

# “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.”

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## [Draft Welsh Language Standards for the health sector laid](#)

These regulations will apply to Local Health Boards, National Health Service Trusts in Wales, Community Health Councils, and the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales, who will have to proactively offer services through the medium of Welsh.

The standards will require health boards to plan their work to improve their offer including more clinical services through the medium of Welsh. They will build on the foundations laid by Mwy na Geiriau..., the Welsh Government’s strategic framework for Welsh language services in health, social services and social care which has helped to improve Welsh language services in the sector.

The Minister said:

“It is really important that we increase the responsibility on health boards to provide more services through the medium of Welsh in future. This is particularly important when it comes to elderly patients and very young children who find it more comfortable to communicate in their mother tongue at a time of acute stress.

“We do however have to balance this against the fact that some of the bodies in this sector operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year offering a range of services from routine treatments to open heart surgery, accident and emergency treatment and end-of-life care.

“Mainstreaming Welsh language services into this sector is a huge challenge which will take time. I am confident that the pragmatic approach we have taken in these draft regulations acknowledges these difficulties whilst still moving the process of securing more

opportunities for Welsh speakers to engage with the health sector in Welsh going forward.”

In addition to making sure that GP surgeries run by health boards will have to comply with the new standards, discussions will also start with contractor representative bodies to agree Welsh language obligations through their contractual arrangements/terms of service.

The Minister laid the regulations following a visit to Cardiff University’s medical school, where she saw a lecture being delivered to 300 students through the medium of Welsh, with simultaneous translation for non Welsh speakers and met first language Welsh speaking students who are studying through their mother tongue.

She said:

“My visit to Cardiff’s medical school was an inspiration. While many of the students were not Welsh speakers, having a lecture delivered through the medium of Welsh demonstrated to them that Welsh is a living language that is part of every day life in Wales and is relevant in all situations. I hope for those who are Welsh speakers it provided them with the confidence to use their Welsh in their future careers.

“If the health sector is to fulfil its obligations under the Welsh language standards encouraging Welsh speakers to use their Welsh in their careers and others to learn Welsh will be vitally important. Initiatives such as the ‘Welsh Language Scholarship and Education Network’ at Cardiff University and the work of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the National Centre for Learning Welsh provide opportunities to empower students and staff to use their Welsh in a clinical environment as part of the NHS’ current and future workforce.”

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## **EU approval unlocks major funding boost for Carmarthenshire**

The Pendine Tourism Attractor Project in Carmarthenshire, will feature a new Sands of Speed state of the art museum dedicated to Pendine’s historic association with Land Speed; an external enhancement and events facility with exhibition esplanade, and a 42 bed hostel.

The developments at Pendine are part of the Welsh Government’s wider EU funded Tourism Attractor Destination programme, led by Visit Wales, which

aims to create 13 must see destinations across Wales. The project is designed to address business investment and employment growth within the tourism sector in the regions, and put Wales on the world map as a holiday destination.

Tourism Minister, Lord Elis Thomas said:

“Our aim through the Tourism Attractor Destination programme is to focus efforts and investment on key projects in each region so we have a real impact on Wales’ profile in this globally competitive market. Projects such as this in Pendine will give people compelling reasons to visit Wales and I look forward to plans which I have seen today coming to fruition – this will be a major boost for Carmarthenshire and south west Wales.”

Cllr.Emlyn Dole, Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council, said:

“The Pendine Visitor Attractor Project, under the EU Attractor Destination Fund will support the development and promotion of Carmarthenshire as a distinctive, high quality year round visitor destination and will establish Pendine as a 12 month a year “day and stay” event destination.

Since 2010, Carmarthenshire County Council has been working on a regeneration master-plan to address the physical and commercial decline of the coastal resort of Pendine. Work has been completed to date to include the Pendine Gateway scheme which improved the aesthetics of the main routes into the village, Commercial Property Enhancement Scheme and the creation in 2013 of a new £800k Promenade. In 2017 the £1m Parry Thomas Centre opened comprising 5 commercially let units, public toilets and external showers.”

It is hoped this will deliver an additional economic boost to the regional economy of £3.3m a year.

This announcement follows another boost for the area with a recent announcement on funding for Celtic Routes project, backed by €1.6m of EU funds, aims to encourage visitors to explore new areas of Wales and Ireland on route to their final tourist destination.

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## **Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines an increase in councillors' allowances this year**

The Panel has determined an increase of 1.49% to the basic salary for elected members of principal councils to begin to address the erosion of the salary in relation to average earnings. This will take the basic salary to £13,600.

The Panel banded Community and Town councils into three bandings according to the level of income or expenditure. This is to reflect the wide variation in responsibilities of community and town councils across Wales.

The Panel have determined that the biggest community and town councils must pay £150 per year to every councillor as a contribution towards costs and expenses incurred by the councillor during the year.

They also propose that every community and town council reimburse the costs of care for all members where necessary. These measures are aimed at enabling councillors to effectively fulfil their role.

This final report and the Panel's previous reports and determinations can be viewed [here](#).