

Ken Skates MS

Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales

13 December 2024

Dear Ken,

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 27 November 2024 to discuss Welsh Government policies on those aspects of the transport portfolio that you are responsible for. The Committee agreed that I should write to you to request clarification of several issues raised during the session.

Freight

During scrutiny of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning on 20 November, we discussed freight policy in the context of her responsibility for maritime ports and Cardiff Airport. Freight does not feature in the responsibilities listed on the Welsh Government website under your portfolio or hers. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning explained that freight is your responsibility.

- Could you update us on progress in developing the Wales National Freight and Logistics Plan, including when it will be published and what it will contain given the National Transport Delivery Plan commits to develop this by 2024.
- Could you outline how you collaborate with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning on the areas where your portfolios intersect, including freight?

Rail reform

The Committee notes your discussions with the UK Government about the forthcoming Rail Reform Bill and the proposed Wales and Borders business unit within Great British Railways (GBR). You told us



about your hopes that, in future, the role of Welsh Ministers in the governance of Welsh rail services will be strengthened.

1. Can you provide details of the discussions you and our officials are having with your counterparts to ensure that Welsh Government priorities are adequately reflected in the Bill?
2. How do you envisage GBR, a body exercising functions in relation to reserved matters, will be accountable to Welsh Ministers in a meaningful way? For example, do you anticipate the Bill devolving significant executive powers to the Welsh Ministers alone, or shared with the Secretary of State?
3. Can you provide further detail on your suggestion that Senedd members will be able to scrutinise the Wales and Borders business unit?

In September, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language, Mark Drakeford MS, wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer setting out priorities for the 30 October budget. The letter called for “a fair approach to the application of Barnett in relation to rail funding, including a review of comparability with the Department for Transport and of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline processes, and working together to develop an agreed pipeline of rail infrastructure investment across Wales, and agree treatment of the Core Valley Lines (CVL) Network in the Barnett formula.”. This issue was discussed in the meeting and we would like clarification on certain aspects.

4. Could you provide further information and detail on the treatment of funding for the Core Valleys Lines under the Barnett formula, including:
 - How this is managed currently under the transfer of ownership agreement.
 - The matters that remain to be clarified in the light of the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
 - The total funding currently received annually, and the amount you estimate is due following further agreement.

The Committee notes your comments on the potential establishment of a dedicated “enhancement” fund within GBR.

5. What assurances have you received from the UK Government about creating a dedicated enhancement fund for Wales?
6. How do you anticipate accountability for this fund be shared between Welsh and UK Ministers to ensure effective delivery of Welsh rail priorities?

In June 2024, the then Minister for Finance and Local Government, Rebecca Evans MS, wrote to Senedd Members to explain that the Welsh Government estimated the total owed to date (up to 2024-25) in consequential funding arising from HS2 to be £350 million.

7. Could you:
 - Set out the calculations underpinning the figure of £350 million, which the Welsh Government has said would be due up to the current financial year.
 - Provide the Welsh Government's view, with calculations, of total consequential funding which would be due on the total project spend, based on current estimates now that phase 2 has been cancelled.

In relation to the UK Government's review of the Green Book appraisal process, we note the comments made during the meeting about the political nature of final funding decisions.

8. Could you explain what steps you are taking to ensure Welsh priorities are adequately reflected in UK ministerial decision-making processes, particularly in cases where objectives between the Welsh and UK Governments may differ?
9. Could you provide further information on the composition, operation, and role of the Wales Rail Board, particularly in light of your comments about the Green Book and its interaction with the objectives of the UK and Welsh Governments?

You highlighted the challenges arising from the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, particularly for vulnerable lines such as the Conwy Valley.

10. What actions are the Welsh Government taking to address the growing risks of climate change to the transport network, including rail?

Rail services and performance

The Committee notes your comments regarding TfW's improved overall performance and the impact of severe weather on recent performance.

We look forward to receiving the supplementary note you promised during the meeting detailing target points for the introduction of new rolling stock on each of the lines and routes in Wales.

During the meeting, you highlighted the potential benefits of extending services, for example, between Milford Haven and Paddington.

11. Could you provide an update on the proposed Milford Haven to Paddington Service?

Road safety and pavement parking

The Committee notes your comments that the new Welsh road safety strategy has been delayed due to prioritisation of the 20mph policy and discussions with the UK Government on their road safety strategy for England.

12. Could you provide the Committee with a timeline for publishing the new road safety strategy?

The Committee notes the ongoing challenges posed by pavement parking, particularly for vulnerable pedestrians, and the capacity constraints faced by local authorities. **We look forward to receiving the note on pavement parking, which you promised during the meeting.**

13. In your note, could you also clarify whether you believe it would be appropriate for the UK Government to legislate on pavement parking for Wales, as suggested, given this would limit the opportunity for Senedd scrutiny and, in any event, would not address the underlying issue of local authority capacity.

Road building and unadopted roads

You highlighted examples, such as the Newtown bypass, as projects that enhance well-being and active travel by diverting traffic from local roads. In relation to Welsh Government policy commitments to reduce car miles per person we note that your answer referred to giving people choices over how to travel.

14. To better understand the role of road building in meeting the Welsh Government's targets, we would welcome data or evidence from projects like the Newtown bypass or others, explicitly demonstrating how they have contributed to a reduction in private car use on the network as a whole, as opposed to specific sections.
15. Could you clarify whether the target of a 10% reduction in car miles per person by 2030, as set out in the 2021 Net Zero Plan, remains Welsh Government policy and how the Welsh Government is pursuing this target?

You told the Committee that 17 local authorities have shown an interest in securing funding for unadopted roads.

16. Can you provide further details on how you intend to support Welsh local authorities in dealing with this matter? Can you also provide an update on the extent to which this issue is linked to broader issues, such as unadopted drains and other adoption of other community assets?

Active travel

Concerns have been raised regarding the impact of shared active travel routes on disabled users, such as blind and partially sighted people, and the rise of high-powered e-bikes on active travel infrastructure. To ensure active travel is inclusive, we would welcome your response to the following:

17. What measures are being introduced to ensure the needs of disabled people are fully considered in the planning and design of active travel infrastructure?
18. How is the Welsh Government addressing the safety concerns associated with high-powered e-bikes on active travel routes?

Legislation

On 9 July 2024, the then First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, delivered a statement on the legislative programme to Plenary. In that statement, he said the Welsh Government would “consult on a draft taxi and private hire vehicles Bill this Senedd term, and we will continue to work with passengers, the trade and licensing authorities to take forward reforms through non-legislative means.”

19. Can you update the Committee on the development of the draft Bill and provide a timeline for the consultation on it? Can you also provide an update on the progress of non-legislative reforms in relation to this sector?

Thank you again for your constructive contribution to the Committee’s ongoing work. We look forward to your response on these important matters.

I should be grateful for a response as soon as possible, and by 23 January at the latest.

Yours sincerely,



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

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg | We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.