

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

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

SHREWSBURY-CHESTER RAIL USERS' ASSOCIATION (SCRUA)

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Response to Welsh Government Consultation on the future of the  
Wales & Borders rail franchise

The Association has no formal position on the ownership or structure of future rail operations in Wales and the Borders, but notes the success, for example, of the London Overground and London Buses networks in which the elected body takes revenue risk and specifies services (subject to democratic input across a wide spectrum of interested parties). This appears to maximise revenue and integration, whilst offering operating companies, as contractors, guaranteed levels of remuneration at what appear to be attractive margins of profit.

SCRUA urges Welsh Government to put connectivity at the very heart of its transport policy, and to recognise its responsibilities beyond its borders. Whilst understandably AMs and Ministers will feel primarily answerable to their own electors, maximising benefits to those who travel between Wales and England for business, work, education and leisure purposes will enhance political support for the concept of a strong devolved Welsh Government that recognises the mutual economic, environmental and social advantages of connecting cities, towns and more rural communities by means of a fast, efficient and sustainable network.

We therefore urge Welsh Government to work closely with local authorities in Cheshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Birmingham and the West Midlands, the Greater Bristol/Bath area, etc., and also bodies such as the Marches Strategic Rail Group, in creating an enhanced framework and pressing for further infrastructure improvements and upgrades to a defined and guaranteed timetable.

Some examples which come to mind are:

Infill electrification between Oxley and Shrewsbury, stimulating the growth of traffic at the latter, as a connectional hub for North, South and Mid-Wales destinations

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Drawing up a strategic plan for electrification within say, 12-15 years, Shrewsbury-Crewe, Shrewsbury-Chester, Crewe-Chester-Holyhead, and Shrewsbury-Newport, leading to exponential growth not just in passenger numbers, but in longer, heavier, faster and quieter freight trains, not least to/from Holyhead\*, encouraging a huge modal shift from road to rail

\*(much of this would be containers from southern and eastern ports, and from Europe via the Channel Tunnel)

Early completion of Wrexham-Chester re-doubling, so that the benefits of the already-completed 90mph upgrade south of Wrexham are exploited to maximum potential

Urgent instigation of properly scoped and specified business case/feasibility studies into station re-opening at sites such as Carno, Pontrilas, Rossett, Whittington, Baschurch, Hadnall, Dorrington and many others where (affluent) populations and business activity have increased enormously since previous, even fairly recent, studies have been carried out. (The appetite of the population at large to be seen to be "doing the right thing" by transferring from car to train should not be underestimated)

Early electrification of the Borderlands line Wrexham-Bidston

Urgent reinstatement of the Halton Curve at Runcorn, to open up new fast journey opportunities from all parts of Wales and the Borders to Liverpool South Parkway (for Liverpool John Lennon Airport) and Liverpool city centre

Where appropriate, the above and other improvements should be specified as part of the objectives of the new franchise or contract.

We would also particularly like to emphasise the desirability of the doubling of the present Shrewsbury-Chester (and beyond, at both ends), service to half-hourly in anticipation of substantial new housing and commercial/high-tech developments in Shropshire,

Wrexham and Cheshire, much of which is already at the planning stage. This of course cannot be done without completion of Wrexham-Chester re-doubling.

There is also the matter of the very large new prison to be built at Wrexham, which, regardless of differing views on penal policy, will create a huge increase in employment and demand for travel to and from Wrexham.

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We cannot stress too strongly the importance of improved journey times and opportunities between North Wales/Chester and Birmingham International, preferably by direct trains, or if not, by way of a new guaranteed clockface connection framework at Shrewsbury, with additional Customer Service on hand staff to assist the greater numbers travelling with heavy luggage. Staff costs will be more than offset by increased revenue generated.

The case for accelerated electrification across the network will of course make itself as sources of fossil fuel become more scarce and politically unstable, and legally-binding CO2 reduction targets begin to bite. New diesel-powered rolling stock will become proportionately more expensive as demand for it reduces. Additional station stops as alluded to above can easily be accommodated when the superior acceleration and braking of modern electric units are considered.

Finally, attention is drawn to the great significance of HS2 and the new interchanges which will be available at Birmingham New Street/Moor Street/Curzon Street and Birmingham International/Interchange. Viewed in conjunction with the grave doubts over Heathrow expansion and the availability of much spare capacity at Birmingham International Airport, the prospect of an HS2 transfer time of around 30 mins. between Heathrow and Birmingham for onward connecting flights seems to suggest a dramatic change in the status of the latter, with implications across a wide area, including Mid and North Wales.

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