

P-06-1365 Re-open railway lines to connect the north and south of Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Tachwedd 2023
Petitions Committee | 13 November 2023

Reference: SR23/6946-2

Petition Number: P-06-1365

Petition title: Re-open railway lines to connect the north and south of Wales.

Text of petition:

Travelling between the North and the South of Wales is always a long journey, especially when using the railway. If a person is traveling between Bangor and Cardiff, one has to go outside of Wales on rail to be able to complete the journey. Wales needs to be connected internally by rail. The plan to do this would be to reopen the Bangor - Afon-wen and Aberystwyth to Carmarthen lines, and integrating them with the Cambrian railway, and the line from Carmarthen on to Cardiff.

What this petition is specifically asking for is:

- A Scoping and Feasibility study for the Bangor to Afon-wen Line
- Commitment to spend any funding for the railways from Westminster on reinstating the railway lines
- Develop a blueprint of the rail route between Bangor and Cardiff on the proposed route
- Look at other routes within Wales that would be beneficial on a national and local level to reopen

If we are looking to develop the infrastructure in Wales, and to use a greener method of travel, reinstating and reopening this railway would be a step in



the right direction, and would be beneficial for all the communities situated along the railway, as well as for Wales as a nation.

1. Background

Aside from the [Core Valleys Lines](#), which transferred into Welsh Government ownership in 2020, rail infrastructure is not devolved to Wales. Although the Welsh Government has powers to invest in rail it does not receive a Block Grant allocation.

There have been many arguments made suggesting [Welsh rail infrastructure](#) has been underfunded – most recently in relation to the [HS2 project being classed as an England and Wales project](#) by the UK Government. In 2021 the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee made a series of recommendations following its [inquiry into rail infrastructure in Wales](#). This also included a recommendation that HS2 should be classified as an England only project.

In 2019, while calling for the full devolution of rail infrastructure, the Welsh Government published '[A Railway for Wales](#)', setting out its vision for the rail network. This identified a number of strategic corridor developments which included north-south connectivity. It suggested “this may include upgraded lines, reopened lines and new lines”.

In a [2021 blog post](#), Transport for Wales (TfW) suggested the fact there is no railway linking north and south Wales without crossing the border “comes down to the geography and history of the nation”. It went on to say that reinstating former routes through mid or west Wales (as called for by the petitioner) would not be enough. It suggested:

...the routes would not be suitable for a north-south intercity service, because their meandering nature would mean journey times would be far longer than via the current route. As well as this, the former track beds of these routes were sold off and redeveloped in many places, making rebuilding of the old railway almost impossible.

The petitioner specifically calls for the Bangor to Afonwen and Aberystwyth to Carmarthen lines to be reopened. In its [2023-24 Business Plan](#), TfW states it will:

...continue to investigate measures that can be implemented to further protect the former rail corridor between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth and Bangor and Afon Wen. We'll work with local authorities and the [Corporate Joint Committees] to have the routes recognised within their Regional Transport Plans.

Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line

The feasibility of reopening the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line has been considered previously by the Welsh Government.

In 2018, it published a [feasibility study](#) which explored the costs and benefits of reinstating the line. It estimated a total cost of £775 million in 2017 prices.

In April 2023, [Professor Stuart Cole](#) suggested at a [Ceredigion County Council scrutiny committee meeting](#) that based on estimated costs “in his opinion, it was very unlikely the railway would be developed in the next 30-40 years”.

Bangor to Afonwen line

In 2020 the Welsh Government published a map showing its [ambitions for the North Wales mainline](#). It included committed work, short term aspirations and further proposals subject to more detailed business case development. This included links between Bangor and Porthmadog shown as ‘further proposals’.

As reported [in the media](#), this raised campaigners hopes of the [Bangor to Afonwen line](#) being reopened.

In 2020 the UK Government established the ‘restoring your railway fund’ to provide “funding for early-stage ideas to explore options to restore lost rail connections”. A June 2022 [update on the programme](#) shows the Welsh Government submitted a bid in relation to the Bangor-Afonwen railway, however this was unsuccessful (see Appendix C).

2. Welsh Government action

At the time of preparing this brief, no response to the petition from the Welsh Government has been received. Relevant Welsh Government action is included in the background section above.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The fact that those journeying from north to south Wales and vice versa have to travel through England has been raised on many occasions in the Senedd.

In November 2020, Llyr Gruffydd MS asked the then Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS what support the Welsh Government could provide for a scheme to reopen the Bangor to Afonwen line. In response, the then Minister referred to various studies taking place to explore connectivity in north and west Wales.

The reopening of the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line has also been raised on various occasions in the Senedd. In June 2022, Natasha Asghar MS asked for an update, to which the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS responded:

The Aberystwyth to Carmarthen Feasibility Study published in 2018 estimated the cost of reinstatement of the line at £775m. Following the publication of the study, we identified the west coast line, including Aberystwyth to Carmarthen, as a key strategic corridor development in our response to the UK Government's Williams Rail Review. This was part of a clear, comprehensive and conclusive case for full rail devolution and a fair funding settlement.

More recently, in October 2023 Delyth Jewell MS tabled a written question in relation to the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line. At the time of preparing this brief the question has yet to be answered by the Deputy Minister.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.