

Attn of Dr Sian Phipps

Herewith my view on the existing franchise, services, trains etc and suggestions for future potential Train Operating Companies that may submit applications to run services presently operated by Arriva.

Ever since Arriva first became involved with the operating of the old Wales and Borders services, they have become a monopoly.

I travel extensively by rail, all over the country from Scotland to Cornwall and, in my honest opinion Arriva Trains Wales are by far the worst of all the Train Operating Companies (TOC's). In South Wales, both main line and The Valleys, services are quite reasonable, staff generally helpful, polite and trains kept in a reasonable condition, given the age of some of them. Longer distance services, South Wales to/from Manchester are also quite reasonable, except for the overcrowding at peak times. Generally, these are operated using class 175 units, which are kept in good condition.

However, the Birmingham International to from Aberystwyth and Holyhead are a completely different ball game. The class 158 units are in a disgusting condition, despite recently having had a refurbishment, which was none other than cosmetic.

For several years, together with other passengers I have been complaining to Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) about the lack of air conditioning, toilets out of use (even on the first train of the day!!), severe over crowding by cutting down trains from 4, even 6 car services to 2. Only last night I travelled from Wolverhampton on one 2 car set, that is diagrammed for a 4 car set. That was in rush hour, 18.42 towards Aberystwyth!! Simply not good enough. Within less than a week of the first refurbished set entering service, I had the misfortune to travel on it and found the air con not working, toilets out of use and information screens not functioning. The other refurbished sets are equally as bad.

I sometimes receive a reply from ATW, which offers 'apologies', but no suggestions of them rectifying the train problems.

Class 158 units of other TOC's, notably Scotrail are in a far superior condition, with toilets and air conditioning functioning correctly.

Some years ago, I did go to ATW offices in Penarth Road, Cardiff, with a list of complaints about the company. The woman that came to see me, introduced herself by name, followed by 'I am Welsh, and Welsh is my first language'. After we overcame that little problem, she admitted that most of their resources were concentrated on the Cardiff area and The Valleys and was totally ignorant of the problems encountered elsewhere on their service.

Any TOC being invited to submit tenders for future franchises need to be instructed to, either hire new stock or rectify all the ongoing faults on the class 158 units and to provide a minimum of 4 car sets on all services to and from Birmingham International, preferably without the farce of splitting and coupling units in Shrewsbury.

Finally, whilst the staff at Shrewsbury who had previously worked for Central Trains, even BR are absolutely fine, polite, helpful and knowledgeable, a lot of those recruited by ATW are, at best ignorant of how to treat us, passengers, customers whatever. After all, without us, they wouldn't have a job.

Regards

Alan Jones