

P-04-627 Improve Commuter Services in North Wales – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 18.03.15

Note on Petition to Assembly concerning Rail Services for commuters travelling to Bangor

Petition Text: *“Although train fares across North Wales have risen at above the rate of inflation over a number of recent years the service offered to commuters has been reduced.*

In particular the service offered at times convenient for most commuters to Bangor – home of one of Wales largest Universities, and also a major hospital (as well as North Wales busiest railway station in terms of passenger numbers!) – have been greatly cut over the last couple of years.

In particular we call for the reintroduction of the Chester – Bangor service which used to arrive at in Bangor at 09.36. (Ironically, whilst this service has been cut on week days, it still runs on a Saturday!).”

The aim of this petition is to raise awareness within the Welsh Government of both the demand for, and the recent decline in the frequency of, the rail services offered to commuters travelling to Bangor for work.

Key facts justifying the petition:

- There are very limited services along the North Wales coast in the early morning on week days. For example, there is only one service from Flint to Bangor between 7am and 9am (this contrasts with no fewer than 5 services advertised to Cardiff!).
- This one service is invariably standing room only by the time the train leaves Llandudno Junction.
- A service leaving Flint (and calling at Bangor) about an hour later was withdrawn in September 2012. (Apparently, according to the minister in her response, because of the need to balance the needs for 2 and 3 coach trains. As the number of coaches on the evening services seems to change nightly this appears a very poor excuse!)

- I personally know of a number of people who no longer use the train, being forced to drive to work instead, because of the inconvenience caused by the withdrawal of this one service. Many of these are young mothers who have very tight time constraints imposed by family responsibilities.
- In the evening the situation is worse with only one train leaving Bangor between 3.04pm and 7.02pm which stops at stations between Llandudno Junction and Chester.
- This train leaves Bangor at 5.18pm (note lectures at the University finish at 6pm).
- This train is often packed with passengers from the Irish Ferries before it even arrives at Bangor station. As a result Bangor passengers have even been turned away. The serious overcrowding on this train was widely reported in the press earlier in the year, with passengers apparently sharing the drivers cabin with the guard!
- In terms of foot full Bangor is probably the busiest station in North Wales as evidenced by the fact that it is the only station in North Wales with 2 ticket dispensing machines.
- As well as University and Hospital staff, many local students use these services to commute into Bangor. In particular nursing and teaching students rely on the train as they spend time on placements across North Wales. These services are also used by children travelling to Schools along the North Wales Coast.

Clearly demand for the Chester – Bangor commuter rail services is high. Furthermore this service directly improves accessibility to higher education and social infrastructure thereby contributing to improving quality of life for communities and individuals in North Wales.

Fit to Welsh Government Priorities:

A recent Assembly Government Ministerial Task Force on North Wales transport identified the “lack of viable and affordable alternatives to the car to access key employment sites.” In particular it is noted Welsh Government Priorities, in the short to medium term, are to build on recent increases in rail use for travel to work (Draft Consultation Document, Welsh Route Study: <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/welsh-route-study/>). This petition therefore clearly

supports the aspiration of WAG in calling for improved commuter services to/ from Bangor.

A WAG transport priority is for North Wales rail modification, potentially including electrification. This is clearly to be welcomed as it will cut journey times. However such an upgrade is dependent on the return on investment. In terms of numbers of journeys made and therefore fares paid, daily commuters offer a substantial source of income. Therefore the current decline in services offered to Bangor bound commuters, and the consequent drop in the number of commuters using the services, are working directly against achieving WAG priorities.

Comments on the Ministers Response:

In her response of the 9th March 2015 the Minister largely fails to answer the call made in the petition.

As outlined above, she makes a rather feeble excuse as to the withdrawal of the 09.36 weekday service into Bangor.

She then makes a number of largely irrelevant comments regarding the increased capacity achieved through the introduction of loco hauled services. The timetable for this service is shown below. This train only call in Bangor once in each direction, very late in the morning travelling west and lunchtime travelling east, and so is unsuitable for commuters. Furthermore the one service which might be of use to Flint based commuters, the 16:50 out of Manchester, does not actually stop in Flint!

The Daily timetable for the loco hauled service:

07:16 Crewe – Chester

07:40 Chester – Manchester Piccadilly

09:50 Manchester Piccadilly – Holyhead

12:59 Holyhead – Manchester Piccadilly

16:50 Manchester Piccadilly – Llandudno.

19:13 Llandudno – Llandudno Junction

19:28 Llandudno Junction – Llandudno

19:38 Llandudno – Crewe