

October 2020

What Future For Welsh Railways?

Dear,

While COVID-19 has dominated headlines, plans to downgrade long-distance rail services in and around Wales have quietly been set in motion. These plans also jeopardise hopes of decarbonising public transport.

KeolisAmey won the contract to operate the 'Transport for Wales Rail Services' franchise promising to replace the entire train fleet. Unfortunately this replacement policy is based on quantity not quality. The outgoing long-distance trains are far superior to the new fleet in many areas, but two fatal flaws lead us to believe that construction of the new trains must be halted urgently.

The Rail Delivery Group have published a document, the Key Train Requirements, which lists industry good practice on train design. The new fleet, unlike the old trains, fails to comply with this on at least two points:

- Intercity and inter-urban services should provide at least one toilet per 85 seats
- All multiple units shall have a minimum of two toilets provided, to avoid major problems in the event of one toilet becoming defective

The majority of the new trains will be two-carriage units with 116 seats and only one toilet. The remainder of the new fleet will have 3 carriages, 188 seats and two toilets and will still fall short of the best-practice. Rail Future Wales have contacted James Price at Transport for Wales, pointing out that this inadequate toilet provision is a major problem for passengers who need to access a WC urgently due to medical conditions. As a result potential passengers may decide that they are unable to 'risk' travel by rail. Sadly, TfW failed to take action to rectify this problem.

The second deal-breaker is the new fleet's impact on decarbonisation plans. The best way to decarbonise rail is electrification. The new 'long-distance' fleet specified by KeolisAmey is diesel-only. They will continue to burn diesel under the wires for many years to come. While complete electrification will take many years, we hope that by 2030 sufficient electrified route will be available to justify bi-mode trains. By that time, the new diesel-only trains would have seen only 8 years service. Thus we believe that a sensible policy is to retain the existing long-distance trains alongside a much-reduced new fleet. There would then be three types of trains in TfW's long-distance fleet with differing ages allowing them to be replaced by bi-mode or electric trains as electrification progresses.

Unfortunately construction is already underway and by May 2021 testing will have commenced. However, reducing the size of the order and extending the lease on the

current fleet could mitigate the problems. We believe a limit of between 20 and 30 new trains would allow them to be restricted to journeys under 2.5 hours in duration, where the reduced comfort and toilet provision would be less of a concern. Longer journeys would remain served by the existing fleet.

The Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers Association (PRTA) and the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association (SARPA) have also expressed concerns. It is clear that TfW are **not** acting in the interests of rail users or of decarbonisation. Welsh Government intervention is essential. Swift action must be taken.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas J. Wheeler
On behalf of Pembrokeshire Friends Of The Earth.