

Comments on Draft Transport (Wales) Bill

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& on behalf of Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association (SARPA).

Background:

The comments made below are the latest being made as a result of a lobbying process, (begun in 2003 & assisted by the offices of Lembit Opik MP and Roger Williams MP) about railway management and transport systems in Mid Wales. The process (involving the above and others from Mid Wales)) included a meeting in July 2003 with the Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Wales and in December 2003 with Chris Austin (responsible for Community Rail development at the SRA) in December. A submission was also made to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee in September 2003.

General

- 1.1 The powers proposed for the Assembly to be able to plan and implement an integrated transport system through directing the co-ordination of existing local authority powers appear satisfactory.
- 1.2 Hopefully, the new process will lead to realistic and effective long term planning leading to an ability to implement projects on budget and to spend budget allocations.
- 1.3 It is assumed that JTAs will continue the planning and procurement of transport services for all the LA departments (local bus, education, social services) for all the constituent LAs. It is also assumed that the constituent LAs will retain the powers to directly operate school, social services (and limited local bus) transport if they so choose.
- 1.4 It is not clear whether the JTAs could act as an agency to procure transport on behalf of the Health Boards. Non-emergency transport to health facilities is probably, at present, the single greatest failing of public transport.
- 1.5 The specified transport functions which can be transferred from LAs to JTAs relate to public transport not private transport and will have a limited effect on freight transport policy. JTAs will have no control over highways other than limited powers to instigate traffic orders – such as those pertaining to bus priority measures.
- 1.6 The Assembly is already the Trunk Road Authority for Wales. Can it be enacted that, at a later stage, a separate operating arm of each JTA would become the Highway Authority for all roads in its area?
- 1.7 JTAs will be able to own land and property.
- 1.8 The funding package from the Assembly to a JTA would include the included LA's share of bus Revenue Support Grant, administration of free bus travel for the elderly and disabled,

rail infrastructure projects, transport interchange developments, walking/cycling schemes, Safe Routes to Schools schemes

- 1.9 It is not understood why the creation of Joint Transport Authorities should result in additional running costs of £1m per annum each since each JTA would be a merger of existing local authority functions and manpower. [Another paragraph implies this by be the average, not additional, running cost of a JTA]. If this kind of finance is available, it should be spent on providing improving transport facilities and services and not on administration.

Rail issues

The following comments are based on present structure. As this report was being written, media reports were suggesting that the rail structure would be radically altered with the possible removal of the SRA. We therefore assume that issues and comments made below would become the concern of the 'heirs and successors' of any agency that may be removed or radically altered as a result of the Government review of railways.

However we are concerned by a situation in which one action is being taken ('Draft Transport, (Wales) Bill') whilst other major related actions are being considered, ones that could have major impact on any conclusion reached by this pre-legislative scrutiny. The media speculation suggests that the new structure will be more centralised and that agencies such as RUCC/RPCs will be disbanded. To what extent will this approach conflict with the general de-centralised thrust of the Transport (Wales) Bill? It makes the process of trying to assist consultative and scrutinising processes such as this one, the more difficult, especially for those who have few time and financial resources.

- 2.1 The granting to the Assembly of enhanced powers in relation to railways will necessitate the creation of four additional posts within the Assembly Government administration at an estimated cost of approximately £100,000 per annum.
- 2.2 This proposal would partially overcome the current problem of the Assembly developing rail infrastructure projects for the benefit of Wales but the SRA then not agreeing to fund the services which could use them.
- 2.3 Would it make more sense to reduce administrative interface and costs by creating a joint SRA/Assembly rail office in Cardiff to plan, implement and monitor franchised rail services in Wales? On this basis, should the SRA's budget for rail services in Wales and the Borders be devolved to this new office together with a share of other rail development funds – including freight grants?
- 2.4 It is unfortunate that this process is following, rather than preceding, the award of the Wales & Borders rail franchise for a 15 year period and will not include analysing the proposed new 'clockface' timetable which Arriva Trains hope to introduce in December 2004. The Public Service Requirement of each line requires updating since its last review in 1994.
- 2.5.1 Different paragraphs in the text suggest that the Assembly will only be able to direct and guide the SRA about rail services which both start and finish in Wales OR start or finish in Wales and are operated by the Wales and Borders franchise. Which is correct? If it is the former, there is only a very limited list of services which will apply:
- Llandudno – Blaenau Ffestiniog

- Holyhead – Chester – Shrewsbury – Hereford – Cardiff
- Pwllheli – Barmouth – Machynlleth (if not operating through to Birmingham)
- The Cardiff Valley Lines network
- Cardiff – Maesteg
- Swansea – Carmarthen – Pembroke Dock
- Carmarthen – Milford Haven

2.5.2 The latter definition would add the core routes:

- North Wales – Chester – Manchester
- North Wales – Chester – Crewe
- Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury – Birmingham??
(since this only passes through Wales but is part of the co-ordinated services Holy head – Cardiff above and Aberystwyth – Birmingham below)
- Aberystwyth – Shrewsbury – Birmingham
- Shrewsbury – Llandrindod Wells – Swansea
- Swansea – Cardiff – Hereford – Shrewsbury – Crewe - Manchester
- Cardiff – Gloucester

2.6 The proposal for the Assembly only to have advisory powers to the SRA for the services from North Wales or South Wales to London because that would mirror the situation in Scotland is unlikely to be changed even though the Welsh services have much greater internal use than the Scottish ones.

2.7 However, neither the proposed powers for the Assembly nor the Wales & Borders franchise would have control over two other key rail routes from Wales: those from South Wales to Birmingham and South Wales to Bristol. These need to be addressed

- (a) as future routes of the Wales & Borders franchise when the responsibilities of other franchises are planned
- (b) adding to the portfolio of rail responsibilities of the Assembly – in conjunction with English LAs - on the same basis as described elsewhere.

2.8 The target to cut car-commuting journeys in Wales from 80% to 75% of the total by 2010 can only be achieved by the modal shift of significant numbers of people. The most likely area to effect this achievement is the South Wales Valleys into Cardiff during the peak periods. Since these rail routes are already running at capacity, the modal shift will only occur if greater capacity is provided by leasing more DMUs (carriages) and extending the length of platforms at smaller stations. This will require cash – and no additional cash is proposed for the Assembly to undertake its new rail responsibilities.

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