



Passenger Focus' response to Network Rail's
Wales Route Utilisation Strategy Draft for
Consultation

August 2008

Passenger Focus is the independent national rail consumer watchdog. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Transport.

Our mission is to get the best deal for Britain's rail passengers. We have two main aims: to influence both long and short term decisions and issues that affect passengers; and to help passengers through advice, advocacy and empowerment.

With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of rail passengers and we work with the rail industry, other passenger groups and Government to secure journey improvements.

Our vision is to ensure that the rail industry and Government are always

‘putting rail passengers first’

This will be achieved through our mission of

‘getting the best deal for passengers’

Contents

	Page
1. Executive summary	4
2. Recommendations	5
3. Introduction	6
4. Scope: Wales Geography	8
5. General Comments	
1. Cross-border journeys	9
2. Stations and Interchanges	10
3. Car parking	11
4. Integrated Transport	11
5. Social Inclusion	12
6. Tourism	13
7. Growth	14
8. Rolling stock	15
9. Network capability and engineering access	16
6. Analysis of Options	
1. Route 13 Great Western Main Line	18
2. Route 14 South and Central Wales and Borders	21
3. Route 15 South Wales Valleys	27
4. Route 22 North Wales and Borders	29
7. Summary table of Passenger Focus' responses to RUS options	35
 Appendices:	
A. List of Consultees	36
B. Bibliography	37
C. Sample questionnaire used for Wales RUS passenger research	38

1. Executive summary

The numbers of people travelling by rail are increasing. Performance on the railways is steadily improving and passenger satisfaction is rising. Passenger Focus expects the programme of Route Utilisation Strategies (RUSes) across the rail network to build on this; to allow for continued passenger growth, to further improve performance and to improve passenger satisfaction.

The RUS objective is defined as “*the effective and efficient use and development of the capacity available, consistent with funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become, available during the period of the RUS and with the licence holder’s performance of the duty*¹.”

Passenger Focus has a wealth of research material regarding what passengers want, and adds to this as the RUS programme rolls out across the network. This evidence informs our input to specific RUS consultations at route level. Drivers of passenger satisfaction change over time, but punctuality and reliability have been the main drivers of passenger satisfaction since the National Passenger Survey (NPS) began in 1999. Issues such as facilities for car parking, frequency of train services and connections with other train services have also been clear factors in overall satisfaction ratings. Passenger Focus expects RUSes to address the link between passenger satisfaction and the development of capacity.

Our submission is based on comprehensive research with 4,085² passengers, looking from the passenger viewpoint at the options proposed for inclusion in the final RUS, as well as generic issues regarding the passenger viewpoint on fares, satisfaction and wider rail issues.

Economic growth across parts of the RUS area is evident with new building developments, job creation and improved leisure and social opportunities.

However, there are towns and villages within the geographic scope of this RUS consultation that suffer from high levels of social and rural deprivation where easily accessible rail services or even meaningful information about rail services for many potential passengers is simply not available.

It is clear that the railways in Wales, operated by Arriva Trains Wales (ATW), First Great Western, Virgin Trains and Arriva CrossCountry, are performing with a fair degree of success. ATW achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 83% (of 782 passengers surveyed)³. The strong growth in passenger numbers, the good overall satisfaction ratings and improved performance demonstrate that the RUS should build on those solid foundations.

¹ Extract from Office of Rail Regulation Guidelines on RUSes (June 2005)

² 829 on the Cambrian line, 665 on the Marches route, 528 on the Valley lines and 610 in South West Wales, March, 2008; 782 on Arriva Trains Wales for the Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey; 671 for Wales Passenger Priorities, July 2007

³ National Passenger Survey, Passenger Focus, Spring 2008

The RUS proposes many sensible options to make “*efficient use and development of the capacity available*” which we support. However, our new research demonstrates that passengers support some options which Network Rail propose not to consider further as part of the final RUS. These should be re-considered/taken forward, ensuring that passenger needs are at the heart of the strategy.

This would ensure that train services meet passenger expectations, and avoids the scenario that the RUS provides an operational solution to improve capacity and performance that creates changes in service patterns that do not meet the needs of passengers.

Passengers will want to know what the RUS offers to those who use the railway – and who pay for it. Do the options provide benefits? Do they offer solutions to difficulties or shortcomings in the present service? Will they match passengers’ priorities and:

- increase frequencies?
- increase connectivity?
- increase reliability?
- improve punctuality?
- improve stations?

Passengers also want to know how the proposals identified in the draft RUS will be prioritised, delivered and funded. If the RUS is to avoid becoming just another planning document that sits on the shelf it needs to provide a mechanism for taking forward its longer term requirements and it must include an estimate of costings, when the work might be done, and possible sources of funding.

2. Recommendations

Our key recommendations for inclusion in the final RUS are:

- options that drive a real step-change in improved passenger services for Wales - for example, faster journeys between North and South Wales
- options that meet passengers’ aspirations and requirements - for example, improved frequency for the Cambrian line and to South West Wales
- options that are designed, not only to serve new developments, but to be in place at the same time as those developments, not later, after travel patterns have been established - for example, a new station at Llanwern
- options that are capable of integrating with other proposals for social and economic development - for example linking Ebbw Vale with Newport, extra services on the Heart of Wales line
- options to improve stations and increase car park capacity - for example at Chepstow, Abergavenny and Machynlleth

3. Introduction

Passenger Focus welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Wales RUS Draft for Consultation. Passenger Focus supports the broad objectives behind the RUS process and welcomes the consultative approach adopted by Network Rail.

Passenger Focus believes that the RUS is a vital component to inform the implementation of the One Wales coalition agreement, the Wales Rail Planning Assessment (RPA), the Wales Transport Strategy, the National Transport Plan, Wales Spatial Plan⁴, and the four regional transport plans. The regional plans are currently being produced by the four regional transport bodies:

Taith	North Wales
TraCC	Mid Wales
SWWITCH	South-West Wales
SEWTA	South-East Wales

We understand there are practicalities around funding some of the proposed RUS options. However, we make no apologies for having an aspirational vision of the future of the rail network in Wales. The total number of passenger journeys on services in the 2006-07 financial year in the Wales RUS area that incorporates Wales and parts of the English border counties was 31 million. This is an increase of 47.9% since 1998/1999. Demand forecasts indicate growth of 25% in passenger demand over the next ten years. An aspirational approach is required to manage current and predicted demand in growth and to meet the stated transport objectives to promote economic growth, social inclusion, health and protection of our environment through a safe, integrated, effective and efficient transport system.

Our response to this consultation is informed by liaison with stakeholders and user groups, our postbag, existing research, and bespoke research commissioned by Passenger Focus. As an evidence-based organisation, the Passenger Focus response to the consultation incorporates research with 4,085⁵ passengers, including findings obtained from new and comprehensive passenger research⁶ conducted on rail services in the Wales RUS area.

The priority generic issues for passengers from our new research can be summarised as:

- **Punctuality and reliability of the train**
- **Provision of information about train times**
- **Being able to get a seat**
- **Frequency of the trains on the route**
- **Journey time**

⁴ For more detail on these publications see the Bibliography, page 37

⁵ *ibid.* footnote 2

⁶ Continental, for Passenger Focus, March, 2008.

Further passenger issues include:

- **Personal security at stations**
- **Ease of getting to/from station**
- **Ease of getting on/off train**
- **Not having to change trains**
- **Ticket buying facilities**

Other Issues

The following issues are considered in section five, page 9, below, "General comments".

- 1. Cross-border journeys**
- 2. Stations and Interchanges**
- 3. Car parking**
- 4. Integrated Transport**
- 5. Social Inclusion**
- 6. Tourism**
- 7. Growth**
- 8. Rolling stock**
- 9. Network capability and engineering access**

4. Scope: Wales Geography

The Ellesmere Port to Helsby section of line has a very limited service of passenger trains. Local stakeholders believe that there is a case for improving the frequency. In recognition of the line's peripheral importance to the Wales RUS, we believe that its future should be considered by the Merseyside RUS. Likewise plans for the Wrexham to Bidston line are, literally, directly linked to the Merseyrail network, and they would benefit from being considered by that RUS.

As noted on page 19 of the draft for consultation, the Wales RUS area has links to other RUSes. However the effect on trains from Wales to London caused by capacity issues outside this RUS's area must be recognised. For example, track capacity through the Severn Tunnel, and on the stretch of single track between Swindon and Kemble, a route vital to passengers between South Wales and London at times when the Severn Tunnel is closed for whatever reason, is of great concern, and directly affects some of the options in the Wales RUS.

5. General comments

5.1 Cross-border Journeys

Cross-border journeys are very important to passengers in Wales, with many people using the rail network to access employment, study and leisure opportunities in England on a regular basis. Figures from the Office of Rail Regulation⁷ (ORR) show that just over one-third (34.4%) of the 20 million annual journeys that start and/or finish in Wales cross the Wales-England border. Travel to/from London represents 9.1% of total Welsh rail journeys, with journeys to/from South West England accounting for a further 9.0%, the North West of England 6.7% and the West Midlands 4.3%, respectively.

These figures highlight the fact that for Welsh rail passengers, important parts of the network are located outside Wales and the larger Wales RUS area. Key destination stations for Welsh passengers in this regard include London Paddington, London Euston, Birmingham New Street, and Manchester Piccadilly.

Section 3.5 in the draft document identifies these cross-border flows, while section 2.2.5 identifies its links with other route utilisation strategies. **Passenger Focus believes, however, that the importance of these cross-border journeys should be given greater prominence in the strategy**, particularly as they are often directly linked to a number of the Gaps and Options being explored such as improving the West Wales train services pattern (Option 14A), increasing reliability and service frequency on the Cambrian line (Option 14F) and improving service levels on the North Wales coast line (Option 22D). This reflects the fact that in contrast to several of the other RUSes (e.g. the Great Western RUS), the Wales RUS focus is on a geographic area rather than a route.

Similarly, the interests of passengers in the Wales RUS area and the development of the network will be impacted by developments elsewhere. The redevelopment of Reading station and re-doubling of track between Swindon and Kemble (a diversionary route for South Wales – London services when the Severn Tunnel is closed) are two such examples. Similarly, in the longer term, Network Rail's recent announcement (23 June 2008) that it is to examine the case for developing new rail lines⁸, including both the Great Western and West Coast routes, is potentially very significant to the future development of rail services in the Wales RUS area. The identification of key schemes such as these would further improve the usefulness of the strategy by helping to identify potential conflicts and synergies in the wider rail network.

⁷ National Rail Trends Yearbook 2006-07, Office of Rail Regulation, September 2007.

⁸ *Meeting The Capacity Challenge: Network Rail Looks At The Case For New Rail Lines*, Network Rail website, June 2008

5.2 Stations and Interchanges

The facilities and standards at stations are very important to passengers. Stations in the RUS area range from many barely improved wayside platforms in rural locations to large stations such as Cardiff Central.

Improvement to stations needs to be a priority issue for the Wales RUS area, as underlined by the high level of dissatisfaction recorded in the National Passenger Survey⁹. In the latest NPS (Spring 2008), scores for station attributes for ATW (which is responsible for all the stations in Wales) were significantly behind the average for Britain. Out of 12 station attributes, ATW had the lowest rating of all franchised operators for four categories (upkeep/repair of station buildings/platforms; cleanliness; connections with public transport; availability of staff) and the second lowest for a further two (facilities and services; overall environment).

Our most recent passenger research¹⁰ in the Wales RUS area indicates a number of areas where passengers would like to see improvements. When asked what facilities were most important to have at the station, the top three responses were: accurate information on train arrivals; toilets; and accurate announcements on arrival and departure times. This research indicates the importance of accurate information about train times for passengers and in this regard the inclusion of a project to install improved customer information systems (CIS) at a number of stations in Wales through the National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP) is very much welcomed.

Many stations in the Wales RUS area also have accessibility issues that need to be tackled to increase access to the network. Similarly, initiatives are needed to address passenger concerns with security at stations, with only 55% of ATW passengers indicating they were satisfied in this regard in the Spring 2008 NPS.

We note that the Enterprise and Learning Committee has expressed a similar view¹¹ on the importance of improving stations in its response, particularly in regards to improvements at smaller unstaffed stations.

The RUS consultation document (3.5.2 page 35) highlights the most and least used stations in the Wales RUS area, with 11 stations in Wales catering for fewer than 1,000 passengers a year. The renewals plan for low footfall stations should be reviewed, together with any relevant proposals for housing or other developments, to ascertain the best future strategy for these stations. However, this is based on the prerequisite that any review undertaken is subject to an inclusive, widespread consultation process. A balanced approach is required when trying to understand the reasons for stations having a low footfall. On the one hand the rail industry notes that

⁹ *ibid.* footnote 3

¹⁰ *ibid.* footnote 6

¹¹ *Route Utilisation Strategy for Wales: Committee response to the Network Rail consultation*, Enterprise and Learning Committee, July 2008

demand for services at some stations is low, whilst on the other passengers note that the service provision is low thereby reducing demand.

The RUS should begin the essential process of creating a strategy for improving the overall network of stations and making the best use of them – both by and for the community they serve.

5.3 Car Parking

With the Wales Transport Strategy¹² aiming to increase modal shift, barriers to using public transport such as lack of car parking at stations need to be overcome. Consequently, Passenger Focus believes that the RUS should address the provision of car parking at stations to ensure it meets passengers' needs.

Passenger Focus has examined the size of the impact that the lack of car parking can have on rail passengers in its report *Getting to the Station*¹³. This case study of stations in the East of England found that the lack of parking was suppressing demand for rail services by 19%.

The growth of rail travel in the Wales RUS area is putting increasing pressure on the availability of car parking at many stations. At several stations, such as Chepstow¹⁴, Machynlleth and Welshpool¹⁵, local users report that the lack of parking is already acting to suppress demand for rail services. It is a particular concern at the stations mentioned because they have a relatively infrequent service pattern (n.b. both of the lines serving these stations are the subject of proposals for improvement in this RUS, see options 13B and 14F), so that the lack of parking not only makes accessing the network more difficult, but by reducing patronage, the business case for frequency enhancements can also be affected.

5.4 Integrated transport

The Wales Transport Strategy¹⁶ has identified 'integrating local transport' as one of its five strategic priorities. Passenger Focus believes that the Wales RUS strategy needs to further highlight the ways in which the rail network can contribute to this objective. Our research shows that connecting the rail network in the Wales RUS area with other forms of transport still has considerable room for improvement. In the Spring 2008 NPS survey¹⁷ only 59% of ATW passengers indicated they were satisfied with

¹² Wales Transport Strategy, Welsh Assembly Government, May 2008

¹³ Passenger Focus, March, 2007

¹⁴ Correspondence from Better trains for Chepstow, July 2008.

¹⁵ Correspondence from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association (SARPA), November 2007.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.* footnote 3

connections with other forms of public transport, while the research¹⁸ on the four lines commissioned to inform this RUS response recorded a satisfaction level of 40%.

Better integration requires action in a variety of areas to be successful, including improving station and interchange facilities (section 5.2) and car parking (section 5.3) as highlighted above. Other important aspects include improving connections with other forms of public transport, particularly local buses and the TrawsCambria coach network - identifying key connections would be a valuable addition to the Wales RUS.

Ticketing technology can also play an important role in improving transport integration. Passenger Focus research¹⁹ has shown that passengers are receptive to 'Oyster card' type multi-modal smartcards that can reduce the complexity of the fares system and simplify the ticket purchasing process. We have also found that there needs to be greater awareness of the ticketing options that are already available. For example, despite more imaginative marketing of late, PlusBus is still relatively unknown to passengers and even to some members of transport industry staff. A much more aggressive campaign is required to increase patronage of this and similar schemes.

5.5 Social Inclusion

Many people living in the Wales RUS area find it difficult to access employment, education, training and health services. Wales has a significantly higher percentage of people on low-pay than England²⁰ (i.e. income 60% or less of the average), while car ownership is particularly restricted among certain groups – for example, half of lone parents and two-thirds of single pensioners do not own a car²¹ (with a significant majority of both groups being women). For these people, the rail network is a vital tool in ensuring social inclusion.

Our recent research underlines the important role that the rail network plays in social inclusion in the Wales RUS area. When asked what other mode they could use for their journey, 16% of passengers indicated no alternative was available to them. A lack of alternatives was particularly acute for passengers using the Cambrian line (23%), as well as amongst people aged 65 years or older (21%).

Many people without private transport cannot access further education or jobs within service industries when both are centred in towns where few public transport services operate in the evening (for example, on the Heart of Wales line); or at weekends when there are often few trains running on Sundays (such as on the Cambrian Coast). Many local bus services linking rural villages are infrequent and

¹⁸ *ibid.* footnote 6

¹⁹ *Ticketing for the future? Research into ticketing technology*, Passenger Focus, February 2008.

²⁰ *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales 2007*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2007.

²¹ *People Without Cars*, Welsh Consumer Council, 2004.

travel slowly on minor rural roads making journeys long and unattractive. Developing more accessible rail travel would open up opportunities to socially disadvantaged people for travel to work and educational establishments.

The Wales Transport Strategy²² highlights the importance of using transport to aid social inclusion by providing greater access to employment, education and leisure opportunities. Passenger Focus wholeheartedly supports these objectives.

Passenger Focus believes that rail can play an important role in tackling social deprivation and that this should be identified as a generic gap in the Wales RUS, as it has been in the Lancashire and Cumbria draft RUS.

5.6 Tourism

Within Wales, tourism is one of the mainstays of the economy and is a major source of employment and revenue. The total number of jobs supported by tourism is estimated²³ to be 9% of all employment in Wales, substantially higher than in the UK as a whole. In 2005 more than 11 million tourist trips were made to Wales, the majority from domestic (UK) visitors, and of these only around 4% were made by train²⁴.

The Community Rail Partnerships in Wales specifically target the tourism market, such as through their joint *Scenic Wales by Rail* initiative²⁵, in their efforts to promote the role of the rail network in the Wales RUS area. As the Cambrian Rail Partnership points out²⁶:

“As well as a way of accessing these areas in the first place the train journey is a great way of exploring once in the area.”

Rail services, however, are not always well integrated with the local tourism market. Despite a number of visitor attractions being situated in close proximity to a railway station, they are often on lightly used parts of the network where rail services are typically infrequent and not on an easy to remember regular pattern. Further, as pointed out in the Wales Rail Planning Assessment²⁷, demand can be up to three times higher in the peak season compared with Winter on some lines, which can often result in overcrowding. As a consequence, rail can be unattractive to tourists, particularly at popular times such as weekends.

²² ibid footnote 12

²³ *Volume and Value of Tourism to Wales 2004*, Wales Tourist Board.

²⁴ *Domestic (UK) Tourism to Wales 2005*, Visit Wales.

²⁵ <http://www.scenicwales.co.uk/en/main.htm>

²⁶ Email from the Cambrian Rail Partnership, July 2008.

²⁷ *Wales Rail Planning Assessment*, WAG/DfT, July 2007.

Passenger Focus would like to see rail's role in contributing to tourism identified as a generic gap in the Wales RUS, as it has been in the Lancashire and Cumbria draft RUS.

5.7 Growth

The Wales RUS Draft for Consultation (page 66) suggests that commuting demand is expected to grow by 40% up to 2018/19. The following table shows stations where footfalls already show large increases.

Table 5.1²⁸ Recent growth at ATW stations

Station	Footfall			change 05-06	change 06-07	change 05-07
	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7			
Milford Haven	39,750	40,899	45,935	2.89%	12.31%	15.56%
Tenby	76,695	75,629	84,598	-1.42%	11.86%	10.30%
Carmarthen	288,795	294,208	323,233	1.87%	9.87%	11.92%
Llanelli	285,144	296,895	316,574	4.12%	6.63%	11.02%
Llantwit	not yet open	208,942	254,621	-	21.86%	-
Barry	425,166	451,164	475,639	6.11%	5.42%	11.87%
Pontypridd	679,588	704,298	778,253	3.64%	10.50%	14.52%
Cardiff Central	7,743,280	8,357,732	9,126,923	7.94%	9.20%	17.87%
Hereford	732,320	800,488	854,475	9.31%	6.75%	16.68%
Leominster	143,300	190,930	216,889	33.24%	13.60%	51.35%
Wrexham Gen.	391,693	401,242	436,468	2.44%	8.78%	11.43%

The Wales Spatial Plan estimates that the population of Wales will grow by 330,000 in the years 2006 - 2031. The population of Chester is expected²⁹ to have grown by 5% by 2021. Herefordshire's population is estimated³⁰ to be increasing at the annual rate of 0.4%. There has been, and still is, much analysis of, and debate about, the likelihood of the continuation of the current growth rates in rail passenger numbers. The current reduction in economic growth has not yet had an impact, and the large transport groups have reported strong growth in their franchises.

It is essential that the rail industry and the Welsh Assembly Government plan effectively for this expected population growth. Service improvements should be in place **before** new houses or employment sites are developed. If improvements to services are only available afterwards, potential passengers will have already decided on their travel plans, and fewer will choose rail. This RUS needs to formally recognise that.

²⁸ Office of Rail Regulation file "station-usage-2006-07"

²⁹ *Population Report 2007 - Chester* Cheshire CC

³⁰ *Population Projections and Forecasts for the County of Herefordshire*, Herefordshire CC, April 2008

5.8 Rolling stock

Passengers and stakeholders have told us that the trains used by Arriva Trains Wales in the RUS area are unsuitable for many of the services. Journeys in “Pacer” type trains are more to be endured than enjoyed because of the all too frequently uncomfortable ride. Their seating capacity is limited (c. 120) and access is hampered by the steps inside their doorways. Class 150 trains also offer basic accommodation, far from that of the average family motor car. Class 158 trains are now showing their age – most are nearly 20 years old – and offer some seats with very limited leg-room. The class 175 trains, the newest trains in Arriva’s fleet, are nearly ten years old and will need to be refurbished in a few years’ time. First Great Western’s fleet of local and regional trains, typically classes 153 and 158 on Cardiff to the South Coast services and 150 on other routes, are of the same age as ATW’s fleet of similar units.

Although thorough refurbishment can offer a really noticeable step-change in the on-board environment for passengers, much of the fleets of both First Great Western and Arriva Trains Wales will be due for replacement before the end of the period covered by the RUS. The “Inter-city Express Programme” (IEP) to replace First Great Western’s high-speed trains is underway, but is still years away from providing new trains. The only sign of planning for the replacement of local and regional diesel trains is the recent announcement that a trial of “tram-trains” will take place on Northern Rail’s route between Huddersfield and Sheffield.

The time has arrived to design, for routes such as those in the Wales RUS area, a new train capable of improving passengers’ travelling environment, with increased reliability and performance, and, possibly, offering different interior arrangements of seating and cycle spaces to match markets. The increase in passenger satisfaction and numbers driven by TransPennine Express’s class 185 trains shows the benefits new trains generate. Research in 2007³¹ found that 92% of passengers were satisfied with the ease of getting on and off the class 185 trains, but Arriva Trains Wales’ rating for the same factor was only 82%.³² Overall the impact of new trains can be seen by comparing the scores for the “upkeep and repair of the train” – ATW scores 73%, TransPennine Express scores 91%.

Passenger Focus urges Network Rail and ATW to consider fully in the RUS the impact that the benefits of new trains would provide; not just a growth in passenger numbers, but also in terms of increased productivity through faster journey times (subject to infrastructure, which, of course, is one aim of this RUS) and reduced maintenance costs.

³¹ Published in *The Pennine Class 185 experience What do passengers think?* Passenger Focus, May 2007.

³² *ibid.* footnote 3

5.9 Network capability and engineering access

The RUS covers the period to 2019. Enhancements to railway infrastructure are often expensive and also disruptive of the timetable, so where possible it is important to combine them with renewals in the same area – for example, the work required that is listed in 5.2 (pages 80 – 82) of the draft RUS.

ATW's franchise has an ultimate end date in 2013, Virgin's in 2012 and First Great Western's in 2016. It is in the interest of passengers and stakeholders, especially those stakeholders who might be able to finance service enhancements, that Network Rail works to synchronise schemes to enhance the capability and capacity of the network in the RUS area with additional funding that might be available to increase train services. New infrastructure must be ready on time for use by new trains; likewise new trains or enhanced services must be ready to use new infrastructure as soon as it is available.

Throughout our response we note many opportunities for agencies to work together to create the best options for passengers and stakeholders. Passenger Focus believes that joint working to improve the railway in the Wales RUS area should be one of the guiding principles of this RUS.

The draft for consultation lists in section 6.2 gaps in the Wales network that hinder or prevent the railway operating services efficiently or to the extent required, either now or in the future. Wherever and whenever, infrastructure improvements should be made to allow the railway to meet passengers' and stakeholders' requirements and aspirations.

Level crossings - public and accommodation crossings - are numerous on lines in the Wales RUS area. They are not just a reason for speed restrictions, which add to journey time, but also cause energy to be wasted by requiring trains to slow and then accelerate. They also represent risk to the safety of passengers and train crews. Passenger Focus notes Network Rail's programme to close such crossings, but believes that the Wales RUS should include a commitment to expedite the programme of closures. Reducing the number of crossings would reduce operating costs, improve the operation of the railway and reduce risk.

In the light of current developments in the energy markets this RUS should begin the process of evaluating the case for electrification of lines in its area. The Cardiff Valleys network is essentially self-contained; its frequent services, with frequent stops, and often steeply graded routes, would ideally be a candidate for electrification. The Wrexham to Bidston line has been the subject of several proposals for electrification (see below, section 6, option 22A). Passenger Focus believes that, given the lead-time for railway projects, work on developing schemes for electrification should be included in this RUS.

Passengers have a poor opinion of rail replacement bus services – our research has found that 48% rated the use of replacement buses as “extremely or very

inconvenient”.³³ In terms of specific issues with bus replacement services, information about them is a major problem - 53% of passengers who had used them stated that the information provided about the replacement bus service was not adequate. When asked the reason, 59% stated that the information did not tell them how much longer the journey would be and 56% needed to know earlier. In the South Wales Valleys 52% of those passengers who had to use them found out that fact *after* they arrived at their departure station; in South West Wales the figure was 50%.

Information shortcomings were also apparent from the fact that 39% of the passengers affected said that they did not receive adequate assistance when changing to/from the bus, with not being given any directions to/from the bus being the main reason given (71% of respondents).

The results are a clear sign that railway routes should not be closed for any but limited periods. Colin Foxall, the chairman of Passenger Focus has written³⁴ to the Secretary of State for Transport outlining proposals to reduce the impact of engineering work on passengers. Included in the communication was a re-statement of our opinion that passengers should be compensated for having to travel on a bus, for example by special reduced “rail replacement service” fares.

The final RUS should select options that increase the capability and capacity of the railway network in Wales to ensure that it meets the gaps identified.

³³ *Passengers' Attitudes Towards Engineering Works* RPC August 2003.

³⁴ Letter dated 16 June 2008

6. Analysis of Options

6.1 Route 13, Great Western Main Line

Option 13A – Stopping patterns and performance on Great Western Main Line

Passenger Focus welcomes the investment in track infrastructure and passenger facilities to support the continuing development of train services at Severn Tunnel Junction station outlined in this option. These improvements reflect strong growth in patronage of the station, with the Severn Tunnel Action Group reporting that journeys to the key commuter centres of Bristol, Bath and Filton Abbey Wood increased just under 18% in 2006/7, with similar large increases to several other destinations including London (18%) and Reading (15%).

The consultation document refers to the installation of a fourth platform at Severn Tunnel Junction during the Newport Area Signalling Renewal programme. This is welcomed, but we would like to note the importance of ensuring this platform is capable of handling inter-city trains to maintain the existing capability to handle these trains during times of disruption.

It should be noted that train overcrowding continues to be an issue with regards to commuter services serving Severn Tunnel Junction. For example, the Severn Tunnel Action Group note particular problems on the 07.55 departure to Bristol Temple Meads:

“With fifty or more commuters joining the service at Severn Tunnel Junction there has not been a single week this year (without) a day (when) the train did not arrive already full and standing³⁵.”

Option 13B – Cardiff to Cheltenham hourly services

Passenger Focus believes that the option to increase the frequency of services between Cardiff and Cheltenham should be included in the RUS, and implemented as quickly as resources allow. The current pattern of service with a number of two-hour gaps between trains throughout the day is not conducive to passenger use, particularly for commuting.

The importance of improving the frequency of services on this route has been identified by a number of regional stakeholders, as evidenced by the Wales Spatial Plan for South East Wales. This strategy identifies Chepstow as one of 14 key settlements linked to Cardiff/Newport. The spatial plan states that all such settlements should be linked to Cardiff or Newport by suitable high capacity public transport, operating at least four times an hour during the normal working day, so that passengers have the confidence to ‘turn up and go’. It should also be noted that Monmouthshire has arguably the weakest provision of access to facilities by public

³⁵ Severn Tunnel Action Group RUS response dated 24 July 2008

transport of all the unitary authorities in South East Wales, having 19 wards on the list of the 40 poorest served wards.

A greater frequency of services on this route will not only improve access to Newport and Cardiff for passengers, but also to Bristol. This is already the most popular destination for passengers from Severn Tunnel Junction, so can also be expected to be similarly attractive to people using neighbouring stations such as Caldicot and Chepstow.

The latent demand on this line has been amply demonstrated during 2008 by the 23% increase in patronage on ATW services on the route resulting from the dual effects of the extension of services from Gloucester to Cheltenham and the A40/A48 road works on the approach to Gloucester. The Severn Tunnel Action Group has observed that the number of people using Lydney station, for example, doubled between May and July 2008, resulting in both the main and overflow car parks being full (approximately 180 vehicles).

Option 13C – New station at Llanwern

Passenger Focus supports the option of building a new station at Llanwern to serve a major new area of housing. This option would be particularly appealing to passengers if it also benefited from an increase in frequency on services between Cardiff and Cheltenham as proposed in Option 13B. We note that the RUS states that the station would be built on the slower Relief Lines rather than the Main Lines. From a passenger perspective, it would clearly be preferable for the station to be built on the Main Lines to enable access to a greater number of services if this is possible.

Option 13D – Further development of Ebbw Valley line

Passenger Focus supports the further development of the Ebbw Valley line to provide direct services to Newport. The first phase of this scheme has exceeded expectations in terms of demand and there is considerable stakeholder and passenger interest in its further development.

We note that SEWTA's work on Ebbw Vale phase 2 has considered options that would extend the Newport services to destinations such as Chepstow or Abergavenny, potentially overcoming the issues mentioned in relation to excessive "lay over" times at Newport station. We would like to see synergies of this type considered as this option is further developed.

Option 13E – Additional trains between Cardiff Central and Maesteg

Passenger Focus would like to see the option of increasing the frequency of train services between Cardiff Central and Maesteg included in the final RUS. Frequency enhancements between Cardiff Central and Maesteg have been a prioritised project in SEWTA's rail strategy for some time and offer clear benefits to passengers.

Option 13F – Revision to Swanline services

Passenger Focus welcomes the consideration given to improving the provision of the Swanline services that serve the local stations between Swansea and Bridgend. A potential doubling of services from these stations would clearly be beneficial to passengers, although we note that this would come with the disbenefit of the loss of direct services to Cardiff. Research shows that passengers have a strong preference for through services compared with journeys requiring them to change and, with Cardiff very likely to be among the most popular destinations for people travelling from these stations, the loss of direct access to Wales' capital city is a potentially significant disincentive to travel from these stations. At this time we give our conditional support to this option being taken forward, with the proviso that further work is undertaken with passengers to understand more fully their views on the trade-off that would be made.

6.2 Route 14, South and Central Wales and Borders

Option 14A West Wales train services pattern

The RUS draft outlines the fact that train services in West Wales are sub-optimally distributed with calling patterns compromised by a stretch of single track between Cockett and Duffryn on the South Wales main line. Passenger Focus research shows that these constraints are reflected in relatively low passenger satisfaction scores for key journey attributes including punctuality/reliability and frequency of service. Consequently, efforts to address these constraints are to be encouraged.

Our survey³⁶ of 610 passengers on the route between Swansea and Whitland found that only 47% of the people interviewed were satisfied with the frequency of trains on the route compared with 80% for the ATW network as a whole. The irregular spacing of services is a likely contributor to this low level of satisfaction.

Table 6.1 Selected West Wales satisfaction scores

	West Wales Survey: Pre-journey Expectation	West Wales Survey: Satisfaction with Journey	ATW network NPS (Spring 2008): Satisfaction with Journey	GB network NPS (Spring 2008): Satisfaction with Journey
Frequency of trains on the route	49%	47%	80%	75%
Punctuality/reliability of the train	69%	68%	83%	79%
Overall satisfaction	74%	70%	83%	80%

Punctuality and reliability is also an area of concern for passengers on West Wales services with only 68% of people surveyed indicating they were satisfied with this on their journey compared with 83% across the entire ATW network.

The RUS draft also notes the potential 'knock-on' impact of delays to West Wales services on connections into and out of long-distance services east of Swansea. Our research confirms the importance of these rail services to passengers in the region. Indeed, there is a strong interest in direct services to such destinations, with 78% of respondents indicating they would use such services to Cardiff, 68% to London and 48% to Bristol.

Our research findings are supported by evidence from a number of other stakeholders. The National Assembly for Wales' Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Services Committee, for example, identified the infrastructure works between Cockett and Duffryn, and enhanced services in West Wales as two of eight priority schemes in its June 2006 report. Consequently, **Passenger Focus supports the reinstatement of double track between Cockett and Duffryn at the earliest opportunity.**

³⁶ *ibid.* footnote 6.

Option 14B West Wales train services (West of Carmarthen) and on the Heart of Wales line

As indicated in the discussion of Option 14A above, our recent research³⁷ has shown that passenger satisfaction with service frequency on the main line west of Swansea is very low at 47%. Asked how often they thought trains should run on this route, 43% of passengers said they should be every 30 minutes during weekday peak periods, with another 40% indicating they should be at least hourly during these times.

An increase in frequency on the western extremity of the South Wales Main Line is in keeping with the strategy of the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) and, as indicated above, was identified by the National Assembly for Wales' Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Services Committee as a priority scheme. **Passenger Focus is currently part of a working group convened by SWWITCH to prioritise rail service improvements west of Swansea and we would like to see the results of this work included in the final Wales RUS.**

In relation to the Heart of Wales Line, Passenger Focus believes that the line has a very important social inclusion and economic development role to play in a rural area of Wales with relatively limited public transport options. The current service provision fails to serve many potential users of the line and we would like to see it further developed. Our position is supported by a number of other key stakeholders, evidenced by improved services on the line being identified as a priority project by the National Assembly for Wales' 'Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Services Committee'.

Option 14C Reduced journey times and improved frequency of services between North and South Wales, and Manchester and South Wales

Passenger Focus fully endorses efforts to reduce journey times and improve service frequencies between North Wales and South Wales, as well as between Manchester and South Wales. Our research shows that there is strong passenger demand on both of these routes for these improvements.

Passenger Focus surveyed 665 people making long-distance journeys on the Marches line, including 145 who were travelling between North Wales and South Wales stations. More than two-thirds of the total (67%) said they would prefer faster journeys to trains that called at more stations. The majority of passengers (62%), however, indicated that it would take a significant reduction in journey time of 30 minutes or more to make a worthwhile difference to their current journey. An increase in journey frequency was also popular with 32% of respondents indicating they believed that services should run every 30 minutes and a further 10% every 45 minutes during weekday peak periods.

³⁷ *ibid.* footnote 6.

The demand for faster and more frequent services was even more pronounced when looking specifically at those making long-distance journeys between North Wales and South Wales. On this route, 83% of passengers said they would prefer faster journeys to trains that called at all stations. It is worth noting, however, that passengers believe it will take a significant cut in journey times to make a difference. Only 2% indicate that a saving of 10 minutes to their long-distance journey would be significant, while a further 11% would find a saving of 20 minutes worthwhile – in contrast 35% are looking for journey savings of 30 minutes and 37% for savings of more than 30 minutes. Passengers on this route would also like to see an increase in journey frequency, with 85% indicating that the service should be at least every hour during weekday peak periods.

Table 6.2 Passenger requirements for train service frequency on Marches line

	Weekday peak	Weekday off-peak	Saturday	Sunday
Every 30 mins	17%	5%	5%	1%
Every 45 mins	8%	5%	5%	3%
Every hour	60%	46%	41%	34%
Less often	5%	21%	23%	36%
No answer	10%	24%	26%	26%

Red highlights the highest responses received for those categories

Passengers are also interested in seeing improvements to on-train facilities for North Wales to South Wales long-distance journeys to enhance work and entertainment possibilities. A total of 35% of respondents indicated that they were interested in a separate business/first class section, including a willingness to pay a premium. Similarly, 66% indicated that were interested in power points to enable the use of electronic equipment such as laptop computers, while 53% were interested in being able to access a wireless internet service while travelling. The importance of catering on these long-distance services was also underlined by the fact that 73% of respondents indicated that they bought refreshments at least half the time while travelling, while 54% were interested in being able to buy hot food on the train.

Passenger Focus’ research underlines that there is considerable passenger interest in the further development of long-distance rail services between North Wales and South Wales, as well as South Wales and Manchester. We would welcome the development of infrastructure improvements that enable faster journey times and better service frequencies as soon as is possible. Further, we would also like to see improvements to the on-board facilities available to passengers on these routes.

Option 14D Additional stopping train services between Cardiff and Abergavenny

Passenger Focus would like to see an option included in the RUS that delivers improved frequency of services between Abergavenny and Cardiff. As with Chepstow (as outlined above in the discussion of Option 13B), Abergavenny is one

of 14 key settlements linked to Cardiff/Newport identified by the Wales Spatial Plan for South East Wales. The spatial plan states that all such settlements should be linked to Cardiff or Newport by suitable high capacity public transport, operating at least four times an hour during the normal working day, so that passengers have the confidence to 'turn up and go'.

It should also be noted that an improvement in service frequency to Abergavenny would need to be accompanied by an expansion in parking provision at the station, as this is already oversubscribed.

Option 14E Additional train services between Shrewsbury and Crewe

Table 6.3 shows how patronage at the intermediate stations between Crewe and Shrewsbury has changed over the two years 2004/5 to 2006/7. It can be seen that patronage at the three stations served "on request" - Wrenbury, Prees and Yorton, is very low. Their average daily usage is in the range 9 - 12 passengers each way per day, and shows no sign of growth. Of the three other stations, at which stops are made in the peaks by trains between Manchester and South Wales, growth at Nantwich and Whitchurch has been very good. The potential for growth is good at all three of those stations.

Table 6.3³⁸ Footfall at the stations between Shrewsbury and Crewe

Station	Footfall			change 05-06	change 06-07	change 05-07
	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7			
Nantwich	46,997	50,320	57,990	7.07%	15.24%	23.39%
Wrenbury	7,746	9,176	7,783	18.46%	-15.18%	0.05%
Whitchurch	65,867	75,958	85,490	15.32%	12.55%	29.79%
Prees	6,177	5,977	5,573	-3.24%	-6.76%	-9.78%
Wem	84,216	86,232	82,518	2.39%	-4.31%	-2.02%
Yorton	5,749	5,342	5,885	-7.08%	9.23%	2.37%

Passenger Focus surveyed³⁹ passengers on trains between South Wales and Manchester/Holyhead, with specific questions about frequency of stops and journey time. 83% of the passengers we interviewed expressed a preference for faster journeys, with 72% of them (60% of all interviewed) stating that a reduction of 30 or more minutes in their journey time would be needed to make a difference; it is clear that additional stops could reduce the attractiveness of the existing service. It is also clear that running an hourly stopping train between Crewe and Shrewsbury would not be likely to be justified by the amount of additional traffic it generated.

Given that a large number of long-distance passengers require faster journeys (see option 14C), and the apparent potential for growth at Nantwich, Whitchurch and Wem, Passenger Focus suggests that an option worthy of study would be running

³⁸ ibid. footnote 28

³⁹ ibid. footnote 6

additional trains between Hereford and Crewe. They would call at all stations between Hereford and Shrewsbury, permitting existing trains to omit stops, thereby reducing their journey time, and also provide more capacity for long-distance travellers, and at Wem, Whitchurch and Nantwich, meeting demand from passengers and stakeholders for additional services.

Option 14F Cambrian (various)

Passenger Focus fully supports efforts to improve the base route performance on the Cambrian Main Line, as well as increasing the service frequency to hourly. Both of these initiatives are long standing aspirations of passengers, with the current level of provision generating a considerable volume of complaints.

Our survey⁴⁰ of 829 passengers on the route between Shrewsbury and Machynlleth reveals the extent of this dissatisfaction. The number of passengers satisfied with the frequency of services on the Cambrian Main Line is only 41%, compared with 80% for the ATW network as a whole. Similarly, satisfaction with punctuality/reliability on the route is 62%, again much lower than the score of 83% for all of the ATW network. As a consequence of these low levels of satisfaction with key service attributes, overall trip satisfaction on the Cambrian (71%) is notably lower than that for the ATW network generally (83%) and the overall GB figure (80%).

In addition to having low levels of satisfaction with their travel experience in the key service areas of frequency and punctuality/reliability, passengers using the Cambrian Main Line also have low expectations, before they even travel, of the service they will receive in these areas. Indeed, expectations of a satisfactory level of service for frequency (40%) and punctuality/reliability (51%) are even lower than post-trip satisfaction. These low expectations of service quality can be expected to impact on the reputation of the line and, consequently, the desire of people to use it.

Table 6.4 Selected Cambrian line satisfaction scores

	Cambrian Survey: Pre-journey Expectation	Cambrian Survey: Satisfaction with Journey	ATW network NPS (Spring 2008): Satisfaction with Journey	GB network NPS (Spring 2008): Satisfaction with Journey
Frequency of trains on the route	40%	41%	80%	75%
Punctuality/reliability of the train	51%	62%	83%	79%
Overall satisfaction	70%	71%	83%	80%

⁴⁰ *ibid.* footnote 6.

Further evidence of the need to improve the frequency and punctuality of Cambrian Main Line services came from asking passengers what single factor (if any) most limited their use of the line. Together with the cost of the train ticket (16%), frequency (15%), punctuality/reliability (11%), and the reduced number of trains on Sundays (10%) were the main limiting factors.

When asked what frequency of service they would like to see on the line, 61% of passengers indicated they would like to see trains run every hour at weekday peak times, and another 14% required trains at least every 90 minutes.

Once more, we note that enabling hourly services on the Cambrian Line was identified as a priority project by the National Assembly for Wales' Rail Infrastructure and Improved Passenger Services Committee.

It is clear from our passenger research that there is demand for improvements on the Cambrian Main Line – reinforced by the growing patronage. **Passenger Focus welcomes the current investment in infrastructure and would now like to see a commitment to introducing an hourly service on the line.**

6.3 Route 15, South Wales Valleys

Options 15A-15F

There has been significant investment in the Valleys network in recent years, which has been rewarded with strong passenger growth, often in excess of 10% per annum on some lines.

Our research⁴¹, however, reveals that passengers believe that the network should be further developed and is not yet meeting their expectations in key areas such as frequency and punctuality. Our survey of 528 people across the Valleys Lines network revealed that only 53% of passengers were satisfied with the frequency of services on their route, indicating that the expectation is for metro-style ‘turn-up and go’ services. While some parts of the Valley Lines already receive service frequencies approaching these levels (e.g. Pontypridd, Caerphilly), many other stations are currently served by only one or two trains per hour. Similarly satisfaction with punctuality/reliability (61%) indicates the need for continuing improvements in this area, while the very low scores for connections with other forms of transport (33%) indicates that further work needs to be done in relation to integrated transport initiatives.

Table 6.5 Selected Valley Lines satisfaction scores

	Valleys Survey		ATW network NPS (Spring 2008):	GB network NPS (Spring 2008):
	Pre-journey Expectation	Satisfaction with Journey	Satisfaction with Journey	Satisfaction with Journey
Frequency of trains on the route	57%	53%	80%	75%
Punctuality/reliability of the train	63%	61%	83%	79%
Connections with other forms of public transport	34%	33%	59%	72%
Overall satisfaction	68%	64%	83%	80%

Option 15A – Taff Vale corridor

While having stated our desire to see service frequency enhancements, we regretfully agree that the short-term option of providing additional capacity on the Taff

⁴¹ ibid. footnote 6.

Vale corridor by running additional services via the City Line is not worth pursuing. As stated in the draft RUS, this option would omit some of the most popular stops for passengers (Llandaf, Cathays) and so would be of limited benefit.

Option 15B – Vale of Glamorgan corridor

Growth on the Vale of Glamorgan has exceeded expectations since it was reopened in 2005. With plans for employment growth at RAF St Athan, and demand for improved public transport provision to Cardiff International Airport, Passenger Focus believes that increasing the frequency of services on this line should be taken forward in the RUS.

Option 15C – Taff corridor

Passenger Focus is pleased to see the Merthyr frequency enhancement scheme progressing and looks forward to its completion at the earliest opportunity.

Option 15D – Increased service frequency on Rhymney corridor

Passenger Focus supports the proposal to use the opportunity presented by the Cardiff Area Signalling Renewals programme to develop the infrastructure required to increase service frequencies north of Bargoed.

Option 15E – New station at Energlyn

We welcome the commitment the commitment to providing a new station at Energlyn in the Rhymney Valley to cater for population growth in the area.

Option 15F – Long term growth.

As mentioned above, the Valley lines have shown growth in recent years, but passenger expectations are for more frequent services. Passenger Focus welcomes the commitment to develop the capacity of the central corridor between Cardiff Queen Street and Cogan Junction to handle 16 trains per hour and the recognition of the need to maximise the synergies available from projects such as the Cardiff Area Signalling Renewals programme. Given the complexity and cost of this scheme it is essential that every effort is made to identify and secure the full range of external funding schemes that may be available.

6.4 Route 22, North Wales and Borders

Option 22A Wrexham to Bidston major service upgrade

Stakeholders have high expectations of the “Borderlands” line, and have engaged consultancies to report on it; in March 2006 Faber Maunsell presented their study of the line and its potential for development to the Borderlands Partnership. In October 2007 the Welsh Assembly Government was criticised for not progressing plans for electrifying the line. In March 2008 the Welsh Assembly’s Transport Minister met Merseytravel’s chief executive to discuss the latest steps in achieving the aspirations for the line. Despite electrification costs far in excess of expectations, which appeared to put the scheme out of reach, recent reports⁴² show Merseytravel are now considering overhead line electrification.

However, local groups such as the Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users’ Association and the Borderlands Line Rail Partnership are actively promoting the line, despite the difficulties of promoting a train service with intrinsic short-comings. The minimum turn rounds at the line’s termini (typically two minutes at Wrexham Central, and three at Bidston) result in the not infrequent need to terminate trains short of their destinations, so as to get them back on time for their next trip. The hourly train service is useful for passengers, but operating it with the barest minimum of resources is almost a plan for failure.

It is clear that there is a need for improvement. There are also plans for additional stations, which would make maintaining an hourly service impossible. Also impossible, it has been said, are the latest costs given for the preferred option of electrifying the line and operating it as part of the Merseyrail network, with the big win for passengers of through trains to Liverpool. The best option would be to electrify the entire line, but if the costs caused the adoption of the scheme to electrify only to Shotton, many benefits would be possible. Through services between the Wirral stations and Liverpool, more frequent services on both sections of the route and a robust timetable would be the main benefits. Interchange at Shotton to and from the North Wales line (RUS Option 22B) would also improve.

One gap so far identified in the Merseyside RUS is the lack of fast journey times between Liverpool and Chester via Hooton. One option suggests adding trains to that route, to enable a mix of stopping and fast services, increasing the number of trains operating round the “Loop” in Liverpool, and making paths for trains from the Borderlands line less easy to provide. Because of the way this line interlinks with Merseyrail any final decision must be taken jointly with plans for that network made in the Merseyside RUS.

However, Passenger Focus believes that passengers on the Borderlands line should not have to wait years for improvements to their train service and we urge all those involved in operating and supporting the line to act together now to develop

⁴² For example, *Modern Railways*, July 2008, page 60.

affordable and quick to implement improvements for passengers on the route from Wrexham.

Option 22B Connectivity at Shotton

Improving interchange at Shotton, between the high-level station on the Wrexham to Bidston line, and the low-level station on the Chester to Holyhead line, is on many stakeholders' agendas⁴³. With only a basic hourly service on both routes through Shotton it is impossible to arrange close connections for all four possible directions - even if the railway timetable for the area could be constructed around Shotton's needs.

Better connections would be created if there were a more frequent service on the "Borderlands" line, which is considered in option 22A. Equally, it would be improved if the frequency of Shotton's service on the North Wales main line were increased. Taith's Draft Regional Rail Strategy requires both routes to have a more frequent service.

It is clear that best possible connectivity, in terms of good connections between trains on the two routes, can only be achieved with more frequent services on the two routes at Shotton. However, even without increased frequencies, better connections could be provided by moving the time of trains on the Borderlands line. Subject to maintaining good connections with Merseyrail at Bidston, trains on the line are self-contained, and could be moved round the clockface to create better connections at Shotton.

The best connectivity depends on how options 22A and 22D are developed. However, better connectivity could be provided by amending the times on the Borderlands line. Analysis of the best departure times should be undertaken as soon as possible.

Passenger Focus also recommends that there is station improvement work at Shotton to fully capitalise on the benefits that would stem from timetable changes and the resulting improved connectivity. As highlighted earlier (see 5.2 and 5.4), passenger satisfaction with stations in the Wales RUS area is currently quite poor, particularly in relation to station facilities. The Spring 2008 NPS⁴⁴ results show that only 51% of ATW passengers scored its stations in the "satisfied or good" category for upkeep and repair, with only 30% ranking station facilities in that category. Personal security scored 55%, with cleanliness at 53%. A "quick win" could be achieved through attention to those factors.

It should be remembered that Shotton is one of the 31 stations in Britain selected to have "Station Travel Plans" created in a trial to determine how to create targets and strategies for increasing the use of means other than cars for getting to stations and

⁴³ See, for example, *Taith Regional Rail Strategy*

⁴⁴ *ibid.* footnote 3

reducing the different types of access by car - "kiss and ride" or parking at the station. Enhancements to the station would help ensure the success of this scheme.

Option 22C Ellesmere Port to Helsby, sparse passenger service

The passenger service on this section of line is extremely limited - four trains per day in each direction Mondays to Saturdays. However, the patronage at its two intermediate stations - Ince and Elton, and Stanlow and Thornton - has increased over recent years. Local stakeholders are of the opinion that it could be developed into a useful transport link.

However, it is very incidental to the other routes in this part of the Wales RUS, linking as it does to the North West and Merseyside RUSes. Gaps identified in the scoping work for the Merseyside RUS include some potential options that include the Ellesmere Port to Helsby route. **Passenger Focus suggests, therefore, that consideration of the service should pass to the Merseyside RUS.**

Option 22D North Wales coast line: general service level improvements

Train services on the North Wales coast line will see a number of benefits from timetable changes planned for December 2008, but passengers would still like to see further development of the region's services. The planned changes will provide a more even spread of services west of Chester and the Llandudno branch will gain a shuttle that will improve journey options, but there will be few through trains between Crewe and Holyhead, reducing connectivity for many in the East Midlands, Cheshire, the North West and Scotland. There are no through services between stations on the line and Liverpool - neither the city centre nor the airport. Given the ties between the two regions, stakeholders such as Taith maintain that through services would be welcomed by passengers.

Stakeholders' aspirations, which Passenger Focus notes, are:

- two trains an hour between Chester and Bangor
- at least an hourly service for all stations between Crewe and Holyhead
- hourly through trains between Crewe and Holyhead
- though trains between Llandudno and Manchester
- though trains between Holyhead and Manchester for ship connections
- through trains between the North Wales Coast and Liverpool via the Halton Curve (option 22F in this RUS)
- through trains between the North Wales Coast and London

The services planned for December 2008 will see:

- one train an hour between Chester and Bangor
- frequent gaps of over an hour at many stations - Conwy, etc.
- infrequent through trains between Crewe and Holyhead (but two-hourly through trains between Holyhead and Birmingham via Shrewsbury)
- though trains between Llandudno and Manchester
- no through trains between Holyhead and Manchester
- through trains between the North Wales Coast and London

There will be considerable gaps between stakeholders' aspirations - and, of course, passengers' - and the services offered. The results of surveys⁴⁵ that Passenger Focus commissioned on trains serving the North Wales Coast showed that many passengers would value faster journeys. 60% of those interviewed stated that a reduction of 30 or more minutes in their journey time would be needed to make a difference on longer journeys. So, on the one hand more stops are required, to increase train services at places such as Conwy, and on the other, passengers require faster journeys. It is clear that additional services are required if both aspirations are to be met.

It appears that if the Halton Curve were re-instated for full use, and an hourly service operated over it between North Wales and Liverpool, many of the aspirations listed above would be achieved, with no reduction to existing or planned services:

- through trains between North Wales and Liverpool city and, via Liverpool South Parkway, the airport
- an additional hourly train along the coast
- more stops at stations with a less than hourly train service

The following table (6.6) gives the change in passenger numbers at stations west of Llandudno Junction. It shows how use of the smaller stations is growing strongly, but that growth at the main stations is much lower - and has actually been negative at Holyhead. That compares dramatically with the situation at stations east of Llandudno Junction, which show double-digit growth, more than double the large stations in the table. Examples of the increases over the two years 2004/5 to 2006/7 are: Colwyn Bay - 11.34%; Prestatyn - 11.52%; Flint - 22.97%. One conclusion that could be made from the figures is that a more-frequent train service will help to draw more passengers. Another is that the strong growth at smaller stations should be encouraged, not stifled.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* footnote 6

Table 6.6⁴⁶ Growth at selected stations west of Llandudno Junction

Station	2004/5	2006/7	change 05-07
Holyhead	215,184	212,266	-1.36%
Valley	16,899	17,624	4.29%
Llanfairpwll	6,312	9,137	28.91%
Bangor	534,185	547,163	2.23%
Llanfairfechan	7,023	9,151	30.30%
Penmaemawr	7,516	9,494	26.32%
Conwy	18,539	23,411	26.28%
Llandudno Junction	236,168	249,861	5.80%
Deganwy	3,629	5,587	53.95%
Llandudno	234,913	239,412	1.92%

Passenger Focus believes that stakeholders should work together to provide the infrastructure, resources and funding to operate an additional hourly service between Bangor and Liverpool. With that in place, the timetable should be developed to create the pattern of services that stakeholders propose and passengers wish to use.

Option 22E Blaenau Ffestiniog freight

Passenger Focus believes that this scheme would ensure a firmer financial outlook for the Llandudno Junction to Blaenau Ffestiniog line, and that the upgrading of the line necessary for the operation of freight trains would also benefit passengers, by improving the track and infrastructure. Passengers expect any infrastructure works to include measures to, at least, alleviate the impact of flooding, which has badly affected the line in recent years. The line has been shut or partly shut for 11 days in December 2006, six days in January 2007 and for over 30 days in January/February 2008, with consequent impact on passenger numbers using the line.

We note that the operation of freight trains would not require any changes to the “established branch passenger services”. We ask for assurance that the freight operation would not fossilise the existing passenger service, preventing its development.

Option 22F Halton Curve

Considerable efforts are being expended by stakeholders such as the North Cheshire Rail Users’ Group in their campaigns for the re-instatement of full capability over this section of route, to permit the operation of a regular passenger service in both directions. The building of Liverpool South Parkway, which offers a link to Liverpool Airport, has added to the reasons put forward in support of their plans.

Passenger Focus notes the potential for the line, but believes that it should provide more than a link between Chester and Liverpool; we suggest that further work should

⁴⁶ *ibid.* footnote 27

be undertaken to consider its potential to provide the means for a cross-border service linking the North Wales coastal towns to Liverpool and its airport. See our comments regarding option 22D.

Passenger Focus agrees that the Merseyside RUS is a sensible place to publish a final decision on this option.

7. Summary table of Passenger Focus' responses to RUS options

Option	Draft RUS opinion	Passenger Focus opinion
13A	Improve Severn Tunnel Junction station, plus track and signalling improvements	Agree
13B	No case	Disagree, should implement
13C	Conditional support	Agree
13D	Wait and see	Faster implementation
13E	Needs work, link to 13F	Implement
13F	Only if 13E proceeds	Conditional support
14A	More work	Implement at the earliest opportunity
14B	No case for Central Wales fifth train	More trains, plus fifth on Central Wales
14C	More development work	Faster and more frequent trains
14D	Possible, long term	More trains are needed
14E	Can't pursue, keep under review	As part of 14C measures
14F	Possible additional trains	Want commitment to more
15A	Not recommended	Agree
15B	Needs investment	Take forward
15C	Under way	Good news for passengers
15D	In association with CASR	Support
15E	Awaiting money	Welcome commitment
15F	Continue enhancements	Use all available funds
22A	More work, link to Merseyside RUS	Introduce quick wins
22B	Link to 22A	Introduce quick wins
22C	Not recommended	Pass to Merseyside RUS
22D	Improved service coming	More work, introduce Bangor to Liverpool service
22E	Needs grant	Good news for passengers
22F	More work, link to Merseyside RUS	Agree

Appendix A: List of Consultees

Passenger Focus contacted the following, inviting them to comment on the Draft for Consultation, and reminding them that they could send their comments to Network Rail.

Railway supporter groups

Amman Valley Railway Society
Better Trains 4 Chepstow
Dyfi Valley Public Transport Users Group
Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association
Ludlow Rail Users
North Cheshire Rail Users' Group
North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum
Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association
Rail for Herefordshire
Railfuture
Severn Tunnel Action Group
Shrewsbury Chester Rail Users Association
Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association
Shropshire and Mid-Wales Rail First
Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users' Association

Railway Partnerships

Borderlands Line Rail Partnership
Cambrian Railways Partnership
Shrewsbury - Chester Rail Partnership
Conwy Valley Rail Initiative
Heart of Wales Line Forum

Regional Transport Groups

South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA)
South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH)
Trafnidiaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC)
Taith

Appendix B: Bibliography

- “Barriers to Interchange” RPC NW Feb. 2005
- “City Links: Integration and Isolation” Centre for Cities March, 2008
- “Delivering a Sustainable Railway” DfT July, 2007
- “Evidence In Support Of CSAG Petition” Carno Station Action Group August 2007
- “Getting to the station” Passenger Focus March, 2007
- “National Rail Travel Survey” DfT 29 May 2008
- “One Wales A progressive agenda for the government of Wales”, Labour Party Wales and Plaid Cymru, 27 June 2007
- “*One Wales: Connecting the Nation* The Wales Transport Strategy” WAG April 2008
- “Passengers’ priorities for improvements in rail services – 2007” MVA for Passenger Focus
- “People, Places, Futures - Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update” Welsh Assembly Government, July 2008
- “Review of Community Rail Development Strategy” DfT March, 2007
- “Rural Railways” House of Commons Transport Committee Vol. 1 Fifth Report of Session 2004-5
- Scott Wilson Railways final report for RPC Wales dated 28/6/05:
“Passenger Research on Welsh Railways”
- Sewta Rail Strategy Study Jacobs Consultancy January 2006
- “Wales Rail Planning Assessment” DfT/WAG July 2007

Appendix C: Sample Questionnaire

Marches route

Thank you again for agreeing to take part in this short survey being conducted by Continental Research on behalf of Passenger Focus. Passenger Focus is the official independent consumer organisation representing the interests of rail users nationally. We would like to hear your views on the service provided on this route. It should take no more than five minutes to complete. Any answer you give will be treated in confidence in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.

The interviewer will collect this questionnaire from you when you have completed it or please use the post paid envelope provided to send it back to us. If you have any queries the interviewer will be pleased to help. As a thank you for your help we are offering you the opportunity of taking part in a prize draw with a prize of £500. If you wish to take part please tell us your name and contact details where we can contact you in the space provided on the last page.

TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS PLEASE TICK THE BOX NEXT TO THE ANSWER(S) THAT APPLY OR WRITE IN YOUR ANSWER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED. UNLESS THE QUESTION ALLOWS YOU TO TICK SEVERAL ANSWERS PLEASE JUST TICK ONE BOX PER QUESTION.

Your Journey Today

Q1 Please fill in the scheduled departure time of the train from the station where you boarded. Use the 24 hr clock e.g. 17:25

Q2 Please write in the name of the station where you boarded **this** train:

Q3 Please write in the name of the station where you are travelling to on **this** train:

Q4 How did you travel to the station where you boarded this train? (Tick all that apply)

On foot/walking	Car parked at or near station
Tram/Light Rail (inc. Metrolink)	Car - dropped off
Bicycle (parked at or near station)	Car share/car pool
Bicycle (taken onto train)	Taxi
Motorbike	Air/Sea
Bus/Coach	National Rail train

If National Rail train: please specify station you travelled from

Q5 How will you travel to your final destination after leaving this train? (Tick all that apply)

On foot/walking	Car parked at or near station
Tram/Light Rail (inc. Metrolink)	Car - dropped off
Bicycle (parked at or near station)	Car share/car pool
Bicycle (taken onto train)	Taxi
Motorbike	Air/Sea
Bus/Coach	National Rail train

If National Rail train: please specify station you will travel on to

Q6 What is the **main** purpose of your rail journey?

Daily commuting to/from work
Less regular commuting to/from work
Daily commuting for education (to/from college/school/university)

Less regular commuting for education (to/from college/school/university)
On company business (or own if self employed)
Shopping trip
Visiting friends or relatives
Sport/entertainment
A day out
travel to/from holiday
On personal business (job interview, dentist etc)
Other

Q7 If you had not made this journey by train today, what other modes could you have used?
(Tick all that apply)

On foot/walking	Car as a driver
Tram/Light Rail (inc. Metrolink)	Car as a passenger
Bicycle	Taxi
Motorbike	Air/Sea
Bus/Coach	
Other: please specify	No alternative

Q8 Why did you choose to travel by train for this journey? (Tick all that apply)

Train is more reliable
Speed/faster than alternatives
Train is the most direct/sensible route
No reasonable route by other public transport
Comfort
Availability/cost of parking
No access to car
Cost
Rail station near home/destination
Other: please specify

Q9 How many times have you made this journey in the last two weeks?
(Please note that if you make a return journey that would count as two journeys)

This is my first journey
1-5
6-10
1-20
21+

Q10 Which of the following, if any, is the main reason limiting your use of this line?
(Please tick one)

Low platforms
Reduced number of trains on Sunday
Trains not frequent enough
Shortage of parking spaces
Trains services not reliable
Trains too crowded
Too many changes and connections required
No direct trains
Personal security at station
Personal security on train
Cost of the train ticket
Nothing limiting my use of this line
Other: please specify

Q11a What is the rail station nearest to your home? (Please write in name)

Q11b If your local station is not the same as the station you boarded this train, can you please tell us why? (Please write in reason)

Q12 Thinking about the station you boarded, which of the following are the most important to have in your opinion? (Please tick up to four)

Car parking
Bicycle parking
Convenient connecting buses
Step free access from the station entrance to the train
Waiting shelter
Waiting room
Toilets
Staff at the station
Information board showing printed timetable
Accurate visual information as to when trains will actually arrive
Accurate announcements on arrival and departure times
Accurate announcements about delays
An interactive help point
Security cameras (CCTV)
Other: please specify

Q13 How often do you think trains should run on this route?

On Monday to Friday peak*	Every 30 mins	Every 45 mins	Every hour	Less often
On Monday to Friday off peak*	Every 30 mins	Every 45 mins	Every hour	Less often
On Saturdays	Every 30 mins	Every 45 mins	Every hour	Less often
On Sundays	Every 30 mins	Every 45 mins	Every hour	Less often

* Peak means Monday to Friday 0700-1000 and 1600-1900

Q14 Would you prefer?

(A) Faster journeys between major towns on this route with fewer intermediate station stops
Go to Q15

OR

(B) Trains that call at all stations
Go to Q.16

Q15 If you chose (A), faster journeys, please indicate how many minutes quicker than at present would make a worthwhile difference to you

10 mins
20 mins
30 mins
More than 30 mins
Don't know

Q16 How interested are you in the following on this route?

A ticket valid for five journeys on the route

A separate business/first class area for which you pay a small premium to use

Q17 If you are interested in using the business/first class area, how much premium would you be prepared to pay per trip? (Please tick one)

£3 £6 £9 £12 £15 or more

Q18 How interested are you in the following ways of receiving your ticket?

By post

Printing out from a PC

Sent to your mobile (you would show the message as proof of purchase)

Q19 How frequently do you purchase refreshments on-board the train?

Always Usually About half the time Rarely Never

Q20 How likely are you to use a buffet service that provided hot food on board the train (as well as sandwiches, snack and drinks)? (Please tick one)

Very likely Fairly likely Neither likely nor unlikely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely

Q21 If the following facilities were available on your train, how likely would you be to use them?

Very likely Fairly likely Neither likely nor unlikely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely No opinion

Wi-Fi (internet access)

Power points for laptops, mobiles etc

Additional luggage space in each carriage

Quiet carriages

Your Expectations

Q22 Before you started your journey today, what level of service did you **EXPECT TO GET?** Please rate your **expectation** for each of the following aspects of the station and train given what you know about this line and train travel on similar routes.

Very good Fairly good Neither good nor poor Fairly poor Very poor Did not use/no opinion

Ticket buying facilities

Personal security at the station

Provision of information about train times/platforms

Connections with other forms of transport

Ease of getting to/from the station

Frequency of the trains on the route

Punctuality/reliability of the train

Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)

Value for money for price of ticket

Being able to get a seat on the train

Personal security while on board the train

Not having to change trains on your journey

The ease of being able to get on and off the train

OVERALL EXPECTATION OF SERVICE

Very good Fairly good Neither good nor poor Fairly poor Very poor

Your Experience

Q23 Thinking now about the level of service you **actually experienced** on your journey on this route

today, please rate what you experienced at the station and on the train

Very good Fairly good Neither good nor poor Fairly poor Very poor Did not use/no opinion

Ticket buying facilities

Personal security at the station

Provision of information about train times/platforms

Connections with other forms of transport

Ease of getting to/ from the station

Frequency of the trains on the route

Punctuality/reliability of the train

Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)

Value for money for price of ticket

Being able to get a seat on the train

Personal security while on board the train

Not having to change trains on your journey

The ease of being able to get on and off the train

OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE Very good Fairly good Neither good nor poor Fairly poor Very poor

Importance of Aspects of Rail Travel

Q24 Thinking now about each of the different aspects of your journey, please rate how **important** each of the following is to you.

Very Fairly no opinion

- Ticket buying facilities
- Personal security at the station
- Provision of information about train times/platforms
- Connections with other forms of transport
- Ease of getting to/from the station
- Frequency of the trains on the route
- Punctuality/reliability of the train
- Length of time the journey was scheduled to take (speed)
- Value for money for price of ticket
- Being able to get a seat on the train
- Personal security while on board the train
- Not having to change trains on your journey
- The ease of being able to get on and off the train

About You

Q25 What is your employment status?

- Work full time (30+ hours)
- Work part time (9-29 hours)
- Not employed - seeking work
- Not employed - not seeking work
- Retired
- Student
- Other

Q26 Which age group do you fall into?

- | | | | | |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Under 16 | 16-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 |
| 55-59 | 60-64 | 65+ | | |

Q27 Are you?

- Male
- Female

Q28 Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

- White
- Chinese
- Black or Black British
- Asian or Asian British
- Mixed
- Other ethnic group

Q29 Do you have a disability or long term illness related to the following: (tick all that apply)

- Mobility
- Wheelchair user
- Learning difficulties
- Speech impairment
- Hearing
- Eyesight
- None

Q30 What type of ticket did you use for your journey?

- First Class Season ticket (weekly/monthly/annual/Travelcard seasons)
- First Class Single/Return

Standard Single/Return
Cheap Day Single/Return
One Day Travelcard
Saver/SuperSaver
Awaybreak/Stayaway
Apex/Super Apex
Standard Season ticket (weekly/monthly/annual/Travelcard seasons)
A special promotion ticket
Holiday package/tour ticket
Rail Staff Pass/Privilege ticket/Police
Group Save ticket
Other : Please specify

Q31 Did you use a railcard to buy your ticket?
Yes/No

Thank you for your help in completing this research.

Please hand it back to the interviewer or use the post paid envelope to return the questionnaire to us. This survey was conducted under the terms of the MRS Code of Conduct. All answers you provide are entirely confidential and will be combined with those of all other passengers who take part in the research. If you would like to confirm our credentials, please call the MRS freephone on 0500 396999.

The information collected will be used to represent the best interests of passengers along this route. The information will be used purely for research and planning future services. As a thank you for your help we are offering you the opportunity of taking part in a prize draw with a prize of £500. If you wish to take part, please tell us your name and details where we can contact you. These details will only be used for the prize draw and will not be passed to a third party.

Name
Contact number
Email address