

Ken Skates AC/AM
Gweinidog yr Economi a Thrafnidiaeth
Minister for Economy and Transport



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-934
Ein cyf/Our ref KS/08713/19

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair
Petitions Committee

Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales

14th January 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 6 December regarding the petition on Public Transport in Blaenau Gwent.

We are moving forward with our ambitious vision to reshape public transport infrastructure and services in Blaenau Gwent, including local bus services, the very popular Ebbw Vale rail line, active travel, and through the additional powers proposed under the Buses (Wales) Bill.

As of 15 December, passengers on the Ebbw Vale line are now travelling in more modern four-carriage modern Class 170 trains. These trains provide a better customer experience, including electronic passenger information, air conditioning, power sockets and increased capacity. From 2022 Transport for Wales (TfW) will be introducing brand new trains to Blaenau Gwent as part of an £800 million investment.

TfW have undertaken a study of the Ebbw Vale Line on behalf of the Welsh Government, focusing on increasing the frequency of services and delivering a new service between Ebbw Vale and Newport. The study is being undertaken in conjunction with Network Rail, who manage the infrastructure of the line. The study aims to understand the opportunities and barriers to running up to four trains per hour on this line, as well as what work is required to allow this. More details of future plans for the line will be announced soon.

Blaenau Gwent Council is currently undertaking a WelTAG Stage 1 study on the Abertillery area using Welsh Government funding from the Local Transport Fund. This study is considering the key issues and opportunities in the valley and identifying potential transport interventions to address these and meet our well-being objectives.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.


With regard to bus services since 2013 the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with £25m a year via our discretionary Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) to help them subsidise bus and community transport services. A notable achievement given continuing challenging financial settlements from the UK Government. Each local authority determines which services to support, based upon its assessment of local circumstances and priorities.

We will also introduce the Buses (Wales) Bill in this Assembly term, building on the proposals in the 'Improving Public Transport' White Paper. The Bill includes provisions relating to improved partnership working arrangements between bus operators and local authorities; franchising; and local authority run bus services. The Bill will also put in place new information management and sharing arrangements, so that information to the public will be more accessible and reliable, and local authorities will be in a better position to make arrangements to address changes in service provision. The changes proposed in the Bill will seek to address some of the negative impacts of de-regulation on users, operators and authorities, by creating a number of tools which would enable local authorities to intervene should they chose to do so.

As part of this programme of bus reform, it is also our intention to initiate four live trials to shape development of the Integrated Responsive Travel (IRT) proposals which Tŷŷ are managing in collaboration with local authorities and operators. The funding is part of the £24m Local Transport Fund. One of these trials will be in the Blaenau Gwent area. The trials will test different models of demand for bus services and where appropriate, build on existing delivery models. The results of the trials will be analysed and will help inform the development of demand responsive travel over the next few years. Depending on their success, a decision will be taken on initiating a permanent arrangement.

We also support local authorities with Welsh Government Transport Grants. Applications can be submitted for support through the Local Transport Fund, Local Transport Network Fund, Active Travel Fund, Road Safety and Safe Routes in Communities Grants. We have awarded £850,000 to Blaenau Gwent Council in 2019-20 for active travel schemes, safe routes to schools and bus stop infrastructure enhancements

I trust this will help you with your consideration of the petition and I look forward to being informed of the outcome.

Yours ever,


Ken Skates AC/AM

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