

SARPA Newsletter No.23

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Steam at Aberystwyth: No.76079 on the Cambrian Coast Express of Saturday May 18th. Photo: Eddie Drinkwater

From the Editor

Firstly, apologies for referring, in my column in the last issue, to Wales and West, when I should have said Wales and Borders.

Both travelling recently, and also seeing and meeting passengers (sorry, customers) off trains, one gets the impression of well patronised trains, running to time, and an air of optimism for the line. The provision of the extra locomotive-hauled train, for a large holiday party, has also added to this upbeat feeling.

I hope that this will continue: the postponement, or even abandonment, of the Dovey loop scheme is a disappointment. We both need an hourly service, and better connections to the coast line from Aberystwyth, and the loop is vital for this.

Chairman's Message

Once more we seem to be fighting against at best, disinterest, and at worst open hostility towards regional rail lines like ours. Apart from the oh-so predictable right wing crackpots and their "reports", the most disappointing aspect is what is happening from within the rail industry and namely from the SRA. Though not being shouted from the rooftops the bidders for the Wales & Borders franchise are being asked by the SRA basically to bid for a "base" level of service. Namely this base level is satisfying the Passenger Service Requirement or what we in the real world would call BR's 1995 timetable. The safeguard built in at privatisation to stop private TOC's cutting back on what BR was running seems to be perpetuated and continued ever onwards. A minimum level of service is fine in theory, until you realise that all OPRAF did at the time was set in stone the final BR timetable, which as we all know was a product of a run down industry, passenger unfriendly and designed to cut costs.

We all know that there are many inadequacies in the timetable currently run on our line, yet this is what the SRA want the new franchise holder to continue with. Pretending that this sort of level of service is fit for a modern transport system in the 21st Century is indeed ludicrous. Why do we need to go through this convoluted and over-

long franchise process if the end result is more of the same?

When tackled on why the strategic plan does not cater for improvements in the regions, the reasons that we are given are that the vast majority of rail use is in the South East of England: seven out of ten journeys start or finish in London, and therefore investment should be concentrated there. Any demurring or questioning of this is then backed up by the retort that the majority of subsidy is given to regional routes already, so we already have more than our fair share. Therefore new money should go where it's most needed - to the "neglected" southeast. A compelling argument? Hardly.

It doesn't take a genius to work out why rail use is greater in the southeast than elsewhere: for a start there is still a comprehensive network of lines and stations; services start early in the morning and finish late at night on all routes; services are more frequent and have greater capacity. In other words the network is relevant to the population. Compare this with Mid Wales, with a decimated network (both lines and stations), an infrequent service, low capacity and fewer operating hours. The result is that people don't see it as relevant. However we all know that the potential is there. How many friends, relatives, colleagues and other people do you know of that have

tried rail and found aspects wanting? Though they want to use rail more they feel it's not attractive enough to them. Why should people outside the south-east be penalised for not flocking to the railways when the railway on offer to them is substandard? If the same sort of railway was on offer they would use it. Yes the southeast needs investment too, but not at the expense of everywhere else.

Another aspect from the seven out of ten argument that doesn't wash is when you take into account travelling to London from the regions. Take the Marches line; the timetable is constructed around connections at Newport for London as c25% of the line's users travel to and from London. How exactly does not investing in the Marches line help these passengers? Similar sorts of figures about London travellers could be used on most lines, but would it not be more accurate to say that four out of ten passengers start or finish their journey somewhere outside of the southeast? The whiff of spin is all too detectable with the seven out of ten argument.

As Paul Salevseon's Transport Research and Information Network pointed out in their response to the Institute of Directors report, the "subsidy" given to regional rail routes is in fact one hell of a good spend as it keeps traffic off unsuitable rural roads, cuts congestion, helps promote social inclusion and is environmentally friendly.

Though it may not feel like it riding on your Pacer/Sprinter you're part of a success story. Consider the alternatives if that service was not there. This reminds me of the time when I studied military theory. The great generals throughout history like Alexander, Wellington and Napoleon were all shown to have been ultimately successful by reinforcing local victories on the battlefield. In other words the key to success was to reinforce success. A point that is drilled in to all officer recruits to this day. This point needs to be rammed home to some captains of the rail industry.

Far from being a millstone around our necks, the money given to regional railways needs to be viewed in a different context, and attitudes need to be changed and drastically. Every penny spent in supporting regional rail services is money well spent, with many positive outcomes for the wider economy and environment. Fossilising the network outside the southeast will eventually lead to transport failure and economic stagnation as our over reliance on road vehicles is already starting to show. Do we really want to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory?

Gareth Marston
Newtown, July, 2002.

Electronic Mail

As well as boasting our own website- www.shrewsbury-to-aberystwyth.org.uk a lot of external correspondence is now done by e-mail in line with what the business world is up to. We have found it a useful way to communicate with members in-between meetings and newsletters. So far several of us regularly correspond. It has proved very useful in the recent consultations with the bidders for the Wales & Border franchise in drafting up our presentation and organising members to attend meetings. If people would like to join this network then please contact the Chairman, Gareth Marston at tanygraig@breathemail.net

News in brief

Birmingham New St.

Tickets barriers are to be reintroduced permanently, after a recent six week barrier trial found that 7% of all passengers arriving at New St did not have a valid ticket. An overnight increase in revenue is sitting there waiting to be had. At last the rail industry seems to be waking up to it.

Shrewsbury.

Likewise Wales & Borders are going to trial barriers at Shrewsbury station again for a trial three month period. Management admits that Shrewsbury leaks revenue out of it. With the best will in the world on busier services the conductors can't always collect every fare, especially from Welshpool. This is compounded by those that board at Newtown ticketless, despite the presence of Newtown Station Travel, and try it on.

Welshpool

Non rail users hogging the car park at Welshpool are also in for a shock, with a private contractor based at Shrewsbury due to regularly patrol the station car park. Despite Mid Wales having the cheapest car parking around - try going to London - there are still free loaders who think it's their god-given right to park for nothing and hang the consequences. Rail users have missed trains because of being unable to park in at Welshpool in the past.

Newtown

Phase One of the station redevelopment is complete.

Passenger Information System.

Replacing the automated and often inaccurate current system has been promised by Wales & Borders. In the near future the button should link through to an actual person at

Machynlleth station with up to date information!

Machynlleth.

Welcome to Nigel and Susan McNeilly who have opened up "The Sidings" Coffee Shop in the station. The much welcomed coffee shop will open from 0800 till 2000 on Sundays and during the school holidays, otherwise normal hours will be between 0800 and 1700 Monday to Saturday.

Aberystwyth.

Remember that there is engineering work scheduled for the weekend of the 14/15 September, and that buses will replace trains as far as Machynlleth.

How much does it cost to rebuild a closed railway line?

Of interest to many especially in Ceredigion. The most recent estimates for the rebuilding of the Northern section of the Waverley route from Edinburgh to Carlisle show that the first 35 miles could be reinstated for £80 Million. This would be double track and capable of carrying intermodal freight traffic. That's £2 ¼ Million per mile for a heavily engineered main line; you could probably knock at least a million a mile off for single track routes.

The single track line from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth at 56 miles would probably attract a similar price tag to the Waverley route, however much is

dependent on how much damage to the trackbed has occurred in the intervening years – the Waverley route is apparently remarkably intact.

Still the important question is what is the cost of not rebuilding the line?

Route Crime.

This is the new name for what was known as Trespass & Vandalism. As responsible rail users we should all do our best to help the railway fight against this menace, which literally costs the industry millions of pounds a year, which could be better, spent elsewhere.

British Transport Police (BTP) have a freephone number which can be used to report any suspicious happening on or around the railway. It's 0800 40 50 40.

Route Crime is a significant source of delays and late running contributing its part to our appalling reliability last year must have been Wellington (Shropshire) which has been ranked sixth in the UK league of vandalism hotspots for 2001/2002.

Stop Press.....*SARPA has recently been mentioned twice by Simon Thomas MP during Parliamentary debate in Westminster...*

A reply from the Secretary of State for Transport, responding to an invitation to address our Annual General Meeting.

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Department for Transport

Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON SW1E 5DU

Dear Miss Jones

The Secretary of State has asked me to thank you for requesting him to appear as guest speaker at SARPA's Annual General Meeting on Saturday 7 September in Aberystwyth. However, due to heavy diary commitments he will not be able to attend but he wishes your association every success on their work representing the interests of passengers using the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line.

The Government's aims are to increase the use of the railway by passengers and freight, to provide new capacity, and to improve the quality of service to customers. Key steps towards the creation of a bigger and better railway were taken with the Transport Act 2000, which set up the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and provides for more effective regulation of the industry by the SRA and the Rail Regulator, and substantial additional resources in the 10-Year Transport Plan.

The SRA under its chairman, Richard Bowker, will provide the strong leadership needed for the industry. Their Strategic Plan, published on 14 January, sets out a series of measures to improve Britain's rail network and ensure the Government's growth targets set out in the 10-Year Transport Plan are met.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Graham
(Private Secretary)

The Dovey Loop

You may recall a while back there was some discussion vis a viz John Curley's comments (Director Railtrack Great Western Zone) on the Dyfi loop project. I have cut and pasted the relevant passage from the minutes of the RPC meeting in Llandrindod Wells in May beneath in italics. The last sentence is the most revealing indicating that the partnership (WDA, Ceredigion CC, Powys CC, National Assembly etc) had not signed any contracts or transferred any funds at the time of Railtrack going into administration, October 2001 despite the project being announced in December 1999.

Mr Curley advised that he was unclear of how much work had been done on Dovey Junction. At the time the Cambrian Line was transferred to Great Western from Midlands Zone, which was June/July 2001, the agreed process was that Midland would continue the schemes that were being developed and at a suitable break point Great Western would take over. The reality is that at the time of administration Railtrack had ceased to work on enhancement schemes where there is no clear sponsor and funding package.

Locomotive hauled to Aberystwyth

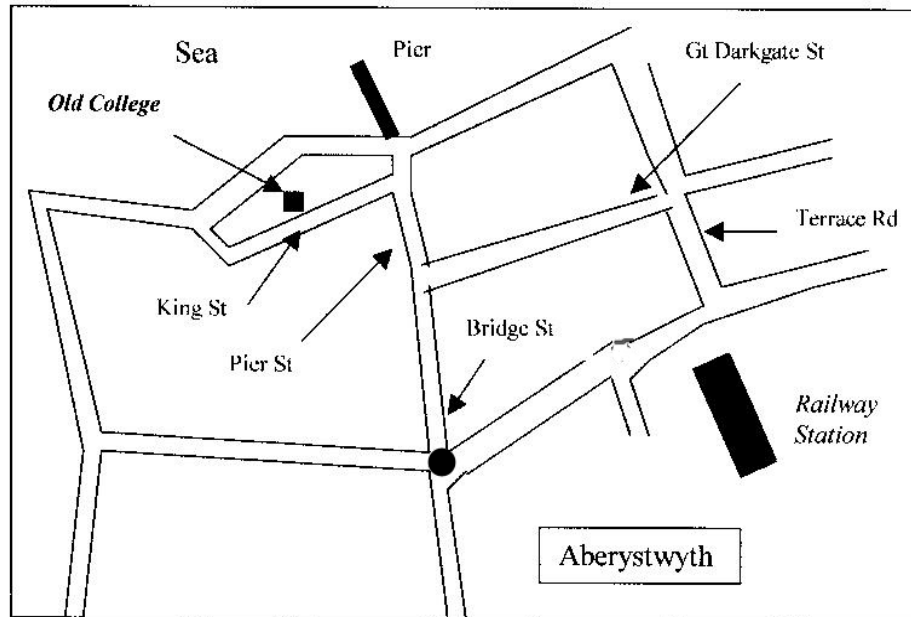
For many years, a Jewish holiday group has come to the university in Aberystwyth, using both public and private transport, many, of course, travelling by train.

Owing to the numbers pre-booking, it became evident that severe overcrowding would have resulted unless extra capacity was provided. Collaboration between Virgin Trains, EWS, Railtrack, Riviera Trains and Wales & Borders resulted in an extra train being provided, leaving Wolverhampton at 1550 on Monday, the 22nd July, running non-stop via the Abbey Foregate curve, and arriving in Aberystwyth at 1840. As the train was

open to the public, about 30 railway enthusiasts took advantage of this unusual working. The return empty stock left Aberystwyth after the 1945 up train, having been stabled in the loop there after the engine ran round. A return working is envisaged for Monday the 5th August.

Eight coaches of Mark 2 stock were provided, hauled by an E.W & S. Railway Class 37, No.37421.

Rumour had it that the train might have formed the regular 1724 arrival in Aberystwyth. However, this would have necessitated a locomotive run round at Shrewsbury.



The AGM: the Old College, Aberystwyth, Saturday 7th September, 1330.

The Guest Speaker will be Paul Harley, Chair of the Rail Passenger Committee for Wales.

The map above shows the centre of Aberystwyth, and the position of the Old College in relation to the station. The Old College building has links to the railway: it was built by the railway contractor, Thomas Savin, as a hotel, to open when the railway reached Aberystwyth. Savin went bankrupt before the hotel was completed, and it became the first building of the new university college for Wales.



22nd July 2002. Class 37 No.37421 heads empty stock past Borth, after working an overload train to Aberystwyth (see separate item).

Out of the Blue?

Proving that transport dinosaur thinking from the 1950's/1960's is still alive and kicking today are two examples that have occurred quite recently.

Telford & Wrekin council's own scheme to set up a freight terminal at Donnington on the truncated remains of the Wellington to Stafford line has been vehemently opposed- from within the council. The opposition Conservative group have screamed loudly that the case for rail freight is unproven. The road haulage sector in the UK still remains the most heavily subsidised part of Western European industry. I suppose too many vested interests are at stake.

At a recent meeting of TAIH- the North Wales Economic Forum, Assembly Mem-

bers were quizzing a somewhat clueless First Minister Rhodri Morgan about transport links between North and South Wales. The general consensus was that only a vastly improved rail service could significantly benefit business and leisure users from North Wales. However the Welsh Conservative leader Nicholas Bourne broke ranks and presented a shopping list of bypasses along the A483 & A470 roads through Mid Wales. Clearly Nicholas likes his driving and wishes more people to share in his experiences of being stuck behind lorries in ever slower moving traffic. Bypasses only encourage more road users and after a short time other stretches of road become more congested as a result.

Some useful phone numbers.

British Transport Police.	0800	40 50 40
Newtown Station Travel	01686	621966
Rail Passengers Council for Wales	029	2022 7247
Wales & Borders Customer Services	08456	061 660
National Rail Enquires	08457	48 49 50
Welsh Language	0845	60 40 500

League Tables

The Government is very keen on league tables e.g. exam results, hospital death rates, etc. Here is a league table of responses to SARPA's invitation to politicians to attend the 2002 AGM.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Attendance</i>
Simon Thomas	Ceredigion MP Plaid Cymru	Immediate acceptance	Yes
Lembit Opik	Montgomeryshire MP Liberal Democrat	Immediate, enthusiastic acceptance; confirmation after 6 weeks	Yes
Nicholas Bourne	Assembly Member; Conservative	Polite, supportive reply after 5 days	No
Alistair Darling	Transport Secretary Labour	Polite, supportive reply after two weeks	No
Paul Murphy	Welsh Secretary Labour	Curt, dismissive reply after 6 weeks	No
Sue Essex	Assembly Member responsible for Transport Labour	No reply	No
Stephen Byers	Invited while still Transport Secretary Labour	No reply	No

The special overload train of the 22nd July. No.37421 runs round her train at Aberystwyth. The coach livery is not the old British Rail blue and grey, but is a darker, royal blue



Welshpool Station

On the evening of Wednesday 3rd July SARPA organised a meeting with Wales & Borders at Welshpool station to discuss the various niggles associated with using it.

Present were

Tony O'Donovan. Line Manager W & B.

Phil Jackson. Highways Dept Powys County Council.

John Gwilt. Mayor of Welshpool.

Several SARPA members though not myself. Ivor Morris was our main spokesman.

Brief summary of the feedback, which all felt was positive, was as follows;

- * The ongoing problems reference the "ownership" of the lights on the footbridge/ramp took a new twist when Tony O'Donovan produced the original Welsh Office deeds to the rebuilding of the station. Two of the lights on the ramp, previously thought to be the rail-ways responsibility turned out to be PCC's. The same two that have not been working for ages.

- * Non rail users hogging the car park. An attendant from Shrewsbury belonging to private contractor will be at Welshpool every Monday for three months to discourage farmers and office workers after parking for free.

- * Phil Jackson offered that PCC could monitor and look after parking meter at station if installed. TO'D not keen on introducing car parking fees though.

- * Passenger Information System. At some stage in next few weeks entire Cambrian PIS will be linked up to Machynlleth station where it will be answered by W & B staff.

- * SARPA expressed need for point in car park as well as on platform due to excessive distance to travel between these two points. TO'D to consider.

- * Station to be repainted shortly.

- * Timetable on platform to be relocated to bypass/town side so can be read when dark.

TO'D mentioned that "doing a Welshpool" i.e. disadvantaging rail users so a road can be built is not allowed now. He cited Llandeilo as example where permission to relocate station to make way for bypass has been refused. Is this correct?

Also barriers are to be reintroduced at Shrewsbury station for three months. TO'D acknowledged that their literally leaking revenue there at moment. Experiment at Birmingham New St showed that in six weeks extra £200K collected, barriers to be reintroduced permamaently, estimated 7% trying to travel without tickets.

There is no revenue flow showing for Welshpool to Newtown advised TO'D that this on our experience is collection problem.

Gareth

SARPA: www.shrewsbury-to-Aberystwyth.org.uk

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS 2002

The venues and times are as follows: we meet where access by rail is practical.

Tuesday 6 th August	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Saturday 7 th September (Note also AGM)	The Old College	Aberystwyth	1330
Tuesday 1 st October	Royal Oak Hotel	Welshpool	1915
Tuesday 5 th November	Bell Hotel	Newtown	1900
Saturday 7 th December	Wynnstay Hotel	Machynlleth	1300

Contributions from people who can't attend are more than welcome.

OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

The current officers for the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association (SARPA) are as follows:

Chairman: Gareth Marston: 31 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Powys. SY16 2LQ. 01686-625716. E-mail: tanygraig@breathemail.net

Treasurer: Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Rd, Welshpool, Powys. SY21 7QB. 01938-554463

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3QQ. Tel. 01970-617667. E-mail deb@aber.ac.uk

Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation
Representative: Roger Goodhew: 12 Granville St, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY3 8NE. Tel. 01743 358873.