

Ebbw Vale train frequency enhancement scheme starts

Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates has announced a reopening of the feasibility study into increasing the frequency of trains running from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff.

He is also calling on the UK Government once again to invest more fairly in Wales' rail infrastructure, especially given the continued concentration of UK Government railway enhancement spending in the wealthier parts of the UK.

Welsh Government entered into a contract to deliver the Ebbw Vale frequency enhancement scheme with Network Rail, but took appropriate steps to pause and review it when costs began to escalate.

Network Rail (Wales Route) fully supported this, and worked closely with Welsh Government to reduce costs, and make sure all expenditure on the scheme delivers the required outcomes.

It will now resume its task to look at the process needed to bring four trains an hour to the line by 2024, as part of the South Wales Metro.

Due to be completed by early summer, it will form part of the case to the UK Government for investing in the non-devolved railway.

Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

"Ebbw Vale needs a high quality and regular rail service – one that can support jobs, investment and economic development in the wider area.

"We are delivering a step change in the provision of rail services in Wales. Our investment through the Wales and Borders rail service contract and in the first phase of the transformation of the South Wales Metro demonstrate what the Welsh Government can deliver when given responsibility and funding.

"This is against a context for rail infrastructure delivery across Wales that is still unnecessarily complex, fragmented and underfunded. Current arrangements in investment in the railway in Wales are a reflection of the time in which they were created, predating devolution. Twenty years on, the Secretary of State for Transport in Westminster continues to retain control of railway infrastructure in Wales.

"The imperfect devolution settlement is the root of many of the problems with our railway. The ongoing lack of infrastructure enhancement investment limits the capacity for new services, restricts the speeds of new trains, and fetters our ability to open

the new stations we want to see. When we have intervened, we have done so using devolved budgets. We shouldn't forget that it was Welsh Government funding that lead to the reopening of the Ebbw Branch line and not the owner and funder of the infrastructure.

"Keith Williams' root-and-branch review of Britain's railways is an opportunity to reform the railway and create the fully integrated public transport network that Wales needs. Our expectation is for the Williams review to set out a clear path for further devolution to Wales.

"In the meantime, we need fair funding from the UK Government – it must invest given its continued responsibility for rail infrastructure."