

GT360 Highlight Report November 2022

- Delivery June 2022 to 1st November 2022
- Next Steps November 2022 – February 2023



Overview

The officer work of GT360 and its partners (June to November) has been focussed on: -

- Supporting the Flintshire LUF2 Bid for the Borderlands Line. Transport for Wales (TfW) prepared and resourced the bid, pulling together the business case information needed. GT360 assisted in seeking stakeholder support and arranging GT360 partner meetings to support TfW and Flintshire.
- Summer stakeholder briefings for MPs and MSs. The briefings addressed the progress of GT360's priorities and how MPs and MSs could help bring funding to GT360's priorities.
- Supporting the speakers at the GT360 Labour and Conservative Party Conference Fringe Meetings. Cogitamus led on making sure the events happened and were well-planned. Mark Walker and his colleagues were able to bring Tan Dhesi MP (Labour's Shadow Rail Minister) and (working with James Davies MP) Kevin Foster MP, then Rail Minister, to the meetings. GT360 prepared meeting plans and briefing notes for the speakers.
- Highlighting the extent of the failure of Avant West Coast Partnership in delivering the West Coast Mainline Franchise

The next period (November 2022 – February 2023) will see GT360 continuing to promote the three in-region priorities: -

- Developing a Wrexham to Liverpool Service on the Borderlands Line based on the partnership between Transport for Wales and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Mayor
- Upgrades to the North Wales Coast Main Line as proposed by TfW and Network Rail
- Upgrades to Chester Station to enable more through services to and from Wales and the Borderlands.

GT360 will also revisit the commitment of the UKG to a HS2 Hub Station at Crewe that will enable effective and improved connectivity between North Wales and Chester with HS2 at Crewe.

Growth Track 360 Board Meeting – 1st November 2022

The Board meeting heard of considerable risks to the enablers of a HS2 Hub Station at Crewe. The Board resolved to renew its campaign to secure regional connectivity at Crewe: -

- A Crewe North Connection to enable HS2 trains travelling North and South to leave the HS2 line and call at Crewe, where HS2 services can connect to regional services from Crewe (Chester and North Wales, Shrewsbury and Mid and South Wales, Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire)

- 5-7 HS2 trains per hour calling at Crewe to give frequent 360-degree regional connectivity with HS2 services
- A modernised Crewe Station with new expanded platforms for 400m length HS2 trains, a DDA compliant and enlarged passenger transfer deck, improved track layout and signalling to accommodate more trains, improved access multi modal access to the station and general safety repairs (roof etc.)

Deteriorating public finances may see cuts and/or delays in infrastructure investment and the introduction of sufficient HS2 services to Crewe to maintain regional connectivity with London, Birmingham and Manchester. This may place any benefits from HS2 for Chester and North Wales in jeopardy.

The Board received promising reports from Transport for Wales on the progress of development work to improve the capacity of key “in-region” rail assets to accommodate more frequent and fast rail services on the North Wales Coast Main Line, the Borderlands Line (Wrexham to Liverpool) and at Chester Station.

A Winter Communications Programme was supported. It proposes a submission to the Treasury prior to the Autumn Statement and asking a supportive Member of Parliament to apply for a Westminster Hall Debate. The Westminster Hall Debate will build on the successful fringe meetings at the Labour and Conservative Party Conferences. Both the Rail Minister and the Opposition Spokesperson are likely to be supportive of GT360 proposals in responding to the debate following their engagement with GT360 in the fringe meetings.

Programme Status and Development

NWCML

Considerable progress is being made to deliver development work for the North Wales Coast Mainline with Transport Wales undertaking WG funded studies that seek to explore how to make the NWCML the spine of the North Wales Metro. Arcadis, working with TfW, are developing a phased and costed programme of works that will enable 5tph (4 stopping and 1 express) along the line.

Network Rail have funds for development work to propose line speed improvements. They have engaged AECOM to undertake the work.

TfW are co-ordinating the work at Chester Station with the NWCML and the Borderlands Line. They have appointed AECOM to help them do so as well as deliver specific studies. TfW are drawing down UCR funds for development work for Chester Station and the two Shotton Stations. The Shotton scheme is to bring together the two stations (Higher, Borderlands and Lower, NWCML) to enable better interchange between the NWCML and the Borderland line.

Chester Station

A senior officer of CW&C Council is chairing a multi-partner project team working on improving Chester Station. Work has commenced on defining the “on track” improvements required at Chester (initial development work). AECOM are delivering the commission.

TfW are refreshing the passenger experience at the station with improvement works to improve passenger flow, retail and other facilities at the Chester.

Wrexham to Liverpool (Borderlands)

Flintshire and Growth Track 360 are awaiting the outcome of the LUF2 Bid submitted in July 2022 for a new station at Deeside and enhancements to the Hanson Cement freight sidings at Padeswood (Penyffordd). Transport for Wales delivered the technical work and completed the application form with Flintshire County Council. GT360 helped with securing stakeholder support.

TfW reported a positive rail appraisal by the DfT of the Flintshire/TfW LUF2 Bid for the Borderlands Line, which reflects well on the work undertaken by TfW and the partners.

TfW are commissioning and receiving the work to develop the line into a commuter service. Work is ongoing to better define the costs of replacing level and barrow crossings, line speed improvements and re-signalling. Proposed phasing of works will come next.

TfW is working closely with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and both TfW and the City Region are working with the Union Connectivity Review unit in the DfT. LCR CA and WG/TfW are jointly bidding to the UCR to test new electric/battery class 777 Stadler trains on the line. This could see the new Stadler trains operating on the line from Wrexham and accessing the Merseyrail inner loop line without changing at Bidston.

Work on a compromise solution between TfW and the rail freight operator on the Borderlands Line to enable 2 passenger tph on the line is under way. This will enable the ORR to sign off TfW's application to increase the number of passenger services on the line, whilst enabling continuing freight services on a short-term basis, pending improvements to Hanson Cement's freight sidings.

Future Funding for In Region Rail Priorities

Throughout its time GT360 has faced two challenges: -

- Obtaining development funding for its rail industry partners (like TfW and Network Rail) to produce costed business cases for investment in the region
- Identifying where capital might come from for the costed schemes that have gone through the rail industry business case production process

TfW, working with the Welsh Government, the DfT (notably the UCR team in particular), Network Rail and LCR CA, have secured sufficient development funding to allow development work to continue working on GT360 priorities through 2023/24. This will see the delivery partners having access to resources to develop costed business cases up until the next general election and the Comprehensive Spending Review that will follow the election of a new government in 2024/25.

The budgets of Network Rail and the DfT are under severe pressure both for development monies and capital for delivery of schemes, so much so, that the much-anticipated RNEP has yet to be published because the DfT does not have the funds to deliver the schemes it is committed to. There are also rumours of possible cuts to major UKG Rail projects like HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

This makes it a priority for GT360 to advocate new sources of funding outside of DfT capital budgets to the current Conservative government for its next manifesto and Comprehensive Spending Review, for example: -

- A capital fund for union connectivity,
- An earmarked bidding fund for regions outside the IRP and HS2 and/or
- An extension to the transport element of the Levelling Up Fund.

In the context of a new government led by Labour, devolution to devolved administrations and English Regions becomes an alternative way forward, along with an increase in the DfT's transport infrastructure spending (for rail, bus, active travel and integration) as a means to catalyse "green" growth.

The GT360 Board is of the view that there is a well-developed, cross-party consensus in support of the "in region" investment proposals – Upgrades to the North Wales Coast Line (to improve capacity and line speeds to 5tph), Chester Station (to improve capacity for through services and passengers) and developing a metro style commuter service on the Wrexham to Liverpool line underpinned by a partnership between Transport for Wales and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

However, the route to capital financing is subject to different approaches by party with the role of devolution (of rail infrastructure to Wales) and the proposal for Barnett Consequentials for Wales from HS2 the main points of difference.

GT360 Working to Influence UK Rail Flagship Schemes (HS2 and IRP)

A HS2 Hub Station at Crewe

In 2018 GT360 published the West and Wales Prospectus that defined the investments necessary to connect the ambitious, growing economies of North Wales, Cheshire and South Merseyside to the proposed High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) and Northern Powerhouse Rail developments. The prospectus argued for: -

- A new "Crewe North Connection" on the HS2 line to supplement the Southern Junction off the HS2 line. This would enable trains travelling both North and South to leave and join the HS2 line to stop at Crewe, enhancing regional connectivity with HS2.
- Frequent HS2 trains stopping at Crewe at 5-7 trains per hour to give regional connectivity and prevent an interchange penalty on travel for North Wales and Chester passengers at Crewe
- Track and station improvements at Crewe to handle 400m length HS2 trains, more trains and more passengers, including a new, bigger, DDA compliant passenger transfer deck

These proposals went beyond an initial HS2 baseline proposal to serve Crewe with 2 HS2 tph (to Liverpool) which only required a southern junction.

The government of the day accepted these proposals as they improved the HS2 business case with additional passengers and revenue. The Government has included the powers to implement a Crewe North Connection (CNC) in the HS2 Phase 2a Bill, currently before Parliament. Financing for the CNC is now part of the Integrated Rail Plan with the financial benefits of a Crewe Hub Station now included in the Business Case for Northern Powerhouse Rail rather than HS2 Phase 2b (Crewe to Manchester).

Network Rail has allocated funds to implement track, signalling and platform improvements at Crewe that will accommodate 5-7 trains an hour and align with the CNC.

Issues of Concern at Crewe

The issue of funding station improvements at Crewe is a matter of ongoing debate between Cheshire East Council, the DfT, HS2 Ltd and Network Rail. Currently Network Rail will fund an interim, partial upgrade to Crewe Station that will address immediate structural problems at the station (a collapsing roof) and accommodate 2 HS2 tph.

The inclusion of the CNC into NPR has pushed back the implementation of 5-7tph calling at Crewe back to the introduction of NPR which could be 10 years after the CNC is built (i.e., in the 2040s). This could see 10 years of connectivity benefits from 5-7 HS" tph calling at Crewe lost to the economy and the rail system, damaging both.

Given the deteriorating public finances and a history of overspends and delays on major rail projects there is growing pressure on DfT budgets, and it is possible that the investment and service levels (5-7tph) required to establish a Crewe Hub station will be lost.

The GT360 Board considers the Crewe Hub Station for HS2 concept to be at risk. Loss of the hub station concept will have severe negative impacts on the region's connectivity and economic well-being. The Board has therefore resolved to renew campaigning for the Crewe Hub investment with particular emphasis on securing: -

- The introduction of HS2 5-7tph from the completion of Phase 2b to Manchester (likely 2035-40).
- Modernisation of Crewe Station to safely accommodate passenger interchange for HS2 5-7 tph, including a new passenger access deck and a new main entrance.

Warrington Interchange (HS2 North and NRP)

This proposal is included in the Integrated Rail Plan. There is no detail on the nature of the proposed station configuration at Warrington Bank Quay, though we know that the interchange will be based on re-opening the lower-level platforms at Warrington Bank Quay.

Again, this project is at risk of delay or cancellation, with NPR as a whole, due to financial constraints on the DfT's capital budgets arising from the recent UKG fiscal crisis.

Access to Manchester

GT360 has worked hard to improve access from North Wales and Chester to Manchester Piccadilly and the Airport via Warrington and the Castlefield Corridor. Access is safe for now but cannot be guaranteed in the future.

In the long term the best access from North Wales and Chester is likely to be via HS2 services to Manchester picked up at Crewe or NPR picked up at Warrington.

Other Rail Opportunities

- C&WLEP is working with partners on increasing service levels on the Mid-Cheshire Line to 2tph. This proposal is making good progress including improvements to services between Sandbach, Middlewich and Northwich
- Merseyrail battery trains enabling services from the Merseyrail network to Helsby (Hooton to Helsby extension)
- TfW are working on business cases for new stations at Saltney/Broughton, Greenfield and re-examining the re-opening of the line from the NWCML to Amlwch.

Bus and Integration of Public Transport (including Active Travel)

The GT360 partners, particularly Transport for Wales, are continuing to work on improving the integration of bus, rail and active travel networks and services to offer an alternative to the car and encourage modal shift.

Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) Projects

Active Travel

The MDA will shortly begin procurement of an active travel strategy that will focus on the join up of individual local authority networks across national and local authority boundaries.

The strategy is intended to enable “better bidding” to active travel funds held by the UK and Welsh Governments and to ensure a joined up cross border network that gives the best opportunity for communities to access work and improve health through active travel.

A procurement brief has been developed and funds have been earmarked for the work. It is hoped to go procurement a consultant by January 2023 and have a report by the end of June 2023.

Integrated Ticketing

Likewise, the MDA has earmarked funds for hatch to prepare a case for investment by the UKG DfT in tap on and off card readers in the Stagecoach Fleet operating out of Chester where some services run into Wales. TfW wish to see the Stagecoach Fleet equipped in the same way as Welsh bus operators so that passengers have a seamless ticketing offer. The MDA will seek to help TfW secure funding from the UK Government which is responsible for bus services operating from England.

The project proposal is being developed in partnership with CW&C Council, Stagecoach and Transport for Wales and will be presented to the DfT when completed.

Next Steps

GT360 will: -

- continue to promote and publicise the solutions being developed by partners (TfW, Network Rail and LCR CA) for in-region priorities: -
 - North Wales Coast Main Line Upgrades to support additional services to underpin a North Wales Metro and improve connectivity and access to employment
 - Redevelopment of Chester Station to enable more through services from North Wales and West Cheshire to Manchester, Liverpool, Shrewsbury (Birmingham and South Wales) and Crewe (London)
 - Enhancements to infrastructure and services on the Wrexham to Liverpool, Borderlands Line
- Work with political stakeholders to secure commitments for capital funding for “in-region” priorities in the manifestoes of the political parties and in the CSR after the 2024/25 general election
- Revisit the issue of Crewe HS2 Hub Station infrastructure improvements with a view to securing firm commitments to 5-7 HS2 train services stopping at Crewe from the inception of HS2 Phase 2b (Crewe to Manchester) services and associated station improvements to enable safe passenger interchange between services from North Wales and Chester and HS2 (principally a new passenger transfer deck)
- Seek the appropriate development of the HS2/NPR interchange at Warrington including upgrades to allow direct services from Manchester via the new Warrington Bank Quay station to Chester and North Wales.
- Seek the improvement of West Coast Main Line Services to Chester and North Wales to a level equivalent to those prior to Covid 19. GT360 believes this will be best achieved by terminating the AWC franchise and taking it into public ownership.
- An invitation to the new Rail Minister, Huw Merriman MP to visit the GT360 geography.
- A winter programme of communications (press releases) based on responding to outstanding government announcements: -
 - A revised RNEP (with the NWCML a potential scheme)
 - Publication of the WASC inquiry into Tourism in Wales (to which GT360 responded)
 - Comment on a Transport Bill (UKG)
 - A formal response to the UCR from the UK Government
 - Next steps with the WISP and the Schapps/Williams Plan that proposed the establishment of Great British Railways
 - An announcement of the location of GBR’s HQ
 - Publication of the WG North Wales Burns Commission

All of these announcements offer the opportunity for GT360 to make press comment and keep GT360 priorities in the public eye, forming the basis of GT360’s winter communications programme.

Appendix 1: GT360 Activity Report, June - November 2022

Key Meetings held June/November 2022

Meetings involving the GT360 Secretariat: -

- Informal Catch ups with: -
 - C&W LEP (2)
 - WG (2)
 - TfW (1)
- Project Meetings (2) for the submission of the Flintshire County Council LUF2 Bid for the Borderlands Line prepared by Transport for Wales
- Rode the Borderlands Line with the Chair of the WBRUA (June) and held a follow up catch up meeting in October
- MDA Cross Border Recovery Deal Project Meetings (Transport Programme)
 - Active Travel (2)
 - Integrated Ticketing (2)
- Attended Cheshire West and Chester Council Meeting with the Chair of TfN (Lord McLoughlin) and TfN CEO (Martin Tugwell) 26th July 2022
- Met Sam Rowlands MS with Ashley Rogers 27th July 2022
- Meeting with Lee Waters MS, WG Transport Minister, sponsored by Ken Skates MS with Katie Wilby on Welsh Bus Reform and follow up meeting with WG Official
- Engagement with Glyndwr University regarding an academic partnership – surveys and review of plans for the Borderlands Line over the years.
- Labour Party Fringe Meeting attended briefly by Tan Dhesi MP, Shadow Rail Minister 29th September 2022
- Conservative Party Fringe Meeting, 3rd October 2022, with Kevin Foster MP, the then rail minister in attendance
- Follow up meeting to the Conservative Party Fringe Meeting with James Davies MP and Sam Rowlands MS 14th October 2022
- GT360 Officer Meeting 18th October 2022
- GT360 Board 1st November 2022
- The Chair and Board Members participated in Stakeholder Meetings with Avanti West Coast.

Key Upcoming Meeting Dates

- 18th November 2022 – Cross Border Bus Workshop 2
- 21st November 2022 – Autumn Statement, likely to include announcement of successful LUF2 Bids
- 2nd February 2023 – Transport for Wales Workshop with GT360
- 20th February 2023 – GT360 Day in Parliament
- 10th March 2023 – Visit of Tan Dhesi MP, Shadow Rail Minister

Press Releases

Public relations activity is led by Cogitamus.

- On the impact of Avanti West Coast's service failure and advocating that AWC lose their franchise, with the franchise then being taken into public ownership.
- On the GT360 submission to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee Inquiry on Welsh Tourism
- On the submission of the LUF2 Bid by Flintshire and Transport for Wales for investment in the Borderlands Line

Submissions/Responses to Consultations

- GT360 made a WG Bus Reform Consultation Response aided by Flintshire County Council
- LUF2 Bid for the Borderlands Line, submitted in the name of Flintshire County Council with Transport for Wales completing the form and providing a high standard of supporting information for the application.

Cogitamus provided: -

- A response to the Shapps/Williams Plan (Legislative Consultation) with input from Cogitamus
- A response to the WASC Inquiry into Tourism in Wales with input from GT360
- Monitoring of activity by the region's MPs in expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of Avanti West Coast.
- Support to APPG MPs in debates at question times (Wales and Transport),
- Support for Dr. James Davies MP to make an application for a Westminster Hall debate to maintain the momentum garnered by the Conference Fringe Meetings. Another applicant will need to be found now that Dr. James MP has joined the government (in the Wales Office).

Letters and Written Stakeholder Briefings

- Letter to Kevin Foster MP, the rail minister during the Truss administration, inviting him to visit the area and to brief him on GT360 priorities (cc to the Wales Office). Wendy Morton MP gave a date, but her visit was superseded by events when she became Chief Whip in the Truss administration.
- Stakeholder Briefing by letter to MPs and MSs (MDA and North Wales) on GT360 Priorities and progress
- Stakeholder Briefing for North Wales Councils Leaders regarding Avanti West Coast's service failure and GT360 priorities and progress.
- Stakeholder Briefing to MPs and MSs in the MDA area regarding the LUF2 Bid by FCC and supported by TfW.
- Letter and briefing note on GT360 priorities for Tan Dhesi MP, Shadow Rail Minister inviting him to visit the area
- Letters of thanks to the participants/speakers at the GT360 Party Conference Fringe Meetings
- Letter to Ministers asking that Avanti be stripped of the West Coast Franchise