

SARPA Newsletter No.25

Chairman's Message

Inside this issue:

Chairman's Message	1
Chris Gibb leaves for Virgin	3
News of the Line	3
September RPC Meeting	5
The AGM	6
An earlier westbound Train?	10
Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth liaison Committee	12
Some silly arguments	13
Welshpool to Shrewsbury, an update, 1st October 2002	14
Meetings, and Officers of the Association	16

What vision is it and who's stating the truth? Do you believe the evidence of your own eyes: of a rail system that has seen some tangible improvements and is crying out for additional investment to increase service frequency and the number of coaches on existing services to accommodate the number of people who are increasingly turning to rail, as an alternative to the now bankrupt roads and cars for all philosophy. Or is it the government in Westminster who cry and moan that the existing rail network and services are just far too expensive to run, and we should forget improvements and be thankful with what we have, as no one in Wales uses the train anyway?

In its response to the Welsh Select Committees recent report on transport in Wales the government apologised for raising the expectation of the travelling public about the Wales and Borders franchise when it was first announced in

2000. The spin is that we should all lower our expectations for rail. However is it an unreasonable and uncostered wish list or aspiration to have services that run when you want to use them, a sufficient number of carriages on your train, connections at junctions, true integrated transport with through ticketing and readily available information? These are not pie in the sky train freaks wishes but rather the basics of public transport that many of our European neighbours enjoy as standard practice. If they can afford and achieve this why the hell can't we? Tony Blair's government has proved despite its rhetoric that it's no better than its predecessors. New Labour must accept its share of the responsibility for the mess the UK rail network is in, blaming previous administrations for under investing (including Labour ones) won't wash after six years in power.

Darling and his chums must get their act together and quick, blaming the rail industry and crying about rising costs is not going to deliver a modern transport system that befits the UK's status. The current cost crises has many underlying causes, the build up of a huge backlog of maintenance exacerbated under Rail-

track, the structure of the industry itself created at privatisation has led to many costs to rise such as staff pay with many different private companies all siphoning off money at every level to pay a myriad of executives and shareholders. Inane Health and Safety standards that require huge sums to be chucked at so called safety measures that actually result in little or no real benefit. Most of these could and should have been avoided and can still be turned round if the effort is there.

All is not lost one solution is getting control of the rail network out of the hands of the London based bureaucrats with their clueless approach who seemingly plan to fail. There are many examples littered all over Europe where regional parliaments have been given control over rail services in their area resulting in noticeable improvements to services, increased passenger number and falling financial support from central government. The Richard Commission is currently investigating the scope of the powers that the Assembly should have, high on the list should be the transfer of powers over the railways in Wales to the Assembly.

I say this not from a narrow minded nationalist approach but because this is what the Germans, French, Spanish etc all do and run regional rail better than in the UK. The Assembly has shown a different vision to Westminster and provided money for the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan and the Ebbw Vale lines it has allocated money for a reinstated passing loop at Dyfi Junction which would allow a greater frequency train service for us, but because it has no powers to direct the rail industry it could not make the industry do the work. In all likelihood if the Assembly had powers over the railways in Wales we would today have an enhanced service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury and not be talking about it. The excuse given from London is that Cardiff can't direct rails service because so many Welsh service run deep into England. Ask the people of the border counties whether they share London's vision for their rails services or would they like to be part of a successful regional consortium. I doubt very much that they are happy with the status quo.

London's vision is holding our transport network back; the dead hand of Westminster must be removed from our rail network.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, April 2003

Chris Gibb leaves for Virgin

Chris Gibb has recently left Wales & Borders to join Virgin Cross Country.

Our Chairman has sent him the following message:

All at SARPA would like to give their best wishes to you & family and wish every success to your new adventure with Virgin XC. The Cambrian is a different place (for the better) since you got your hands on it 18 months ago!

Chris has replied as follows:

Thank you Gareth. I've thoroughly enjoyed my involvement with the Cambrian.

www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian

This website is on the Cambrian Rail Cruise - the circular trip of North Wales and the Borders by train. It has train times, fares information and a guide to the route.

NEWS OF THE LINE

Wales and Borders franchise bidding.

The Strategic Rail Authorities bidding process continues to slip more than the Leyland Railbus trial unit did coming up Talerddig bank in the early 1980's. Publicly they're sticking to announcing their winner at the end of April 03 and the franchise starting proper in October 03. However National Express Group has revealed it only submitted its Best and Final Offer (BAFO) on the 7th April!

Denmark

Putting in an early candidate for totally avoidable cock up of the Century are

our Scandinavian cousins. Taking leave of their senses the centre right government decided to privatise their state railways following the British model which is widely cited as how not to do things around the rail industry in Europe. Services in Jutland then immediately descended into complete chaos with driver shortages and cancellations, the franchise runner involved – UK firm Arriva who are frighteningly short-listed for the Wales and Borders franchise, a portent of things to come?

Shrewsbury

The traditional style signalling is to continue into the foreseeable future with no date to modernise or replace

it finding its way into Network Rails Business plan for 2003. This also puts a question mark over reinstating to full operational use Platform 3, which is becoming increasingly needed to help with congestion at the station. Currently the platform can only be used for trains arriving from/departing to Chester.

Welshpool

Good news – The National Assembly Government's recent £2.5 million grant to improve station facilities includes money for a project to build a small structure at Welshpool capable of accommodating a ticket office and staff rest facilities.

Bad news- the lights on the ramp are now into their third year of not working, with early April seeing the platform lights fail as well to rub salt into the wounds.

Cilgwarn

The crossing between Abermule and Newtown alongside the A483 has finally had its speed restriction lifted. An on-time departure from Welshpool now sees the train sitting in the platform at Newtown waiting the time-tabled departure time.

Newtown

Is where it's happening at the moment. The old goods shed has been demolished to make way for a dedicated station car park and space is being pro-

vided for buses only to run past the site and down to Croesawaddy house. This will see a vast improvement in integrated transport for Powys's largest town. The station is also receiving a lick of paint at the moment including the buffer stops in the Down bay.

The middle section of the station building is currently being done up to make a continental style Café bar which promises to have live jazz music and serve tapas. *Café loco* as it is will be known has initially stated that it will open from 0600 to 2300 therefore being of benefit to passengers awaiting trains.

On the downside (pardon the pun) residents living in the Treowen estate have complained of increased noise from the railway following the felling of trees bordering the station. The recent engineering trains running through at midnight were not entirely welcomed.

Caersws

The replacement of the old manually operate level crossing gates in the village and at Llanidloes road are not even on the radar with Network Rail, who are concentrating on the unmanned crossing for upgrading and replacement. Three potential sites between Welshpool and Machynlleth are due to be abolished providing funding can be found from Powys County Council and the Assembly Government towards the cost.

Project Inform

The installation of the real time passenger information system was well advanced in early April with only Welshpool, Newtown and Caersws still to have it installed.

Machynlleth

The old guards van, a familiar site at the eastern extremity of the station for a number of years has been removed by road and ended up with a preserved railway in England.

The RETB signalling system will receive a life extension refit in 2005/2006 if Regional ERTMS has not been fitted by then.

Dyfi Junction loop

Network Rail, though not committing themselves to the scheme have men-

tioned it in their latest business plan. A reliable hourly service is not considered viable without an additional two or three loops with these dependent on the current RETB signalling being replaced.

Aberystwyth

The line between Dovey Junction and Aberystwyth benefited from renewals taking place over a period of several weeks in the spring, including a week long possession.

Cambrian Residents Railcard

The railcard for local residents only was introduced in March. A third can be saved off most fares between Shrewsbury, Aberystwyth and Pwllheli for an outlay of £5.00.

TR&IN ON LINE

From: TR&IN ON LINE

The electronic newsletter of Transport Research and Information Network and the Association of Community-Rail Partnerships (ACoRP)
paul@thecarriage.freeserve.co.uk

websites: www.platform8.demon.co.uk and www.acorp.uk.com

ACoRP's annual event is in Shrewsbury, on **Friday June 27th**. The theme will be 'Railways and sustainable development' and will take place at the Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury. Speakers will include Adrian Lyons, director-general of the Railway Forum, and representatives of national organisations involved in different aspects of sustainable development. On the Saturday there'll be a special programme taking in Gobowen's excellent independently-run station booking office, the Llangollen Railway and other attractions in the Welsh Borders.

Scottish trains for Mid Wales.

From October the Cambrian System will have its ex Central Trains Class 158's replaced by ScotRail Class 158's. As part of a swap around of resources amongst National Express Group franchises. Our green ex Central Trains units will go back to Central. The units sent down from Scotland will be the same age as the current ones having been introduced in the early 1990's and used extensively on Regional Railways Alphasine express on the Glasgow-Edinburgh-Aberdeen triangle and more recently on other services as they have been displaced by Class 170's ordered by ScotRail and backed by the Scottish Parliament.

Their first winter may see a prolonged refurbishment program as they are still fitted with their original air conditioning units which will need replacing and will probably be repainted with the new Wales and Borders livery at the same time.

Additional coach link service

Starting Monday, 19th May and running to 27th September

Monday to Friday : 0825 Aberystwyth - Machynlleth coach link, arriving Machynlleth 0855 and connecting into the 0908 Machynlleth - Pwllheli, offering a day trip opportunity to places such as Barmouth (arr 1001), Harlech (arr 1027), Minffordd (for Portmerion and Ffestiniog Railway) (arr 1042) and Portmadog (1047). A good return train connection departs Porthmadog 1517, Minffordd 1521, Harlech 1537, Barmouth 1600, connecting at Dovey Junction 1642 - 1658 for Aberystwyth (arr 1720).

Saturday : the coach link departs from Aberystwyth at 0800 connecting into the 0842 from Machynlleth to the Cambrian Coast. A return connection operates similar to the rest of the week.

Rail Passengers' Council meeting of last September

From the RPC: MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE Tuesday 24th & Wednesday 25th September 2002

An incident on the Cambrian Lines in June, when TPWS equipment failed, the faulty train had been allowed to run empty to the depot, yet passengers had been de-trained and transferred to a less safe form of alternative road transport was highlighted. There were examples where other rail companies had sought derogations from blanket regulations and the example of TPWS failure could act as a test case.

Mr Clarke thought it perverse that TPWS failed on a line where TPWS was not present. Mr Gibb asked why should the railway industry lower its standards to those of other industries although he agreed relaxed rules for the rural railway. Mr Williams reiterated the TPWS incident highlighted a desire to safeguard rail safety and protecting Train Company's safety at the behest of passengers safety. In suggesting the correspondence be sent to Mr Clarke, Mr Williams referred to the three train operating companies who had sought derogation on the use of cup and cone and these derogations could be applied to other issues on the railway. The HSE should take such alternative risks into account. Mr Gibb concluded that a train company's Railway Safety Case only applied on the railway.

Mr Gibb suggested it was only a small number of regular trains, which suffered from overcrowding. On Cambrian Lines improvements, he praised depot staff at Machynlleth for their efforts on maintenance. The success involving the Hassidic Jews had been down to the industry working together and was evidence of growing passenger numbers on the Cambrian routes.

Work to introduce the passing loop at Dovey Junction was still progressing. The best hope might be in the adoption of the Cambrian Lines for trialling ERTMS and Mr Gibb reaffirmed his volunteering of staff to test ERTMS and had discussed with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) the possibility of securing funding to increase the number of passing loops on the line.

From the RPC Wales meeting in December

Wales & Borders.

- Barriers to remain at Shrewsbury perhaps even permanent ones.
- Project Inform installed in Shrewsbury soon will roll out west and be complete by end of April.
- Cambrian Punctuality 87.9% last recorded period (2nd best in W&B) moving yearly average now at 85%.
- Chris Gibb said summer plans same as last year in terms of amount of stock being brought in. Where from question mark negotiating with other NEG TOC's may not be CT units. Mach staff received praise in public.
- Barmouth Tourist information Office will be relocated into Barmouth Station buildings will be able to sell tickets plans advanced.
- Sunday service in February due to engineering works will be routed via Crewe, Stafford and WCML(!!) bus replacement not considered due to heavy loadings. Lengthened journey time between Wolves and Salop please check before you travel.
- Rebranding of 158 fleet into W & B house colours (silver) due by end of 03. Possibility of some advertising liveries i.e Celtica on one unit.
- Phase 2 of Newtown Station scheme construction due to start Spring 03.
- St David's day launch for Cambrian Coast line residents railcard.
- ERTMS trial for Coast still being advanced.

Network Rail

- Network Rail Great Western has enough budget next year to close some level crossings with the ones recently installed with temporary keepers being on the hit list namely Cilgwrgan, Llanbrynmair and Old Chapel.
 - Llanidloes Road and Caersws though still manually operated are not prioritised as they have good safety record.

Part 1

As well as the usual reports from all the industry players concerning Wales this session was dominated by three big subjects namely Virgin XC cuts, Millennium Stadium and the SRA's proposed 10% or 20% franchise subsidy reductions.

Interesting points aside from above issues were:

Network Rail

- Network Rail Great Western has enough budget next year to close some level crossings with the ones recently installed with temporary keepers being on the hit list namely Cilgwrgan, Llanbrynmair and Old Chapel.
 - Llanidloes Road and Caersws though still manually operated are not prioritised as type have good safety record.
 - Climate Change was well discussed with flooding problems, precipitation in the Thames Valley is up c35% in last decade apparently.
 - John Curly (Zone director) spoke of problems of Reading area maintenance contract coming back in-house as Network Rail has to recruit staff to do it!

First Great Western

- Kinchen-Smith (New MD) very impressive has firm grip on things lot of management lead improvement schemes evident since his takeover.
- Merger with Thames/Wessex very much on cards FGW team talking very confidently of plans for improvements when this happens i.e benefits of segregating commuter and long distance services between Paddington and Reading.
- Proposed new HST replacement will be more like a proper train than anything Virgin has on offer. Coaches similar to Mk3 and engines at each end not underfloor.

Wessex Trains

- Half Stroud Valley services have been dumped on them following Virgins withdrawal from route.
- Persisting with Loco hauled services on Cardiff-Brighton route at own cost not seeking subsidy.

Central Trains

- Anyone want to swap a 156? CT getting rid of all 20 156's looking to swap them for 158/170's with other TOC's (ScotRail favourite?). Part of route utilisation strategy getting 75mph stock off of lines where they run with 125mph stock.
- Cardiff to Nottingham services will be just that no more extensions out east, also as compensation for Virgin will all be diagrammed for three car 158's

(reforming sub class again) or 170's. In effect four units down overall question where will Cambrian Summer strengtheners come from?

First North Western

- Have seconded manger to W & B to smooth over transition of N Wales services.

British Transport Police

- Machynlleth post advertised internally no takers! Supt McHugh reevaluating options.

Wales & Borders.

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A GOOD TRAIN JOURNEY: SHREWSBURY TO LONDON AND RETURN FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 2003

An annual meeting in the Regent's Park area from 10:00 to 16:30 hrs in late January. In 2003, wintry weather affected eastern England and parts of the Midlands. Black ice had been widespread on the previous day. In addition, an area of intermittent snow had extended southwards down the east coast of England. The forecast was for more snow in south-east England early on Friday.

The 0530 CT departed normally for Wolverhampton ETA 0615. [When on time it is just possible to catch the 0619 VT ex Wolves for Bham NS and London Euston *and / or* the 0622 Centro ex Wolves "green stopper" for Galton Br (0637), Bham NS and Coventry] This time the CT train was c.7 mins late into Wolves so the next connection to Bham was 0633 CT ex Wolves which departed normally ETA Bham New St 0651.

In central Birmingham pavements were clear so the 15 minute walk between the platforms at New Street and Snow Hill via Victoria Square and Colmore Row went OK. The 0714 Chiltern was at platform 2 waiting to depart for London Marylebone ETA 0928. [This train is the 0621 ex Kidderminster which also calls at Galton Bridge at 0649]. We arrived three minutes early at Marylebone after a comfortable journey - aided by at-seat trolley service and no-fuss one class travel.

In London journey planning eliminates the need for tube travel by choosing the best rail terminus and travelling light enough to allow for up to 45 minutes walk. On this occasion, it was a delight walking across a snow- and ice-bound Regent's Park. The walkways were impassable even on foot, but the 'grass' was covered in about an inch of crisp snow so careful walking for 30 minutes achieved the destination. It was creepy crossing the deserted A41 at 0930: the traffic must have been jammed up somewhere. It turned out that the M11 had had stationary traffic on the previous evening.

Chiltern Railways marshal passengers at Marylebone so trains leave on time. I watched the 1657 leave for Birmingham SH (1905) and Kidderminster (with its trolley) on time. The 1711 Chiltern train to Birmingham Snow Hill (no trolley as expected) departed on time, and arrived at Snow Hill on time at 1939.

On arrival at New Street, Wales & Borders train is found in platform [2,3,11 or 12]; c. 2003 it departs for Shrewsbury. It is in fact the 1934 ex New Street delayed for 'traincrew' [This train is frequently delayed; it does not go on to Chester or to Aberystwyth after Shrewsbury; it seems to run any time between the Centro "green stoppers" which are timetabled to leave NS at 1938 and 2011 for Wolverhampton]. Arrival in Shrewsbury is soon after 2100.

The total time on the train was 7 hours 15 minutes; the time in London 7

hours 30 minutes.

An alternative route would have been via Crewe to Euston using the W&B 0650 from Shrewsbury, and a Virgin fast service reaching London at 0947. However, this would have been too late for a 1000 meeting.

Roger Goodhew

Bustitution

Simply put "bustitution" is the replacement of train services by a bus or "luxury express coach" as its proponents would say. They claim it is a cheaper and more effective method of providing public transport than rail especially in rural areas. Transport Secretary Alaister Darling if rumours are to be believed is a closet bustitution fan.

History: its not a new idea many of line closed in the Beeching era had a replacement bus service provided instead as part of the deal. Over the years as pro rail campaigners became more aware, organised and formulated their arguments the case against bus replacement has become strong and well documented. Perhaps the most famous instance of bus substitution being knocked down was the public inquiry in to the proposal to close the coast line in 1972. The replacement bus service proposed was so ludicrously inferior it was the central plank in the inquiries recommendation that the line stay open. There have been many attempts at rail closure since the Beeching era the Serpell Report (early 80's) and more recently the 1999 suggestion by the bus companies that won the Wales & West franchise at privatisation to replace trains with buses. Each time the proposals have come to nothing. Indeed one can ask why they keep trying as each time they get knocked back.

The basic arguments against bustitution are:

People won't use it: one of the main arguments against bus replacement services is that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that when trains are replaced by buses the passengers that formerly went by rail do not decant to the bus services.

The evidence being:

- Beeching era rail replacement services soon died out as virtually no one used them. Former rail passengers either did not travel or choose private motor cars.

- When the rail network publishes that bus replacements will run due to engineering works it is well documented that passenger numbers dip during these periods.
- Coach travel is not the preferred mode of travel for all but the few. National Express runs one lightly loaded bus a day from Aberystwyth to London. The vast majority choose car or rail . If coach travel was so attractive then why don't more people already use it?

Why are coaches less attractive? Over longer distances there is a trade off as coaches are less comfortable than trains and don't have the privacy of your own car. Journey times are also uncompetitive. For instance Arriva Buses D75 Llanidloes to Shrewsbury service takes an hour and forty four minutes to travel from Shrewsbury to Caersws compared to 55 minutes by train or an hour and ten by car.

Accepting that a replacement bus service will not attract the numbers of passengers on rail already let alone new ones a lot of dire consequences follow:

- The bus service will not stand alone but require subsidy to survive.
- More traffic will be forced onto the roads not just the coaches but all the cars that people will use instead. There then follows all the disadvantages and costs of road, congestion, pollution, police cost, NHS costs, cost to business of lost time, loss of life, loss of ability to earn due to injuries in RTA's, lower standard of living as families are forced to buy second car etc etc
- Many small business along the Welsh coast exist on a knife edge with a narrow margin between success and failure. If fewer people come to the coast because of the loss of the rail service then it could be the difference between survival and failure. Some simply won't travel because of the lack of a train, others will find the driving experience to awful and won't repeat it, existing road users will find the extra traffic off putting.

Impact on the local economy: as well as the potential loss of custom to small business the loss of a rail line will impact on jobs and multiplier effects in the local economy. Fewer people will be required to run the buses at a lot less pay. Railway staff earn a wage well above the local average in Mid Wales and are significant contributors to the local economy. The loss of their incomes will be hard felt.

Domino effect: around 10% of the traffic on the Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton line is destined for the Cambrian for instance the majority of this will be lost to rail if bustitution occurred. The first thing the operator of the line would do is to ask the SRA for more subsidy to cover the loss of income or cut back services.

Costs: a bus replacement service may require less subsidy than what Wales and Borders receives now but what actually happens is that the cost is shuffled around as other players ask for more money. The saved subsidy will soon disappear to lines still open to make up for loss of income, County Councils whose road repair bills will increase, the NHS, the Police. Social Services budget to areas whose economy has been ravaged, benefits payments and remember you won't be able to extract as much tax from these people if you take away their livelihoods.

Conclusion: far from being a "quick win" for public transport it is more of an "own goal". In all likelihood it will actually cost more than the current subsidy when all the costs are added up and fewer people will travel by public transport.

So why do it?

Teifi Valley Gala

The Teifi Valley Railway are pleased to announce that plans are well advanced for a 2003 GRAND GALA to commemorate their first 20 years of operation. To be held over the weekend of 19th and 20th July 2003, Many local and national traders have been invited to attend, offering a wide selection of railway memorabilia, books and models, all relating to railways. Owners of 7.25 inch locos are invited to contact the railway to arrange display of their locomotives, it is hoped that a running track will be available over the weekend. For further details on any aspect contact The Teifi Valley Railway on 01559 371077 or visit our website at www.teifivr.f9.co.uk

Useful Addresses

Wales & Borders Trains:

WB4, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Road, Cardiff CF24 0SU

Tel 0845 6061 660

Email: customer.services@walesandborderstrains.co.uk

RPC Wales:

Secretary, St. David's House, Wood Street, Cardiff CF10 1ES

Networkrail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London [WC1N 1BY](#)

Central Trains Limited

Central Trains Limited, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB

Tel. 0121 654 1200

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH

Tel. 0870 789 1234

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call:

0870 9000 773

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

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS. 2003

We meet on a monthly basis in public and occasionally have guest speakers. We will be inviting the candidates for the forthcoming Assembly elections from all the parties to our March and April meetings.

All are welcome please come along and discuss your concerns with the committee and other members.

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

June	Saturday 7 th	Railway Hotel	Borth	1115
July	Tuesday 1 st	Bell Hotel (Downstairs Function Room)	Newtown	1900
August	Tuesday 5 th	Red Lion	Caersws	1830
September	Saturday 6 th Also AGM	Wynnstay Hotel (Lloyd George Function Room)	Machynlleth	1315
October	Tuesday 7 th	Pinewood Tavern (Upstairs Function Room)	Welshpool	1915
November	Tuesday 4 th	Bell Hotel (Downstairs Function Room)	Newtown	1900
December	Saturday 6 th	Cambrian Hotel (Upstairs Function Room)	Aberystwyth	1130

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:

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