

## **This is the response from Crewe and Shrewsbury Passenger Association (CASPA) to the Cheshire East Council consultation on Local Transport and Car Parking Engagement 2020**

CASPA comments in the context of the Nantwich section of the consultation because this best presents our view. Our comments apply to the whole rail line between Crewe and Shrewsbury. We have made our suggestions against the 5 objectives so they best fit our comments. There is some overlap between objectives in these comments.

### **Five objectives have been proposed to improve transport in Nantwich**

#### ***1. How strongly do you agree or disagree that the objectives proposed are the right areas to focus on within Nantwich?***

CASPA is the passenger association covering the stations of Crewe to Shrewsbury including the intermediate stations at Nantwich, Wrenbury, Whitchurch, Prees, Wem and Yorton. The Association aims to promote, encourage and improve the use of the rail services in this route. CASPA therefore supports all the initiatives to improve transport to and from Nantwich and Wrenbury.

#### ***2. Are there any other overall key objectives for Nantwich that have not been identified?***

There is very little mention of rail services in the proposals and CASPA regard this as a missed opportunity.

The rail service controlled by Transport for Wales (TfW). TfW awarded a contract for day to day operation of the services to KeolisAmey in 2018 when the franchise of Arriva trains ended. From February 2021, the operations will pass to Transport for Wales Ltd, which is an operator of last resort. The Welsh Government have effective control of the services.

The rail services on the Crewe and Shrewsbury line are substantially made up of through trains running from Cardiff to Manchester via Hereford, and trains running from Swansea to Crewe via Llandeilo. This is supplemented during the afternoon with a shuttle train that provides an all stops service to the stations between Crewe and Shrewsbury. The through trains stop infrequently at Wem, Whitchurch and Nantwich.

The train carriages are old stock inherited from Arriva. Some have been refurbished and TfW are reaching the end of a programme of upgrades to meet the legal requirements for disability. TfW have ordered new trains but these will not be in service until 2023 at the earliest. These will not fully replace the old stock, and we can expect with current plans, to be riding on trains 30 years old for the planned future. There are no plans for electrification of the line.

The service provided has generally been reliable and on time.

TfW do not have full freedom to set timetables. The trains must be timed to pass places such as Crewe, Shrewsbury and Cardiff. These are heavily constrained junctions. The Crewe - Shrewsbury line is used for freight trains avoiding the West Coast main line and Birmingham, and this further constrains stopping passenger trains.

We have made a number of detailed comments in the sections below all targeting development of rail traffic in support of Cheshire East's objectives.

A notable omission is the lack of anything to promote community partnership with the rail operator, Transport for Wales (TfW). They have a programme for this. It can be found here.

<https://tfwrail.wales/about-us/community/community-rail-partnerships>

We note that TfW have had a difficult time in their first years. They inherited trains that were life expired and a requirement to upgrade for disabled compliance or to scrap them. This has resulted in a chronic shortage of stock. The transfer of some other old trains from other regions and a reduced timetable for Covid has enabled them to survive with a level of service. It is apparent that TfW has very significant issues in Cardiff, the Valleys and elsewhere within Wales. CASPA suggest the CE have an important role to play in reminding TfW of their responsibilities in serving Cheshire.

CASPA recommend that Cheshire East should engage with TfW. Many of the objectives are shared and engagement would facilitate understanding of mutual problems and provide good solutions.

**Objective 1: Improving transport access to and within the town centre to support a thriving market town**

**3. Do you have any comments to make on the potential options listed under objective 1?**

There is no mention of rail services in this section so there is no comment to make.

**4. Are there any other options under this objective that we could look into that have not been identified? If so, please comment below:**

Parking at Nantwich and Wrenbury Stations

There are parking issues for rail users at Nantwich Station, who are affected by the lack of car parking, and this impacts the available day parking for the town.

Nantwich Station has small free car park which is always fully utilised on a working day. It is not clear whether the users are for the train or use the station car park for access to the town. Part of the area for the station yard is fenced off by Network Rail (NR) as an engineering compound. This is an unsightly mess and reflects very badly on NR. The Shrewsbury office of NR wish to retain it 'just in case' as an engineering compound. CASPA notes it is rarely used and NR do not maintain it. The area could provide an additional 20 spaces for the town. A paid for system for rail users would be appropriate. CASPA suggest that CE press NR to release this area for rail parking immediately. Would CE consider compulsory purchase of this land?

Commuting rail users from Wrenbury have no choice but to drive to Nantwich (or Crewe) to park and catch the train because there are no stopping trains. This puts pressure on Nantwich free parking, which is already in short supply. If a passenger gets to Nantwich station and there is no place to park, where do they go? Street parking in Wellington Road, or the Riverside park parking area? This is not what is needed. CASPA observes that lack of train stops at Wrenbury have an impact on parking in Nantwich, and this needs to be addressed. W comment on this further under Objective 4.

There is no parking at Wrenbury Station. The available area has been developed as a concrete products area. With ongoing house development it is clear that parking (and commuter services) are required to support the village. Would CE consider a change in policy for this land and ensure that it available for parking? What other land can be made available for parking here?

**Objective 2. Improving access on key routes to Crewe, Chester and the Potteries**

A number of options have been developed to help to address this objective.

These options aim to help improve access on key routes, address existing congestion hotspots and future proof the road network.

***5. Do you have any comments to make on the potential options listed under objective 2?***

There is no mention of rail services in this section so there is no comment to make.

These routes are not in the area covered by CASPA. But it follows that to use rail routes to these other conurbations, rail travellers have to get to Crewe in the first place using the stations at Nantwich and Wrenbury. Improving usage on these stations facilitates further travel.

***6. Are there any other options under this objective that we could look into that have not been identified?***

If so, please comment below:

**Objective 3: Supporting access from rural communities around Nantwich to key services and employment centres, such as Nantwich town centre and Whitchurch**

***7. Do you have any comments to make on the potential options listed under objective 3?***

There is no mention of rail services in this section so there is no comment to make.

***8. Are there any other options under this objective that we could look into that have not been identified?***

Wrenbury is the only other village in the Cheshire East area served by the Crewe to Shrewsbury line, but the rail service is important for connections to the north and south, and also serving the towns and villages of Shropshire. The lack of interconnecting bus services to the south makes the rail service vitally important. Key for the rural area is a stopping rail service that facilitates commuting and day visits. TfW provide a very meagre service for Wrenbury, Pees and Yorton . CASPA understand that TfW have a poor record on announcing and serving request stops at Wrenbury, Pees and Yorton particularly on the intercity services, and this leads to passenger inconvenience. TfW no longer display timetables at our stations. They rely solely on electronic display boards and the internet for customer information. All this reflects poorly on TfW and their apparent low priority of servicing minor English villages. It is in such areas as this that community engagement is particularly important. If we take no interest, why will they?

#### **Objective 4: Supporting access to education and employment sites, such as Reaseheath College**

##### ***9. Do you have any comments to make on the potential options listed under objective 4?***

Item 35 We comment on the desire to Improve safety at the London Road level crossing.

We don't know what is proposed for this, because the crossing is equipped with double barriers. A footbridge would facilitate pedestrian flow in these periods, but CASPA is silent on this issue.

In general we note the following. There are three road level crossings in Nantwich, and a further one at Wrenbury. They all have impact on traffic flow with barrier down times often of ten minutes. CASPA believes that there is no available technology that can greatly improve this situation, and the towns have to live with the impact. Network Rail (NR) manage the crossings and undertake periodic safety reviews. CASPA recommend that Cheshire East Highways engage with these reviews to better understand the impact and any improvements that might be available. We note that NR have long term plans to convert the London Road crossing to a bridge and close the crossing in Shrewbridge Road. We ask if CE are aware of and agree with these long term plans?

There are two pedestrian level crossings in Nantwich between the station and London Road crossing. CE might wish to consider the safety and necessity of these, or whether a footbridge would be appropriate.

Item 36. We comment on the desire to Improve rail connections to Crewe and Whitchurch.

Commuting services north bound. Trains to Manchester stop at Nantwich at around 07.15 and 08.15 and provide a popular commuting service to Crewe and Manchester. Passenger numbers are increasing with the new housing estates becoming occupied. These are important services, and to be encouraged to keep road traffic down. The trains are reliable, despite the fact that they are intercity services and have been travelling for many hours before they arrive at Nantwich. CASPA would welcome additional morning shuttle services as passenger numbers grow. Commuting services do not currently stop at Wrenbury. It is therefore not possible to commute by train from Wrenbury. Morning and evening stopping trains are required to support commuters and school children traveling to Whitchurch and Nantwich, there being no secondary school in Wrenbury. Parking issues are mentioned above under Objective 1.

Weekday southbound service. There are no services southbound from Nantwich and Wrenbury between 07.42 and 11.28 for 6 days per week, a period of nearly 5 hours. There are through trains, but they do not stop. This effectively prevents day trips southwards by train. CASPA does not regard this as a satisfactory service for the county and again reflects on TfW's apparent lack of understanding of the importance of servicing minor English villages.

Sunday service. CASPA has long campaign for 2 hourly Sunday service and we are please to report that this was implemented in 2020.

##### ***10. Are there any other options under this objective that we could look into that have not been identified?***

TfW no longer display timetables at our stations. They rely solely on electronic display boards and the internet for customer information. CASPA regard this as obstructive in encouraging rail travel.

**Objective 5: Strengthening the transport network to accommodate development sites, such as LPS 46 Kingsley Fields site identified within the Local Plan**

These options below aim to improve access to the Local Plan development sites within Nantwich and ensure that the transport network has capacity to accommodate the associated growth.

***11. Do you have any comments to make on the potential options listed under objective 5?***

There is no mention of rail services in this section so there is no comment to make.

***12. Are there any other options under this objective that we could look into that have not been identified?***

CASPA suggest Cheshire East have an important role to play in reminding TfW of their responsibilities in serving Cheshire. CASPA believe TfW have neglected their responsibilities because of the pressures within Wales.

We draw attention to the growth in rail travel from Nantwich and Wrenbury stations. Nantwich rail travel has shown growth in all years since 2005. The continued approval of housing schemes is driving this. In Wrenbury the growth in the year to 18/19 was 9%. There has been no change to rail service or facilities to accommodate this growth. It is common for there to be 60 passengers waiting for the commuter trains from Nantwich to Crewe in the morning, and yet there are no all-weather canopies and meagre ticket facilities. Car parking is minimal. The commuter trains are long distance services, ill equipped for commuter duty and quick boarding. There is no commuter service from Wrenbury. This does not demonstrate any support for the growth of Nantwich and Wrenbury as residential hubs. TfW promised deep cleaning of stations, and new ticket machines when they took over, but none of this has come to Nantwich and Wrenbury stations. Branding remains in the colours of the Arrive franchise from pre 2018. CASPA believe that Nantwich and Wrenbury stations are ready for improvement to support the residential growth in the areas.

## Overall Plan

### **13. What do you think the top three overall priorities for Nantwich are?**

CE should:

- Engage with Transport for Wales to provide a solid commuter service, and a 2 hourly general service that support the importance of the villages, and the growth in housing in Nantwich and Wrenbury.
- Agree with Network Rail a plan to increase car parking facilities at Nantwich and Wrenbury Stations.
- Allocate s.106 moneys for Nantwich and Wrenbury developments to be spent at the stations to improve facilities.
- Engage with Network Rail on safety and timing issues on the level crossings in Nantwich and Wrenbury.

### **14. Now thinking about the detail presented for Nantwich as a whole, how strongly do you agree or disagree that it takes into account all the right evidence...**

CASPA welcomes the opportunity to support all the initiatives to improve transport to Cheshire East stations. CASPA would be happy to further discuss the issues raised. Our contact details are: email [contact\\_us@caspa.org.uk](mailto:contact_us@caspa.org.uk) and c/o 35 Williamson Drive Nantwich CW5 5GJ

Our web site is at [www.caspa.org.uk](http://www.caspa.org.uk)

28 January 2021

End of submission