



Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes
Experts in Business

23rd February 2017

Russell George AM
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Pierhead Street
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Russell

RE: Rail Franchise & the Metro

FSB Wales welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail franchise and the South East Wales Metro.

FSB Wales is the authoritative voice of businesses in Wales. With 10,000 members, a Welsh Policy Unit, two regional committees and twelve branch committees; FSB Wales is in constant contact with business at a grassroots level. It undertakes regular online surveys of its members as well as a biennial membership survey on a wide range of issues and concerns facing small business.

In order to inform the 2016 National Assembly elections, FSB Wales commissioned a number of work-streams to build an evidence-base around the needs of Wales' smaller business. One of the areas of focus was transport and infrastructure. Professor Stuart Cole produced a report into the needs of smaller firms in relation to transport entitled *Moving Wales Forward*. A copy of the report is attached for the Committee's reference.

The following key themes were highlighted in the report:

- The majority of FSB Wales members surveyed judged their car/van as being the most important mode of transport. However, around 10 per cent said that trains were an important mode of transport for their business.
- For business users to make greater use of trains, four priorities areas were identified. They were; lower fares, increased network coverage, increased service frequencies and better integration of public transport services and ticketing. This was seen as key to model shift.
- Issues of quality were of significant importance to many business users. For instance, many business users would like to see their journey (particularly longer journeys) as taking place in something more similar to a mobile office environment. However, due to issues such as overcrowding and lack of services such as on-board Wi-Fi, this is presently unattainable across much of the network.
- Pursuing greater integration of public transport with services and the economic environment is crucial. The concept used in our research was *Information + Interchange + Investment + Imagination = Integration*.

FSB Wales would like to see the next Wales and Borders franchise focus on the themes highlighted above. This is also relevant to the discussion around the Metro, specifically about integrating the various modes of transport. In particular, the next franchisee should set out the level of investment needed to reduce overcrowding, improve the current rolling stock used in Wales and increasing the frequency of services.



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Furthermore, the use of the transport estate should become a part of wider town centre regeneration discussions. For instance, many train stations in Wales have excess capacity in terms of building that could be used innovatively as business incubation space or retail space for new independent businesses.

This could also be applied to the supplier opportunities the Wales and Borders franchise offers. For instance, the next franchisee could examine increasing the proportion of Welsh products offered to customers, or ensure that local businesses are able to occupy retail space in stations as opposed to larger chains.

I hope you find the comments above of interest to your inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact FSB Wales should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Janet Jones'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that serves as a separator.

Janet Jones
Wales Policy Chair
Federation of Small Businesses Wales