

Transport for Wales Rail application for track access rights, Wrexham-Bidston

Stakeholder support

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Growth Track 360
c/o Cheshire West and Chester Council
4 Civic Way
Ellesmere Port CH65 0BE
Tel: 01244 972867
Email: [REDACTED]

17th November 2021

John Larkinson,
Chief Executive, The Office of Rail and Road Regulation,
By email via Lee Robinson of Transport for Wales: lee.robinson@tfw.wales

Dear Mr. Larkinson,

Support for Track Access for Transport for Wales for a second train per hour on the Wrexham to Bidston (Borderlands) Line

Growth Track 360 (GT360) is the “brand name” for the North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Taskforce which was set up in 2016 to work for better rail infrastructure and services in North Wales, West Cheshire and the Wirral. The membership of the Growth Track 360 Board comprises of: -

- Councillor Louise Gittins, Chair of Growth Track 360, Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council, representing the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and Transport Board
- Councillor Ian Roberts, Vice Chair of Growth Track 360 and Leader of Flintshire County Council representing the North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- Councillor Liam Robinson, Chair of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Transport Committee (formerly Merseytravel/Merseyrail) representing the LCR Metro Mayor
- Councillor David Bithell, Wrexham County Borough Council representing the Transport Committee of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.
- Business Representatives: Ashley Rogers (Commercial Director, North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council) and Debbie Bryce (CEO, West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber of Commerce)
- Cllr. Mark Pritchard Chair of the Mersey Dee Alliance and Leader, Wrexham County Borough Council

The GT360 Board speaks communities across North Wales, Wirral and Cheshire with representative mandates from local and business communities. The Board is advised by and works with transport bodies including Transport for the North, Transport for Wales and Network Rail.

The Board of GT360 was shocked and dismayed to learn at its meeting on the 15th November 2021 that long-term plans to improve passenger services on the Wrexham to Bidston (Borderlands) Line are at risk of being lost due to an objection made to the ORR by GB Railfreight (GBRf). Growth Track 360 strongly supports the application by Transport for Wales to run an additional service on the Wrexham to Bidston (Borderlands) Line to implement a Franchise commitment to run two trains per hour (2tph) on the Line.

Growth Track 360 asks that you grant track access to Transport for Wales to enable the new 2tph service to commence at the earliest opportunity. The Board of GT360 will then seek to work with Transport for Wales, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Network Rail, Hanson Cement, Tata Steel and GBRf to ensure that line is improved and upgraded not only to provide enhanced passenger services but more freight services.

By way of explaining our request it is important to communicate our vision for the Wrexham to Bidston, Borderlands Line, which has been developed over a period of years.

The Wrexham to Bidston Line is a neglected and underutilised transport asset for North East Wales, West Cheshire and the Wirral. However, the line has enormous potential as it links three substantial employment centres – Wrexham (Town Centre and Industrial Estate), Deeside Industrial Park and Birkenhead/Wirral Waters with onward access to Liverpool City Centre. It passes through many residential areas in Wrexham, Flintshire, Wirral and Birkenhead.

Our vision is to transform the line into a major commuter and leisure transport artery building on the successful example of 15-minute services from Chester to Liverpool Central. The introduction of two trains per hour by Transport for Wales is the first step on our journey to achieve this vision.

Following successful trials of new, Stadler electric battery trains by Merseyrail we hope that the 15-minute services will be provided by Merseyrail electric/battery stock within five years.

The concept of a Wrexham to Liverpool service every 15-minutes will support aspirations for Metro style transport in North Wales and the cross-border area built on a rail spine with integrated, connecting bus services and active travel corridors.

Parts of the GT360 area have exceptionally low usage rates for rail travel, both for work and leisure. The transformation of the Wrexham to Bidston line into a Wrexham to Liverpool Central service every 15-minutes is a key component in our vision for enabling modal shift from the car to public transport to reduce carbon emissions and improve sustainable access to work.

To deliver our vision it is essential that we see the two trains per hour service implemented in 2022. The new service will trigger plans for a range of investments to upgrade the line: -

- Improvements to signalling and track to improve line speeds
- Closures of level crossings
- A new station at Deeside Industrial Estate with a connecting bus shuttle
- Park and ride facilities along the line (in commuter towns and villages like Penyffordd, Buckley and Neston)
- Improvements to the Hanson Cement freight sidings to improve access and egress for freight trains serving the facility (with aggregates). This will reduce the time that freight trains for Hanson Cement “block” the line (currently 45 minutes)
- Ticketing facilities and station improvements for the many unmanned stations along the line.
- Charging facilities for new rolling stock along the route, initially Vivarail and then Merseyrail electric/battery trains to complete the 27-mile journey along track without the third rail.

GT360 recognises the importance of the line to freight traffic and will seek to build in additional capacity for freight into the transformation of the line so that less freight travels by road. Indeed, this year GT360 sponsored a Levelling Up Bid by Flintshire County Council for £30m to deliver: -

- A new Deeside Parkway Station
- Enhanced Freight sidings at Hanson Cement to reduce the time taken for freight trains to access and egress the Hanson sidings
- A park and ride facility at Penyffordd.

The bid was not successful, but we will re-apply to the next round of the Levelling Up Fund. This demonstrates that the interest of freight operators is being considered in our strategy to develop the line with TfW and Liverpool City Region.

Our plans for passenger and freight services will deliver modal shift, reduce carbon emissions and ameliorate road congestion if they are successful. They will stimulate the economy and generate wider economic benefits by improving access to work.

These are the aspirational arguments for granting TfW track access for two trains per hour (2tph) on the Borderlands line.

There is also a very strong argument for TfW to have track access for two trains per hour on the Borderlands Line in terms of value for money and rail governance. Transport for Wales has:

- Invested in business case development work for the new service.
- Purchased new rolling stock to provide the upgraded service and
- Improved platforms for greater accessibility ahead of deploying the new trains.

Should track access not be granted this substantial investment of monies by TfW will have been wasted.

Network Rail has also invested in “barrow crossing” closures and safety upgrades to enable the new services, which likewise, will be wasted if track access is not granted.

TfW and Network Rail undertook these investments to deliver longstanding commitments to deliver a 2tph service on the Wrexham to Bidston Line made by the Welsh Government in the new Wales and Borders Franchise awarded in October 2018. Local Senedd Members and Members of Parliament campaigned on their support for the new 2tph service on the Wrexham to Bidston in 2019 and 2021. Local Councils have supported the upgrade. The new service is expected by local communities and has a democratic mandate.

The commitment to 2tph on the Wrexham to Bidston Borderlands Line has been in place since 2017 when the specification for the new franchise was published. The Welsh Government is committed to delivering more sustainable transport and a North Wales Metro. Implementing the improvements listed in the Welsh Franchise including 2tph on the Borderlands Line are critical to the North Wales Metro and are the baseline for further frequency and infrastructure improvements.

The new 2tph service has a clear democratic mandate, supported by local communities and is embedded in the Wales and Borderlands Franchise. Local support and the Franchise commitment should trump the narrow commercial interests and “notional” track access rights represented by the GBRf objection. In rail governance terms the longstanding Welsh Franchise commitment to 2tph on the Wrexham to Bidston Line should be a decisive factor in the track access decision.

We therefore look forward to your decision to grant TfW track access for 2tph to support sustainable economic growth, integrated transport and modal shift, thereby meeting the expectations of local communities, elected representatives and businesses for improvement in sustainable, public transport from a transformed Wrexham to Liverpool service.

GT360 will continue to work with stakeholders, including freight operators, to improve the contribution of the Borderlands Line to the local economy, community wellbeing and sustainable transport solutions.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Louise Gittins,
Chair, Growth Track 360,
Leader of Cheshire West & Chester Council



Councillor Ian Roberts,
Vice Chair, Growth Track 360,
Leader of Flintshire County Council

b. North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council (letter)



Business Council
Cyngor Busnes

North Wales Mersey Dee
Business Council Ltd
8 The Paddock
Prestatyn,
Denbighshire

17th November 2021

Lee Robinson
Development Director
Transport for Wales,
3 Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd,
Rhondda Cynon Taf,
CF37 4THM

RE: Wrexham Bidston Line – 2 Trains Per Hour Service

Dear Lee,

We write in reference to the above and Transport for Wales' (TfW) application to the ORR for an increase in passenger service frequency on the Wrexham to Bidston line.

As the North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council, the regional umbrella body for the private sector in the North Wales and Mersey Dee region, our primary remit is to support a vibrant and sustainable regional economy across the North Wales, Cheshire and Wirral cross border area. Our membership is predominantly made up of key sector, county and national business representative bodies (12+) including North Wales Tourism, the FSB, Make UK, North Wales Exporters, the Chamber of Commerce, CITB, the IOD, Creative North Wales, and Wrexham Business Professionals.

One of the key areas the Business Council focuses on, is working with partners in the Public Sector to secure much-needed rail investment, from both a services and infrastructure perspective. As such we are a founding Board level member organisation of the Growth Track 360 rail partnership along with the Cheshire & Warrington LEP, the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and Liverpool City Region amongst others.

When considering increases in service frequency on the Wrexham to Bidston line (the line), we must look at the potential for further patronage of the line and the current state of play.

Running through or close to 3 Enterprise Zones across North East Wales, Cheshire and the Wirral, the line is unique in its potential to connect residents to high value jobs, access to skills/training and much wider leisure opportunities.

A substantial part of our cross border regional economy is focused along the route of the line predominantly around manufacturing (20% of the GVA of the area, more than double the UK level for manufacturing). Major businesses based here include Airbus, Raytheon, Magellan, Tata Steel, Toyota, Stellantis and JCB. The majority of the roles in manufacturing are not able to be carried out from home and necessitate travel to work.



Business Council
Cyngor Busnes

North Wales Mersey Dee
Business Council Ltd
8 The Paddock
Prestatyn,
Denbighshire

Unfortunately when it comes to current status, the line serves our communities extremely poorly, with a service frequency and reliability level that makes the car the obvious and continuing choice for the vast majority of commuter, business and leisure travellers with knock on negative effects on air pollution, congestion, public health and lost productivity. The commuting levels using public transport in the area show clearly the status quo, with extremely low levels (approx. 1%) versus comparable areas.

In summary the line has the potential to revolutionise cross border travel in key economic zones, enabling much reduced use of the car for workers accessing well paid skilled jobs, along with reducing transport emissions and supporting wider economic growth.

However to release this potential, a major and much needed overhaul of the line is required (a key element of the investment asks of Growth Track 360) and the service frequency enhancement TfW has applied for, is the first crucial step in this process. Service frequency increases will pave the way for a reliable and frequent cross border service that can fully exploit its potential for the region for residents and businesses and play an essential part in the wider connectivity plans e.g. the creation of the North Wales Metro (includes extension of the line into Liverpool).

The TfW application to enhance the service frequency to 2 trains per hour (2 tph) on Weekdays and Saturdays from May 2022 on the line along with completion of essential level crossing upgrade works, is an application therefore which the Business Council fully and strongly supports.

Without the increase in service frequency as a first step, we remain with a third rate service, which neither serves our communities nor businesses now, nor releases the considerable pent-up potential for economic growth, at a time when we absolutely need it most.

We are very happy to discuss further.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Rogers'.

Ashley Rogers
Commercial Director
NWMD Business Council
Tel: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

c. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (letter)



METROMAYOR
LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

22 November 2021

Lee Robinson
Cyfarwyddwr Datblygu – Canolbarth, Gogledd a Chymru Wledig / *Development Director for Mid, North and Rural Wales*
Trafnidiaeth Cymru / *Transport for Wales*
3 Llys Cadwyn
Pontypridd
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF37 4TH

Dear Lee,

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) is committed to the development of an Integrated Transport network within which rail plays an integral role in how journeys are both made within the Liverpool City Region and across the borders into surrounding areas. The Borderlands (Wrexham – Bidston) Line is a vastly underused asset which provides a direct link from Liverpool and the City Region into North Wales.

The LCRCA has and continues to work closely with Transport for Wales (TfW) and Growth Track 360 (GT360) in the development of rail services between Liverpool and North Wales and to make the case for significant enhancements, including a doubling of service frequency.

The aim of all organisations being to develop rail services so that they better serve the regional economy and underpin economic growth.

The development of the Borderlands Line has been highlighted as a key development in the manifesto of Steve Rotheram, the directly elected Metro Mayor, and forms part of his clear vision for the delivery of a London-style transport network and “Merseyrail for All”. As Lead Portfolio Member for Transport, I have worked alongside the Metro Mayor and we have engaged directly with Welsh Government Ministers over several years in support of this ambition. Enhancing the line is also a longstanding ambition in the LCRCA’s Long Term Rail Strategy. Its enhancement would provide important links to the Wirral Waters development, to the Deeside Industrial Park as well as providing direct links from the towns and villages along the line into Liverpool City Centre. This reflects the strength of the cross-border relationships, with Wrexham and Flintshire forming part of the LCR’s wider economic geography and travel-to-work area.

The current commitment in the Franchise agreement to increase services on the line to two trains per hour is a vital step in the future development of the line. It complements the proposed new stations at Deeside Industrial Park and a possible station at Woodchurch and is the first step in bringing a high-quality passenger rail service to the line. This is essential to support better access to work, education and leisure, and support the shift to rail from the very high levels of car-based commuting in the area, to support air quality and net zero carbon targets, on both sides of the border.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
No 1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP

Telephone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk



METROMAYOR
LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

The LCR along with TfW and GT360 are currently working towards the potential operation of a service providing 4 trains an hour with direct services into Liverpool. One of the issues which caused some concern was the issue of 3rd rail electrification, it is clear that the ORR is very much against such extensions. The LCR recognised this issue and when authorising the replacement fleet, the issue was addressed directly; the new Class 777 units have the potential to be AC/DC or DC/battery operation. This is a significant development as it now makes extending the Merseyrail network without using 3rd rail a practical option.

The LCR is currently funding the extension of the Kirkby Line through to a new station at Headbolt Lane which will use the new unit's battery capability between Kirkby and Headbolt Lane. This will be the first time this technology has been used to operate main line services in the UK. The importance of this development is key to the future extensions of the Merseyrail network as it will now be possible to do this without using 3rd rail technology.

The LCR would also highlight that this is a Franchise commitment to deliver two trains per hour on the line on weekdays and Saturdays, which we would see as the first step in developing the line to the level we would like to see in the future. This would make the line more attractive to commuters and leisure travellers and help to boost both the North Wales and LCR economies, connecting people to employment, education and leisure opportunities.

In conclusion, we see this as a crucial important cross border service and is an essential in the process of transport decarbonisation - reducing car use in North East Wales and North West England where use of rail already lags behind the rest of the UK due to historically poorer service offers.

Based on the way we would see this line developing in the future, we feel it is critical that the delivery of the service upgrade to two trains an hour needs to be delivered as soon as practical to begin to realise the vision for the Borderlands line as a strategic cross border link.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liam Robinson".

Cllr Liam Robinson

**Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Transport Portfolio Holder
Chair of Transport Committee**

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
No 1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP

Telephone: [REDACTED]
E-mail: [REDACTED]

liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk

d. Mersey Dee Alliance (letter)

Councillor Stuart Whittingham
Vice Chair Mersey Dee Alliance
Upton Ward Councillor
Wirral Borough Council
Wallasey Town Hall
Brighton Street
Wallasey
CH44 8ED

John Larkinson,
Chief Executive, The Office of Rail and Road Regulation,
By email via Lee Robinson of Transport for Wales: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Larkinson

I am writing to express my full support for the application by Transport for Wales to increase the frequency the Bidston to Wrexham frequency from 1 train per hour to 2 trains per hour.

The Bidston to Wrexham line has for many years been neglected, there are however huge opportunities to develop the line to realise its potential as a vital cog in the regions public transport system.

Welsh Government and Transport for Wales recognise the potential and importance of the line, hence the investment in new rolling stock and a franchise commitment for 2 trains per hour. This service enhancement is a key commitment for Transport for Wales and is an important step towards the development of the North Wales Metro, providing more journey options for people across the region.

Liverpool City Region also recognises the importance of the line, having trialled battery technology for the new class 777 units that have been bought for the Merseyrail network. This brings the potential of direct electric trains from Wrexham to Liverpool, without the huge investment in full electrification, providing yet more journey options for people.

An attractive, convenient, and well connected integrated public transport network is key if we are to meet our climate goals, the Bidston to Wrexham line passes through numerous residential areas and employment centres. The increase to 2 trains per hour will be transformational for those communities and access to employment.

Moving more freight from road to rail is also vital to achieve our climate goals, I also give a clear commitment to strongly support measures that will create more capacity for freight on the Bidston to Wrexham line. Historically both passenger and freight services have comfortably co-existed. Sadly, the recent levelling up bid submitted by Flintshire County Council was unsuccessful. A successful bid would have seen enhanced freight siding provision at Penyfford for Hanson Cement. There is a clear commitment however to bid in future LUF rounds for the Hanson improvements. This, I believe, evidences that the needs of freight operators are being fully considered when developing the line.

Given the above, I look forward to your decision to grant track access to Transport for Wales for 2 passenger trains per hour.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Whittingham', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Stuart Whittingham

e. Dr James Davies MP, Vale of Clwyd (email)

From: DAVIES, James (MP) [REDACTED]
Sent: 18 November 2021 16:36
To: Lee Robinson <[REDACTED]>
Cc: WOODROW, Mark R [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Letter of Support for Transport for Wales to secure Track Access from the Office of the Rail and Road Regulator from GT360
Importance: High

Dear Lee,

I'm pretty sure I haven't been asked to support this agenda but I am happy to do so by way of indicating my approval of the GT360 letter. You may also wish to ask David Jones MP.

Kind regards,
James

--

Dr James Davies MP
Vale of Clwyd/Dyffryn Clwyd
PPS to the Department of Health & Social Care

House of Commons, Westminster, LONDON, SW1A 0AA
Ty'r Cyffredin, San Steffan, LLUNDAIN, SW1A 0AA

Tel/Ffôn: [REDACTED]
E-mail/E-bost: [REDACTED]
Web/Gwe: [REDACTED] | YouTube: [REDACTED]
Facebook: [REDACTED] | Twitter: [REDACTED] | Instagram: [REDACTED]

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f. Mr Justin Madders MP, Ellesmere Port and Neston (email)

From: MADDERS, Justin [REDACTED]

Sent: 19 November 2021 17:19

To: Lee Robinson [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: ORR 2 tph arbitration issue

Am happy to support the commitment to two trains per hour for passengers.

Regards