

# WREXHAM INDEPENDENT ELECTION VICTORY

RMT Wrexham branch secretary and Wrexham Independent Group chair David Bithell explains how his group has increased the number of seats in local elections

In the May local elections in Wales the Wrexham Independent Group increased its representation on the council by winning ten seats.

As our group of members increases we will continue to work with other councillors in Wrexham and across North Wales to support more improvements to the rail network.

First elected in 2004, I am currently deputy leader of the council and vice chair of the executive board, a key decision making body for the council.

I also deal with environment and transport issues and represent the Wrexham Council on the North Wales regional leadership board, looking at how we can work collaboratively across the region to improve services.

I am a rail working group member and a member of the Board on North Wales Transport Consortium (TAITH).

Since setting up the rail group we have lobbied for rail improvements both locally, regionally and nationally. The figures produced by the ORR (see below) show that passenger numbers continue to grow.

I know that members in North Wales have questioned, and rightly so at times, why we are now 'all Wales', but the level of investment by the Welsh government is significant. We must support the aim of bringing more investment to Wales which will see more passengers using rail.

One on the major

improvements we have lobbied for both as a council, TAITH and the local RMT branch is the redoubling of the line between Wrexham and Chester at the cost of £45.4 million. Singled in 1980, the recent announcement by the Welsh government to support journey time improvements between north and south Wales will ensure that seven of the 9.5 miles of single track are doubled together with line speed enhancements of up to 90mph between Gobowen and Shrewsbury and from Chester to Saltney.

This will allow for the rerouting of the original north to south express train from Holyhead to Cardiff to operate via Wrexham and enable us to campaign for more frequent services to and from Wrexham, North Wales and the North West.

We have also looked at improvements on the Wrexham Bidston line, working with TAITH and the Mersey Dee Alliance on cross-border issues to improve the frequency of the services together with line-speed enhancements.

Currently work is being carried out to increase the line speed with the ultimate aim to have a 30-minute service operating from Wrexham to Bidston. Although the current franchise agreement does not allow for more services, I hope the Welsh government will be looking at a new franchise agreement in Wales to support growth.

Some of the other projects

we have been working on include lobbying for improved timetabling between Chester, Wrexham and Shrewsbury which currently has an hourly service pattern with trains between Holyhead, Cardiff, Holyhead and Birmingham International Airport via Wrexham General.

A lot of work has gone into support investment at stations and significant improvements have been at Ruabon and Chirk as well as an access lift installed on Platform 4 at Wrexham General. A continued investment programme has been ongoing throughout Wrexham County Borough including bus,



rail interchanges and car park extensions at Chirk, Ruabon and Wrexham General.

There are also CCTV and customer information scheme projects at all stations and Chirk station will shortly benefit from funding to improve disabled access via a new Department for Transport programme at a cost of £1.2million, this will include some match funding from the consortia. ■

Data from the ORR (Office of the Rail Regulator) shows consistent increases in passenger numbers on this line of route as follows:

Year	Station	Journeys	Growth	%
2002/3	Wrexham General	364267	-	-
2004/5	Wrexham General	391693	27426	7.53%
2005/6	Wrexham General	401242	9549	2.44%
2006/7	Wrexham General	436468	35226	8.78%
2007/8	Wrexham General	487713	51245	11.74%
2008/9	Wrexham General	534256	46543	9.54%
2009/10	Wrexham General	584176	49920	9.34%
		<b>Total Growth</b>	<b>219909</b>	
<b>Wrexham General</b>		<b>Growth 2003 to 2010</b>	<b>219909</b>	<b>60.37%</b>

2002/3	Ruabon	28470	-	-
2004/5	Ruabon	32414	3944	13.85%
2005/6	Ruabon	39854	7440	22.95%
2006/7	Ruabon	46623	6769	16.98%
2007/8	Ruabon	54369	7746	16.61%
2008/9	Ruabon	61578	7209	13.26%
2009/10	Ruabon	71346	9768	15.86%
		<b>Total Growth</b>	<b>42876</b>	
<b>Ruabon</b>		<b>Growth 2003 to 2010</b>	<b>42876</b>	<b>150.60%</b>

2002/3	Chirk	31532	-	-
2004/5	Chirk	32094	562	1.78%
2005/6	Chirk	36295	4201	13.09%
2006/7	Chirk	42762	6467	17.82%
2007/8	Chirk	50688	7926	18.54%
2008/9	Chirk	54988	4300	8.48%
2009/10	Chirk	56310	1322	2.40%
		<b>Total Growth</b>	<b>24778</b>	
<b>Chirk</b>		<b>Growth 2003 to 2010</b>	<b>24778</b>	<b>78.58%</b>