

EPT-18-02 (p 4)

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 04 December 2002

Time: 9.15 am to 12:00 pm

Venue: Committee Room 3/4 National Assembly Building

WALES AND BORDERS RAIL FRANCHISE

Purpose

1. To provide background information for the discussion with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) about the latest position on the bidding process for the franchise. Four bidders have been shortlisted:

Arriva Trains

GB Railways/Connex

National Express Group

Serco Rail/NS Dutch Railways

Best and final offers will be presented to the SRA in February 2003 and they will take a decision in the spring with implementation in autumn 2003.

2. The Minister for Environment has met all shortlisted bidders. A copy of the Assembly Government's Vision for Rail Services was sent to all franchise bidders in March 2002 and a copy is attached for information. This was originally drawn up following a wide consultation exercise and takes account of the recommendations in the Committee's review of public transport. Members received copies when it was published.

3. The document sets out core expectations for the new franchise covering levels of service,

key routes and the passenger environment. It makes it clear that it is essential to bear in mind that improvements will take time to bring about and an incremental approach is the only way forward.

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Annex 1

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

VISION FOR RAIL SERVICES IN WALES AND BORDERS

A GUIDE FOR FRANCHISE BIDDERS

March 2002

THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT'S VISION FOR RAIL SERVICES IN WALES AND BORDERS: A GUIDE FOR FRANCHISE BIDDERS

1 Introduction

1.1 This briefing paper is being made available to all companies which have been prequalified by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). It has also been sent to the Strategic Rail Authority, local authorities and the Rail Passengers Committee for Wales.

1.2 The paper provides an introduction to the transport policy aims of the Assembly Government, and the key elements of the aspirations for rail services set out in the Transport Framework, which was published in November 2001. It also takes account of the recommendations in the review of public transport undertaken by the Assembly's Environment, Transport and Planning Committee published in December 2001. Finally, it updates the original Guide for Franchise Bidders published in October 2000.

1.3 If pre-qualifying companies wish to discuss any issues please contact Mr Denzil Jones, Head of Transport Policy Division (Tel 029 2082 6322)

denzil.jones@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

2 Setting the Context: What role does Rail play within Assembly Transport Strategy?

2.1 One of the central objectives of the Welsh Assembly Government's Plan for Wales and Transport Framework is to develop and maintain transport networks and infrastructure to widen choice and opportunity for affordable and convenient transport options for individuals, businesses and communities. Transport is vitally important in supporting the economic regeneration of Wales, and a particular concern is to improve links from more deprived communities, such as those in the Valleys and remote rural Wales, with the emerging opportunities in the larger urban centres. If the Assembly Government is to succeed in improving accessibility to work, leisure and welfare facilities, one of the key elements it needs to get right is the way it supports the growth of the rail network across Wales.

2.2 The rail network is regarded not just as having a functional role to support people moving within and between communities. The stations and services which a community has can define the way it sees itself and is seen. Attractive facilities, good services and high quality rolling stock can attract businesses and tourists to an area, support equality of access, can promote civic pride and raise expectations, as well as encouraging people from their cars. Poorly maintained and low quality facilities have the opposite effect, and can even encourage increased crime.

2.3 For that reason, the development of a coherent network of rail services is not only about

ensuring increased service frequency. It is also about providing high quality facilities which complement the needs of the community, and providing the routes and interchange points with other transport modes which fit local transport aspirations for addressing congestion and ensuring accessibility and are consistent with wider planning and environmental objectives. This holistic spatial approach to developing Assembly Government aspirations for the new single franchise is aimed at leveraging in added value for the community from each service improvement.

2.4 The rail network in Wales is one key element to underpin the Assembly Government's development of a coherent transport network. We expect it to act like a spine across the country linking key urban centres, from which complementary bus routes and other transport modes can fan out. A fifteen year franchise, and a more coherent network of routes, is expected to deliver tangible improvements in terms of investment and services. Improvements in quality of the rail network will depend on capital investment and the Assembly Government is playing its part in this in funding some of the costs of infrastructure improvement through local authorities. The primary responsibility for taking forward rail investment rests with the SRA, train operators and Railtrack.

2.5 We have also welcomed the SRA commitment to supporting wider integration between other transport modes and rail. We would expect all franchise bidders to demonstrate within their bids how their proposed services will link to other public transport modes. The new franchise will also give the successful operator responsibility for station management; other operators will also be using many of these stations, especially the major ones. We expect that this should include improvements to passenger comfort and information, including improved interchange facilities with other modes of transport, including private transport - where initiatives such as Park and Ride schemes can encourage modal shift and reduce local congestion.

3 Core Expectations

3.1 Below are the set of core expectations for the new franchise. They represent the expectations of the Assembly Government, based upon the need to establish a minimum core standard across Wales, which takes account of the major demands for transport, the policy aims and investment priorities of the Assembly Government and the ongoing work by local authorities and other interested bodies. They cover levels of service, key routes, and the passenger environment. It is essential to bear in mind that improvements will take time to bring about and an incremental approach is the only way forward. Some developments will require improvements in infrastructure and additional revenue support. It is imperative therefore that the successful operator is committed to a long term programme of investment and willing to work in partnership to bring about cost effective improvements. Give the challenge faced by the rail industry the case for additional investment by the SRA will need to be robust.

Level of Service

3.2 Our expectation is that the new franchise will offer continual improvement in standards of service frequency, reliability and comfort offered to passengers throughout the life of franchise.

3.3 The Transport Framework for Wales sets out in detail frequency aspirations for each route, which were supported by the results of the rail audit conducted in November 1999. An extract from the Transport Framework is included as an Annex. In general the new franchise should develop a coherent set of standards for services across Wales and the Borders, so that the frequencies on any route consistently reflect demand for route and populations served. The general aspirations are:

- 4 trains per hour in central urban areas
- 2 trains per hour in travel to work region (e.g Heads of Valleys, North East conurbation), interurban routes (Abergavenny, Shrewsbury) and long-distance links to major cities in England (Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol)
- 1 train hourly for smaller stations on mainline routes (e.g. Whitland, Abergele)
- 2 hourly services for rural routes.

3.4 We are looking to the successful operator then to improve upon this general standard for peak hour provision, setting patterns which respond not just to commuter needs, but also to those of schools, markets and other local needs. In addition, there is an expectation of more imaginative timetabling to improve provision where rolling stock or capacity may be restricted, for example by exploring the provision of alternate fast and stopping services along sections of line.

3.5 We recognise that the development of the single franchise will offer greater operational flexibility to the successful operator, particularly given the reduction in competition for key rail paths. On that basis, we expect clockface timetabling for all routes, and for service coverage on major routes to be extended to ensure regular service provision between 06h00 and 23h00 Mon-Sat. Tourism is a key contributor to the Welsh economy and greater similarity than is currently available between Sunday and weekday services both in terms of service frequency and coverage is desirable over time.

3.6 Finally, we expect the successful operator to work with bus operators, local authorities and community transport providers in Wales, as well as other rail operators, to develop a coherent policy on setting times for connections, and provision for delayed or missed services.

Route Strategies

3.7 Our aspirations are for a step change on all routes. There are specific routes where Assembly Government investment in infrastructure though local authorities will provide the capacity for improvement in service levels within the life of the franchise.

- **Valley Lines**: The Assembly Government is supporting the SWIFT infrastructure plan developed by the local authorities, through Transport Grant, which will upgrade track and signalling in the Cardiff/Maesteg/Valley Lines area with indicative completion dates.

Llanharan Station – 2004

Rhymney Line – 2005

Taff Vale North – 2005

Maesteg line – 2006

Brackla Station – 2006

Queen Street station – 2006

- Once the upgrades are implemented, the aspiration is to increase peak hour service frequencies as shown below, as set out in the SWIFT Plan. Existing services are shown in brackets.

- **Rhymney Valley Line**

Cardiff to Ystrad Mynach	7/hour (4) (Including 1 freight train)
Ystrad Mynach to Bargoed	4/hour (2)
Bargoed to Rhymney	2/hour (1)

- **Taff Vale Line**

Cardiff to Pontypridd	8/hour (4/5)
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Pontypridd to Porth	4/hour (2)
Pontypridd to Aberdare	2/hour (1) (including freight)
Pontypridd to Merthyr	2/hour (1)

- The SRA's Strategic Plan identifies RPP (Rail Passenger partnership)-funded additional rolling stock on the Taff corridor to alleviate overcrowding (2002-05) together with infrastructure improvement at Barry (expected completion 2002-03) to provide operational flexibility. RPP proposals for selective increased frequencies on the Cardiff Valleys network and for strengthened morning services on the Barry Island – Aberdare service are currently being assessed by the SRA.
- **Vale of Glamorgan line reopening:** The Assembly Government has committed Transport Grant, in partnership with the SRA (through a RPP bid) for the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan Line to passenger traffic. New stations are to be constructed at Rhoose (to serve Cardiff International Airport) and Llantwit Major. Passenger services are due to be introduced in May 2003.
- The evaluation of the SWIFT schemes show that, in combination, they will reduce car travel in the South Wales Valleys and Central Cardiff by around 775,000 trips per year. This represents approximately 2,500 car trips removed from the City Centre and Cardiff Bay each day, which will bring between 5% and 10% reduction in peak hour traffic on the radial routes. This will reduce parking demand and will make a significant contribution to bringing about modal shift. Increases in passenger numbers over the last few years have been significant and there is a major opportunity for modal shift provided that commuters have reliable, regular and comfortable trains with no overcrowding.
- **Ebbw Vale line reopening:** Funding towards the capital costs of the re-opening of the Ebbw Vale line to passenger services was announced on 31 January 2002, by the Assembly Government, through the Corus aid package and Transport Grant. The project will be eligible for consideration for Objective 1 support. Further support is under consideration by the SRA. The project will involve the construction of 6 stations. Subject to all the funding being in place and the works completed, services on the line could start in two or three years.
- **North Wales mainline:** Services to support urban movement, particularly to underpin modal shift in the journey to work from car to public transport, offer a good opportunity for development within the new franchise. The North East Wales conurbation is well placed to benefit from the works supported by the Assembly Government and Railtrack to raise linespeeds along the North Wales coastline, which should result in improved commuter services to Chester, Manchester, Runcorn and Crewe for these communities.

TAITH, the North Wales consortium of local authorities, is developing the integrated transport approach for this region, and the Assembly Government would expect the successful operator to work to develop these urban services in partnership with this group. Incremental Output Statement (IOS) schemes are identified in the SRA's Strategic Plan at Bangor and Chester to improve operational flexibility (proposed completion 2004-05).

- **South West Wales:** Services to West Wales, including to the important tourist ports of Fishguard and Pembroke, are infrequent and rarely provide a useful link to the ferry services. Studies conducted by SWITCH, the South West Wales consortium of local authorities, suggest that the existing single track section, the west of Swansea, does not impede the immediate provision of some additional services, and although the Assembly Government aspiration is for redoubling for this section, the Assembly Government will expect the successful operator to work in partnership with the SWITCH authorities, and with ferry operators to improve provision with the existing infrastructure. One key Assembly Government aspiration is an enhanced rail service between Swansea and Cardiff given the number of commuters from Swansea and intermediate towns to Cardiff.
- The SRA proposes an infrastructure scheme at Swansea West Loop (proposed completion 2004-05) which will improve operational flexibility and provide parallel arrivals and departures to/from West Wales, thereby facilitating improved connections between West Wales and First Great Western services. The SRA's RPP will fund additional services between Carmarthen and Milford Haven, connecting with First Great Western.
- **Links to England:** As important as those services supporting journey-to-work journeys, are the **longer distance mainline services**, which both provide links between key towns, and provide important hubs from which both rail and bus services to more rural areas can flow. Many of the key long distance flows in Wales are from West to East. They underline the role which Wales plays as a landbridge to Ireland, through the connection with ports, as well as connecting with key gateway stations in England. All these flows to the East require good connections with the Welsh Border line services serving Chester and Shrewsbury, as well as the provision of sensible termini which reflect the pattern of passenger flows including running forward to Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester.
- **Cambrian line:** The Assembly Government is part-funding (with the SRA through an IOS scheme) improvements to track and signalling including Dovey Junction and Machynlleth. This will enable increased service frequency on the Cambrian line, in accordance with our aspirations for improved, more frequent links through Mid Wales to Aberystwyth, commensurate with the town's importance as a key tourist and university centre. It will also improve links with the Cambrian coast line important for communities in the vicinity of the line and also for tourism.

- **Heart of Wales line:** The Assembly Government is funding station improvements on the Heart of Wales line, through Transport Grant. Additional Sunday services on this line are being funded through the RPP scheme and innovative proposals for developing this line would be welcome.
- **North South Rail services:** The importance of East-West links reflects how the economy of Wales has developed to date and its interdependence upon its links with England and with Ireland for both access to jobs and to markets. However, we are keen for transport provision to complement the developments in the economy within Wales, and for that reason, the links between North and South Wales are especially important. The Assembly Government has supported, since May 2000, an additional direct return service from Cardiff-Holyhead via Wrexham. In response to representations, Wales and Borders has prepared alternative services and these will be implemented from the October 2002 timetable. The Assembly Government will expect bidders to put forward proposals for direct and connecting services between North and South Wales taking into account the services funded by them. The SRA's IOS programme includes infrastructure improvements on the Chester- Shrewsbury (proposed completion 2002-03) to improve journey times.
- **Improved facilities stations:** Transport Grant is supporting enhanced inter-modal facilities at stations (eg bus/rail , park and ride, improved access) including Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, Port Talbot, Neath, Swansea, Bridgend, Wildmill (Bridgend), Pencoed and Aber (Caerphilly). Haverfordwest station is also part funded by the SRA's RPP scheme. In addition the SRA is funding a Modern Facilities at Stations programme. This scheme provides specific new facilities at certain categorised stations. These include waiting rooms, customer information systems, CCTV and toilets. 48 stations in the franchise area will benefit from this programme.
- **Longer term aspirations**

The Assembly Government has provided funding for a number of feasibility

studies. These include a rail strategy for the SWITCH consortium, in

South West Wales, the TIGER consortium, in Gwent, options for the link

between Cardiff Queen Street and Cardiff Bay and a new station on the

Wrexham - Bidston line. The TIGER consortium has aspirations for half hourly

clock face services to all existing stations and the provision of three new

stations at Caerleon, Coedkernew and Magor/Undy.

- The SRA has a scheme for improving capacity on the Newport - Crewe line (completion expected 2006/07) to provide increased passenger and freight capacity.

Rail Environment - Quality of Passenger Experience

3.8 As important as the service frequencies and route priorities is the quality of the passenger experience, whether on a train, or waiting in a station. The single franchise offers considerable advantages to the successful operator, both through being able to pursue a common brand approach for station management, and for rolling stock provision.

3.9 We are aware of the rolling stock investments which companies have made within the existing franchises but nevertheless the availability of rolling stock for improved services is an issue which will need to be resolved if early progress is to be made. We are also concerned that the commitment to early implementation of new safety systems, and to ensuring proper provision for disabled passengers are taken forward.

3.10 We are therefore looking for a rolling programme of operator investment to ensure that appropriate rolling stock is available to support each route - whether this is comfortable short haul commuter vehicles, vehicles with appropriate catering, toilet and workspace facilities for longer trips, or those which suit tourist trips on scenic railway or those which can take additional cycles. Refreshments and other passenger services on board should be of high quality, and readily available.

3.11 A firm commitment to marketing of stations and station services from the new operator would be welcome. Working with Railtrack and local planning authorities, stations could be landmarks within their community (particularly rural communities) and potentially could offer retail, post office or other essential services. There is also an expectation that stations will be safe, attractive places to wait, that the routes to the station for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists are well planned, and that adequate provision for modal interchange, whether through providing secure parking or bus interchange, or rail-bus feeder services, is available. We would wish to see a rolling programme of station upgrades so that all stations in Wales achieve accredited secure station status within the lifetime of the franchise. A good start has been made already.

3.12 Another element of the passenger environment, is the access to information. Fully

accessible real-time information which is accurate and takes into account needs of disabled passengers should be introduced. The current bilingual provision of information should be developed and extended to cover main line franchises operating through Wales and Borders stations as well. The operator should work proactively with other transport operators and local authorities to ensure that the local community is aware of the full range of rail services and possible intermodal connections which are available.

3.13 We would expect this partnership with operators and local authorities to extend to the development of integrated ticketing schemes and the introduction of smartcards. Some bus operators have already negotiated add-on rail fares, and the new franchise operator should actively promote this at stations.

3.14 Finally, given the role of the railway as a social railway, which improves accessibility, as well as an important link to give access to employment and to markets. The fares structure adopted across Wales should reflect these different needs. Fares need to be market sensitive: high quality services should not automatically result in higher fares. This is particularly important to encouraging modal shift for journey to work travel, as passengers will equate rail fares only with the petrol costs of the private transport alternative, rather than the whole car costs.

4 The New Franchise.

4.1 This document sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's Vision for Rail. The Assembly Government's current programme of transport expenditure shows a substantial commitment to rail and measures to promote the integration of public transport. We recognise that there are constraints imposed by the rail industry's shortage of specialised skills and delays in delivering rail infrastructure projects even when funding is available. The SRA's Strategic Plan sets out the context for developing the railway across Great Britain. It has made it clear that while most use is made of main lines and south east of England commuter lines leading to London there will be every opportunity to develop other services and the Wales and Borders franchise has a significant role in enhancing economic and social inclusion objectives within Wales.