



FOREST

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Delivering a thriving economy

Response to Cross Country Rail Franchise Consultation
Submitted on Behalf of the Transport and Infrastructure Sub-Group of the
Forest Economic Partnership

It is the view held by the Forest Economic Partnership that the Forest of Dean is a place in which there is continuing development in terms of housing and tourism, but for the Forest to thrive on an economic level, the infrastructure and transportation systems need to be able to cope with increased numbers of those who are likely to:

- a) Live and work in the Forest of Dean;
- b) Live in the Forest of Dean, but work in other parts of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, South Wales and Bristol;
- c) Live outside of the Forest of Dean, but decide to work for businesses located within the Forest of Dean; and
- d) Travel to the Forest of Dean as a destination for leisure and recreation – for instance in 2016 it was found that there were 2,372,000 day visits in relation to visiting the Forest of Dean as a place for leisure

The Gloucestershire 2050 Conversation has a vision for the Forest of Dean which is for the Forest to become a regional park though there is nothing substantive to suggest what that would entail. Another vision is for a third bridge across the Severn between Lydney and Sharpness. In light of this, the Partnership feels that the transport and infrastructure within the Forest needs to be sufficient to be suitable in line with this vision.

Our assumption is that the existing railway service of trains stopping at Chepstow and Lydney will not be adversely affected by the incoming owners of the Cross-Country franchise. We would submit that there is a strong case for not only maintaining the existing stopping services, but improving and increasing them. This is on the following basis:

1. In a 24-hour weekday period, Lydney Railway Station receives 17 trains that travel in the Gloucester direction and 18 in the Cardiff direction. There is an argument that these do not stop with sufficient frequency at Lydney and there are commuters or tourists missing out on opportunities to travel;
2. Lydney is the only town in the Forest of Dean that has an active railway station and that commuters from Coleford, Cinderford, Bream, Parkend, and other parts of the Forest of Dean regularly travel to commute whether it be to Gloucester, Cheltenham, Bristol, or Cardiff among others;
3. There are currently plans to add further housing in the Lydney area which will see a potential increase in those who want to commute from Lydney using the railway service. Figures from Forest of Dean District Council have indicated

that 6,600 new homes are planned across the Forest of Dean of which 2,100 new homes are planned for Lydney through to 2026;

4. There are currently plans to add further employment uses in the Lydney area which will also see a potential increase in rail commuting passengers. Figures from Forest of Dean District Council have indicated a total 21.2 ha new employment land allocated through to 2026 and according to their allocation plans, 2.2 hectares of land are allocated for the development of Lydney Station and its associated facilities and a related mix of uses which can include housing - all development to be compatible with station operations. Housing is included in the mix to enable a comprehensive development so would not be allowed to come forward in isolation;
5. The Ministry of Defence site at Beachley is due to be decommissioned by 2027 which will also see an increase in potential housing at Chepstow and therefore increase usage of the railway services from Chepstow. The Partnership believes that an additional 900 estimated homes could be developed at the site;
6. The railway station car park in Lydney has seen growth over the past three years to add 80 spaces. The car parks are regularly at capacity;
7. There is a strong appetite to use other means of transport to commute to and from the Forest of Dean to other parts of the country other than by car and the roads serving the Forest, particularly the A48, is already being used beyond its condition. The impact has seen this particular part of the country be in breach of its CO2 emissions in the first quarter of this year;
8. There are plans to implement new cycle tracks around the Lydney area, one of which is to connect the town to the Lydney station. This would encourage rail users to use bicycles to get to the station from the town;
9. The removal of the tolls over the Severn Bridge should encourage those who work in Bristol to relocate to places like Lydney and Chepstow, which would mean more potential users for the railway services. According to ONS house prices increased in Forest of Dean Local Authority area by 10.1% in last year which is the 11th largest local authority increase. This is fuelled by Bristolian purchases and signals demographic change requiring improved rail connection;
10. There is currently, albeit in its infancy, plans being prepared to enhance and develop Cardiff Airport and there is potential to link up between the Forest of Dean and the Airport in terms of railway service users;
11. The plans for the new nuclear power station at Oldbury would see an increase in jobs, but there would be reliance upon the railway system to be able to travel between Oldbury and the Forest of Dean; and
12. There are current planning considerations for a garden town as a new centre of population accessible within 15 minutes to Lydney station potentially adding more population and consequently more potential railway service users.

We would therefore submit that the incoming owner of the Cross-Country franchise considers the following:

- a) Improving and increasing the amount of trains that stop at Lydney and Chepstow rather than reduce them or eliminate them. At present if a train is missed, it could be close to two hours before the next one can be caught;
- b) Improve the connectivity between Lydney and Bristol;

- c) Improve promotion of the Cross-Country network so that the Forest of Dean is promoted as a place to visit from a leisure and tourism view;
- d) Reinstatement of a railway station between Lydney and Gloucester to improve traffic to and from Gloucester and the forest. With capacity for parking it could be a good link and park and ride option for forest residents without having to drive through;
- e) Use more coaches for peak time trains. Presently there are issues of overcrowding at these times with there being only two coaches, whereas the addition of a third coach should resolve the overcrowding issues; and
- f) Consider events such as the Cheltenham Races where a two-coach train is not sufficient to cope with the demand (again, adding a third coach to the train should resolve any overcrowding issues)

In short measures, the Partnership and the people of the Forest of Dean would like reassurances that the services are safeguarded and improved. This includes but is not limited to - An indication of development such as an increase on passing stops, as well as a spread interest & correspondence with the Partnership sub-group, confirming no intentions to eliminate or decline the unsustainable services currently in place.

That concludes the FEP Transportation & Infrastructure Sub-Group response.