

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail](#)

Evidence from Gareth Calan Davies – WBF 45

National Assembly of Wales Consultation on the Future of the Rail Franchise

It is now accepted that the franchise model as set up under the rail privatisation act is basically flawed. The Welsh Assembly Government is to be congratulated for seriously considering the future form of the Welsh Railway system, its structure and management. In this respect I would make the following comments.

1. The geographical and topographical composition of Wales makes an internal North-South rail link a prohibitively costly project.
2. The main rail passenger flows will continue to follow the inverted E pattern of the existing network. These flows are namely:
 - a. North Wales to Chester and the regional centre of Manchester
 - b. Mid Wales from the coast to Shrewsbury and the regional centre of Birmingham
 - c. South West Wales to Swansea and Cardiff
 - d. South Wales Valleys suburban services
 - e. South Wales to North Wales via England (the Borders) where the flows are a mixture of local journeys between English towns and longer distance traffic between South Wales and North West England. The level of movement between North and South Wales is comparatively small
 - f. Important but fringe rural services of which the main ones are the Heart of Wales Line, the Blaenau Ffestiniog to Llandudno service and the Wrexham to Bidston service.

It is considered that the principal London services will remain outside of any future 'Wales Rail' as at present.

3. If the future of a 'Wales Rail' follows a pattern involving a re-integration of train operation and infrastructure as a non profit making company (eg Dŵr Cymru) then it should clear the way for a positive consideration of:

A. A modest and planned improvement of internal secondary and fringe rural services, e.g. increasing the level of service on the Heart of Wales Line to cater more for local movements. Wales remains a predominantly rural country.

B. A substantial improvement and expansion of the South Wales Valleys network centred on Cardiff, Swansea and Newport.

C. The potential for re-connecting important rural centres to the network, e.g. Brecon, Mold, Denbigh, Ruthin, Caernarvon.

However, a 'Wales Rail' policy will also raise the question of what happens to those lines currently in the franchise but which operate substantially in England, chief amongst them being the Borders line. As noted, a fair proportion of traffic on this line is local between the English towns on the route. Therefore it is to be expected that if the level of service is to be maintained then it is only natural that the English authorities should contribute to a 'Wales Rail'. Whether this is politically acceptable on the English side of the border is debatable at a time when local authorities are in turmoil and facing major financial crises. Also there are strong moves to strengthen rail connections between Shrewsbury, Birmingham and London and between Hereford and London. With hints of a divide beginning to take place between the Welsh Assembly and Westminster over the future form of a Welsh franchise, it is possible that the Borders line will turn into a route of contention.

4. Decisions on the future of Rail in Wales cannot be taken in isolation from other forms of public transport. This includes the continued development of an integrated Traws-Cambria coach/bus network of services under Welsh Assembly control. This has its own difficulties connected with the bus services deregulation act of past years. Further, it is likely that the most cost effective way of dealing with the low level of traffic between North and South Wales is the development of an internal national air network, a form of transport already successful in small countries with difficult terrain but which appears to receive little attention in Wales.

I hope the above comments are of use.

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