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Gowerton Redoubling Project: Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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Gowerton Redoubling Project: Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

AECOM

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

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 AECOM was commissioned by the Welsh Government (WG) in June 2015 to undertake a final evaluation of the Gowerton Redoubling Project. The £24.3m project, funded jointly by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and WG, was developed with the aim of upgrading an 8km single section of track between Duffryn West (Llanelli area) and Cockett West (Gowerton, Swansea area) to double track and implementing improvements to Gowerton station.
- 1.2 The project sought to overcome a key pinch point in the rail network within south west Wales, facilitated an improvement over the previous maximum frequency of two trains per hour, enabled improvements to operational performance and facilitated more frequent stops at Gowerton station.
- 1.3 Additional services have now been made available following project completion:
- 1) Additional train service(s);
 - 2) Additional stops on existing services (which were previously non-stop or request services);
 - 3) Capacity for further additional services on the route between Swansea and Carmarthen.
- 1.4 The project was completed in May 2013 and was delivered alongside the £16m replacement of the grade 2 listed Loughor Viaduct, which was funded and delivered by Network Rail and is not within the scope of this evaluation.
- 1.5 The Final Evaluation has considered the impacts of the project for users of the station, as well as services passing through the new double track section based upon the analysis of key patronage data and market research surveys with users of

the station. The key processes utilised to deliver the project have also been considered based upon interviews with key project staff and a review of key project information. This has informed the identification of key lessons learnt for future projects.

- 1.6 As planned, alongside the delivery of additional track and station facilities the project has also contributed to additional vehicle kilometres being created/improved, as well as additional passenger kilometres on public transport.
- 1.7 The Business Plan calculation of additional vehicle and passenger kilometres delivered, prepared following scheme implementation, cannot be compared to the original justification of the scheme, as the latter was made on the basis of rolling stock being available to operate additional services over the re-doubled line and WG subsidy to cover the cost of operating those services. The risks of non-availability of rolling stock, and lack of funding were recorded in the risk registers accompanying both the business case for the new services and the separate case for the re-doubled infrastructure (which assumed the additional services would operate). These risks had already transpired at the time the Business Plan was written.
- 1.8 The passenger satisfaction survey undertaken at Gowerton sampled the opinions of 291 station users and determined that 50 per cent of respondents thought that the improvements made at the station had increased their levels of train use. Both the changes to train timetables and the changes to station facilities were considered beneficial improvements that had contributed to increases in use.
- 1.9 The survey also indicated that prior to using Gowerton station, 73 per cent of those surveyed would have undertaken comparable trips by car (either as driver or passenger). This indicates that the station has had a positive impact in promoting modal shift. Additionally, only 4 per cent of respondents would previously have used a different station, indicating a low level of abstraction from other local stations.

- 1.10 The process evaluation determined that the project was delivered to target costs, with minor additional costs relating to additional items of scope, such as platform resurfacing. A pain/gain arrangement within the contract helped to ensure the project was delivered within the available budget, whilst a series of audits were undertaken to ensure only eligible costs were included within the final project accounts and in preparation for the Business Plan and post-award funding claims. Synergies with the Loughor Viaduct project were a key means of keeping project costs down.
- 1.11 Risk was managed throughout the project as part of the GRIP process and through the utilisation of quantified risk assessments. The key risks identified at project inception included those associated with delivery of the project alongside the Loughor Viaduct project and the tight timescales of the available track blockage. The evaluation determined that the risk management processes were successful in managing this risk. However, issues that occurred during the project included the collapse of an embankment and the poor condition of the existing platform.
- 1.12 The project was managed with the WG undertaking the role of project sponsor, Network Rail providing project management, whilst utilising the contractor Colas Rail Morgan Sindall to deliver the works. Regular meetings were held between appointed project team members representing a cross-section of functional/stakeholder interests and the relationships between these partners during the delivery of the project were considered to be good. A Programme Management Board has since been initiated to strengthen and formalise the high level management control of WG rail projects further.