

**COMMENTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MAESTEG BRANCH AND STATIONS
BETWEEN BRIDGEND AND CARDIFF**

I wish to comment on the situation with regard to services between Maesteg and Cardiff Central

The present service serves five stations between Maesteg and Bridgend and three between Bridgend and Cardiff. These stations reopened in 1992 with the exception of Llanharan which was reopened in 2007. The service is well used with main passenger flows to and from Cardiff and Bridgend (which has the fifth highest passenger footfall in Wales).

The line between Bridgend and Maesteg is single line with a goods loop at Tondu and thus at present can only accommodate a hourly service. It has no Sunday service and the last service from Cardiff on Saturdays is at 21.10, the earliest late departure for any line in the Cardiff City region. The running time between Bridgend and Maesteg is 22/23 minutes.

There has been a long history of promises from the start of Welsh Government for a half hourly service from Cardiff to Maesteg which will involve the construction of a crossing loop on the branch. The main problem appears to be the inability for Welsh Government and Network Rail to agree on a cost effective scheme with the most expensive involving a new loop at Tondu with two new platforms and an interconnecting bridge and additional car parking. SEWTA obtained European Funding for crossing loops between Bridgend and Maesteg and Bargoed and Rhymney when both sections of line had a similar footfall although Maesteg had fewer services The Rhymney Valley line scheme was completed with a new loop at Tir Phil but there was no service enhancement but the Maesteg scheme did not materialise. However additional class 150 units were acquired for the additional services but have since been deployed elsewhere. It has never been made clear what has happened to the European funding which raises concern with regard to EU funding for the present rail proposals in the Cardiff city region.

I find it difficult to understand that with all the studies a scheme for at least on crossing place on the line cannot be agreed. Problems have been created on the former double track section between Bridgend and Tondu by laying a gas main between Tondu South and Wildmill (I assume Network Rail gets an annual payment for this), a link road bridge near Sarn and a footbridge at Tondu which can only accommodate one track. The obvious location for a crossing loop is to reinstate the one at Gelli Las and if more resilience is required the following could be considered a loop with a connection to the Bridgend bay platform no1 between Bridgend and Wildmill , increasing line speeds on the line from 50 to 60 mph, track realignment at Tondu and removal of the token exchange , reduction of foot

crossings. The loop at Bridgend would assist with train regulation and ensure that capacity on the main line is not reduced .

I make these proposals as TfW has no clarity in its proposals for an improvement of train services on the Maesteg branch but also the three stations on the main line which are served by the Maesteg services.

The footfall on the Maesteg branch north of Bridgend is comparable with that on the Rhymney branch north of Bargoed which is to have an increase from one train an hour to three an hour and consequently it is apparent that the resources to provide improved services are not evenly spread throughout the Cardiff City Region and in fact throughout Wales.

The Maesteg branch is one of a few lines in Wales which does not have a Sunday service although some main line trains stop at stations between Bridgend and Cardiff. It was mentioned during the period of finalisation of the new franchise that the Maesteg branch would have a Sunday service after October 2018 .It was stated that the timetable would be developed by the new operator. This raises uncertainty as to when the Sunday service will start and what will be its frequency.

The previous franchise gave certainty as to what services would be provided. I cannot find reference to new service levels for the Maesteg line in what has been by TfW. The former franchise stated that at least two services from Maesteg should arrive Cardiff Central before 09.00 and journey time should not exceed 53 minutes. This certainty has not been given with detail published for the new franchise and in fact TfW has the month delayed the departure of the 07.59 from Maesteg so that it never reaches Cardiff at its former booked time of 08.47 with average arrival at 08.56 and frequently after 09.00 which would have been breaking the former contract and incurring penalties from Welsh Government. This makes the former 07.59 service from Maesteg unsuitable for commuting and a consequential loss of passengers and loss of opportunity for inhabitants served by the Maesteg service. If one wishes to attend a conference in Cardiff which starts at 09.00 a departure from Maesteg at 06.44 is required.

The quality rail services to and from Maesteg was at its peak after the introduction of the standard pattern time table when services were operated by class 158 units and a three car class 175 was provided for what became and still is the most over crowded service in Wales the 17.16 by TfW 17.21 by Network Rail from Cardiff to Maesteg . Gradually the quality of the service provision has been eroded with pacers, Class 150 and class153 units replacing the class 158 on many services as 158 have been deployed to other services such as Birmingham International, Fishguard Harbour and Ebbw Vale. A recent move has been the removal of the three car class 175 from the 17.16 service and its replacement by a class 150 or 158 unit with reduced capacity and resulting in passengers for Maesteg line stations being left behind at Cardiff ATW used to frequently provide a class 153 attachment to this

service but this has not been the case with TfW. This raises concern that TfW is not planning any capacity improvements for the Maesteg line. It's proposals refer to 2 and 3 car class 170 units replacing class 175 units in the short term and newer 3 car units after 2023 which will have insufficient capacity unless a half hourly service is provided

There is no promise of following immediate improvements which are urgently needed

A fit for purpose morning commuter service to Cardiff which has three arrivals well before 09.00 and with more reliable journey times.

A later service from Cardiff on weekdays and two on Saturdays .

Assured capacity so that passengers are not left behind at stations especially Cardiff and Pontyclun.

Priority over late running GWR services

A Quality Sunday service

A return to class 158 and three car 175 providing the service before the introduction of new stock

There is no mention in the plans that adequate rolling stock has been ordered to provide a future half hourly service to Maesteg and the number of replacement class 170 for the interim is insufficient for an increase in capacity and services to and from Maesteg and Ebbw Vale.

An improved train service from Maesteg will reduce car travel considerably as there is no direct bus service from Maesteg and the other three adjoining valleys in Bridgend CBC to Cardiff. There is a roll for a considerable number of bus links .This is in contrast to Merthyr which has a two lane road and express bus services to Cardiff with the promise of a 15 minute interval train service. Those that have will have more!

A further problem is that of car parking spaces as those at Bridgend station are inadequate with limited car parking at three other stations. There has been no major park and ride development in Bridgend compared with those at Abercynon, Pengam and Radyr. A suggestion is to locate one at Wildmill with a shuttle service to Bridgend.

The Bridgend Valleys have always 'lost out' by their location at the western edge of the South East Wales conurbation and it is important that they are fully embraced by the new Cardiff City region especially by substantially improved rail connectivity. There have been no recent road improvements in the area and there are capacity problems of leaving and joining the M4

TfW plans also raise further concerns as to the line capacity train capacity and journey times between Bridgend and Cardiff. The proposals for a station at Brackla are unclear but there

are proposals for new stations at Miskin and Ely which will have an adverse effect .I suggest that the proposed Ely station should be on the City line and Cardiff Airport served by an enhanced service to Rhoose.

The major seaside resort of Porthcawl is not rail connected and its nearest railhead is Pyle . There are plans for improved car parking at Pyle but this should also be accompanied by an improved rail service in line with services provided in the Cardiff Valleys. This is not considered in information issued by Transport for Wales

The term flattening of fares causes concern as at present all fares from heads of the valley stations to Cardiff are the same ie Maesteg, Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Ebbw Vale with corresponding lower fares for stations nearer to Cardiff. It is important for this to be retained for social and economic reasons and a sense of fairness that has been built up over many years. However Pyle should be included in this arrangement as it is the only one that was missed out in the former SEWTA agreement. I also consider that the over 60 half fare pass should be continued and its availability extended over the whole of Wales possibly replacing some of the existing schemes.

Passengers using services to stations between Bridgend and Maesteg often have to wait for long periods of time if arriving from the following directions West Wales, London and Manchester. There is no mention is TfW plans for enhanced facilities and for longer opening times of the waiting rooms at Bridgend .

There appears little fairness in TfW plans as the service plans do not match the present use made of the railways in Wales with the published station footfall data .No information is provided with regard to expected higher passenger level if services are increase. Will there be 150% increase in passengers from Rhymney for example

I have tried to highlight that promises for rail improvements by Welsh Government have not always been delivered and that there must be some doubts as to its capacity to deliver what it has promised with the new franchise or what has been understood to be delivered by confusing messages from some academics. Will Maesteg and stations en route to Cardiff eventually see a 15 minute service? Where is the money that was previously allocated for a crossing loop on the Maesteg branch be retrieved or found ?

Finally it is time the Maesteg branch was remembered by TfW and the new Cardiff City Region

Rowland Pittard

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