

DP 1071/07-11

Y Gwir Anrh/Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AC/AM
Prif Weinidog Cymru/First Minister for Wales

25727-1001



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Mohammad Asghar AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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5th March 2008

Dear Mohammad

During First Minister's Questions on 19 February 2008 I promised to write to you about the issue of the Ebbw Valley rail service continuing to Newport, Ebbw Vale town and Abertillery.

We have commissioned Network Rail to provide a costed feasibility study for removing the constraint at Gaer Junction once the Newport Area Signalling Project is complete.

There has been no U-turn on our wish to see a service provision between Ebbw Vale and Newport. The service provision will be renewed with Arriva Trains Wales and Network Rail, and in conjunction with SEWTA to decide the best way to provide a service into Newport. This process will include consultation with rail users on the service provision and timetable options. As with all service extension proposals, the outcome will be subject to value for money and affordability considerations.

A regular scheduled Ebbw Vale - Newport service needs both full bi-directional working for all four platforms - to be delivered by the forthcoming Newport Area Resignalling which also generally improves throughput at Newport; and the reinstatement of the crossover at Gaer junction. All works need to be completed, as a regular service is not possible for reasons of operational capacity at/through Newport (not just strictly track configuration).

There is currently insufficient capacity on the infrastructure to provide a regular passenger train service to Newport. Works required to remove this constraint include a new cross over point where the Ebbw Line meets the South Wales Main Line, signalling alterations in the Park Junction area, the completion of a full length and fully operational platform 4 at Newport Station and the re-signalling of the Main Line. It is currently anticipated that the earliest all these works will be complete is 2009/early 2010, when Network Rail completes the first stage of the re-signalling of the Main Line at Newport.

The regulations controlling empty stock moves (and freight trains) are different and less onerous to loaded passenger trains. There is not enough track capacity (at Gaer Junction) to run a regular timetabled service from Newport to Ebbw Vale. The passenger-less driver training trains have been going Down (west) back from Newport station along the main Up (eastbound) line the half mile to Gaer when there is a tiny gap in the timetabled services. It is not a regular gap and if a service was run it would have a great impact on the performance of other services.

Extending the line into Ebbw Vale town centre and to Abertillery are future aspirations where stakeholders would need to undertake future business case work.

I am writing in similar terms to Trish Law AM.

Yours

Rhodri