Transport for Wales Consultation – Proposals for five new stations in South-East Wales

Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog promoting the interests of rail users throughout Great Britain; bus, coach and tram users across England, outside London; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. Our subsidiary Transport Focus Wales was set up to give focus and energy to representing Welsh transport users. We have a Board Member for Wales, appointed by Welsh Ministers.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation for new stations in South-East Wales. Our response is informed both by our extensive evidence base and insight gathered through the engagement of our work in Wales. This gives a strong case for setting out passenger priorities, barriers to address and actions to support the potential that proposals have to improve the rail journey experience and satisfaction for passengers and to attract new users.

Key points summary

We have a number of key points to make about the new station proposals:
- The key benefit for passengers will be the timetable provision. It is important that this meets emerging demand and provides sufficient capacity for as yet unknown travel patterns, if rail travel is to be an attractive option and a catalyst for modal shift.
- A four train-per-hour service would provide most benefit, giving a metro-style turn-up-and-go frequency. However this must deliver a reliable service underpinned by availability of rolling stock and train crews. Given the current context of service difficulties, it is important that future ambitions deliver performance reliability.
- A significant question is whether there would be issues with resilience of longer-distance services – fast trains being delayed behind stopping trains, as is seen on the approach to Birmingham New Street for example? How will plans incorporate additional open access services and provide capacity for growth of freight?
- We note the inclusion of bus stops and connections to bus services. It will be essential to have well-served links with other public transport at each location, if the new stations are to really help tackle congestion – only by doing that can they be part of full end-to-end journeys.
- We would like to see more detail about active travel and the quality of walking and cycling routes to the station from the surrounding area. Are they obvious, safe, attractive to use?
- Do the stations provide enough shelter for passengers, such as when waiting for buses or taxis or where a longer walk is required to reach the platform in unpleasant weather, for example at Llanwern, over the long, exposed footbridge?

- Access to information is key, particularly during disruption. It is crucial for control and station teams to have effective tools to provide accurate and timely information, particularly at unstaffed stations. How is it planned to support help points and give reassurance to passengers who are disrupted or need to summon assistance?
- We would like reassurance of more detailed and ongoing consultation and engagement with passengers and a wide range of representative groups throughout the design and implementation phases, to align plans with their priorities and maximise satisfaction with new services and stations. Transport Focus has significant expertise in this area and would be pleased to provide assistance.

General comments

Transport Focus's research continually emphasises the importance of an affordable, punctual, reliable, frequent service on which you can get a seat. Our most recent research on priorities[1] found that passengers' two main issues are the 'price of train tickets offers value for money' and 'reliability and punctuality'. The ranking of what matters to rail passengers in Wales is shown below. This is consistent with previous research[2] and reaffirms that the railway must maintain its focus on a punctual and reliable railway that delivers on the timetable's promise at an acceptable price.

Passengers' other key priorities emphasise getting the basics right, with sufficiently frequent trains and accurate and timely information about train times. They want to feel safe at stations, find it easy to buy the right ticket, have trains and stations easily accessible by older and disabled people and those with pushchairs, bicycles, luggage etc and have good connections with other public transport.

Looking at what drives overall passenger satisfaction[3], punctuality and reliability is almost twice as important as any other aspect of the journey experience. The level of crowding and length of the journey make up the top three. They are followed by a group of four aspects of similar importance: overall satisfaction with the station, information on how busy the train would be before travelling, frequency of trains on that route and the cleanliness of the inside of the train.

Our work on rail passengers' priorities for improvement[4] included views on stations across the nations. The chart below shows passengers are keen for basic station amenities of toilets, seating and shelter. Passengers in Wales then place more emphasis on free wi-fi, cash points and outlets for refreshments, as well as station security, litter bins and help points. Whilst not all points will be applicable, clear focus on those that are will support a more attractive proposition for passengers, alongside an innovative approach to points such as providing refreshments – what scope is there for partnering local businesses? Also for signposting to local facilities such as Magor and Undy Community Hub?

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[1] Britain's railway: what matters to passengers. Transport Focus. December 2022
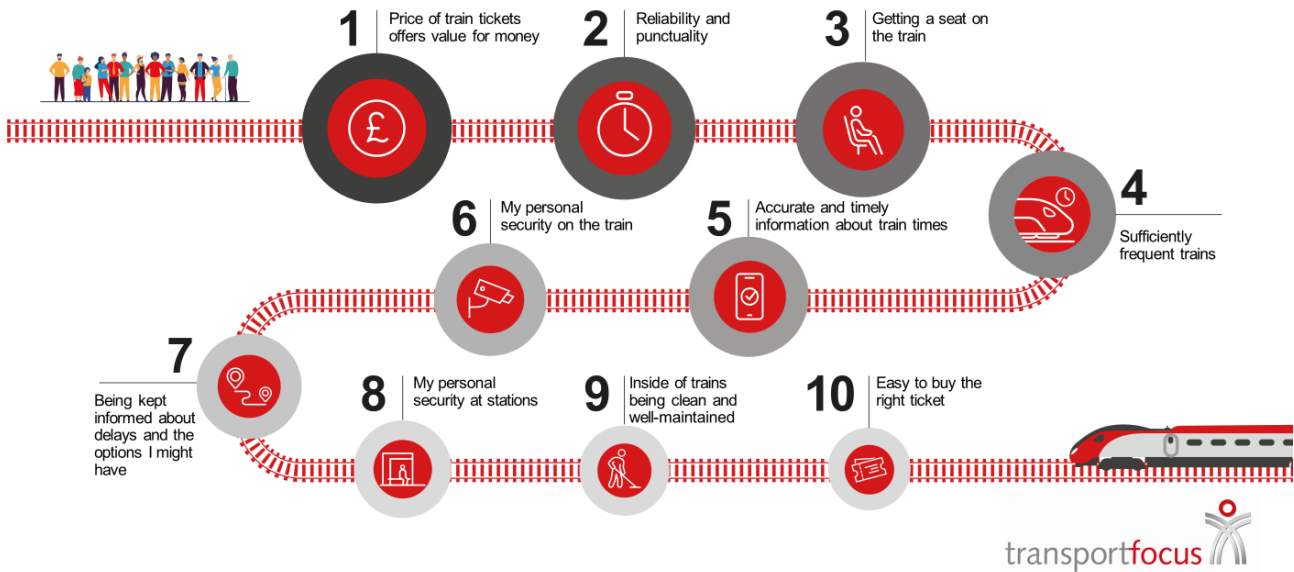[2] Rail passengers' priorities for improvement 2017 and 2020. Transport Focus
[3] Rail passenger satisfaction: key driver analysis. Transport Focus. February 2023
[4] Rail passengers' priorities for improvement. Transport Focus. July 2020
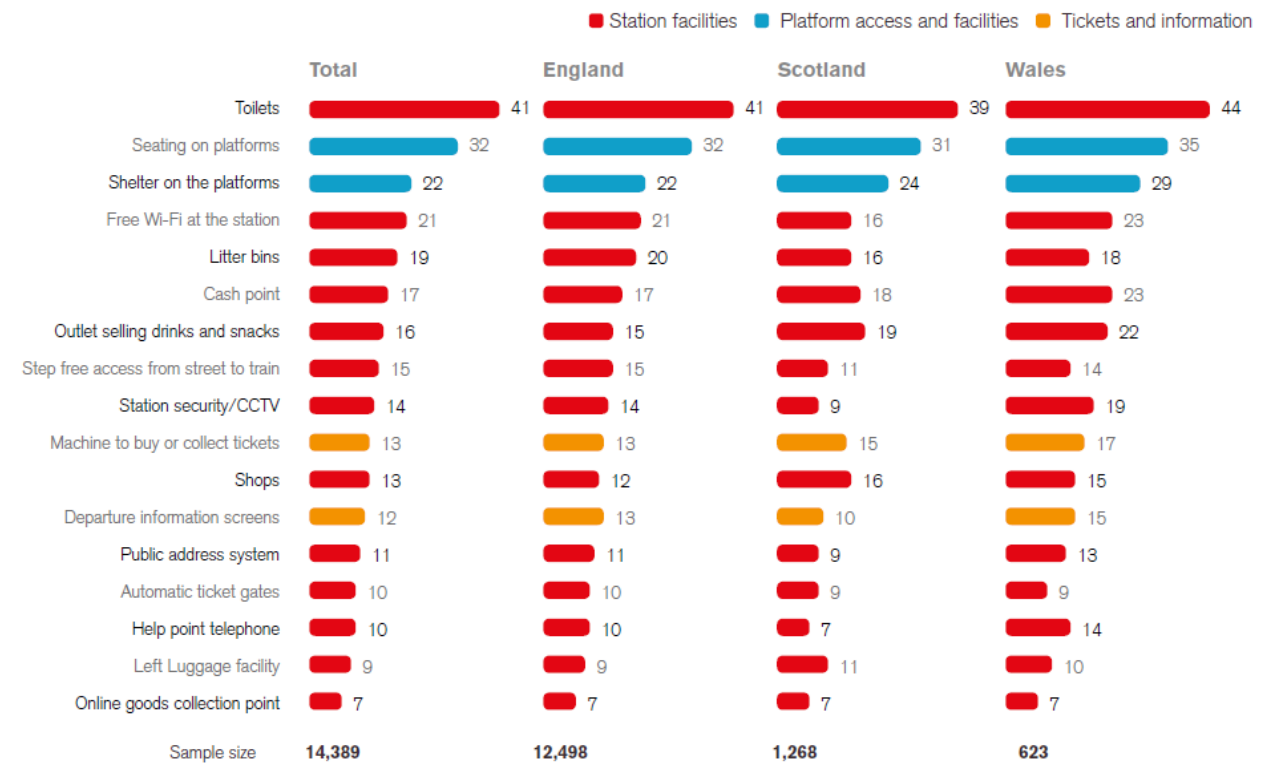
What matters to rail passengers in Wales 2022

quadrangle

1 Price of train tickets offers value for money

2 Reliability and punctuality

3 Getting a seat on the train

4 Sufficiently frequent trains

5 Accurate and timely information about train times

6 My personal security on the train

7 Being kept informed about delays and the options I might have

8 My personal security at stations

9 Inside of trains being clean and well-maintained

10 Easy to buy the right ticket

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11. Quick journey times
12. A railway that can cope with adverse weather events (snow, wind, flooding and extreme heat)
13. Trains and stations easily accessible by older and disabled people and those with pushchairs, bicycles, luggage etc.
14. Comfortable seats on trains
15. Well-maintained, clean toilets on the train
16. Good connections with other train services
17. Good connections with other public transport at stations

18. Engineering works planned to keep passenger disruption to a minimum
19. An environmentally responsible railway that is reducing its carbon emissions
20. Helpful staff at stations
21. Stations being clean and well-maintained
22. Helpful staff on trains
23. Reliable Wi-Fi and mobile reception on trains
24. Sufficient space on the train for luggage
25. Easy to claim compensation when delayed

Icon size in the red circles relates to what matters to rail passengers. The more important, the larger the icon.

Priorities for improving station facilities by nation (%)

■ Station facilities ■ Platform access and facilities ■ Tickets and information

	Total	England	Scotland	Wales
Toilets	41	41	39	44
Seating on platforms	32	32	31	35
Shelter on the platforms	22	22	24	29
Free Wi-Fi at the station	21	21	16	23
Litter bins	19	20	16	18
Cash point	17	17	18	23
Outlet selling drinks and snacks	16	15	19	22
Step free access from street to train	15	15	11	14
Station security/CCTV	14	14	9	19
Machine to buy or collect tickets	13	13	15	17
Shops	13	12	16	15
Departure information screens	12	13	10	15
Public address system	11	11	9	13
Automatic ticket gates	10	10	9	9
Help point telephone	10	10	7	14
Left Luggage facility	9	9	11	10
Online goods collection point	7	7	7	7
Sample size	14,389	12,498	1,268	623

Accessibility

The Wales Transport Strategy[5] sets out a vision for an 'accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system'. So we welcome the measures for step free access at the new stations. This issue also comes out in our Age and the train research, mentioned below. Accessibility should consider not only passengers with disabilities, but also passengers with pushchairs, restricted mobility and also accessibility in terms of language (ease of understanding as well as bilingual).

Although accessibility has improved over time, our research[6] shows there are still some very real barriers and problems to overcome. Alongside practical barriers of physical design and layout of stations and rolling stock, is confidence: will the train run as planned, what happens if trains are disrupted? This applies to all passengers but the consequences of getting it wrong can be much greater for some passengers with disabilities.

The ability to get and from the train station is a key factor in choosing to travel by train. The availability and accessibility of parking at stations and proximity to the station can present challenges to passengers with disabilities. Similarly, with public transport to and from railway stations, which is often seen as a barrier to train use.

Being comfortable, is vital for emotional wellbeing and energy levels. Passengers with disabilities often arrive to the station early to offset anticipated barriers, so they are likely to spend more time at the station. Having somewhere to rest is crucial, particularly those with respiratory or fatigue conditions, and mobility impairments. Those with anxiety and other mental health impairments often find sitting down can prepare them for the journey ahead.

Access to information is vital for passenger confidence. However platform display boards are not suitable for some passengers. Screens and message boards can be out of sight, not visible or legible to visually impaired passengers, those with dyslexia and ADHD. Some also need these to be at eye level and close enough to see. It is important that announcements are clear, precise and easy to understand. Measures such as hearing loops and talking signs using technology such as the *React* system[7] can also provide much needed support.

Connections

In deciding what mode of transport to take, people are generally swayed by three key factors: how convenient will the journey be, how much will it cost and how long will it take. The Wales Transport Strategy focuses on a more multi modal approach, so is vital to ensure that the end-to-end passenger experience is considered and good to see bus connections being factored into the design process.

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[5] Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy. Welsh Government. March 2021
[6] Disabled rail passengers research. Transport Focus. July 2019
[7] REACT talking display system. React Accessibility.

This point came out in our research into how younger and older people use the train to travel[8]. Younger people (teenagers in particular) do not want to rely on their parents or others to get lifts to the station. For older people, the effort required for first and last mile can feel too much, particularly the final leg, especially if this is in the evening. This was an added inconvenience and/or expense, arranging additional travel involving taxis or asking for lifts. We recommend working with local operators and authorities to enable easier access by aligning bus schedules, providing secure cycle parking and engaging with taxi operators (including accessible taxis).

As well as connections, this research also brings out further points to address at stations:
- Providing reserved car parking for off-peak users
- Making it clear where customers are to stand on the platform for the accessible coach or cycle spaces – which may differ between operators (GWR, TfW etc)
- Ensure timetable boards are clear to read and tannoys are clear to hear.
- Aim to reduce gaps between platform and train, as well as step-free access to the train, station and platforms – with benefit to a much wider range of passengers.

Active travel

Walking and cycling are the top tier of the sustainable transport hierarchy in the Wales Transport Strategy, with benefits for the environment as well as personal health. Supporting this with secure cycle storage at the new stations is welcomed. It is also important to consider additional features, such as charging facilities for e-bikes and potential for tie-ins with businesses hiring and/or maintaining bikes.

Active travel will also require a focus on personal security – not just at the station but on the approaches to stations. We applaud the plans for thinking beyond station boundaries. Proposals should ensure that main walking routes are accessible and well-lit and safe cycle routes are provided, potentially working with local authorities on delivery.

Car parking

For many rail passengers driving to the station remains the most viable and practical means of accessing the railway. Bus services may end too early in the evening or not be provided at weekends or fears over personal security, or bad weather may inhibit active travel. We welcome the provision of car parking facilities, particularly at Llanwern and Newport West and also at Somerton. We note the provision of blue-badge spaces close to station entrances, helping to make rail more accessible for passengers with disabilities.

Cost of parking is an issue. Although a source of income for the railway, it is important to ensure it does not make the total journey cost so high as to deter travel. What is the scope for bundling car parking with tickets and offering a discount to rail users – which might also help to preserve parking capacity for rail users? Many car parks are moving towards digital payments via a website or app, which will suit many people. But there remains a need for

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[8] Age and the train: how younger and older people use the train. Transport Focus. June 2020

an alternative, non-digital payment mechanism for those who do not have digital access or who do not feel confident in buying tickets this way.

<u>Electric vehicle charging</u>
The plans set out provision for electric vehicle charging. Transport Focus has recently conducted research[9] setting out the user experience in England, which may be useful. Our research reveals that most of the time charging at a public chargepoint is straightforward, but problems can cause frustrations. These tended to fall into three categories:

Reliability
- Faults – users experience occasional faults themselves, but also see faults on apps or online that were reported months earlier that have not been addressed (or confirmed as addressed), leading to nervousness of 'will it be working?' Sometimes chargers just need a simple reset, maybe when a charge is stopped before it is complete. How will these be monitored and remedied?
- Dependency on apps – needing different apps depending on the charging provider is an irritation. But users also say that it isn't uncommon for an app not to 'talk' properly to the charger. How will ease of use be approached?
- Customer support – roads and the charging infrastructure are usually available 24 hours each day – but the customer support often isn't.

Complexity
- Road users want charging a car to be as easy as buying petrol or diesel, including the payment process, – ideally with the charger detecting who you are and billing you behind the scenes. As a minimum, with straightforward payment by contactless bank card.

Physical
- Personal security concerns when chargers are 'tucked away' at the periphery of a site, often with poor lighting
- Shelter from the weather when charging, whereas petrol stations have a canopy
- Finding the chargepoints in a large car park – is signage effective?
- Concerns about sometimes sharing the space with other facilities, such as air and water; being on private land which can be closed off 'out of hours'; or being located in awkward spots which are difficult to manoeuvre into or out of.

We would add consideration for those with disabilities – do they meet their needs?

<u>At the station</u>
Passengers expect stations to be welcoming and convenient, providing an inclusive, safe gateway to the railway and to the local town or destination. Passengers can have different needs according to the type of journey they are making and there are common themes that consistently appear in our research. As seen above, our work on passenger

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[9] [Plugging the gap: drivers' experiences with electric cars](#). Transport Focus. September 2021

priorities[10] asked passengers about station facilities, revealing an emphasis on providing basic station amenities: toilets, seating, and shelter on platforms.

We would like clarity on siting of ticket machines, including shelter from the elements and reducing any glare from sunlight on the screens and whether facilities such as help points and smartcard tap in/out points are in the most suitable places; also shelter when waiting for buses and taxis. So we would like to see a commitment to engaging with a wide range of passenger representative groups and panels, to ensure their needs and priorities are being met in the design and implementation of these plans and potential for future proofing. Also to give opportunities for testing proposed facilities, such as seating, signage, placement of facilities, active travel routes and safety and accessibility across the stations.

Information and wayfinding

Customer Information Systems (CIS) at stations play an important part in keeping people informed. Our work[11] shows that CIS screens generally perform well in meeting passengers' needs with confirmation of departure time, platform number, destination and calling points and act as a focal point for passengers entering a station. Passengers also welcomed the broadly 'standard' approach to CIS design across the network giving reassurance and continuity when in an unfamiliar station. The clarity of the newer white on black screen designs is liked and further rollout would be welcomed.

Clear, audible announcements are also important. However, it remains crucial that the information is accurate and consistent with the display boards, including bilingual content. Control and station teams need to have effective tools to ensure both these channels are providing the most accurate information, particularly at unstaffed stations.

Accurate and timely information becomes particularly important during disruption, with a strong need to know what is happening, how long the delay will be and alternatives, so passengers can make other plans if necessary. Lack of information contributes to stress and a sense of powerlessness, so it is crucial that this is provided effectively at locations where the reassurance of a member of staff is not available. How would this work for groups such as neurodiverse passengers for example, who may need additional support when things go wrong?

Wayfinding at stations is also important, with good signage denoting ticket machines and other facilities and for easily navigable routes to platforms, exits and onward travel. Signage layout and lettering needs to be fit for purpose and be legible from a distance.

Personal security

Personal security was the key station-based priority in our most recent work on passenger priorities[12]. So it is reassuring to see measures to support this being integral to plans, with CCTV and passenger help points.

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[10] Rail passengers' priorities for improvement. Transport Focus. July 2020
[11] Passenger information at railway stations. Transport Focus. July 2021
[12] Britain's railway: what matters to passengers. Transport Focus. December 2022

Personal security is a higher priority among women and passengers with disabilities. In 2022 we worked with Transport for the West Midlands to better understand the experiences of women and girls on public transport[13]. Our colleagues at London TravelWatch also looked at personal security on London's transport network[14], also finding that women and users with disabilities were more likely to feel unsafe. Good lighting, CCTV, clear sightlines, the availability of help points, and a well maintained environment can all help people feel safer. But it is also clear that passengers value the ability to summon assistance from a member of staff or police if necessary. Clear means of doing this, with obvious signage will provide reassurance, helping enhance passenger perceptions of personal security and potentially act as a deterrent to crime and disorder.

Barriers to travel
Key to fostering growth in patronage is addressing barriers to rail travel, which need to be overcome before journeys can be more widely considered across the general public, especially integrated journeys. Currently, there is an issue with the perception of rail travel and the need to ensure the reality is a positive experience.

One of our submissions to the Williams Rail Review focused on barriers to travel[15]. It found that two main factors drive modal choice:

- Cost of the journey: for non-users it is invariably a direct comparison between rail fares and the price of fuel and parking – rarely taking into account the 'sunk' costs of car ownership (such as the car itself and insurance). Also the number of people travelling – for instance the relative price per person reduces if more people are in the car, but on rail will multiply.
- Convenience: can take many forms – the overall door-to-door journey time, comfort, the potential to work/relax while travelling or the ability to travel when they want.

In theory, improving value for money and the journey experience for users should also make rail more attractive to non-users. Our most recent work on passenger priorities[16] found that cheaper fares was the single biggest initiative that would encourage 'lapsed users' to return to rail. However, perceptions also matter – the barrier can sometimes be the perceived cost of travel, perceived inconvenience or perceived complexity of making a journey. Lack of familiarity with journey planning, factoring in connections, difficulties with timetables, interchange or access, availability of facilities and uncertainties all undermine confidence to travel.

The measures that would be likely to encourage lapsed users to travel by train are shown in the chart below. Drilling into these in more detail, we also found:

- 25 to 34 year olds want parking at stations (45 per cent very likely)

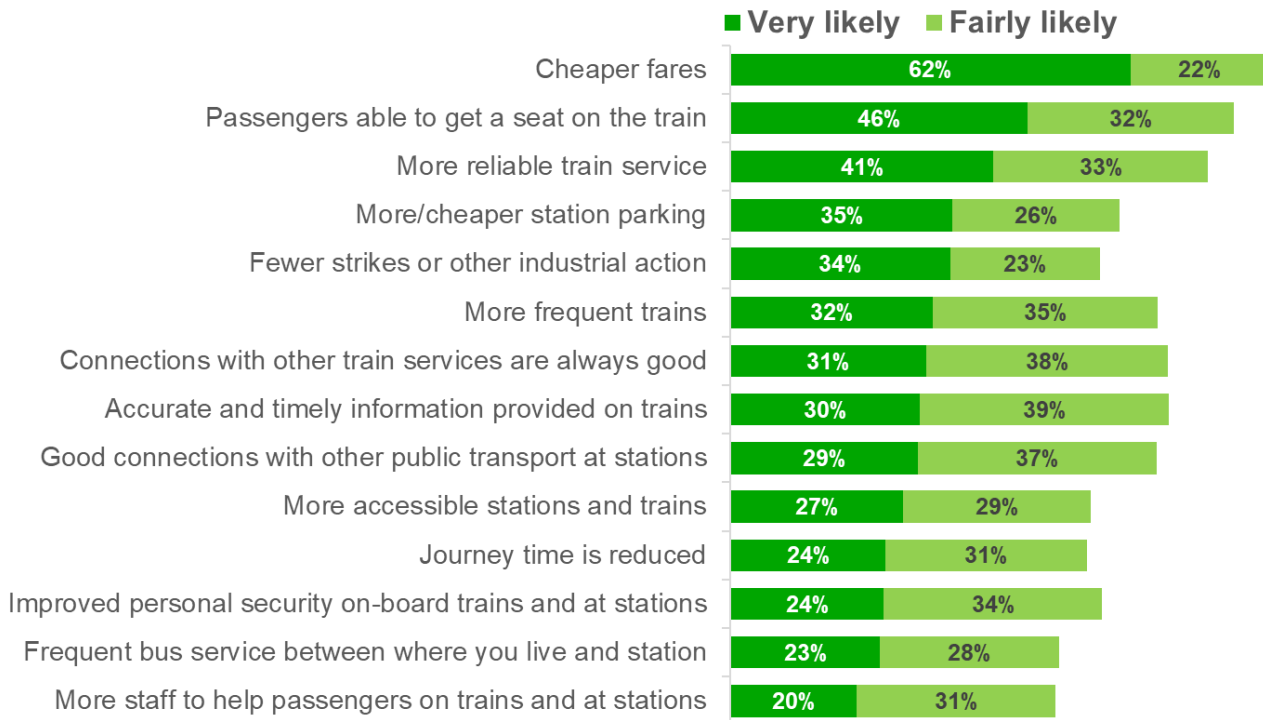[13] Experiences of women and girls on transport. Transport Focus. March 2022
[14] Personal security on London's transport network: recommendations for safer travel. London TravelWatch. January 2022
[15] Williams Rail Review: Barriers to travel. Transport Focus. April 2019
[16] Britain's railway: what matters to passengers. Transport Focus. December 2022

- Those in skilled or unskilled manual and lowest grade occupations or unemployed want good connections with other public transport (33 per cent very likely)
- 18 to 24 year olds would like more frequent trains (37 per cent very likely).

Measures likely to encourage lapsed users to travel by train

Legend: ■ Very likely   ■ Fairly likely

Measure	Very likely	Fairly likely
Cheaper fares	62%	22%
Passengers able to get a seat on the train	46%	32%
More reliable train service	41%	33%
More/cheaper station parking	35%	26%
Fewer strikes or other industrial action	34%	23%
More frequent trains	32%	35%
Connections with other train services are always good	31%	38%
Accurate and timely information provided on trains	30%	39%
Good connections with other public transport at stations	29%	37%
More accessible stations and trains	27%	29%
Journey time is reduced	24%	31%
Improved personal security on-board trains and at stations	24%	34%
Frequent bus service between where you live and station	23%	28%
More staff to help passengers on trains and at stations	20%	31%

In seeking to address these points, it will also be vital to promote the new stations to local residents, who may not have considered rail previously. Pricing of journeys from the stations will also be key in offering value for money, together with communication and positioning of the new stations and services, including potential for initial offers and discounts to draw people into trying them out. It is crucial for this to be a positive experience to bring people back again and to gain recommendations to others, to achieve growth in patronage and support passenger satisfaction.

Conclusion

Transport Focus welcomes this proposal for new stations and increased services that will provide benefits to transport users and support modal shift.

The options to improve frequency of services in South-East Wales can only be good for the economic prosperity of Wales, giving better access to jobs and leisure activities, and provide better mobility and access to services which is likely to be key over the next few years as recovery from the pandemic continues, but in the longer term to attract more passengers and revenue, addressing current decline.

Key, however, is execution of the plans which will require rigorous monitoring to ensure things stay on track and key risks are managed, especially within the current economic climate. Any drive to improve services must be supported by sufficient financial and physical resources.

There is an inherent need to embed passenger involvement and engage with a wide range of representative groups, to align plans with their priorities and ensure their needs are being met, so key benefits are realised and the journey experience is easy and positive, to delight passengers at every point, encourage them onto the rail service and to keep coming back. Transport Focus has significant expertise in this area and would be pleased to provide assistance.

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Ffocws ar drafnidiaeth Cymru | Transport Focus Wales
Tŷ Trafalgar, 5 Plas Fitzalan, Caerdydd, CF24 0ED
Trafalgar House, 5 Fitzalan Place, Cardiff, CF24 0ED

www.transportfocus.org.uk

Cysylltu | Contact:
David Beer
Uwch Reolwr Cymru | Senior Manager Wales
07854 966411
david.beer@transportfocus.org.uk

Michelle Roles
Rheolwr Rhanddeiliaid Cymru | Stakeholder Manager Wales
07562 430815
michelle.roles@transportfocus.wales