

Sent Date: 30/11/2011 12:48:35

Dear Abigail Phillips

Thank you for your response and for resending the email. I am now able to view the attached word document.

National Rail Enquiries is only an information-based company based company able to provide train times and fares travelling in UK. As we don't operate any services or set times tables, we will not be able to address the issue you have raised.

I would therefore, suggest that you contact Arriva Train Wales who operate the train services between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth to enquire if they are able to address the issue you have raised. Their contact details are as follows:

Contact no:
(Mon-Sat 08:00-20:00 Sun 11:00-20:00)

Email:

Thank you again for contacting us and I hope this information is of use to you.

Regards

Axaya Tikle
Customer Relations Executive
National Rail Enquiries

Response from SWWITCH

Introduction

The South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) is committed to improving access to, from and within the region to facilitate economic development, promote social inclusion and protect and enhance the environment.

In the Regional Transport Plan (RTP) 2010 – 2015, SWWITCH sets out clear objectives, a long term strategy, policies and a programme of transport projects. The RTP is available from the website on www.swwitch.net

The RTP also includes SWWITCH priorities for rail infrastructure and services, which link closely to the Assembly forward programme for Rail as updated by the National Transport Plan (2010).

The Carmarthen to Aberystwyth Railway Line

- The line was built in 1854 at the same time as the Manchester and Milford railway. The line to Aberystwyth catered for holiday traffic in 1867
- The whole route closed on 22nd February 1965 following flood damage to the track at Strata Florida in 1964. Buses replaced the trains at this point
- The peak service on the line was 4 trains per day on weekdays with a fastest journey time of 2 hrs 30 minutes, typically it was 2 hrs 40 minutes
- There were also branch lines : one to Newcastle Emlyn (5 services per day) the other to Aberaeron (4 services per day), both were withdrawn (1952 and 1951 respectively) although the last freight train came out of Newcastle Emlyn in 1973
- Passenger numbers do not appear to have been particularly high hence bus replaced rail by 1952, well before the Beeching cuts

Response to petition

Whilst SWWITCH is sympathetic to the nostalgia generated by long closed railway links, it does not believe that re-opening the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth branch line is a viable option for the following reasons:

- Practical/technical - much of the former alignment has been built on and some new alignments in very challenging topography would be required
- Operational – the line was closed almost half a century ago, as an unviable operation and would almost certainly require substantial operating subsidy
- Financial/business – in current financial circumstances any investment in the railway industry must be backed by a robust economic evaluation and business case with a positive rate of return. This is extremely unlikely with a line serving such dispersed populations
- Alternatives available – there are alternative bus based options for journeys between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth with Traws Cymru (hourly service) and also with the Bwcabus service (demand responsive service connecting rural hinterlands with mainline services). These options have faster journey times than the original train service and operate at more frequent intervals. There is no direct rail link and those wishing to make the journey by rail would be obliged to travel via Shrewsbury

Alternative public transport linking the two centres is of course capable of improvement and the Welsh Government is currently working with consortia and local Councils to improve the quality, service pattern and vehicles associated with the Traws Cymru network. The degree to which aspirations for improvements will be achieved is directly linked to current public sector budget constraints. However, it is very much quicker to make improvement to road based public transport when the financial situation improves and the ongoing maintenance costs are much lower.

In summary, SWWITCH is already working with TraCC and the Welsh Government to secure improved access between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. SWWITCH believes it is the ongoing work to improve road based public transport options which should be the focus of attention and any future investment by the Welsh Government.

Annwyl/ Dear Rhodri

Please find attached a copy of the TraCC response to the invitation to submit evidence to the Committee – covering letter and enclosure.

I apologise for this communication arriving later than originally intended as it had taken slightly longer than anticipated to gather views/ contributions. However, I trust that it will be considered alongside other submissions.

I confirm that it is **not** the intention to nominate a Member or Officer to give oral evidence in person but TraCC is willing to provide further clarification/ information which the Committee may require via letter or email should this be required or helpful.

Regards

Chris

Mr Christopher M. Wilson BscEcon (Hons), MPhil
Cydylyydd TraCC *Co-ordinator*

Cyng / Cllr Trevor Roberts, Cadeirydd / Chairman
Swyddfa TraCC Office,

Ms Abigail Phillips, Clerk
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Eich cyf / Your ref:
Ein cyf / Our ref: GEN/01/2012

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e-bost / e-mail:

Dyddiad / Date: 3rd January 2012

Dear Ms Phillips

RE: Petition P-04-345 - Public Transport Links between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen.

Thank you for your letter dated November 2011. I apologise for the slight delay in responding to your letter.

As you will hopefully be aware, Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC) is the local authority Regional Transport Consortium for Mid Wales and is a partnership between the three Mid Wales local authorities – Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Powys. The town of Aberystwyth, Ceredigion is regarded as the principal regional centre in Mid Wales and connectivity/ ability to travel by all transport modes is considered to be of critical importance to the Region.

Whilst it is not the intention to nominate a Member or Officer to give oral evidence in person, TraCC has taken the opportunity to provide the attached short response and I can confirm that TraCC is willing to provide further clarification/ information which the Committee may require via letter or email.

Yours sincerely



Chris Wilson
TraCC Co-ordinator

Enc.

Petition P-04-345: *'We call upon the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to restore and/ or improve rail and bus links between Carmarthen in the county of Carmarthenshire and Aberystwyth in the county of Ceredigion.'*

TraCC Response to Petition P-04-345

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The town of Aberystwyth in Ceredigion is regarded nationally, regionally and locally as the principal regional centre in Mid Wales and connectivity/ ability to travel by all transport modes is considered to be of critical importance to the Region – reference the Welsh Government's Wales Spatial Plan in particular. Both Aberystwyth and Ceredigion fall within the 'Central Wales' area and the need for maintaining and improving connectivity between both settlements has been recognised historically (as part of the former Dyfed County Council) and as part of current economic and social policy and planning.
- 1.2 TraCC published its first Regional Transport Plan (RTP) in 2009, setting out the local authorities' shared regional transport objectives and priorities and the passenger transport and highways strategy elements are currently being reviewed refreshed and strengthened along with the development of a region-wide programme for investment through capital grant funding sources currently available to the Regional Transport Consortium. Under a temporary arrangement, TraCC receives only 13.7% of all available Regional Transport Plan Capital Grant made available across the whole Wales and yet has the largest geographical area with the poorest access to passenger transport services and highest levels of social exclusion associated with the rurality of the Region. Copies of all TraCC published documents are available at the TraCC website: www.tracc.gov.uk.
- 1.3 The outcome of the Welsh Government's recently announced National transport Plan (NTP) review and 'prioritisation' process also includes reference to a number of welcomed public transport improvements serving Aberystwyth (and its surrounding rural hinterland) and Carmarthen, albeit not to the full extent that TraCC would have preferred.
- 1.4 Wherever possible, TraCC and SWWITCH work together collaboratively on an ongoing basis at a strategic transport planning level and Ceredigion (in particular) works with Carmarthenshire at a more operational level regarding local and longer distance bus services and on the *Bwcabus* project. A number of arrangements are in place to underpin these arrangements, and include joint meetings of consortium co-ordinators/ managers, joint meetings of passenger transport officers and other bodies, such as the Heart of Wales Line Forum and Management Group.

2.0 Public Transport – Local and longer distance bus services

- 2.1 The transport corridor between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen is well served by the existing local bus service network, tendered by local authorities and financially supported through annual Revenue Grant funding. Service frequencies are generally good when compared with those in many other rural areas of Wales, with the X40 TrawsCambria operating at hourly intervals, during the daytime Monday to Saturday and connecting the rail-heads at Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, with connections to onward journeys by rail or bus at either end. There are current (well advanced) plans to significantly upgrade the quality and availability of public transport - particularly the X40 *TrawsCambria* service, following public consultations undertaken during Autumn 2010 by the Welsh Government,

Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils. There was clear support for shorter journey times and the provision of higher quality, low floor buses with coach-style interiors. As a result, a proposed new T1 service is scheduled to commence in April/ May 2012 to replace the existing X40 service, with the outcome of the recent tendering exercise awaited and the exact service has not yet been finalised. This provision may or may not take place as planned due to other proposals currently being brought forward by a commercial operator, which however do not meet fully the ethos of the proposed *TrawsCymru* network.

- 2.2 In addition to this development, a fully-integrated passenger transport model is being developed through the use of *Bwcabus*. Following a period of community engagement and generally positive reaction, an extended *Bwcabus* service commenced on 5th December 2011 and will initially run alongside the X40 service until the new T1 service begins, with this overlap allowing for the local communities to see the operation in situ and to react to it directly or through their elected representatives. TraCC has supported the extension of the *Bwcabus* operation through providing Regional Transport Plan Capital Grant to support the purchase of new vehicles and improvements to interchange facilities.
- 2.3 A significant amount of grant funding from a number of sources is currently being invested in the road/ rail passenger transport interchange ('Gateway') in Aberystwyth. The re-modelled bus station and waiting facilities, taxi rank and public realm area surrounding the railway station is scheduled for completion by Ceredigion County Council by Summer 2012. It is hoped that National Station Improvement grant funding will allow significant improvements to be made to the railway station in line with the current work being led by Arriva Trains Wales.

3.0 Rail Services

- 3.1 There are no longer any rail services between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen – passenger services were ceased in 1965, the railway line dismantled, other infrastructure removed (with the exception of a few remaining structures) and much of the former track-bed, station sites and sidings now in private ownership (often developed upon). Based on timetables from when the rail service operated, there were up to four journeys between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen and journey times appeared to exceed two and a half hours – it is unlikely that this level of service would be acceptable in 2012, given current road-based public transport service frequencies and journey times. TraCC and Ceredigion have considered the merits of undertaking a feasibility study of restoring the rail link but – nostalgia aside - cannot justify this work on the grounds that restoring the line and rail operations through public funding is unaffordable (even in the longer term) and local communities these days are clearly better served by a road-based public transport.
- 3.2 For residents of northern Ceredigion in particular –but also benefitting residents of Meirionnydd (southern Gwynedd) and Montgomeryshire (northern Powys) - the clear solution is to better use the existing Cambrian Lines and in particular, for the Welsh Government to fulfil its National Transport Plan (NTP) commitment to fund the introduction of an hourly service on the Cambrian Main Line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury – especially following the completion of Government-funded line upgrades and the completion of the European TEN-T funded ERTMS signalling installation project. This NTP commitment disappointingly appears to remain somewhat 'on hold' without a revised start date, albeit the project is described in the recently announced prioritised NTP as one of a number of 'Ongoing Commitments'. Clearly, a more frequent rails service linking into the national rail network at Shrewsbury/ Birmingham will present greater public

transport travel opportunities for many Mid Wales residents with more frequent rails services supported by *TrawsCymru* and other local bus service connections. Residents of Carmarthenshire and Powys, the Heart of Wales Line is under-utilised and offers an opportunity for Welsh Government investment in increased frequencies of rail service, although disappointingly, the recently announced NTP prioritisation only refers to a further re-evaluation of the business case at some stage 'Beyond 2015'.

- 3.3 TraCC would no doubt reconsider its position should the Welsh Government consider the re-opening of the former railway line as a national transport priority, having developed a business case to support national government investment to enable the re-instatement of the former line. It is quite possible that the potential to carry goods/ freight could strengthen such a business case.

4.0 Necessary improvements to highways

- 4.1 Alongside a programme of improved passenger transport interchanges (or 'hubs'), the reliability, quality and efficiency of the local road network should also be considered as part of the 'public transport offer'. Through its RTP Capital Programme and the annual Delivery Plan process, TraCC is seeking to provide funding to allow Ceredigion County Council to complete of the A486 Ceredigion Southern Link Road project and to carry out other much-needed local road improvements. There is also the on-going requirement for Ceredigion County Council to fund the provision of quality passenger transport information (at 'hubs' and roadside stops) and maintain the roads themselves in a safe condition.
- 4.2 As a consequence a targeted investment in upgrading the highway network linking Aberystwyth and Carmarthen is seen as the way forward. This investment however needs to be spread along the whole corridor and not solely on the Trunk Road elements of the route.
- 4.3 Investment in the past has often been piecemeal, with no real overall strategy for investment. Once grant funding for road schemes became significantly constrained and prioritised by Government to serve more populous areas and more heavily-trafficked corridors/ routes, sections lay forgotten or placed on long term 'wish lists'. For many years, TraCC and its constituent local authorities, regional economic bodies (including the WDA) have argued for investment to apply national design standards to upgrade the road network to enable the safe and efficient movement of road-based public transport, as well as to increase the connectivity and 'permeability' of Mid and West Wales to the rest of Wales, the UK and Europe. With specific reference to the current *TrawsCambria/ TrawsCymru* planned improvements, a high quality public road transport needs a high quality Road network to run on.

Prepared by Chris Wilson, TraCC Co-ordinator