



News Release

Britain's best known rail author backs Flintshire's £36m Round 2 bid to the UK Levelling Up Fund for the Wrexham-Liverpool Borderlands line

Britain's best known rail author, Christian Wolmar, has joined MPs, Senedd Members, business and local authority leaders from North Wales and North West England in backing the £36m bid to Round 2 of the UK Levelling Up Fund (LUF) from Flintshire County Council for investment in the Borderlands railway line between Wrexham and Liverpool via Bidston.

Christian Wolmar visited the line as the guest of cross-border rail campaign Growth Track 360 in October 2021 and wrote about his experiences in his *RAIL* magazine column. In his letter of support for the LUF Round 2 bid, Mr Wolmar says that during his visit he "was struck by the strength of the improvements that were being proposed.....to this excellent but underused railway line".

The two investment schemes within the LUF bid are proposed to accelerate progress towards higher frequency, faster and more reliable rail services on the Borderlands Linea that will attract more passengers:

- **Deeside Industrial Park station** – a flagship new station with a large 200+ space car park, bus interchange and active travel facilities; and
- **Padeswood Hanson Cement works connection** – new sidings and improved access arrangements from the main line to eliminate competition for track capacity between passenger and freight trains.

The LUF focuses on capital investment in local infrastructure with the aim of having a visible, tangible impact on people and places and supporting economic recovery.

With the support of local authorities and business organisations in the cross-border Growth Track 360 alliance, Flintshire Council submitted an initial bid for LUF funding for the Borderlands line in June 2021. Learning from UK Government feedback on this bid and now with extensive work by Transport for Wales and detailed input from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, expectations are high of a positive response to the Round 2 application.

The new bid contains formal priority letters of support from local Westminster Members of Parliament Christian Matheson MP (Labour, City of Chester), Mark Tami MP (Labour, Alyn & Deeside) and Justin Madders MP (Labour, Ellesmere Port and Neston) and supporting letters from Dr James Davies MP (Conservative, Vale of Clwyd) Chair of the Westminster Mersey Dee and North Wales All Party Parliamentary Group, Sarah Atherton MP (Conservative, Wrexham) and Mick Whitley MP (Labour, Birkenhead) as well from the Welsh Government, seven Senedd Members representing North Wales, businesses, rail trade and user associations, and local authority leaders from across the region.

Growth Track 360 Chair, Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of Cheshire West & Chester Council, said:

“Improvements to the Borderlands railway will support the UK and Welsh Governments’ shared desire to tackle climate change with alternatives to the car by seamlessly connecting Liverpool City Region and Cheshire with the future North Wales Metro, providing our citizens with access to a wide range of job opportunities, skills training, educational and leisure facilities regardless of which side of the Wales-England border they live.”

Leader of Flintshire Council and Vice Chair of Growth Track 360, Councillor Ian Roberts, said:

“Flintshire, Growth Track 360 and our supporters learned a great deal from our first application to the UK Levelling Up Fund for the Borderlands railway. With great support from Transport for Wales, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the private sector, we have now produced a superb bid for Round 2 which, if approved by the UK Government, will accelerate the transformation of the Wrexham-Liverpool line and assist in unleashing the full economic potential of our cross-border region.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors:

The Flintshire LUF2 Bid for the Borderlands Line

The Bid components are: -

1. A new Deeside Station to service the Deeside Industrial Park, which hosts 26,000 jobs, at a cost of £20m.
2. An enhanced set of freight sidings at the Hanson Cement’s Padeswood Works at Penyffordd at a cost of £16m to accommodate longer freight trains and to enable speedy access and egress of freight trains from the site. This will release track capacity for the planned increase in passenger services from one train per hour to two trains per hour. This commitment to improve passenger services is not currently deliverable due to the potential for freight services to block the line.

The two schemes will enable improved connectivity along the Wrexham to Bidston, Borderlands Line and including the interchange with the North Wales Coast Main Line at Shotton will: -

- Improve local people’s access by public transport to jobs, schools, colleges and universities, town centres (e.g., Wrexham and Neston) and health facilities (like Arrowe Park and Wrexham Maelor hospitals),
- Shift people out of cars, reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality by reducing noxious exhaust emissions.
- Get freight off the roads, with Hanson Cement having better rail connectivity to its key customers, like the Hinkley Point C power station, which will provide low-carbon electricity for around six million homes, equivalent to 7% of the UK’s electricity demand.
- Improve health by connecting the Deeside Station to fully integrated active travel corridors
- Link the new Deeside Station to the main employers on the Deeside Industrial Park with new bus services
- Link the Borderlands Line to the North Wales Metro.

The Welsh Government and Hanson Cement will be providing match funding towards the scheme.

Currently the Borderlands Line is one of the most congested on the rail network and requires infrastructure improvements to remove conflict between proposed growth in passenger and freight services on the line. The freight enhancements at Hanson Cement will have UK wide benefits for freight and will enable Transport for Wales to deliver their franchise commitments to provide two trains per hour on the Borderlands Line.

The proposals match the criteria of the Levelling Up Fund by enabling: -

- Economic Growth, by improving access to jobs and education
- Local Pride in place, by improving long neglected community assets
- Improved transport infrastructure outside London and the South East
- The achievement of a local priority (to improve the contribution of the Borderlands line to local transport connectivity and quality of life)

They contribute to Strengthening the Union by enhancing cross border transport connectivity and integration of the cross-border economy in the North Wales and Mersey Dee areas.

Growth Track 360

1. Growth Track 360 is a public-private partnership established in 2016 uniting North Wales, the Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester. Its goal is improving cross-border transport connectivity with specific emphasis on rail.
2. Growth Track 360 works closely with key stakeholders, their policies and objectives including the Welsh Government, Transport for the North, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Mersey Dee Alliance, North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Transport for Wales, the West and Wales Transport Forum and the private sector.
3. Christian Wolmar's October 2021 article in *RAIL* magazine about the Borderlands line may be viewed here:
<https://www.christianwolmar.co.uk/2021/10/rail-942-a-big-test-for-the-levelling-up-agenda/>.

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