

P-05-820 Don't take Neath off the main railway-line – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 13.06.18

The people of Neath wish to thank the Committee for considering our Petition. In line with procedure, we would like to express our specific concerns surrounding the proposal.

Our concerns are centred on the following aspects:

1. The proposal to remove Neath from the main railway line was included in a piece of work commissioned by the Welsh Government. The people of Neath would like to thank the impartial Research Services and Petitions Committee for uncovering this information
2. The statements by Minister Ken Skates are welcomed, but we feel that they have been stronger since the petition gained thousands of signatures. Therefore, we are of the belief that the petition deserves to be considered fully in recognition of those who signed
3. Our concerns are based on the fact that this proposal fits into a wider regional plan; that being the Swansea Bay Metro scheme
4. This scheme has been supported by the Labour Leader of Swansea Council, Rob Stewart
5. It is clearly evidenced that Swansea West Labour MP, Geraint Davies is supportive of the plans. These plans “including a rerouting of the Great Western Mainline, which could see train journeys between Cardiff and Swansea of just 30 minutes.”
6. Independent research conducted by Aberafan Cllr Nigel Hunt has further reinforced the position of Geraint Davies MP
7. Geraint Davies MP, as seen in the minutes of the Welsh Affairs Committee in Westminster, asked about the straightening of the line five times. I attach photos of these in the evidence. For your reference, please see question(s) 111, 112, 116, 117 and 119
8. These discussions range from December 2017 to 14th March 2018, signalling that the matter is still very much in contention
9. The straightening of the line was very specifically mentioned in the Welsh Affairs Report of May 15 2018.
10. Neath station is a gateway to the western valleys. This is an area of stunning beauty in need of economic renewal not increasing marginalisation.
11. Since the petition was launched and in spite of the Welsh Minister's statements, the Secretary of State for Wales has agreed to discuss the

proposal with Professor Barry and the UK Parliament's Welsh Affairs select Committee have asked for the line-straightening to be considered further

12. Professor Barry is a serious transport academic and we certainly do not disrespect him, but have fundamental concerns over the re-routing of the track
13. Our greatest concern, is that, had residents not raised concerns via the Committee, these discussions may well have continued unchallenged
14. We the people of Neath and the 10,000 people who signed the Petition, would request that consultation is taken with a matter that is important to the community
15. Neath is the second busiest station in South West Wales. It is fundamental to our economic development. The station serves the people of Neath in many different ways; from commuters, to concert goers and sports fans. It not only allows people to travel to and from Swansea and Cardiff, but it also allows commuters from outside of Neath to travel to Neath and contribute to our local economy
16. Residents from Skewen and Cardiff have also noted their concerns about these proposals. The proposal to remove Neath from the mainline will not solely affect the people of Neath, but will also affect people in and around the area who use the line
17. Commuters travel along the Swansea to Cardiff and Swansea to London Paddington line for work and taking Neath off the mainline would be disruptive to their travels and add time onto their journeys
18. You can understand, that as long as these discussions are circulating, there is potential for the proposals to come into fruition. As a result, we the people of Neath would request that proper research and consultation is conducted before plans go any further

Yours sincerely,

Bethan Phillips,

On behalf of the activists of the campaign to Keep Neath on Track.

Evidence:

Welsh Affairs Committee, 5th December 2017.

- Mark Hopwood:** I am happy to pick that up. There has been some work done within Wales and locally, particularly in south Wales, about a Swansea Bay Metro. I know Mr Flynn does not like me talking about history, but it might be useful just to know the railway from Cardiff to Swansea was built to go via Neath because the people in Neath were very keen to have it there, but that does add quite considerable distance and time to the journey. If you were to go as the crow flies from Port Talbot straight into Swansea, with line speed improvements you might be able to reduce the journey time to as close as 30 minutes. That work has been done by a number of interested parties within Wales but, of course, building new railway lines is very, very expensive and brings all sorts of challenges. You asked the question so that is the answer.
- Q111 **Geraint Davies:** To pick up on this, would you support the idea of an electrified Swansea Metro that had that realignment along the original Brunel straightened line? Have you any idea what it would cost? I know you said it would cost a lot. Some people are saying this system would cost £1 billion, but I would not know. Do you have any idea?
- Mark Hopwood:** I do not have an idea of costs. I have been made aware of the project and I have spoken to some of the people in Wales who have done some of the work, but I have not seen detailed costs.
- One of the realities with railways is there are always far more ideas to develop than there is money to fund it, but in principle clearly I would welcome anything that improves the journeys for our customers. I know that many of our customers find the journey time to Swansea to take longer than they would like and that slight diversion at the end of the journey clearly does not help. Simply, yes, I would welcome it but equally I recognise that politicians and Government have many priorities for limited funds, so at the end of the day I guess this will have to take its place.
- Q112 **Geraint Davies:** You will know that the case against electrification was built upon the idea that there was no marginal journey time saving between Swansea and Cardiff. As part of the package there was straightening of the railway to save half the time, 30 minutes, because we are only saving 15 minutes between London and Cardiff after all. Do you think that would be a powerful argument alongside the City Deal and the extra demand to make the business case for the straightening and electrification to Swansea?

Welsh Affairs Committee, 5th December 2017. Swansea West Labour MP discusses possibility of straightening the line with for the Swansea Metro

- 23:52
data.parliament.uk
- Q168 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** In light of cancellation of electrification, you said about being open about revisiting or looking at different options and working with the Welsh Assembly. I was wondering if you were aware of some work by Professor Mark Barry from Cardiff University about the proposal for a Swansea metro system. Obviously, you have only had a week in post.
- Joseph Johnson:** I am familiar in very high-level terms with the ideas that the Welsh Government are developing around how they can use the new devolved system. I understand that the Swansea metro system is one idea that is being looked at alongside others.
- Q169 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** My colleague Geraint Davies is not here today. He has written to you to ask you to consider that as well. If you could, that would be great.
- If you were going to look at a different route, can you talk us through any work that would be involved in changing a route specifically from Cardiff to Swansea? Do we need to change the route from Cardiff to Swansea?
- Brian Etheridge:** As I understand it, the proposal is that you would reroute the existing Great Western route to come into Swansea docks instead of taking that huge turn north to Neath, then back around south-west into Swansea. On the face of it, that is feasible and could be attractive. From our perspective, we would worry about suddenly having a very fragmented service to Swansea. The downside is if that were the new station in Swansea going back out to stations like Llanelli, it would take even longer, or if you had two stations you would suddenly be disconnected. Potentially, it is something we would look at but, on the face of it, it is difficult to understand the benefits that that would bring.
- Q170 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** It is also to look at using the best service as well, and maybe a tram service that would integrate into that to service Neath and then Llanelli and further out.
- Brian Etheridge:** Indeed. We have been conscious of a number of proposals that would effectively cut out Neath. At the moment, Neath and Swansea are two of the busiest stations there, so obviously it would be something in terms of the overall transport provision that we would be worried about.
- Q171 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Would you be able to support the Welsh Assembly Government in looking at a feasibility study for this to enable it to move forward as soon as possible?
- Brian Etheridge:** I think it is a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government, but as we have stated before, we are more than ready to assist people to look at the options.
- Q172 **Glyn Davies:** Minister, it is a bit unkind to ask you to indulge in any blue-sky thinking. Mind you, it might be the best time to do it when you are starting in the new role. I think the position of the Government is that we see new battery technology and alternative fuels—that probably means hydrogen—being used to power trains in the future. Can you give us any idea of what your thinking is on these technologies? Are there any alternative technologies in mind that you

Welsh Affairs Committee, 16th January 2018.

Geraint Davies MP supporting rail franchise

<https://www.geraintdaves.org.uk/stories/2018/01/14/transport-secretary-chris-grayling-urged-to-back-1bn-swanea-bay-metro>

Leader of Swansea Council supports this:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/swansea-chief-executive-admits-council-13718291>

Welsh Affairs Committee report May 15 2018;

54. In light of recent developments, including the cancellation of electrification and the devolution of some responsibilities to the Welsh Government, we recommend that the UK Government, Network Rail and the Welsh Government commit to developing a revised route study for Wales over the next 12 months. This revised study should examine all options for improving the South Wales railway. Before committing to any proposals, it will be important to ensure that they are cost effective, offer good value for the public purse and draw on lessons learned from the Great Western Programme.

55. If the track between Cardiff and Swansea were to be straightened to enable trains to run at increased speeds, the case for electrification of this route could be strengthened. We encourage the UK and Welsh Governments to work with Network Rail to explore the viability of this option. The outcome of this work can then inform the route study process.

56. We were interested in the proposal by Professor Mark Barry for a Swansea Bay Metro, particularly in light of the increased demand that may result from the Swansea Bay City Deal. This idea is still at an early stage, but merits further exploration. We recommend that the Department for Transport and Network Rail engage with the Welsh Government and establish a working group to explore the options in more detail. This group should report back by the end of 2018. If the group considers the proposal viable, it should then seek to develop a business case for taking the work forward.

Welsh Affairs Committee, 14th March 2018.

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Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)

9. What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on future investment in the railway network in Wales. [904282]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns)

I hold regular meetings and discussions with the Transport Secretary and his ministerial team to make the case for investment in Wales' railway infrastructure. I am determined to drive forward improvements to Wales' rail connectivity for the benefit of our passengers, commuters and businesses.

Geraint Davies

I am losing my voice, Mr Speaker. HS2 will cost £56 billion and 20,000 Welsh jobs. For £1 billion, we could build two and a half miles of HS2 or halve the time between Cardiff and Swansea and have an electrified Swansea metro. Why is the Welsh Secretary not objecting to the £1 billion cut from Network Rail to our rail infrastructure and investing in Wales instead?

Mr Speaker

The hon. Gentleman has done very well, considering he has lost his voice.

**14th March 2018, Swansea West Labour
MP re-suggests cutting journey down to
benefit Swansea Metro**

Alun Cairns

I point out to the hon. Gentleman that HS2 is a UK scheme and provides an opportunity for significant connectivity benefits with north Wales. He refers to the Swansea metro project, which offers interesting opportunities, and I am happy to say that I am meeting Mark Barry, the project's architect, in the coming weeks.

Swansea Councillors supporting proposal:

<https://www.swansealabourcouncillors.org/swansea-labour/swansea-labour-backs-plans-for-swansea-metro/>