

We love free Wi-Fi on all Arriva Trains Wales routes

The £1.5m Welsh Government investment means the whole ATW fleet including Pacer trains, Class 153's, and the carriages used on the north-south Express have now been retrofitted to provide free-to-use Wi-Fi for all passengers.

Every train will carry the following sticker:

There will be information leaflets available at stations and Arriva will also run an awareness campaign for passengers, handing out free 'I love Free Wi-Fi' chocolate treats at busy interchanges.

Speaking at a launch event to mark the completion of the on train Wi-Fi project, Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

"This rollout should be a real boon to commuters and business users alike. I expect it to make a real contribution to our ambitions for a growing economy with strong businesses in productive regions set out our Prosperity for All Economic Action Plan.

"Importantly, our investment means that Pacer trains, Class 153's, and the carriages used on our north-south Express all now have free-to-use Wi-Fi for all passengers. These trains amount to almost one-third of the fleet.

"Passengers across the Valley Lines and West Wales – including the Heart of Wales line – will now benefit from this vital connectivity. This is another example of our strong record of investment in the current rail franchise where we continue to fund additional services and capacity across Wales."

Ian Price, Director at Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Wales said:

"Over the last couple of years, we've seen a definite shift in attitudes around the importance of connectivity for businesses.

"There has also been a significant growth in remotely hosted computing applications, with data and processing hosted 'in the cloud'. Both small and large enterprises are increasingly utilising internet-based applications to manage their businesses.

"This is even more so where supplier-client relationships are concerned; where not only access speeds are seen as critical, but the speed of responding to social media content, images and data are potential gauges of the efficiency of a business to respond to their customer needs."

Tom Joyner, Managing Director for Arriva Trains Wales said:

“The fact all our customers will be able to use our free wi-fi on every single one of our trains is brilliant news and we are delighted to mark the completion of the project.

We know how important connectivity is and being able to be productive during your journey, check your onward travel plans or simply catch up on social media will make a real difference to our customers.”

“Customers have frequently been asking for Wi-Fi on-board our trains and this has been a really significant project which has taken careful planning and hundreds of staff hours to deliver successfully without impacting on services.”

[Vacant land tax idea to be used to test Wales Act powers](#)

The Cabinet Secretary will today set out the next steps for proposing a new Welsh tax as part of the tax policy work plan for 2018.

Since announcing a shortlist of 4 new tax ideas alongside the draft Budget in October, the Welsh Government has been examining the case for each of these.

The 4 tax ideas were: a social care levy, a vacant land tax, a disposable plastics tax and a tourism tax.

Although the vacant land tax idea will be used to test the Wales Act powers, work will also continue on each of the other 3 tax ideas.

The decision to take forward the vacant land tax idea follows engagement with stakeholder organisations, the public and across government.

A vacant land tax has been chosen both because it could help to incentivise more timely development, and because it could help prevent dereliction and aid regeneration.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Housing is a priority for the Welsh Government. A tax on vacant land could prevent the practice of land banking and land not being developed within the expected timescales.

“The Republic of Ireland vacant sites levy provides a useful starting point for how a vacant land tax could work in Wales.

“The existing model in the Republic of Ireland and the relatively narrow focus of the tax make this the most suitable of the 4 shortlisted ideas to test the Wales Act.”

Additional £10m for social services in Wales to deal with winter pressures

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement ahead of a statement in the Assembly later this afternoon, in which he will update Assembly Members on how NHS Wales, local authorities and partners are managing winter pressures across health and care in Wales.

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“Health and social services in Wales have been under significant pressure this winter, like the rest of the UK. It is testament to the commitment and skill of staff that the vast majority of people continue to receive the care they need in a compassionate, professional and timely manner.

“Social care plays a huge part in delivering care as close to home as possible. I realise it has been under considerable pressure over recent months. In recognition of the demand being experienced, I have decided to provide an additional £10m to Local Authorities to enable social services to support people in their homes and communities.”

Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies added:

“Our health and social care services are heavily dependent on each other. So I’m really pleased we have been able to put this extra £10m investment into our social services, so that local government can continue providing high quality social services to people across Wales.

“I want to thank our social services staff who continue to deliver high quality care during what continues to be a very challenging time.”

This investment is in addition to the additional £10m the Health Secretary announced earlier this year to support frontline services to support them in taking immediate action to help improve care.

The Welsh Government also invests £60m a year through its Integrated Care Fund, which is being used to develop more care and support at or close to home and help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and delays in discharges.

[Anthem, Music Fund Wales](#)

Backed with a £1m investment from the Welsh Government, Anthem, Music Fund Wales, is a pioneering endowment fund for music in Wales.

Set up by the Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales, Anthem is aimed at helping children and young people, from as young as three years old up to 25, access musical opportunities and develop their skills and talent.

This is an additional source of funding established for the long-term to enhance existing music funding in Wales. Celebrating the launch at Motorpoint Arena Cardiff, hosted by Connie Fisher, were the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, and Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Lord Elis-Thomas.

The event also showcased Wales's latest emerging talent, duo Into the Ark, Horizons / Gorwelion Launchpad awardees and 2017 finalists of The Voice, who are soon to tour the US with mentor Sir Tom Jones.

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams said:

“I want all our young people, whatever their background or ability, to enjoy music and to be able to develop their talents and skills. Anthem – Music Fund Wales, established with £1 million from the Welsh Government, is a ground-breaking initiative that will not only increase access to musical experiences but also enhance existing music services.

“This will build on the music education already delivered by schools as part of the new curriculum and will allow learners access to new and exciting opportunities outside of school.”

Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport Lord Elis-Thomas AM, added:

“I am proud of the way the Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales have worked together in order to make Anthem a reality but in

order to build the Fund we will need to work in partnership with the music industry across the UK.

“That’s why I am today calling on all artists and businesses across Wales to be part of the Fund and make sure that others can discover and share in the joy of music.”

The fund, which values the nation’s rich musical heritage, while firmly focussing on nurturing future talent, emerged from the recommendations of a Welsh Government-commissioned independent Music Services Task and Finish Group.

Phil George, Chairman of the Arts Council of Wales, tasked by Government to deliver on Anthem’s ambition, welcomed today’s announcement, saying,

“There’s no doubt that the citizens of Wales want to see our young people enriching their lives through musical expression. We must all hope that private and corporate donors will seize this new opportunity to join the Welsh Government in nurturing young musical talents and helping them delight and amaze us all.”

The £1m investment from the Welsh Government is the first stage of establishing the capital of the fund which is set to grow over the next two to three years, with a target annual pattern of grant giving of up to £300,000 per annum scheduled from 2021 onwards.

The Anthem Board will be developing detailed criteria for applications, carefully considering how the funding can be used to develop opportunities for young people across Wales.

To ensure availability of funding for future generations the Anthem fund will need to be built up from a variety of sources – public, private and third sector – investing for the long term.

To turn up the volume on Anthem’s aims and to support its ambitious fundraising effort, high- profile ambassadors are being sought representing all musical genres. Anthem Ambassadors will be supporters of the long-term goals of the fund to make a difference for musical talent and will act as figureheads for its campaigns.

Anthem Ambassadors, together with its Board Members, will be seeking supporters and partners passionate about ensuring young people throughout Wales have access to opportunities to develop their musical skills and talent to support the ambitions of the fund.

For further details, see: www.anthem.wales

Taskforce members discuss better transport links for the Valleys

The eighth meeting of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which was held at Lewis School Pengam, in Bargoed, was a chance for the group to explore transport issues facing Valleys communities and learn more about how the latest developments in rail and bus transport, including the development of the South Wales Metro, could help address them.

Our Valleys Our Future, the recently published plan on how we deliver the priorities of the Taskforce, identified some of the actions required to improve and enhance the transport infrastructure in the Valleys.

Transport was one of the most commonly-raised issues by the public when the taskforce took evidence from Valleys communities. These engagement sessions helped to shape the taskforce's action and delivery plans – Our Valleys, Our Future – which was published in July and November 2017, respectively.

The Our Valleys, Our Future delivery plan identifies a series of actions required to improve and enhance the transport infrastructure across the Valleys.

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies, who chairs the taskforce, said,

“We believe connectivity is key to supporting economic growth and building stronger communities.

“This meeting was a great opportunity to discuss with taskforce members the actions we are taking to improve infrastructure in the area, not only through the South Wales Metro project, but also from our wider actions on public transport which will in turn improve the economic growth for the Valleys region.”

He added that the South Wales Metro will not only improve links between communities but it will also support the local and wider Welsh economy by enhancing connectivity across Wales, the rest of the UK and Europe. It will allow people greater mobility and easier access to jobs and services.

Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, who is a member of the taskforce said

“We are moving forward with our vision of an integrated transport system, by looking to reshape public transport infrastructure and services across Wales.

“We will soon have rail franchising powers, so that we can, for the first time, specify and let Wales and Borders rail services. We are also securing the transfer of the Valley Lines north of Cardiff Queen Street, where we can separate operation from the South Wales Main Line, enabling us to deliver the next phase of the South Wales Metro.

“We are also looking at reforming the planning and delivery of local bus services in Wales which should lead to a real tangible improvement for people in Valleys communities.”