

Carl Sargeant AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Minister for Local Government and Communities



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref SF/CF/3496-12

William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

13th November 2012

Thank you for your letter of 10 October, on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I am grateful to the petitioners for bringing the topic of express rail services between Holyhead and Cardiff forward for consideration by the National Assembly. I am a regular user of these services myself, so fully understand their importance to the travelling public and business community.

The Welsh Government, together with its predecessor the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), has played a key role in strengthening direct rail services between Holyhead and Cardiff.

Historically, it is thanks to WAG that Wales benefits from direct services between North and South Wales via Wrexham as it initiated funding for the first of these in 2000.

Subsequently, the former Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) awarded the current Wales and Borders franchise to Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) from 2003. WAG set out its strategic priorities for services under this unified franchise in the Transport Framework for Wales in 2001. Following this, the SRA's franchise required ATW to introduce a consolidated Standard Pattern Timetable (SPT) from 2005. Under the SPT, ATW built on the funding of the original service to introduce the current regular two-hourly service of Holyhead-Wrexham-Cardiff trains.

From 2008, in addition to the regular services, the Welsh Government introduced the original Y Gerallt Gymro fast service Holyhead - Cardiff mornings and afternoon return. This had the objectives of:

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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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- reducing journey times between North and South Wales;
- allowing arrival before 1000 and sufficient time in Cardiff for a full day of business or leisure before the afternoon return;
- the option of Premier service and dining; and,
- encouraging sustainable transport.

At the time, due to constraints of the rail network, timetabling, and the capabilities of rolling stock, it was not possible for the original express service to call at Wrexham, which had always been a key objective.

A commitment to continuing express services was set out in the former Welsh Government's National Transport Plan of 2010. From 2011, a second, slightly later, limited stop service was introduced, using Diesel Multiple Units and where timetable constraints and rolling stock capabilities did enable calls at Wrexham. This service, however, was unable to provide the dining options of the original service.

When the current Welsh Government took office last year, I committed to prioritise the NTP, and announced the results last December. Under the prioritised NTP, I am continuing to support the Y Gerallt Gymro service, as well as a programme of continued improvements for rail services between North and South Wales.

In September of this year I introduced a single enhanced Y Gerallt Gymro service. It combines the characteristics of both previous services including travel via Wrexham along with business class and buffet facilities, as well as delivering savings of more than half a million pounds per year.

I am also committed to delivering the north-south Wales enhancement project, which will include redoubling the majority of the single track between Wrexham and Saltney Junction, and associated track and signalling work. The construction phase of this £45 million project will commence in 2013. This project will enable faster journey times and increase capacity.

I also want to see North Wales properly connected to the electrified network that would deliver the potential of further reduction in journey times for all services using these lines. Following the Welsh Government's success in securing electrification of the Great Western Main Line to Swansea, and the electrification of the Valley Lines, I have opened discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport about a similar programme for North Wales.

As outlined above, the Welsh Government has a strong track record of providing better and faster direct services between Holyhead and Cardiff, and this work is continuing. I trust that the Committee will find this information useful for its inquiry.



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