

Carno Station Action Group

To all Assembly Members
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA

Blaenglanhanog
Carno
POWYS
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May 8th, 2017

Dear Assembly Member,

Prioritisation of new stations proposals

On 26th April, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure wrote to you to advise that the first stage of a new three stage process for assessing proposals for new railway stations in Wales had been completed, resulting in the selection of twelve proposals to be taken forward to the second stage. We were astonished to discover that Carno was not amongst them.

Our group has been campaigning vigorously for the re-opening of Carno station for many years, recognising the dramatically improved access to jobs and services that the station would provide. As a result of an 800 signature petition to the Welsh Government in 2007, the Enterprise & Learning Committee held a hearing on the re-opening proposal in Carno itself and subsequently recommended the development of a formal Business Case. At the Scrutiny of the Minister later that year the then Head of Rail said the Welsh Government “would look to see Carno as a priority within” the Regional Transport Plan then being prepared.

The economic, social and environmental case for the station was established by the Stage 1+2 WelTAG Transport Appraisal commissioned by TraCC, the Regional Transport Consortium, with Welsh Government funding in 2010. The Appraisal was completed in May 2011 and demonstrated a benefit/cost ratio of 1.15. Then, in 2014, the Business Case in the 2011 WelTAG appraisal was revised to take account of new information on costs associated with flood prevention and station operation and to correct errors in the prediction of passenger volumes. This exercise resulted in an improved BCR of 1.65 – a figure which was agreed by the Welsh Government Transport Economist.

Following the introduction of additional trains on the Cambrian Line in May 2015, our group wished to demonstrate that stops at Carno could be incorporated into the new timetable. To this end the group proposed an amended version of the new timetable with Carno stops inserted into the schedules of most of the trains and submitted it to WG officials for consideration. The timetable was based on existing sectional running times, with the three minute delay due to the Carno stop coming from a reduction in the lengthy 10 to 15 minute layover of trains at Shrewsbury.

It should be clear from the above that the Carno station proposal has crossed most of the hurdles required before the decision is taken to proceed with re-opening. Our group is therefore extremely concerned that the new prioritisation process appears to cut across all the previous work that has been done in relation to Carno and, in all probability, may not have built on it at all. It also cuts across the previous procedure whereby either official backing or local public support for a proposed new station led WG or the Regional Transport Consortium to commission a

WelTAG with the expectation that a favourable outcome would eventually lead to a decision to build.

In view of this, we are writing to let you know that we believe a number of questions should be raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure about the first stage of the new prioritisation process, as follows:

1. Can the document setting out the three stages of the assessment methodology for assessing proposals for new railway stations be made available?
2. What WelTAG criteria were included in the first stage of the assessment? Were they given individual scores? If so, how were the different criteria weighted?
3. Were Benefit/Cost ratios for the candidate stations calculated and compared?
4. If so, how were the Benefit/Cost ratios estimated? As of 2015, only four yet-to-be opened stations had had detailed WelTAG appraisals – Llanwern, Caerleon, Carno & Bow Street.
5. Were the Benefit/Cost ratios obtained in these detailed WelTAG appraisals used in the current assessment? If so, what BCR was used for Carno – 1.15 from 2011 or 1.65 from 2014?
6. How have the expansions of employment opportunities offered by candidate new stations been compared?
7. Can the initial assessment of the 46 new station proposals be made available in the interests of transparency?

The re-opening of Carno station has received strong local support over many years because of Carno's remoteness from employment centres. This support was demonstrated when:

- 200 people turned out to hear TraCC's presentation of the WelTAG appraisal in the Community Centre in 2011
- 200 residents came to a drop-in session on February 14th 2015 and signed 183 letters to Edwina Hart calling for the station to be re-opened
- the Mid Wales Rail Implementation Group gave its 100% backing.

The omission of Carno station from the short list of stations to be considered for re-opening seems to be a betrayal of the expectations that have been raised by both National Assembly Committees and the Welsh Government since the petition was accepted by the Petitions Committee in 2007.

We trust you will support us in calling on the Welsh Government not to delay further in programming the re-opening of Carno station.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Barnes,
Chairman, Carno Station Action Group
Member of Carno Community Council