



Ein cyf/Our ref KS/PO/07/2025

Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP, Secretary of State for Transport  
Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP, Secretary of State for Wales

13 January 2024

Dear Heidi and Jo,

We are making good progress on the manifesto commitment to establish a Welsh Rail enhancements pipeline.

Three years ago, the Welsh Affairs Committee published its report on rail infrastructure in Wales. One of the Committee's key recommendations was the creation of a 'Wales Rail Board' to support a more joined-up approach to the planning, funding and delivery of rail enhancements in Wales.

The Wales Rail Board was established 2022 and includes senior representatives from the Department for Transport, the Welsh Government, Wales Office, Network Rail and Transport for Wales. The Board meets on a quarterly basis.

Responding to the Committee's recommendations, our two governments agreed that the Board should identify and agree a prioritised set of proposals for rail infrastructure investment in Wales. This work has progressed well, with the Board taking an evidence-based approach to considering the projects that have greatest potential to meet the following objectives:

- Boosting economic growth
- Breaking down barriers to opportunity
- Creating opportunities for sustainable development
- Delivering modal shift
- Decarbonising the transport network

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Ken.Skates@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Ken.Skates@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

## **Immediate priorities**

In the short-term, the Wales Rail Board has proposed that our immediate priority should be to develop and deliver the recommendations of the North Wales and South East Wales Transport Commissions, led by Lord Burns. When I met with Lord Hendy earlier this year, I was pleased that he recognised the strength of the analysis underpinning the Commissions' recommendations and their alignment with the priorities of the UK Government.

In North Wales, the focus will be on improving rail services along the Borderlands line between Wrexham and Bidston and on the North Wales Mainline - unlocking capacity through Chester station. This will include working jointly with Liverpool City Region to continue the development and delivery of a Metro style service directly connecting Wrexham and Liverpool.

In South East Wales, the Burns proposals include upgrading the relief lines between Cardiff and the Severn Tunnel, and the development of five 'Burns stations' in Cardiff East, Newport West, Somerton, Llanwern and Magor and Undy. Initial development work has been completed and demonstrates the potential of these stations and new connecting services to promote growth, support new housing and improve connectivity to and from major economic centres. It will also reduce reliance on private car travel, providing people with real transport choices and easing congestion along the M4 corridor.

## **Future role of the Wales Board**

Our thinking on the future role of the Wales Rail Board has evolved since the Committee published its report in 2021. While there will be an ongoing requirement to prioritise future rail enhancements, we believe the Board should have a permanent role in the future governance and high-level programme management of the ringfenced Wales Rail Enhancement Pipeline.

With appropriate delegation and streamlined governance, we see the Board as the ideal vehicle to support both the agreement of priorities and then the allocation of funding as schemes are developed and delivered. To support this, we intend to table a paper for the next Wales Rail Board with proposals for governance of the Wales Rail Enhancement Pipeline.

As we discussed, I fully support the work you are undertaking to review the transport portfolio and develop a strategic approach to rail investment, and I am aware that a detailed review of the overall GB rail enhancements pipeline is underway. Once this work is complete in late spring, I look forward to the opportunity to jointly set out next steps on our immediate rail enhancement priorities for Wales and how our pipeline in Wales will be delivered.

Historic underfunding in Wales' rail network, the lack of Barnett funding for HS2 and the false promise of the previous Government to electrify the North Wales mainline has led to major political challenges and fostered widespread cynicism and distrust. We must work together to address this and develop a deliverable, long-term pipeline of rail infrastructure improvements, as we committed to in the Welsh Labour General Election Manifesto.

The Spending Review is an opportunity for the UK Government to demonstrate to the people of Wales that it is delivering against its missions, with investment in transport infrastructure critical to kickstarting economic growth in Wales and its borders. In summary, I would like to

see our respective Governments agree both funding and delivery mechanisms as part of the Spring Spending Review.

Finally, I am pleased to report that both governments, and industry partners in Wales, continue to work collaboratively on the delivery of improvements to the rail network in Wales. This includes a major enhancement of Cardiff Central station, a jointly funded Metro link between Cardiff Central and Cardiff Bay as well as plans to deliver a 50% increase in TfW services operating on the North Wales mainline.

I would be delighted to welcome you to Wales in the spring so that we can make a joint announcement on our plans, alongside the Secretary of State for Wales. I will ask my Private Secretary to liaise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

**Ken Skates AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales



From the Secretary of State  
**Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP**

Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000  
E-Mail: [heidi.alexander@dft.gov.uk](mailto:heidi.alexander@dft.gov.uk)

Web site: [www.gov.uk/dft](http://www.gov.uk/dft)

Your Ref: KS/PO/07/2025

Ken Skates MS  
Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North  
Wales  
Welsh Government  
Cardiff  
CF99 1FN

14 January 2025

Dear Ken,

Thank you for your letter of 13 January 2025.

The UK Government is determined to build a modern and integrated transport network that drives economic growth and opportunity across the UK and delivers value for money for taxpayers.

We are pleased to see how these principles have guided the Wales Rail Board's evidence-based approach to identifying prioritised investment proposals. We see this as a real example of the benefits that can be delivered through our two governments working collaboratively on our priorities for sustainable growth.

We recognise that railways in Wales have seen low levels of enhancement spending in recent years, particularly in the context of major investments such as HS2, and that this makes it more difficult to realise the modal shift needed to sustain a continuous enhancements pipeline. In seeking to address this, we agree with the Board's assessment that our priority should be focussed on the key recommendations of the Transport Commissions for North and South-East Wales, and the Union Connectivity Review.

These proposals, based around the North and South Wales main lines and the Wrexham to Liverpool Borderlands line, will have the ability to drive economic growth, job creation, house building, and improved social cohesion, subject to satisfactory business cases being completed. Better cross-border connectivity on these key corridors should better serve the overall economic and social needs of the whole of the UK.

With the Wales Rail Board having proved to be an effective vehicle for inter-governmental collaboration, we agree that its role should be affirmed and expanded in relation to the governance of rail investment in Wales.

The development of the longer-term arrangements for funding of enhancements should be aligned with our proposals for rail reform and we are grateful for the Welsh Government's ongoing positive engagement on the development and implementation of these. The DfT will be happy to receive the Rail Board's advice on how we might transition to these longer-term arrangements and is supportive of the transfer of some existing Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline governance functions for Wales from the department to the Board. DfT, Wales Office, Welsh Government officials and Network Rail should work together on these proposals.

The Chancellor has been clear on the position of the public finances bequeathed by the last government which must be addressed as a matter of urgency. She has been equally clear on the need to fix the foundations of the economy by unlocking critical infrastructure. The prioritisation of rail service improvement projects proposed by the Wales Rail Board, and described in this exchange of letters, will therefore inform both Departments' work with HM Treasury in the run up to the Spring Spending Review.

In the meantime, we remain committed to the investments underway at present and are keen to see improvements to Cardiff Central station and the construction of the Metro link to the Bay delivered as soon as possible. We will be delighted to support a joint visit at a suitable opportunity to see directly the benefits being delivered through the joint work of our two governments.

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP**  
Secretary of State for Wales  
Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru



**Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP**  
Secretary of State for Transport