

**Serco Rail's Response to the "Policy Review of Public Transport" -  
A Consultation Report, prepared by the Environment, Planning & Transport  
Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, July 2001.**

**1. Introduction**

Serco Rail, a division of the Serco Group plc, is one of the four companies shortlisted by the Strategic Rail Authority to bid for the Wales & Borders passenger trains franchise.

In seeking to understand the public transport requirements and aspirations of the people of Wales, and the border counties in England, we have consulted a wide range of stakeholder organisations and individuals. They include the unitary authorities, the National Assembly, the Rail Passengers Committee for Wales, and various line user and transport interest groups.

We were therefore very pleased to be given the opportunity to read, and comment upon, the National Assembly's "Policy Review of Public Transport". Our thoughts, which draw upon the insights we have gained from our consultations, are given below. We do hope that, in some small way, they may contribute to the National Assembly's realisation of its vision for creating a fully integrated transport system throughout the whole of Wales.

**2. Our Particular Comments on the Consultation Report**

(NB. Each of our comments is referenced to a specific, numbered paragraph in the Consultation Report)

May we begin by saying that we positively endorse the "Vision" which is the theme of the Consultation Report. Further, the "challenge", as described in paragraph 3.3, exactly reflects our own sentiments and understanding of what has to be done. We also acknowledge that good public transport is more readily achieved, and sustained, in a strategic climate which is consistent and enduring, and where there are commensurate levels of funding. The exemplary transport systems in certain continental European countries, to which we often aspire, have not been realised without such consistency and clarity of purpose.

**Paragraph 1.1**

We suggest that the integrated transport model should also include ferries, not least because they constitute a significant mode of transport, for both people and freight, between Ireland and Wales, and thence eastwards to, and through, England to the Continent. Indeed, they form part of the European Union's TENS routes through North and South West Wales.

The provision of train, coach and bus services, primarily to meet the ferries' needs, also benefits both residents and visitors to Wales. We therefore feel that ferry traffic

is important, not only for strategic cross-border flows, but also in making better local travel opportunities possible. Thus, it would be beneficial to ensure that trains serving ferry ports are timetabled to meet local travel needs as well as ferry connections.

In addition to the Irish Sea ferries, the more local ‘water bus’ services proposed for the Cardiff Bay area form a key part of the total public transport network.

#### Paragraphs 1.7 and 3.12

We like the idea of introducing a quality “kite mark” for public transport services in Wales. Indeed, we feel that this should be adopted as a prerequisite criterion by all public transport operators and procurement agencies, throughout Wales, at the earliest opportunity. When implementing such a scheme, it is important to ensure that clear measurement criteria are both set, and rigorously applied, to ensure that quality standards are upheld. Equally, it is advisable to guard against the process of measurement becoming the main focus of attention, rather than the instrument of quality assurance, for which purpose it was intended.

We suggest that a kite mark scheme be introduced, earlier rather than later, and, if practicable, simultaneously, to all forms of public transport. Confining it to bus services at the outset may hinder its effective application to other modes at a later date. Further, we suggest that the scheme should be extended to cover all multi-modal interchanges, including rail-ferry and rail-taxi, where quality arrangements have been established.

#### Paragraph 2.10

The Welsh Consumer Council’s report on bus travel in Wales concludes that inadequate information was one of the key factors perpetuating the public’s negative perception of bus transport. This conclusion is borne out by recent bus use promotion initiatives which have specifically targeted improving information provision. Unfortunately, in many areas of Wales, the availability of comprehensive public transport information, and integrated transport information in particular, is less than perfect. This is despite recent legislative changes, which have required local authorities to provide such information. We do feel that information provision should be a primary obligation for both local authorities and public transport service providers alike.

#### Paragraph 2.12

We are conscious that parts of Wales lie outside the current rail network, whilst other areas (for example, in central Wales) have a very minimal train service. However, rail travel can be an attractive and vital means of transport.

The proposed Wales & Borders franchise provides a fresh opportunity for railways to become the backbone of an extended, rejuvenated, and fully integrated public transport network for Wales. Given the kind of vision and commitment proposed in the Consultation Report, the new franchise could readily provide the stimulus for a dramatic rise in the quality, use and appeal of public transport in Wales. Bus and coach routes, community transport, and taxi services should be designed to

complement, and integrate with, an improved rail network, thereby providing the people of Wales with better access to employment, education and leisure opportunities. This contrasts with the current situation confronting parts of the population, whose very mobility is wholly dependent on either poor bus services or their access to a private car.

### Paragraph 3.1

We support the premise that choice encourages modal shift, and enables high standards of quality in public transport service delivery to be both set and sustained.

Coaches and buses can be used more extensively and imaginatively both to complement and augment train services, rather than compete directly with them. There is evidence to suggest that coaches do not provide an ‘aspirational’ alternative to train and car travel. Thus, we foresee that the introduction of directly duplicating and competing coach routes would be more likely to dilute rail patronage than seriously encourage modal shift. This will not facilitate better integration of public transport throughout Wales, providing equal access and travel opportunities for everyone. Widespread integration overcomes many of the problems of exclusion, however caused, whilst providing a positive and appealing alternative to the inveterate or enforced car user.

Rather, buses and coaches have a vital role in filling ‘missing links’ in the rail network. This enables passengers to undertake journeys which are currently either very inconvenient or effectively impossible by public transport. Travel opportunities between South West Wales and Mid and North West Wales are a case in point. Frequent, fully integrated, well-publicised, and connection-guaranteed coach links in these areas would link the three respective east-west oriented railway routes together (and, further, with the Heart of Wales line), offering access to and from communities currently cut off from the railway network.

### Paragraph 3.10

It goes almost without saying that effective integration hinges upon there being total cooperation and mutuality of trust, vision, urgency and purpose amongst the providers and procurers of public transport services of all types. Whilst recognising that there has been notable progress in recent times, more needs to be done if we are to create a public transport system which fully reflects the expectations and prevailing ‘fashion climate’ of the present time. Aspects requiring particular attention include integration, information provision, station environments and facilities, and customer sensitivity. Realising such mutuality of vision and intent remains a major challenge.

### Paragraph 3.13

We should like to see the concessionary fares scheme for bus services extended to train services as soon as is reasonably practicable. There is the risk that pensioners, families and the less well off will be dissuaded or precluded from travelling by train, despite rail having many frequency, journey time, comfort and convenience attributes. This might also, psychologically, further crystallise the popularly held perception of bus travel being somehow ‘unfashionable’.

#### Paragraph 3.14

The need to redress historical under-investment expressly mentions bus quality partnerships. We assume that this initial prioritisation will not detract from the equally pressing need to increase essential investment in other forms of transport, notably rail, whose real potential is currently only partially being realised.

#### Paragraph 3.15

The “information centre” concept is a laudable way of ensuring that multi-modal travel information is made more readily available to all. Railway stations, often currently deserted and forlorn, provide an ideal venue for such centres.

It is apparent that multi-modal information provision needs to be enhanced. Central Cardiff provides a case in point. Information on trains is available at the railway station, on urban bus services at the bus station, but information on regional bus services is conspicuous by its absence. Journey planning and choosing between options are certainly only for the determined and seasoned traveller by public transport.

The reference to the “views of passengers” is also very valid. It might be addressed by emulating the London example of the London Transport Users Committee(LTUC), where all modes are represented by one body. This might be preferable to the Welsh Consumer Council’s suggestion, which could lead to confusion, even rivalry, between the overarching body and the separate rail (Rail Passengers Committee for Wales) and bus user groups.

#### Paragraphs 3.16 to 3.19 and Chapter 4

We have remarked elsewhere in this response about the necessity for mutual cooperation between such parties as bus and train operators, local authorities, and Railtrack (or its successors) if material progress towards public transport integration is to be realised.

It is acknowledged that the advent of Local Transport Plans has brought greater clarity to articulating what communities require, and seek to achieve, in meeting their local needs. However, integrated transport suggests the need for a more regional focus in order to agree priorities, avoid unnecessary duplication or competition between ‘projects’ or transport modes, and to achieve coherence. The dual problems of parochialism and peripherality are also ameliorated by adopting a wider perspective towards transport provision.

We counsel that regional groupings should be geared to, and reflect, current and perceived people and freight movement flows and demand. This may well cut across existing local government/historical boundaries and traditional allegiances. For example, the Cambrian Railway and the railway routes in South West Wales have relatively close proximity, but are operated and perceived separately. Closer integration, in both thought and deed, is effected by the presence of a regional authority.

The difficulties of exclusion, lack of choice, and imperfect integration would be better tackled by the more “holistic” regional treatment and cooperation suggested in paragraph 3.17. If regional bodies representing the more rural, remote and less populated areas are to be fully effective, it is considered important that they have a voice and influence equal to their counterparts representing the more urban areas.

Further, when manifesting regional identities, it is considered wise to guard against creating solely a plethora of somewhat disparate brand identities, having little substance in terms of what they provide. Perhaps a more constructive way of instituting meaningful regional bodies, whilst retaining their individual character, would be to develop a national, overarching, identity for the ‘National Transport Network’ in Wales, to which the regions would conform in the interests of national homogeneity. This would avoid unnecessary confusion, given the already disparate identities of train, bus, coach, taxi and ferry operators.

## Chapter 5

The PTE/PTA model, applied in England and Scotland, could well be adopted, with advantage, in Wales. However, as the Consultation Report remarks in paragraph 5.7, the model would need to be “specifically designed to meet the requirements of Wales”. The foundation of the model might be the national strategy (manifested by the National Transport Network) for integrated public transport, endorsed and championed by the National Assembly, with implementing powers being vested in the regional bodies. This model would facilitate the development and strengthening of the national network, whilst enabling the more local requirements to be addressed. It would also help to nurture a cohesive transport outlook, as well as its identity, whilst protecting local interests.

The new Wales & Borders franchise might form the basis for creating this national network - naturally, taking care to ensure that bus, coach, community transport, and other public transport services are viewed and treated equitably. In short, the railway network would be the skeleton on which the flesh of integration would be hung.

## Chapter 6

We recognise the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that money is spent prudently, and that feedback on past experience is used for the benefit of future initiatives, and to achieve sustained improvements in service delivery. We should like to see a range of systematic evaluation measures introduced so that such factors as output-based quality can be measured in addition to the now somewhat ubiquitous ‘value for money’, which is not always evident in the end product which the travelling public uses and perceives.

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