

Russell George AM  
Chair, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

9 November 2018

### **Rail Services Contract and Metro Scrutiny**

Dear Russell,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on the new rail services contract, ahead of your planned meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Transport and representatives of Transport for Wales.

You will recall we provided detailed written and oral evidence as part of your inquiry on this topic last year and we welcome the continued close scrutiny of key rail developments at this pivotal moment for the industry in Wales & Borders. We see this as a once in a generation opportunity to transform rail services for passengers, and while its success can only truly be measured in the years ahead, this is nonetheless a timely opportunity to reflect on mobilisation and early implementation.

#### **Mobilisation**

This was the first change of lead operator since the formation of the devolved Wales Route in 2011, and we implemented lessons learned from franchise changes on other routes to develop our own mobilisation plan to ensure the smoothest possible transition to the new rail passenger service.

Working collaboratively with Transport for Wales, and our regulator the Office of Rail and Road, a wide range of activity took place in the run-up to mobilisation across several workstreams, including property, commercial and operational readiness. As well as continuing to focus on safety, key priorities included the development of new leases for the 248 stations across the Wales Route, connection agreements for the depots at Canton, Machynlleth and Holyhead and the new Track Access Contract which transfers to the new operator and required regulatory approval.

We also worked closely with Transport for Wales to ensure all their proposed service alterations have been included in the December 2018 timetable change, so that passengers in Wales & Borders will benefit from improvements to train services as quickly as possible. Although no new trains are in service yet, our teams are working with Transport for Wales as they develop their plans for new and refurbished rolling stock, so that our staff and infrastructure are fully prepared for future fleet requirements.

#### **Autumn preparedness**

With the change of operator coinciding with the challenging autumn season, seasonal preparedness was also a key area of focus and we worked closely with Transport for Wales to develop a comprehensive joint autumn plan. This included targeted vegetation management, a programme of railhead treatment at agreed priority sites and a significant investment in new train wheelsets to maximise fleet availability throughout the season.

The timing of Storm Callum, just ahead of mobilisation, provided an exceptional challenge. The storm was one of the most severe weather events in living memory for parts of Wales and our Route Control recorded 34 separate weather-related incidents over a 48-hour period. While the storm impacted fleet availability and meant closures on parts of the network, including the Heart of Wales

line, track and train worked well together to minimise the impact on passengers wherever possible and restore services as soon as it was safe to do so. Overall, our work to manage the impact of autumn is progressing well. Train performance is currently above target and we continue to monitor the weather closely, working proactively and completing additional railhead treatment where appropriate.

### **Collaborative working**

We believe the new rail passenger service is a chance to build on the partnership working we developed with Arriva Trains Wales over 15 years, taking that already very close track-train relationship to the next level with our new industry partners.

There is an opportunity to enhance the way we communicate with customers and stakeholders, work more closely to deliver projects more quickly and efficiently, and to collaboratively improve performance for the passengers who rely on rail. Through the successful working arrangements established during Arriva Trains Wales' franchise, including the joint-boards covering operations, property, access and communications, as well as the overarching Route Supervisory Board, we have the framework in place to support the delivery of this vision.

Over the coming months, some Transport for Wales staff will co-locate at our headquarters in Cardiff, and we are working towards a new Joint Partnership Agreement, which we hope to be in place by the beginning of the new industry Control Period in April 2019. This will further cement joint-working arrangements that ensure passengers are at the heart of everything we do.

Through the Route Supervisory Board, which includes Network Rail, Transport for Wales and Welsh Government, new passenger performance measures - which will focus on passenger time lost – are being agreed. We are currently developing next years' route scorecard, ensuring key performance indicators for track and train are aligned and that passenger and stakeholder priorities are our focus.

### **Future investment**

Transport for Wales' ambitious plans will see unprecedented levels of investment in the network, with new and refurbished trains, investment in stations and increased capacity across the route. In addition, the delivery of Network Rail Wales & Borders' strategic plan for the next industry control period will see £2bn invested across the network on operations, maintenance and renewals over the next five years (including centrally allocated costs) - a 28% like-for-like increase on our determination for 2014-19.

Clearly, it is incumbent on both organisations to ensure we align project delivery so that taxpayers' money is spent efficiently and disruption for passengers and communities is kept to a minimum. For example, we need to work together to ensure planned signalling renewals are aligned to Transport for Wales' aspirations for future increases to services and key station renewals and enhancements are delivered collaboratively to increase efficiency and minimise disruption. We also continue to work closely with Transport for Wales, and the Welsh and UK Governments on the proposed transfer of the Core Valley Lines and the potential implications for the Wales Route in terms of our outputs, funding and our people.

To conclude, there is considerable excitement across the industry about this new era for rail in Wales & Borders. Mobilisation was successful, collaborative arrangements are working well and we continue to jointly focus on safety. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with Transport for Wales still further in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely,



**Sam Hadley, Senior Public Affairs Manager, Wales and Borders**