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Llyr Gruffydd MS
Chair of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

5th March 2024

Dear Llyr,

Written follow-up further to TfW's appearance at the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Thank you for your invitation to address the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee on 22nd November 2023. During the session, I promised to follow up on a number of points in writing, and have now collated those points below:

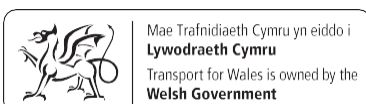
1. Provide the latest strategic update about TfW's planning for football matches, including TfW's latest meeting with the Football Association Wales (FAW).

We have held several sessions with the Football Association Wales (FAW) to discuss and share details around upcoming events. Together with members of my senior team, I met with the FAW on 9th January to discuss TfW's planning and event strategy for football matches in Wales; we will continue working to build this key relationship over the coming year with regular engagement.

Our Special Events team also presented to the Football Supporters Association on the 15th February at Cardiff City Stadium around upcoming customer and operational plans. This also included a deep dive around lessons learnt from previous fixtures. This was well received and the team committed to reattend after the Euro qualifier events on 21st and the 26th of March. The collaboration between the Special Events Team and the FAW to continue with regular meetings is now planned throughout the year. Customer and operational delivery plans for the Euro Qualifier events on 21st and 26th March are progressing well, with all additional and strengthened services now showing in planning systems. Agreed messaging will be shared in early March, whilst a robust customer support/event plan is in place for both fixtures, with contingency plans in place around key services. We will have a visible management presence in place on the ground to focus on customer engagement and ensure the best delivery possible on the day.

2. Provide confirmation of the latest gender pay gap figures for both TfW Rail and Non-Rail, and outline work ongoing to ensure equality.

The Non-Rail median gender pay gap (GPG) for FY 2022/23 is 14.1%. This has decreased year-on-year since 2020, with GPG decreasing from 32.8% in FY 2021/22, which was a decrease from 33.2% in FY 2020/21.



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The Rail median GPG for FY 2022/23 is 16.2%. This is also decreasing year-on-year, having decreased from 19.2% in FY 2021/22, and from 21.2% in FY 2020/21.

We are currently in the process of drafting our Gender Pay Gap Report for 2023, which will report both entities as one. Our combined GPG figure is yet to be calculated.

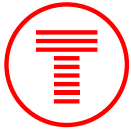
In terms of our work towards achieving equality:

- We launched our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) during National Inclusion Week 2022. Among the groups created is a group which focuses exclusively on gender. Our ERGs are helping us to build a more inclusive workplace environment and address diversity and inclusion in a more holistic, community-based way. Our ERGs provide a safe space for staff who share common interests, issues or concerns to address those issues. The ERGs will support national campaigns and internal events relevant to their subject areas, and also support the development of our 'employee led' EDI objectives.
- In collaboration with the Welsh Government and PTI Cymru, funding was agreed for the Women in Transport Wales Hub, which launched in November 2022. The Hub provides a central point of support and professional development for women already working in transport and for those considering a career in the sector.
- Although a challenging time, the pandemic gave us the opportunity to become more flexible and integrate a hybrid way of working for our support functions and colleagues working in some other areas. This approach is helping to attract and retain talented people who are committed to our purpose and continue to develop flexible ways of working.

3. Outline provision of conflict management training and support for frontline staff dealing with aggressive customers.

In 2024, the Security and Resilience team will undertake a full review of TfW's conflict avoidance policy and the supporting mitigations in place across the organisation. This will include a revision of the existing policy and associated procedures, while workshops will be provided for frontline colleagues to ensure we fully understand their views and concerns. The first of these workshops is due to take place on the 19th March. We will also review our security incident reporting process and dashboard, so that we may better analyse where issues occur across the network and take action where escalating trends require intervention.

We will also be introducing the use of temporary/mobile CCTV to deter and capture incidents which go undetected at present. Finally, conflict avoidance training will be made available to all frontline teams.



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4. Provide the latest update about services to Maesteg, Cheltenham and Ebbw Vale.

Maesteg

Our brand-new Class 197 trains were introduced to the Maesteg - Cheltenham line on 19th February. These new trains, built here in Wales, have a number of modern, accessible features to significantly improve customer experience. The Class 197s provide greater capacity, comfortable seating, accessible toilets and spaces, bilingual visual information screens, priority seating, Wi-Fi, charging sockets and bicycle spaces. They will also be significantly more reliable than the older Class 150 trains which have been operating along the line, making disruption less likely; though the Class 150s will still operate some services as we continue introducing our Class 197s during the ongoing transition period from old trains to new. We will also continue working closely with Network Rail and other rail partners to ensure further resilience to services operating between the Tondy signal box and Maesteg.

Cheltenham

Together with the Welsh Government, TfW is reviewing its existing timetables and the upcoming changes scheduled for future timetable changes to recognise the significant changes to post-pandemic travel patterns and ensure that our timetables best meets the demands of customers. All timetable changes are within the scope of this review.

As noted above, we have now introduced Class 197s on the Maesteg line, which operates as far as Cheltenham. We are currently working closely with CAF, who build the Class 197s trains, to understand when the remaining deliveries will take place and when the fleet will be large enough to support these extra services.

Ebbw Vale

I am also pleased to confirm that regular rail services between Ebbw Vale and Newport were introduced for the first time in more than 60 years on 1st February, thanks to a £70m investment from the Welsh Government and a close collaboration between TfW, Network Rail and Blaenau Gwent council. Work included the extension of a passing loop between Crosskeys and Aberbeeg, upgrades to signalling, and the installation of new platforms and lifts at both Newbridge and Llanhilleth stations. As a result of this significant investment, the frequency of trains along the Ebbw Vale line has doubled, making a considerable difference to all the communities along the route. We will also introduce new trains to the line in spring 2024.

5. Outline the different challenges posed by summertime and wintertime conditions on the cancellation of rail services and provision of rail-replacement bus services.

Extreme summertime and wintertime weather conditions can impact rail services for a number of reasons. The steel railway tracks may absorb too much heat in high temperatures, which could result in the track expanding or even buckling.



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Railway tracks are installed to a Stress-Free Temperature (SFT) of 27c, and a series of mitigations are in place to minimise disruption and ensure safe operation of the railway when this temperature is reached or exceeded. When temperatures exceed 27c, a dedicated watchman is placed on site to monitor lateral movement of the rail and impose speed restrictions if necessary (or to place the line on stop in extreme cases).

To prevent this happening in the first place, tracks are painted white in areas prone to high rail temperatures, while we have also installed weather stations across the CVL to monitor air temperatures and now have 12 months' worth of data to indicate trends.

While we work to source alternative road transport when services are disrupted or cancelled as a result of extreme heat, it is important to note that this can also be impacted by specific summertime challenges. The number of buses available to provide alternative road transport for rail passengers can be impacted by operators completing summer tours and also increased demand for travel to and from popular holiday destinations.

In addition, the number bus drivers available to provide this service is also impacted during the summer holidays as many take annual leave during this period.

Finally, an increase in road traffic to and from popular holiday destinations during the summertime can slow down the arrival of a rail-replacement bus service, causing delays, while extreme heat may also impact vehicle reliability.

Extreme weather in the wintertime, such as heavy rain and flooding, snow and ice, can also impact the running of the railway. Flooding may damage the electrics of signalling equipment, while speed restrictions are often imposed on trains travelling along flooded tracks, delaying services. Snow and ice can adversely impact the tracks, while trains cannot run in deep snow. Train reliability is also adversely impacted by extreme winter weather, meaning they require more maintenance and repair.

To mitigate against this, winterisation management plans are put in place each year for our fleet and our trains are prepared for cold weather conditions in line with vehicle maintenance instructions. Additional materials and spare train parts are stocked in stores at key locations, while we ensure all operational staff are familiar with rule book requirements during cold weather conditions.

While we work to source alternative road transport for passengers when services are disrupted or cancelled as a result of extreme winter weather, it is important to note that this can also be impacted by specific wintertime challenges. Extreme winter weather can impact road conditions, station accessibility, the speed of a rail-replacement bus service and the ability of operators to deploy buses to every corner of the TfW network. Extreme winter cold may also impact vehicle reliability.



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6. Outline the power constraints encountered for the electrification of the Rhymney line.

The initial designs for the CVL transformation in Rhymney included a connection to the National Grid in the Rhymney area to provide the power needed to charge the batteries of the tri-mode trains (both during the turnaround at Rhymney Station as part of the timetabled service, as well as overnight while stabled in Rhymney Sidings).

Through development of the Rail System design, we worked with our supply chain and Western Power to refine the electrical loading details that powering the tri-mode trains would have on the local electricity network. Design development concluded that the initial “in rush” load from the connection of the trains to the power supply, as well as the potential fault loading if issues occurred, would overwhelm the local grid network.

In order to provide sufficient power, which is essential for operation of the tri-mode trains in the area, the CVL Transformation Programme considered multiple options, including upgrades to the existing grid network, installing a dedicated renewable supply (solar), providing a cable connection to the planned rail power network, and extending the railway overhead line to provide a route for the power from the planned rail power network.

From a commercial, programme and operational resilience point of view, extension of the overhead line above the railway was selected to provide the necessary power to the Rhymney area. In addition to being the lowest cost solution, the extended overhead line provides an increase to operational resilience by allowing the train to run on electrical supply (rather than battery) between Bargoed and Rhymney.

7. Provide an update on the electrification of the North Wales line, including the latest communications from UK Government/Network Rail and an outline of any timescales.

At this stage, the potential cost of electrifying the North Wales line, as well as the funding package and any requirements of TfW, remain unknown. Further collaboration with Network Rail, Welsh Government, UK Government and other relevant stakeholders is needed to fully understand the feasibility and full cost of this work.

Network Rail engaged TfW as a key stakeholder and then developed a paper outlining initial thoughts and recommendations. The resulting paper builds upon the extensive North Wales Metro development work led by TfW over the past few years, but with the additional scope of electrification and the resulting journey time improvement. It is important to note that so far to date, TfW has served only as a consultee in this process.

In a stakeholder briefing issued in January, Network Rail advised that the UK Department for Transport (DfT) will consider these recommendations when discussing funding arrangements and any conditions/targets that will accompany it. It is likely that DfT will engage with Network Rail in the new financial year (FY 2024/25) to explore the next steps for development work and delivery (if discussions progress positively).



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I trust the committee will find the content of this written follow-up to be detailed and informative, and I welcome any additional questions you may have. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

James Price
Chief Executive, Transport for Wales.