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Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS  
Chair – Petitions Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
CARDIFF  
CF99 1SN

7 August 2020

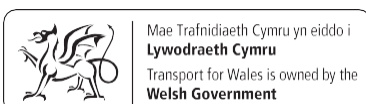
Dear Janet Finch-Saunders MS

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the delay in responding to the Committee regarding services in North Wales.

Transport for Wales (TfW) has been managing rail services during exceptional circumstances under COVID-19 parameters. The pandemic has brought up some difficult challenges for us, but I want to assure you that we are doing all we can to transport our key workers and those who have no other alternative means of travel. We do understand and share the will, and energy to return services operations to normal, giving our passengers the service they deserve, but one that is also safe.

Since the start of COVID-19 restrictions, we have increased our services from 40% and are currently running around 80% of our usual services. A reduced level of services is not just unique to Wales and these challenges are also faced by all train operating companies in the UK who are also running a reduced service as they deal with the pandemic. TfW guidance is that *“2M distancing should be maintained where possible”*, which follows Welsh Government guidance that *“employers to ensure they take reasonable measures to maintain a distance of 2 metres between people in the workplace”*. This puts a high level of statutory responsibility on us to maintain the 2M and to have sufficient traincrew available where social distancing can be maintained.

We were able to achieve an increase to 80% by taking robust workplace risk assessments, and by moving quickly in applying mitigations and acquiring additional portacabins for traincrews to use between them having to take up their duties. Our passengers and staff well being is important to us and we want to provide the safest environment we can for them by following government workplace guidance, to ensure that they too can safely distance and limit further spread of the virus.



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I have tried to answer the queries in the letter in more detail, but following the December 2019 timetable changes, a service was highlighted as having a significant impact on passengers along the North Wales Coast – namely the 17.16 from Bangor which had been replaced with a 17.18, that only called at Llandudno Junction and Chester. This change was made as a result of the introduction of long distance (Cardiff <> Holyhead) express services. Although, we recognised the impact on our passengers, and developed plans to rectify the situation very quickly, due to Covid-19 restrictions, no changes were able to be implemented. However, I want to assure you that we are committed to resolve this issue, and we have instructed Rail Services to adjust the departure time of the Holyhead – Cardiff service (to leave earlier and include the stops along the North Wales coast) once we return to full timetable service and when restrictions have been lifted and of course all have been approved validations from Network Rail.

### **A north-south service being introduced**

We work to the Train Service Requirement (TSR) which states that from December 2019, one southbound service shall arrive at Cardiff between 2000 and 2159 and shall have a journey time between Holyhead and Cardiff of no more than 4hr 25mins. The service shall include business class and catering should include the availability of hot meals. Included within this is a commitment to deliver 8 direct services per day provided southbound between Llandudno Junction and Cardiff where at least 7 services shall also extend to/from Holyhead, calling, as a minimum, at Bangor

### **Fares**

The reduction of fares in North Wales and the northern Valley Lines in January 2020 was a key commitment when Transport for Wales took over the Wales and Borders rail service, as part of the wider investment programme to transform the service. This was done in conjunction with a number of other fares initiatives across the Wales and Borders network, including free travel for under-11s, free off-peak travel for under-16s, half-price fares for under-18s, two new railcards, and the introduction of Advance tickets that can be purchased on the day of travel

Since taking over the Wales and Borders rail service, TfW have significantly increased the number of cheaper Advance tickets available to purchase, including on all journeys over 50 miles except those wholly within the South Wales Metro area. TfW have also introduced Delay Repay compensation for delays of at least 15 minutes

The reasons for the disparity in fares between certain routes is largely due to historic reasons and other train operating companies also using the line. A number of factors play into disparities, such as fare reduction under previous operators, track access fees, differing maintenance costs and customer demand for services.

## **Consultation**

We recognised that there was need for further engagement and consultation and we have committed to two stakeholder workshops a year to discuss timetable changes, which will be conducted in a timely manner to allow the rail planning team to discuss and incorporate any changes. The first of these workshops commenced in November 2019 and we held our second (virtual meeting) in March. We have also commenced regional stakeholder forums, which are held quarterly to discuss timetabling amongst other topics. The last North Wales regional forum was held on 23 July 2020 which informed us that stakeholders were keen for there to be a North Wales rail user group, and we are also supportive of this and terms of reference are currently being drafted. We have also reached out to Bangor University for representation to join our forum, and we hope to welcome a representative at our next forum in October.

## **First class rail users**

I wish to assure you that first class rail users are not prioritised. The loco hauled stock introduces many benefits to all passengers including greater comfort, more capacity/seating and the option for hot/cold food and beverages. Passengers can take advantage of this regardless of which ticket they have. We are also introducing Mark 4 train carriages this year for services between Cardiff <> North Wales which will operate 3x Holyhead to Cardiff services each way daily. Train crew training was imminent but was impacted by Covid-19 due to the inability to put 2 people in a train cab to receive driver training. This is expected to be re-instated shortly so we can introduce these carriages on the network.

## **Passengers south of Shrewsbury**


As previously mentioned, timetabling is complex. Timetables need to balance demand for trains serving communities and non-stop fast trains as well as the requirements of businesses that rely on freight. When addressing timetabling, we consider many things, and many of these are to keep passengers safe, such as:

- Speed limits vary on a length of track – for example, at bends and over points.
- Only one train can occupy a given section of track at any time.
- Because signalling infrastructure varies across the network, what is considered to be the safe distance between trains at one part of the route can differ at another part.
- There's a minimum time gap required between trains using the same platform at a station.
- Stopping, non-stopping and freight trains all travel at different speeds, so a mix of these on the track affects the number of trains that can use that section of track.

- Trains can't be scheduled to run too closely together because we need flexibility if there is an incident to get trains back on time. We work hard to avoid knock-on delays.
- Different schedules are run on bank holidays
- Time for improvement work and routine maintenance needs to be planned in to increase capacity and keep the network running reliably.

I hope this answers your queries

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James Price," with a comma at the end. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James Price  
Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive