# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Severe Weather and Flooding** |
| **DATE**  | **05 March 2020** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales** |

Following the scale of the severe weather and flooding experienced during Storm Ciara, Dennis and Jorge, I would like firstly to extend my sympathies to the hundreds of people effected by the devastating effect of the weather, particularly those whose houses and safety have been affected by the floods.

We have all witnessed the devastation caused to so many homes, families and businesses over the last month due to severe weather, with our communities enduring three major storms in as many weeks. I would like to pay tribute to our friends, families, communities, Councils, emergency services, volunteers and businesses who have all pulled together during this awful period. We know there is lots to be addressed and our focus as a Government is to make sure we can return our loved ones back to their homes and businesses, as well as provide a safe transport network as quickly as possible.

Regarding the transport network, I greatly appreciate the way passengers and Transport for Wales (TfW) have dealt with very challenging conditions and disrupted services. The sheer volume of water, in what was the wettest February on record, caused the greatest damage. Rivers, streams and culverts across Wales and Borders burst their banks, with saturated fields struggling to cope, as well as an abundance of surface water.

TfW and Network Rail's control centre teams, together with operational colleagues, had to react swiftly as conditions continued to deteriorate through the storms.

Due to Storm Ciara, the Conwy Valley Line remains closed following significant damage caused by Storm Ciara, with rail replacement buses in operation between Llandudno Junction and Blaenau Ffestiniog for the foreseeable future.

Flooding also hit the Heart of Wales line, the Cambrian line at Black Bridge and the main north South route on the Marches line between Abergavenny and Hereford. It also impacted the Ebbw Vale line between Llanhilleth and Ebbw Vale Town. Volunteers from across TfW headed to many of our affected stations to pitch in and help coordinate the replacement travel operation. Network Rail also had teams out across the route, working round the clock to inspect and repair infrastructure and ensure routes were safe to reopen as the water began to recede.

The line between Abercynon and Aberdare was particularly badly affected where flooding and a separate landslip left nearly 100 tonnes of debris blocking the busy route. After a tremendous effort by Network Rail, with its team working around the clock, the line reopened on Tuesday afternoon.

Storm Jorge battered the UK with strong winds and downpours, leaving the south Wales mainline closed after flooding at Llanharan and many other routes affected.

Our rail network has been hit particularly hard over the last month, but I wish to assure members that both TfW and Network Rail played their parts in helping return the network back to working order including pitching up to help with the clean-up and to support our communities that have been severely affected.

The situation is changing all the time and therefore services are likely to be disrupted with last minute alterations. Customers are advised to check their journey before travelling on nationalrail.co.uk or journeycheck.com/tfwrail/

If rail infrastructure were devolved, Welsh Government would be in a position to adapt more quickly to extreme weather events, and with that in mind we will continue to push for further devolution. We will continue to work with our partners to identify ways to make our transport system more resilient to these type of events. The £25m funding we have earmarked in the 2020/21 financial year for this type of intervention will allow us to start the change needed. However, reflecting on the extent of the impact recent events have had on our transport services, it is clear that substantial funding over a number of years will be required, if we are to address the challenges we all face from climate change. We expect UK Government to address this in the forthcoming budget.