

£119m EU funding secured to progress South Wales Metro

Work is underway to transform the current Core Valley Lines rail network as part of the South Wales Metro Phase 2 programme, which will provide a faster and more frequent service for the heads of the valleys stations and a direct connection to Cardiff Bay.

The investment will go towards improving infrastructure to accommodate the doubling of the number of trains to the heads of the valleys stations from two per hour to four. It will also be used to modernise stations to further improve rail users' journeys.

The First Minister said:

“The South Wales Metro is an important part of our ambition as a government to improve public transport and better connect our Valleys communities and people to employment opportunities.

“Today's confirmation of £119million EU funding means we can proceed with investment in infrastructure work on the valleys lines to make faster and more efficient journeys a reality for the thousands of rail users who use these routes daily.”

Today's funding announcement includes:

- £21.1million for the Merthyr line for track doubling between Merthyr Tydfil and Pentrebach, and between Merthyr Vale and Quakers Yard. New platforms will be constructed to accommodate the track doubling, with an improved interchange at Merthyr Tydfil station, new ramped access at Pentrebach and a new platform and footbridge at Quakers Yard.
- £27.4million for the Treherbert line to allow sufficient infrastructure works along the full length of the line, including track doubling from north of Ynyswen to the south of Treorchy and north of Llwynypia to south of Dinas. The scheme also includes new platforms.
- £23.7million for the Aberdare line for track doubling, new platform construction and other infrastructure work to allow the service to be increased to four trains per hour along the full length of the line from Abercynon to Aberdare. Track doubling will take place between Aberdare and Cwmbach, Fernhill and Penrhiwceiber, and north of Abercynon. The scheme includes a new platform, new step-free access and new waiting rooms at Aberdare, and an enhanced interchange at Abercynon.
- £19.5million for the Rhymney line to undertake track doubling south of Rhymney, north of Tir Phil and around Bargoed. The funding will also be used for other infrastructure work to allow the service to be increased to four trains per hour and provide new platforms, including step-free access and a new waiting room at Rhymney.

- £27.3million will also be allocated to the Taff's Well Depot scheme for land purchase, road build and rail access, providing serviced land for a new high quality depot facility which will improve Metro service reliability and enable the maintenance of the modern vehicles.

Welcoming today's announcement, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates, said:

"I'm pleased we are able to confirm this significant amount of EU funding for the South Wales Metro. This, along with the start of the new Wales and Borders rail contract later this month, marks considerable progress towards our plans for a modern, efficient and forward looking rail service."

Ken Skates, who is also a member of the Valleys Taskforce, which was established to improve connectivity and encourage economic growth in the South Wales Valleys, also said,

"We've listened to passengers concerns and put their needs at the centre of our plans around the new rail contract and South Wales Metro. Today's funding will be used to provide faster services, with modern facilities, and provide better connection throughout the Valleys."

The Welsh Government is also applying for a further £40million plus in EU funding to support Metro infrastructure enhancements, which it hopes will be secured by the end of 2018.

Work on South Wales Metro Phase 2 is expected to be completed by 2023.

[Minister visits Llanberis to view the £1.6million flood alleviation scheme after approving grant funding](#)

Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn announced the funding during a visit to the area to see the work already underway through the scheme, which will reduce the risk of flooding to 96 properties in the area.

The funding will be provided to Gwynedd Council through the Welsh Government's flood risk management grant to support with the cost of construction of a flood alleviation scheme in Llanberis.

It comes after a history of flooding in the area. Llanberis experiences higher than average rainfall, with surrounding steep catchments resulting in flash flood run-off flowing quickly towards the village.

In 2012 most of the properties in the high street were flooded, whilst past reports show flooding numerous residential and commercial properties.

The works to be carried out to reduce the risk of flooding to properties in the village will include:

- reconstruction of the existing bridge to increase flow capacity
- removal of weir
- increase height of flood walls downstream.

Once complete, the works will reduce the risk of flooding to 96 properties, including 57 homes, as well as a public highway maintaining transportation links.

Businesses in the village, including the local Siemens factory, which is a large employer in the area, will also benefit from reduced flood risk.

The Welsh Government has approved 85% grant funding towards the cost of construction for the Llanberis flood alleviation scheme, providing grant funding of £1,382,177. Gwynedd Council will cover the rest of the cost of the £1,626,091 scheme.

During a visit to see the progress of works in Llanberis on Thursday, Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn said:

“The Welsh Government is committed to supporting Local Authorities with the cost of implementing appropriate flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes.

“We know about the devastating economic, physical and mental impacts flooding can have. We are therefore committed to continuing our investment in flood risk management across Wales to benefit homes and businesses.

“After the disruption caused by the last major flooding in the area in 2012, I am pleased to announce £1.3m grant funding for the scheme and to see the work is being undertaken to prevent such damage from being wrought again in future.”

Gwynedd Councillor Gareth Griffith, Cabinet Member for Flood Risk said:

“Over the past two years, Gwynedd Council engineers have been working on a detailed business case to secure Welsh Government funding to develop a specific long-term solution by replacing the current arch bridge (Pont Ddol) and increasing wall heights along Afon Goch.

“We were delighted that the Welsh Government confirmed Llanberis in their capital programme for 2018, and work recently got underway on the new bridge with the entire project expected to be completed next summer. We appreciate the patience of the local community while this vital scheme to protect the village is being constructed.”

[Ken Skates to lead aerospace trade mission to Toulouse](#)

With the backdrop of Brexit, this trade mission provides the Welsh based companies with a timely opportunity to network with senior representatives of key potential clients at a number of receptions and events, including the prestigious ADS Toulouse Annual Event. It will also be opportunity to discuss future opportunities and challenges for the sector with the Economy Secretary and to visit the Airbus Final Assembly Line and gather information on the French commercial aircraft sector.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“The aerospace sector is absolutely vital to Wales. Our reputation, and that of our skilled workforce, in this growing international sector is one which is the envy of economies across the World, and we are a Government which is determined to do everything possible to create and maintain the right conditions to ensure it remains so.

Brexit, and the way it is being handled by the UK Government, brings with it unquestionable uncertainty and questions for the sector, both here, in Europe and further afield. The timing of this important trade mission could therefore could not be better, allowing Welsh companies to strengthen existing ties and build on our strong, mutually beneficial relationship with partners from across Europe.

The ADS Toulouse Annual Event, one of Europe’s flagship aerospace networking events, is of particular importance in this regard. With over 250 senior representatives from across Britain, France and beyond in attendance, it’s also an unmistakable opportunity to reinforce the very clear message from Welsh Government that Brexit mustn’t change the relationship our aerospace industry and others enjoys with Europe.

The quality and number of companies on this trade mission is

testament to the strength of the industry in Wales and I'm delighted to be in Toulouse with them today to ensure Welsh Government does everything it can to ensure the sector continues to grow and prosper."

Thirteen Wales based companies are participating in the Trade mission programme:

1. Arcunam Information Security
2. Consort Precision Diamond
3. Cydweithio
4. Derichebourg Atis aéronautique
5. Electroimpact
6. Gardner Aerospace
7. Global Tooling Solutions
8. Hexigone Inhibitors
9. LMg Solutions
10. STG Aerospace
11. Trittech Group
12. Wall Colmony
13. Zip-Clip

Final report on "grassroots of governance" published

In June last year, we commissioned an independent review on the future role of Community and Town Councils in Wales.

A panel of experts, co-chaired by former Assembly Members Gwenda Thomas and Rhodri Glyn Thomas, was asked to explore the current, and potential role of town and community councils in Wales.

Over the past year, the Panel has held an extensive engagement exercise, with the sector, stakeholders and the public, to understand on how communities in Wales can best be supported through this tier of democracy. The Panel held a series of public events around the country, issued targeted surveys, and invited written evidence.

Today the Panel presented its final report to the Welsh Government. Its recommendations include ensuring that every area in Wales is supported by a Community and Town Council, and that they should be established in areas that don't currently have one; and making all place-based services the responsibility of Community and Town Councils.

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services Alun Davies said,

“Community and Town Councils are the grassroots of governance in Wales – hyper local democracy – and the tier closest to our citizens. They should be accountable to local people and represent the interests of the different parts of the community equally.

“I would like to place on record my thanks to the Panel for the conscientious and constructive way they have undertaken their responsibilities. I will now consider the Panel’s recommendations and how we can use this wide-ranging evaluation of town and community councils to support our aims to modern democracy in Wales.”

Gwenda Thomas said,

“Over the last year, we feel we have delivered a truly evidence-based review, with over a thousand points of contact including over 800 responses to our dedicated surveys, with over 100 responses from young people. Our findings and recommendations have been shaped by these views and, in some cases, may seem radical, but we feel represent the scale of opportunity available to Town and Community councils in Wales.”

Rhodri Glyn Thomas said,

“We know that whilst we can learn from the past and only deal with the present, we have a role to prepare Community and Town Councils for the future. We believe that if we are to succeed in improving the well-being of future generations, Community and Town Councils have a vital role in contributing towards this – and should be recognised.”

[New way of delivering grants to vulnerable groups](#)

Throughout the last year, we have been testing a new way of delivering grants in seven local authorities across Wales. The aim of this work was to bring together a number of grants to strengthen the ability of local authorities and their partners to deliver preventative services focused on early intervention for those in the greatest need.

The interim evaluation of the work across all local authority areas to test the Early Intervention, Prevent and Support Grant was published today.

Following a review of the evidence gathered from the pathfinders, and discussions with stakeholders and local authority partners, it was agreed that from April next year the grant would be delivered in two streams; the Children and Communities grant and the Housing Support grant.

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies said,

“We believe this new approach has a number of advantages. It will ensure these crucial preventative services are integrated as effectively as possible. The new grant structure will take up the methods of working trialled by the pathfinders, involving regular communication across partners, peer challenge and review.

“We will continue to work in partnership with local authorities and our wider stakeholders, including providing support to the non-pathfinders, to take forward the new arrangements and emphasise the importance of early intervention and prevention.”

Rebecca Evans, Minister for Housing and Regeneration, said,

“We are grateful to those who have played a crucial role in testing the Early Intervention, Prevention and Support Grant, we have listened to the outcomes of the evaluation and understand the need for stability in the planning and delivery of these crucial services.

“We will support the sector to make a success of this new structure and are united in our commitment to improve outcomes for individuals and communities who benefit from services funded via the grants.”

These arrangements will remain in place for the remainder of this Assembly term and will apply to all local authorities in Wales. They will be carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure the concerns raised by the National Assembly’s Public Accounts Committee and the Wales Audit Office are addressed.