

Setting the Direction for Wales and the Borders Rail

Sustrans' submission to Welsh Government's consultation on priorities for delivery by the Wales and Border Franchise

18 March 2016

Introduction

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

Sustrans welcomes the Welsh Government's ambition to create a new model of franchise in Wales with a strong emphasis on community connections. We believe that a key part of succeeding in this aim will be an emphasis on viewing rail as one part of a wider journey and building into the franchise requirements which facilitate the journeys either side of the rail element by sustainable travel modes whenever possible. The franchise must require the operating company to demonstrate a commitment to not only increasing patronage but also enabling integrated sustainable transport.

Sustrans has limited the remainder of our comments to focus on our core interest of how the Wales and Border Franchise can contribute to achieving an increase in active travel, stated ambition of Government in Wales. The new franchise offers an opportunity to help deliver many of the aims of the Active Travel Act but only if the requirement to work fully with agents who are responsible for delivery of the Act is clearly spelt out in the franchise. We also believe that, whilst the commitment to sustainability in the consultation document is welcome, that approach should be based on the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act.

Outcomes

Naturally we support the ambition for the franchise to encourage more people to travel by train. However we believe there should be a far greater emphasis on the way people travel to the start of the rail journey and the onward journey to their destination. Building into the franchise requirements to facilitate greater use of active travel modes to and from stations would produce significant health, environmental and equality benefits, in accord with the first five goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. There is also evidence of public demand for this. When questioned, nearly a third of rail users and nearly half (47%) of those who drove and parked at the station, would like to use an alternative means of travel to or from the station (Passenger Focus 2010 National Station Improvement Programme final report). In the same survey over 11% of rail users questioned said they would like to cycle to and from the station and 40% of passengers cited an increase in bus/cycle lanes near the station as a key measure in getting them to travel to the station by sustainable means.

We also strongly believe that greater integration with other public transport modes should be a priority outcome.

Capacity for carriage of bicycles on trains

Welsh Government's commitment to active travel is aimed at achieving a modal shift from cars to walking or cycling for purposeful journeys, such as the commute to work or school. For many people, the ability to use rail + bike is constrained by the need to use the bicycle at the start and finish of the rail journey. The current overcrowding on many commuter services means that taking a bicycle on the train as part of the journey to work or school is either forbidden by the train operator or made practically impossible by the sheer number of people in a carriage. There should be a clear requirement for franchisees to allocate space for the carriage of bicycles on trains, including on services at commuting times. It is also important that the space for bicycles is not lost if the space is required for other uses. It is invidious to expect people with bicycles to compete for space with people using wheelchairs or parents with children in buggies, as is frequently the case now.

On shorter journeys it is important that bicycles can be carried without prior reservation, at the discretion of the on board train staff. It is also important that staff receive training in how to manage the use of space effectively and to deal with situations where there is insufficient space.

Performance standards

A key concern for passengers is safety and security at stations. For people using bicycles to travel to or from the station, the provision of secure cycle storage is a critical factor. Unfortunately, thefts of bicycles from stations are common and is a significant deterrent to increasing sustainable travel to and from stations. We therefore believe that franchisees should be incentivised to address this issue by having theft from stations as a factor within the franchise performance standards.

Ticketing

As we have already stated, we do not favour compulsory reservations for bicycles on shorter journeys. However when bicycle reservations are required they should be available by the same means as the passenger ticket. The current franchisee does not permit online cycle reservation, Virgin East Coast does have this facility and we request it should be stipulated within the Wales franchise.

Rolling stock

We welcome the expectation that new rolling stock will have additional provision for passengers wishing to travel with bicycles. Please see the paragraph on Capacity for our other comments relevant to new rolling stock.

Stations

The quality of facilities for active travel at and around stations is fundamental to the achievement of a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. In particular the proposed high level outcome of "Reduced emissions through lower road vehicle use" is more likely to be realised if the journey to and from the station by walking, cycling or bus is made a more attractive option than driving. We strongly support a requirement that each station should have in place a Station Travel Plan. Details on how such a plan should be developed are contained within the Association of Train Operating Companies' Guideline for Development of Management for Stations which can be accessed here: http://www.atoc.org/download/clientfiles/files/Lo_Res-GUIDANCE-FOR-

[DEVELOPMENT-MANAGEMENT-FOR-STNS.pdf](#) and the 'How to' Companion Guide, which can be accessed here: http://www.atoc.org/download/clientfiles/files/Lo_Res-COMPANION-HOW-TO-DOC-FOR-DEVELOPMENT-MANAGEMENT-FOR-STNS-1.pdf

We welcome the statement on the provision of additional secure bicycle storage at stations and would wish to see this as a formal requirement of the franchise. The location of secure bicycle storage can make the difference between it being well used and not – it must be clearly visible, close to the station entrance, preferably undercover, and of a good design.

With regard to the use of assets, we believe that there is significant scope at many busier stations for the utilisation of buildings and empty space around stations for the provision of active travel hubs. These would provide a mixture of secure cycle storage; cycle maintenance; advice on public transport and walking and cycling routes; cycle hire; and other commercial services. There are examples of this type of provision working successfully in Leeds, Sheffield and Nottingham. Facilities like this should form part of Government's investment in the promotion of active and sustainable transport.

Many stations in Wales are well served by active travel routes in the surrounding areas, but too often these routes are difficult to identify from the station forecourt. Often active travel routes are routed via the rear of a station because the road network is less busy so safer for cyclists, this means often users are required to use stair access to stations, which is challenging with a bicycle. The franchise must require the operator to work with local authorities to integrate active travel route planning and with convenient access to station for those arriving on foot or by bicycle.

Passenger information

There should be a clear requirement for ongoing travel advice to prominently feature both sustainable and active modes of travel.

Safety and Security

Please see our comments under Performance Standards.

Sustainability

We believe this section should base itself on the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. As such there should be a consideration of the health impact of the franchise. This would encapsulate the aim of reducing car journeys – though this needs to clearly include car journeys to and from the station - in order to reduce emissions prejudicial to health and the favouring of active travel modes to and from the station to increase physical activity. Reducing car journeys to stations should also be a key consideration under environmental impact to help combat climate change. Other initiatives could also boost the sustainable transport options available to users of rail services for example reduced car parking costs for car sharers and electric car charging points at railway stations. The cost of maintaining station car parks should not be at the expense of people who do not use car parks – the franchise should incentivise operators to be innovative in the way that station car parking revenue is used to pay for sustainable transport promotion.

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