

Welsh Government show commitment to Wales and Borders staff

Following positive and constructive discussions, begun by Wales TUC, the commitments mean Wales, its passengers and its rail staff can move ahead with confidence as the Welsh Government's ambitious plans for the future Wales & Borders Rail Service gathers pace.

As a result of those discussions the First Minister has made the following commitments:

- As a result of significantly increased service pattern, in response to demand growth experienced in Wales, the expectation is there will be more staff not less employed on the franchise. There are rapid changes in railway technology which can improve service and efficiency but the Welsh Government recognise that passengers value personal service and want this technology to complement staff and not replace them.
- The Welsh Government wishes to improve safety, security, service and also accessibility for passengers who require assistance. The Welsh Government therefore commit to keep a safety critical conductor (guard) on all of the Wales & Borders trains and services including heavy rail Metro services and the trains will require this second person to operate. This commitment builds on a clear public response in our consultations, where over 90% of respondents said that a second member of staff was either quite important or essential in the Wales and Borders region, something Age Cymru said was 'essential'. Disability Wales estimates that disabled people make up more than 20% of the population in Wales.
- Heavy rail infrastructure for the Wales & Borders franchise outside of core valleys will remain with Network Rail.
- The exception to this will be the Core Valley lines where responsibility would transfer to the Welsh Government through Transport for Wales (TFW) subject to an agreed evaluation of the assets between Network Rail and the Welsh Government.
- Therefore the railway infrastructure will remain in public ownership and effected employees will also remain in the public sector with Network Rail or TFW. In the event of any transfer to TFW pensions will be protected and there will be no changes to conditions without the agreement of the trade unions.
- Any new Rolling stock will be maintained by skilled railway people with the maximum number of staff employed in Wales.
- The Welsh Government recognise the unions desire to maximise job security and conditions of employment of catering and cleaning staff and TFW will enter into constructive dialogue with the unions to explore how these can be met.

- The Welsh Government also commit to work constructively with the unions around unions aspirations for ticket office and station staff.
- There will be a no compulsory redundancy guarantee throughout the franchise and in respect of direct sub-contractors.
- There will be continued trade union recognition and the government will also work to ensure this also applies through the sub-contractor supply chain.
- There will be trade union representation on the Transport for Wales Board.
- If future legislation allows the Welsh Governments preference is for the heavy rail ownership and operation of the Wales & Borders services to be part of a UK national integrated railway under public ownership with responsibility and powers for passenger services and infrastructure to be sustainably and comprehensively devolved to the Welsh Government.

These commitments will underpin further detailed discussions between the trade unions and Transport For Wales officials.

The First Minister said

“Our hard working railway staff are a major asset in delivering a modern and safe railway and it is right that they are central to our ambitious plans for the new Wales & Border Services and South Wales Metro.

“I am therefore delighted that we have been able to have such positive and constructive discussions with the railway trade unions, something I have been keen to ensure from the offset.

“These are progressive commitments that will mean a better service for passengers and a better railway in Wales and I look forward to this positive dialogue continuing as we develop our plans.”

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates added:

“I’m delighted that we have been able to make progress in issuing the tender and also that we have been able to make these commitments to passengers, rail unions and their members.

“We want to hold up the Welsh rail network as an example of where a government can work in effective social partnership with trade unions to deliver a world class railway for commuters, our economy and our communities.”

Yesterday, Abellio Rail Cymru, Arriva Rail Wales, KeolisAmey and MTR Corporation (Cymru) Ltd were invited by Welsh Government to submit final tenders for the next Wales and Borders Rail Service, which will come into

force in October 2018.