

Reopening of Ebbw Vale line highly successful, new report finds

Peter Brett Associates, in partnership with Beaufort Research and Loxley Consultancy has undertaken a final evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund funded Valleys Rail Strengthening (VRS) Project.

The VRS was principally a Welsh Government initiative intended to support enhanced services on key rail corridors (most notably Ebbw Vale) linking the Valleys with Cardiff. The total project cost was £22,674,978, including £8,478,945 European Regional Development Fund grant monies. The project ran from 1st April 2008 to 30th April 2011.

The evaluation consisted of two distinct strands and considered both the new services on the reopened Ebbw Vale Line in February 2008 between Ebbw Vale Parkway and Cardiff Central, and the provision of additional rolling stock to provide strengthened services at peak times on the; Merthyr Tydfil to Aberdare, Bridgend to Barry Island, Treherbert to Cardiff Central and Rhymney to Cardiff Central lines.

The Ebbw Vale line was reopened in order to reduce the level of car usage – particularly single occupancy commuting – improve access to employment opportunities and key services and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emission levels on roads by providing enhanced rail services during peak travel times.

The main findings of the report show the VRS has:

- delivered a 19% increase in capacity on the Valleys rail network
- increased travel-to-work by rail on strengthened lines by 88% between 2001 and 2011
- removed around 14 million road kilometres annually
- improved local air quality
- generated around £1 million of gross economic benefits per annum
- transformed access to the jobs market, and
- facilitated new housing developments in Ebbw Vale and Rogerstone

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“I was very pleased to note this report found that our funding to reopen the Ebbw Vale Line has provided a significant boost to the economy of Ebbw Vale. The report justifies the significant investment that has been made by Welsh Government in the area over many years and provides an important example of how devolution has positively shaped the local community and its economy.

“The report concludes that this is exactly the type of project which should be developed under the Metro concept and a best practice example of where targeted government investment in infrastructure can support wider economic development and

regeneration.

“No transport project is undertaken for its own sake – it is always a means to enabling and facilitating a wider package of policy initiatives through improving access to markets. The strong peak in rail passenger growth across South-East Wales would have been unlikely without the introduction of better service.

“As set out last week, we want a transport network that prioritises people and businesses – a truly resilient and modern system for the benefit of the people of Wales.”