



Welsh Affairs Committee: Cross-border Road and Rail Connectivity

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 18,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current Welsh Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into the provision of Cross Border Services in Wales.
3. The Union recognises 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. 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. ASLEF

regrets 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 there must be greater emphasis on expansion and capacity. Whilst recognising that renewals improve efficiency and reliability which in turn can lead to increased capacity, it is important to be bold in planning for the future of rail in Wales considering the extent to which passenger numbers have increased. Since privatisation, passenger journeys have increased by 80% in Wales. Cross border services have increased by 58%.
6. ASLEF strongly supports the electrification of the Great Western Mainline. Electrification brings a huge amount of benefits including many long term savings. Due to there being fewer moving parts, maintenance on the trains becomes simpler and cheaper. Also, because the vehicles vibrate less and are more rugged, electric traction trains have far longer operational lives meaning they are more cost efficient. It also has many environmental benefits. Electrifying the mainline is a good start but it should not represent the end of the process. Branch lines must also be considered.
7. The Union is concerned that the electrification will end at Cardiff. This will lead to a dramatic deterioration of the service between Cardiff and Swansea and have a negative effect on Swansea's economy. This is despite the fact that First Great Western who run the franchise believe that there is a business case to continue electrification to Swansea.
8. Cross border passenger journeys which go to and from Swansea have increased by a third since 1995-96 suggesting more frequent services are required, not fewer.

9. There are many services that should be extended but cannot due to 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. The evening service from London should also be re-established.

10. Footfall on the on the Cambrian line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury grew by 9.2% in 2009-2010. More frequent services are being demanded by passengers. Passenger Focus research, which interviewed more than 800 people, found that 61% would like an hourly service on weekdays. Punctuality is another continuing area of concern on the route, with only 62% of survey respondents satisfied with this aspect of their journey. Such improvements to frequency and punctuality would require improvements to the infrastructure and signalling. While ASLEF welcomed 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.

11. ASLEF are concerned that it appears the electrification of the Boarderlands Line between Wrexham and Bidston appears to be no closer. Merseyrail estimate the cost of such work would only be £60 million. The Union feels 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. The scheme would also allow access to jobs and opportunities in both Deeside Industrial Park and central Liverpool.

12. The proposals have been around since the 1970s for the Borderland Line to be electrified. Despite studies being conducted into the feasibility of this, little real progress has been made.

13. ASLEF 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.

14. ASLEF is 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 on-going Welsh economic, social and environmental development. 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.

15. 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.

16. Whilst there has been progress in regard to cross border services over the last few years, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure capacity meets current passenger numbers and the growth that is expected in the future.

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