

**NORTH AND MID WALES ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS  
NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 17<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023  
BY TEAMS**

**1. Present were**

Russell George SM  
James Price CEO Transport for Wales  
Colin Lea Transport for Wales  
Lewis Brencher Transport for Wales  
Gwyn Rees Transport for Wales  
Charlotte Harries Transport for Wales  
Cllr Trevor Roberts (Cambrian Lines Chair  
Diane (Russell George's office)  
Robert Robinson (Secretary to the Association)

**Apologies for absence**

Cllr Ian Hodge (some confusion over time of meeting)

**2. The survey August/September**

Robert Robinson outlined the survey method and details of the issues that come out of it which were important to note:

These were:

- i) Overcrowding on trains common with observations showing on some trains people had difficulty in finding places to stand or sit. There were two instances where children were sitting on cases in a toilet and a mother with small child sitting on the floor due to space. This was the case for most of their journey from Shrewsbury through to Machynlleth.
- ii) Issues of safety due to:
  - a. Overcrowding causing injury issues in an accident or sharp stop.
  - b. People not being able to get to a toilet causing anxiety and stress.
  - c. In a medical emergency the guard cannot get down the train to help.
  - d. A person witnessed falling off a train (new one) due to overcrowding by the central opening doors (a significant drop to the platform).

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- iii) Guards not coming down the trains due to overcrowding with the issue of not collecting fares.
- iv) The catering trolley had no chance to get down the overcrowded trains.
- v) A specific issue is the Birmingham/Holyhead services which are planned to change (i.e. currently trains 4 car 158 class – proposed timetable a 197 class – reduction of seating from 276 to 116). The train is due to split into 2 x 2 car units at Shrewsbury when the Cambrian Line hourly service is put in place in early 2025.

**3. Circulation of survey report**

The survey report has been issued to Welsh Government, Association members, the ORR, H&S Executive, Transport for Wales and Network Rail. The reason for the wide circulation is that the Association felt using the words 'unsafe' meant it was right to share the report so it was on record.

**4. Discussion around the issues**

A discussion took place around the identified issues with the following being of note:

- i) James Price received the report and the information contained in it. In general the findings are accepted as accurate.
- ii) Cambrian Line 197 class introduction late 2024/early 2025 after which the hourly service will be introduced.
- iii) More 197 class units should be fitted with the ERTMS system to give flexibility.
- iv) Several schemes to help with issues are being discussed with the Minister.
- v) The general rule is that passengers should not have to stand on a train journey for more than 20 minutes – it was acknowledged that in some cases (particularly on the North Wales, Chester/Shrewsbury and Cambrian Lines) this is not being achieved.

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- vi) Collection of fares on busy trains where the guard cannot get down the train. Action is being taken with some trains having two guards and enforcement officers in other areas. This has shown to increase fare collection substantially.
- vii) 4 car units on the Cambrian Coast is to run Spring to Summer in 2024.
- viii) When Franchise was granted 25% growth pa was expected – covid put this back 2 years. If this growth had taken place the rail provision would not have been enough.
- ix) Trains from Shrewsbury – Holyhead from Birmingham – particular overcrowding issues on these trains. Suggestion of a Shrewsbury start point for Holyhead trains to be seriously considered. The Association was asked to help with suggestions of how this can be achieved.
- x) Loss of 175 class units has not affected lines as badly as might be. The reliability of these units was becoming unacceptable. The 197 units are replacing these with new units arriving approximately every 12 days.
- xi) Keeping some of the class 158 units may not be possible as the leasing company appears to only want them back at the end of the term altogether.
- xii) Customer service survey was good, staff singled out for praise. Only overcrowding and reliability noted of concern.
- xiii) The summary and recommendations are added to these notes at appendix A.
- xiv) The meeting was positive and constructive.

**5. Positives from the survey**

It was acknowledged that there were some positives from the survey which included:

- i) Staff on the trains were considered excellent from the survey results.
- ii) The customer care part of the survey gave a good result in most areas (apart from reliability and overcrowding).
- iii) Electronic display boards have improved.

**6. Other matters raised in the meeting**

Other matters raised during the meeting were:

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- i) A passenger contacting Russell George regarding shortchanging times between trains at Shrewsbury with platform 3 involved. It was noted – however if people want more time to change trains, they should allow for this in their journey planning.
- ii) 4 car units along the coast are planned for 2024 from spring through the summer months. This is much welcomed.

**7. Actions to be taken forward**

The meeting agreed the following actions to be taken forward:

- i) TFW to consider more 197 class trains being fitted with the Cambrian Line signalling system
- ii) The Association to work with TFW to seek a plan to start Birmingham Holyhead trains from Shrewsbury, leaving the 4 car unit to go along the Cambrian Lines and a 2/4 car unit to Holyhead.
- iii) The Association will continue with surveys to monitor the North coast and Cambrian Lines and report accordingly.
- iv) TFW is working to improve on train revenue (currently 60% with a wish to get this up to 80%).
- v) TFW retaining class 158 units until the new trains are fully in place. (it was noted that the leasing company did not wish to extend leases for only part of the fleet).
- vi) Further survey work to be completed in the new year and into 2025 to monitor where we are.
- vii) Robert to copy Russell George into letter to Minister which has not been responded to after some time.

**APPENDIX A**

Copy of the summary and recommendations of the survey report (August 2023).

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**Executive summary**

The main points of note of the survey are:

The overcrowding on many trains (on all the lines surveyed) is at an unacceptable level and when measured against the proposed 197 class units leads us to state that levels expected when they are introduced will be unsafe and bordering on dangerous – maybe even illegal. Where there is a mitigation, it should be put in place – i.e. more capacity.

The reduction of 4 car units to 2 car on the Birmingham to Holyhead service after Shrewsbury measured against passenger levels will put people at risk and the trains proposed with this level of use are unsafe and bordering on dangerous – maybe even illegal. Where there is a mitigation, it should be put in place – i.e. more capacity.

- i) The reason for stating they will be unsafe are:
  - a. If a passenger goes ill there is no space for them nor can a member of staff get to them.
  - b. If there was to be an emergency stop or an incident such as a crash the devastation with such overloaded trains will cause death and life changing injuries that could be avoided.
  - c. If such an incident takes place and nothing is done to alleviate the issues highlighted in this report the Association will consider what actions to take to bring those responsible to account.
  
- ii) The reduction in business and commuters is of concern and this must mean they are using other forms of transport (even considering working at home).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- iii) The class 197 trains are not fit for purpose on long journeys and alternatives should be sought to stop what is heading for a catastrophic situation on the Wales railways. Cost should not be an issue when

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people's lives are put at risk. There is no way that a single train is suitable for commuting and long distance.

- iv) The customer care on train by the staff is good.
  
- v) Staff are stressed and put under constant pressure due to no fault of their own but due to the issues identified above.
  
- vi) Catering was available on most trains, however due to overcrowding could not get down the train.
  
- vii) The loss of revenue on trains because the guard cannot get down the train must be massive.
  
- viii) The height of the step onto the trains combined with many platforms with a gap gives a health and safety situation which should be investigated and rectified as needed.
  
- ix) The Association does not see how a subsidy reduction per passenger can be achieved by reducing the size and number of trains which this report shows is not an option.
  
- x) The guidelines as we understand them are that no passenger should be expected to stand on a train for more than 20 minutes, this is not being achieved now let along with the new timetabled trains proposed.
  
- xi) A car and a coach are only allowed people who have a seat (a few standing on a bus) as it is considered unsafe. Compared with a train there appears to be an issue.
  
  
- xii) There is an issue around people on crowded trains, particularly with central opening doors. People are 'pushed close the doors' so

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when they open some were seen to fall out the train. With the difference in train and platform heights this can be dangerous.

**Recommendations**

The Association from the evidence of this and previous reports suggest the following recommendations:

i) The current 158 stock should be retained on long distance lines (i.e. Cardiff and Birmingham to Holyhead and the Cambrian Lines) to supplement the new 197 stock whilst the situation is investigated fully and rectification put in place.

ii) All long distance class 197 trains should be 3 or 4 car minimum. Two car units are not acceptable on all long distance timetabled services.

iii) The Holyhead and Aberystwyth service out of Birmingham is due to split at Shrewsbury with 2 cars going to each. We recommend that the four car train out of Birmingham goes through in total to Aberystwyth. A 4 car train for Holyhead should then start from Shrewsbury to meet this train.

The support for this proposal is shown in the survey results. (a two car unit on this service north of Shrewsbury is not acceptable and due to the number of passengers using this service would be unsafe and bordering on dangerous – maybe even illegal. Where there is a mitigation, it should be put in place – i.e. more capacity).

iv) In the summer months a four car unit should be provided on all Cambrian Coast services. Again due to the numbers using these services a two car unit is unsafe.

v) More class 197 units should be fitted with ERTMS to give the flexibility required.

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vi) The Health and Safety Executive should consider if there is a case to stop the current introduction of class 197's in the way proposed to ensure safety is observed.

vii) The reduction in overcrowding on many lines will increase revenue (thus reducing the overall cost of subsidy per person) as at present on very busy trains the guards cannot get down the train to collect fares.

viii) A meeting between the Minister and senior rail officials with the Association should be held as soon as possible.

ix) If there is no satisfactory solution found within the immediate future (i.e. within 3 months) then the Association feels that due to the public interest this report should be released into the public domain.

x) In the public interest this report will be made available to the press as well as Welsh Government, The Minister, Transport for Wales,

Network Rail, the Rail Partnerships, H&S Executive and the ORR. xi) Reference to be made to the ORR position statement on overcrowding of trains as set out at the end of this document. xii) An urgent high level meeting is to be arranged with Welsh Government and senior officials to present the report and seek some improvements to help what is considered a 'serious' situation.



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- xiii) A further survey of numbers on trains should be carried out in November 2023 as an addendum to this report.
  
- xiv) The ORR statement on overcrowding and safety is to be noted.