

Issue 77 Autumn 2024

# Rail Wales

*Newsletter of Railfuture in Wales*



*The 11.30 from Manchester Piccadilly nears the end of its over 230-mile journey to Carmarthen as it enters Llanelli station on 14 September. The train is formed by a class 197 unit. This type of Welsh built train now operates most of the long-distance services in Wales. Photo: Peter Kingsbury*

## WELCOME

I am pleased to welcome you to another issue of Rail Wales, the magazine for Railfuture members in Wales. This is the first issue of Rail Wales since I stood down as Chair of Railfuture Wales/Cymru at our AGM in April 2024 and I am pleased to have been succeeded by Richard Wilcock who introduces his views on rail industry priorities below.

Since the last Rail Wales appeared six months ago, Transport for Wales Rail has been making progress in introducing its new trains which are gradually improving the travel experience of rail users, but this progress seems at times rather slow. Reports of trains being overcrowded are still too frequent. The Marches line (Shrewsbury – Newport) seems especially prone to this issue at weekends where occasional observations suggest passenger numbers now exceed pre-Covid levels.

No date has been provided when electric services will begin on the Core Valley (S Wales) routes whilst the new class 398 trains stand outside the new Taffs Well depot going nowhere. However, on a more positive note users of the Rhymney line are enjoying the benefits of new Stadler diesel trains which will eventually only serve the Cardiff to Ebbw Vale, Maesteg and Cheltenham routes. Furthermore, the entire Core Valley network benefitted from a comprehensive timetable revamp from June with frequencies being increased on most routes, a Sunday service provided on the Cardiff City line for the first time and Cardiff Bay enjoying services to destinations other than Cardiff Queen Street. Further frequency improvements are promised when electric running starts.

Transport for Wales announced at its Transport Liaison Group in April that it had undertaken a reassessment of its timetable improvement ambitions following a review of the impact of Covid on rail use patterns. Reductions were proposed to frequencies on the Cambrian Coast and Heart of Wales line. Further details of other proposed changes in future timetables originally announced following the Wales franchise award in 2018 and Railfuture's response are outlined below (page 14). The final decision from TfW is expected in early October.

I am sad to report the passing of Lindon Stone (right) in August. Lindon, who was based in Swansea, was a member of the Railfuture Wales committee for a number of years. He made a useful contribution to many of the meetings. He had decided to stand down from the committee at the last AGM but will be greatly missed.



Finally, I would ask you to take any opportunity to publicise Railfuture to non-members and ask them to consider joining (apply online at [www.railfuture.org.uk/join/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/join/) using your credit/debit card or PayPal account). The very existence of the organisation, which is the only campaign group with a GB-wide rail-only remit, will be under threat in the foreseeable future if new members are not recruited. At £14/£20 a year, it provides excellent value as well as the satisfaction of knowing you are contributing to help ensure decision makers are made aware of the value of rail in a world where the challenges around movement, and its environmental impact, grow ever more apparent.

*Peter Kingsbury*

## **VIEW FROM THE CHAIR**

As you may know, I have taken over as Chair of Railfuture Wales/Cymru from Peter Kingsbury. I thought I should write a piece expressing my views on the rail industry, but no sooner than I had started, the news changed. So, on the basis this may be out of date when you read this, here goes. In my opinion the main issues the rail industry faces are:

1. To be a customer focused service. Too much of what is done is at the bequest of the management, unions, politicians and civil servants. It is time the industry engages with the wider public on what their needs are. Examples are a train service that gets you from major venues at the end of the night or gets you to the airport in time for your early morning flight or back after the last.
2. A simpler fares system. There is no simple solution to this, but the present system is a complete mess because none of the players mentioned are prepared to take the risk of changing it. The new government has promised rail reform including fares and ticketing; we need to keep the pressure on to ensure that this happens.
3. Reforming the industry. Great British Railways may change things, but we still have trains cancelled because of rest day working. The industry runs nearly 24/7, so we need terms and conditions that reflect this and to recruit enough staff to make this happen.
4. No more stop/go investment. The new Chancellor's decision to cancel the 'Restoring Your Railway' scheme is an example. Why not defer or implement schemes in stages? We need a long-term plan, an aim. How and when it is delivered is dependent on money, but for too long we have bought what we can afford resulting in something that needs redoing. We need to invest not simply spend.

5. Cutting the cost of major projects. Apparently, the new Thames Road crossing has cost £300m in planning documentation, HS2 costs increased because of this. This is a ridiculous waste of public money – no wonder infrastructure costs in the UK are much higher than the rest of the world. We need new infrastructure, not well-paid barristers. The new government has promised to tackle this issue. Let us hold them to that.

Feel free to disagree. Just argue your case so that we can move on together to improve our railways. I do not want to go into details of schemes, electrification, expanding rail freight etc, for unless we get the industry sorted, we will continue to squander money, our money.

*Richard Wilcock*

### **Editor's Note**

Do you agree with Richard's thoughts? There will be an opportunity to discuss these with other Railfuture Wales members at the online members' meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> November. See below (page 15) for details.

## **FREIGHT NEWS**

Beginning in North Wales, the quarry traffic from Penmaenmawr continues, as does the slate waste which is brought by road from Blaenau Ffestiniog to Llandudno Junction where it is loaded onto rail.

In Mid Wales, the timber train normally operates weekly from the Aberystwyth loading point, whilst in Northeast Wales, Colas continues the timber traffic to Chirk, on average three to four days a week, using Class 56 locos.

Turning to Pembrokeshire, the petroleum traffic from Robeston (Milford Haven) to Westerleigh (Bristol) and Theale continues, and is now pulled by modified Class 66s, in place of Class 60s, with gearing suited to the gradients and trailing weight when loaded.

Trostre (Llanelli) receives coil from Margam twice a day normally, and there is outward scrap to Margam, and covered wagons are sent to Tilbury I believe twice weekly.

In South Wales there has been major change in relation to Port Talbot steelworks, with the closure in June of blast furnace 5, and the closure at the end of September of blast furnace 4. Although steel making has

ended, the milling of steel made elsewhere continues. Since early summer, imported steel slab has been arriving at Newport Docks, and five trains a day are taking the slabs to Margam, where this is processed into other products. This replaces steel formerly produced in furnace 5. Possibly more of these trains will be needed from October after furnace 4 closes?

In addition, a new regular flow of steel coils is arriving at Cardiff Tidal sidings, comprising several trains a day which are then forwarded for processing at Port Talbot or Trostre. So, perhaps unexpectedly, there are more inbound movements to Port Talbot passing through Cardiff Central following the blast furnace closures than before.

Celsa steel generates several trains a week from its works in Cardiff, and I am told the Machen branch near Newport has one, and sometimes two stone trains a day, including some on Saturdays.

Finally, the Daventry to Wentloog (Cardiff) Tesco trains continue twice daily, and Freightliner container trains also operate from this site to and from Southampton and London Gateway.

*Rhodri Evans*

## **RAILFUTURE WALES IN ACTION**

### **New MPs Contacted**

The 2024 UK General Election resulted in a crop of new MPs being elected to Welsh constituencies. Following the vote, Railfuture Wales wrote to the MPs to inform them about us and inviting them to meet our representatives to learn more about our priorities for better rail services in Wales. A meeting is due to take place with Becky Gittins, the new MP for Clwyd East in early October. Further meetings may follow.

### **Breakfast TV appearance**

Peter Kingsbury was the surprise face on Sky TV's 'Breakfast with Kay Burley' news programme on the 31<sup>st</sup> May when he did a live interview from the platform of Cardiff Bay station. The three-minute slot was arranged to cover the timetable upgrade to the Core Valley lines from the 2<sup>nd</sup> June which includes through running from Cardiff Bay to Pontypridd for the first time in several decades.

Peter outlined how the ongoing electrification of the Core Valley routes, combined with the new trains and timetables, will transform the experience of passengers and hopefully attract more people to rail network.

The interview did not require anybody from Sky to travel to Cardiff as it was conducted via Zoom using Peter's mobile phone. Sky wanted 'action' in the background so during the interview a class 150 Sprinter arrived and departed. This provided visual interest but required Peter to exercise his hearing to the limit as Sprinters are not the quietest of trains.

## **Cardiff Bay tramline consultation**

Railfuture Wales will respond to the recent TfW consultation on the details of the proposed new tramline from Cardiff Central to Cardiff Bay (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c303y2l8g85o>) following the 10<sup>th</sup> October committee meeting.

The route will involve about one kilometre of on street operation with a further kilometre using the existing Cardiff Bay branch. The branch is likely to welcome the scheme which will provide a direct link from Cardiff Central to the Bay area where many visitor attractions are located.



At present to make this journey by rail requires two changes of train. However, the location of the station after Cardiff Bay station in the next phase is critical. An earlier consultation showed the tram route continuing between the Red Dragon Centre (to be demolished and replaced by an arena) and the Wales Millennium Centre, with the next station near the far end of Pierhead Street. There needs to be a station closer to the centre of activities in Cardiff Bay, or people will not be attracted out of their cars onto the new tram trains. Details of the on-street part of the route are shown on page 9.

The Central to Bay scheme forms the first phase of a project known as Cardiff Crossrail which may eventually link the eastern and western suburbs of the wider city via the city centre and former docklands (Bay) area.

## **LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

### **Broken SailRail connections on Rosslare – Fishguard route**

For generations a train has connected to and from both the daytime and night Rosslare sailings at Fishguard Harbour.

In May 2017 Stena Line implemented major changes to their St. George's Channel sailing schedule. The timings of the connecting trains to/from Fishguard Harbour were adjusted accordingly. Incidentally at Rosslare, where poor/no rail connections had been an issue for years, the new schedule integrated neatly with Irish Rail services; only the morning sailing ex Rosslare didn't have a train connecting to it.

In July 2023 changes were made to the sailing schedule with departures deferred around an hour or more. The evening sailing from Rosslare now departs at 19:30 (previously 18:15). However, the train timings weren't adjusted and some fourteen months on remain as before. The last train departs Fishguard Harbour at 22:15 weekdays (23:03 Sundays) – it only runs as far as Carmarthen. Travelling to Ireland the former 23:45 sailing doesn't set off until 01:30. The train arrival remains unchanged at 22:00 meaning a prolonged wait albeit preferable to no connection at all.

It is unclear how much notification Stena Line gave Transport for Wales of the sailing schedule change. What is clearer, however, is that there doesn't appear to have been any engagement with or consideration of foot passengers in making this change to the sailing schedule. In fact, in the last few years the foot passenger experience on the Rosslare – Fishguard route is more cumbersome; foot passenger walkways have been dismantled at both ports resulting in a generally slower embarkation and disembarkation process (via a shuttle bus to one of the ship's vehicle decks).

Given the climate emergency and the fact that travel by rail and sea offers an eco-friendly and sustainable means of travelling the relatively short distance between Wales and Southeast Ireland it is very disappointing that connections on the Rosslare – Fishguard route are now broken. It comes across that SailRail (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SailRail> for history) has become little more than window dressing; it looks good for the rail and ferry operators to offer it. The experience on the ground could be so much better and if the ambition was there, it could be significantly developed and grown – a win-win all round. GWR, who could promote SailRail to a wide audience, don't even mention it on their website.

The last train of the day from Fishguard Harbour needs to be deferred to connect with Stena Nordica's arrival from Rosslare. If this isn't feasible then a rail replacement bus ought to be provided – this would restore the eastbound night connection to the wider rail network for ferry passengers and West Wales residents alike. If such a bus was to serve all stations it would depart Fishguard Harbour around 00:15 and reach Swansea circa. 03:15; serving key stations only it could leave an hour later. In both cases it would connect into the 03:46 GWR ex Swansea.

It is noted that in the December 2024 timetable the last train to Fishguard Harbour will be a rail replacement bus at 20:42 ex Carmarthen with the final service of the day in the reverse direction also being a bus at 20:15 from the port. It is unclear for what period of time the use of rail replacement buses will apply. Perhaps the bus could connect from a later train arrival at Carmarthen around 22:00?

In conclusion it must be highlighted that nothing additional or unreasonable is being requested of limited transport budgets, all that is being sought is for reinstatement of the longstanding arrangement whereby each sailing has a train connection each way.

Diolch yn fawr,









Bernard H. Allan

Editor's comment: I wrote about the decline in the number of foot passengers on the Fishguard to Rosslare ferry, and therefore the use of rail to travel to Fishguard Harbour, in Rail Wales 73. Do you consider it inevitable that air travel dominates the travel market for non-car movement across the Irish Sea, or should rail be working more closely with the ferry operator to attract people away from the airlines? Please send me your comments for the next issue of Rail Wales.

*On the next page, the detailed route of the tram line from the rear of Cardiff Central to the Cardiff Bay branch, recently unveiled by Transport for Wales and Cardiff Council, is shown. Central station is just off the left side of the map with the existing Bay branch on the right shown by a curved line of red/brown colour. The tram route, shown by three parallel grey lines, will result in cars being removed from the south side of Callaghan Square.*

*Source: Transport for Wales /the Urbanists*



- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Route key                                    |  Proposed paving  |
|  Existing trees retained                      |  Cycle lane       |
|  SuDS (Sustainable drainage systems) planting |  Highway tarmac   |
|  Low ornamental planting                      |  Concrete tramway |

## **RAIL USAGE IN WALES: HOW HAVE PASSENGER NUMBERS FARED IN RECENT TIMES?**

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) publishes data on the number of people using trains to travel in Britain. This article examines how Transport for Wales Rail (TfW) use has compared with the other train operators in Great Britain over the past decade. This allows the impact of Covid 19 on numbers to be seen and how well Welsh railways have recovered compared to England and Scotland. It also puts Welsh rail usage in the context of the wider British rail system.

<b>Number of passenger journeys (millions) – Source: ORR</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>TfW</b>	<b>All GB rail</b>	<b>TfW as % of GB</b>
2011-12	28.4	1,456	1.95%
2018-19	33.5	1,701	1.97%
2023-24	26.2	1,392	1.88%

Note: the GB figures exclude passengers on the Elizabeth Line, which fully opened in 2022 and attracted former London Underground users.

2018 to 2019 was the peak year of passenger use in recent decades. Indeed, you have to go back nearly 100 years to the 1920s to find a year when the recorded number of journeys was higher. The low point in the post war era was 1982 when 630 million journeys were recorded, less than one half of the pre Covid year peak.

When comparing Wales with the rest of GB (right-hand column), it can be seen that the TfW numbers have not recovered from Covid quite as well as the GB average. However, this average hides great variations with (excluding the open access operators) two long-distance TOCs ahead of their pre-Covid figures (LNER and East Midlands Trains) whilst others, such as South Western Railway, are still at around two thirds of their pre-Covid peak. This reflects the greater loss of commuting traffic since Covid compared to leisure and business use.

Usage of TfW services in 2023-24 was similar to that seen in the late 2000's (noughties) decade when usage of the rail network was in the middle of a purple patch of year-on-year growth. The immediate challenge for TfW rail is to return its use to that recorded in 2018/19 and then hopefully to see further growth. Whether the completion of the Core Valley lines upgrade (South Wales metro), with many more trains operating, will allow TfW Rail to attract back passengers where numbers have fallen by the greatest amount as a result of less commuting, remains to be seen.

## NEWSLINES

### Cardiff Parkway

The proposed station situated midway between Cardiff Central and Newport and associated business park are still awaiting a decision from the Welsh Government. The station is one that would be primarily funded by private sources – the profit from the development of the business park – although it would form part of a scheme for five new stations proposed between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction which seek to remove traffic from the parallel M4 (see Rail Wales 76).

The reason given for the time taken to make a decision is that changes to nature conservation policies make the impact of siting the development in a sensitive area (the Gwent Levels) a more important consideration. The proposal therefore needs further assessment. Railfuture Wales has been a long-term supporter of the scheme and considers that the potential of the station to attract traffic from the M4, with its associated reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and other pollutants is more important than harm to the local watercourses and the associated flora and fauna. There is a risk that the ongoing lack of decision will prejudice the private funding for the station and business park.

### Cardiff Bus station finally opens

The long-awaited new bus station in Cardiff city centre opened on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The new facility, called Cardiff Interchange, replaces a larger bus station that adjoined Cardiff Central rail station for decades before closing in 2015 to make way for the redevelopment of the space outside the rail station. The delay in completing the new bus station was in part due to the matter not being finalised when permission was negotiated for the new public square and employment buildings which includes the BBC Wales HQ.

The new bus station is smaller than the one that existed beforehand with the lack of use by long distance coaches being an obvious omission. However, the new facility aims to encourage the use of train and bus for multi modal journeys by providing rail information alongside that for buses.

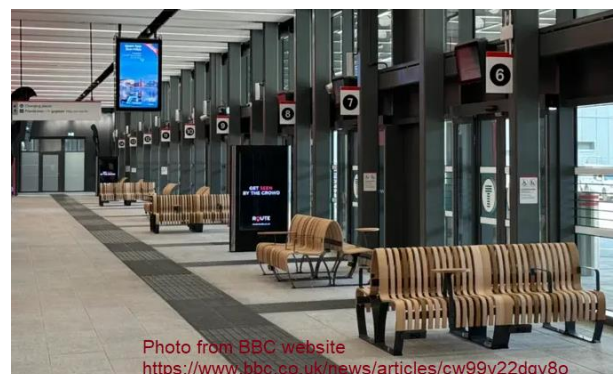




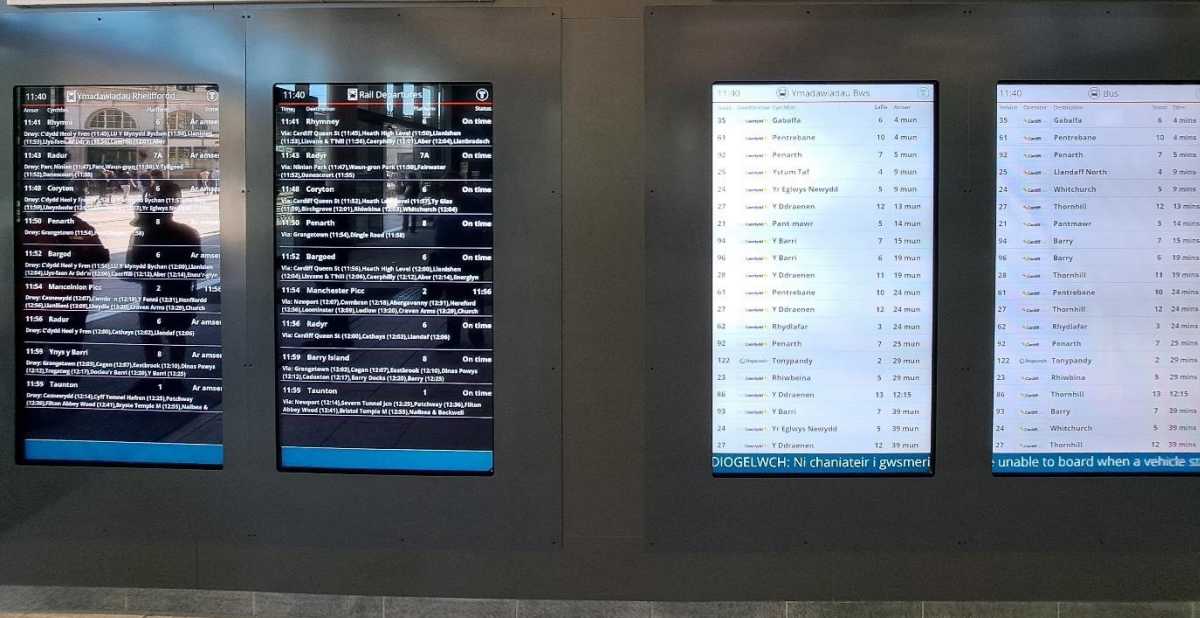
Photo from BBC website  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw99y22dgv8o>

# Sut allwn ni helpu?

# How can we help?

 Amseroedd trenau byw  
Live train times 

 Amseroedd a llwybrau bysiau  
Bus times and routes



Passengers in the new Cardiff Interchange can see rail and bus service information side by side to encourage multi modal journeys. Photo: Peter Kingsbury

## Global Centre for Rail Excellence

Progress is being made with the design of this potential world leading rail testing facility to be built in on a former open cast mine site near Neath. Details of the scheme can be viewed on the planning applications portal of Powys Council. Enter 'Nant Helen' into the search box found at this address: <https://pa.powys.gov.uk/online-applications/?lang=EN>

"GCRE will regenerate a former coalfield site and enhance biodiversity to help establish an attractive destination for the community and visitors in a way that links its history with its bright future." <https://www.gcre.wales/>



## TfW Rail Timetable review

In April 2024 Transport for Wales announced the conclusion of its Strategic Future Timetable Review and started a consultation on the proposals. This review looked at the how demand for passenger trains had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily greatly reduced demand and accelerated some pre-existing trends such as the move to home working.

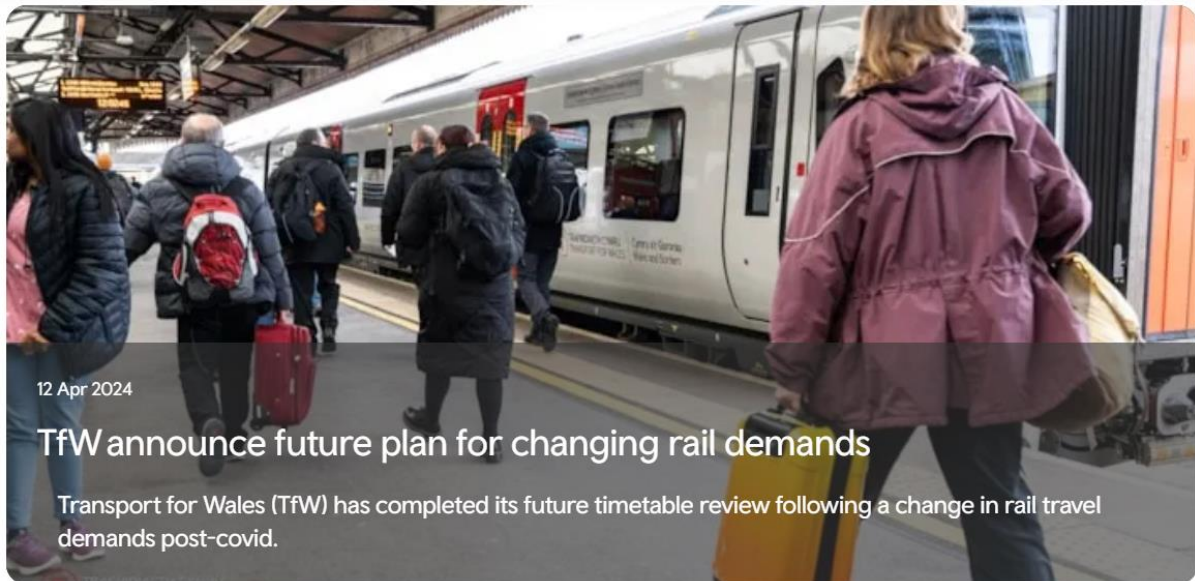


Image: <https://news.tfw.wales/news/tfwannounce-future-plan-for-changing-rail-demands>

The reviews assessed the longer-term timetable proposals announced at the time of the franchise award in 2018 against the latest demand patterns. Revisions to the long-term vision were put forward for comment. Amongst the more significant changes are:

- there will a greater variation between summer and winter number of services than previously.
- Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury hourly frequency will operate in summer (May to September) only from May 2026.
- the Cambrian Coast service will be reduced by two trains in each direction.
- the Liverpool to Chester via Runcorn service (itself a relatively recent new route) is to be extended to Llandudno in 2026
- the Heart of Wales line is to revert to four through trains per day from the five trains introduced in 2022. Services are to cross at Llandrindod Wells rather than Llanwrtyd Wells.
- the Vale of Glamorgan line (Barry- Bridgend) is to remain at one train per hour instead of two apart from during peak hours.

- the Swanline (Bridgend to Swansea all stations service) is to remain at a two hourly frequency apart from at peak times.
- the planned Cardiff to Liverpool two hourly through service has been abandoned. This will result in the Shrewsbury to Newport line continuing to have three trains per two hours at irregular intervals rather than a consistent half hourly service.

Railfuture Wales responded to the consultation by stating that the recently introduced Heart of Wales service had not been given a sufficient time period with a reliable service to demonstrate it had the potential to increase passenger numbers. It also stated the service reductions on the Cambrian Coast would potentially cause great hardship. The extension of the Liverpool-Chester service to Llandudno was welcomed as this would potentially allow the existing hourly service to that resort from Manchester to be terminate in Bangor/Holyhead, increasing frequencies on the western part of the North Wales main line.

## **Ken Skates returns to transport brief**

2024 has been a turbulent year in the make-up of the Welsh Government. However, one change that represents a return to the past is the appointment of Ken Skates as the minister for transport.

Mr Skates replaced Lee Waters in the role after Vaughan Gethin was chosen as the new First Minister in March 2024. Mr Skates, the Senedd member for Clwyd South, had previously served in this role from 2018 to 2021 but stood down from the cabinet following the 2021 Senedd election. He retained the transport portfolio following the election of Eluned Morgan as First Minister in August 2024. Mr Skates would therefore not have had to spend much time learning the transport brief and the many challenges it brings. His responsibilities also include a specific brief for wider policy issues in North Wales.



Official photo of Ken Skates MS Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales, taken from Wikipedia.

## **RAILFUTURE WALES MEMBER NEWS**

### **Online Meeting**

A meeting for Railfuture Wales members will be held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November. The event will commence at 7pm and last around two hours. The event will use Zoom- see link below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87232646744?pwd=bPlsHLdYwz4MEL7mLLWT75LdAmbM5T.1>

Meeting ID: 872 3264 6744 Passcode: 349263

If you have a subject which you would like to raise and discuss, please email Railfuture Wales chair Richard Wilcock with details in advance. He can be contacted on [richard.wilcock@railfuturewales.org.uk](mailto:richard.wilcock@railfuturewales.org.uk). There will also be an option to raise issues at the start of the meeting.

### **New Online Group for Members**

After considering opportunities for involving members in discussions of topical issues, the Railfuture Wales committee has decided to establish a new forum to allow views to be shared and debated. The new group will either use What's App or Facebook. The type of topics to be covered could be the merits of different Apps for ticket purchase, opportunities to obtain money from large scale developments to fund new stations and improved services and the performance of TfW Rail.

Once a decision has been taken on how to proceed, an email will be sent to members advising them of the new opportunity. If you might wish to take part and have not yet informed Railfuture of your email address, please send it to [renewals@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:renewals@railfuture.org.uk) so that we can update our database.

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Thanks are extended to all who contributed to this issue. In all cases, any opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent *Railfuture* policy. Material for the next issue – articles, letters, photos or comments – should be sent to the editor, Peter Kingsbury at [peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk](mailto:peter.kingsbury@railfuturewales.org.uk) or by post to 22 Winchester Avenue, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9BT, by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 for the spring 2025 issue. The editor may edit letters for publication.

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*Not a rail scene in Wales but an essential part of services to South Wales. The backbone of GWR's operation, London Paddington, sees two class 800 IET trains, one on the right arriving from Great Malvern, the other about to depart to Carmarthen, on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024. However, services from Wales and the West Country into Paddington will not operate on 17 Nov and 27-29 Dec as a result of work to construct the new Old Oak Common station. There will be one service per hour from Swansea into Euston instead, adding 15 minutes to the journey. Further closures for this reason will occur over the next few years.*

*Photo: Julian Langston*

Website: [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)

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