

Date issued: 9 August 2021

### Freedom of Information Request

We are writing in response to your request for information, which has been dealt with under the auspices of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Your request has been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Act and our information access policy.

#### You submitted the following request (your questions are highlighted in red):

*"I travelled from Cardiff to Aberystwyth via Shrewsbury last Monday returning on Friday. It was a journey to visit family who I hadn't seen for 18 months. I don't have a car and always use public transport. Pre Covid the train service from Cardiff to Manchester and other north Wales/England destinations always had few carriages, sometimes the Manchester service has 2 carriages. This was never enough for such a busy service. It was similar again last week, with two carriages and social distancing impossible and a lack of seating for everyone. Now, more than ever, it's important to feel safe on trains. Please can you let me know why there are so few carriages on this service (Question 1)?*

*It is even more puzzling when there are many more carriages on services such as that going from Cardiff to Barry. There was a delayed train for Ebbw Vale at Cardiff station which had more carriages. It really doesn't make sense. In effect, you are making your service unusable for certain citizens, eg the elderly, the disabled, people who have long term health conditions, who would simply not feel safe to travel. I would certainly not suggest to my elderly relatives that they use Tfw trains at present, which is a great shame as they have used them regularly pre-pandemic.*

*Have you carried out an Equality Impact Assessment on the impact of not being able to ensure social distancing on your trains, so that you can assess the impact on the people I mentioned above, eg people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act? If not, please could you let me know why (Question 2)?*

*I appreciate the difficulties of operating a train network during a pandemic and appreciate the efforts of your staff in carrying on working. There is, of course, an impact on your staff if you are unable to guarantee social distancing as they are put at risk (Question 3). The pandemic is not suddenly going to disappear so every effort to make train journeys safe and comfortable for everyone needs to be made. Please let me know the following:*

*Will there be more carriages (than 2) provided on the Cardiff - Manchester, north Wales/England service in future (Question 4)?*

*Why do some services have so few carriages and some, less busy, have so many more (Question 1)?*

*Have you done an Equality Impact Assessment on not being able to ensure social distancing? If not, why not (Question 2)?*

*Do you intend to introduce first class on any of your services in the future? If so, which ones? I would gladly pay for a guaranteed seat and a less busy carriage (but not everyone can)*(**Question 5**).

*Is the problem with providing more carriages on those busy routes simply down to funding* (**Question 1**)?"

**In response to your questions, we are able to provide the following information:**

Throughout the pandemic we have introduced many measures to reduce the risks to passengers and staff. These are still in place today, including additional deep cleans, high touchpoint spot cleaning with antiviral agents, additional signage, information, announcements, additional staff providing wayfinding and security; as well as providing live information through our online [Capacity Checker](#) for passengers to make safe decisions around their travel arrangements.

Our face covering compliance has been above the national rail average, and is a testament to our commitment to engaging with our passengers, as well as our strong working relationship with the British Transport Police, who are responsible for the enforcement of the social distancing laws.

We continue to work hard to support passengers returning to our services, but as passenger numbers increase, social distancing onboard public transport is becoming more challenging. Our train planning and operational teams work incredibly hard to ensure as much social distancing capacity as possible is available.

**Question 1 – How our carriages are allocated**

We only have a limited number of carriages available to operate the hundreds of services we run daily across our network. We allocate our longer units (3-cars) to the sequences of journeys performed by an individual train according to the demand experienced on that train throughout the day. So, for example, a train may experience heavy peak loads, but operate quieter journeys between the peak hours where it would appear that its capacity is over-provision. This is especially true of the local services around Cardiff. Conversely, we would allocate a shorter train (1- or 2-cars) where a train experiences quiet journeys throughout the day but may form one journey that is busier, and where it appears capacity is under-provided. This is not an issue of funding; it is a balancing act across the entire network. We continue to proactively monitor the numbers of people travelling and regularly review our timetable to ensure our carriages are used in the right places.

We're sorry that the train you travelled to Manchester on was uncomfortably busy. Usually, trains between Manchester and South Wales are formed with 3-car trains, so we'd imagine there was an on-the-day problem that caused the reduction. However, without specific journey details (ie – the time of the service in question), we can't investigate this further.

**Question 2 - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for Social Distancing Requirements on Services**

TfW understands the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion and it is actively promoted at all levels within the organisation. There is information about our approach to equality and diversity on our website: <https://trc.cymru/equality>

An EIA was not formally undertaken with regards to social distancing on trains; but equality and diversity have been considered within the plans. Our risk assessment to manage social distancing and principles for managing social distancing both recognise the potential needs of old, disabled or vulnerable people. Passengers' protected characteristics are explicitly considered in conductor's risk assessments about whether to allow additional passengers onto a 'full and standing' service or what to do if there isn't a safe way to allow them to board.

TfW also hosts an [Accessibility Panel](#), which influences our accessibility policies and advises us on how to support disabled, Deaf and older customers to use our services effectively. Throughout the pandemic, the Panel has been kept abreast of our plans and, in March 2021, we held a workshop with the Panel so they would advise us on our plans for a safe return to public transport. They endorsed the plan, subject to some minor changes (such as signage) that we delivered.

Whilst an EIA wasn't taken on this issue, during the last 12 months EIAs have been completed on all the commitments for our rail service. This exercise formed part of our 'future of rail' programme.

### **Question 3 - Staff safety**

Our Principles of Managing Social Distancing procedure ensures a safe working environment for conductors in line with requirements under the Health and Safety at Work act 1974 and ensures we comply with the Health Protection (coronavirus restrictions) 2020 both for Wales and England.

However, as in normal operating circumstances, staff can refuse to work a train if they feel safety is threatened, in line with company safety procedure.

Throughout the pandemic, most of our conductors have remained within their cabs, where they are not at risk of catching or spreading the coronavirus.

### **Question 4 - Will there be more carriages (than 2) provided on the Cardiff - Manchester, north Wales/England service in future?**

Yes. We have commissioned a new fleet of trains, which are currently being assembled, to increase the size of our fleet and provide longer trains. These new trains will start to enter service in 2022 and a sufficient number of the trains will be available to operate longer trains from 2023. Trains between Cardiff and Manchester will generally be formed of a 4- or 5-car train (except very early or late in the day, where we don't need the capacity); and most trains between North Wales and Manchester will be formed of 3 cars, with some peak trains strengthened to 4 or 5 cars.

### **Question 5 - First Class services**

We already offer first class accommodation on two journeys a day between Cardiff and Holyhead, and this number will increase to six in this September. From 2023, we intend to offer first class on journeys between Manchester and South Wales.

We hope this information is of use to you.

Yours sincerely,

**Transport for Wales**

### **Appeal Rights**

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, please write to the Head of Freedom of Information at either Transport for Wales, 3 Llys Cdwyn, Pontypridd, CF37 4TH or freedomofinformation@tfw.wales. Your request must be submitted within 40 working days of receipt of this letter. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision.

The Information Commissioner (ICO) can be contacted at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or you can contact the ICO through the 'Make a Complaint' section of their website on this link: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

The relevant section to select will be "Official or Public Information".