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10th July 2020

Dear Ms Kelley

Re: ARRIVA Cross Country Services to Lydney and Chepstow

We write on behalf of Monmouthshire County Council as Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood services and Chair of the Council's Strategic Transport Group.

We have recently been made aware by the travelling public of the withdrawal of train services to Chepstow and Lydney provided by Arriva Cross Country, and we have discussed the matter with officers and community representatives with particular interest in rail.

It is fair to say that we are both disappointed and frustrated that your company has chosen to withdraw all but one of the seven scheduled stops in Chepstow (northbound and southbound) and from five to two (northbound) and five to one (southbound) for Lydney.

We acknowledge that your company may need to review service frequencies in light of COVID -19 and the demands for social distancing on public transport. We also recognise that the majority of these stops do not form part of your franchise with DfT so their withdrawal is more easily achieved by your company, as these stops are 'discretionary' being outside of the franchise.

However, there is significant concern amongst travellers and the community more widely that the level of service previously campaigned for and achieved may so readily be withdrawn. Undoubtedly, it will take time before any new 'normal' is established but there is worry that the frequency of service previously enjoyed may never be re-established.

It also seems a regressive step to reduce the availability of public transport when Welsh Government is promoting active travel and public transport as we commence the recovery from the pandemic. Furthermore, a WelTAG/WebTAG study jointly commissioned by authorities in England and Wales is highlighting public transport as a key feature in getting vehicles off the roads and generally reducing congestion. Added to this is the increase of residential properties in the south of the Forest of Dean for whom the public transport has become significantly less attractive as a mode of transport, inevitably seeing residents reverting to car travel.

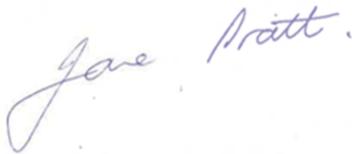
Obviously, the loss of these services are of extreme concern but in your correspondence with officers you explain that this is necessary to respond to social distancing demands. We believe that some existing regulations/guidelines will change in the near future, in particular a reduction in social distancing from 2m coupled with wearing a mask (acknowledging that regulations differ slightly between England and Wales). A change in social distancing will no doubt improve

dwelling times so we would ask you to revisit the service changes at your earliest convenience with the eventual target to be full resumption of the service frequency previously enjoyed in Chepstow and Lydney.

Our concern is such that we have copied this letter to several other organisations and elected members for information and attention. In particular, this letter has gone to Welsh Government and Transport for Wales who are responsible for the future franchise of the Wales and Border service and we would ask that the previous frequency of service (at least) be included within the franchise in the future. The importance of a frequent and quality public transport service will be essential to government and local authority priorities to reduce car travel so to achieve this the agreements and contracts with providers must reflect this.

Finally, we wholly accept the need for your company to provide a service that seeks to safeguard the public but we are anxious that as we recover from the pandemic the services previously enjoyed are not lost.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Pratt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Cllr Jane Pratt
Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Dovey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Cllr David Dovey
Chair of the Strategic Transport Group