

Minutes of Rail for Herefordshire meeting held:
Thursday September 11th 2008 at 7.30pm at All Saints Church, Hereford

About 35 people came to hear Gary Draisey, Network Rail Wales, Senior Commercial Scheme Sponsor, Network Rail Enhancements in Wales:

Here are the notes from his presentation:

PRESENTATION TO RAIL FOR HEREFORDSHIRE
THURSDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER
ALL SAINTS CHURCH, HEREFORD

I first had the opportunity to present to RfH approximately 5 years ago when I was a serving army Officer with Defence Rail and Container Services, where I was responsible for the day to day management of the MoD rail system from Scotland to Cornwall including all MoD rail depots and the mainline contract with EWS. During that period I was involved with the reopening of a number of MoD rail served sites as well as developing the use of rail as a cost effective method of moving MoD equipment around. In a 4 year period we had significantly increased the use of rail as well as driving down costs and providing the taxpayer with a very lean cost effective operation.

I am now employed by Network Rail as a Senior Commercial Scheme Sponsor based in Cardiff responsible for all Network Rail Enhancements in Wales, reporting to the Regional Enhancement Manager for Western Region.

I would like to discuss today the background and the current situation we have on today's railways and the impact that devolution and the establishment of the Welsh Assembly have had on rail development in Wales with particular reference to re-openings.

Currently the rail network is experiencing unprecedented growth, both in terms of passenger numbers and freight. This growth has been particularly significant over the last 5 years and has benefited from increases in petrol/diesel prices. The growth has led to significant demands on the current railway network as we are trying to squeeze more and more trains into an already congested system. Although a significant amount of investment has occurred; and is planned, for the delivery of enhancements to increase capacity and resolve bottlenecks, in the longer term to meet demand work will need to be carried out into reactivating old lines and possibly developing new high speed lines.

With regard to the Welsh Assembly, the WAG has now inherited a significant amount of financial power and also responsibility for managing railway operations within Wales (and also on associated lines such as the North and West line through Hereford and Shrewsbury). Since assuming authority for railways in Wales the WAG has seen an opportunity to develop a system that fits in with the political aspirations of a 'One Wales' strategy.

The policy has manifested itself in developing a strategy that looks at the overall benefits of rail and the impact that rail can have on communities that are somewhat isolated, suffering from high unemployment or are being developed with an integrated approach to transport. The policy has been developed in line with the 4 Transport Consortia in Wales TAITH, TRACC, SEWTA and SWITTC, who represent all the local authorities in Wales and look to develop integrated transport plans for their region that are fed up to WAG for a national perspective.

In practical terms WAG rail policy has provided Wales with extended platforms in the South Wales area and reactivated passenger lines at the Vale of Glamorgan (VOG) and Ebbw Vale lines as well as a new station at Llanharan. In addition there are numerous other schemes to increase and improve the network within Wales, these include;

- Major re-signalling schemes at Newport, and Cardiff
- New station at Newport
- National Stations Improvement Programme
- New Freight Terminal at Wentlooge
- Improved services for west Wales
- New interchanges, bus links and car parks at existing stations

The Vale of Glamorgan line was a freight only line between Barry and Bridgend that was used primarily for servicing the Aberthaw Power Station and as a diversionary route, however there has been a growing demand to re-establish passenger services over the line and this was achieved in 2005 when the line reopened and new stations at Llantwit Major and Rhoose Cardiff International were opened, since then the line has gone from strength to strength and with the establishment of the new MoD Defence Training Academy at St Athans another station is likely

Ebbw Vale which similar to the VOG was a freight only line that served the Ebbw Vale steel works, however with the recent closure of the steel works and the potential spectre of mass unemployment the WAG in line with the local SEWTA plan decided to press ahead with the development of passenger services on the branch with new stations at Ebbw Vale Parkway, Llanhillith, Risca, Newbridge and Rogerstone. Again similar to the VOG the success of the branch has surprised most observers with a high level of patronage from the start.

The success of the reopening of these two branches has spurred the WAG to look at other potential re-openings and they are actively exploring, along with the consortia, which are the most suitable lines for development.

Although the reopening can be viewed in terms of success the issue of rail has been a steep learning curve for the WAG and not without a few painful lessons, particularly regarding the cost of developing infrastructure. Interestingly, the WAG can also claim to be victims of their own success as being responsible for managing the ATW franchise, they are also responsible for many of the costs incurred including providing more rolling stock to meet the increased demand, but overall the policy can be deemed a success.

One of the fundamental keys to the success of the rail development is the ability for local authorities to make decisions and also to have the financial and political ability to carry out those decisions.

Next Meetings: October 11th, November 13th, December 11th All Saints Church, 7.30 p.m.

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