

“Next Stop St Clears” Support the bid for a railway station in St Clears

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 9 Mehefin 2020
Petitions Committee | 9 June 2020

Reference: RS20/12645-1

Petition Number: P-05-957

Petition title: “Next Stop St Clears” Support the bid for a railway station in St Clears

Text of petition:

We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to recommend St Clears to Network Rail as a location for a new railway station in Wales. St Clears and the surrounding communities will benefit greatly from reopening the railway station, closing the gap in the West Wales line and enabling more people to use the train. We believe a station in St Clears would bring many benefits including social inclusion, reducing carbon footprint and increased tourism in the area.

1. Background

St Clears station in Carmarthenshire opened in the 1850s and served the town of St Clears until it closed in 1964 following the Beeching Report.

Unlike in Scotland, responsibility for rail infrastructure is not devolved to Wales. Rather, funding rail infrastructure investment and Network Rail operations in both England and Wales is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport.



While the Welsh Government has powers to invest in rail infrastructure, it does not receive a block grant allocation for this and is classed as a **“third party promoter”** of infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government has invested significantly in rail infrastructure since devolution.

The UK Government provides funding via Network Rail to part fund new stations in England and Wales **through its New Stations Fund (NSF)**. Currently, £20m is available through NSF 3 which is open to any third party promoter **meeting the conditions of the fund**. The closing date for applications was 5 June.

This is the third iteration of the NSF. The competition for NSF 1 ran in January and February 2013 and funded five stations, including Pye Corner in Newport. The NSF 2 competition ran between August and November 2016, with Bow Street Station in Ceredigion receiving funding.

NSF 3 will fund up to 75% of the capital cost of construction of new or previously closed stations. The **number of stations funded** “will depend on how many can be shown to represent good value for money as well as their cost”.

NSF 3 was **announced by the Secretary of State for Transport** in January 2020 as part of a wider “Restoring Your Railway” fund of £500m to “drive forward reversal of the Beeching era cuts”.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government’s **2015 National Transport Finance Plan (NTFP)** committed to develop assessment criteria to produce a “a prioritised list of new station proposals for further consideration” and identified a long-list of 46 candidate stations, including St Clears.

Subsequently, the Welsh Government developed a three stage assessment process, which was described in **a June 2017 letter from the then Minister for Economy and Infrastructure to all Assembly Members** (PDF, 448KB).

In August 2019 the Minister provided an update on the process in **responding to a written question from Mark Isherwood MS**:

From an original list of 46 possible new stations considered by the assessment process, twelve were prioritised for stage 2 assessment and four of these 12 have been selected to be taken forward to a Stage 3 assessment. This will include undertaking a **WelTAG Stage One Report**.

business case and Network Rail’s Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) process.

The four station proposals taken forward were: Carno (Montgomeryshire); Ely Mill/Victoria Park (Cardiff); Deeside Industrial Park / Northern Gateway (Flintshire); and St Clears.

In an October 2019 response to a written question from Russell George MS, the Minister indicated that the St Clears proposal “is being taken forward through work on the South West Wales Metro. Funding has been allocated for this via the Local Transport Fund”.

The South West Wales, or Swansea Bay, Metro is in the early stages of development, with Transport for Wales working in conjunction with the Welsh Government and relevant local authorities.

The letter from the Welsh Government’s Deputy Director for Transport Strategy and Policy to the Chair of the Committee, responding to this petition, gives the latest update on the development process for new station proposals:

The Minister wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on 2 March about the UK Government’s “Restoring Your Railway investment” funding. The letter sets out Welsh Government’s priorities for the UK Government’s New Stations Fund (NSF) 3 these being Deeside, Carno, St Clears and Ely Mill/Victoria Park. Each of these has further feasibility assessment under way – assessment of development options for the South West Wales Metro in the case of St Clears.

In light of the unforeseen short NSF application window set out by the UK Government – the deadline is 5 June - Transport for Wales (TfW) have been commissioned to undertake further independent assessment and evaluation aiming at getting each of the four shortlisted priorities application-ready. The Minister has also requested that the report should identify solutions to timetabling and other operability issues identified to date by the rail industry, which will be asked by the UK Government to provide views on applications submitted to them.

The letter notes engagement by TfW with “the constituency MP and the St Clears Town Council” in early April. It continues:

The terms of reference for the TfW study include a requirement for engagement with stakeholders. In terms of St Clears, TfW’s independent

advisers have been told this should include the County Council, Town Council and elected representatives.

3. Welsh Parliament action

Proposals for new stations in general, and St Clears in particular, have been discussed in Plenary on a number of occasions during the Fifth Senedd.

Most recently, on 26 February 2020 the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates, responded to a question from Angela Burns MS on the St Clears station proposal, which referenced this petition. He said:

I can assure the Member that I am supportive of the application for St Clears station. It's one of four shortlisted across Wales for further assessment and potential nomination as a priority for UK Government investment. I think that it would assist in the UK Government showing that it is willing to invest more heavily in rail infrastructure in Wales, and, so, the project is being progressed under the south-west metro programme.

The Petitions Committee has also considered a number of other petitions calling for new or reopened railway stations:

- Include a Mynachdy and Talybont Station as Part of the Cardiff Metro Proposal (completed September 2017);
- Reopen Carno Station (completed in July 2018); and
- Reopen Crumlin Railway Station (completed November 2018).

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.