



Welsh Liberal Democrats
Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru



The Road to Rail

Getting Wales on the right track

Transport Consultation Document
Autumn Conference 2009

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This paper has been approved for publication by the Welsh Liberal Democrats' Policy Committee as a Consultative Paper for debate at the Party's Conference.

Not all of the questions asked by the consultation will become party policy and no question or statement should be taken as being Welsh Liberal Democrat policy unless it has been approved by Conference.

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Published and promoted by J Foster on behalf of Welsh Lib Dems, both at Blake Court, CF10 4DW.



Dear Colleague,

Since I took over the Transport portfolio in the Welsh Liberal Democrats earlier this year, I have been relishing the challenge of trying to find solutions for the massive problems that Wales has faced in terms of chronic under-investment in our rail industry and over prioritisation of road building.

From the very top to the very bottom, it is time for an overhaul. The Department for the Economy and Transport within the Welsh Assembly Government is rightly spending the bulk of its energies on the economy, leaving transport as a very poor relation. In a written question to Ieuan Wyn Jones earlier this year, I discovered that his department does not even know how many of its officials, if any, have practical, professional experience in the transport industry.

Without an overhaul of transport, to help people out of their cars and onto the rails, we will never make the progress we need to on tackling climate change. That is why I am proposing that transport should become part of an enlarged Department for the Environment, with a Deputy Minister responsible solely for public transport. We must put improving public transport at the heart of Government and stop it continuing to be a poor relation.

We need a change at other levels of Government too. In tight financial circumstances, we must find clever ways to save money without slashing services. The Assembly Government's own Ministerial Advisory Group on transport recognises that there is too much in the way of repetition of services and roles within transport delivery. I am proposing that we scrap the four current Strategic Transport Authorities and coordinators, and create new organisations, owned and operated by Local Authorities who will have responsibility for all transport provision and organisation in Wales. These will move transport closer to communities while saving huge costs through cutting repetition. Local Authorities will take on far more responsibility, while allowing them to work with their neighbours will lead to more practical solutions to regional transport problems.

This paper sets out a major shift in direction: From road to rail. I am quite clear that some of the commitments that we will make will cost significant amounts of money. Now more than ever, we must show how we will afford everything we do. I am quite clear that along side the administrative savings mentioned above, we will make significant savings from the road budget in order to reinvest in rail. Road costs have ballooned in recent years and we must bring them under control in favour of more environmentally friendly transport. As we move towards the next election, we will set out in full the costs of all our plans.

I hope you find this paper interesting and inspiring. I also hope if you have suggestions for changes or additions for our final set of policy proposals, you will make them clear, either during the debate in Wrexham, or at a later date by post or email. I am happy to answer any questions from anyone about this paper and look forward to debating how we build the road to rail.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Randerson AM

Welsh Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for the Economy, Transport and Education

Financing our plans

This document sets out the proposed priorities for the Welsh Liberal Democrats in the area of transport at the next set of elections and beyond. At the moment there is considerable uncertainty about the state of the public finances in the coming years so it is currently impossible to provide full costings for the priorities contained in this document. As always, our final manifestos will be thoroughly costed and affordable.

This document sets out plans for a significant decrease in the bureaucratic structures associated with transport in Wales. This is likely to save significant amounts of money to redirect into our priority areas. On top of this, we are very clear that we wish to see a rebalancing of the transport budget away from road building and towards a vastly improved public transport system with rail at its heart.

We are concerned by the past record of some PFI projects for capital transport investment but recognise the very difficult funding issues facing Wales and the UK over coming years. We will consider the use of alternative models of Public-Private Partnerships to finance infrastructure improvements but will always ensure that it can be demonstrated that it offers genuine value for money and quality services.

These plans will therefore be affordable by a combination of more effective use of public private partnerships, significant savings within the current transport budgets and a rebalancing of the roads budget towards rail and public transport. As with all policy areas, we will set out the full costs of our priorities well ahead of the next election.



I. Introduction

I.1 Wales is thoroughly disconnected. It is a nation that was given a transport infrastructure based on export. Exporting coal and the products of industry, exporting the talent and minds of our young people, exporting the responsibility we all share for a green and sustainable future to the Westminster Government. We must change the way Wales is linked together and the way it is linked to the world, not based on a dogmatic, nationalist agenda, but on one which allows the development of our economy and communities, our lives and our futures.

I.2 For too long, the quick fix of patching up our road system has been irresistible to Government. Short term benefits of road development have blocked the need for a proper public transport and freight system based with rail at its foundation.

I.3 For too long, the word integration has meant the wrong thing. It has meant a bus stop by a car park, a rail station near a motorway, a supermarket by a bypass. This has to change.

I.4 The politics of transport are completely askew. The Department of Economy and Transport within the Assembly Government is too focused on road building. For too long, transport has been under-prioritised, and within that rail, bus, walking and cycling have been further neglected. The Welsh Lib Dems would increase the attention paid to sustainable transport, especially railways.

I.5 Earlier this year, the UK Government announced the electrification over the next decade of the rail route between London Paddington and Swansea. This is a welcome start, but far more attention and investment must be paid to electrification, particularly as a means of increasing economic development and reducing our environmental impact. The Federal Party has committed to the almost total electrification of the UK rail system by 2040, a policy we wholeheartedly support.

I.6 Under a Lib Dem Government at Westminster, we will see Wales put on the right tracks to almost total railway electrification, but we must also make plans for what we would do in Government here in Wales, under less impressive transport policy at Westminster. The Assembly Government can invest in further electrification and service building. The Valley Lines network is a prime example, as Network Rail has acknowledged electrification is highly possible with investment from WAG.

I.7 The Welsh Assembly Government's own Ministerial Advisory Group recently published a report on transport policy. It is deeply concerned about the complexity of organisational arrangements for overseeing the transport network in Wales. The current system has unnecessary tiers of bureaucracy in management. It concludes that costs are escalating out of control with little delivered as a result. We must reform the system, both at Ministerial, but also at regional and local level in order to ensure that expertise is maximised, and as much spending as is possible is used for the services themselves rather than complex organisational and bureaucratic processes.

2. Successes and failures since devolution

2.1 During the 2000-2003 partnership government, the Welsh Lib Dems delivered:

- The introduction of free bus fares for elderly and disabled people from April 2002, following the introduction of a co-ordinated Welsh concessionary fares scheme the previous year.
- Introduced 'safe routes to school' schemes and increased investment in walking and cycling routes
- Adopted a surge of investment in subsidies for bus travel by £6m, with a particular focus on rural areas.
- Concentrated new road building on reducing congestion on the existing trunk road network.
- Supported the establishment of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise covering all of Wales

2.2 Since 2003, the movement from road to rail and other forms of sustainable transport has slowed significantly. With the notable exceptions of the recent announcement of main line electrification and the new Ebbw Vale services, Government has done little to end our dependency on roads. The prolonged and chaotic process over the proposed Gwent Levels motorway and the spending of £15m of preparatory work on the doomed project has left many people seriously concerned about the ability of the One Wales Government to deliver large scale transport projects. The subsidy for the Cardiff to Ynys Mon flight has smacked of political interest rather than effective national policy making.

2.3 The biggest disappointment has been in the lack of strategic action on rail. Network Rail have signified their ability and willingness to go for more electrification but have qualified this by saying that this can only be delivered with financial commitments from the Welsh Assembly Government.

2.4 The under-investment in the Heart of Wales line since the formation of the Labour-Plaid Government has led to accusations that the Deputy First Minister has been prioritising investment in areas of political interest to Plaid Cymru rather than in areas that require the most urgent investment.

3. Creating the politics of public transport

3.1 The Welsh Lib Dems will remove the responsibility for transport from the Department for Economy and Transport and place it under the control of the Department for the Environment and Sustainability. This will send a clear signal that transport is at the heart of the sustainability agenda.

3.2 We need political leadership to make the switch from road to rail so we would create the post of Deputy Minister for Sustainable Transport within the new Environment and Transport Department. This Minister would provide the political leadership to ensure that the Welsh Assembly Government puts sustainable transport at the centre of Government.

3.3 We will ensure that the new Government department develops and recruits the talent that it needs to put things right for sustainable and public transport – especially rail. Currently the Department for Economy and Transport do not even know how many of their officials have previous professional experience in the rail industry. Much of this talent is within Welsh and UK industry, but we will make full use of the skills of transport experts from across the world if necessary, while ensuring we build up home grown expertise for the future.

3.4 We will develop and maintain good relations with the Department of Transport in Westminster, under whatever political colour it functions. Much of what we wish to achieve will only be possible with support and co-operation between Westminster and the Assembly.

3.5 We will build on current Welsh Liberal Democrat policy by trialling a different management structure on designated rural rail routes and using the experiences and expertise gained to reduce future costs across the network. A separate rail company should be created with its directors representing its shareholders – Network Rail, WAG and the Train Operating Company holding the Wales and Borders Franchise. This separate company would employ a single, independent management team to undertake all aspects of operations and maintenance on the designated lines utilising best practice appropriate for a rural railway rather than a main line anywhere in the UK. This has the ability to substantially bring down costs.

3.6 Rolling Stock Leasing has proved incredibly expensive to the tax payer and TOCs since privatisation, with much anger directed at the large profits made by the rolling stock companies. The UK Department of Transport has now set up its own Rolling Stock Leasing Company to overcome the expense and cash flow problems within the original companies. We will investigate as a matter of urgency whether WAG should look at purchasing new and second hand rolling stock for use in Wales rather than continuing to lease expensive stock at inflated prices. Interestingly, some South Wales Local Authorities currently own diesel trains which they lease to Arriva Trains Wales for a nominal amount.

3.7 The Wales and Borders franchise was set up as a “no frills” service. This meant that even though they were the lowest bidder, Arriva Trains Wales were still told by the Department for Transport to shave another 5% of their projected costs. We are informed that all bidders at the time warned that the resources would not allow services to cater for known demand let alone expected standards with the anticipated rise in numbers – especially on the Valley Lines. This lies at the root of the current problems. The DfT accepted this and expected WAG to meet any additional costs. WAG now frequently faces high costs from Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales for requested upgrades and service enhancements because of the earlier squeeze placed on these organisations by the DfT. We would follow the professional advice that WAG urgently needs to renegotiate the amount of money received from the DfT for the franchise as it is significantly too low to meet expected standards and the extra costs that WAG is forced to meet is having a detrimental effect on the entire Welsh budget.

3.8 Wales is currently facing a significant overstretch in the amount of resources and talent it has within Local and National Government in order to drive and implement effective transport planning and projects. There is currently a perception that contractors and consultants always have the upper hand when dealing with Local Authorities and WAG because of the lack of professional experience. WAG’s Ministerial Advi

sory Group came to a very similar conclusion about this problem, and particularly the problems of over-bureaucratic systems and the costs associated with them.

3.9 There are currently 4 regional transport consortia, sharing responsibility for transport with the 22 Welsh Local Authorities. There is an urgent need to rationalise the number of organisations with responsibility without centralising powers over transport which would have a detrimental effect on dealing with local needs. We would therefore envisage a fundamental reform of organisational structure. All of the local transport responsibilities of local authorities (of all departments) should be transferred to Joint Transport Authorities (JTAs) each represented and owned by two or three neighbouring local authorities with common transport network interests. All the areas that a Local Authority covers need not be in the same JTA. There are likely to be a total of 7 or 8 JTAs rather than the current 22 local authorities, 4 regional transport consortia and 4 regionally-based transport co-ordinators.

3.10 The new Joint Transport Authorities would plan, procure and market local and long distance bus services, community transport, home to school transport and social services transport for all the local authorities in their area by way of Service Level Agreements. They will be owned and driven by the local authorities themselves. As well as taking on much of the current roles performed by local authorities, the JTAs will also manage and monitor the operation of the services on a day to day basis but, unlike now, from a greater number of locations closer to the communities and people served. We would end up with a system that is cheaper to run - allowing more money to be used in transport infrastructure and frontline services, less complex, and allowing talent to be developed and utilised. All this will be achieved with a system that is more, not less, based on the Liberal Democrat principles of Localism.



4. Investing in Rail

4.1 The Assembly Government needs to be clear and open with the public about the future of transport in Wales, particularly in tough economic times. Under Welsh Lib Dem plans, we will undertake a large scale rebalancing of the transport budget away from road building and towards sustainable transport solutions with the rail network at their core. The public understand the urgent need to cut emissions, but will only accept curbs to spending on roads if it is balanced with effective and large scale investment in fast, affordable public transport.

4.2 We will seek to build on UK Government plans to electrify the route from Paddington to Swansea by investing in electrification of large sections of the Valley Lines network, in partnership with Network Rail. This would massively aid the economic development of some of Wales' poorest areas, by providing better links and access to business and investment.

4.3 The electrification strategy should be accompanied by the electrification of the diversionary routes from Swindon to Newport via Gloucester and Cardiff to Bridgend via Barry and the reinstatement of the double track between Swindon and Kemble.

4.4 The electrification of the Valley Lines network could occur in 2014 when the majority of diesel rolling stock will require replacement anyway. Although the business case for electrifying some of the outlying sections is poor, a practical long term strategy for each line on the network should be put in place with the medium-term goal of developing the network into a Metro system.

4.5 We will seek to support the electrification of the Wrexham to Bidston route in conjunction with the local and regional authorities of the Merseyside area, if it proves feasible.

4.6 We will, as a matter of urgency, create a database of disused railway lines, station and depot sites and ensure that consideration is given to potential future use before permission is given to their development for non-railway purposes. While the re-opening of disused railway routes will be difficult in the current economic climate, without compromising enhancements to the existing network, the possibility of this occurring in the future, where there is economic and environmental potential, should remain.

4.7 We will invest in services on the Heart of Wales line, which has been scandalously abandoned by the current Government. We believe that it should be possible to lengthen trains, reduce journey times and enhance the frequency of services providing that the line is managed in an alternative and innovative manner without compromising safety.

4.8 We will ensure that Ebbw Vale is connected to Newport by rail as soon as possible.

4.9 We will overcome the polluting and dangerous congestion along the M4 on the approaches to Cardiff and Newport by facilitating additional rail capacity, stations and park & ride sites, to Metro standards, providing the new housing developments in the area with an efficient way to commute into Cardiff, Newport, Bristol and Gloucester. We will support the proposed Gwent Parkway station, at the site of the current Severn Tunnel Junction, which already has platforms long enough to accommodate inter-city trains and is very close to the underused M48. This will additionally reduce the number of motorists, from a wide area, seeking to park in Newport before using longer distance rail services to Birmingham, Nottingham and the South Coast of England.

4.10 We believe that in rural areas there are a number of former stations, such as Carno on the Cambrian line, which now have a strong economic case for re-opening. This will be balanced against the additional time required in the timetable for the extra stop.

4.11 We will support local authorities, either alone or in collaboration, in creating tram or light rail networks where good economic cases can be made and will assist them in overcoming financial restraints.

4.12 We will work, as a matter of urgency, with Local Authorities to identify and acquire appropriate sites in close proximity to rail stations to be developed as park and ride facilities. It is scandalous that substantial communities like Merthyr Tydfil and its surrounding area have virtually no opportunity for residents to use park and ride when travelling towards major conurbations.



5. Reducing the reliance on road

5.1 We must balance the needs of road users with the consequential environmental impact by encouraging sustainable forms of transport and increasing the provision of public transport. We will always differentiate between rural and urban areas, where needs are very different.

5.2 We will invite bids from local authorities to pilot a congestion charging system in an urban area. Any decision on this will require local decision making, but we would provide financial support for such a scheme, providing that it is part of a wider plan to improve public transport.

5.3 We will press the Westminster Government to devolve more powers over speed limits to Wales to allow more locally based decision making.

5.4 Safety, improving access for rural areas and reducing congestion will take priority over new large-scale road building plans, with the money saved being diverted towards public transport with a particular emphasis on rail.

5.5 Safety on the A470 and A55 will be a key priority within road policy.

5.6 As well as our major improvements to public transport in South East Wales, we will support measures to relieve congestion on the M4, including the opening of new routes for non-motorway traffic such as the Corus steelworks road.

5.7 Any major road improvement and maintenance schemes will have to include new facilities for cycling and walking, where feasible.



6 Getting on the buses

6.1 While Welsh Lib Dem Transport policy in the coming years will focus on improving the rail infrastructure of Wales, we recognise that there are many areas which cannot rely on the rail network, and even if our plans are put in place, will not see all the benefits for many years. In these areas, we will prioritise providing affordable, reliable and fast bus travel as an alternative to rail transport.

6.2 As a matter of urgency we will commission a report into the potential benefits of re-regulation of bus services in Wales (with separate recommendations for rural and urban areas) while ensuring the powers to do this are gained at the earliest possible opportunity.

6.3 We will ensure that access to buses for passengers with disabilities is improved by building on best practice throughout Wales, not only by way of on-bus equipment but roadside furniture and ensuring that driver training always includes understanding the needs of disabled passengers. Whenever street works are undertaken by a local authority in the vicinity of a bus stop, it should be mandatory for the bus stop facilities and kerbs to be upgraded to DDA-compliant standards.

6.4 The *TrawsCambria* network of long distance coach routes, linking those parts of Wales where there is currently no rail service into the rail network, is in urgent need of completion and upgrading. *TrawsCambria* routes should be considered as 'virtual railways' with coach stops in the larger settlements having the facilities expected of a railway station. We will work with Local Authorities to ensure that each *TrawsCambria* route fulfils a local as well as a national role and is complemented by the local bus network and demand-responsive transport (DRT) feeder services.

6.4 In order to ensure that bus travel is not seen as the 'poor relation' to rail or car travel, we will build on the best practice in areas such as Swansea and Cardiff where comfortable, clean, low-floor vehicles with facilities such as wi-fi internet connections are becoming the norm.

6.5 While we recognise the financial difficulties facing public spending in the coming years, we will prioritise maintaining the system of free bus passes for everyone over sixty and all those with a recognised disability. Free bus passes have not only benefited those entitled to them but have also stimulated under-used routes with benefits for everyone. The impact on encouraging elderly people out of their cars can also not be overstated.

6.6 We will increase the number of joint bus and train interchange stations to encourage the greatest possible use of integrated public transport, while ensuring that as many bus routes as possible connect to railway stations.

6.7 We will expand and enhance integrated ticketing to allow through travel between bus and train services. Integrated ticketing has been promised for years but is yet to reach anywhere near its full potential.

7 Cycling and Walking

7.1 We will at least double the budget for safe cycling and walking infrastructure and promotion. WAG's current budget for "safe routes to communities" is currently just £9m, the cost of just half a mile of motorway. Currently the budget is totally inadequate and is applied using too many different initiatives that lack co-ordination. The approach to the walking and cycling budget should be strategically co-ordinated.

7.2 We will encourage better integration between cycle routes and rail transport by safeguarding cycle spaces on trains, encouraging more secure cycle storage at stations, and supporting more cycle-bus routes. We will build on the good work currently being implemented in Welsh Lib Dem run Cardiff to provide more locally run cycle hire in urban and tourist areas.

7.3 Powers over Traffic Free Routes and "shared streets" must be used carefully and effectively to make life for pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities as easy as possible.

7.4 We will act upon the outcome of the Department for Transport consultation exercise on Shared Streets.



8 Freight

8.1 There are clear and obvious benefits in both the short and long term for encouraging freight off the road and on to rail. From reducing pollution and emissions to dealing with the congestion that is often exacerbated by lorries in both rural and urban areas. We will support all efforts to ensure that the benefits of moving as much freight as possible onto the tracks are made.

8.2 We will upgrade rail freight facilities to make them more competitive and effective and do everything that we can to stop and reverse the selling off and decommissioning of freight terminals. We will encourage innovative ideas, in the use of rail freight facilities. Examples include: schemes whereby supermarkets trunk-haul their goods by rail for local distribution by road and timber is loaded by the lineside for transportation to the paper mills. We will support the movement of slate waste by rail from Blaenau Ffestiniog for construction purposes.

8.3 We will fight for more integration between rail and air and sea links to benefit freight and passenger services and work with both the Westminster Government and the Government of the Irish Republic to encourage freight between mainland Europe and the Irish Republic to be transported through the Channel Tunnel by rail and then via a Welsh port to Ireland.

8.4 We will support the establishment of more domestic sea freight services.

8.5 We will always carefully monitor any potential negative effects of increased rail freight on passenger capacity. Increased freight should always be in addition to, not instead of increased passenger numbers. While it is argued that there is greater environmental benefit from transferring freight rather than passengers to rail, we will be committed to reinstating passenger capacity when any conflict becomes evident.



9 Air Transport

9.1 We recognise the importance of air transport for businesses, communities and tourism, but we fully understand the detrimental effect on the environment. We will carefully balance environmental and economic impacts of air transport, and prioritise rail transport for internal travel.

9.2 We will end the subsidy for the air service between Cardiff and Ynys Mon.

9.3 We will support our Liberal Democrat colleagues from around the UK in opposing a new runway at Heathrow.

9.4 We will seek to improve train and bus connections between Wales and UK airports in order to cut car journeys and support improvements to the rail and bus links to Cardiff International Airport.

9.5 We will develop a long term strategy for the future of Cardiff international Airport which considers all the associated environmental impacts, as well as the economic effects, of its commercial business plans. Improved rail links should lead to a greater switch of passengers from short-haul flights to the Channel Tunnel. We will develop a long term strategy for the future of the airport.



10 Transporting Communities

10.1 We recognise the importance of building transport around communities, commuter areas and business. We must move away from the traditional car-focused new builds and developments.

10.2 We will require all major planning developments to produce a sustainable travel plan and ensure that Section 106 money is prioritised towards transport and infrastructure improvements.

10.3 We will support and increase the “Sustainable Travel Towns” initiatives to increase the availability of safe and easy healthy transport choices for more communities.

10.4 We will support Community Transport services including dial-a-ride. Long term financial stability for these services is essential to plan for the future so we will consider the introduction of longer term budgets for community transport operators as well as introducing new support schemes to help them manage cash flow such as insurance grants and loans as well as offering management skills training. The role of Community Transport schemes in augmenting access to medical facilities should be recognised by exploring funding streams from within Local Health Board budgets.

10.5 We will support the creation of more park and ride schemes in urban areas to cut congestion.

10.6 We will support car share schemes and car-pools. We recognise the key role that employers have in encouraging these schemes and will support their use.

10.7 We will prioritise creating a public transport system which is accessible for all. Working with the voluntary sector, we will draw up a code of practice for public transport operators to ensure that services are available to disabled and elderly people. We will prioritise an end to inaccessible rail services by the end of the next Assembly term.

10.8 We will work to identify best practice from across the industry to ensure that staff understand how to deal with passengers with accessibility issues.

10.9 We will ensure that whenever street works are undertaken by a local authority in the vicinity of a bus stop, it will be mandatory for the bus stop facilities and kerbs to be upgraded to DDA-compliant standards.



Written Response Form

Name:
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E-mail:
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My response is ...

(continue on other sheets if necessary)