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Caerphilly and Taff Rhondda Turn-back Final Evaluation Executive Summary

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 63/2015

AECOM was commissioned by the Welsh Government in December 2014 to undertake a Final Evaluation of the Caerphilly and Taff Rhondda Turn-backs (CTRT) project. The project, part funded by Welsh Government and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), was developed to encourage modal shift from car to rail through the provision of the following rail infrastructure:

- An additional platform (known as a 'turn-back') at Caerphilly station on the Cardiff to Rhymney corridor; and
- An additional platform (turn-back) at Pontypridd station on the Cardiff to Taff Vale corridors.

This additional infrastructure was designed to facilitate the running of additional rail services on the Rhymney and Taff Vale corridors, between Caerphilly, Pontypridd and Cardiff. The turn-backs allow trains to terminate at Caerphilly and Pontypridd off the main line, allowing continuous paths for through trains on the main lines. The works were also designed to improve both stations as intermodal facilities.

The works associated with the project were completed in 2014, providing additional network capacity. However, at the time of the Final Evaluation no additional rail services were timetabled for the two stations. This was due to the need to complete the Cardiff Area Signalling Renewal (CASR) programme, including the opening of Platform 8 at Cardiff Central which is now scheduled to be operational in 2017.

The scope of the Final Evaluation included a process evaluation of the implementation and management approaches adopted on the project. No ex-post impact evaluation was undertaken due to the lack of additional services operating to Caerphilly and Pontypridd stations.

The project was delivered within the forecast budget, although some variance was observed in forecast costs during implementation. The monthly finance meetings between Welsh Government and Network Rail were an effective approach to manage project costs.

The project was procured and commenced construction later than forecast, and delays were experienced on specific elements of both turn-backs. The interdependencies with CASR introduced programme delays which impacted on the CTRT project. Overall, the construction periods for both turn-backs were within the forecast durations.

A key issue which affected the benefits achieved by the project was the fact that the planned service improvements were not implemented at the time of evaluation. Despite this lack of service improvements the operators have been able to make use of the turn-back to hold trains, providing additional network resilience.

The level of stakeholder engagement varied across the project. Engagement and liaison between strategic delivery stakeholders, such as Welsh Government, Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales, was good, enhanced by the introduction of the Programme Management Board in early 2014. The Welsh Government and Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) Rail Programme Board was also considered effective by stakeholders, a view endorsed by the evaluators. The approach to public engagement was considered by some stakeholders to be less effective, with the timing of scheme completion publicity a central area of concern.

The overarching management and oversight of the project was also significantly enhanced by the introduction of the Programme Management Board in January 2014. This monthly meeting increased the level of scrutiny across project delivery.

The cross-cutting themes were evaluated and the CTRT project provided fully accessible facilities for all potential users, alongside bi-lingual information. No assessment of the impacts of such improvements on demand and issues such as social inclusion were feasible at the time of the evaluation. The scheme was anticipated to have a beneficial impact upon

environmental sustainability via reduced carbon emissions resulting from achieving modal shift away from car use. It was, however not possible to assess whether this objective had been achieved due to the current lack of associated service improvements on the corridor. Additionally, no ex-post evaluation data was available to assess the economic value for money of benefits achieved. However, stakeholders did indicate that through integration with CASR, significant cost savings had been achieved compared to delivering the project in isolation.



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