



**Neston Town Council
Submission to National Infrastructure
Commission – Call for Evidence
15.12.2016**

**Submission to the Call for Evidence on Infrastructure Challenges by
the National Infrastructure Commission – December 2015: Submission
Date 8th January 2016**

1 Introduction

Neston is a town of 15000 people in the Cheshire West and Chester Council area. Reviews of the area's status and potential have consistently demonstrated that it is a "town on the edge". So far as the Town Council is concerned, we wish to ensure that it is on the edge of success. There is every reason to be optimistic:

- It has an excellent state school that will soon enjoy brand new buildings that will help the young people of the town to compete effectively in the job market.
- It is a great place to live. It has green spaces, the Cheshire Riviera (Parkgate) and affordable house prices.
- Flourishing concerns such as Aldi have expressed confidence in the town by placing their large and growing distribution centre in our area.
- Neston is at the crossroads of Liverpool – North-East Wales economic axis and the Atlantic Gateway corridor from Liverpool eastwards.

Almost the only thing that Neston lacks is CONNECTIVITY.

- There is no major road near enough to the town to be useful
- It has dilapidated rail system with old rolling stock, worn-out track and threadbare stations.
- Neston Town Council has found that fares to important local destinations such as Chester and Liverpool not only take longer but are up to 60% more expensive using the local line rather than nearby Hooton.
- Reliability on the Borderlands line is poor – with many cancellations in the recent high-risk leaf-drop season.
- Its railway provides a stark contrast with the Liverpool-Chester line that passes it by at Hooton and provides fast, frequent and reliable services between these places and also to Ellesmere Port.
- The governance of its railway services is delivered from Cardiff and is understandably focused on the Welsh side of the border.

Overall, the infrastructure provided to Neston can best be described as

Not fit for purpose - the purpose being to enable Neston to make a significant contribution to the housing, employment and leisure needs of the Mersey-Dee Region.

2 EVIDENCE

The National Infrastructure Commission call is for *evidence* – so here is the evidence.

- Three nearby towns were rated in the top ten in England as places to live. The criteria were green spaces, schools and commuting times.¹ Neston only lacks the last named of these as our Neighbourhood Plan evidence made clear.²
- The recent North Wales Transport Summit emphasised the importance of the link between that area and the Northern Powerhouse.

Speaking after the conference, Chief Executive of the Llandrillo Menai Group Glyn Jones said: "There's a great deal of interest in the electrification of rail across north Wales and into Liverpool and Manchester."³

This only confirms other studies in recent times, for example the North East Wales Integrated Transport Task Force of 2013 that observed:

North Wales is an economy worth approximately £10.4billion per annum¹ and represents 22% of the economy of Wales as a whole². The strength in the manufacturing character of the area is, however, illustrated by the fact that North Wales represents over 30% of the manufacturing output of Wales³. Much of this includes high technology jobs such as those at Airbus and St. Asaph Business Park, but it should not be forgotten that there are also significant numbers of jobs that whilst not as highly skilled or paid, do create valuable employment for the country and local area.

***It is also useful to consider North East Wales in the context of its wider economic geography since our evidence clearly shows that people do not base their employment decisions upon national or local boundaries, but on practical realities of gaining an accessible relevant job. The scale of the economy running along the M56/A55 from Manchester Airport to Anglesey generates an output of £31billion. Merseyside's economy is also growing and is strong in core sectors such as car manufacturing and petrochemicals.*⁴**

Key conclusions of their study were:

- Frequency of rail services on some routes are poor, particularly the Wrexham – Bidston corridor *through the economic heartland* of the area.
- Identification of funding to facilitate a half hourly service on the Wrexham - Bidston rail line, with all trains stopping at Hawarden Bridge station;

Flintshire's Economic Development Strategy for 2009-20 also called for

¹ <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/three-wirral-towns-listed-top-8898498>

² <http://nestontowncouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/1221-NP-SubmissionDoc.pdf> ,p47

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-31060580>

⁴ <http://www.taith.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/130628-NEWITT-Report-FINAL-High-Res.pdf> , page 2
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- Future development of the Wrexham / Bidston line to increase sustainable transport opportunities⁵

Cheshire West and Chester also seem to have recognised the importance of the line. Their leader Samantha Dixon told the North Wales Rail Summit:

*"It is critical that we make a strong case for the Cheshire Warrington/North Wales areas being a part of that wider geography [of the Northern Powerhouse]. **Not just because we don't want to miss out but also because we have a significant contribution to make in our own right.**"*

And she was clear on the priority for making the connections

"All forms of transport and connectivity are important, but rail is an absolutely essential part of the picture. It can provide one of the fastest, safest, most convenient and environmentally sustainable ways to connect people, places and business."

Within that improvement of rail she emphasised that

*"Upgrades to the Wrexham to Bidston line would provide much needed connectivity between some of our largest and most rapidly expanding employment sites and our major centres of population on the Wirral and Merseyside."*⁶

We also have access to voices that are often not heard at these high-level Government reviews – those of the local people. Our MP has organised a petition for half-hourly services at Neston and the Town Council has supported the initiative.⁷ As part of this effort a petition sheet was left in the local supermarket so people were left to sign it or not as they wished. This part of the petition has been very successful and people have left their own unsolicited comments:

"trains should always stop at Hawarden Bridge" (nearest to Deeside Industrial Estate)

"Make it electrical" (x2)

"Prices should be the same as Bromborough –Liverpool"

"Please electrify"

- It is notable that the local High School sent senior staff to support the launch of the petition for better services and that a large number of students from the High School have signed it. The railway provides an important local link to education for students, but they want it to be better.
- Neston Town Council has carried out a detailed assessment of its current public transport and has rated it as RED – the worst of the three ratings. It suggests that improved rail connections would largely solve the town's

⁵ <http://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Regeneration/Regeneration-Strategy-2009-2020.pdf>

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⁶ Extracts from speech of Samantha Dixon, leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council to North Wales Rail Summit, November 2015. Document provided to Neston Town Council.

⁷ <http://nestontowncouncil.org.uk/event-items/neston-town-council-supports-mps-petition-for-improved-rail-services-from-neston/>

connectivity problems. Its assessment is currently available for public comment.⁸

3 What exactly does the Council want?

The Council's ambitions are set out in its Rail Position Statement of September 2014⁹ and in its contribution to the Network Rail review of the Welsh Network in July 2015.¹⁰ These documents emphasise service frequency, fares and the quality of station facilities in the town.

However, as this is an infrastructure review it seems most important to identify the infrastructure required to improve the Town's prospects (along with those of the wider region)

3.1 ESSENTIAL

- **Electrification of the track from Bidston, initially to Shotton to connect with the North Wales Coast line. A later development should take electrification to Wrexham.**

An essential product of that change that should be built into the new franchise of 2018 is **through working of trains into Liverpool.**

- Improved station facilities – ticket machines, staffing, CCTV, toilets and a bus interchange at Neston.
- New station to serve the Deeside Industrial Estate.

3.2 IDEAL

- Create a rail junction at Shotton so that trains can move to and from the Borderlands line to the Chester –Holyhead line in all directions. Shotton should become a single station.
- Reinstate the four tracks between Shotton and Chester to enable local services to run frequently alongside rapid through services on the main line from Chester to Holyhead.

4 Conclusion

Neston Town Council has been campaigning on public transport in general (and rail in particular) since 2014. It believes that only a serious infrastructure project will lift the town from its isolation and ensure its inclusion in the growth and progress that is happening all around it. The Town Council endorses the view expressed by Samantha Dixon, the Cheshire West Leader, that:

“Whilst it is our shared ambition to secure economic growth, I do not see growth as an end in itself. Growth must provide the basis for creating genuinely vibrant and sustainable communities.”

⁸ <http://nestontowncouncil.org.uk/event-items/neston-town-council-consults-on-a-standard-for-public-transport-for-the-town/>

⁹ <http://nestontowncouncil.org.uk/agendas-archive/full-council-summons/>

¹⁰ <http://nestontowncouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/REF-AMC27.pdf>

Neston Town Council believes that it has the basis for being such a community, but considers that it has been left out of many of the investments that have improved surrounding areas. It urgently needs to be part of the railway investments that are now being considered and therefore requests priority consideration by the National Infrastructure Commission for its desire to be linked to the local and regional engines of growth in the North of England and North Wales.

Neston Town Council request that the National Infrastructure Commission give priority to Neston rail services in its consideration of major infrastructure challenges within the Northern Powerhouse and neighbouring regions.