

Carno Station Action Group

David J Rowlands
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA

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April 19th, 2018

Dear Mr Rowlands,

Petition P-05-780 Reopen Carno station

Thank you for forwarding us copies of your letter dated 24th October 2017 to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport and of his reply dated 30th November 2017. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on his response and apologise for our long delay in doing so.

Our chief reason for submitting a second petition was that the fundamental shift in Welsh Government policy away from funding new stations itself effectively eliminated the possibility of Carno station re-opening in a reasonable timeframe. This is because the alternative source of funding – the Department for Transport New Stations Fund – only becomes available every few years and because Wales has been disproportionately successful in the first two rounds (winning both Pye Corner and Bow Street).

We fully understand that the powers, funding and responsibility for the development of rail infrastructure in Wales is reserved to the UK government, as Ken Skates points out in his reply. However, this has been the case from the start of devolution, and did not prevent the Welsh Government spending money from its block grant on new stations prior to 2016, using its powers under the Railways Act 2005.

With the help of the National Assembly research service, we have been able to establish the extent of WG government support for new station schemes. In total, an average of £8.5 m per year was spent on new stations (and the new lines associated with some of them) over the 10 year period from 2005-6 to 2014-5. This represented 0.058% of the Welsh Government average annual budget for the period, which was £14.7 bn. [The annual expenditures are detailed in the Table reproduced at the end of this letter.]

It has been suggested to us that the Welsh Government has had to discontinue expenditure on new stations programme because of cuts in the block grant, but in fact the block grant has risen every year since 2014-5 [see Table reproduced below.]

We assume that the Welsh Governments previous policy of supporting the opening of new stations out of its block grant was driven by the desire to promote economic regeneration, especially in disadvantaged areas, and to encourage the move to sustainable transport, in line with its legal obligation to promote sustainability. There can be no doubt that the objectives of economic regeneration and sustainability are as important as ever, so we cannot understand why the Welsh Government has changed its new stations funding policy.

The Cabinet Secretary's reply does not explain why the Welsh Government has decided to stop opening new stations using its own funds, even though the rationale for so doing has not changed. It is all very well to "invest in the rail network to deliver services and infrastructure" as the Welsh Government continues to do, but this prioritises people already served by the railway network over those who are not served. This is the fundamental problem with the current approach of the Welsh Government and we believe it should be held to account for it.

Given the valuable work the former Enterprise and Learning Committee did in highlighting the need for a Carno Station Business Case in the first place, we believe that the successor committee, the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, should examine the new stations funding issue. We are therefore writing to ask if your committee could refer our petition to them with this in view.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Barnes,
Chairman, Carno Station Action Group & Member of Carno Community Council

		WG New station expenditure (£m)	WG Total Annual Expenditure (£bn)	New station expenditure as a percentage of total
2005-6	New stations on Ebbw Vale	21.8	12.2	0.179 %
2006-7	& Vale of Glamorgan lines;	21.8	13.2	0.165 %
2007-8	Llanharan	21.8	14.1	0.155 %
2008-9	Ebbw Vale line	1.3	14.6	0.009 %
2009-10		1.3	15.8	0.008 %
2010-11		1.3	15.6	0.008 %
2011-2012		0	15	0 %
2012-2013	Energlyn	2.7	15	0.018 %
2013-2014	Pye Corner	1.3	15.8	0.008 %
2014-2015	Ebbw Vale Town	11.5	15.4	0.075 %
	Total	84.8 £m	146.7 £bn	0.058 %
	Average	8.48 £m	14.67 £bn	

Table 1: Welsh Government Overall Budget Since 1999-2000
(Source: Welsh Government)

	<i>£000s</i>				
	TME	DEL	Revenue DEL	Capital DEL	AME
1999-2000	7,453,643	..	..	..	..
2000-01	7,924,332	..	..	..	..
2001-02	9,705,827	..	..	..	..
2002-03	10,514,334	..	..	..	..
2003-04	11,209,877	..	..	..	..
2004-05	11,780,895	..	..	..	..
2005-06	12,739,161	12,238,790	10,961,132	1,277,658	500,371
2006-07	13,757,390	13,235,309	11,729,257	1,506,052	522,081
2007-08	14,566,124	14,084,254	12,516,713	1,567,541	481,870
2008-09	15,280,784	14,583,559	12,917,672	1,665,887	697,225
2009-10	16,557,597	15,759,438	13,817,505	1,941,933	798,159
2010-11	15,866,773	15,583,016	13,830,994	1,752,022	283,757
2011-12	15,465,150	15,037,037	13,641,891	1,395,146	428,113
2012-13	15,483,141	14,985,958	13,673,874	1,312,084	497,183
2013-14	16,167,748	15,765,863	14,439,395	1,326,468	401,885
2014-15	15,816,846	15,374,770	13,934,153	1,440,617	442,076
2015-16	16,099,283	14,843,090	13,296,074	1,547,016	1,256,193
2016-17	16,484,444	14,790,184	13,342,795	1,447,389	1,694,660
2017-18	17,707,901	15,863,072	14,088,198	1,774,874	1,844,829
2018-19	17,662,097	15,474,940	13,866,762	1,608,178	2,062,933

Note: Figures up to 2017-18 are taken from the second supplementary budget for the relevant year.