

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter No. 33

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Aberystwyth 1960: a pannier tank, No.7428, still in GWR livery.

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Chairman's Message

"They're British they're used to cuts"! Shouts Kenneth Williams' character the Khasi of Kalibar in the 1960's classic *Carry on Up the Khyber*. The SRA in its death throws seems to have taken this on board with service withdrawals and station closures back on the agenda with its "route utilisation strategies". Today's railway is costing the taxpayer £6.5 Billion a year, yet ATOC is warning that even modest growth cannot be coped with by the railway. The Treasury clearly wants to cut back on that support - after all the £20 Billion to fund ID cards has to be found from somewhere - and the answer from the SRA in its Route Utilisation Strategies is to cut services in order to save money. We all know that this is at odds with the reality of UK's failed transport system desperately needing an expanded railway to make a difference. Many believe that going back to the natural structure of railways - vertically Integrated - can produce a better railway. Costs will tumble too as the wasteful interfaces between fragmented sections of the industry and artificial "profit" taking on transactions is abolished.

The Government has been told and told again that Vertical Integration is a way out of the mess. You can have the same size railway for less money or hopefully use some of the savings to expand and build a better railway. Why then have they not listened and acted? Instead passengers are to be forced off services by the spectre of even higher fares than even now, and some areas will lose services and stations altogether all because common sense is not being applied.

I had a chat via E-mail with the respected Transport Journalist Christian Wolmar back in May, and asked him why the Government fails to re integrate the railway. His reply stated that he gets that asked a lot and what are my opinions?

So why doesn't Government act? (by the way he broadly agreed with my analysis)

1. The Whitehall Game

The Treasury has been traditionally "top dog" in Whitehall and even more so under Gordon Brown. Unfortunately they have a skeleton in their cupboard – they designed the disastrous rail privatisation model. If their cock-up were to be completely undone it would send out a message – the Treasury is not infallible. The individuals that perpetrated this have largely gone but their successors want to preserve their department's status in the Whitehall pecking order. The rail industry and the country's transport network can be hung out to dry as long as their status is preserved.

2. Ignorance

Unfortunately the majority of our politicians are in it: as individuals who want to run the country they are not there as specialists with knowledge of how the country or parts of it work. Their collective knowledge and experience of transport is very weak despite it being such an important facet of the UK's economy and people's lives. Witness how transport was swept under the carpet at the general election. The railway is not understood nor cared about sufficiently certainly within cabinet and the party hierarchies. The motivation/knowledge to act is lacking.

The opposition must bear some of the blame too as the state of the railways is a stick that could be used to beat the government's head with on a regular basis, their own ignorance means they can't drive this advantage home.

3. **A lack of a unified rail lobby**

The rail industry is chronically poor at lobbying as an industry: combine this with sections of it who are happy with the status quo, then inertia ensures. This contributes to the politicians' continued ignorance.

3. **Interests in preserving the status quo**

The big banks are hardly going to lobby to abolish the ROSCO's are they? In fact the opposite. Other private companies have done well for their shareholders out of today's railway: with a few notable exceptions shareholder interest is put ahead of the railway and the countries transport network.

It's not only companies that have "benefited" from the situation. Privatisation was accompanied by a rapid expansion of people at managerial grade as a multitude of new interfaces were created. This combined with the fact that a lot of experienced managers left the railway at privatisation has created a new generation of managers and senior managers with mortgages who may be fearful that structural change will impact on them personally.

4. **Arrogance**

All governments get arrogant: it's usually why they're voted out, however the length of time New Labour has been in power has breed complacency on top of this. Restructuring the rail industry was never on their agenda and they're not going to do it because a "bunch of train spotters" want them to, after all the "people" have voted them in three times on an agenda that didn't include the railways!

5. **Fear/ Political Cowardice**

As the current Railtrack Shareholders court case is showing the government didn't exactly cover itself in glory forcing it into administration. There is clearly a concern in government that this will backfire in their faces and it is putting them off any further actions.

6. **The fifth column**

Every rail supporter has long known that there is a strong anti-rail element in the Department for Transport and Treasury for that matter. What better way to do your enemy down than to keep it inefficient and cut its budget? This fifth column is actively trying to undermine the chances of the railway becoming efficient and being able to expand - this may result in a happier road lobby but ultimately it's doing the country down.

7. **The DfT had something else very big on the (semi hidden) agenda**

Road pricing. It's clear the battle to go with this was being fought long before the election within Government and the hierarchy of New Labour. The effort to put this on the agenda would have crowded out other issues.

8. **The marginalisation of old Labour**

Remember John Prescott? His heart seemed to be in the right place about the railways; however he like many other traditional Labour members have been increasingly pushed to the fringes of the New Labour Government and the railways have been tarred with that brush. Railways also have a lot of Union members who are also to be ignored.

9. **Back Bench Concerns**

As our old friend the SRA was so keen on pointing out the majority of rail use in this country is in the South East of England. No prizes for guessing the colour of their political representatives. Rail is less of a priority in Labour constituencies so less likely to be top of their agenda.

So not one reason but a mix of them. So what joy for the future? Transport Secretary Alaister Darling has now got his (public) hands full with road pricing. The predictable hysterical reaction of the road lobby will intensify and a lot of their effort will be diverted into fighting any road pricing system: this will of course include the fifth column. However the big battles of the road pricing war have already been settled within Government and they will have more time to attend to other issues. The road lobby will have less time to attack the railways. In the meantime we have a gradual process of moving towards re-integration on the railway, rumours abound that the ROSCO's may be in for a shock. The stopping train to re-integration is moving slowly and there will be casualties along the way if we're not strong.

ATOC actually provided a chink of light with its June paper entitled "Looking Forward- Contribution to Railway Strategy". Though the headline message was doom and gloom it was clever in that it gave an unpalatable message to Government that had hung its colours to road pricing. The message was simple: the railway as it stands will not take up any modal shift caused by road pricing - What are you going to do about it? Is Tony listening as he promised to?

Gareth Marston
Newtown, July 2005

News in brief

New bus links connecting communities in Powys and Ceredigion with south Wales will start operating later this year.

The TrawsCambria network is enhancing its rural service with new connections and buses.

From 3 October, a new route will directly connect Aberystwyth and Cardigan.

In December, Newtown and Brecon, in Powys, will be linked for the first time in 35 years. That service will run on to Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff.

As part of the firm's expansion, more than 13 new buses will join the fleet already operating throughout the country.

There are also plans to trial a hydrogen-powered, environmentally-friendly bus in west Wales next year.

The Welsh Assembly Government said the TrawsCambria long distance bus strategy was one of its key policies for improving public transport in Wales.

Machynlleth

The 1401st busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 81,219 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

Contrary to some ill informed speculation amongst rail enthusiasts circles, Network Rail have not spent a fortune enhancing Barmouth Bridge for a week of steam specials. Network Rail and before them Railtrack have conducted (and still are) a painfully slow

renewal process on the Bridge after some of the timber used in the 1980's repairs was found to be suspect in the mid 1990's and a severe weight restriction imposed. After a decade sufficient work has at long last been done to raise the weight limit on the bridge. However it is still not up to the previous limit and this has determined what class of steam locomotive will be used which we understand will not be a Manor class locomotive.

A standard Class 4MT 2-6-0 76039 visited the line on the 29/30 June and 1st July, staying overnight in Machynlleth and taking part in gauging trials on the coast. Arriva MD Graham Bunker firing the locomotive in person.

Aberystwyth

The 879th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 218,498 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

From the Cambrian News (21 July 2005)

Strengthened trains, of six coaches, will be used for the annual gathering of Orthodox Jews in August. (these were loco hauled).

Children from Taliesin have been on a train journey with a difference - in their very own moving art studio. Their trip was to Birmingham, there to meet with children from the Small Heath area to share their experiences of life and travel, and discuss the similarities and differences between rural and urban life. On the way, the children created art work reflecting the surroundings that they travelled through.

The project was organised by Catrin Webster, of Aberystwyth Arts Centre, and sponsored by Christine Hughes of Barclays Bank, Tony Donovan of Arriva Trains and Tia Jones of the Arts Centre.

The joint Meeting of the Line Liaison Committees on the 1st July heard welcome news that the morning commuter train into Aberystwyth was to be retained as the upgrading of Machynlleth depot would mean more units serviced overnight at Machynlleth allowing an extra unit to be on hand to run down to Aberystwyth in the morning. This unit will then strengthen the 0935 departure to Birmingham to 4 cars a most welcome move. However the train will proceed to Birmingham from Shrewsbury as 2 cars so be warned!

Shrewsbury

The 219th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 1,258,346 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

The SRA's West Coast team are working on options to enhance services off the electrified portion of the West Coast Main Line and relieve overcrowding on the longer distance Cross Country services. With a target date of 2008 they plan to introduce an hourly Reading to Shrewsbury service using Class 170 DMU's and an hourly Manchester to Birmingham New St service using EMUs's thereby releasing Voyager units for duties elsewhere. Beneficiaries are understood to be Chester and the North Wales Coast, strengthening on Cross Country Services and the return of a handful of Shrewsbury to Euston services. These would be ten car tilting super Voyagers who

would run in the path of current Wolverhampton to Euston Pendolinos. At the moment it is unclear how this would impact on our services or whether we could change at Shrewsbury for London once more. There's a possibility that these London trains could take the paths of current Arriva Trains Services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham.

July saw the release of the SRA's West Midland Route Utilisation Strategy. C.30% of the trains between Wellington and Wolverhampton are to be cut by March 2006, Arriva services will then no longer call at smaller intermediate stations in a simplification of services on the Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton corridor.

Cardiff

Arriva Trains Wales relocated from Brunel House in Cardiff (next to Queen St station) to St Mary's House on the Penarth Road along with Network Rails Area Control. A joint control room is to be set up.

London

The SRA trumpeted the industry performance figures for the last Quarter of 2004/2005 which showed a general improvement. Which TOC bucked the trend with a 1.2% decrease in punctuality? Yes that's right Arriva Trains Wales. However Arriva released a set of figures to the Line Liaison committee showing an average of nearer 89% for Arriva compared to the SRA's 81%. Confused? Apparently they use different methods of measuring punctuality.

A hefty Royal visit

The royal train visited our line on July 13th, Prince Charles was visiting Tywyn to open the new museum at the Talylyn Railway station. What was hauling the Royal train caused more of a stir as it was top 'n tailed by a pair of Class 67 locomotives. With a route availability rating of 8 surely they were too heavy for the Cambrian, which is supposedly route availability 5 only. They made it as far as Machynlleth. Though not the heaviest locomotives to work on the Cambrian - Class 40's were - they certainly have the highest axle loading. The same day saw an engineers train hauled by a Class 37 returned from Barmouth where it had gone the night before. The first time in 12 years we believe two locomotive hauled trains have been on the Cambrian at the same time.

Annual General Meeting

SARPA's AGM will be in the upstairs function room of the Cambrian Hotel, Aberystwyth on Saturday 8th October at 11.30am.

Rail Passengers Committee Wales

The Welsh committee became a victim of the Transport Act 2005 on the 23rd July 2005 when it ceased to exist. How the "new" RPC will interact or what it can do is very unclear. Most former members of the regional committees feel that the new organisation will have no regional representation and will in effect become just a call centre to adjudicate on passenger complaints when they receive no satisfaction from the TOC's.

Caersws

The 1912th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 23,600 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

Borth

The 1850th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 37,036 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

Welshpool

The 1767th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 60,538 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003.

Dovey Junction

The 2430th busiest station on the national network according to the SRA with 814 passengers tickets sold from and to in 2002/2003. Incredibly a further sixty six stations see fewer ticket sales from/to!

Alfred McAlpine Capital Projects have applied to the Secretary of State for Environment for consent to carry out repairs on the wooden railway bridge over the River Einion, just west of the site of Glandovey Station. As the river underneath it is tidal, representations or objections on navigational grounds can be made. [*Cambrian News*, 11th August 2005]

PlusBus Shrewsbury

The Shrewsbury "PlusBus" scheme is to become live in September.

For those not familiar with the scheme, this is an add-on to a normal rail ticket which will allow unlimited travel on buses in the destination area.

Full details of the scheme throughout the country can be found at

www.journeysolutions.com

and full details of the conditions of the Shrewsbury add-on will be on the site shortly.

PLUSBUS tickets will be available from the 25th September 2005. Participating Bus Operators are: Arriva Midlands, First PMT, Tanat Valley Coaches, Whittle Bus, Bromyard Omibus and Shropshire County Council. Non-Participating Operators are: Beadles Travel, Elcock Reisen, Peoples Express (Pete's Travel), Choice Travel, Boultons of Shropshire, Minsterley Motors and Worthen Travel.

PLUSBUS tickets will be £2.00 for adults and £1.00 for children, standard national railcard discounts apply.

Joint Meeting of Cambrian Coast Line Liaison Committee and Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee. Friday 1st July Celtica, Machynlleth.

I attend the above meeting on behalf of RPC Wales. There was a good turn out from town and county councillors from Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Powys. Authority Officers from Powys and Ceredigion were absent. One MP was present Elin Llwyd but no AM's.

Most welcome was Network Rails presence at the meeting there has been a long history of Network Rail and Railtrack failing to attend the meetings of both committees. Tim James the new Wales Area Director and the Cambrian Signal Manager Carl Jones were present.

Arriva Trains were represented by Ben Davies Stakeholder Relations Manger North & Mid Wales., Tony O'Donovan Cambrian Station Manager and interestingly MD Graham Bunker. His presence perhaps explained by the fact that he had been firing the steam locomotive that had been undertaking gauge clearance on the coast line the day before.

The meeting turned out to be pretty positive and contained some good news for passengers in Mid Wales.

Arriva Trains

- A lot of the discussion was about the steam week in August, Arriva want this to be fairly successful and run it year on year and are prepared to take a small loss this year.
- £1 million is to be spent on Machynlleth depot upgrading to become a permanent depot with its own fleet of 158 units and the ability to carry out maintenance to a higher level than previously.
- The 158's were "not designed" for the Cambrian – the coast with its low speeds and frequent stops and the main line with Talerddig bank. The captive fleet will have modifications to make it perform better in this environment.
- Starting in the autumn an enhancement programme to the toilets on the 158 fleet will start. Plus some reupholstering of certain units (implied ex CT ones).
- A dedicated fleet and the benefits of the SPT were touted as being of benefit to punctuality in the area. The Cambrian being the poorest performing group in Arriva according to their figures for the last 4 periods of 2004/2005. An average of 84.4% punctuality was achieved.
- The Integrated bus/train tickets promised in the franchise will appear this winter in NW Wales stretching down to Aberystwyth. It was stated that a day rover from Bangor to Aberystwyth would be £6.00.

- The Cambrian was described as an “expanding market” and “destination marketing” is to be implemented when the SPT comes in. The new 0633 Birmingham to Aberystwyth is to be particularly promoted in the West Midlands as it will allow arrival in Aberystwyth and Barmouth 2 hours earlier than now and north of Barmouth 4 hours earlier than possible now.
- Graham Bunker was “99% sure” they had come up with a solution to the loss of the morning commuter train from Machynlleth to Aberystwyth in the SPT. The establishment of a beefed up Machynlleth depot will lead to more units being serviced their overnight. They are hopeful of having a 158 unit that can run down to Aberystwyth for a commuter arrival this will then attach to the arrival from Birmingham (ex New ST 0633) and then form a four car unit for the 0935 departure. This being the service that overcrowds most regularly at the moment being only a 2 car. One unit will be detached at Shrewsbury to form a crewed reserve unit for the rest of the day.
- The first UP train of the day (0514 ex Aberystwyth) which currently forms the all stations commuter service into Birmingham between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton is to be strengthened to 3 cars from Shrewsbury from December. Welcome news as this service is a long standing sore for Mid Wales passengers and was singled out in the West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy as being the most overcrowded AM peak regional arrival into New St.
- Graham Bunker ventured onto the theme of the hourly service on the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line. He said that Arriva had signed up for being the trial TOC if they got something in return. It was clear that further work had gone into using the ERTMS trial as a means to do something. He announced that the thinking was now along the lines of loops at Borth and the somewhere in the Caersws area rather than at Dovey Jnc. He stated that the “political will” existed to make this project happen.
- On a less positive note the continued and increasingly more common problem of services being turned around short at Wolverhampton was raised. Arriva could offer no better than promises it was being looked at.

Network Rail

Noticeably less upbeat than Arriva, Tim James concentrated on saying how the Cambrian was a challenge for Network Rail as it was coastal railway with numerous level crossings and many timber bridges.

- Network Rail control will move in with Arriva in St Mary’s House in next few weeks. Hinted that would help performance improve.
- A lot of new rail had been laid on Cambrian in last 18 months. There will be blockade south of Pwllheli in summer holidays.
- Class 37 leaf busting trains will operate again this autumn.
- Less gushing about ERTMS and hourly service confirmed that feasibility work is being carried out and also mentioned Borth and Caersws as locations for reinstated loops.

As Network Rail had been absent for so long a number of old issues mainly regarding boundary/interface issues with railway land and adjoining roads etc were raised by various councillors.

TraCC

A brief outline of the new consortia was given to the assembled councillors. A draft regional transport plan was due to be out in early 2006 and would be reviewed every five years. It was noted that TraCC was slow in getting off the ground compared to others like SEWTA & TAITH. The Deputy Minister for Economic Development had confirmed WAG's backing for the hourly service to TraCC recently.

Cambrian Rail Partnership

A 5yr development plan had been agreed on but details were not made available. More worryingly it was discovered that Gwynedd's CC Legal Department were in dispute with the former long standing Community Rail Officer over his severance package this having dragged on for some time. This has effectively left the Cambrian without a CRO and with no prospect of recruiting a new one till the matter is resolved.

Gareth Marston

Newtown to Machynlleth bus route

Lloyds Coaches of Machynlleth have taken over the 522 Newtown to Machynlleth bus route.

This is the only public transport for six communities who had their stations closed on our line in June 1965. Pontdolgoch, Carno, Talerddig, Commins Coach, Llanbrynmair & Cemmas Rd.

Lloyd's have bought a brand new modern single decker bus in a striking new livery bearing the legend "prepare to be amazed". However, examination of the timetable reveals only four return trips a day, three via Aberhafesp and one via Coleg Powys. With only one bus "in steam" and tied to being at Coleg Powys in Newtown at certain times integration with the railway is patchy and inconsistent.

The issue of Carno Station needing to be reopened has raised its head again with emails to the Chairman and the Montgomery Liberal Democrats recently.

Sufficient stations and proper integration is bread and butter for many European countries. In Wales "insurmountable obstacles" still exist.....in the minds of those that run the country anyway.

The Dec 2005 Standard Pattern Timetable

The proposed timetable changes, particularly the rescheduling of the 0845 week-days arrival in Aberystwyth, have provoked comment not only from ourselves, but also from others:

From Clive Williams' (RPC Wales) submission to Arriva Trains Wales

Table 75 Birmingham to Chester/Aberystwyth/Pwllheli

It is unfortunate that the opportunities presented by the SPT have not extended to the Coast Line north of Machynlyth which remains virtually unchanged compared to the existing timetable with all its current deficiencies. Indeed the Committee notes that in some cases earlier running of down trains from Shrewsbury has not been balanced by earlier departures for the Coast, resulting in no overall journey improvement.

The Committee is concerned to note in the latest proposals that the first train from Aberystwyth departs "off pattern", some half-hour earlier but still arrives "on pattern" in Birmingham because it is used to form an "all-stations" service between Wellington and Wolverhampton. This is wholly unacceptable for long distance travellers from Wales, who will suffer to ensure a commuter service in England.

This provision contrasts with the effect the SPT on commuting opportunities into/ out of both Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. Loss of the present 08.45 arrival at the latter, in particular will cause hardship to regular users. Perhaps this service could still be retained if a Class 153 unit were used, and then used to strengthen the 09.36 from Aberystwyth.

It would also appear that some of the connectional opportunities originally proposed at Shrewsbury every two hours between Cardiff/Holyhead and Aberystwyth/Birmingham services will be lost for no apparent reason, even though the heroically optimistic operational requirement of getting four trains through the restricted layout in a short space of time remains. For example:

10.30 Holyhead	13.15 – 13.19	to Cardiff
11.20 Cardiff	13.18 – 13.26	to Holyhead
11.36 Aberystwyth	13.24 – 13.28	to Birmingham
12.34 Birmingham	13.25 – 13.32	to Aberystwyth

So passengers from Holyhead can get a connection to Birmingham but only have 1 minute to do so in the other direction, while passengers from Aberystwyth can get to neither Cardiff nor Holyhead, although there are good connections from those places into the Aberystwyth train. The Committee are at a loss to understand the underlying thoughts behind this situation.

Further timetable news

From April 2006 Shrewsbury to Birmingham corridor will be served by hourly semi fast (ATW) and hourly all stations Salop to Wolves and then on to New St service. This means possibly improved punctuality as Wellington to Wolves will have one less train an hour on it. The first train from Aber will no longer call all stations between Wellington & Wolves.

It now appears likely that the 0815 from Machynlleth to Aberystwyth will be retained, as a commuting train (it may be rescheduled to run five minutes earlier). It will be followed by the 0918 arrival, and the two trains will together form the 0936 from Aberystwyth - this becoming then a four car train throughout.

Cambrian Steam

For the Cambrian steam in late August, the locomotive was 76079 (BR 2-6-0), known colloquially as the Pocket Rocket. The steam trains were provided by specialist steam operating company, West Coast Railway Company (WCR), which has run the highly successful 'Jacobite' steam train from Fort William in the West Highlands of Scotland for the past 10 years.

By all accounts the venture was a success, with well loaded trains, although it appears that those from Aberystwyth were less well loaded. The consensus seems to be that the customer service aspects could have been better this summer but everyone enjoyed the experience despite reservations about destinations, photo opportunities and connections.

The latest on next year is that they are planning to do it over series of weekends up the Coast line only. There will be connections from England as the 0634 ex New St will run from December for the Saturdays and the 0830 ish ex Salop on the Sunday is available.

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At the time of preparing this newsletter, there was no picture of the 2005 steam trains to hand. This is 7819, Hinton Manor, on the 1987 train at Machynlleth.

SARPA MONTHLY MEETINGS. 2005

Meetings for 2005

Please double check. Dates, venues, times correct as of going to print (August 2005). May be subject to change.

Month	Day & Date	Time	Town	Venue
December	Tuesday 6 th	1900	Welshpool	Pinewood Tavern

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

The new national Rail Passengers' Council

STATE OF THE RAILWAYS 2005

One of the first projects of the new organisation has been to publish an in-depth survey of public opinion about the state of the railways and aspirations for the future. 'State of the railways 2005' is the first ever research to bring together the views of passengers, non-rail users, industry stakeholders and rail staff from ten train companies to find out how optimistic different groups are about the future of rail.

The research shows that:

- All groups are more favourable about rail than unfavourable, although public perception lags behind that of the industry. Around two thirds of the public rate rail positively, compared to over 70% of the industry vote

PASSENGER AND NON-RAIL USER PERCEPTION

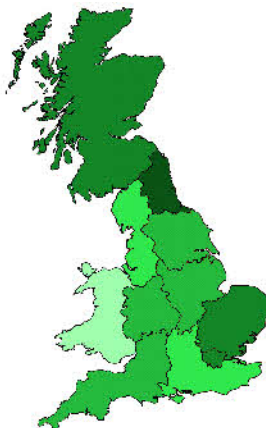
- 53% of the public surveyed have used rail in the last year. Regular rail users have a more positive perception of railways than those who do not use rail
- There are significant differences in views by region, with passengers in the north east most likely to be satisfied with their rail journeys (51%) and passengers in Wales least likely (21%)
- Commuters' perception of rail is considerably less favourable than leisure users (41% vs 51%)
- Opinion on whether rail is getting better is mixed. Amongst the general public, over a quarter rate it as improving while another quarter think it is getting worse. The same regional pattern emerges, with north eastern passengers noticing the biggest improvements and Welsh passengers most likely to think services are deteriorating

- Many passengers (44%) rate punctuality as the biggest cause of improvements but conversely another 47% of passengers still rate punctuality as the area causing the biggest problems
- Improvements in the new trains (23%) and improved timetables (23%) rate as the other areas where passengers are noticing improvements but the cost of tickets (34%) and overcrowding (19%) present the other major areas of concern
- Respondents were also asked what attracts them to rail travel and 51% rated convenience as the main reason. 33% were attracted by speed whereas 14% felt that it was the only option for them

RAIL STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS

- These groups were generally more positive about rail, with nearly all stakeholders and 55% of rail staff thinking that services were improving
- Both groups rated trains on time (42%) and better customer service (39%) as the main reasons for improvement but recognised that capacity and getting a seat are going to overtake punctuality as the big worry for the rail industry in future

Favourability by region



Favourability

- 21 – 25%
- 26 – 30%
- 31 – 35%
- 36 – 40%
- 41 – 45%
- 46 – 50%
- 51 – 55%

The North East is the most favourable, at 51%

London, the East and Scotland are the next most favourable regions (41% in each case)

Wales is least likely to think favourably of the rail sector (24%)

Why are railways viewed so unfavourably in Wales? The legacy of Beeching with large gaps in the network? Cardiff's commuter network of sub-standard Pacers? Poor connections? Lack of investment? No electrification? Please send SARPA your views.

All you need to know about government's attitude to public transport, the dynamic modern Welsh nation and scheme 32

Cardiff Bay Tuesday 24th May 2005.

A delegation from SARPA meets with the Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport with Mick Bates AM. The Minister listened to what we had to say, demonstrated she had read our advance briefing paper but made no firm promises. Delegates were impressed by the lobby entrance to the National Assembly building – a screen with train running information is the focal point of the entrance with information on all arrivals/departures at Central, Queen St and Bay stations. Are things on the up - does the Assembly believe in public transport?

Cardiff Bay station, five minutes after leaving the WAG building. In the truncated remains of the Rhymney Railways four platform Cardiff Bute St terminus we find a single platform, a single track and a Pacer which will take us up to Queen St where we will have to change again to get to Central. Looking upon the desolate scene in what is supposed to be the heart of the rejuvenated modern Welsh capital Tony Burton says "this tells us all we need to know about government's attitude to public transport". Needless to say in any other European capital city or even a regional centre the situation would be vastly different.

The Western Mail 6th June 2005

In another leak about what the bidders for the Wales and Borders franchise wanted to do but weren't allowed to we learn that Arriva planned to buy a fleet of 22 new trains for Valley lines services at a cost £45 million. Comparisons are immediately drawn with the Assembly Government's £50 million deal to lease seven 20 year old ex Scottish Class 150's for Arriva.

Westminster June 6th 2005

Transport Secretary Alister Darling announces that there will be a pilot scheme for road pricing. National road pricing is on the cards and central government has bitten the bullet. A charge of c £1.40 a mile on the busiest stretches of road will help ease congestion, road tax and vehicle fuel duty will be abolished to compensate.

In Cardiff the Assembly Government remains strangely silent about its road construction agenda (December 2004's 15 yr transport plan), which it sold to the public on the premise that more roads would help relieve congestion. With road pricing planned to relieve congestion are the new roads necessary especially when public transport is in desperate need of improvements? Cardiff Bay remains silent.

12th June 2005 Vale of Glamorgan

The Vale of Glamorgan line reopens to passenger services, only an hourly service and no direct link into Cardiff International Airport but passenger numbers in the first few weeks still exceed expectations.

July 1st Machynlleth

The line liaison committee hears from the Chairman of TRaCC that the Assembly remains committed to the hourly service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury though neither timescale nor commitment of funding is mentioned.

July 6th BBC Wales Week In, Week Out programme

We hear how Cardiff's congestion problem is so bad that a London style congestion charge will have to be introduced shortly. An all too easy unfavourable comparison is drawn with a similar city in Europe, Bordeaux, where we see how the city's new Light Rail system has almost driven pollution and congestion off its streets. We also hear how the Assembly is planning to spend £4 Billion on road capacity expansion in its 15yr transport plan - a staggering £250 million a year. We hear how the city's public transport system needs modernising and what could be – but isn't being done.

Andrew Davies AM, Minister for Economic Development and Transport, is wheeled on. So why isn't public transport being improved minister, for instance a Cardiff Light Rail System that really could make a difference? "The schemes are too expensive" and "buses are better value for money" he bleats.

Newtown High School July 8th 2005

The Assembly Cabinet is in town proudly proclaiming that it's the only government that goes out and takes questions from the people. A number of transport related questions are pre submitted but fail to be asked. A conspiracy to keep transport off the agenda or simply crowded out due to all the other questions and time constraints?

"Dynamic Wales" and similar phrases giving the impression that Wales is a go ahead modern vibrant country are favourites of the Welsh Assembly Government. However our transport system belies this image. You will be hard pressed to find a capital city in Europe that has such poor public transport as Cardiff – though by Welsh standards it's streets ahead. A "world class Wales" is not going to be achieved by being bottom of the table in the public transport stakes. What other country in Europe has a comparable road expansion scheme to Wales? "Trunk Roads Forward" is the name of the scheme which sucks up most of the Assembly's 15yr transport plan budget. No fewer than 46 schemes across Wales are listed ranging from bypasses, road straightening schemes and even duplicate motorways (seven of which are in Montgomeryshire). The equivalent in Germany on a scheme per head of population would be 1227 schemes, such a list does not exist.

The Assembly will no doubt defend itself by pointing to the Vale of Glamorgan reopening and the Ebbw Vale scheme. In all honesty these are big steps forward in comparison with what's gone on for the last four/five decades, but in reality are just a small part of what's needed.

The Wales Transport Research Centre under Professor Stuart Cole estimates that it would require £2 Billion to give Wales's public transport network an overhaul to bring it up to a passable level. This is not cheap so how would it be funded? Ironically the answer comes from a Scottish bus supporter in Westminster – road pricing. How many of the schemes on "Trunk Roads Forward" stack up once the effect of road pricing

is factored in on predicted demand and especially if public transport improvements are on offer? The answer is not many, especially the purely capacity expansion ones. Which makes spending the money on them pointless, so here's the funding stream for Wales's improved 21st Century Public Transport network.

The mouth waters with what can be done from the funding earmarked for Scheme 32- the Newtown Bypass. A £20 to £30 million makeover for the Cambrian? Restored passing loops, definitely an hourly service, maybe even some reopened stations and new rolling stock.

Now if Wales is to be a truly dynamic and forward-looking country it must have a modern transport infrastructure. Avoiding questions, dragging heels, sulking about cost, regurgitating road lobby propaganda and pursuing a retrograde pointless road expansion scheme are not going to achieve it.

What are the first years of devolved Welsh government going to be remembered for? "Team Wales" should be doing something about the "sick man of European transport" label: over to Rhodri and Andrew?

Gareth Marston

Branch Line Added Value (BLAV –not to be confused with Chav)

Further to my plea in SARPA Newsletter 32 for the proper costs of rural lines to be used when evaluating their worth, we also need to pay attention to how the true worth of the revenue for rural lines is assessed.

The railway allocates revenue on a line by line basis, which is say fine for Newtown to Shrewsbury Cheap Day Returns and Fairbourne to Barmouth ones which are all captured in the revenue basket for the Cambrian, which as I stated previously is £4.2 million per annum (source: Line Liaison Committee). However when we consider trips beyond Shrewsbury and how they are allocated things get interesting. As a general rule of thumb a long distance trip is divided up by miles travelled into fare and then allocated across the different lines travelled by route mileage. So a trip from my hometown of Newtown to London on a Saver at £38.00 is calculated thus. Distance is 190 miles, Newtown to Shrewsbury is 34 of those or 18% of the distance so 18% of the revenue is allocated to the Cambrian. So £6.80 is allocated to the Cambrian and the remaining £31.20 elsewhere. This works for journeys in the reverse direction also.

Using a general rule of thumb that 20% to 25% of all rural traffic is in fact traffic to/from London (source: Strategic Rail Authority), and given that Newtown's footfall figure is c. 80,000 per annum and a stab at an average fare of £30 for all the different fares you can get to London, the London to Newtown/Newtown to London market may be giving the railway revenue of £475,000 to £600,000 per annum. Of this the Cambrian gets £87K to £108K and the rest of the route the rest. Now these figures may be completely wrong, and certainly are inaccurate, but I think the reader will now be getting the general point I'm making: that Newtown is generating considerably more revenue to the railway as a whole than is being marked off against the Cambrian line.

My own observations over the years would indicate that c. 50% of all passengers on our line are travelling beyond Shrewsbury so that's c. 300,000 journeys per

annum that will fall into the category of generating revenue elsewhere on the railway in addition to what percentage is allocated to the Cambrian.

A quick diversion to that old chestnut substitution is needed here to bear out the point further. As our misguided friends like to point out the good old quality bus link is cheaper to run than the railway, however they go very silent when it's pointed out that only a fraction of those using rail would transfer to it. The evidence? Lets recap.

1. Planned and advertised engineering work on the railway with bus replacements is well known to cause a massive downturn in demand for travel.
2. Rail vs Coach. National Express runs one coach a day from Aberystwyth to London: its average loading is between 10 & 20, while around 1600 journeys a day are made on average by rail between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury. If quality road coaches are that good why the disparity in use?
3. Bus/coach use in the UK has been in decline since bus deregulation, except in London (which is still regulated) and in Wales where OAP's have been given free off peak travel by bus.
4. The evidence of the Beeching closures which is compelling. As everybody (apart from the socially excluded) bought cars and drove when the trains were taken away, the replacement bus services found that they weren't viable due to low usage.
5. The Assembly has recently created a subsidised all Wales coach network. Some of the routes parallel lines closed in the Beeching era, the X94 Barmouth to Wrexham and X40 Carmarthen to Aberystwyth for example. Loadings are low - compare this with the reopened Vale of Glamorgan railway line which has exceeded expectations already.

So if nobody is on the replacement coach link how many will railhead? Perhaps one day the railway should try the 3 C test. That's find out how many rail travellers are from or are travelling to Caernarfon, Cirencester and Corby - all towns that lost their rail link. The answer is not many and remember Caernarfon has the magical quality coach link to Bangor station- the X32!

So the point I'm making is that a very small percent of these 300,000 or so journeys would still be on the wider railway if it were not for the existence of the Cambrian and therefore that revenue which is allocated elsewhere in the system would not exist.

So how much is that? Somewhere someone in the industry can press the right buttons on CAPRI and find out. An educated guess? Well our 300,000 intrepid travellers past the gateway of Shrewsbury only need to generate an average of £14 of revenue off the Cambrian each to equal the total revenue that's allocated to the Cambrian! With London flows generating £20 plus each it would be reasonable to assume that the sum is equal to or not greater than the official revenue maybe £4 to £5 million.

So this is Branch Line Added Value or BLAV- the income the line generates for the rest of the system. Rover tickets need to be taken into account also as most Rover ticket users will be travelling on the scenic/rural lines though allocating them is very hard. It's also been called "contributory revenue" but my acronym sounds better!

The BLAV rating for the Cambrian is probably mid range, a line like Wrexham to Bidston pretty low. You can apply this to all lines though you end up with the acronym LAV! The Marches line between Crewe and Newport is probably LAV rich.

Going back 40 odd years a certain Doctor and his committee didn't take into account BLAV, got their sums wrong and failed to do what they hoped for (bring the

railway into profit). Lost BLAV revenue was not the sole reason –mainly they grossly overestimated the savings that could be made by line closures. It's all well and good running the railway taking into account “hard economics” and making “tough” decisions but you still need to be counting the beans correctly if the right decisions are to be made.

A copy of the national rail timetable will give you mileages and a calculator will provide fun, so work out the BLAV for your favourite trip and remember to shout it at the next bean counter that mumbles about loss making lines.

Gareth Marston

Caersws - a railway village

Caersws was developed as a railway village, with a junction for the Van line, the Cambrian Bridge Department, and the nearby Moat Lane Junction. Up to 150 railway staff were employed in the area.

Brian Poole is collecting information and photographs on the station and area, with the intention of producing a publication - after that on the Mawddwy, Van and Kerry branches. Any information, especially photography of Moat Lane and the approaches, would be welcome. Several local retired men have some excellent photography on bridge repair. Any photographic records of trains at any period on bridges between Whitchurch, Aberystwyth, Pwllheli and Brecon plus branches would be appreciated. It is hoped that an excellent historical record will be secured, as the few railwaymen left who were involved are now over 70 years of age. Brian would be delighted to have additional contacts.



Aberaeron 1963
Pannier tank No.7407 shunting the yard

Useful addresses

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Network Rail:

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The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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Officers of the Association

Chairman: Gareth Marston: 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Powys. SY16 2LH. 01686-625716. E-mail: gareth.marston@btopenworld.com

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.

Committee Member: Angus Eichoff: The Forge, Whitehouse Bridge, Welshpool, Powys. Tel. 01938-553572.
E-mail angusmetal@ukfsn.org

Website: www.paradox-it.co.uk/sarpa