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Setting the Direction for Wales & Borders Rail

MAGOR (Magor Action Group On Rail) Response.

Thank you for the invitation to comment on Setting the Direction for Wales & Borders Rail. MAGOR has in the main responded in a localised way and how the future rail policy for Wales impacts upon south Monmouthshire and our communities. MAGOR has chosen to use a paper response rather than complete the questionnaire form. The MAGOR response has been selective by only responding to issues that we feel passionate and strongly about or qualified to comment upon. We have set out what we believe should be incumbent on future rail strategy and policy in Wales. We have put alongside items the relevant page numbers to which the item relates to in the consultation document. We hope you find our contribution useful and relevant to this 'once in a decade' opportunity for the railway in Wales.

An Overview of Wales & Borders Rail

MAGOR would like to see a vertically integrated rail system similar to France, SNCF (train operation - rolling stock) RFF (track and infrastructure). A parent holding company and its subsidiary would run Wales & Borders Rail. This would see the train operation and the infrastructure under one organization allowing continuity of management, whilst retaining separate accountability.

A new franchise award should be for a minimum of fifteen years. This would allow time for long term critical investment to be made in both trains and infrastructure. With a short franchise, private operators are often reluctant to invest as they may not be the franchise holder within a very short space of time and therefore unable to get the return on investment.

Page 8 &10: 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. Despite the austere times of the last seven years, rail travel demand has outstripped forecasts. An example of which is south Monmouthshire. 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%! This is both confounding and staggering. The cross border route from Cardiff to Bristol is a case in point. In a report a few years ago, it was not identified as a route that suffers from overcrowding. However, whilst this might be the case at off peak times, the situation is critical at certain times of the day at Severn Tunnel Junction. There are and continue to be instances where passengers have been unable to get on the train in the peak hours. Bearing in mind these are primarily commuters going to their place of work and paying significant sums of money for the privilege of using the railway this is a state of affairs that should not be happening in the 21st century. Allied to this the parking situation at Severn Tunnel Junction is less than adequate and quite frankly dangerous. Therefore, there is an urgent need to deal with this situation by increasing capacity and the opening of Magor & Undy Walkway Station, as part of a

holistic transport solution for Severnside. It is time that people are not simply seen as just passengers but be viewed as customers. This means that providing a holistic experience which satisfies their needs or even exceeding them, should be a priority in this day and age. What are the minimum standards a customer should expect for their money?

- **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, that arrives at their destination station on time.**
- **The ability to get a seat on the train and be comfortable.**
- **Station and on train safety and security**

Unless there is a strategy to address the needs and provide a holistic experience for the customer, future growth is not an option for Severnside, which is an important cross border arterial route for work/leisure travel to Bristol and Cardiff. A complete and efficient transport system that includes rail is essential to providing (borrowing a well-used analogy) a Severnside Powerhouse.

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 three 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 jobs. The area has also places of beauty, historical, scientific and nature interest, which attract significant numbers of tourists.

Whilst we understand the focus to develop rail being biased towards the major cities/towns and the valleys to drive economic growth in Wales, this approach is 'tunnel-visioned'. It loses sight of the needs of a growing, affluent, mobile population who choose to live in the more rural areas of Wales, such as Monmouthshire but need to regularly commute into the English cities. Areas such as Monmouthshire have an immense opportunity to grow economically not only from its affluent mobile population but also from a commercial and tourist perspective. Therefore, future rail planning, strategy and development **must** include areas such as Monmouthshire, if the Welsh Government is serious about growth and regeneration that serves all the people of Wales.

This is why it is important to ensure whoever operates the railways in Wales in the future, does so for the benefit of its customers rather than the needs of its shareholders.

Page 20: Station Improvements/Developments

There is the need to provide a lasting solution to the parking at Severn Tunnel Junction. Remember this is the rail gateway to Wales. There have been some recent quick win solutions with the re-instating access to overflow sites. However, there has to be a priority commitment to provide a long term and permanent solution for parking at Severn Tunnel Junction. With a huge development of one thousand houses planned for Lydney, South Gloucestershire in the next few years, it is very probable that the majority of the residents of these new builds will work in Bristol and North Somerset. This makes it a realistic possibility that they will railhead at Severn Tunnel Junction (18 miles away) to commute to the place of work. This could potentially see a dramatic impact on demand for more parking at the already overstretched Severn Tunnel Junction. Another potential solution could be – the introduction of a cross border service from Lydney to Bristol, reversing at Severn Tunnel Junction. This idea has been dismissed in the past due to the cost benefit ratio being identified as only 0,63. However, as previously stated the planned expansion of Lydney with a further 1000 dwellings, could potentially change the cost benefit calculation? However, if this solution is not adopted, with a proven 30% of users of Severn Tunnel Junction emanating from Magor with Undy, it is vital that Magor & Undy Walkway Station is built. The station could potentially divert up to 30,000 passengers a year to

Magor & Undy Walkway Station. Whilst this could be argued as abstraction of current users, it is the solution to managing and accommodating growth at Severn Tunnel Junction. Allied to the opportunity to divert westbound rail users from road to rail, this would enable to create new business at both stations. Therefore, it is imperative that the building of Magor & Undy Walkway Station is included in the new franchise specification.

There is a need for a station at Llanwern. Newport is fairly unique for a city with an urban area population of 306 000. Prior to Pye Corner station being opened in December 2014, Newport had only one railway station. With the large scale housing development to the east of Newport, a large demand for a train service has been created.

The argument the rail industry will use is the need for speed and the more frequent the stops, the longer the journey times will be extended. Whilst this is true in the case of London and other intercity long distance journeys. The inter-urban/commuter market is less reliant on speed and more dependent on reliability of the services. In other words, they want to depart and arrive at the times published in the timetable, have a seat, at a cost effective price. Therefore, the inter-urban market should serve the local population by getting them out of their cars, to their places of work and leisure.

P8: Rail Services Currently Operated

Whilst the current services have been improved in the last decade, there are still significant gaps in services stopping at Severn Tunnel Junction and Caldicot. The cross country services run non-stop from Newport to Chepstow. Whilst we appreciate local stopping slows down services and impact at places like Birmingham New Street. There is surely enough recovery time on the journey to include at least a stop at Severn Tunnel Junction

Page 10: Range of Future Services.

The owner of the new franchise should actively seek new cross-border routes such as operating through services from West Wales to Bristol, Bath, Taunton etc. This could open up new revenue streams, increase competition, increase frequency and above all, be a benefit to passengers by giving greater choice.

P24: 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. Magor & Undy Walkway would enable around 60 bus services a day 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.

P 20: Magor & Undy Walkway Station

There is a need for a joined up solution to meet the needs of travelers within the Severnside area as a whole. With Severn Tunnel Junction providing park and ride facilities for rail passengers and, as previously mentioned, complemented by Magor with Undy 'Walkway'. Support for a new station for Magor with Undy was included in principle in Monmouthshire County Council's 2001 LDP. 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.

Page 10, 22, 24 & 25: 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 200 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. MAGOR has developed working relationships with - Network Rail, Passenger Focus, Arriva Trains Wales, First Great Western, Railfuture and with the Welsh 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 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 be revenue generative through a station agency ticket office with income going back to the community. This type of joined up thinking is what is needed in the future planning of the railways in Wales.

In 2015 a survey was 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. The results have demonstrated that the two most desired improvements for Magor with Undy are a Community Centre and Magor & Undy Walkway Station. This confirms the research we had already undertaken.

Page 22: Welsh Language.

We fully endorse the use of the Welsh language as an important and essential part of the culture of Wales. Therefore, everything where possible that can be done by a Wales Train Operating Company to promote the language and the culture, should be done. However, station announcements, the vast majority of passengers are only able to understand English. Therefore, Welsh should be the second announcement, not the first announcement as it is currently.

P15: Ticketing

The current range of methods to source tickets is good. However, with the ever-increasing use of smart phone apps, the need for the passenger to be able to access their ticket through an online service. This will be essential for the future of rail travel in Wales, where there is a large number of unmanned stations. There is also, with new franchises, a need to develop more multi-modal ticketing. This would enable passengers to have seamless joined up journeys with bus and other service operators.

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