a stage where the total capacity on trains is unable to cope with the numbers of people wanting to travel. There is a second by-product associated with the need for extra rolling stock, and that is in relation to the provision of some contingency in the event of trains breaking down. This is something which is likely to increase as the current rolling stock ages, but at present on those isolated lines and which already only require the use of one train if a train breaks down, no service is then provided.

The only new train introduced into Wales in the past ten years has been the Class 175 unit operating on services in North Wales, and also serving North West England. The trains which have had some problems with their reliability, are generally regarded as good trains by all people who use them. Outside of the Class 175s, fifteen to twenty year old trains are commonplace on Wales' railways. Regular refurbishments have allowed them to provide reliable and comfortable services. However there will be a time when no more refurbishments of the trains can be made, and newer trains or new 'old' trains will have to be procured for Wales' rail services. There is a lot of empirical evidence to suggest that new trains are a strong demand factor for increasing rail passenger travel. This also supports the view that certain types of routes – such as the Cardiff to Manchester – will benefit from having a type of train that meets the changing needs of rail passengers using the services.

The age and use made of the current rolling stock requires a strong maintenance regime, which is aware and reflects the distances involved in Wales' rail network.

### **2. Infrastructure Enhancement and removal of constraints on Wales' rail network**

Within Wales, there exists pinchpoints and areas where the rail network is constrained which adversely affect both train performance but also the rail network's ability to cope with increased demand. The following list which is not exhaustive, gives a flavour of pinchpoints and areas which if addressed will help the development of Wales' rail network.

- **Single Lines Sections of Track** – Between Wrexham and Chester, Swansea and Llanelli, Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth, the single lines in these areas act to constrain any increase in the basic level of service and constrain demand. This is particularly the case on the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line where supply for rail services is currently not able to meet the demand that exists. Similarly, the single line sections do not easily allow for late running trains to make up time.
- **Junction Approaches** – Several stations and key junctions are 'single-lead' [which means two tracks comes into one]. Single-lead junctions reduce the track capacity at junctions, limiting any increase in the level of service and not providing any contingency in the event of

a train running late. Key constraining single lead junctions exist at Swansea, Bridgend and Crewe, which although outside Wales hamper the important Cardiff to Manchester services.

- **Signalling and low linespeeds** – Another constraint to increasing the level of service is the length of the sections between signals, and the maximum linespeeds. On North Wales, the long signalling sections in Anglesey restrict the number of trains which can be run across the island. Similarly in North Wales, the low maximum linespeed means that some of the trains used on the North Wales Main Line (such as the Class 175, Virgin Pendolino) do not run to their maximum ability.
- **Insufficient platform capacity** – At a number of stations, the lack of sufficient platforms together with track layout acts to limit capacity and the provision of extra trains. An example of this can be found at Cardiff Queen Street where the current set-up of three platforms are constraining some development of more services on the Valley Lines network.

### **3. Loss of through Services to England**

Over the past decade, Wales has seen its direct links to North East England, London Waterloo, Birmingham and the Midlands, and South West England severely reduced. Our main reply illustrates the importance of the remaining rail links from Wales to parts of England. This point has been recorded by other bodies such as the DfT with its acknowledgement of the journeys made from North Wales to Manchester and Liverpool airports.

### **4. Personal Safety and Security**

Personal safety and security for passengers remains a key issue, with the need for many stations to become more safer. Only two stations in Wales have secured secure station status with many more having good CCTV facilities and help-point facilities giving passengers greater confidence to use the train and rail station. Parts of Wales are in need of greater attention, such as in North Wales which suffered from the hiatus associated with the re-franchising of rail services in Wales and a lack of commitment from previous agencies.

Throughout the whole of Wales, the presence of staff, security personnel or British Transport Policemen is viewed by passengers as a key way to engender greater confidence in their safety. Again, empirical evidence supports the importance of providing more visible station staff and giving more resources to the likes of the British Transport Police.