



National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail

Evidence from Magor Action Group on Rail – WBF 30

National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Franchise

First and foremost MAGOR (Magor Action Group On Rail), welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise.

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 in the Local Development Plan get the go ahead, which is 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 response we have put together is drawn from the experience of some of our members who are ex rail employees and some who served on various rail groups that have participated response will draw from both documents. This pool of experience and expertise has helped to deliver some improved rail schemes across the region. We have geared our comments to reflect some of the nine items in the terms of reference.

We trust you find our response useful and would welcome the opportunity to expand on our comments in the oral evidence sessions the Committee intends to hold during the autumn term of the National Assembly for Wales

Yours sincerely

Laurence Hando

Chairman, MAGOR

Dated: 9th September 2013

MAGOR Response to National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry in to the future of the Wales and Borders Franchise

1. 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.

2. 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 need 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 deliver 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

Does the current franchise model meet passengers and community's need?

3. Since privatisation there have been some improvements compared to when British Rail owned and operated the railways. However, the number and frequency of services has actually declined with an inferior service being delivered to the passengers of South East Wales. As far as the infrastructure improvements, part of the funding for new stations and development has come through investment from the Welsh Assembly Government or through local government accessing European funding. As the franchise which was let with zero growth targets for the fifteen years duration of the franchise, meant the incentives to grow the business, was not as acute for Arriva Trains Wales.

4. Presumably since the Wales and Borders franchise was let in 2003, the experience over that time has provided a greater insight and knowledge as to how the new franchise should be let and operate.

5. The growth in rail travel has vastly outstripped the forecast of zero growth, which underpinned the letting of the franchise. Therefore, the services today are more akin to the pre-millennium pattern and do not reflect the needs of today. What is required is the need to meet the changed need of today's market, where increased leisure, tourism and shopping needs are significantly different to those of a decade ago. At the time of the franchise being let Welsh Assembly Government and local government in Wales did not have the influence for the specification of the Wales and Borders Franchise, which was then under the Strategic Rail Authority in London. Similarly Railtrack and now Network Rail was still a largely centralised structure not yet considering setting up of a separate Wales route. It was not until 2006; the Welsh Government secured greater powers over the future of railways in Wales, and become a co-signatory to the Wales and Borders franchise.

6. In British Rail day's rail travel numbers was always seen as the barometer of the economy. However, this is no longer the case as the recession has dragged on for five years, but rail travel growth has shown no signs of abating or slowing down. Therefore, the long term forecasting of passenger growth needs to be more scientific and robust.

7. Whilst it is acknowledged that at certain times there will be capacity problems with the expansion of the current services, if the new franchise was to improve the timetable. There are quadruple lines between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction and therefore there should be ample capacity to enable the creation of new stations such as Magor & Undy Walkway along the route to cater for future demand and improved services.

Consulting Passengers and Communities on the Franchise Development.

8. The view of the MAGOR Group is that there before the new franchise is established there should be a pan Wales consultation people/communities/businesses with adequate time before the awarding the new franchise to collect and analyse the results. This should involve current and potential passengers and what they want from a future rail franchise? Whilst we accept there has to be a business case that is economically sound, the railways are a service and need to meet the needs of the people of Wales, as well as running a safe, reliable and value or money business. After all, the passenger wants, a train service that goes to where they want to go, at the right time, a reasonably priced ticket and a seat There must also be transparent public accountability for pricing policies and performance,

Could Local Authorities/Communities be Involved in Running the Franchise?

9. It should be possible for local authorities and communities (local people know what is best for the locality) and there should be with the new franchise an on-going mechanism to communicate the needs of the local communities. As previously mentioned the MAGOR vision for Magor & Undy Walkway is - that it would be an integral part of a community centre and therefore a local community station. We also realize that the local involvement could be at odds and in conflict with the national business requirements of the franchise and therefore would need careful management.

Welsh Assembly Government: Not for Profit Franchise

10. The MAGOR Group supports the creation of a not for profit franchise run by the Welsh Assembly Government. Clearly the business would have to be run as a value for money and a social service for stakeholders rather than shareholders. As previously stated the on-going growth in rail usage will assist in keep the income from the franchise rising. There will be a need for a professional, dedicated and experienced management in the rail to ensure a safe railway and the income and expenditure budget is delivered. Most of the Train Operating Companies only have one resource that is theirs, that is their people. Therefore, it is imperative that the management team at all levels is committed, dedicated and professional.

The Length of the Franchise.

11. The MAGOR Group would support a not for profit franchise operated by the Welsh Assembly Government franchise for 15 years. This would give the opportunity for long term planning and investment. The management and staff would have the much needed stability in their employment and would lead to a buy in to the culture and vision of the owner of the franchise.

12. Finally, the MAGOR Group want to see that „passive provision“ is inserted in the franchise agreement that a Magor & Undy Walkway Station will be developed sometime in the future.