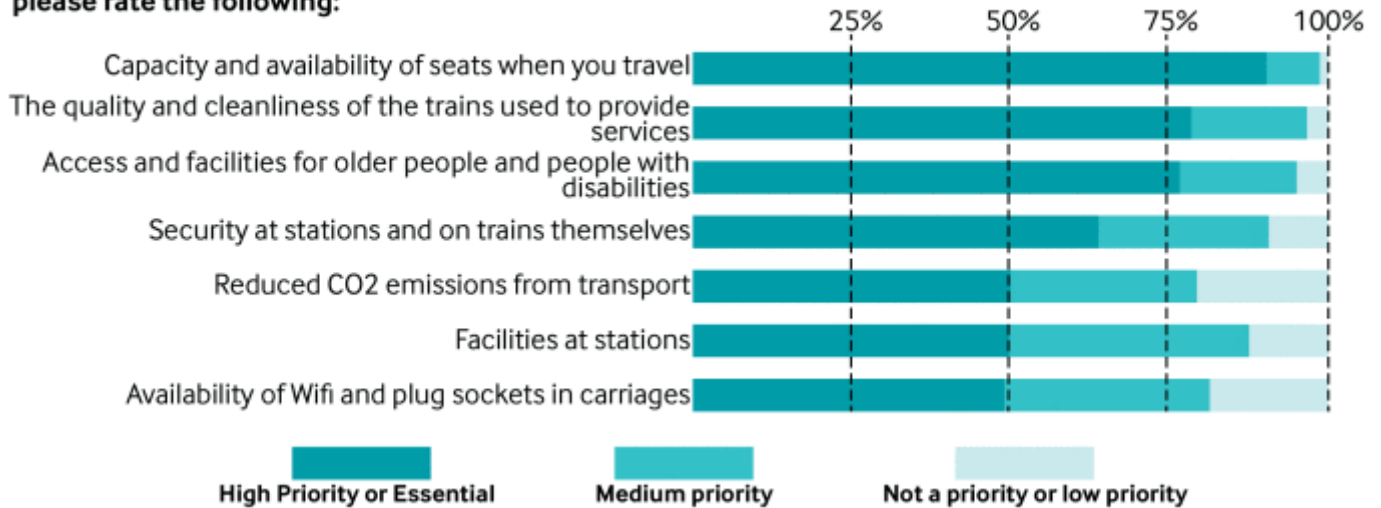


The rail priorities? Finding out what passengers want from the next Welsh rail franchise.

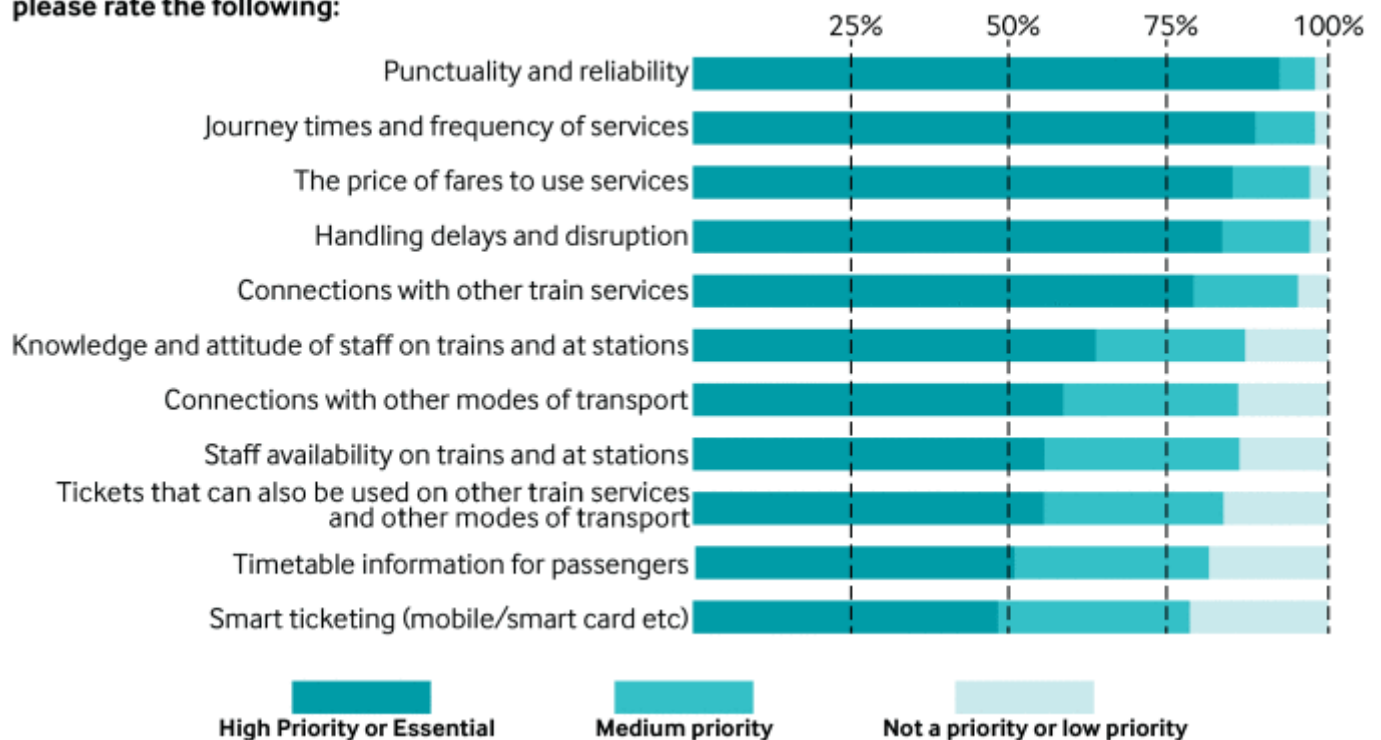
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30/06/17

Considering what you think are the priorities for improving Wales and Borders franchise rail services, please rate the following:



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The Assembly's Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee published their report, [On the right track? The Rail Franchise and South Wales Metro](#), today. The report sets out the Committee's views on the Welsh Government's procurement of the next Wales and Borders Rail Franchise and Metro, and suggests key priorities for the next franchise.

This inquiry was the Committee's main focus for the spring term. A public consultation ran from 24 January 2017 to 23 February 2017. They took further evidence on 23 and 29 March, and 6 April 2017 from a range of witnesses including civil engineers, academics, rail passenger bodies and interest groups, as well as the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government. You'll find full details of the inquiry [on the Committee's webpage](#).

The procurement process is being led by [Transport for Wales](#) (TfW), the body set up to advise the Welsh Government and manage the franchise and Metro contracts. The Committee timed their inquiry to coincide with TfW's [most recent consultation](#) in order to influence the process before the tender specification is published in July 2017. The report drew 34 conclusions, and made 19 recommendations, including the Committee's Top Ten Priorities for the franchise specification itself. These priorities address a range of issues such as performance measures, environmental considerations, routes, fares, ticketing, how information is provided to passengers, and how delays are managed.

Putting passengers at the heart of the inquiry

The Committee wanted to focus on passenger priorities, so they produced a survey so that rail users could have their say. They also held a roundtable event to gather comments from user groups and others with an interest in the railway. The event was held in Shrewsbury in order to highlight the need to capture the views of users from across the franchise area, including those who live in England.

Almost 3,000 survey responses from all parts of the network

The Assembly's Outreach Team conducted the survey between 23 January and 3 March 2017. It asked a range of questions about priorities for improving rail services.

The Outreach Team worked closely with [Transport Focus](#), the independent transport user watchdog, who shared the survey amongst their stakeholders. We were able to



raise awareness using a range of methods including: placing articles on websites; signposting on social media (including Facebook and Twitter); and emailing participants directly. Facebook ads were also used to target a wider audience in Wales and England.

The result was 2985 responses, one of the biggest response rates to an Assembly Committee survey and the Committee would like to thank the public for taking part.

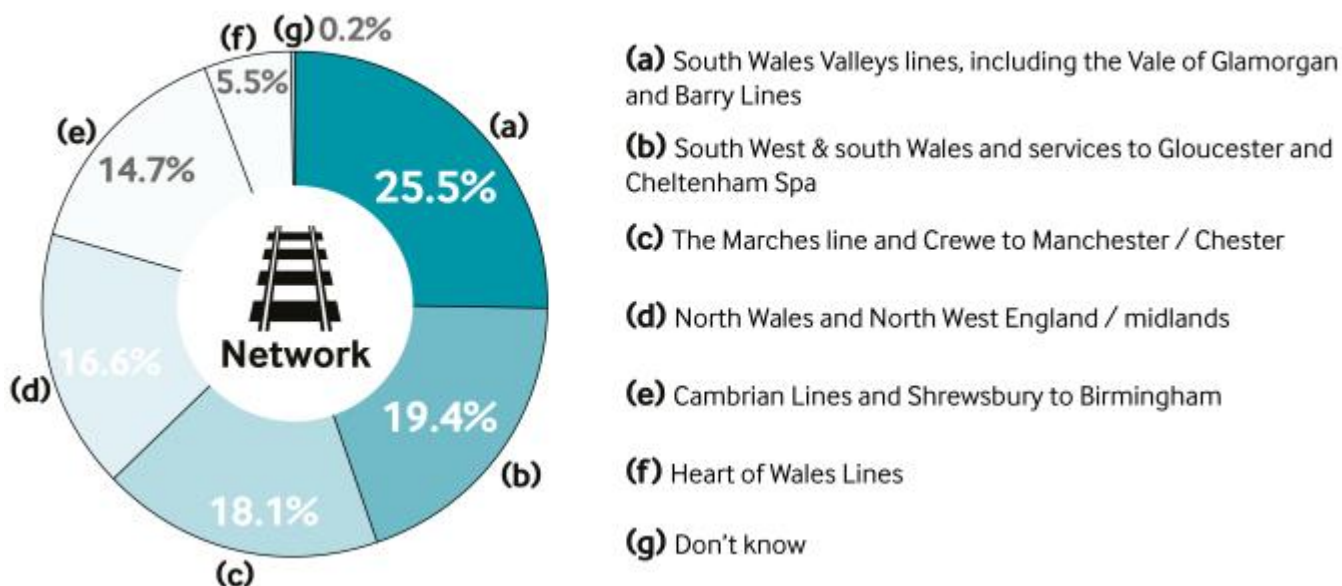
The passenger priorities for the next franchise identified in the survey are above. Passengers identified capacity and availability of seats when you travel (90.2% high priority or essential) as most important.

Other areas identified as a high priority or essential were: punctuality and reliability (92.3%); journey times and frequency of service (88.5%); the price of fares (84.9%); and handling delays and disruption (83.3%).

Just outside the top five, passengers wanted to see: improved connections with other train services (78.8%); quality, clean trains (78.4%); and improved access and facilities for older people and people with disabilities (76.6%).

The survey drew passengers from across the network with those who took part using a range of routes across the Wales and Borders franchise area.

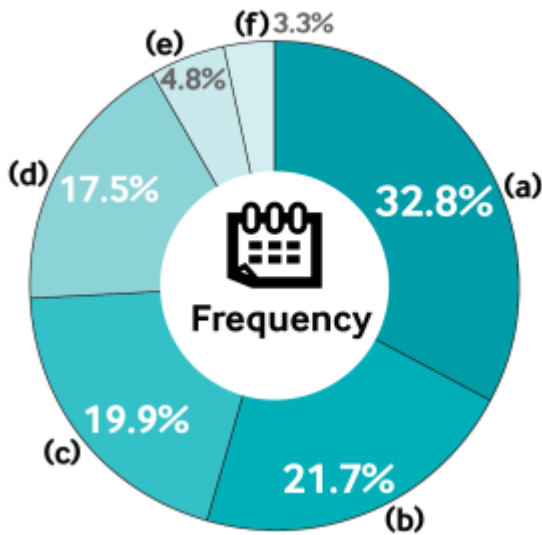
Can you tell us which parts of the network you use to travel by rail (please select as many as you use)?



Respondents were also fairly frequent users with 39.2% of those surveyed using Wales and Borders franchise rail services daily or weekly.



How often do you use Wales and Borders franchise rail services?



- (a) At least once a month
- (b) Daily
- (c) At least once every 6 months
- (d) At least once a week
- (e) At least once every 12 months
- (f) I haven't used rail service in Wales in the past 12 months

While 23.4% of passengers surveyed rated their experience of using **current** Wales and Border franchise services as good or very good, 40.4% rated this as poor or very poor:



How would you rate your experience of using Wales and Borders franchise rail services over the last 12 months?

The Committee heard evidence which suggested that the passenger priorities for the next franchise identified by the survey reflected other work being done to understand passenger views and concerns. In particular, Transport Focus told the Committee the results were comparable with those from their [annual National Rail Passenger Survey](#):

We ask about satisfaction with current services and we also ask, periodically, about what the priorities for improvement are. If you look at our priorities for improvement and the results, they're much the same. The core product:



punctual, reliable, getting a seat, frequency drives most attitudes to the railway. If you think of it in that sort of Maslow hierarchy of needs, we're on the bottom bit—the basic core product. And then, things like good Wi-Fi and availability of staff are the next tier up, but it all starts from that core product. At the moment, it's quite hard to get beyond that, so, I think the results that we've seen reflect the same. – Mike Hewitson, Transport Focus

Face to face views from rail stakeholders

Committee members were keen to talk to as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. The Committee travelled to Shrewsbury on 9 March where they held a formal evidence session followed by an informal stakeholder event

Members discussed the following topics with stakeholders:

- Preparation for the franchise and stakeholder involvement;
- Franchise specification;
- Rolling stock; and
- The franchise management model and relationship with Network Rail.

Transport Focus, also assisted in the organisation and promotion of this event and attended the session.

The next stop on the journey...

The Committee used the contributions from the survey and stakeholder event to create their Top Ten Priorities for the New Wales and Borders Franchise and to help form their recommendations and final report.

The report will be shared with the Welsh Government, who will have around six weeks to respond to the recommendations. However, just as the proof of the pudding is in the eating, Committee Members and the public alike will look to the publication of the tender specification in July, and ultimately start of the new franchise in October 2018, to see what the future holds for Welsh rail passengers.

Article by Rhayna Mann, National Assembly for Wales Outreach Service and Andrew Minnis, National Assembly for Wales Research Service

