

Dear Martin

**MAGOR (Magor Action Group On Rail) response to SEWTA Rail Strategy, June 2013
Stakeholder Consultation**

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the review of Sewta's Rail Strategy.

There are many good things in the report, particularly in the identification of quick wins and improvements at stations. In particular low cost schemes that are easy to implement which would have instant benefits for passengers.

As the timetabling for some of the existing lines is inferior to what it was in the BR era, we welcome the commitment to improving the frequency of services on existing routes in particular the Chepstow and to Bristol lines.

Managing Growth

In British Rail day's rail travel was seen as the barometer of the nation's economy. Today the opposite is true with rail travel bucking the trend as far as the economic conditions are concerned. In the last ten years rail travel on the lines that serve the three stations in the south of Monmouthshire has risen by on average 10% per annum. Ten years ago the forecast was for zero growth on these routes and bearing in mind the recession that has persisted since 2008, the rise is currently in excess of 100% is both confounding and staggering. The route from Cardiff to Bristol is not identified in the report as a route which suffers from overcrowding. However, the situation is critical at certain times of the day at Severn Tunnel Junction. There have been instances where passengers have been unable to get on the train in the peak hours. Bearing in mind these are commuters going to their place of work and paying significant sums of money for the privilege of using the railway This is a situation that should not be happening in the 21st century. Allied to this the parking situation at Severn Tunnel is less than adequate, there is an urgent need to deal with this situation. It is time that people are not seen as just passengers that should be viewed as customers. This means that satisfying their needs or even exceeding them should be a priority in this day and age. What should the customer receive for their money? Taking Severn Tunnel Junction (which is predominantly a park and ride station) as the example, the requirements to meet the customer needs are:

- Safe, secure and convenient car/motorcycle/bicycle parking.
- Easy access and egress to all parts of the station (particularly for the disabled customer).
- Welcoming and comfortable facilities.
- Easy and convenient methods to purchase a ticket or product.
- A frequent and reliable train service.
- The ability to get a seat on the train and be comfortable.

Unless there is a strategy to address the needs and provide a holistic experience for the customer, future growth is not an option for Severn Tunnel Junction or on this important arterial route for work/leisure travel to Bristol and Cardiff.

The perception of the MAGOR Group is- Monmouthshire is seen as a backwater as far as rail policy and strategy are concerned. Hitherto it has not been a priority for county and community councils within Monmouthshire. This is probably due to Monmouthshire being a large county which is mainly rural and only has two rail routes and four railway stations. The demographic profile of Monmouthshire is similar to that of Wales, whereby there is a density of population in the north and south of the county.

The populations of Magor with Undy, Rogiet, Caldicot and Chepstow have grown significantly in the last twenty years. As work is limited in the area at least 40% of workers have to commute to their job. The area has also places of beauty, historical, scientific and nature interest, which attract significant numbers of tourists.

Whilst we can understand the focus to develop rail being biased towards the major cities and the valleys to drive economic growth in Wales, this is a 'blinkered' approach. This policy loses sight of the needs of a growing, affluent, mobile population and an area of Wales with immense opportunity to grow economically from a commercial and tourist perspective. Therefore, future rail planning, strategy and development **must** include Monmouthshire if Wales is serious about growth and regeneration and an expanding modern railway that serves all the people of Wales

Station improvements

There is the potential for improvements at Severn Tunnel Junction around better car parking management by re-instating access to overflow sites that the community council closed off for what seems to be no logical reason whatsoever. However, there has to be a commitment to a priority to provide a long term and permanent solution for parking at Severn Tunnel Junction.

Timetable improvements

MAGOR welcomes the inclusion of improvements to Sunday services on the Chepstow Line. SEWTA must lobby the Welsh Government and the train operating companies to implement these low cost, high benefit improvements quickly.

Service Frequency Improvements

MAGOR welcomes the aspiration and commitment to an half hourly local services between Cardiff and Chepstow and the three trains every hour to Bristol. SEWTA must continue to keep the pressure up on the Welsh Government, Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western, to implement these important and necessary enhancements to the timetable.

Before the next Great Western Franchise is awarded it is vital that the opportunity is taken for SEWTA to be in the lead in co-coordinating the submissions of Monmouthshire County Council, Community Councils, Severn Tunnel Action Group, Better Trains for Chepstow, MAGOR and any other interested parties. SEWTA must press the Welsh Government and the Department for Transport for enhancing the services between South Wales and Bristol provided by the next Great Western Franchise Operator. As previously mentioned without these enhancements, future growth is not an option. However, this should not preclude SEWTA from pressing for the more immediate solutions such as the implementation of a half hourly train service to Chepstow.

M4 Scheme

The future proposal for the M4 between the Second Severn Crossing and Cardiff is currently subject to consultation. Even if the new M4 gets built, this will be many years away. Therefore, it is vital that Magor & Undy Walkway is built; Severn Tunnel is made a fit for purpose parkway, with good connectivity to B4245 and the M48, together with adequate parking for cars, cycles and motorcycles. Also this would enable access to the bus services to serve the station, thus creating an integrated transport system to the benefit of all customers and the area. There would also have to be an improvement in both rail and bus service timetables.

This strategy would create alternatives to the car on the congested M4 and even if the new M4 was built it would probably reduce short motorway journeys, enabling the motorway to be used for the purpose it was built, the long distance and fast journeys.

Magor & Undy Walkway Station

A measure that is not currently included in the SEWTA 2013 Rail Strategy Review, is the building of a new station for Magor with Undy. Support for a new station for Magor with Undy was included in principle in Monmouthshire County Council's 2001 UDP. However, Monmouthshire County Council at the time decided that support would be for the development and improvement of Severn Tunnel Junction and the Magor with Undy proposal was not progressed.

As previously stated in the last ten years growth on the route has exceed 100% and the idea of a new station for Magor with Undy has been re-born. In pursuit of this objective, MAGOR was formed in 2012. Monmouthshire County Council formally accepted the proposal on 13th July 2013.

MAGOR

MAGOR is a community action group formed and constituted by local residents in 2012, with the single objective of re-instating a railway station to serve the growing communities of Magor with Undy. The population of Magor with Undy has seen a population and housing explosion in the last twenty five years. If the proposals contained in the Local Development Plan get the go ahead for a further 640 houses in Magor with Undy, the population is set to expand by a further 20 – 30% in the next few years. The B4245 road (the main road through the villages) carries in excess of 11000 vehicles per day. Given a projected 20 – 30% rise in the population of Magor with Undy in the next few years, we see a railway station that is a walk to, rather than a drive to, as a solution to alleviate some of the inevitable growth in traffic that the increase in population will create. We currently have around 100 members signed up to the group and the full support of the **COMMUNITY** Jessica Morden MP, county, community councillors and local businesses. We see the development of the railway station as key and critical strategy to easing the congestion problems the villages currently have to endure. We aim to establish working relationships with - Network Rail, Passenger Focus, Arriva Trains Wales and First Great Western and with the Welsh Assembly Government. We support the strategy to improve regional transport in south-east Wales. We see rail as key to the movement of people and goods and as a driver to the future prosperity of the area.

The transport infrastructure is key and critical to the prosperity and social cohesion of the people of Wales. The railway network has an increasing role to play in helping to deliver and meet the needs of communities within Wales. Over the next twenty five years the usage of rail will increase dramatically, car travel is likely to become more and more expensive and the reliance on oil supplies having an uncertain future. Therefore, to ensure the future development of the Welsh economy and the prosperity of the Welsh people, Wales will need a rail network that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of all Welsh people.

The development and improvements in the rail industry require long and often protracted planning processes. There is a need to streamline and speed up the process for future change to deliver a railway that will meet the economic and social needs of Wales. The demand for rail travel is going to grow probably beyond the forecast and projections. Therefore, there is a need for a different planning model when it comes to catering for growth. In the past the building of new stations was totally dependent on being built at the same time as new and volume housing developments in the location. This is then perceived as totally new business for the railways, which is a flawed thesis. An example being, the communities of Magor with Undy, where the housing development explosion took place in the 1990s and therefore do not meet this "at the time" criteria. This is despite the fact that 40% of inhabitants have to commute out of the area to work. This is usually by car on ever increasingly congested and crumbling road infrastructure. The nearest railway stations are Severn Tunnel Junction – 2.5 miles and Newport – 10miles.

The building of Magor & Undy Walkway would potentially transfer a lot of westbound commuters in to Wales away from cars to rail. A cost benefit ratio study has shown that Magor with Undy would be one of the top best value for money for proposed new Welsh railway stations. Therefore, there is a requirement based on the needs of the communities to change the qualification requirement for developing new railway stations. This process should also be driven by the need to integrate railway stations as a valuable part of the social fabric of the community (Swiss model) and not be seen as some piece of infrastructure that is on the fringe of the community which is only used for a few hours each day. To illustrate the point, the communities of Magor with Undy are desperate for a Community Centre. Despite over thirty years of trying to secure the Community Centre on allocated land in the in the middle of both villages, little progress has been made since 1974. The integration of a railway station within the proposal would be a major opportunity to have joined up thinking when it comes to meeting the future needs of the community and make both schemes cheaper to construct. The MAGOR Group proposal is for a joint development of a new station incorporated with the Community Centre. This would a community asset and the station would revenue generative through a station agency ticket office with income going back to the community (Swiss model). This type of joined up thinking is what is needed in the future planning of the railways in Wales.

In the last two months a survey has been carried out with the residents of Magor with Undy, seeking their views on what they would like to see to improve their quality of life. Although the results have not yet been made public, we have learned that the two most desired improvements for Magor with Undy are a Community Centre and Magor & Undy Walkway Station. This confirms the research we already undertaken.

Should you require any further information or clarification, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Laurence Hando
Chairman