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Rail tourism: developing the tourism offer on the Heart of Wales line



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Executive Summary

This 2,000-word report will discuss the Heart of Wales Line with regard to tourism. The format includes an introduction, main body and conclusion, with recommendations being made throughout. A range of theory will be included, with the main theory discussion point being Porter's Five Forces.

Introduction

The Heart of Wales Line is a picturesque rail service that operates between Swansea and Shrewsbury, providing its guests with beautiful scenery of Mid Wales. The service also provides vital links for rural towns and communities across Wales. The service is operated by Transport for Wales and runs through 31 train stations, such as Llanelli, Shrewsbury and Llandeilo. However, the majority of the 31 stations are request stops in small rural towns (The Heart of Wales Line, 2019).

The line has been in operation since 1868 and covers 121 miles worth of rail that enters both Wales and England. The railway offers great amount of tourism for the small towns it passes through, as along the rail, footpaths are available for guests to hop on and off at different stations, while also taking in the Welsh landscape. The footpaths will lead the guests to the small towns, where they could use facilities such as, pubs, restaurants and B&B's. By 2022 the line is set to go under expansion as part of Transport for Wales strategic transport plan, to possibly double the capacity of their passengers, resulting in additional tourism for the rail stops. (Rushby, K, 2018).

The Heart of Wales Line

Regarding tourism, The Heart of Wales Line has many opportunities and facilities. The route showcases the spectacular landscapes throughout Wales. From the Cynghordy viaducts to the estuary of Loughor, travellers are provided with the opportunity to take in the countryside scenery, either from the comfort of a train carriage or exploring it first-hand by following the footpath of The Heart of Wales Trail (Wales Online, 2018).

It is believed that the rail is capable of contributing toward the social and economic wellbeing of Wales. If its connectivity was to be enhanced, creating links both within Wales and linking Wales of the rest of the UK, there would be many benefits as a result. As an internationally recognised route, The Heart of Wales Line attracts many tourists to Wales, despite the line terminating in England. The line begins and ends in urban areas, giving a contrast to the rural scenery that is prevalent along the journey (Senedd, 2016).

There are concerns that the current planning process is purely to develop the urban cities and towns that are linked by the line, with the rural routes being insufficiently supported (Senedd, 2016). The National Assembly for Wales highlight the importance of communication between both England and Wales to ensure that both provinces are able to utilise the HS2 hub efficiently, receiving the maximum benefit of it. Crewe will feature as a stop for both The Heart of Wales Line and the HS2, making it paramount that Wales' infrastructure is sufficiently developed in order to support an increased number of visitors (Senedd, 2016).

However, in order to accommodate the HS2, some English communities will need to be dismantled. This is a social implication that may lead to the prevention of the development. As a result of Crewe being a proposed stop for both The Heart of Wales Line and the HS2, it would not be unreasonable to predict a similar fate for some Welsh villages and towns that may lay along the intended route (BBC, 2013).

In order to ride the train, it will cost £40 for adults, £26 for concessions with a rail card, and £20 for children. In the winter months, OAPs are invited to travel on the line free of charge (Transport for Wales, 2019). This incentive has increased the usage of The Heart of Wales Line by OAPs, especially throughout winter. It could be suggested that charging a reduced fee during these months may increase the financial benefits of the line, with the funds made

being used to develop the line or to contribute to its upkeep. Conversely, applying a fee may reduce the usage of the line by OAPs, reducing the popularity of the line outside of peak season. In this scenario, the Heart of Wales Line are charging for a service that was previously free, therefore being paid more for the same service (Rice, 2010).

The use of trains and other forms of public transport has been identified as being a lower emission alternative to car travel, as well as being a generally more enjoyable experience (National Geographic Traveller, 2019). Toward the beginning of 2019, “flight-shaming” was credited with the 8% rise in train journeys as travellers become more aware of their carbon footprint, now favouring a rail journey over an internal flight (CNN, 2019).

A similar initiative has been formed by the joining of the Highland Main Line Community Rail Partnership with over 30 other groups to promote the most scenic rail journeys in Britain. The partnership promotes sustainable tourism by encouraging commuters to travel via rail to experience the picturesque landscapes whilst also reducing their carbon emissions by using public transport to commute (ACoRP, 2019). This partnership has a similar goal to that of the Heart of Wales Line, making them ‘Existing Rivals’. Both initiatives are attempting to increase tourism in their area using the picturesque landscapes that run alongside their railways. Existing rivals is one of Porter’s Five Forces (Grundy, 2006).

Additionally, in these scenarios, rail travel is acting as a substitute for air travel. Substitutes are identified as one of Porter’s Five Forces (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Rail travel meets the same basic need as air travel, but with added environmental benefits.

“Transport is fundamental to the success of our economy in Wales” (Ken Skates – Minister for Economy and Transport, 2019).

Furthermore, excursion trains have been highlighted to be of great importance in an attempt to promote tourism in Wales, particularly in coastal areas. Excursion trains are able to carry up to 400 passengers to a destination, many of whom may patronise local businesses, providing a financial contribution to the area (Cambrian News, 2019).

The trains used on the Heart of Wales Line are generally the modern engines that can be seen at any station. However, in order to increase the popularity of the line, it could be

recommended that steam trains be used. Particular steam trains have been known to attract crowds. For example, The Flying Scotsman has been known to cause a crowd at stations and vantage points, attracting enthusiasts from all over the country (North Wales Pioneer, 2019). In November 2019, The Flying Scotsman travelled from Crewe station to Holyhead station, attracting a large crowd. If a steam train service was a more regular occurrence, it would be interesting to see if the line became more popular as a result. The tour of the Flying Scotsman is an event that rarely occurs more than once in the same area. This makes it a 'New Entrant' with regard to Porter's Five Forces (Moreno-Izquierdo, 2016).

When you purchase a ticket for the Heart of Wales Line, you receive a ticket to ride the train and get off at whichever stop you choose. Although this allows you to see the picturesque landscape that Mid-Wales has to offer, other rail journeys may offer more value-for-money. If you choose to travel to London by train, your rail ticket entitles you to 2-for-1 entry at over 150 attractions within the capitol (Days Out Guide, 2018). If the Heart of Wales Line was to offer a similar promotion, a partnership could be developed with Parc Y Scarlets, Llanelli, offering a 2-for-1 deal on match tickets when you have travelled to the game via rail. This would correlate with one of Porter's Five Sources, buyers. In this recommendation, buyers are paying the same price, but receiving a better deal as they are saving money elsewhere (Qi, Sun & Chen, 2014).

Parc Y Scarlets stadium has a capacity of 14,870 people, with an average attendance of 9,256 people (Lloyd, 2018). A promotion such as this could see an increase in interest for both the Heart of Wales Line and Parc Y Scarlets. Rugby fans may be more inclined to travel via rail if there is an incentive to do so. The stadium is easily accessible from the train station. Commuters could either take the 39-minute walk, or call a taxi, contributing yet more money into local businesses. This would cause an increase in secondary expenditure, benefiting all of the companies involved, as well as the local community.

Another rural stop along the Heart of Wales Line is Llandridnod Lake in Llandridnod Wells. The centre of the lake displays a statue, making reference to the Myths surrounding the area. At present, tourists are able to rent a paddle boat to peddle around the lake (Visit Mid-Wales, 2017). Possible tourism generators for this area would be lake cruises and pre-recorded head-set tours. Such opportunities are likely to attract tourists, as well as local schools who may be studying myths and legends in the classroom. As a result of this, the lake could become an

educational attraction. However, such a development may prove harmful to the wildlife at the lake. Footpath erosion and litter are some of the many detrimental impacts of tourism.

Conclusion

The Heart of Wales Line has been successful in raising awareness of environmentally friendly tourism in Wales whilst promoting the different stops along the rail. However, there are a range of ways in which the service could become more financially stable and promote the more rural areas as successfully as they promote the urban stops.

As 'flight-shaming' has reduced the number of people opting to take domestic flights, the use of rail travel for commuters has increased by 8%. Using public transport to travel has been highlighted as a definitive way to reduce the commuter's carbon footprint and increase awareness of sustainable travel.

Profitability is likely to increase if OAPs were charged a reduced price in the winter months as opposed to promoting free travel at this time. If it is explained to customers that the purpose of the charge is to develop the communities along the line as well as maintain the rail itself, it is unlikely that they will reject the cost.

Recommendations

1. It could be recommended that charging OAPs a reduced fee to travel on the Heart of Wales Line during winter months, instead of free travel, may increase the financial benefits of the line. The funds will be used to develop the line and its community stops or to contribute to its upkeep.
2. Introducing a steam-train service may increase the popularity of the Heart of Wales Line. An example of where this has been used is The Flying Scotsman. It has been known to cause a crowd at stations and vantage points, attracting enthusiasts from all over the country. If a steam train service was a more regular occurrence, it would be interesting to see if the line became more popular as a result.
3. Offering a 2-for-1 ticket deal at Parc Y Scarlets may improve the popularity of the line with Rugby fans. If customers are receiving a better deal that suits them, they are more likely to use the service. This allows for secondary expenditure in the local community as customers may then hire a taxi from the station to the stadium, as well as generally spending money on local businesses.
4. Promoting Llandridnod Lake as an educational attraction will increase the number of schools visiting the area to learn about the myth of the lake. This would require an initial budget to purchase the cruise facilities and audio tour resources. However, leasing these resources out to schools is likely to create repeat business and fund the maintenance of the lake whilst money is spent in the local area.

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