



**December 2020 Timetable and Rail Service Workshop
Feedback Report**

Venue: Virtual Feedback through Survey Monkey and individual discussions as required

Date: 20 March - 7 April 2020

Groups Represented: All Wales and Borders Rail User Groups and Community Rail Partnerships
The following groups provided feedback

Cambrian Line - Community Rail Partnership
Chester Shrewsbury - Community Rail Partnership
Chepstow and Better Trains for Chepstow Group
Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association
Heart of Wales Line - Community Rail Partnership
Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association (HoWLTA)
Leominster Rail Users' Group
Marches Rail Users Alliance
North Cheshire Rail Users' Group
North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum
Pembrokeshire Rail Travellers' Association
Rail Future
Severn Tunnel Action Group
Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Liaison Committee (also representing the Cambrian Coast line)
Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association
Shrewsbury Chester Rail Users Association
Wirral Transport Users Association
Wrexham Bidston Rail User Group

Summary:

Transport for Wales (TfW) exists to drive forward the Welsh Government's vision of a high quality, safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network that the people of Wales are proud of.

We want to collaborate with our stakeholders; creating the opportunity to discuss our performance and progress as well as to provide us with valuable feedback that will allow us to continually improve and shape our plans.

A key area on which we would like to collaborate - and one which we recognise is of great significance to stakeholders - are the twice-yearly timetable changes. Timetable changes primarily revolve around May and December and timetable planners begin the industry consultation process months in advance. The first TfW Timetable Stakeholder workshop was held in November 2019, and whilst largely the discussion and feedback sessions focused on Timetable changes, there were a number of other transport and rail related topics that were raised - such as communication and special events management - that prompted stakeholders to suggest that, moving forward, the workshops should expand to cover more topics.



TfW committed to expanding the workshops not only to cover the significant twice annual timetable changes, but also to use the opportunity to discuss other key service delivery areas with stakeholders, including – on this occasion – road replacement transport.

Workshops and Feedback

The workshop in March 2020 was impacted by incredibly unique circumstances and we unfortunately had to take the decision to cancel the meeting in Shrewsbury (scheduled for March 11th) but we were keen to keep the dialogue going and not miss the opportunity to engage – albeit virtually. We arranged for all the presentation material to be sent out via email and post, asking users to complete a survey, where broad, open ended questions were asked and a 300 word limit was introduced.

We understand previously there has been no restriction to word counts when submitting feedback and survey responses to the timetable engagement exercise. However, as we are proactively reaching out to more groups and stakeholders through our virtual forums and asking for input to multiple items alongside the timetable change, we feel most appropriate that word limits are in place for several reasons.

As we issued the survey to many stakeholders through various forums and groups, we received many responses. Putting in place a reasonable word limit allows for each stakeholder / group to have equal opportunity to input, allows us to consolidate the information succinctly and to ensure we can action it as swiftly as possible.

We rely on stakeholder input to be detailed, but we ask stakeholders to give us their feedback as concisely as possible. We understand many will want to get across detailed information and demonstrate knowledge, and whilst we are keen for stakeholders to not feel restricted, we would hugely appreciate if you could consider the following tips to assist (most of which we follow when we write internal papers):

- Tell us about the issue, and the impact you are aware this is having. This is a helpful format for us to then discuss internally, as opposed to only suggesting a solution, even if you believe the solution to be a simple one.
- Simplify your style. Look for long sentences and try to make them more succinct. This will make your submission easier to read, as well as reducing your word count.
- Be ruthless and cut any unnecessary content, as well as any repetition that isn't essential to your submission.
- Arrange a call with your local stakeholder manager to discuss your survey feedback if you feel you would like to explain further.
- We understand that some decisions are frustrating but again please be aware of the language used within written feedback and always pick up the phone first before writing a formal response.

The following is a summary of the feedback received from March to April 2020, but many comments raised will require further analysis and discussion, which will be progressed by regional stakeholder managers.

Significant changes in December 2020

At the time of sharing the information, there were very little changes to TfW services in December 2020 (particularly for weekday services) but there is likely to be further engineering work and planned possessions to deliver the Valley's transformation work and we will keep stakeholders informed of those.



Covid-19 raised some unique challenges for the industry – a reduced service came into operation from the 23rd March, closely followed by a period of gathering feedback from passengers, health boards and assessing headcounts. The May timetable change is constantly being reviewed and its commencement is to be confirmed. Additionally, no further changes will be considered for the December timetable change.

Despite this, we will retain, develop and discuss suggestions with stakeholders which we believe could be explored further next year and onwards. Additionally, we will consider holding regional workshops where required to discuss matters in much more detail.

In the absence of a face-to-face workshop, the following was collated from survey responses, emails and phone calls. Although responses have been sought for some direct questions, some suggestions will require investigation beyond the issue of this report.

Timetable Feedback

Changes for 2022/23/ Future Enhancements for Consideration

A number of respondents suggested improvements on items that we would be suitable to explore in the longer term, as part of a bigger package of changes being planned for 2022/2023 i.e. when our brand new rolling stock begins to enter service. The following is a list of suggestions raised that fall into this category. We are already shaping our plans for a workshop in 2021 to discuss the 2022/23 significant timetable changes.

We will review the following suggestions and request further information:

- Connections to align with Grand Union
- Cardiff > Gloucester Service increase to full hourly
- Additional southbound services calling at Church Stretton and Craven Arms
- Earlier northbound service from Hereford to Crewe
- Fixed pattern timetable/recast of Sunday services on the Marches line – looking at what was running previously but with an improved Sunday service
- Retiming the Milford train for onward connection to Nottingham (as part of other changes we are looking into at the moment)
- Removal of the public vs working timetable
- 7-day clockface timetable for Wrexham > Bidston
- Changes to afternoon services to Fishguard – when additional units become available
- Swiss-style interchange at Cardiff

Cardiff – Maesteg Service to Depart from Gloucester

It was proposed that 16:18 Cardiff > Maesteg starts back from Gloucester to reduce gap in service from the Border Counties. Following receipt of this feedback, this has now been submitted as a change for the December 2020 bid and we await the outcome.

Connections between Pembroke Dock and GWR Trains to London

Following the GWR train timetable changes, an issue was raised with trains from Pembroke Dock missing the opportunity to connect at Swansea with GWR trains to London. We can confirm that as of the May and December 2020 timetable changes, the majority of services from Pembroke Dock will connect at Swansea to London Paddington.



Irregular Service Patterns

Irregular service patterns were raised (Monday to Friday) on the Chester – Shrewsbury line, along with a lack of Sunday services. The new 06.45 Cardiff Central service being introduced in May 2020 will reduce a gap in morning services but other services would require additional train crew and units which are not readily available to us at present. However, a substantial increase in service is planned for Chester <> Shrewsbury for 2022, so we will work with stakeholder and passenger groups to gather feedback to help shape the new timetable and do our best to limit gaps in service.

Missing Services on the Halton Curve

Respondents queried whether there could be additional services from Chester and Lime Street as rolling stock becomes available, especially as two services have been amended to accommodate Wrexham General.

When the original timetable was implemented, there was an hourly service from Chester to Liverpool using two units and this was amended to accommodate a morning and evening service extending to Wrexham General. We will continue to further explore the suggestions to make more use of the Halton Curve and further services to Liverpool, linking into John Lennon Airport, building on the early success of the reopening of the Halton Curve.

Additional Services calling at Shrewsbury

Respondents raised a query whether they had correctly identified an additional stop at Shrewsbury. We can confirm that the 08:00 Shrewsbury (6:18 at Llandrindod) service will still run and stop at Shrewsbury and we can confirm that the Shrewsbury stop on the 8:35 (6:35 @Cardiff) is an extra service.

“Ghost Train” and Gaps in Afternoon and Evening Services in West Wales

We understand stakeholders are keen for us to make some significant amends or ‘recast’ the timetable for services running to Fishguard. We recognise that there currently gaps in the afternoon, evening and early morning services, however, in order to recast these services it would require additional crew and units, which are not available to us at this point in time. We understand this may be frustrating for users and we are in the process of looking into this further to explore if this issue can be addressed once crew and units are available.

Developing the Service on the Wrexham – Bidston Route

We are keen to develop an improved service on the Wrexham – Bidston line and are progressing many possibilities through the development of the North Wales Metro. We are discussing the line on a regular basis and are about to embark on a Memorandum of Understanding with Mersey Travel. We’ll continue to work closely with the rail users and we fully recognise the potential of this part of the network.

Deganwy Crossing

It was raised that in order to access a housing estate and hotel in Deganwy, car users have no alternative route other than to cross over the railway line. The crossing can be closed for up to 6 minutes (trains are travelling between Llandudno and Llandudno Junction). To overcome the issue, a suggestion has been made for the trains to stop at all request stops and would require the train to depart earlier. We are exploring some other opportunities with this part of the network and will discuss this further.

Earlier First Sunday Train from Pembrokeshire

Respondents raised that the first Sunday trains from Pembrokeshire are 1124 from Milford and 1200 from Pembroke Dock. When an additional early morning service was raised with Network Rail for the recent December 2019 timetable changes the suggestion was rejected due to it impacting the amount of daylight hours available for essential maintenance access. However, we are looking at this further with the operator and Network Rail.



Requests for Additional Services

We received numerous requests to change services due to demand namely:

- The 0435 Cardiff to Manchester, calling at Wrenbury in the morning to meet a growing commuter demand, suggesting it would need to leave Cardiff earlier
- Saturday services to call at Wem, Whitchurch and Nantwich – understanding it is likely to require TfW services to skip a different station and/or retimed services from Carmarthen
- Additional services to Wem – although this may increase the journey time between Cardiff and Manchester
- Additional services via the Halton Curve
- A service from Milford Haven to Cardiff (using the district line, avoiding Swansea, shortening the journey). The longer-term solution would be a parkway station and/or South West Wales Metro project which are being explored currently (both at feasibility stage) and we will share more detail in future

As a first step, we will look at the analytical data behind each suggestion to ascertain whether there is demand. We will also work with stakeholders to gather passenger feedback on additional services and see if a business case can be developed for consideration. Whilst the above listed additional services are unlikely to be achievable increases in 2020, we will continue to work with stakeholders on these suggestions for potential future implementation.

Connections to Bus Service in Fishguard

It was noted that in the December 2020 changes, the Fishguard and Goodwick arrival had changed from 18:46 to 18:52 and that the train no longer connects with the last bus to Fishguard. We are unable to revert back to an earlier arrival as the train in question cannot leave Swansea earlier due to paths not being available (there is an 18.22 Swansea to Chester service and a freight train Westerleigh to Robeston). However, we recognise the importance of integrated transport and connections and we are happy to liaise with local stakeholders and the bus company to see if alternatives are possible.

Leominster – Not All Trains Stopping

It was noted that not all TfW services stop at Leominster. It is often difficult to find the perfect balance for services between calling at more/all stations and making journey times shorter. At Leominster station some long distance services stop but not all, providing passengers in the region the option for faster journey times from nearby stations. We would be happy to work with stakeholders to understand demand and look at further analytics behind this suggestion, but implementation of this suggestion may require other stations to be skipped, as we have commitments around journey times/durations. It is often difficult to find a solution that suits all passengers around the number of calls vs. overall journey times.

Splitting the Manchester – Cardiff Service

A suggestion was made to split the Manchester – Cardiff service (running two services instead i.e. Manchester to West Wales and Manchester to Cardiff) to provide efficiencies to keep the rolling stock on the long distance section of the route and for the west of Cardiff stopping service to be provided by more suitable cascaded rolling stock. Prior to the current franchise, splitting the service was discussed between Welsh Government and the DfT but benefits couldn't be derived from this option for either party and it would ultimately increase the amount of movements around Cardiff.



Rail Replacement Service (RRS)

The following are regular themes that have emerged from the feedback we have received within the survey but also over the last few months. These have been ordered with more commonly suggested items at the top, but this is not an indication of importance:

- Consistency of information for the passengers – namely through staff, CIS, Journey Check/Planner and other platforms (especially in unmanned, rural stations)
- Clear signage on where the passenger needs to catch the bus
- Clear communications – staff asking passengers if they require the bus service
- Accessibility – appropriate coaches that can carry all items that could normally travel on the train (e.g. wheelchairs and similar, pushchairs, luggage, dogs, etc)
- Arrival times adjusted to ensure passengers' arrival time is not later than planned (e.g. earlier departure time)
- Passenger feeling abandoned (especially at unmanned/rural stations)
- Use of local companies/community buses and lack of driver awareness of station locations
- Bus services not stopping at request stops
- Providing appropriate waiting areas for the rail replacement service
- Provision of toilets
- Bus replacement should be a last resort

A commercial exercise took place for a new road replacement transport supplier for TfW, with a contract due to be awarded in 2020. As part of this tender exercise, TfW has clearly stated its requirements for an improved service for passengers, to be provided by any supplier. A key action plan has been put together with interim actions to ensure short term improvement and long term actions to be delivered with a new supplier.

As part of this tender, key Priorities included:

- Safety and compliance
- PSVAR Compliance
- 24/7 Control Room
- Real Time Information
- Ensuring that our customers are able to adequately identify the road transport, that they are well informed and able to confidently board/alight
- Ensuring that there is a robust complaint resolution process in place
- Ensuring that where possible local operators are used
- Experience in the industry and a track record of success delivering road transport
- Enable customers to purchase valid tickets for all RRS journeys

Please continue to feedback to your stakeholder manager as each occurrence relating to RRS is investigated and is useful in shaping our service.

Minimising Use of RRS and providing passenger facilities

RRS is only put in place where an alternative by train is not possible or practical. Where RRS is required, our planning team endeavour to ensure connections are maintained and customer journeys are as close to that of a train as practically possible. When planning RRS we review station facilities to ensure these are appropriate and do our very best to ensure bus/train interchanges at stations that have more facilities (such as waiting shelters and toilets).



Accessibility

Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulation (PSVAR) was raised in the feedback in relation to rail replacement, which looks at improved bus access for disabled passengers. PSVAR legislation will impact the available pool of operators able to undertake RRS and we are working with industry (both rail and coach and bus) colleagues to increase availability.

As part of looking at PSVAR, we are also considering how line closures are managed to minimise the demand for RRS, ensuring PSVAR compliant bus drop off and pick up points are included in all new station designs concepts. A draft plan has been submitted to RDG on how TfW are looking to achieve PSVAR with the current demand.

RRS – Not calling at all stations

We received feedback that the RRS is not calling at all stations when it should be (for example, Borth on the Cambrian line) - if there is specific examples please let us know via stakeholder managers and the team can investigate. Reports of stations being skipped are thoroughly investigated and appropriate steps take to avoid repeats events. We will ensure our RRS team reissues a brief regarding stopping at all planned stations and that provided route maps (which are provided to bus operators for all RRS operations) are to be followed.

Lack of Information at Platforms/Stations

Timetables for RRS are distributed to stations for pre-planned engineering works are prominently displayed and useful information posters at stations show the pickup point for rail replacement. This info is also available online. We recently received some positive feedback about posters displayed in Caersws station and this has been fed back to the team on how we can further enhance signage.

Additionally, we are exploring ways of tracking RRS vehicles to provide clearer and more accurate information. This is a significant and long-term project given the technology requirements and the large number of bus and coach operators that we utilise.

Parking in a Bus Stop

It was highlighted that at Leominster station advance notices of RRS bus services need to be posted to dissuade cars from parking in the bus-stop area. We will investigate this with our RRS team and explore options to ensure that the correct pick up point is used.

Use of Local Suppliers

We always endeavour to use local operators, however this is not always possible due to the significance of our requirements or as they have alternative commitments or have not registered to be considered for rail work. The majority of our rail replacement is undertaken by local and experienced operators.

Special Events

We greatly appreciated stakeholder feedback on special events and again we ask that stakeholders continue to provide us feedback on current services to events and any missed opportunities. Below are a number of detailed feedback items received regarding special events.

Wayfinding

We received a query surrounding major events management at Cardiff Central station around with around which queue the customer should join if they are wanting to travel to Severn Tunnel Junction station. We advise passengers for Severn Tunnel Junction to join the Gloucester queue, which provides



greater capacity and a more frequent service. Some Bristol trains do call at Severn Tunnel Junction, however customers for Bristol and beyond are often given priority for these services

Overcrowding

We were asked whether we had considered the implications of the ORR report of February 2015, where on the 27 and 28 of December 2014, passengers travelling into or out of King's Cross and Paddington stations were severely disrupted as a result of overrunning engineering works (specifically "*considering arrangements for crowd control and passenger welfareshould the weather be severeparticularly for the elderly or more vulnerable*").

Ahead of the 2015 rugby world cup, several marquee / canopies were put up to give customers shelter for any adverse weather conditions, however these raised further safety concerns as the area in Central Square is an area that gets caught in very high winds.

These concerns, in addition to the further restrictions encountered for CCTV coverage meant that the decision was taken on safety grounds to remove them, and it is for the same reasons that it has not been revisited since. However, should Cardiff Central Station receive enhancement funding in the future, we would be keen to work with funders to explore ways to provide shelter to passengers queuing to enter the station on major event days.

Rolling Stock Impacted due to Events

It was commented that the Wrexham-Bidston service was halved to provide extra rolling stock for a major events in Cardiff. We can confirm that this has happened on two occasions - the UEFA Champions League Final (the world's biggest sporting event in 2017), and the second was for a Wales v England rugby match in January 2019 during a period of severe rolling stock shortages which jeopardised the safe delivery of the event. We are keen to keep disruption to the wider network to an absolute minimum, however, for these occasions we hope our stakeholders and passengers can understand the magnitude of these events and why we made the decision to make this extra provision to the Capital City at this time.

Forward Planning – Marketing of Royal Welsh Show Train

It was identified that there were some lost opportunities with regards to an additional train being announced a week before the show. Unfortunately, due to rolling stock shortages at the time, we were unable to confirm whether the service would go ahead until nearer the time of the event. Once confirmed, the service was advertised in retail systems as soon as it had been through the Network Rail validation process.

Our event planning process and rolling stock availability has significantly improved since December 2019, and (prior to the event cancellation) this year's train was planned under normal timescales, so would have appeared in retail systems 12 weeks in advance.

Recognition for England-based Events Impacting Wales Services

We recognise that there are many high profile and popular events that occur in England, which may require amends to TfW services. We have a robust event planning process which examines all sorts of events across our network and beyond, with milestones at T-20 (20 weeks before the event), T-8, and T-2 weeks out, with a full categorisation programme depending on the expected level of attendance.

This includes additional and/or strengthened trains where possible, but we haven't always been able to enhance all trains/ put on extra carriages particularly for 'all-day' events as this could impact services elsewhere on the network, something we try to limit as much as possible. However, as our rolling stock numbers increase over the coming months and years, we are keen to work with stakeholders and event



management to explore opportunities further and strengthen services to support events across our network.

Supporting North-based passengers going to Sporting Events in South Wales

We appreciate that many passengers for sporting events in Cardiff are travelling from further afield. We run an additional Cardiff – Holyhead return event train for each Principality Stadium sporting event. We have in the past ran additional trains for Wales football matches in the city stadium, however passenger numbers have been very low.

For those travelling from the Marches direction, we run additional Abergavenny and Newport ‘shuttle’ trains.

Service Enhancements to Support Premier League Football

We endeavour to strengthen some key trains where possible, however as these events sit outside our direct Network and Manchester is very well served by other operators, we do not run any additional trains for premier league football matches in Manchester. However, as noted above, as our rolling stock provision increases, we would be keen to explore connecting services on our network further to provide improvements where possible.

Communicating Event Support to Passengers

For major events in the Principality Stadium, enhanced communications are put out via local authorities, posters at stations and on our website / social media accounts. These include expected ‘busy train’ posters colour coded in a RAG format, encouragement to passengers to plan ahead and detail of the queuing system at Cardiff Central Station. We also work with the media to relay important messages.

One-Off Services for Events

We were asked to consider whether we could organise one-off service for special events, an example given was the Shrewsbury Rocks event.

In this specific instance, we were encountering significant train-crew shortages. We have an obligation that all ‘booked’ trains in the timetable must be covered before any additional / special trains are able to run. Rosters are only confirmed 48 hours ahead of the day in question.

Unfortunately, on the day in question we were not able to resource enough train crew, so had to cancel other trains as well as not being able to run this special service. Dedicated bus services were put on however and were reasonably well utilised.

Recovery Plan Following Covid-19

During the time that this feedback was collated, the rail service was dramatically impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak.

The safety and wellbeing of all our customers and staff is always our top priority and a reduced timetable came into operation from the 23rd March throughout the Transport for Wales rail network, with service changes in place to support identified key workers.

Along with bus companies and community transport operators, we are facing a significant and unprecedented challenge – travel demand has reduced significantly and the pandemic has created uncertainty and challenge across all industries and sectors.

The ambition remains to create a sustainable integrated public transport network, including community transport, across Wales and Borders. We therefore must act now to ensure that when we reach the



other side of the current COVID-19 pandemic, we will have a viable public transport network to allow us to achieve this. We will no doubt involve you in our recovery plans and will be keen to hear your thoughts on how we achieve this.

Boards and Forums Structure

In March, we commenced our four TfW regional forums to build relationships with and collect feedback from stakeholder group we have previously had little interaction with. We presented the same material that was shared with CRPs and RUGs (namely, the December 2020 timetable plans, how we manage rail replacement and an overview of Community Rail). We will hold the forums every quarter, whilst continuing to support rail user group meetings and Community Rail Partnership meetings and hold twice annual workshops (when safe to do so) with these two core stakeholder groups.