

Chester - Shrewsbury Rail Users Association - SCRUA

**Response to the Wales Route Utilisation Strategy Consultation Document
July 2008**

The Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association welcomes the draft Wales Route Utilisation Study and the considerations noted therein on issues relating to the Chester - Wrexham - Shrewsbury Line.

The recent figures released by the ORR indicated that passenger numbers along this line of route was growing faster than the national average.

We take this opportunity to make comment on issues raised in the consultation document.

Our comments fall into two categories

1. Capacity restraints
2. Line speed
3. New Stations

1. *Capacity Restraints*

The 9.5 mile single track section between Saltney Junction and Wrexham has a line speed of 50mph and with the introduction of the hourly passenger service and continued freight use this section of track is heavily used. Locomotives from EWS for the new London service from Wrexham use this section daily and Virgin Trains are proposing running two services through to Wrexham from London via Chester in December 2008.

The Association see this section of route as a major constraint in delivering a reliable and frequent service to this area capable of delivering both freight and passenger requirements in the future.

As part of the Scott Wilson study commissioned in 2006/7 capacity constraints on this line were examined. On the single track section two pinch points were identified namely the single line overbridge over the A483 Gresford bypass and the single track span bridge carrying the A483.

A number of options were examined including:

- A dynamic loop
- Redoubling the route between the bridges
- Redoubling the whole route

2. *Line Speeds*

It is noted that the draft Wales RUS highlights journey time enhancements that may be possible in raising the line speeds on this route.

The current route is rated at line speeds of 50 to 70mph. In the past the ruling line speed for this route was 90mph. Significant benefits throughout the network can be shown by returning the route to this level. The Scott Wilson report (March 2007) indicated that a benefit to cost ratio of up to 4.2:1 could be achieved.

SCRUA whilst keen to see line speeds increased to reduce overall journey times feel strongly that it should be by improving line speeds and not by 'skipping stops' to the detriment of passengers/stations along this line of route. 'Skipping stops' on current services would not be acceptable. The hourly service operating on this line has seen significant raises in passenger numbers (ORR report 2008) from the smaller rural stations where facilities have improved (CIS, CCTV, car parking and bus interchanges) much of which has been provided by the

local/regional transport authorities helping to deliver local transport plan targets on car reduction and modal shift.

3. New Stations

Analysis of the potential for new stations has been undertaken by Scott Wilson in 2006/7. Old stations sites on this line were revisited together with sites that may prove to hold a business case in the future.

Analysis was carried out in line with the DfT (Rail) criteria for new stations and on the basis of both the full and restricted cost benefit analyses it was recommended that surveys be undertaken at the following sites:

- Lache/Chester Business Park
- Rossett (close to the A483/B5102 and not at the former station site)
- Johnstown

The benefits these stations would bring was linked closely with the re-doubling or partial re-doubling of the single track together section and with line speed enhancements and thus should only be considered if the enhancements take place thereby not increasing the journey times over this section of route.

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