

# New trains on a rail line that Welsh Government has spent £90m on despite it being a non devolved matter

New trains have been introduced on the Ebbw Vale Line following a £90m investment by the Welsh Government, despite it not being a devolved infrastructure asset.

The upgrade to the line, which includes a new seven mile passing loop between Crosskeys and Aberbeeg, has allowed Transport for Wales to run two trains per hour – one to Cardiff and a new direct service to Newport Station.

While the rail line is a responsibility of the UK Government and Network Rail, the cost of the upgrade has been met by the Welsh Government. The UK Government failed to prioritise the line for improvement across numerous Network Rail five year rail capital spending periods. The lack of investment in the Welsh rail network – where only the core Valley Lines is devolved – is highlighted by the fact that it receives less than 2% in rail enhancement project spending, despite having around 10% of the total UK rail network.

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The Ebbw Vale line, which runs for around 13 miles, was brought back into operation by the UK Government in 2008 having being in disuse for 40 years. In 2014 a new station at Pye Corner in Newport opened serving passengers at the southern end of the network. A year later 1.5 miles of new track was laid to extend the railway from Ebbw Vale Parkway to

a brand-new station, Ebbw Vale Town.

The latest investment phase, which was carried out by Network Rail, was financed through a Welsh Government interest free loan of £70m to Blaenau Gwent Council.

The only contribution from the UK Government has been required signalling upgrading at the south end of the line at a cost of £17m. The Welsh Government's total investment since 2008 has been around £90m.

The Welsh Government has said its required intervention highlights that Wales needs a fair funding deal on rail investment.

It said: "This again demonstrates the need for the full devolution of rail infrastructure aligned with a fair funding settlement from the UK Government."

Transport for Wales, the Welsh Government's at arm's length transport body that operates services on the Wales and Borders network, has introduced new class 197 trains on the line.

Built in Newport at the train making factory of Spanish firm CAF, the Class 197 trains have started to enter service on mainline routes around Wales and the Borders. They will be able to run up to a maximum of four carriages on the Ebbw Vale line.

Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport, Ken Skates said: "This is great news. These trains are modern and comfortable and provide a much-improved experience for passengers. This is another positive step for rail services in Wales."

The trains are part of an £800m investment in new roll stocking funded by the Welsh Government replacing trains aged between 30 and 40 years old.

Chief customer and culture office at Transport for Wales Marie

Daly said: "Earlier this year we were able to launch brand new services to Newport from Ebbw Vale thanks to a £70m public investment in the stations, track and signalling, and these new trains are the next important step to help boost the economy and to encourage people to make more sustainable journeys.

"I'm delighted that our Ebbw Vale customers will be benefiting from our brand-new trains. The trains are comfortable, and offer greater capacity for our customers."

There will be 77 class 197 trains operating throughout Wales and along its border routes, forming the backbone of the mainline fleet.

Transport for Wales said with the transition is ongoing, customers may still see some of the older trains in operation however these will gradually be phased out over the coming years.

The Class 197s will start operating to Pembroke Dock later this year and on the Cambrian line in 2025.