



Picture: NETWORK RAIL

Stations begin to go green

Work has started on a new station in south Wales, which aims to be eco-friendly.

Newport station is a dramatic canvas and concrete design by Atkins/Grimshaw which Network Rail hopes will become an iconic gateway to Wales.

The £13million scheme will take nearly a year to transform the station, which will double in size.

Clad in ethylene tetrafluoroethylene, the new station should be a bright and airy space.

ETFE is a lightweight, recyclable material that requires less steel to support the structure.

Used at the Eden Project in Cornwall, it provides better insulation than double glazing.

It is not degraded by light or atmospheric pollution and should clean itself, with grime being removed by rain.

The station project is jointly funded by Network Rail and the Welsh Assembly Government and should be ready for the Ryder Cup which is being staged in Newport in October next year.

The station will also be equipped with three lifts, CCTV, a modernised customer information system and new waiting shelters.

It will have improved ticketing facilities, information points and shops on both sides of the line.

Platform 4 will be extended by 50 yards to accommodate longer trains. Mike Gallop, route enhancement manager, Network Rail said: "This is the beginning of a new chapter for the people in Newport and for rail passengers travelling into Wales." The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economy and Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones, said:

"Our investment here is another example of our commitment to make public transport as accessible as possible to provide a real alternative to the car and to fulfil our One Wales promise of delivering an integrated transport system fit for the 21st century."

Arriva Trains Wales head of stations, Peter Northcott said: "The new look Newport Station will be a landmark building for the city providing passengers with a welcoming and modern facility.

"We are delighted work has begun and look forward to the construction completion."

Councillor Matthew Evans, leader of Newport city council, said: "We anticipate that it will act as a springboard to attract further regeneration in this part of the city centre."

Green campaigners say Network Rail could go much further in making its stations green.

Most station canopies are, on the face of it, ideal places for solar panels. There is also potential for building wind generators on railway land and at stations.

Trains are already by far the most eco-friendly way to travel, using less energy per passenger and causing few problems at the point of use if they are electric.

Network Rail however faces an environmental challenge at King's Cross station in London where it is implementing a £450million transformation which it hopes will complement neighbouring St Pancras International.

There will be 15,000 square yards of new photo-voltaic glass in the main trainshed to generate 10% of the station's electricity needs. It begs the question how many other

railway roofs and platform canopies could accept photo-voltaic glass or solar panels.

These big improvement schemes highlight the failures of many of our other big stations.

London Euston, down the road from King's Cross, is a little lacking. It's even very difficult to spot the platform numbers from the main concourse!

It is estimated that 70 million passengers pass through the mainline station annually and that could be significantly boosted if it becomes the terminus for high-speed trains.

According to Richard Anning of Euston Estate Limited Partnership, Euston cannot cope with the current number of passengers at peak times because of congestion on the Underground. He has called for action to upgrade the station now.

Further up the line at Crewe, there have been increasing complaints about the state of the station which used to be one of the best known and most efficiently run centres in Britain.

Virgin Trains is one of the complainants but is in the dock itself over plans to close travel centres at Crewe, Stafford, Birmingham International and Coventry.

At the other end of the scale, students at London Metropolitan University are working on a "reversing Beeching" brief and are being asked to bring new ideas to new station designs for Sussex. One of the designs included a thatched roof. And there are moves to make stations in other parts of Britain the focus of green action too.

King's Norton on the Birmingham CrossCity line has become an eco-friendly station, one of 24 pilot schemes across England. The aim

is to improve the number of rail passengers getting to the station by environmentally friendly modes like walking, cycling, bus or even by car if it is shared.

Real-time bus information is being provided in the station, as well as extra cycle storage and improved signs for pedestrians and cyclists – not just for cars.

It will, however, take two years to implement the scheme and involve the train operator London Midland, Centro, Birmingham City Council, Network Rail and local bus operators.

At Bedford, because of increasing demand for cycle space, First Capital Connect has agreed to install a few extra stands, bringing the total number of cycle spaces to 410.

And at Marylebone, London, a large area of spare space on one platform is taken up with cycles belonging to season ticket holders.

At Chiltern Railways' new Aylesbury Vale station, three people arriving by car before 9am (Monday to Friday) can park free.

Many other stations are developing their own station travel plans with the encouragement of the Association of Train Operators.

The idea is to bring together all the stakeholders (rail industry, local authorities, passenger groups, bus and taxi operators, cyclists and others) to agree common objectives and a coordinated approach.

More info at www.stationtravelplans.com

Network Rail is not the only big organisation going green.

Royal Mail has joined the 10:10 campaign to fight climate change. It could do us all a good turn by sending more of its mail by train.