

Risks

R1. An hourly Halton curve service between Liverpool and Chester is due to start in December 2018. Given that the new franchise will not begin until October 2018, at the earliest, there will be very little time to acquire the necessary additional rolling stock (assuming 4-car class 150s would be used initially, that is a requirement of 4 additional trains).

R2. The Great Western summer Saturday services to/from Pembroke Dock are due to be withdrawn in 2018ⁱ. The new Wales & Borders operator will need to provide significant extra capacity to and from Tenby from May 2019, which will require additional rolling stock. This is barely six months after the start of the new franchise.

R3a. Accessibility regulations come into force on 1st January 2020. This could make it even harder to source additional rolling stock to cover the requirements noted in R1 and R2, since accessible trains may not be available in time and anything else would be expensive to bring into service and only usable for a short time.

R3b. It should not be assumed that sufficient cascaded trains from other franchises will be available to enable the W&B fleet to be made compliant. The four franchisesⁱⁱ (including ATW) that have not yet announced plans to make their fleets compliant will between them have 74 units requiring replacementⁱⁱⁱ. This figure does not include ATW's uncomfortable class 150 units, which could be made compliant if refurbished. I have been able to identify less than 61 compliant DMUs becoming available^{iv} in the necessary timeframe.

R4. The combination of accessibility regulations and the future electrification of the ValleyLines raises serious concerns, given that the current DMUs in use on the ValleyLines (Pacers and class 150s) are not currently accessible. If the current fleet is made accessible, the owners may require a long lease to ensure they see a return on the investment. That rolling stock will be redundant once the ValleyLines are electrified (Pacers and class 150s are inappropriate for limited-stop services or any journeys over 1 hr in duration).

R5. There is a risk that the Welsh Government's specification for the franchise may require a sub-optimal service pattern. For example, as pointed out by SARPA^v, if the government insists on hourly Holyhead-Cardiff services, opportunities for more lucrative services may be lost due to a lack of train paths or resources. For example, these might be at the expense of Holyhead-Birmingham through-services. Perhaps more seriously, regular Holyhead-Cardiff services damage the case for electrification of the north Wales coast line (they would have to be diesel trains since the marches line from Newport to Chester would not be electrified). Reducing the Holyhead-Cardiff service to 3 express services each way daily would allow maximum through trains from

north Wales to attractive destinations such as Crewe, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London, all of which could support electric trains.

Priorities for the franchise specification

P1. I believe that the current thinking is that the new franchise will be another long-term contract (a 10-15 year term). This approach has its advantages, but it is essential that flexibility is built-in so that changes can be made to cover unforeseen circumstances and to take advantage of any opportunities that arise. For example, it should be possible to introduce additional services and/or rolling stock on fair terms for both the operator and the authority funding the service.

P2. With a long-term franchise, it should also be recognised that the priorities will shift over the course of the contract; the overall theme however should be one of continuous improvement.

P3. At the start of the franchise, the priority should be to get the basics right. This should include the following, most of which are intended to ensure that the railway operates in the interests of passengers:

P3.1 Addressing the immediate requirements for additional rolling stock outlined in R1. and R2.

P3.2 Keeping railway staff on-side, in order to avoid strike action as seen on Southern over the past few months (see also SARPA^{vi}).

P3.3 Ensuring sufficient capacity is provided on every service to avoid passengers having to stand for more than 10 minutes on peak suburban services and not at all on off-peak and longer-distance services.

P3.4 Ensuring that rolling stock of an appropriate type is diagrammed for every service (eg. no suburban trains on regional or regional express services) and that the fleet has sufficient 'slack' to ensure substitutions for less-comfortable types are extremely rare

P3.5 A suitable member of staff should be available to assist all passengers at all times while on-board, checking and selling tickets (this means either that trains must allow free passage along their entire length or there needs to be a member of staff in each part of the train).

P3.6. Trains should not divide in service (as Cambrian trains do at Machynlleth) unless they allow free passage along their entire length.

P3.7 Trains that serve platforms shorter than the train must allow free passage from every carriage to at least one usable door.

P3.8 Establishing basic standards for stations, including a fully-enclosed waiting room at all stations used for interchange between trains (except where the connection is guaranteed to be held and the wait time is less than 10 minutes) or any interchange between trains and buses. Ideally, toilets will also be provided at these stations (perhaps jointly with local authorities, as public toilets). Station toilets must be free-to-use.

P3.9 Service levels on Sundays should be the same as Saturdays.

P4. Having established a basic level of service, the focus should shift to incremental improvements, optimising and/or adding routes to attract modal shift away from private cars. Possibilities include:

P4.1 Provision of direct services from the north Wales coast to Birmingham (ie. via Crewe not via Wrexham). Perhaps these could run through to London.

P4.2 Addition of regular fast Cardiff-Carmarthen services (avoiding Swansea) followed by linespeed improvements with an eventual aim of making these time-competitive with driving.

P4.3 Enhanced services to Milford Haven (hourly, preferably alternating between a Swansea service and the fast Cardiff service proposed in 4.2) and Fishguard (all trains extended to Swansea or Cardiff, including two additional services to reduce the maximum gap between trains to three hours).

P4.4 Increased frequencies on the Conwy valley line (to every two hours) and Heart Of Wales Line (at least 8 trains per day, 4 stopping and 4 semi-fast, providing towns such as Llandrindod with faster services)

P4.5 A new passing loop between Whitland and Tenby, permitting an hourly service between the latter and Swansea.

P4.6 Creation of new line from Bangor to Caernarfon, with passive provision for extension further south. I have read unconfirmed reports that Arriva's bid for the current franchise originally included this. I hope the new franchise will include this and other prospects denied by the 'no growth' franchise.

P4.7 Reopening the mothballed lines from Gobowen to Oswestry, Blaenau Ffestiniog to Trawsfynydd and Gaerwen to Amlwch.

P4.8 Building a new link between Gowerton and the Swansea District Line via Gorseinon to provide services to Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen and speed up journeys to the Heart Of Wales Line.

P4.9 Continued introduction of additional rolling stock.

P4.10 A Swansea metro, including routes to Swansea Fabian Way from Seven Sisters and Aberdare/Hirwaun, Swansea Fabian Way to Swansea High Street via the Swansea District Line and trams from Swansea to Mumbles and Morriston.

P5. If the franchise runs for 15 years, there may be opportunities for transformational improvements. Some examples are included, but these are areas where the flexibility mentioned in P1 becomes really important. These could include construction of new railway lines in Network Rail's Control Period 8, such as:

P5.1 from Caernarfon to Porthmadog

P5.2 a brand new A470 parallel route from the Merthyr Tydfil area to Newtown through Brecon and Builth Wells

P5.3 from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth

Appendix: Glossary

ATW: Arriva Trains Wales

DMU: Diesel Multiple Unit (self-propelled carriages)

EMU: Electric Multiple Unit (self-propelled carriages)

LHCS: Locomotive Hauled Coaching Stock (train formed of un-powered coaches pulled/pushed by a separate locomotive)

ROSCO: Rolling Stock Leasing Company

ⁱ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583945/first-great-western-service-level-commitment-3a-22032015.pdf

ⁱⁱ These are ATW, Chiltern Railways, London Midland and East Midlands Trains.

ⁱⁱⁱ The trains in question are class 121 (slam-door units used by Chiltern), Pacers (class 142 and 143, used by ATW) and class 153s (single-car units used by ATW, London Midland and East Midlands Trains and being withdrawn before 2020 by Great Western, Northern and Greater Anglia).

^{iv} 14 class 156, 17 class 170, 8 class 172 and 22 class 185. The latter fleet is due for release between November 2019 and March 2020, so the actual number of units available by the accessibility deadline will be less than stated here. Dates of release for the other fleets listed here are not known, so may also not be available until after the deadline.

^v Page 8 of the document here: <http://www.sarpa.info/pdf%20archive/sarpa71.pdf>

^{vi} Pages 2-3 of the document here: <http://www.sarpa.info/pdf%20archive/sarpa71.pdf>