

N e w I n q u i r y :
R u r a l R a i l w a y s

R e s p o n s e b y

T r a n s p o r t - W a t c h U K t o t h e
T r a n s p o r t C o m m i t t e e

Transport-Watch is an independent association not connected with any business or political party initially funded by a trust and dedicated to making the best use of land already committed to transport in the interests of the Community as a whole.

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1. Transport Committee members
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Rural Railways

The first tranche of rural railways that the Committee are considering are:

- The Cotswold line linking Oxford to Worcester and Hereford.
- The Chester to Shrewsbury line
- The Borderlands line linking Wrexham to Bidston
- The North Cheshire Line linking Chester to Warrington

The daily one-way passenger train flows, along with estimates of equivalent bus plus lorry flows, are as follows. The bus flows assume an average of 3 buses per train although often the “trains” are two or possibly one car. The lorry flows assume that freight is proportional to the national average except for Borderlands where there are 7 freight trains per day, 6 carrying steel and one carrying coal, here assumed to be equivalent to 50 lorries each. (The SRA have not responded to our query about freight usage; passenger train data is from timetables).

		Passenger Trains	Equivalent road vehicles		
			Bus	Lorry	Total
Cotswold Line	Oxford to Worcester	15	45	27	72
	Worcester to Hereford	18	54	22	76
Chester to Shrewsbury:	Chester to Wrexham	15	45	27	72
North Cheshire Line	Out of Chester to Warrington	20	60	37	97
	Out of Chester to Stockport	16	48	30	78
		Total	36	108	175
Boaderlands	Wrexham to Bidston	13	39	350	370

Probably the committee will hear from railway enthusiasts and the “community” that these routes perform an essential public service. However, it is clear from the trivial use, and the dereliction at the stations, that that cannot be the case. Instead the routes are extracting very substantial sums from the exchequer.

With the exception of Borderlands, the flow estimates are probably too large by up to a factor of two. That is because freight may be absent and the allowance of 3 bus equivalents per train may be excessive. Whatever the case, if the lines were closed and the traffic diverted to the existing road networks the effect on congestion would be imperceptible.

However, it would be a tragedy if the routes were lost to the nation since they lie in corridors of substantial demand. Instead of that, or of being preserved by subsidy as railways, the rights of way should be paved and subjected to tolls or distance charging. Each lane may then carry a vehicle flow in excess of 5,000 per day - providing bypasses to many small settlements and badly aligned local roads.

The replacement express coach services on the routes would be superior to the trains - seating and speed would be at least equivalent and fares substantially reduced so promoting public transport.

An additional effect would be the rapid development of many hundreds of acres of derelict railway land at the main stations. Committee members will be astonished at the extent and width of that, all of which would be vibrant business park, shopping centre or industrial estate, if there were good road access.

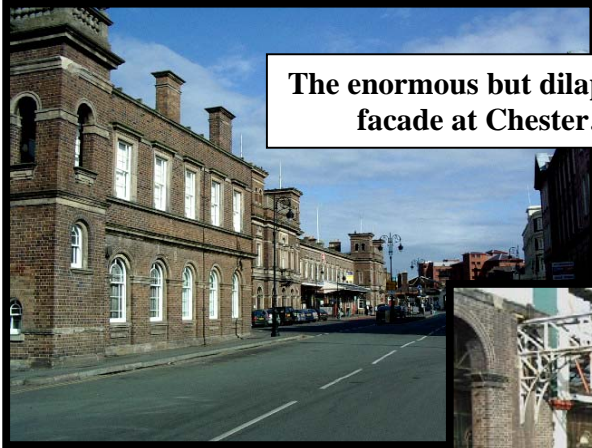
Lastly we note that all these routes are wide enough for standard 7.3 metre carriageways but not for the verges associated with green field construction.

Hence we encourage the Committee to recommend an urgent study into the conversion of these routes to roads – taking care to avoid having the study carried out by railway enthusiasts, who will surely triple the real cost and place imaginary barriers in the way of progress.

Transport-watch pictures

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The enormous but dilapidated facade at Chester...



hiding very little activity,

moldering dereliction



and hundreds of acres of intensely valuable land



Enabling the occasional 2-car train to depart



Into the mists of time

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The peace at Wrexham



Dereliction and a swamp of rails at Shrewsbury

