

# national express

William Graham AM  
Chair, Enterprise and Business Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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Dear Mr Graham

I was pleased to learn that the Welsh Assembly's Enterprise and Business Committee will be examining the impact of transport issues during the recent Rugby World Cup games in Cardiff.

The Committee is right to highlight the importance of efficient public transport networks in realising the economic benefits of major events, such as the Rugby World Cup. Notwithstanding the fact that the transport problems related to this particular event relate primarily to capacity and increased demand on the rail network, I wanted to take the opportunity to outline the vital role of coach travel as part of the national public transport offer and the flexibility and resilience of our services.

National Express is the UK's largest scheduled coach operator. Each year we serve around 1,000 destinations and 18 million passengers. Over 550 National Express coaches travel more than 84 million miles. Cardiff is one of our most important locations and we continue to make a valuable contribution to the local economy. With over half a million people each year using National Express coach services to travel between Cardiff and towns, cities and airports across the UK, we are a critical part of the local public transport mix.

We are extremely well-placed to respond to gaps in connectivity where there is demand for travel, but where a rail, or local bus solution does not exist, or would not be operational within required timescales. We are highly experienced and successful at adapting our network to provide scheduled services on routes of 20 miles or more to infrequent events including major sporting occasions, or concerts. This is demonstrated by the fact that we are the official travel provider to Wembley and that we provide transport to festival-goers from 73 towns and cities in the UK each year, including almost a quarter of those attending Glastonbury.

During the Rugby World Cup this year, we provided 5,000 additional seats on to our national coach network to meet demand from passengers attending matches. 2,000 of these seats were between London and Cardiff and included special late-night services following games with a later kick-off. Our location at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff is just a short walk from the Millennium Stadium. We would have been able to add further capacity as required, had more been done to actively promote coach as part of the overall transport offer and as a viable alternative to rail.

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Our coach network is highly responsive to temporary planned or unplanned rail disruption, or insufficient rail capacity. For example, over the summer we added 18,000 additional seats during the ongoing disruption in the South West due to the electrification programme. This is particularly critical when disruption coincides with large-scale events, such as the First Great Western rail strike in July, which would have impacted on rail passengers travelling to the Ashes test match in Cardiff.

Furthermore, our network can support large-scale events that attract an international audience, as we are able to cater for both inbound and domestic visitors. In addition to serving the main airports to and from 414 locations across the UK, we are part of the consortium that owns Eurolines, the largest scheduled coach operator in Europe. Our Eurolines operation from London Victoria Coach Station facilitates connectivity to and from mainland Europe, covering 500 destinations across 33 countries.

While I recognise that major events can also be impacted by disruption on the strategic road network, we are able to utilise alternative routes where necessary. Coach travel also provides a more efficient use of road space than other forms of transport. A full coach can take the equivalent of one mile of motorway traffic off the road.

The advantages of coach travel as outlined above are clear. We believe there is an opportunity to support greater passenger demand if coach travel could be more widely and effectively promoted as a transport option alongside rail. Coach travel plays a key role in providing passengers with reliable and affordable public transport, maximising the economic benefits of major events and tourist attractions, and supporting the visitor economy. We would encourage the Committee to afford greater recognition of this role, particularly with regard to any emerging recommendations following the meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> November.

If you would like any additional information on the role of coach travel and National Express in Cardiff, please feel free to get in touch at [charlotte.ritchie@nationalexpress.com](mailto:charlotte.ritchie@nationalexpress.com).

Yours sincerely



Tom Stables  
Managing Director, Coach