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National Station Improvement Programme for Wales (NSIP+): Phase 1 Evaluation Executive Summary

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National Station Improvement Programme for Wales (NSIP+):
Phase 1 Evaluation
Executive Summary

AECOM

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

David Roberts

Social Research and Information Division

Welsh Government

Sarn Mynach

Llandudno Junction

LL31 9RZ

0300 062 5485

david.roberts@wales.gsi.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 AECOM was commissioned by the Welsh Government in June 2015 to undertake a final evaluation of the National Station Improvement Programme for Wales (NSIP+). The programme, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Welsh Government, Network Rail, and Arriva Trains Wales, was developed to improve railway stations and their connections with other transport modes across the ERDF West Wales and the Valleys area over a 5-year period (2010-2015).
- 1.2 Individual projects consisted of improvements including station modernisation and upgrades (such as new or modernised station buildings), new or improved passenger facilities (such as ticketing), general station access improvements (such as cycle parking facilities) and easier access improvements (including lifts and ramps).
- 1.3 The programme was delivered in two phases, with Phase 1 schemes funded under the 2007-2013 ERDF programme and Phase 2 schemes funded under the 2014-2020 ERDF programme. This report focuses on the Phase 1 schemes which were predominantly delivered via a grant delivery model via third parties; a subsequent evaluation report will be prepared for Phase 2.
- 1.4 A total of 65 stations received some degree of improvement as part of NSIP+ Phase 1. In line with what was indicated within the Business Plan, schemes were delivered at Swansea, Carmarthen, Porthmadog Harbour and Llandudno, as well as a series of minor accessibility upgrades; the Easier Access Humps (EAH) programme and SWWITCH station access programme. The scope of the SWWITCH and EAH programmes did however vary from what was planned as part of the application for NSIP+ funding.
- 1.5 This evaluation has considered the results and impacts of the programme in terms of the numbers of stations improved and the nature of the improvements made, as well as the results of these improvements for users in terms of the change in passenger kilometres. The perceptions of station users have also been gauged by way of a review of the National Rail Passenger Survey and face to face surveys undertaken at a sample of four stations improved as part of NSIP+.

- 1.6 Additionally, a process evaluation has been undertaken based upon interviews with key project staff and stakeholders and available project data sources, to establish key lessons learnt and examples of best practice from NSIP+.
- 1.7 In terms of the impacts of the programme on passenger kilometres the methodology adopted for the Business Plan was repeated utilising ticket sales data for the period following completion of the schemes. This indicated no observed evidence that the station enhancements have had any large impact on levels of passenger travel yet. However, the impacts of the improvement made may be obscured by external factors.
- 1.8 Face to face surveys were undertaken at a sample of the stations improved during NSIP+ Phase 1. It was identified that these station improvements had contributed to increased levels of satisfaction amongst passengers. One of the most noticeable improvements across the surveyed stations was the increase in the perceptions of safety. Although they are based on a small sample the results of the surveys also suggest that there may have been a modal shift from other modes of transport (from car to rail) though it was not possible to identify NSIP+ as the cause of this over other factors.
- 1.9 In terms of the processes adopted for the programme, NSIP+ initially adopted an open grant model to encourage involvement from a range of different organisations. However, concerns regarding contractual arrangements and match funding constraints limited the levels of take-up via this model, leading to a decision for Welsh Government to directly deliver subsequent projects.
- 1.10 Available financial information identifies that both the EAH programme and SWITCH Access to Stations programmes experienced slight cost escalations, as well as changes to project scope. This resulted from initial costings having been based upon preliminary designs, which changed following more detailed feasibility and option testing and consultation.
- 1.11 The project team members interviewed as part of this process evaluation have indicated that there was a good level of collaboration between the various organisations delivering different aspects of the programme.

1.12 Stakeholder involvement across the programme has been widespread, with a number of different organisations engaged in helping to shape the schemes delivered. The improvements made to Swansea station illustrate the impact that this involvement can have in ensuring the facilities provided meet the needs of users with different requirements.