

# Upgrades and electrification of Wales' ageing rail infrastructure should be addressed by UK-Welsh collaboration that would improve services for customers

July 14, 2021



The Welsh Affairs Committee has today called for a new Wales Rail Board to be in place by the Autumn – comprised of UK and Welsh government bodies – that can consider improvements and upgrades to Wales' ageing rail network.

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- [Inquiry: Railway Infrastructure in Wales](#)
- [Welsh Affairs Committee](#)

Rail infrastructure in Wales is a lifeline for millions, connecting communities and central for the transportation of goods in Wales and across the UK. However, it is a Victorian system trying to support a 21st century level of service, with passengers experiencing slow services and inadequate stations.

To enhance rail infrastructure in Wales, urgent upgrades backed up by sufficient investment is desperately

needed. A new Wales Rail Board, including the UK and Welsh governments, Network Rail, the rail operators providing services in Wales, and Transport for Wales, has been recommended to identify improvements and the investment required.

While significant rail investment has been dedicated to HS2, resulting in a supply chain that encompasses the entire UK including Wales, Wales will not benefit in the same way as Scotland and Northern Ireland from the Barnett consequentials arising from the project. The Committee recommends that HS2 should be reclassified as an England only project. Using the Barnett formula, Wales' funding settlement should be recalculated to apply an additional allocation based on the funding for HS2 in England. This would help to ensure that Welsh rail passengers receive the same advantage from investment in HS2 as those in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Committee notes that HS2 could have clearer and more direct benefits for Welsh rail passengers if it is accompanied by enhancements to the Chester and Crewe stations which, in turn, could help facilitate the electrification of the North Wales mainline. The Committee therefore recommends that the UK Government, working in partnership with the Welsh Government, should prepare a full strategic case for the upgrade and electrification of the North Wales mainline.

Electrification of the railways can play a key role in the UK Government's decarbonisation agenda, and the Committee has argued that the decision to cancel the electrification of the Great Western mainline from Cardiff to Swansea is short-sighted. The Committee urges the UK Government to bring forward proposals – before the end of 2021 – on new proposals for greater connectivity between Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol, which could require completing electrification of the mainline between Cardiff and Swansea.

Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP, said: “There is a compelling case for greater investment in rail infrastructure in Wales to improve journey times for passengers, strengthen connectivity with the rest of the United Kingdom and reduce carbon emissions.

“Reaching our net zero targets will require a significant investment in rail electrification. We believe that this should result in a reconsideration of the short-sighted decision to cancel the electrification of the Great Western mainline from Cardiff to Swansea.

“While there will always be voices calling for the further devolution of rail powers, it's clear that what passengers most need is both of their governments, as well as the rail operators, working together. Our Committee has proposed a new Wales Rail Board, which would bring together the two governments, Network Rail and rail operators, which can be tasked with bringing forward a shared pipeline of Welsh rail projects and which should be in place by the Autumn.”

## Recommendations

The Welsh Affairs Committee's recommendations are:

- Bringing forward new proposals for greater connectivity between Swansea-Cardiff-Bristol, which would include completing electrification on the mainline between Cardiff and Swansea and a Swansea Bay Metro to integrate the public transport network westwards to Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire and feed rail patronage from Swansea, would be an important sign of the UK Government's commitment to its green agenda and to improving connectivity across the UK. We call on the UK Government to produce draft proposals before the end of 2021.
- The UK Government should establish a Wales Rail Board, consisting of itself, the Welsh Government, Network Rail, the rail operators providing services in Wales, and Transport for Wales. The Board would be tasked with identifying and developing a prioritised set of proposals for rail infrastructure improvement and investment in Wales. The Board should be established, with its membership and terms of reference published, by this Autumn.
- The UK Government should set out its plans to reform the Rail Networks Enhancements Pipeline with a view to accelerating the delivery of projects in Wales.
- In light of the forthcoming publication of the Union Connectivity Review, we recommend that the evaluation process for rail infrastructure proposals in Wales factors in the UK Government's strategic ambitions to strengthen connections between all parts of the UK.
- We recommend that HS2 should be reclassified as an England only project. Using the Barnett formula, Wales' funding settlement should be recalculated to apply an additional allocation based on the funding for HS2 in England. This would help to ensure that Welsh rail passengers receive the same advantage from investment in HS2 as those in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- The development of the HS2 programme in England could yield direct benefits to Welsh rail passengers if it is accompanied by enhancements to the North Wales mainline, including the upgrades at Chester and Crewe stations which will be required for full electrification of the North Wales mainline to proceed. A full strategic case should therefore be prepared for the upgrade and electrification of the North Wales mainline. Consolidating the benefits of HS2 for Wales by reducing journey times within North Wales, increasing freight capacity and improving connections from Holyhead to the West Coast main line would be consistent with the UK Government's economic and environmental objectives and with the objectives of the Union Connectivity Review.
- Efforts should be made to develop synergies between climate mitigation efforts, such as protecting against rising sea-levels, and measures to protect transport infrastructure. Noting that significant Welsh transport infrastructure lies either adjacent to the coast or runs along valley lines (often alongside rivers), we believe there are significant opportunities to link efforts and budgets to protect transport infrastructure to wider community protection.
- The Wales Rail Board should:
  - establish immediate infrastructure investment priorities;
  - consider how passenger services can be improved without inadvertently reducing freight capacity; and
  - determine on a route by route basis what improved services will mean for passengers in terms of frequency, speed, and cost.