

# Petition: Free Train Transport for school pupils with Arriva Trains Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 1 November 2016

Petitions Committee | 1 Tachwedd 2016

## Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-5-716

Petition title: Free Train Transport for school pupils with Arriva Trains Wales

Text of petition: Here in the UK we are entitled to free education so surely we should be allowed free, safe transport to and from school? The answer to this is yes for many years Arriva trains Wales have been providing Treorchy Comprehensive pupils with Free train transport which is a huge benefit to those who live outside the catchment areas, however recently this has changed they have now called for all pupils to buy a train pass to get to and from school and these prices range from £19.95 to £32.90 per school term. For some parents with more than 1 child this can work out to be very costly and because these passes are provided through Arriva Trains Wales the school is unable to help parents with this funding. Arriva trains have stated that this is for safety precautions however children who have these designated train passes are in front of a "protective" metal barrier closer to the platform edge and the children that do not have these passes are in this small enclosed barrier space which actually causes more of a safety hazard due to overcrowding in such a small space. By being allowed free train transport once again every pupil will be able to have a fair chance to gain an education and will be able to go on to what they want to do in life we will all be treated as equal and money will not be a major concern for anyone.

## Background

Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) introduced free travel for students from Treorchy Comprehensive approximately ten years ago to encourage good behaviour from students travelling to school on the Treherbert line on the Valleys rail network.

ATW withdrew this arrangement from June 2016 following safety concerns caused by the level of demand leading to crowding at stations. This followed a risk assessment undertaken by ATW following concerns raised by train crew and British Transport Police.

In the morning pupils normally travel on two trains, arriving at Treorchy at 08:04 and 08:34. However, the afternoon school train normally carries approximately 300 pupils. Removal of free travel has not reduced the volume of pupils travelling. ATW has introduced a crowd management plan, and now employs four security staff at Treorchy station in the afternoon.

Following withdrawal of free travel, students are able to apply for an ATW education season ticket. ATW issues approximately 300 of these season tickets annually to students travelling by rail to a number of schools across the Wales and Borders Franchise area. These offer a 55 per cent discount on the fare, with pupils in receipt of free school meals travelling free. A valid pass can be used at any time between the stations shown on the pass.

## Welsh Government action

### Franchise management and procurement

Rail franchising is not currently devolved. However, the Welsh Government is responsible for the day to day management of the Wales and Borders Franchise.

The current ATW franchise expires in October 2018. The Welsh and UK Governments are currently negotiating devolution of executive powers to the Welsh Government to procure the next Welsh rail franchise from 2018. Powers are expected to be devolved from 2017.

The Welsh Government launched a public consultation, [Setting the Direction for Wales and Borders Rail](#), in January 2016. A [summary of consultation responses](#) has been published. The summary says that respondents support the current rail concessionary fares arrangements, although a number of suggestions were made including “considering concessionary offers for Welsh university students/young people”.

### Welsh Government concessionary travel policy

The Welsh Government’s [All Wales Concessionary Fares Scheme](#) primarily provides free bus travel for the over 60s, people with certain disabilities and some injured service personnel / war veterans. However, the scheme also extends to rail travel in areas where bus services are limited, primarily in north and mid-Wales. Currently this scheme is funded until March 2017.

In 2015 the Welsh Government introduced the [My Travel Pass scheme](#) in partnership with the bus industry to provide a one third discount on bus travel for 16 to 18 year olds across Wales.

## Learner Travel

Local authorities' duties with regard to home to school transport are set out in the [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure 2008](#). Under the provisions of the Measure, local authorities are required to assess the travel needs of learners who are aged under 19 in their area. They must provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age who live further than certain distances from their nearest suitable school. For secondary pupils this is three miles. However, Rhondda Cynon Taf has used its discretionary powers to set this distance at two miles. If the local authority determines that the school is not the nearest suitable school, the pupil generally does not have a right to free school transport even if they live beyond walking distance.

[Rhondda Cynon Taf's school transport policy](#) states that the efficient use of resources will dictate the mode of transport provided. Transport may be provided by means of contracted school transport services or existing public transport services which, together with the size and type of transport (bus, minibus, train, taxi, etc.), will be dictated by cost effectiveness.

The [local authority has said](#) that ATW's arrangements are independent of the local authority and pupils who meet the criteria would be eligible for free transport under the Rhondda Cynon Taf's scheme.

## National Assembly for Wales action

The issue free travel for Treorchy Comprehensive pupils does not appear to have been discussed in the Assembly to date.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.