



Representing rail users, potential rail users and the rail transport interests of communities along the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor

Website: www.wbrua.org

7th January 2016

Dear Sirs,

As the Chairman of the Wrexham-Birkenhead Rail Users' Association (WBRUA), representing the interests of users and potential users of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor, I am pleased to be able to respond to the National Infrastructure Commission's call for evidence. My response relates solely to the *connecting northern cities* element of the consultation with a focus on rail; the other elements being outwith the direct interest of the WBRUA.

1. Overview

The WBRUA believes that this call for evidence places too great an emphasis on connecting the northern cities even though it does not define them. It is our view that the focus for transport infrastructure must be towards effectively connecting the population and industry in the north, not simply inter-connecting cities.

The Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor epitomises both the issues and the opportunities for the north. It does not form a corridor between northern cities and crosses a number of administrative boundaries but, with investment and an enhanced service, it could enable workers to reach employment by rail and effectively connect the people in the communities it serves with the city regions in the north of England as well as the rest of the UK. In an area that has congested roads (such as the A550 near Deeside) and many people currently driving to work, a modal shift to public transport can only be beneficial. Analysis of the 2011 Census by the Office of National Statistics indicates a reduction in the use of public transport (down by up to 1%) and an increase in drivers (up by up to 3%) in the vicinity of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor.

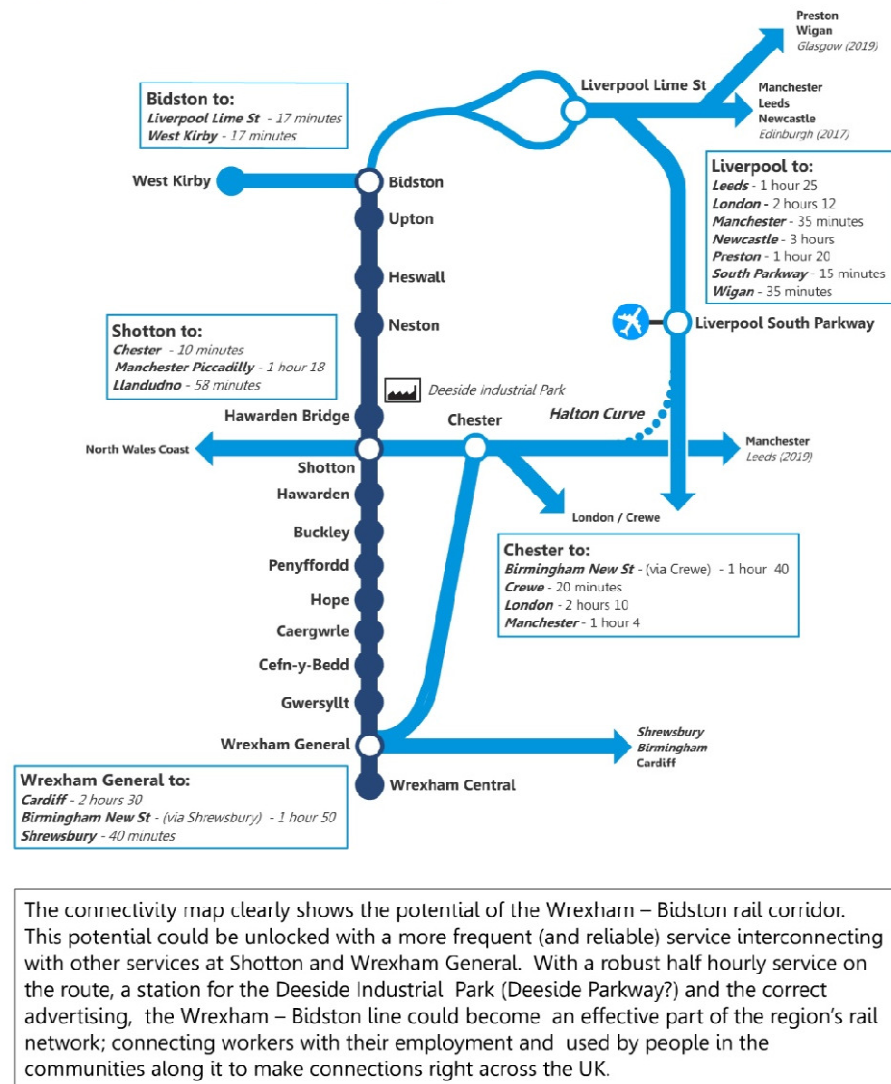
Investment to introduce incremental improvements to the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor, and the routes it connects with, is highly likely to generate significant economic benefit to the immediate area as well as the northern region and the UK as a whole. The WBRUA currently sees the following steps as the way forward for the Wrexham-Bidston route:

- Improved service frequency (increased from one to two trains an hour) and an extension to current operating hours between Wrexham and Bidston together with improved interchange with other services at both Shotton and Wrexham;

- The introduction of a new station on the route to serve the Deeside Industrial Park (*Deeside Parkway*);
- The introduction of a through service between Wrexham and Liverpool when suitable rolling stock (such as IPEMUs) can be made available;
- Electrification of the route as soon as a positive business case can be realised.

The connectivity map (*Figure 1* below) shows the potential of the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor.

Wrexham - Bidston connectivity map



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Figure 1 – Wrexham – Bidston connectivity map

When Network Rail (NR) consulted on its draft Welsh Route Strategy during 2015, WBRUA was pleased to note that NR was proposing to improve the interchange at Shotton during its Control Period 6 (CP6). The significant journey opportunities which the improved interchange at Shotton could achieve can only be realised with an increased service on both the North Wales Main Line and the Wrexham-Bidston Line, for which the draft NR Welsh Route Strategy did not provide. Two trains an hour on the Wrexham-Bidston Line with two trains an hour calling at Shotton on the North Wales Main Line timetabled roughly 15 minutes apart will enable effective connections to and

from both routes in all directions: Chester to and from the Wrexham direction, Chester to and from the Bidston direction, North Wales Coast to and from the Wrexham Direction and North Wales Coast to and from the Bidston direction (the actual travelling time by rail from Chester to Neston via Shotton for example is currently a respectable 18 minutes but at present such a journey usually involves a 57 minute wait between trains at Shotton giving an unattractive overall journey time of 1 hour 15 minutes).

2. WBRUA's Response to the five specific questions

2.1. To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?

- The WBRUA recognises that industry, such as that located in the successful Deeside Industrial Park, is unable to recruit those who cannot easily reach it. Employers at Deeside have told us that potential employees are being denied to them as they cannot access the site by public transport and are unable or unwilling to drive from where they live.
- Across the UK many people are forced to buy a car to reach their employment and, for young people in particular, the cost of running a car can take a significant element of their salary. Such car usage is also contributing to congestion on the road network.
- People living in areas poorly served by public transport, who are unable or unwilling to buy a car, limit their employment opportunities and may not realise their potential.
- The poor service frequency on the Wrexham-Bidston line, the absence of a station serving the Deeside Industrial Park and lack of effective connections with other services at Shotton and Wrexham means that the Wrexham-Bidston Line significantly underperforms its potential in providing transport connectivity for the wider region to support jobs, enterprise creation & growth and housing.

2.2. What cost-effective infrastructure investments in city-to-city connectivity could address these weaknesses? We are interested in all modes of transport.

- This should not be just city-to-city connectivity; it should address journey needs - specifically where people need to travel from and to.
- Improved frequency, increased capacity and reduced journey times between residential areas / employment locations by public transport will result in a modal shift from private cars and help to reduce road congestion.
- For the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor a modest infrastructure investment, with a new station to serve the Deeside Industrial Park, will allow a reliable two trains an hour service on the route to connect workers with their employment. Capacity improvements on the North Wales Main Line will enable more trains to call at Shotton to connect the Wrexham-Bidston rail corridor and realise enhanced connectivity with northern England and beyond to the benefit of both population and industry.

2.3. Which city-to-city corridor(s) should be the priority for early phases of investment?

- Transport corridors other than city-to-city must also be considered.
- Priority should be given to those corridors which are constraining economic potential (such as the Wrexham-Bidston Line and the lines with which it connects) to enable workers to access employment and businesses to develop.

2.4. What are the key international connectivity needs likely to be in the next 20-30 years in the north of England (with a focus on ports and airports)? What is the most effective way to meet these needs, and what constraints on delivery are anticipated?

- Effective, quick and easy rail access to airports (regional and key UK hubs such as Heathrow) is essential and capacity constraints on the rail network will need to be addressed to keep ahead of passenger demand.
- HS2 will, in due course, provide easy connection to Birmingham International and London Heathrow (with an interchange at Old Oak Common). It is essential that through services are run beyond the HS2 route to the likes of Chester and North Wales (which will require electrification of the North Wales Main Line) in order that connectivity is maintained with locations beyond those on HS2.
- Insofar as the Wrexham-Bidston Line is concerned an effective interchange at Shotton with services to Liverpool South Parkway, Manchester, Birmingham and London will afford the communities along the route of the line easy access to regional and national hub airports and, in due course, to HS2 destinations.

2.5. What form of governance would most effectively deliver transformative infrastructure in the north, how should this be funded and by whom, including appropriate local contributions?

- The approach for infrastructure provision and its funding needs to be hierarchical with the overarching UK strategy at the top with appropriate devolution of responsibility to regional and local levels. This should enable the appropriate and effective delivery infrastructure needs from a national down to local level.
- There should be no step change in infrastructure provision over administrative boundaries.
- Funding for infrastructure provision should be prioritised on a national basis regardless of where responsibility is devolved to.

Yours sincerely,

John Allcock

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Chairman of WBRUA