

Ken Skates AM
Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales

25 February 2020

Dear Ken,

On 29 January 2019 the Committee held a scrutiny session with Transport for Wales, Network Rail and TfW Rail Services (Keolis Amey). Members looked in detail at the Wales and Borders rail franchise and the wider work/development of Transport for Wales. Following our session the Committee is seeking clarity on a number of points. I anticipate that some of these questions will need input from Transport for Wales, however I wanted to put them to you in the first instance.

Transfer of Core Valley Lines

- How will Transport for Wales report on its investment and spending on the Metro and Core Valley Lines– both in terms of investment in upgrading the network, and future operation, maintenance and renewal (OMR) spending? Currently Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) report on investment. As this is large scale public investment in vital infrastructure the Committee feels data around spend and reporting on the investment should be as open and transparent as possible.



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- During the session James Price said he would welcome the Committee's views on financial reporting on Metro investment. In the Committee's view, at a very minimum, investment in the Core Valleys Lines infrastructure (both enhancement and on-going OMR) should be at least as transparent as it is currently through Network Rail Regulatory Financial Statements. However, we believe that the transfer of the asset provides an opportunity to simplify and clarify this reporting, including reporting on wider performance, ensuring information is available in a form which is more readily accessible for the public.
- James Price told us that TfW and the Welsh Government are in discussion with the ORR about potential future options for regulation of the South Wales Metro. We would ask that you provide further information on these discussions, including the rationale for considering a role for the ORR, and the other regulatory options being considered.

Compensation for passengers

- The Committee previously recommended that Transport for Wales work with stakeholders to explore additional ways to compensate passengers above contractual obligations during periods of severe disruption. TfW accepted this recommendation. When asked about progress on this James Price informed the Committee that TfW had recently established customer groups and that TfW would be speaking to them about the issue. However he also stated "any money we take out of the budget that we've already got comes out of money for investing in the future."
- The Committee notes Mr Price's comments about the implications of this type of compensation for future investment. However, we would also highlight the very severe impact on passengers of this continuing poor performance – including in some cases financial impact and an impact on their employment – and we reiterate that TfW accepted our previous recommendation. We would like to hear your view on the provision of additional compensation for severely disrupted passengers.



Integrated ticketing

- The Committee feels the progress with integrated ticketing is far behind where it should be and this needs to be a priority. James Price made it clear in the session that technology was not the barrier to integrated ticketing. Please can you provide the Committee with an update on the Government's stance on, and progress towards, integrated ticketing, including details of barriers to implementation and how these are being addressed? The Committee would also welcome ongoing updates on this matter. We note that, unlike in recent English and Scottish legislation, your planned Bus Services (Wales) Bill will not include provisions around ticketing.

Capacity and new trains

- As you know there is currently an issue with overcrowding on the Rhymney Line. The Committee was told to expect a 30–40% uplift in capacity on the Rhymney line this year – an increase in capacity which is very much welcomed. As well as the obvious negative effects on passengers on the Rhymney line, the overcrowding, and issues with the temporary class 37 trains, have a knock on negative effect on the wider south Wales network. As Transport for Wales has experienced severe delays in securing additional rolling stock recently it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that this new capacity will not be delivered on time. Do you have confidence in the rolling stock delivery? If the rolling stock is not delivered on time how will you mitigate any delay and remedy overcrowding and its knock on effects in the short term?
- The Committee notes that TfW expect to be running pacer trains on the network until July, but that the organisation is preparing for the possibility that it may need to extend this if they cannot source replacement rolling stock. TfW is also hoping to replace class 37 trains in the next two to three months but may extend their use if required. As you know both the pacers and the class 37 trains are not compliant with legislation on rail vehicle accessibility. Whilst the Committee accepts that removing these trains from service would worsen the current overcrowding on the network it is greatly concerned that the failure to source accessible replacements is having a detrimental effect on the mobility of disabled people across the Valleys and



in Cardiff. If the non-accessible trains cannot be replaced by the end of July how confident are you that the UK Department for Transport will issue a further dispensation against the Regulations? What contingency planning is being undertaken around the possibility that TfW fails to source rolling stock in time and DfT does not grant a further extension?

- As you will recall the Committee's Autumn Rail Disruption report, published last March, warned of suppressed demand for rail services and recommended that capacity planning should take this into account. During the 29 January scrutiny session James Price agreed with this view, stating that despite TfW being "quite ambitious in terms of the number of people we thought would use the service in future" they "have underestimated the potential growth." The committee is concerned that suppressed demand may lead to South East Wales Metro services remaining at capacity or seriously overcrowded. The Committee is interested in your view on this, and what work is being undertaken to address these capacity concerns?

Welsh Language

- The Committee discussed TfW's responsibilities in relation to Welsh Language requirements, in the light of media reports indicating that TfW is not complying with its legal obligations. James Price explained that some issues TfW are having are due to a failure by the Rail Delivery Group to accept that Welsh language legislation applies, for example, to ticketing. However, there are areas which are clearly within TfW's control and very easy to fix. These include bilingual signage and announcements. The Committee would like to see greater urgency given to fixing the problems with Welsh language provision, which Welsh-speaking customers are quite rightly unhappy about. The Committee would also like details of each of the issues raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner, and a specific response and approach to each, in due course when the Commissioner's report is published.

Passenger surveys

- When asked about Transport Focus's National Passenger Survey James Price noted "some of the strangest things for me are the areas where we thought we're doing best on are some of the areas where we've seen scores drop,



and some of the areas where we thought we're doing poorly on we've seen the scores jump". He also informed the Committee that TfW undertakes around 600 surveys over the course of a year into customer satisfaction. It would be helpful to know more about the methodology and results of the survey work undertaken by TfW, including how these compare to Transport Focus's National Passenger Survey.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Russell George". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Russell George

Chair, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

