

# Final tenders invited as Wales nears decision on next rail service

The new rail service will deliver a step-change in the quality of rail travel in Wales. Since January 2017, officials and bidders have been discussing a range of innovative solutions to find those which best meet the needs of people in Wales and the border regions.

Rather than follow the traditional model for procuring a rail service, with the issue of a set specification that companies bid for, this approach has allowed new ideas to be explored and collaborative working relationships to be developed – setting the tone for the new service.

Proposals for the South Wales Metro are being developed alongside the Wales and Borders service to aid development of an integrated transport system in the region. The deadline to submit final tender is 21 December.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“I’m delighted to confirm that Abellio Rail Cymru, Arriva Rail Wales, KeolisAmey and MTR Corporation (Cymru) Ltd have all been invited to submit final tenders for the next Wales and Borders Rail Service. From rolling stock to frequency of services, Metros to profit thresholds, this final tender will provide the blueprint for what these four giants of the rail industry are bidding to provide Wales.

“Detailed discussions with all four of the shortlisted potential operators have only served to reinforce our optimism that the next service will see big improvements. I look forward to seeing how the detailed tenders tackle our ambitious requirements for the next 15 years before making a decision on the successful operator in early 2018.

“We intend to create a rail service that benefits the whole of Wales, communities along the border and in England. One with passengers at its heart and today’s announcement is another

important step towards that.”

In inviting final tender for the franchise, the Economy Secretary provided an update on progress with UK Government on fair funding. He said:

“There is will on both sides to ensure that the settlement works for Wales and the Border and, following positive talks, a resolution is near. It’s great news for rail users across Wales that this ensures the services modern Wales expects and have been promised, will be fully delivered.”

---

## **Council tax debt report shows need for change says Cabinet Secretary**

The report, commissioned by the Welsh Government, brings together existing evidence, provides an insight into how local authorities currently manage the collection of arrears and explores the key issues from the local authority perspective.

In a statement today, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Making council tax fairer is an essential part of our plans to reform local government in Wales.

“Although this is just one strand of research which brings out the perspective of local authorities, the report helps to build our understanding of current practices in respect of council tax collection and recovery methods used across Wales.

“I will be considering the report’s findings in full before considering what changes need to be made to ensure local authority practices are consistent, reasonable and proportionate in all cases.

“I want to work closely with local government to see how we can adopt more proactive approaches, focusing on people’s individual circumstances to help prevent debt occurring and escalating.

“We know many of these households are struggling to cope with the effects of the UK Government’s welfare reforms and I remain committed to ensuring action is taken to mitigate the consequences for those affected.”

---

## Nursing workforce is the lifeblood of the NHS in Wales – Vaughan Gething

Speaking at the All Wales Nurse Staffing Conference, Vaughan Gething thanked nurses across Wales for their hard work and commitment to the NHS and stressed the importance of ensuring Wales has a nursing workforce fit to meet the needs of patients both now and in the future.

During the speech, the Health Secretary spoke about the importance of having the right numbers of nurses with the right skills and knowledge. He spoke about the importance of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act and announced in readiness for commencement of the Act in April 2018, the Welsh Government will be publishing the required Statutory Guidance in the next six weeks.

Vaughan Gething said:

“Wales is the first country in Europe to legislate on nurse staffing levels. We took the lead, empowering nurses and ensuring the resources are in place to care sensitively for patients. I’m delighted the guidance, developed with and for the nursing workforce, will be published in the coming weeks.”

Speaking on the one per cent pay cap on public sector workers, the Health Secretary told the conference:

“The number of nurses working in NHS Wales continues to increase year on year. There are more nurses working here in our NHS than ever before; something to be celebrated,

“We do however recognise there are challenges around the recruitment of nurses in primary and secondary care – that’s why we developed our successful This is Wales: Train Work Live campaign to attract more staff here for the future.

“Pay and the public sector pay cap is an issue for those already in the profession and those considering a career in nursing. We have called, repeatedly, on the UK Government to end the cap on public sector pay and give workers across the UK a much-deserved pay rise.

“Any lifting of the cap must be funded by the UK Government, doing so ourselves would mean £50 million coming out of the budget for NHS Wales alone. This would threaten thousands of public sector jobs and impact on the services we value and rely on. I know NHS staff do not want a pay rise on the back of redundancies in local government and other public services.

“I have written to the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt on two occasions calling for an end to the cap; he has not given me the courtesy of a response thus far.”

---

## £2.6m to help rough sleepers and increase the capacity of emergency night provision

This funding has been allocated to projects which tackle rough sleeping, youth homelessness, mental health and homelessness as well as supporting people to find housing in the private rented sector.

Of the £2.6 million, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham local authorities have also benefited from capital funding to increase the capacity of emergency night provision for rough sleepers. The Cabinet Secretary's announcement coincides with homelessness figures for April to June 2017 which, based on information from 21 of the 22 local authorities across Wales, highlight that homelessness was prevented, for at least six months, for 63 per cent of households threatened with homelessness.

The new figures show; of the 2,652 households assessed as being homeless during April to June 2017, 39 per cent were helped by local authorities to secure accommodation that was likely to last for 6 months.

Communities Secretary, Carl Sargeant said:

“The latest quarterly figures show the legislation we introduced in 2015 is continuing to help more people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

“Providing people with a safe, warm and secure home remains a key priority and I acknowledge there is more we can do; particularly for rough sleepers and those groups who are struggling to get the help they need. This £2.6 million will increase the capacity to support those most in need of our help.”

---

## Enhanced TB eradication measures coming into force

In June, the Cabinet Secretary published an enhanced TB Eradication Programme, which committed to taking a regionalised approach to eliminating the disease in Wales.

From Sunday, Low, Intermediate and High TB Areas will be established in Wales, and are based on bovine TB incidence levels.

Enhanced measures will be applied in each TB Area, depending on local disease risks and drivers. This approach is designed protect cattle in the Low TB Area and drive down the disease in the Intermediate and High TB Areas.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We have worked closely with the industry to develop these new enhanced measures and together we can achieve our goal of a TB free Wales.

“I cannot stress enough the importance of the work to clear up long-standing TB breakdowns, some of which have been under restrictions for 10 years or more. On average, the cost of testing in these herds and compensation of cattle slaughtered, is almost £200,000 per herd. Clearing up infection in these herds will offer significant savings to the taxpayer and farm businesses.

“We will be closely monitoring the impacts of all these measures and aim to be in a position to review the boundaries of the TB Areas once we have the full calendar year dataset for 2018.

“We have already made significant progress towards eradicating TB in Wales. The number of new incidents has fallen by over 40% since its peak in 2009; the lowest level in twelve years. Currently 95% of herds in Wales are TB free and I would like to thank the farming industry and veterinary profession and other stakeholders for their continued cooperation and engagement as our Programme develops and progresses.”

Alongside these enhancements the annual TB herd testing regime continues across Wales. We have almost eight years of annual testing data in Wales and this sustained high level of active surveillance provides indisputable assurance of the true TB status of cattle herds in Wales.

The TB Eradication Programme and Delivery Plan are available on the Welsh Government [website](#).