



# THE FUTURE OF RAIL IN WREXHAM

THE ASPIRATIONS OF  
WREXHAM COUNTY  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

This document sets out the aspirations of Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) in terms of rail services and infrastructure within the County Borough area. Wrexham County Borough Council is one of 22 unitary local authorities in Wales. This document is designed to inform both the local implementation document and the TAITH<sup>1</sup> Regional Transport Plan (RTP). The TAITH Regional Transport Consortium will author the RTP on release of the Wales Transport Strategy from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). Other constituent authorities in TAITH will share many of the same development wishes, in terms of rail, within their own areas. This document reflects the priorities in the Wales Spatial Plan and contributes to the corporate objectives of Wrexham County Borough Council, in particular “Improving Roads and Transport” and “Improve Health, Social Care and Well Being (including Sustainability)”. This document will be periodically revised as appropriate.

The Regional Transport Plan, much the same as the Local Transport Plan that it will in time replace, aims to identify improvements to sustainable transport modes thereby reducing the dependency on private and road based transport. This document will inform the local implementation strategy of sustainable transport (particularly in relation to rail) and will be complemented by similar strategies for Walking, Cycling, Buses and Taxis, Community Transport and Road Freight.

This strategy is designed to be complementary to other approved strategic documents, published and maintained by Wrexham County Borough Council, including;

- ✓ The Unitary Development Plan
- ✓ The Local Development Plan
- ✓ The Community Strategy
- ✓ The Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy

as well as regional strategies in which Wrexham County Borough Council have an interest such as the ‘Northwest Regional Economic Strategy 2006’ and ‘Strategy to Reality’ : Rail Passenger Council Feb 2005.

Railways running through the WCBC area are the Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury line (including Wrexham General, Ruabon and Chirk stations) and the Wrexham – Bidston “Borderlands” line (including Wrexham Central, Wrexham General and Gwersyllt stations). Wrexham County Borough Council does not own or operate railways or railway services but it will work to deliver sustainable benefits to the rail sector.

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<sup>1</sup> – TAITH is the regional transport consortium for North Wales, including Wrexham CBC, Flintshire CC, Denbighshire CC, Conwy CBC, Gwynedd CC and Anglesey CC.

## **1.0 Strategic Aims and Objectives**

- 1.1 To maintain and appropriately enhance the level of service provided by the All Wales Rail Franchise and its current Train Operating Company (TOC) – ARRIVA Trains Wales. This is to be achieved through consultation with Network Rail, DfT(Rail), WAG and the various local, regional and national partnerships within the rail sector.
- 1.2 To ensure that infrastructure, rolling stock and track is maintained and enhanced to the highest possible standard for services affecting the County Borough for the benefit of all, in terms of timeliness and adequate capacity, this would include appropriate line speed improvements.
- 1.3 To lobby for a direct rail service from Wrexham General station to London on a local, regional and national level, including supporting the WSMR<sup>2</sup> proposal.
- 1.4 To lobby for the inclusion of certain rail services within the existing bus concessionary travel scheme for the elderly, disabled and young, amongst other identified groups, by promoting appropriate rail services as a qualifying mode of transport.
- 1.4 To monitor and scrutinise changes and proposals relating to the delivery of rail services to best inform improvements, working together with the presiding TOC to deliver the best possible service for the passenger.
- 1.5 To maximise the movements of freight by rail and to inform the DfT(Rail) and Network Rail of opportunities as they become apparent.
- 1.6 To be aware of new residential and commercial developments, in particular those within reasonable distance of the railway lines. To ensure that relevant opportunities are taken to maximise the potential of such developments. To analyse opportunities which may exist in the award of planning permission to developers, specifically in relation to section 106 funding which may be forthcoming, to enhance rail linkages and the use of rail services by new and existing residents, via current and new stations. Where proposed developments are remote from the existing rail network due consideration is to be made for the introduction of appropriate connecting publicly accessible services.
- 1.7 Wrexham County Borough Council will continue to work together with the rail partnerships on the development of rail services and to maximise the potential for modal

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<sup>2</sup> - WSMR is the Wrexham – Shropshire – Marylebone Railway company analysing the potential for a direct service from Wrexham via Shrewsbury to London (Marylebone)

shift. The Chester - Shrewsbury Rail Partnership<sup>3</sup> meet four times per year with separate meetings involving officers and elected Members of each partner organisation, the Borderlands Steering Group<sup>4</sup> also meets four times per year as an officer group, it is hoped to facilitate meetings between elected Member of partner authorities in the near future.

- 1.8 The work of the Rail Users Associations for the two lines in the County Borough is acknowledged as being key to the on-going consultation process for improvement to rail services. The Council will maintain membership and representation of each of these organisations.

## **2.0 Specific Aims and Objectives**

- 2.1 To maximise the potential of both the Borderlands line (in collaboration with Flintshire County Council, Cheshire County Council and Merseytravel) and the Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury line (in collaboration with the Partnership Forum).
- 2.2 To work towards a robust solution to the single-track issue between Wrexham and Saltney Junction as this is felt to provide capacity constraints in the network, particularly since the introduction of the SPT<sup>5</sup>
- 2.3 To progress the recommendations of a report into the electrification of the Borderlands line, by Faber Maunsell, and lobby for national support of enhancements identified, through DfT(Rail), the WAG and neighbouring English authorities.
- 2.4 To work with the TOC to introduce Real Time Information (RTI) and generally improve timetable and other relevant information at all rail stations in the County Borough area.
- 2.5 To lobby and support the TOC on appropriate improvements to existing and potential future new stations, in particular CCTV installations at station and on train, to generally improve personal safety and security within the mode.
- 2.6 To identify and progress joint initiatives with other organisations with similar aims for the betterment and promotion of rail travel.

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<sup>3</sup> - membership consists of Chester City Council, Cheshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Oswestry Borough Council, Shrewsbury and Atcham, Shropshire County Council and Arriva Trains Wales.

<sup>4</sup> - membership consists of Merseytravel PTE (representing Wirral Metropolitan Council and Liverpool City), Cheshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Arriva Trains Wales and Wrexham County Borough Council.

<sup>5</sup> – SPT – Standard Pattern Timetable, introduced by Arriva Trains Wales on December 11, 2005, delivered an increase in the number of trains operated between Chester & Shrewsbury. The service is now hourly throughout the day Monday to Saturday.

- 2.7 To explore opportunities for improving access to stations including pedestrian and cycle routes, bus/rail interchanges, park and ride facilities and dedicated parking provision at certain stations, akin to the development of Ruabon Station – throughout the Wrexham County Borough Council area.
- 2.8 To further promote Ruabon Station as an effective, multi-modal interchange point by increasing the number of bus services which call at the station. To continue to support and inform future developments by the delivery of quality publicity in conjunction with the rail partnership. Also to move towards a more robust bus timetable for bus – rail linkages at Chirk Station.
- 2.9 To continue to raise awareness of rail services, particularly amongst communities and businesses around stations as well as through groups such as the Young Peoples Partnership.
- 2.10 To continue with the commitment of collaborative working with both Rail Partnerships, in relation to station adoptions, building on the success achieved at Chirk.
- 2.11 To work with partners on the improvement in station access and facilities, particularly in relation to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act .
- 2.12 To explore opportunities for rail to provide home to school/college transport to entitled students whilst also maximising service awareness to all, particularly those residing in the catchment areas of existing stations.
- 2.13 To support the development of schemes in outlying areas to further enhance opportunities for rail travel, an example being the Halton Curve project that could result in the provision of direct trains to Liverpool airport from the Wrexham and North Wales area.
- 2.14 To establish monitoring processes in order to measure passenger growth and levels of passenger satisfaction on both the Borderlands and Chester – Wrexham Shrewsbury line, in partnership with the TOC and Passenger Focus.

### 3.0 **Current Schemes and Background**

- 3.1 A report, commissioned by TAITH, the Welsh Development Agency, Cheshire County Council (CCC) and Merseytravel, into opportunities that exist for the enhancement of the Borderlands line, was presented to the Borderlands Partnership in March 2006 by Faber Maunsell Consultancy. The Borderlands line currently operates as a diesel service from

Wrexham Central Station through Wrexham General and Gwersyllt then north through Shotton into the Wirral, terminating at Bidston where connection to the Merseyrail Electrics services to Liverpool, West Kirby, Ellesmere Port and Chester is possible. Amongst the proposals analysed within the Faber Maunsell report is the lines part or complete electrification to enhance opportunities, it is considered that a barrier to increased ridership of the Borderlands service is the current requirement to change services at Bidston for Liverpool. This appraisal makes due consideration of issues including the City of Culture Status awarded to Liverpool for 2008, the ever improving status of Wrexham Town Centre as an attractor to businesses and leisure and shopping trips and the Deeside Industrial Estate as a growing area of employment. Electrification of all or part of this line would lead to improved efficiency, service frequency, seamless end-to-end journeys and capacity. Merseyrail had programmed feasibility for an extension of the electric south from Bidston to Woodchurch, prior to the instigation of this study. The Welsh Assembly Government (in July 2006), in partnership with Merseytravel, sponsored Network Rail to provide a costed appraisal of the electrification options identified by Faber Maunsell.

- 3.2 An improved Sunday service has been secured for the Wrexham – Bidston line, due to the advent of revenue support from Merseytravel the line will benefit from six return trains per Sunday, all year round, from December 11, 2005, previously the line had three return Sunday journeys during the Winter season, subsidy from Flintshire and Wrexham Councils towards such services is maintained.
- 3.3 The introduction of the SPT has seen the maintenance of the commercial service frequency (weekday hourly) for the Borderlands line whilst the Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury line saw an enhancement to an all day hourly service. The Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury line now forms part of two long distance services, these being the Holyhead – Cardiff and the Chester – Birmingham services, both at a two-hourly frequency.
- 3.4 The Chester – Shrewsbury Partnership, in February 2006, appointed Scott Wilson Railways to conduct a line study which will analyse options to address the single track between Wrexham and Saltney Junction, new station potential based on DfT (Rail) criteria, DDA compliance at stations, enhancement to interchanges and cycle facilities as well as the market for rail. This study, funded by TAITH, the Welsh Assembly Government, Arriva Trains Wales, Cheshire County Council, Shropshire County Council and Oswestry Borough Council, is due to be completed during August 2006, it will then be used as a strategic document to structure and steer future decisions.

## 4.0 **Future Aspirations**

### 4.1 **Rail Freight**

4.1.1 Wrexham County Borough Council is eager to ensure that maximum opportunities are taken to enable modal shift from private to public transport. In developing improved passenger rail services the Council feels that it gives a real choice to the traveller towards reducing congestion and the social and economic benefits that this brings both locally and nationally. We must strive to ensure that we exploit the opportunities in terms of integrating freight movement by rail to achieve improved sustainability as well as contributing towards ecological, environmental and economic targets, rail freight movements are being analysed as part of the Chester – Shrewsbury Study.

4.1.2 Wrexham County Borough Council will strive to maximise the opportunity that the rail network can provide in this regard. A recent trial (in 2005, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government) successfully demonstrated that timber could be moved from Mid Wales (Aberystwyth) to Kronospan (Chirk), this trial was successful in replacing a substantial number of HGV's from the road network. Wrexham County Borough Council would welcome the operation of a further trial for this and other initiatives.

4.1.3 Wherever possible, consideration will be given to the development of freight railheads to facilitate greater utilisation of the network. The Council will support appropriate and sustainable proposals made and strive to develop this facility. The Council will consider making funding bids to develop railheads as deemed necessary, regional need will be assessed in collaboration with partner agencies such as Taith, Northern Gateway and the Mersey Dee Alliance.

## **4.2 Sustainable Development**

- 4.2.1 Wrexham County Borough Council will strive to ensure that, so far as possible, new developments of both a commercial and residential nature are centred on existing sustainable routes, not exclusively rail. On receipt of such applications the Council shall consider enhanced utilisation of infrastructure. This could include opportunities to enhance linkages and parking facilities at stations to accommodate demand for residents to utilise the rail network for short, medium and longer distance travel.
- 4.2.2 Where residential developments are proposed in close proximity to existing rail stations consideration should be given by the Council to require the developer to offer would-be residents a form of rail travel concession to further enhance the potential for modal shift.
- 4.2.3 When considering developments on land in close proximity to the railway, Wrexham County Borough Council will consider whether the land should be reserved and protected for potential future rail infrastructure development. An example of this is the preserved status of land adjacent to the railway in Johnstown, which had been identified within an Oscar Faber report (1999) as a site for a potential new station on the Chester – Wrexham – Shrewsbury line. Further that Planning policy notes the importance of the protection of other such infrastructure.

## **4.3 Park & Ride**

- 4.3.1 Wrexham County Borough Council aspires to introduce a park & ride facility for the town of Wrexham at such time when considered appropriate. Wrexham County Borough Council will appraise the options to offer Park & Ride through the medium of rail. It is widely acknowledged that to operate an attractive park and ride service the user would require a minimum service frequency of twice hourly. It should be noted that the SPT<sup>3</sup> has not resulted in any service within the County Borough operating at a frequency any greater than hourly but that one proposal of the Borderlands Study is for a half hourly service throughout the day (except Sunday).
- 4.3.2 In the event of the Borderlands railway being upgraded to a 30-minute service frequency consideration should be made of developing an existing or new station to offer a park and ride service, particularly as the Borderlands service offers better penetration of Wrexham Town via Wrexham Central station.



## **4.4 Equalities**

- 4.4.1 Whilst refurbishment and renovation of existing station infrastructure is currently exempt from Disability Discrimination Act compliance, replacement infrastructure is required to meet the standards set. Wrexham County Borough Council will strive to achieve DDA compliance throughout the rail network to maximise modal shift and facilitate greater integration between modes, offering the opportunity for as many people as possible to make sustainable travel choices.
- 4.4.2 Wrexham County Borough Council will support the rail sector in addressing other issues within equalities such as use of other languages in publicity and assistance for persons who are, in ways other than mobility, disadvantaged.

## **4.5 Travel Planning**

- 4.5.1 Wrexham County Borough Council promotes the use of rail services, as well as public transport in general, in its Travel and Subsistence guidelines. Council Officers and Members consider utilisation of rail services when making business journeys, particularly over longer distances.
- 4.5.2 Wrexham County Borough Council will encourage businesses in the locality to consider utilising public transport for business purposes in the same way by raising awareness of rail services generally throughout the local community.
- 4.5.3 The provision of rail services and sustainable modes are a key aspect of the Council's Green Travel Plan. The Wrexham Shuttle, a demand responsive transport service for Wrexham Industrial Estate, can be pre-booked to call at Wrexham General Station for visitors and employees to travel sustainably from locations outside of the locality.

## **5.0 Consultation**

### **5.1 Internal**

Wrexham County Borough Council is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on proposals that affect them. It is recognised that there are a number of internal departments within the Council who need to maintain proactive links with the railway and its issues, all departments have been consulted in the authoring of this document and are to be continually engaged in ongoing enhancements as well as with issues and improvements.

## 5.2 External

Wrexham County Borough Council will continue to work with external stakeholders in the delivery of the most advantageous service level. With this in mind consultation will be held with partner organisations such as:

- ✓ Taith
- ✓ Welsh Assembly Government (as well as local Member representatives)
- ✓ DfT Rail
- ✓ Network Rail
- ✓ United Kingdom Government (as well as local Member representatives)
- ✓ Neighbouring Local Authorities
- ✓ Town and Community Councils in Wrexham CBC
- ✓ Train Operating Companies – Arriva Trains Wales and Virgin Trains
- ✓ Passenger Focus (new Rail Passenger Committee)
- ✓ Shrewsbury – Chester Rail Users Association
- ✓ Wrexham – Birkenhead Rail Users Association
- ✓ Local Rail Partnerships
- ✓ Welsh and North West Development Agencies, Advantage West Midlands
- ✓ Young Peoples Partnership
- ✓ Local Health Board
- ✓ Local Health Trust
- ✓ Health, Social Care & Well Being Group
- ✓ Further / Higher Educational Establishments (e.g. Yale and NEWI)
- ✓ Welsh Tourist Board (Tourism Partnership for North Wales)
- ✓ CBI and Chambers of Trade
- ✓ Federation of Small Businesses
- ✓ Trade Unions
- ✓ Environmental Lobby
- ✓ Countryside Council for Wales
- ✓ Environment Agency
- ✓ Transport 2000
- ✓ British Waterways
- ✓ Llangollen Railway Society
- ✓ Kronospan