

North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

Great Western Specification Consultation

INTRODUCTION

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum is an independent voluntary group that works for the provision of an effective integrated transport system to, from and within North Pembrokeshire, promotes the benefits of public transport and works towards the greater use of public transport systems. The Forum is funded by the membership subscriptions of its Individual, Family and Corporate members.

The Forum supports strategic objectives that:

- Provide for the greater integration and interchange between different modes of transport.
- Put in place public transport services that meet the needs of individuals and communities by improving, for example, the quality of passenger information, and increasing the responsiveness, reliability, and security of public transport services.
- Promote social inclusion (making services available to all members of the public) through the further development of an affordable, accessible public transport system which meets user needs and works to remove access and mobility barriers for all public transport users.
- Encourage more sustainable modes of transport and reduce the need for travel by car.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Q1. We believe that the Great Western franchise should maintain rights to run through services between London Paddington and Fishguard Harbour. Indications from the ferry operator Stena Line UK are that rail-sail passenger numbers are increasing and if this trend were to continue then restoration of the through services, particularly during the Summer months may be beneficial in the future. If the regulatory framework around low-cost airlines were to change, particularly in relation to fuel duty then rail-sail numbers could increase

considerably, and the option of restoration of through Fishguard – London services needs to be safeguarded.

We believe the issue of connections between West Wales services and Great Western services to London, needs to be considered. At present connections out of Milford Haven / Fishguard Harbour to Manchester services are generally made into the Cardiff to Paddington services at Cardiff. While this arrangement generally works well on weekdays, there are issues on Saturdays when at times certain Cardiff – Paddington services do not run, so that stock can be used elsewhere. An example relates to the 09:55 Cardiff to Paddington stock being used on additional services to Glastonbury. This service is normally the London connection out of the 07:05 Milford Haven / 06:53 Fishguard services. Its withdrawal during the Glastonbury festival adds 30 minutes to an already slow journey. The lack of consideration surrounding connections with West Wales services into / out of Great Western services remains a concern locally in West Wales.

Q2. As the economic development and business activity in Cardiff increases, it is clear that pressures on capacity on the South Wales Main Line West of Cardiff are increasing. Commuting into Cardiff for employment purposes continues to increase at around 5% per annum, and developments indicate this is likely to continue, or increase with the development of the Cardiff metro area, and the related Swansea Bay city region. Passenger flows between Wales' two principal cities needs to be considered in developing the minimum service requirements. An example has been the withdrawal of the traditional 17:30 departure Westbound from Cardiff to Swansea by Great Western HSTs – a large capacity train that is able to cope with peak flows. Since its withdrawal the passenger load now falls onto the 17:40 departure Westbound from Cardiff of the 3 car class 175 Manchester to Milford Haven service, which consequently is often severely overcrowded, and on occasions leaves passengers to await a later train. Passengers heading to West Wales have a near 2 hour wait if they are unable to board this service, those for Fishguard a delay of around 5 hours, arriving at 01:20 rather than 19:23, a totally unacceptable delay.

We believe restoration of the through London to Swansea service departing Cardiff at around 17:30 is critically important not only to passengers along the line to Swansea, but more importantly to those heading for stations to Fishguard Harbour and Milford Haven, and those locations reached by connecting bus services across West Wales, for whom it would be the last bus service of the day.

Q3. The ongoing development of both the Cardiff and Swansea City regions and connectivity between those, and the South East of England, is of prime importance to the economic wellbeing of South and south west Wales.

Q4. Consideration to maintaining a right for Great Western to operate services to Fishguard Harbour, subject to future increases in rail-fair numbers as low cost airlines become increasingly expensive, and as economic outlook in the Irish Republic improves. We also believe Great Western should have the option to restore through London services to Milford Haven.

Q5. Note elsewhere our comments relating to a Westbound GW HST service extended from Cardiff to Swansea at around 17:30. Similarly the requirement to provide limited stop South Wales – London services during business peak travel times, and the requirement to maintain through Summer Saturday services from London to Tenby and Pembroke Dock.

Q6. We attach a copy of our paper “The Role of Transport in Rural Development” dated February 2013 for information. See Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

Q7. We are in agreement with the Welsh Government that the journey times for South Wales to/from London Paddington need to be improved. We note that proposed timings following electrification by 2017/8 will barely restore timings to those timetabled from 1976, and through the 1980s. While appreciating the increased passenger numbers on the Paddington to Bristol / South Wales route we feel it untenable that Cardiff to London timings from 2018 will be similar to those achieved in 1976. With the improved services on the WCML linking London to major English and Scottish conurbations, and the proposed HS2 bringing timings down further, the economic disadvantages to South Wales, as well as to Bristol and the West Country will increase further. We believe that as a minimum there should be a limited number of limited stop services between Cardiff and London Paddington, whose timings are targeted in particular at the business market, both to and from London in the morning and afternoon peak business travel times. We believe the use of South Wales services serving commuter locations such as Didcot while Paddington to Oxford services omit the Didcot stop is causing economic difficulties not only to South Wales, but also West Wales.

Q8. In line with Q7 above, we propose that the Great Western franchise requires the provision of certain specified limited stop Swansea / Cardiff to / from London services, around 06:30 Swansea / 07:30 Cardiff, and 16:30 / 17:30 Eastbound, 07:00 and 17:00 Westbound from London to give headline timings between the two Capital Cities of 1 hour 40 minutes maximum. We also believe that the last Eastbound Cardiff to Paddington service

should operate around 30 minutes to 1 hour later than at present (compare the last Eastbound Cardiff – London and Bristol – London services in the present timetable).

Q9. We strongly believe through London to Pembroke Dock services on Summer Saturdays (Mid May to late September) should be mandated, also limited stop South Wales to/from London Paddington services as noted in Q8 above should be mandated. We also remain concerned that the present 30 minute interval morning peak hours service which runs from Swansea should be mandated, rather than the hourly service suggested.

Q10. Priorities should be around increasing capacity on the London – Reading – Didcot (– Swindon) corridor by provision in peak hours particularly of limited stop services that allow longer distance passengers to use the services through to Bristol / Cardiff / Swansea. The reduction in calls at Reading and Didcot of a limited number of South Wales services would assist this alongside the provision of suitable capacity – say 9 vehicle instead of 6 vehicle Thames Valley commuter services, and the use of Oxford line services rather than Swansea line services to assist in carrying Didcot / Reading - London commuters.

Q11. Although far outside our sphere, our only comment is that a loss of through services would seriously reduce the attractiveness of services West of Newbury. A semi-fast London to Exeter service would improve connectivity Eastbound and Westbound for these communities.

Q12. Community rail partnerships should gain a more formal input into the service level requirements for routes. Their local expertise could assist via provision of information over connections with other forms of public transport and to provide stakeholders with a more knowledge-based response to local factors that could be exploited to increase passenger numbers.

Q13. This is certainly an option, although public engagement at an early stage is critically important. CRPs certainly need to be involved in this from a very early stage in order to promote a sense of ownership among users.

Q14. With the planned 5 year franchise period covering the electrification of routes to Swansea, Bristol and Oxford the expectation should be that services, wherever possible,

should be diverted around engineering work rather than suffer bus replacement. At present FGW train crew maintain a comprehensive knowledge of diversionary routes. It should be mandated in the franchise that the operator maintains, and where necessary enhances this route knowledge of train crew so that the ability to divert services around engineering work is not lost. With Swansea to London, it is possible to divert services via alternative routes between Reading and Severn Tunnel, and Between Cardiff and Port Talbot, the sections between Reading and London, and Severn Tunnel Jcn and Cardiff are 4 tracked and where possible 2 lines out of 4 should be kept open wherever possible.

The provision of accurate, detailed information, in suitable time in advance of, and during the expected engineering work is critically important, and the industry needs to place a particular emphasis on information provision for occasional travellers in particular.

Q15. Partly answered by Q14, but in addition we believe it important to have trained knowledgeable staff on board trains and at stations to keep passengers informed. These staff need to be clearly identifiable wearing clear stand-out tabards / clothing, in a similar way to the London Olympic ambassadors, which clearly worked so well.

Q16. As passenger numbers continue to increase we remain concerned that sufficient rolling stock is available to cater for rising passenger numbers. We remain concerned that Thames Valley / Swindon commuters seem to take priority over longer distance travellers, and hope that the Great Western franchise continues to see itself as a mixed franchise with Inter City, Inter Urban, Commuter and rural flows. The impression given is that Great Western is viewed increasingly as simply an inter urban network – with a Swansea – London journey time of 3 hours (2 hours 40 minutes in the 1980s we note), and longer journey times from Devon and Cornwall, a focus on the needs of London to Didcot, Swindon and Reading should not drown out the needs of other flows. We remain concerned that although fewer services are overcrowded than in the past, the Great Western franchise still has 3 of the heaviest overloaded trains on Network Rail; with additional rolling stock being some years away, and the capacity increase of those proposed trains remaining a concern too.

We recall with concern the rolling stock situation endemic at the start of the present Great Western franchise; our concern remains that if the minimum service requirement is set too low, there could be a tendency to believe the franchise could operate with less stock once again. We cite the example of the requirement to only provide an hourly Swansea to Paddington service while the present timetable has far more frequent services than that. If the minimum service requirement is left at only hourly in the face of experience to the contrary then the question of where those passengers would be carried needs to be

answered by those setting the requirement, rather than leaving the pieces to be picked up in the months after the new franchise commences.

Q17. While reliability of the South Wales service group is far better than a decade or two back the consequences of late running to Swansea, when connecting services generally run two-hourly to destination needs to be considered. We still suffer the consequences of that previous poor timekeeping in that a number of business travellers continue to use Port Talbot as a rail-head rather than say Carmarthen, to the detriment of services West of Swansea generally. This need to consider passengers connecting into West Wales services needs to be a particular focus during the forthcoming electrification work disruptions.

Q18. We remain concerned at the high costs around the utilisation of additional stock for enhancing capacity, or for provision of services for special events such as Glastonbury or Rugby Internationals in Cardiff. This leads to the withdrawal of certain Cardiff – Paddington services in order to resource stock, something that impacts on West Wales passengers and their connections highlighted earlier.

We remain concerned about the high costs of the Hitachi Super Express Trains proposed to replace the existing Great Western High Speed trainsets, especially in comparison to the more complex West Coast Pendolinos.

Q19. We remain concerned about the capacity available at Cardiff Central for increasing passenger numbers. While we welcome the work ongoing to provide additional capacity on the Valley lines section of the station we remain concerned that platforms 3 and 4 at Cardiff are increasingly a limit to capacity, and wonder if restoration of the Westbound facing bay platform (number 5) ought to be considered to at least provide some capacity for Westbound local services. We note the complete unsuitability in the use of Newport as a transfer point between Great Western and Manchester – West Wales services.

Q20. We strongly believe, at a time when accurate, up to date running information is available via sites such as realtimetrains.co.uk (RTT), information on station CIS remains patchy. We hope the roll out of an updated customer information system will reduce the occasions when the CIS gives up the ghost and passengers have to rely on twitter feeds. We can see the information is available (RTT etc) and remain frustrated that the rail industry provision of information, especially at times of disruption remains patchy. We believe information should be provided across a range of media platforms, but that timely advance

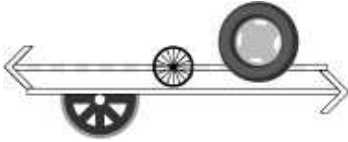
notice, especially for occasional travellers is available at the point where they enquire about train times and ticketing details.

Q21. Provision of timely, accurate information should be considered, including at times of disruption. We believe the ability of a train operator to divert services around planned engineering operations rather than rely on bus replacement services, where appropriate, should also be included. We see too often an operator deteriorating train crews ability to minimise disruption by diverting services through the loss of knowledge of diversionary routes, and believe this should be viewed negatively in monitoring service quality. The ability of operators to consider using additional resources where necessary should also be monitored, otherwise we will see a gradual move towards the industry being unable to cope with changed flows such as Glastonbury etc.

Q22. We believe that the Department needs to consider how it can ensure that partner organisations, such as bus operators, obtain finalised timetable information at least 2 months prior to the start of new timetables in December and May. We hear of bus operators who only get confirmed times a short period before the start date of new timetables and then find it difficult to amend their connecting services. This may be more about systems rather than timetable difficulties, bus operators waiting until they get an operator's published timetable for instance, but it does act as a barrier to integrated transport, which is especially important in rural areas like ours with service frequencies likely to be hourly or two-hourly.

We remain concerned at the lack of detailed information available at locations such as London Paddington with relation to the connections provided out of South Wales bound services to West Wales etc. While appreciating that Paignton and Newquay services for example are operated by Great Western while services to Tenby and Fishguard are operated by Arriva Trains Wales it remains a concern that connection information at Paddington remains patchy indeed for onward services to Fishguard, Tenby and other West Wales services. We also would hope that great Western were incentivised to promote the rail-sail offer via Fishguard Harbour and should be mandated to play a role in a more coherent advertising of the Southern Irish Sea rail and ferry corridor.

We'd like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude at being involved in this consultation, and hope that our comments can help to ensure that the Great Western Franchise can continue to grow and improve in future years.



Appendix 1

The Role of Transport in Rural Development

Introduction - The Transport Context in Urban Settings

Members of the Executive Committee of the North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum were asked to consider the Role of Transport in Rural Development in January 2013, and this is the result of their deliberations, drawn together by Emma Lewis, Operations Co-ordinator of Green Dragon Community Transport (Preseli Rural Transport Association).

In cities and towns, where many of our population, decision-makers, employment and major facilities (main hospitals, sports stadia, Government offices, etc.) are located, most people can get wherever they want to go by bus, train, bicycle, on foot or by car.

Households with more than one adult or older child usually don't need a second car (or a car at all) to carry out their shopping, employment, medical appointments, education facilities, leisure opportunities or social events. If one adult takes the car to work, the rest of the household walk, bus or cycle to school, the shops, a second or third job, appointments, relatives and places like the park, the leisure centre, the library or the cinema.

Tougher economic conditions and the rising prices of motoring are unlikely to cost many people in urban areas their jobs, their ability to go shopping or the possibility of visiting friends or family.

Families and friends are able to support each other in illness and older age. Families without a car available when support is needed can often visit by bus or on foot to help out when needed. Isolation happens, but not often through lack of access to a car.

Likewise, businesses in urban areas are unlikely to struggle to find a range of employees, unless they are looking for very specialist skills or knowledge. Many people will be able to reach the workplace, even on a shift basis, with or without their own transport and, similarly, businesses dealing directly with the public (from shops to pubs, solicitors to dentists) have access to plenty of customers, with or without their own transport.

Transport and Development in Rural Areas

In rural areas, the picture is different. This is not due to a difference in the people; it's just geography. For most people it is too far to walk to the shops, doctors, leisure centre and, in many cases, to visit relatives. Most country roads don't have any kind of footpath or lighting. Cycling is an option for some people on some journeys, but most country roads are not safe for cyclists and places people want to or need to visit are not often close enough to make cycling a viable option for our daily and weekly needs. Buses are often not viable in very rural areas, and with cuts to Government funding, financially supported services have to be cut too. Where buses do run, services are unlikely to run in the evening and there is often nowhere sheltered to wait.

People and businesses in rural areas have the same wants and needs as people in urban areas, but unless you have a car in a rural area you are unlikely to be able to access many of the goods and services we all need.

Even rural centres – bigger villages and small towns – now have limited public transport, and accessing them from the surrounding area is still difficult on foot or by bicycle as the distances are often significant and safe roads for pedestrians and cyclists don't usually start until you're actually in the town or village.

Rural businesses are less likely to be able to freely access workers, as those without access to a car may find some areas completely inaccessible and other areas accessible only at restricted times of the day.

Put simply, people and businesses in rural areas without ready access to a car whenever it's needed suffer lack of opportunity economically, socially and in accessing health and care services.

Worse, due to an ageing population and the increasing cost of motoring threatening car access to more households, the situation is getting worse with no foreseeable possibility of a change in this trend. Closing services and facilities due to Government funding cuts have disproportionately more impact in rural areas where the next service or facility may be completely out of reach.

There are a number of ways of addressing these issues. A trite answer is to move everyone into the bigger towns and cities, but there isn't enough accommodation in our towns and cities for the people who already live there; if this is the answer, it's a long term one.

A second option is to provide more mobile goods and services. Many people in rural areas shop mostly online, but this threatens local businesses, reduces choice and removes the opportunity for social interaction and community development. Some people e-commute, which works well for some people, but increases isolation, severely limits job opportunities and does not achieve the same social benefits most working people enjoy. Mobile libraries, hairdressers and so on provide excellent services, but services delivered in this way are necessarily limited, and do not provide all the social benefits of visiting the premises and meeting other people, finding the full range of services, etc.

The third option is to invest properly in rural transport, through supported public transport, community transport, car clubs, scooter hire for youngsters, Dial-A-Rides for the older and more frail and other Community Transport solutions such as Country Cars, community minibus hire, taxi and car sharing and other local and national schemes for those without access to a car when they need to travel.

There is much national and local Government rhetoric regarding equal access to services, ensuring equal opportunities for all, adults and children, in education, employment, business development, social and health care and so on. None of these can be addressed without proper access to transport in rural areas, where the vast majority of the deficit lies. There is no point in having the best hospital, factory or school if people cannot get to them and home again safely and affordably.

Proper transport provision enables rural communities to be economically sustainable, reduces isolation, ensures access to goods and services, and reduces mental health problems and difficulty in accessing care for physical health problems. It ensures proper access for people and businesses to earn money and contribute to the economy. Things most urban areas have already, intrinsically, and that in rural areas are becoming bigger problems which are getting harder and more expensive to resolve.

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