

Ken Skates demands £700m from UK Government for scrapping electrification across South Wales

Proposals for powers over rail infrastructure to be devolved to Welsh ministers should now also be progressed with immediate effect, Economy Secretary Ken Skates has said.

In a letter to UK Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, Mr Skates described the decision as “extremely disappointing” and demanded answers on how and when Welsh communities would see the money promised for electrification of the mainline to Swansea.

Ken Skates wrote:

“Funding and delivery of electrification to Swansea was announced in 2012, and restated in 2014 by the Prime Minister David Cameron. There was a commitment for £105m for the delivery of the Cardiff-Bridgend section of the Main Line electrification scheme, part of a wider investment estimated at £700m to electrify the line to Swansea.

“The scheme would have delivered important journey time, reliability, efficiency and emissions benefits, promoting economic growth across South Wales. For the UK Government to announce the cancellation of this scheme at this stage and through the press, with no prior warning, was hugely disappointing.

“Yesterday’s announcement did not describe how the £105m promised would be allocated to the Welsh Government now that the Cardiff-Swansea scheme has been cancelled. Neither did it address the hugely damaging historic underspend in Wales over recent years.

“Passengers across Wales experience poor network reliability, low speeds, and capacity constraints which results in a much smaller proportion of people choosing to travel by train than in England and Scotland. It is imperative that our rail infrastructure gets the urgent funding it needs to deliver the fast, reliable and frequent services needed to support our communities and businesses, and to grow our economy.”

Mr Skates pointed out that although the Wales route area has around 11 per cent of the railway track, since 2011 it has only benefited from around 1.5 per cent of the money spent by the UK Government on rail enhancements.

He added:

“This is damaging to our economy and to our communities and either urgent investment is needed to correct this historical under-investment and the £700m shortfall, or the long awaited proposals to devolve powers to Welsh Ministers over rail infrastructure should be progressed with immediate effect, alongside a fair and proportionate funding settlement.

“I would welcome a commitment from you to ensure the estimated £700m funding that would have been provided to deliver electrification to Swansea is instead ring-fenced for projects in Wales. This must be in addition to a fair proportion of funding allocated to Wales for other rail enhancements in the future.”