

“Cross border rail plans can’t leave Wales on the platform” – Ken Skates

Responding to the UK Government’s consultation on the current Great Western rail franchise, Ken Skates also pressed the need for faster journey times, more services, better access to Heathrow and delivery of UK Government promises on infrastructure investment.

The full consultation response sets out Welsh priorities and how any new arrangements must work in the best interests of Wales and dovetail with Transport for Wales:

- South Wales Services – Journey times between major South Wales stations and London and Bristol Temple Meads must improve at peak times. There are several changes to the current operation that could facilitate this, including removal of station calls in England which are not frequently travelled to / from by people in Wales. Services must also call at future Cardiff Parkway and Llanwern stations.
- Infrastructure investment – To support improved direct services between Pembroke Dock and London on the brand new InterCity Express trains, investment announced in July 2017 must be delivered as a priority. A Business Case for the redevelopment of Cardiff Central station has already been submitted and there can be no de-scoping of electrification works in Cardiff. Delivery of the long awaited scheme to provide western access into Heathrow Airport is also essential to Wales.
- Meeting customers’ needs – In order to reflect the significant effects that service disruption has on passengers’ perceptions of an effective railway, the next franchise should take all possible steps to improve the management of both planned and unplanned disruption. We also expect those delivering services in Wales to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

Ken Skates added:

“Any new arrangements must work in the best interests of Welsh passengers and in tandem with Transport for Wales. There is now an overwhelming case for applying the model developed for cross-border services under the next Wales and Borders franchise to the procurement and management of services currently operated by Great Western.

“We developed detailed agreements for how cross-border services could be delivered in a way which takes full account of both Welsh and UK Government roles and accountabilities. Wales’ connectivity with Britain’s economic hubs and international gateways in the south-east of England are going to become even more important to Wales’ prosperity post-Brexit.

“HS2 will of course not be serving Wales directly and will result in many towns and cities in north England being closer in journey time to the south-east of England. There is a real danger it could reduce the competitiveness of locations in South Wales for inward investment.

“Now is the time for Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to have the role we need to ensure that services are designed and delivered in a way which will take full account of Wales’ interests and would, I believe, result in real competition and genuine choice for passengers in England.”