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Campaign for Rail

NETWORK RAIL WALES ROUTE STUDY CONSULTATION
COMMENTS OF CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL

Campaign for Rail is an organisation that advocates railway interests and the best interests of all rail passengers and groups, including (but not limited to) Rail User Groups, Freight Development, and re-opening of lines and services. We also lobby for and promote rail interests with the relevant statutory bodies.

We welcome this opportunity to comment on the draft Wales Route Study and the enhancements to infrastructure and to passenger services that it recommends. The comments which follow are mainly directed to parts of the route within England and in particular the passenger services which cross from Wales into the West Midlands Region.

We understand that the study's objectives are stated to include:

a. The level of rail capacity required to accommodate the demand for passenger and freight services in CP6 and beyond and;

b. The level of rail connectivity between key economic centres.

We note that the starting point for this study includes the interventions that are already committed for CP5, the conditional outputs that have been proposed in the Market Studies and some additional conditional outputs that are specific to Wales and the English border region.

We also note that Network Rail are forecasting that passenger numbers in the Study Area will grow, from a baseline set in 2013, by 20% in 2023 and by 77% in 2043 (Table 3.1, p17); and it appears from Table 3.2 that much of the expected growth is predicted to be commuting into Cardiff.

Conditional Outputs

In general we agree that the conditional outputs set for the flows from Cardiff to Birmingham (CO7, CO14, CO15, CO35) and from Cardiff to Shrewsbury (CO4, CO5, CO6, CO9c, CO17) are appropriate.

Paragraph 4.3, p29 says: "Where not identified [the study] assumes that existing level of services in the baseline will be maintained".

However, we suggest that a reference to flows between the market towns on the Marches Line within England is missing from this list of conditional outputs despite evidence for significant commuting from these towns into Hereford, Shrewsbury and Crewe (as well as Cardiff).

The Marches Line is also a strategic freight corridor from South Wales (Fig 3.7) to North Wales and we note that the study recommends the provision of 1 hourly off-peak path for freight between Newport and Shrewsbury [CO9]. Whether this single freight path will prove to be sufficient depends in part on the availability of alternative paths into the West Midlands via Bromsgrove and the Lickey Incline, and we wonder whether the aggregate total of freight paths into the Midlands will be sufficient.

We support the proposal in the Long Distance Market Study that the current Cardiff Nottingham service should be diverted to run via Leicester, as that City has a greater population than Derby and this service would then address the capacity gap between Leicester and Nottingham that was identified in the East Midlands RUS (2010), whilst allowing a local service to take over the existing path to Derby.

Train service specification for 2043

Although Figure 4.13 shows 1 tph Cardiff - Manchester and 2 x 0.5 tph Cardiff - Chester paths, there appears to be an error as the Cardiff - Manchester shown does not pass through Crewe! The result is that it is not possible to see what the TSS between Shrewsbury and Crewe is proposed. However, we note that in the discussion of Shrewsbury - Crewe outputs (Para 6.2.5.3, p73) the 2019 (base) passenger service is described as: Manchester 1 tph; Local 2 x 0.5 tph which, if correct, would be welcome.

Although Table 4.1 shows the conditional outputs on the Marches Line for commuting into Shrewsbury (CO4) and all day capacity (CO5) there is no mention of commuter flows into either Crewe or Hereford which contribute to overcrowding on the existing services.

From paragraph 4.15 we note that peak-hour passenger demand into Shrewsbury is expected to grow by 24% to 2023 and by 82% by 2043 but, surprisingly, there are not expected to be any additional peak-hour trains arriving in Shrewsbury after 2019. [CO4]

Anticipated passenger growth on the Cardiff - Manchester service is shown in para 4.16 as 34% by 2023 and 141% by 2043 [CO5/6]. However the bar charts in Figs 4.8 and 4.9 seem to understate the number of passengers travelling on the route today.

Additional Conditional Outputs [Table 4.6]

We are surprised that para 4.4.1.5 of the study does not mention the poor connectivity between towns in Shropshire and Manchester Airport [CO41 Airports]. Providing a through service from Shrewsbury to Manchester Airport is just as important as that to Birmingham Airport and this aspiration should have been acknowledged despite the severe constraints of the existing layout at Crewe station.

Travel to and from the main International Airports is also one aspect of Integrated Transport [CO46] but is often suppressed by the expense of booking Single tickets when the return journey will be later than the month allowed by Open Return tickets.

We welcome the brief references in the study to improving capacity and connectivity for Leisure markets (para 4.4.4), to travel for Higher Education (para 4.4.5) and more generally to improved passenger satisfaction (para 4.4.6) all of which can easily be overlooked in the larger picture.

Options for Funders

Marches Line - Proposed Interventions

The growth forecast for 2043 suggests that this route will need to provide capacity for: 1 tph, Freight; 1 tph Cardiff - Manchester; 1 tph Cardiff - Abergavenny and 2 x 0.5 tph Cardiff - Shrewsbury. [Although the latter services are not shown beyond Shrewsbury.]

However we are concerned to read (on page 69) that "In practice the constraints identified on other parts of the Network prohibit the accommodation of the 2043 ITSS on this route. Therefore, while there may be the

capacity for shorter distance passenger services to use parts of the line - for instance at the north and south ends, and around Hereford - it is unlikely that today's number of long distance freight and passenger paths can be substantially increased".

We welcome the three specific interventions that are suggested for this line, described in on p70 in Tables 6.17, 6.18, 6.19.

Option 'A' (Table 6.17); Providing additional signalling sections at four locations, will clearly ease some of the current pathing constraints on this busy line and may contribute to providing a path for the enhanced end-to-end journey speed of 100 mph for Manchester services as specified in conditional output CO17.

Option 'B' (Table 6.18); Providing a new freight loop to replace the Panteg Up loop and lengthen other loops at six locations, is particularly welcome as much of the network cannot currently support pathing either the 660 or 770 metre trains that the freight TOCs need to remain competitive.

We note also that in a discussion of the South Wales Main Line (page 62) the study says that: "Practical time-table development may demand extension and re-location of loops for the purpose of time-table flexibility or extending the performance buffer".

Shrewsbury Station

In the discussion on possible interventions at Shrewsbury Station (page 61) the study says: "It is likely that many services will require longer than average stops at Shrewsbury ... in order to meet their timing at other key constraint points elsewhere on the network".

We therefore support both Option "A' (Table 6.20) - Extension of Platform 3 to provide access to the Crewe line; and, perhaps in the longer term, Option 'B' (Table 6.21) - An additional platform on the north side of the station.

Appendix A - Option evaluations

Train lengthening between Cardiff & Manchester [Options 7A, 7B]

The Cardiff - Manchester service is unusual in that the basic end-to-end flow is overlaid by several more local commuter and leisure flows, including contra-flows into the sub-regional centres at Hereford, Shrewsbury and Crewe. It is therefore not altogether surprising that the service is often overcrowded and it seems likely that as a result there is suppressed demand on the route.

In addition connectivity at several of the intermediate stations on the line is poor as the nominal hourly service is irregular (e.g. at Leominster), whilst the thriving market towns of Wem, Whitchurch and Nantwich do not even have an hourly all-day service in the current timetable.

Whilst we clearly support the early implementation of Option 7B to lengthen the majority of trains to 3-car units it seems likely that providing some additional capacity, perhaps less than that examined in Option 7A might also have a medium value for money.

There is however, an alternative option which would also address the poor connectivity and irregular service frequency currently provided at stations north of Hereford (and in particular at the three market towns north of Shrewsbury).

In August 2008, as part of their response to the Wales RUS, Passenger Focus suggested that an additional service could run in alternate hours between Crewe and Hereford, in between the existing Crewe - Shrewsbury local service, to provide a genuine hourly service to Nantwhich, Whitchurch and Wem, as well as Craven Arms, Ludlow and Leominster.

It seems possible that, by picking up many of the shorter distance flows (and passengers making connections at Crewe and Shrewsbury), this new service would relieve the main Cardiff - Manchester service of some local overcrowding in the same way as is proposed at the south end of the line.

Parking facilities

The study has noted under Integrated Transport (CO46, Para 4.4.7) the need for adequate parking facilities at stations, the availability of which can often influence the decision to travel by rail.

As every station on the Marches line serves a broad rural catchment in addition to the town, often with only minimal local bus services, provision of adequate parking spaces is essential. We suggest that Network Rail should take the lead in providing additional parking spaces at medium sized stations such as Leominster where the existing facility is full to capacity every day.

Conclusion

In conclusion we appreciate the effort that has obviously gone into presenting a complex and wide ranging study for public consultation, and look forward to seeing the additional cost evaluations in the final report.

Peter Cousins
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