

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

Tel 07807 768124
 Email: admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
 Website: www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
 Correspondence address – 11 Harvelin
 Park, Todmorden, OL14 6HX

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport.....

Sir Peter Hendy CBE,
 c/o Department for Transport,
 Great Minster House,
 33, Horseferry Road
 London
 SW1P 4DR

29th December 2020

Dear Sir Peter,

Union Connectivity Review: Call for Evidence

TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views as follows to this call for evidence. We frame our comments around questions 7 and 9 of the consultation.

As a general observation, consideration must be given in detail about the cost, feasibility, value for money, delivery arrangements and how any project the review recommends should be sequenced. The review team will have to consult widely with relevant government departments and agencies as well as local authorities, industry, academics, engineering experts and of course transport users.

Opportunities for improved transport connectivity between the nations of the UK.

Anglo Scottish public transport links

One key factor in improving these links will be HS2. The West Coast Main Line (WCML) will need additional capacity north of Preston to cater for extra HS2 services as well as catering for possible extended services to and from Scotland (see below) and improving on current service levels at intermediate stations. This will mean more passing loops or an extension to 3/4 running lines where possible. Where 4 track cannot be accommodated, we understand that a 3 track option could provide relief with bi-directional running.

An example would be between Lancaster and Carnforth where Leeds & Furness line services have also to be accommodated. This investment will also pave the way for improving rail connectivity between the North West (& West Midlands) and Scotland in HS2 phase 2b.

Ultimately we suggest that action should be taken to work with the Scottish Government to build a high speed line throughout.

Through rail connections between the North-West and cities in Scotland north of Glasgow and Edinburgh are almost non-existent. There are occasional through trains to Aberdeen on the East coast main line, but apart from the overnight sleeper trains there are none on the WCML. CrossCountry formerly operated a through train to Dundee and Aberdeen via the WCML but this has now been discontinued. For example oil industry workers requiring visits to Aberdeen from our region have to take a rail journey including a walk through Glasgow City centre between Central and Queen St stations, or a change of train at Haymarket or Edinburgh Waverley. There should be at least one through service per day between North West England and cities in the North of Scotland. There is of course a line through Coatbridge avoiding Glasgow and Edinburgh and thus obviating the need to reverse the service.

There is a current campaign to restore through links between West Yorkshire (and also South Yorkshire/ the East Midlands) and Scotland via the Settle-Carlisle line. Surveys have shown that there is a real demand for this, the shortest route, with a significant number of passengers using the line in spite of the lack of through services and relatively poor timetabling and connections at Carlisle. In the longer term this would help to relieve pressure on the WCML north of Preston which will become increasingly busier and the route can also be used for freight.

Other potential improvements –

- Electrification of the Glasgow and South Western route from Glasgow to Carlisle (already planned as far as Barrhead for local trains).
- Extension of the Borders Railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle, despite the lack of population between Hawick and Longtown.

Anglo – Welsh links

Some potential public transport improvements for cross border journeys –

- Electrification of Bidston - Wrexham as part of the Merseyrail network, with through trains to Liverpool.
- Electrification of Cardiff - Swansea, previously approved but cancelled in 2017 because of cost over-runs.

Connections to Northern Ireland

Boris Johnson has proposed a fixed link across the North Channel to connect Northern Ireland directly with Scotland, and with England via Carlisle. This would be very expensive, whether by bridge or tunnel. A 2010 report by the Centre for Cross Border Studies estimated building a bridge between Galloway and Ulster would cost around £20 billion. The tunnel option would have to consider the Beaufort's Dyke sea trench which is approximately 300m deep and was used for dumping munitions after World War II. This would require an expensive and potentially hazardous clean-up operation. There is of course the question of whether this should be a rail-only option, road and rail or road only.

If there is a rail crossing, whether bridge or tunnel, the different track gauges of British and Irish railways would have to be considered. If trains only operated to Belfast, the branch from Belfast to Larne could be converted from 5' 3" gauge to 4' 8½" (standard) gauge, allowing trains from Glasgow or parts of England to run through. This in turn would require Northern Ireland Railways to acquire some standard gauge trains, or convert existing ones, for the local service to Larne, and these could only be used on the one route. Mixed gauge, i.e. laying a third rail inside the 5' 3" gauge Irish track to accommodate trains of both gauges, would be feasible but there is no recent experience of this in the British Isles and therefore no regulatory standards. Most European examples involve standard and narrow-gauge trains (typically metre or 75cm gauge) sharing tracks.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary