



Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales for General Scrutiny at the CCEI Committee

06/11/2024

Information provided to aid the Committee in advance of the Cabinet Secretary's attendance for General Scrutiny on 27 November 2024.

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1. Rail

Rail collision on the Cambrian line

1. On Monday 21 October, two TfW trains were involved in a low-speed collision near Llanbryn-mair in Powys, Mid Wales. 41 passengers and 4 crew members were involved in the incident, following which one passenger sadly passed away. Emergency services were called to the scene and 15 people were treated for injuries at nearby hospitals.
2. Following extensive safety checks, Network Rail reopened the line on Monday 28 October and TfW resumed services the same day.
3. The Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) is leading the investigation. No further comment will be made until the investigation has concluded and its findings have been considered.

Rail Performance

4. Transport for Wales (TfW) has demonstrated sustained performance improvement this year and, on average so far in 2024, is the most reliable and punctual operator in Wales.
5. In the first quarter of this financial year, TfW demonstrated the biggest improvement in punctuality and reliability of all rail operators in Great Britain compared to the same period last year. TfW also recorded the largest rise in passenger numbers, attributing this increase to factors including the introduction of new trains, additional and brand-new service options and improved performance.
6. Passenger satisfaction with TfW continues to rise, scoring 88% in the most recent Transport Focus survey. This represents a 16% increase over the past 12 months.
7. TfW are progressing with the roll-out of the new fleet of trains, with many of these trains now in regular operation across Wales. The Stadler Class 756 tri-mode trains will be introduced to the Core Valley Lines (CVL) network before the end of this year, marking the first time ever that an electric train is in regular passenger operation on the CVL. Following completion of the new fleet roll out, TfW will have significantly more carriages available compared to those inherited in 2018. These trains will offer improved capacity, accessibility and comfort for passengers.
8. In December, TfW will implement changes to the timetable following a review to ensure that services meet passenger demand and travel patterns. Whilst this means a reduction in some services, TfW are prioritising and bolstering capacity where it is needed most. TfW have undertaken a public

consultation exercise regarding the proposed changes, listening to the feedback and, where appropriate, making changes.

9. TfW are working to increase farebox revenue and reduce the annual subsidy requirement by bringing more trains into service across the network, improving performance and introducing ticketing offers such as Pay As You Go and discounts on Advance tickets for longer distance journeys.
10. Over the summer, TfW safely transported hundreds of thousands of passengers to and from major events, including the Taylor Swift concert at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff and the National Eisteddfod in Pontypridd. More recently, TfW worked with stakeholders to support major events by pausing engineering works on the Coryton line to enable passengers to use services to travel to the Wales vs. Montenegro international football match and provided earlier services from key stations into Cardiff prior to the start of the Cardiff Half Marathon. TfW have developed bespoke event plans for the Wales rugby internationals in Cardiff this autumn.

Rail Reform & Passenger Services Bill

11. The UK Government has announced its intention to introduce the Rail Reform Bill next year. This presents a significant opportunity to work in partnership with the UK Government to deliver a better railway for Wales, including an empowered Wales and Borders Business Unit within Great British Railways that delivers against Welsh priorities and is accountable to Welsh ministers. The Welsh Government is also seeking a role in the specification of services operating in and out of Wales considering the importance of these services for the Welsh economy and connectivity. Work is ongoing to develop the detailed proposition, but the UK Government has already committed to a statutory role for Welsh Ministers on managing, planning and developing the rail industry in Wales.
12. The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill introduced by the UK Government this summer will see the operation of rail services brought into the public sector, revoking existing franchising powers and delivering on a key Welsh Government ask of rail reform. This move is welcomed by the Welsh Government, and a Legislative Consent Memorandum will be debated in the Senedd on 5th November.

Wales Rail Board

13. The Wales Rail Board is a joint Welsh and UK Government board that includes membership from Transport for Wales and Network Rail. Welsh Government officials have worked to build consensus with the UK Government on a list of rail infrastructure priorities to be agreed with the Wales Rail Board. These are enhancements schemes over and above the work and investment needed to maintain and renew the existing rail network and its assets. The intention is to

have a single set of rail infrastructure improvements in Wales to enable development and delivery funding to be targeted on what all stakeholders agree are the priority interventions. I have met with Lord Hendy, UK Government Rail Minister and, more recently, Louise Haigh, Secretary of State for Transport to progress this important discussion and work towards agreeing the shared priorities between governments.

Core Valley Lines Transformation

14. The Welsh Government is investing over £1 bn to deliver the Core Valley Lines (CVL) transformation programme. This will upgrade the lines to Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Coryton, and includes Overhead Line Electrification (OLE) to enable brand-new electric trains to replace the inherited diesel-powered fleet.
15. The extensive work required to deliver this ambitious programme has caused disruption to people who live alongside the route. However, this is necessary to undertake essential upgrades and achieve our vision of a high-quality network that is fit for future generations. We are already starting to see the benefits of these upgrades, with the introduction of the new CVL timetable in June 2024 bringing more frequent and later services for passengers.
16. The CVL transformation works were originally planned to be completed by the end of 2023. However, this has been delayed due to the impact of Covid on the programme, which, alongside high levels of inflation, has also increased the cost of delivery.
17. So far, TfW have electrified the lines from Cardiff to Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr. Stations across the CVL are being upgraded to ensure that they can accommodate the new trains and, where possible, achieve level boarding. 'Access for All' facilities are also being installed at key stations across the CVL and, following completion of the transformation programme, the majority of the CVL network will have step-free access.
18. Key outstanding infrastructure interventions include track and signalling enhancements at Cardiff Queen Street and on the Rhymney line. The programme is currently forecasted to finish in 2027 and, when complete, will deliver a metro style turn-up-and-go service with 4 trains per hour to the valley heads at Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr and 12 trains per hour from Pontypridd to Cardiff. Incremental benefits will be realised before this, including the introduction of brand-new electric trains on the CVL before the end of the year.

Cardiff Central Enhancements Programme

19. The Cardiff Central Enhancements Programme (CCEP) will improve the safety and operations of Cardiff Central Station by increasing platform capacity,

improving the operation of services and improving pedestrian flows around the station whilst maximising commercial returns and economic value of the surrounding land.

20. The Welsh Government is the client for the scheme and a prospective funding partner alongside the Department for Transport (DfT) and Cardiff Capital Region. Transport for Wales is leading delivery of the scheme. Initial survey work has commenced on-site, with construction currently planned to begin in summer 2025 and the majority of disruptive works completed by summer 2028 in time for the European Football Championships – for which Cardiff is a host city.
21. This project represents an opportunity to work collaboratively with partners to leverage significant funding into Wales, enhancing Wales' busiest station and a major hub on the South Wales Metro network which is key to services across the capital regional and beyond.

2. Active Travel

New priorities for walking, wheeling and cycling

22. Building on the four Cabinet priorities, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales has identified his priorities for active travel and creating environments that encourage walking, wheeling and cycling for everyday journeys. These priorities are:
 - Ensuring safe and inclusive access to public transport, especially for those without cars.
 - Promoting walking, wheeling, and cycling to young people, supporting healthy access to education.
 - Making the most of safer speed limits, reducing the need for expensive new infrastructure.
23. Underpinning these priorities will be a hierarchy of users founded on social justice and inclusion, with the most vulnerable walkers and wheelers at the top. Investment decisions will be based on this hierarchy. In practice this will mean that infrastructure for walking and wheeling will take priority.

Active travel to schools

24. The Welsh Government works with partners to encourage more children and young people to walk, wheel and cycle to school. These efforts include creating safe and accessible routes to schools, through new and improved infrastructure or through the introduction of school streets. Across Wales, over 20 School Streets have been piloted or implemented to date, including many supported through our Active Travel Fund and Safe Routes in Communities grant. A School Street reduces danger around the school and

improves air quality by restricting traffic at the start and end of the school day.

- 25.** Further emphasis is on supporting the development of School Travel Plans to identify and address barriers to healthy school travel, complementing our Active Journeys programme and cycling and child pedestrian training. Additionally, we back the Walk to School programme, delivered by Living Streets, to encourage students to walk, wheel, scoot, or cycle to school, fostering healthier lifestyles and reducing reliance on car travel for school commutes.

Active Travel Delivery Plan

- 26.** Since publishing the Active Travel Delivery Plan 2024-27 in March, we have made good progress with the actions set out for the current year. Some have already been completed, like the publication of the promotional toolkit and others are in progress. Welsh Government will formally report on progress after the first year in Spring 2025.

Active travel and Safe Routes in Communities funding

- 27.** During 2023-24 £36.4 million was invested through the Active Travel Fund across Wales. £30.5 million was spent on 34 main schemes, in addition to £15.9 million core funding provided to all local authorities. Core funding can be used for small scale improvements such as installing crossings, benches, or cycle parking and to get larger schemes ready for construction. For 2024-25, applications to the Active Travel Fund exceeded £89m. Over £35 million has been allocated to 37 main schemes, in addition to core funding of £15 million provided to all local authorities.
- 28.** In 2023-24 funding of over £4.8m was allocated through the Safe Routes in Communities grant for 17 schemes and for initial feasibility and development funding for School Streets. The Safe Routes in Communities grant received 35 applications for 2024-25, totalling over £9.5m. Funding of over £6 million has been allocated to 24 schemes.

Audit Wales report on active travel

- 29.** Welsh Government accepts all ten recommendations from the Audit Wales report on active travel. Five of the recommendations relate to how we can improve data collection. Our new National Transport Survey Wales (NTS), which we are currently piloting, will help address this. Our active travel monitoring framework will draw on future NTS and wider data. Welsh Government is working with Transport for Wales to ensure monitoring at the local level is more consistent.

Active Travel Board

- 30.** The Active Travel Board's first annual report was published in August 2024. Similarly to the Audit Wales report, the Active Travel Board pushed for better data on active travel in Wales.

3. Roads Policy

- 31.** Our [National Transport Delivery Plan](#) sets out the programmes, projects and policies that Welsh Government will be delivering up until 2027.
- 32.** Good progress is being made on the delivery of schemes identified in the NTDP. The A55 Aber to Tai'r Meibion and the A487 New Dyfi Bridge Improvements have been completed and open to traffic and the A40 Llanddewi Velfrey to Redstone Cross and A465 Sections 5 and 6 are due to be completed during spring and summer 2025 respectively.
- 33.** A public consultation is due to be held in December 2024 on the A494 River Dee Bridge Replacement scheme with a view to progressing a preferred option to draft orders publication stage by the autumn of 2025. We provided grant funding and are working with Wrexham County Borough Council to progress the A483 multi-modal corridor improvements and city centre connectivity and consultants have also been appointed to undertake this work.
- 34.** Similarly, consultants have been appointed to develop options to address the highest priority recommendations from the North Wales Transport commission for improving the resilience of connections across the Menai Strait.
- 35.** The procurement of an employer's agent is also underway for the A483 Llandeilo and Ffairfach Bypass and good progress is being made to develop options and solutions for a number of high priority schemes under the Safety and Resilience programme - these schemes are being developed through the WelTAG stages, and short, medium and long term measures are being considered for each site.
- 36.** Through our transport grants, we fund local authority road schemes. These include schemes to repair and improve the existing road network or to develop new roads if the evidence demonstrates that a new road is the best solution. For example, this year the Welsh Government is providing £1.8m to Wrexham County Borough Council to repair and re-open the B5605 in Newbridge, and £0.6m to Gwynedd Council to develop plans to address traffic in Llanbedr.
- 37.** We have recently invited local authorities to apply for [transport grants for 2025-26](#). This includes the Resilient Roads Fund, through which local

authorities can apply for funding to adapt the road network to climate change or improve the condition of roads for all users.

- 38.** We are currently assessing the road building purposes which were published following the roads review and will shortly be engaging with local authorities to understand their experiences of applying the purposes in practice. We want to ensure we have a framework which raises the bar and enables us to build better roads in a way which is consistent with the climate and nature emergencies. This means not immediately jumping to a roads solution when there is a transport problem but considering alternative options and thinking innovatively about solutions (while acknowledging that in some circumstances a road scheme will be the best option).

4. 20mph

- 39.** We engaged during the summer in the listening programme, and as well as local authorities Welsh Government fed into the update guidance as a highway authority. The updated guidance on 30mph speed limits on restricted roads was published in July 2024.
- 40.** We have begun working with our Trunk Road Agents to review the speed limits on 111 sections of trunk road. The review of trunk road speed limits will require gathering significant data as evidence to support consistent decision making, along with input from the relevant Local Authorities. The current programme is we will conclude this review work in May 2025 – at this point we will understand any changes to the 20mph and 30mph on the ground on the trunk road network.
- 41.** Any changes to the speed limit on the trunk road network arising from this review require Traffic Regulation Orders, the process for which can take 9 months so changes on the ground will be seen in mid-2026.

5. Bus

Bus reform

- 42.** We want to give people more accessible, affordable and sustainable options for the journeys they take. To do that, we need a public transport network that works for all. By bringing public transport into public control, we can deliver our vision of 'one network, one timetable, one ticket', and deliver an integrated system.
- 43.** As we set out in our 2022 White Paper and Roadmap to Bus Reform (published in March 2024), we intend to reform the delivery of bus services in Wales, bringing the planning and contracting of buses into public control, so they can be delivered in the public interest.

- 44.** The present deregulated system means that commercial bus operators can cherry pick the most profitable bits of the bus network and local authorities often have to fill in the gaps, where they can afford to do so. The current system is un-strategic and an inefficient way to deploy public money. Most of the money going into the bus system comes from public funds, yet we are not able to design the system to deliver the best public service.
- 45.** We are proposing a new system to reverse that, allowing public bodies to work together to plan and deliver the local bus network people need in Wales. We are working with Transport for Wales and local authorities to plan and implement local bus networks that work as effectively as possible.
- 46.** In brief, the Bill will:
- Require the Welsh Ministers to secure the provision of local bus services, primarily through franchising.
 - Allow local authorities to create new municipal bus companies and lift restrictions on existing local authority owned bus companies to place them on an equal footing.
 - Ensure the appropriate sharing of information both between organisations for the management of the network and with the public for effective use of services.
- 47.** We have identified the Bus Bill as a priority for the remainder of this Senedd term. We are planning to introduce the Bill in the Spring and, subject to scrutiny and approval by the Senedd, obtain Royal Assent before the end of this Senedd term. The rollout of bus franchising is intended to begin in 2027, following the introduction of secondary legislation.

Bus Funding Support

- 48.** We recognise that buses play a crucial role in supporting our economy as well as providing access to education, health services and other important services and activities. This is why we have invested significant funding into our bus industry – since the beginning of the pandemic alone we have provided local authorities with over £250m to keep bus services running.
- 49.** Our Bus Network Grant was introduced at the beginning of April this year and has replaced the Bus Transition Scheme. The scheme provides local authorities with £39m funding for 2024/25 to secure bus services that would not otherwise be provided through their existing statutory duties. This is on top of the existing Bus Service Support Grant for 2024/25 totalling £25m.
- 50.** We also continue to fund the Welsh Concessionary Travel Scheme which provides free local bus travel for all eligible residents aged 60 and over across Wales. Free travel is also available for eligible residents who are disabled. This year our investment will be over £50m.

TrawsCymru

- 51.** TrawsCymru services provide vital links to communities and main centres not directly served by rail. If we did not invest in the TrawsCymru network large areas of rural Wales would not be served by a regular bus service. Passenger numbers across the TrawsCymru network are recovering well following the Covid pandemic, and Transport for Wales are working actively to promote the network to new passengers through targeted publicity campaigns and ticketing promotions.
- 52.** Having Transport for Wales contracting services enables us to improve connections and ticketing arrangements between TrawsCymru buses and trains at key stations. For instance, in West Wales we now offer combined 'through' bus / rail ticketing between the T1 Carmarthen and Aberystwyth bus station and trains at Aberystwyth and Carmarthen rail stations. Last year this route became the first to be converted to a zero emissions operation, which we intend to rollout across the TrawsCymru network.