



ASLEF Response to Welsh Affairs Select Committee Inquiry – Provision of Cross-Border Services for Wales – October 2008

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and Overground in addition to the light rail sector. ASLEF is committed to the re-nationalisation of the rail network. With our long experience and extensive knowledge of the UK rail industry, the union is well placed to comment on the current issues and developments in the sector.
2. ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current Welsh Select Committee Inquiry into the provision of Cross Border Services in Wales.
3. We recognise that many important renewal works are taking place within the Welsh rail infrastructure at present although the union is of the view that much of this work needs to be far more ambitious in order to qualitatively improve Cross-Border services not least because cross border services account for one third of all passenger journeys in Wales.

4. ASLEF believes that many basic improvements to Welsh infrastructure could aid cross border services not least the speed at which trains can enter and leave stations. For instance there are currently speed restrictions of 15 miles per hour in and out of Cardiff Central while proper investment in track and signalling would allow trains to move in and out at a higher speed not only improving journey times but also increasing the capacity of the station. In some parts of the network trains can enter and exit station at speeds of up to sixty miles per hour. Such a step would dramatically assist some of the issues of bottlenecks in the Cardiff Central area. We regret that Network Rail's infrastructure development plans for Cardiff station are simply replacing like for like and will not address the urgent capacity issues which need to be faced.

5. ASLEF applauds the investment into renewing the infrastructure of the railway network in Wales however we would like to see greater emphasis on expansion and capacity. Whilst we recognise that renewals improve efficiency and reliability which in turn can lead to increase capacity, we believe it is important to be bold in planning for the future of rail in Wales considering the extent to which passenger numbers have increased. Between 06/07 and 07/08, passenger journeys went up 9.3% on Arriva Trains Wales and passenger kilometres went up 12.7%. Since 1995/96 passenger journeys either beginning or ending in Wales are up by 51%.

6. In addition more frequent services are being demanded by passengers. A recent Passenger Focus report, for instance, showed that just 41% of passengers on the line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury are satisfied with the service. The survey showed that passengers want hourly services as well as better punctuality. Such improvements to frequency and punctuality would require improvements to

the infrastructure and signaling. While ASLEF welcomes the investment of £13 million into the Cambrian Line to improve reliability and punctuality the union firmly believes that ensuring a higher frequency service is equally important.

7. ASLEF is of the view that there are many services which should be extended but are unable to do so because of a lack of investment in track. It is simply not good enough for Swansea, the second city of Wales to only have an hourly service to London that takes three hours. Trains should be running at 125mph to cut the journey time to two hours. This would bring great benefits to the whole of South West Wales. We believe that the evening service from London should also be re-established.

8. In addition passenger journeys which include Swansea station have increased 34% since 1995-96 suggesting more frequent services are required, not fewer. Bridgend that is serviced by Swansea has seen passenger journeys increase by 81% since 1995-96. ASLEF would therefore urge the Committee to recommend that evening service from London be re-established.

9. ASLEF welcomes the recommendation by Network Rail that further work takes place on demand-forecasting in relation to the case for electrification of all or part of the "Borderlands Line" between Bidston and Wrexham. We feel that this could lead to a major catchment area having a more frequent and efficient service, and possibly lead to more passengers using the connection to commute to London and increase passenger service capacity on the W&SR.

10. ASLEF also believes that this option should be pursued and consideration should be given to further lines. Greater electrification is becoming an even more logical infrastructure enhancement aspiration with volatile oil prices and the need to reduce carbon emissions to reduce the impact of climate change.
11. ASLEF very much regrets that cross-border services have in fact reduced over the past few years. Until recently there were direct services from Swansea to the north and the midlands such as Birmingham, York and as far as Newcastle. The absence of such services ought to concern the Committee greatly.
12. ASLEF is also very concerned that very little consideration is given to onward connections when Welsh passengers are forced to change services in stations such as Bristol Parkway or Crewe. It is essential that services are integrated so that passengers who cannot take direct services are able to make connecting trains without long waits. Only when the system is integrated will people feel they are receiving the service they deserve.
13. Once again ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Welsh Select Committee's important inquiry into the provision of cross border services in Wales. ASLEF believes that in order to improve the one third of all journeys in Wales which are cross border rail services there has to be greater investment in the country's rail infrastructure. Network Rail's Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Wales, for instance, errs too much on replacing track and signals with like for like rather than upgrading the infrastructure to provide the vital infrastructure enhancements needed to boost capacity and frequency of service.

14. ASLEF is also concerned that cross border rail services in Wales have in fact reduced in recent years with direct services from Swansea to north Wales and to Birmingham, York and Newcastle all discontinued. Our view is that such services are vital to ongoing Welsh economic, social and environmental development. We therefore urge the Committee to consider the need for greater frequency of services particularly on lines such Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury. We'd also draw the Committee's attention to the importance of connection times at stations such as Bristol Parkway and Crewe and recommend Network Rail better integrate its connection times so that passengers who cannot take direct services are able to make connecting trains without long waits.

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