

<p>Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association</p>		<p>Newsletter No. 53 February 2011</p>
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A snowy scene at Barmouth, on the 18th December last. Photograph: Kate Jones.

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This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene.

Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom.

The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy.

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The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2011) £7.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

- * SARPA will lobby for better rail services.
- * Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.
- * Meet in public once a month.
- * All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.
- * Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We subscribe to the Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation and occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emergency fund for the future. None of the officers gains financially in any way from SARPA.

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:
SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown,
Powys SY16 2LH.

Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

Secretary and Treasurer

These positions are currently vacant. If you wish to volunteer for either position, please contact the Chairman.

Chairman's Message

The back end of January brought much news. The ATW drivers pay offer would have to be paid for by a large chunk of the January fare rises, the equivalent of leasing another 8 Class 158 Units. There's no such thing as consequence free, whether you're having a big pay increase, awarding yourself a bonus on top of a big salary or making a profit out of public funding. It seems some in the unions are out of touch with reality. How many of the passengers behind them on the train are having a pay increase this year, let alone already earn in the mid thirty thousands with a 35 hr week? And remember the driver's guaranteed a seat! The £39K pay settlement would see ATW drivers have to work an average of around 7/8 Sunday shifts a year rather than just volunteer for them. The

unions have to grow up: train drivers are relatively privileged in what they earn compared to the vast majority. The equivalent civil service earner in the WAG would be a Senior Executive Officer or Grade E – middle management. Then we had the Wales Audit Office report on WAG road expenditure which was no shock to me - a staggering average 61% cost overrun was identified. That's road construction for you. There needs to be a moratorium on all road building projects until a better system is devised of estimating costs more accurately.

The demise of Wrexham and Shropshire has some implications for us – it perhaps showed that DB is maybe truly only interested in sending profits back to the fatherland. An earlier news article suggested that our (ATW) fare rises would end up in Berlin. A sensible rational national rail network would ensure that direct services from all conurbations of significant size and remote regions would run to London on a daily basis. Which given the rail geography and line congestion south of Birmingham means that Intercity style services to Shropshire and Mid Wales must come from extending existing services north west of Birmingham. There's been much hysteria about a lack of a market to support a London service - this misses the point completely. The current services between Birmingham and Shrewsbury are often overcrowded even outside the peak, running longer or more trains that happen to come from London via Birmingham would address capacity consideration to the west of it for the Birmingham market as well as providing a through service. A pity there is still no direct access from the west to Snow Hill station - a legacy of bad decision making in the past.

This brings me to the McNulty Review – so far McNulty's Interim Review - which from what I've seen has shown little or no understanding of the reasons why the costs are now so high in the rail industry. Instead a "killer fact" has emerged and there is a danger it will be gazed at like rabbits staring at car headlights. McNulty thinks it's "inescapable" that his final conclusion will not say that most subsidy goes towards regional rail. Shock horror scream. It was said of BR before the Thatcher/Lawson recession in 1989 that Intercity was profitable, Network South East was just about breaking even and Regional Railways consumed 90% of the subsidy with the rest going to freight. Here's McNulty's "killer fact" table.

	Passenger Miles (bn)	Net Cost to Government (£m)	Net cost:- Pence per passenger mile	Net cost to government as % of total cost
Long Distance Franchises	9.4	693	7.3	25
London & South East Franchises	15.8	760	4.8	19
Regional Franchises	8.0	1873	31.1	61

The more knowledgeable amongst us will wonder where the balance of the £5.2 Billion annual subsidy to the rail industry goes, and also note that BR in 1989 only got around £1050 million (in today's prices) subsidy in total. The real questions should be how come two sectors that between them hardly needed subsidy under BR need £1.45 Billion per annum under private ownership? Why has regional railways subsidy increased by 200%? And remember fare box income has doubled since the late 80's. Shouting that the cost of regional subsidy is too high misses the real problems entirely.

You can easily deduce why regional rails' costs have gone up. Back in BR days there was no such thing as track access charges for the regional manager to pay. In addition BR owned all its stock so there were no leasing charges either. In Wales and the Borders two thirds of ATW's rolling stock is ex BR which despite being paid for by BR, still

has to have leasing charges paid; throw in track access charges, the need for profit to be made, pay, especially for drivers and senior managers has gone up beyond inflation and of course as we don't have any electrified lines the annual diesel fuel bill has easily doubled at least since BR days as the world price of oil has gone up. What we want is some real analysis and real answers - not a desk exercise whose authors are in awe of figures they don't understand. As the Beeching era amply demonstrated, if you don't understand what drives the costs in the first place your remedies stand a very good chance of not being the right ones, leading to disastrous mistakes.

The world of 2011 is very different to that of 1963 or 1982, the wider consensus is pro-railways and probably the strongest it's been in the UK in the lives of its population. In the age of the internet, freedom of information requests and mobile phones, anyone who thinks regional railways are a soft target for cuts is sadly mistaken, as is anyone who thinks that the increase in public subsidy to the railway is because regional railways exist.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, Montgomeryshire. January 2011

News in brief 53

Shrewsbury

Shropshire County Council have now officially dropped its campaign to build the so called North West Relief Road, conceding that getting the £100 million plus funding was unlikely in the current climate. Instead they are backing a £30 million package of traffic calming and control measures, including the building of the long mooted Shrewsbury Parkway station – on the Wolverhampton line near to where the A49/A5 roads split/join.

The current A49/A5 bypass around the town dates from the early 1990's, an earlier bypass just involving the A5 was built in the 1930's avoiding the town centre. It should be noted that a bypass on a bypass has not resolved traffic congestion in the centre of the town. It should also be noted that an arrival into Shrewsbury station around 0830 in the morning from the Cambrian would take traffic off the A458 road.

Welshpool

A low speed derailment of the 1809 service from International to Aberystwyth one cold November evening caused some local media excitement as "passengers were led to safety" according to reports. Pictures showed the train all of 10 yards away from the platform at Welshpool. If anyone knows what perils were hidden in those 10 yards please let us know. The chain of events that led to the derailment was instigated by the door unlocking mechanism failing on one of the two units and passengers trying to alight at Welshpool not being able to, and subsequently pulling the emergency cord when the train moved off. It then moved backwards over the spring-loaded points, causing the lead coach to derail.

Conservative candidate for the Assembly Russell George has approached the Health and Safety Executive about the condition of the footbridge.

Moat Lane Junction

From a briefing given to the National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Learning Committee in January 2011 by Professor Stuart Cole, Professor of Transport, Wales Transport Research Centre, University of Glamorgan Business School:

“Re-opening of the Moat Lane junction to Builth Road section primarily for freight operation to enable increased use of both the Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines for freight movements between South Wales and North West England and give some relief to the congestion in the Cardiff - Newport areas”.

Caersws

Frost damage in January saw the stones on the platform edge all raise upward and tilt downwards, leading to a temporary closure of most of the platform at the Machynlleth end which had no been fixed at time of going to print.

“But how could Arriva Trains Wales Class 158 slip by 24% in a year?”

Was the exasperated comment from Modern Railways Magazine Industry and Technology Editor Roger Ford in his Fleet Reliability review for 2010. From a moving average of 7903 miles between unit failures in 08/09, 09/10 brought a decline to 6003. Meaning ATW’s 24 strong Class 158 fleet fails 52 times in every 4 week period on average. For the record Class 158 operators managed the following moving annual average in 09/10:

South West Trains	29485
East Midlands Trains	8840
First Great Western	6583
Arriva Trans Wales	6003
Northern	5874
First ScotRail	5456

ATW’s buzz phrase of “best in class” clearly does not apply to their Class158 reliability! And no, SWT is not a misprint: they really do manage nearly 30000! ATW’s 143,150,153 & 175 fleets were not “best in class” either. Their 142 fleet was! Though having a table with Pacers on it says what we need to know.

And talking of rolling stock reliability, congratulations to Sam Compton. Sam is a Fleet Manager for South West Trains responsible for their Class 444 EMU’s who managed 42,119 miles between failures in 09/10, the most reliable UK train. Sam grew up in Llandinam and is the son of Newtown Station Travel’s proprietor Peter Compton.

Also spare a thought for those that promote longer franchises as the answer to everything on the railway. Chiltern’s fleet of New Generation DMU’s performance was sickly to say the least. Another inconvenient fact to be swept under the carpet?

Cardiff Bay

The nasty coalition Government in Westminster (Conservatives/Liberal Democrats) have been blamed for a poor budget settlement which has seen the WAG transport budget slashed, meaning that the wonderful coalition government in Cardiff Bay (Labour/Plaid) cannot lead the welsh people into the sunny uplands of its National Transport Plan (published in March 2010). Details of what will be pared back and postponed have not emerged yet (30 January 2011). Intense lobbying has been taking place as every small

community bangs on about how vital to their local economy their pet transport scheme is.

Meanwhile money was found for the North to South airlink for another 4 years, a study for reopening the line from Gaerwen to Llangefni and the current WAG Express train for another 12 months, whilst WAG Express 2 was announced, funded for 4 years, drawing widespread criticism of Ynys Mon resident and AM - WAG Transport Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones! Another WAG pet project appears to be storming ahead with road construction firms submitting tenders to complete the dualling of the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road between Gilwern and Brynmawr- the Clydach Gorge section. This 4 mile stretch already has a 3rd crawler lane on the uphill west bound carriageway. Cost - £170 million or £45 million per extra lane mile. Value for money?

WAG's Trunk Road Forward Programme isn't, according to the Welsh Audit Office, who uncovered a shocking average cost overrun of 61% in the programme amounting to hundreds of millions of pounds.

In the meantime concerned interested parties enquiring about the status of the Cambrian Main line Hourly service received this reply from WAG's Rail Unit: "Thank you for your e mail of 2 December to the Deputy First Minister, about an hourly peak-time service on the Cambrian line. I have been asked to reply. The Deputy First Minister is currently considering the detailed implications of the draft budget and will be making an announcement in due course."

Of note is the use of the phrase "Cambrian" not mainline or coast and the term "hourly peak-time service" not hourly or even daytime hourly!

Machynlleth

Conservative Montgomeryshire MP Glyn Davies and the Conservative prospective AM for Montgomeryshire Russell George made a visit to the train depot in early December, and were pleasantly surprised at the nature of the facilities at the depot and the progress with the ERTMS system. Glyn apparently enjoyed trying out the train simulator used to train drivers on ertms use.

The rock face behind the depot has been covered in a metal screen.

Borth

The Line Liaison Committee were told that Borth's footfall for the first 9 months of 2010 was c61,000. The ORR figure for the year 08/09 was c47,000. Observations from members suggest that fare collection has been more effective recently.

Aberystwyth

Cambrian News readers were surprised and delighted to find that their local AM and Minister Elin Jones had publicly rediscovered transport issues in Ceredigion. Elin has promised to raise the issue of the Cambrian hourly service and the A487 Dyfi Bends road project as a matter of urgency with the WAG transport minister. "Could there be an election this year?" was one passenger's comment.

Friday 17th December was another black day for passengers as the usual 2 car formations failed to cope with the number of students heading back home for Christmas. The Guild of Students at Aberystwyth University reported that they warned ATW in advance of the numbers expected. An apology was printed in the Cambrian News in response from ATW in early January with no answer as to how this scenario will not repeat itself. We understand that passengers were left behind on the 1330, 1530 & 1730 departures that day and the units were crammed with people standing on departure. A regular commuter between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth described a "near riot" as she tried to get the 1730 train home. Apparently the left-behind students understandably went to Yr Hen Orsaf - Wetherpsoon's - to wait the 2 hrs till the next train, with drink exacerbating the already fraught situation. We understand that no one from WAG or ATW was in attendance to explain how the rationale behind the Class 158 Refurbishment will address passenger concerns about getting a seat.

Work on the station refurbishment was due to start "in early 2011".

Refurbishments

The first 158 unit (158840) is due to emerge in February. The internal layout has been heavily criticised due to the increase in airline seats, reduction in tables and seats not lining up with the windows. Civil servants at funders WAG excused the design brief with the bizarre claim that it would address passenger concerns about being able to get a seat.

Arriva Trains Wales is proposing the refurbishment of Mark 3 coaches, including the installation of 240v sockets, Wifi, CCTV and passenger information screens. One will include a buffet.. Initially five coaches are to be refurbished; there is the potential for up to 12.

The end of Wrexham and Shropshire

The Wrexham and Shropshire service stopped on Friday 28th January, the last train being the 1830 from Marylebone. The cessation was only announced on Wednesday 26th. The company's website stated:

"This very difficult decision has been taken following a full review of all possible alternatives, in which it was concluded that the business, which operates with no public subsidy, would not provide a return on investment.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your loyal and continued support. Without your assistance, our award winning service would not have been possible. We are very sorry that we have not been able to sustain it.

From Saturday 29th January, all Wrexham & Shropshire tickets already purchased will be valid on alternative routes into London Euston operated by Arriva Trains Wales, London Midland and Virgin Trains, and London Marylebone by Chiltern Railways."

The stock may be redeployed for Chiltern's growing Birmingham loco hauled service and/or the soon to be introduced Marylebone-Oxford service.

The operation was apparently only covering two thirds of its costs, despite revenues per week of just over £100,000. The service has lost £13 million over the three years of operation.

Train Stay Save on the Cambrian

Mid Wales Tourism (MWT) have teamed up with the Cambrian Railways Partnership (CRP) to develop and promote a new initiative whereby accredited accommodation

providers afford visitors who arrive by train a 10% discount. The new TRAIN STAY SAVE initiative was launched at the Mid Wales Tourism Marketing in Partnership Conference held at Y Plas, Machynlleth on 19 November.

The idea is that accommodation providers will benefit through a free and new marketing opportunity to reach a considerable number of potential customers, while discounted accommodation rates will add to the attractiveness of train travel to visitors and potential visitor.

Attractive promotional leaflets, posters and postcards featuring new artwork by Abersoch artist Neil S. Hopkins have been produced by the CRP to promote the initiative and will be widely distributed. These materials refer to an on-line list of participating establishments that is managed by Mid Wales Tourism and available to view at www.visitmidwales.co.uk

Being an on-line list this can be updated regularly.

[From Charlie Hulmes' North Wales Railway website, 22 Nov 2010]

[Note: Gerwyn Jones has left the post of Rail Development Officer with the Cambrian Railways Partnership, initially for a 12 month period, to take up a secondment within Gwynedd Council's new Integrated Transport Unit. We wish him well in his new venture.]

Class 67 locomotives reach Barmouth

On the 9th January, a UK Railtours excursion reached Barmouth. It was double headed by 67s to Machynlleth, and then topped and tailed over Barmouth bridge.

Cae Pawb Crossing with the Welsh Highland Railway

Cae Pawb crossing is under the control of Mach Control Centre. Signals and catch points which spread the gauge of the WHR tracks protect the Cambrian Coast line, and are interlocked with the ERTMS train control system. Permission to use the crossing is dealt with locally, and permission to proceed is given automatically by ERTMS as long as the main line section is clear.

Speed up to Wolverhampton

The weekend closure of the Wolverhampton line for engineering work seems likely to end as of 6 February which will be welcome news to both train operators and passengers. The line will then be passed for 90 mph running which should provide for speeding up of services and revision of timings. [from SEVERN - DEE NEWS No.71 January 2011 The Newsletter of the Shrewsbury – Chester Rail Users' Association]

Club 55 again

Arriva Trains Wales are again running their Club 55 promotion, until the 9th April. With this you can travel anywhere on the Arriva Trains Wales Network for just £15 return (try Fishguard to Holyhead!). To get this all you need is proof that you're 55 or over. A supplement can be paid to get First Class on the Holyhead to Cardiff service. Senior Railcard holders and Disabled Persons Railcard holders, over the age of 55, can get an additional £2.00 off the fare.

News from Borth Station

Work has commenced on the renovation of the offices on Borth Station, prior to the development of Borth Station Museum. The long haul of meetings, planning submissions, estimates and tenders etc., has finally come to fruition and after three years, trowels and chisels are now being wielded in earnest. The Museum is intended to house various collections, including Village History, Railway and Industrial heritage Collections and Natural History and Environmental displays.

The renovation of this building, subleased from Arriva Trains Wales, is being funded from various sources, including Borth Station Volunteers, The Railway Heritage Fund, Cambrian Railways Partnership and the industrial heritage fund known as PLWM.

If you feel you want to contribute to this exciting heritage project, have anything to donate or loan to the collection or wish to join the Friends of the Museum, or think you can help in any other way, please contact George on 01970871850.

The Museum will be staffed by volunteers and should be open for visitors some time at the beginning of the summer season. Watch this space for a date and opening hours.

Beeching and the Cambrian

Gareth Marston

Having grown up with the word "Beeching", and discovering why so many railway lines that were to a child unfathomably closed including the preserved Severn Valley Railway where many visits were made as child, I was certainly immersed in my own family's opinion on the matter. Both my father and grandfather campaigned against rail closures in the 1960's. What's popularly known as the Beeching report's conclusions are well known: it was alleged that a third of the lines only carried 1% of the traffic, that branch line and stopping services plus many commuter ones were loss making, many coaches were not used intensively, general freight carrying of small loads was unprofitable and that many routes were duplicated. The alternate view is of course it was cooked up in conjunction with the road lobby to secure a roads based transport future, the Tory government of the day being neck deep in vested interests with the road industry.

To actually get my hands on "The Reshaping of British Railways Report" recently and read it - even though I know the outcome - and to look at it objectively was not as bad as I might have expected. Having been paid to look at and scrutinise things for many years it wasn't too hard to automatically go into that mode. This prompted some more background research and four key areas emerged for me:

The plan failed using its own criteria

The publicly stated reason for it was to get the railways back into profit. In the early 60's there was no public subsidy to the railways. Indeed the railways were making a loss. In 1960 it was £87 million on a £561 million turnover. Page 59 of the report concludes that direct savings from closures would amount to just £34-£41 million, and other measures such as scrapping seasonal coaching reserves, general small load freight, rationalizing repair facilities and staff would cut around another £70 million by 1970. By 1968 after much of this had been implemented, savings on the scale promised failed to materialise: it's estimated that perhaps only £30 million was saved by these measures, but by then the deficit had crept over £100 million. The Labour government of the day introduced subsidy. Today when 50% of the cost of the so called privatised industry is met by

government who desperately want to get back to BR's historic 25% level, the c.17% that would have been needed in 1960 doesn't look so bad in retrospect!

The report even by its own admission used inaccurate guesswork to draw firm conclusions.

A survey was done for the week ending 23rd April 1961, when every passenger seen and ton of freight moved was hopefully counted. This weekly figure was then assumed to be the average throughout the year, infamously discriminating against any line with a seasonal flow. Maps were produced showing these figures as conclusive proof of traffic levels. Whilst it was acknowledged that some lines may have seasonal variations, doing another survey or series of surveys to get an accurate set of figures from throughout the year to give a more robust stab at an average were dismissed as being too hard to organise again. Thus inaccurate estimations were used. In another part of the report commenting on track maintenance costs we can again see in the reports own words (p.13) how inaccurate estimates were used to come to firm conclusions.

“The estimated costs per route mile and the total costs of track in the various maintenance categories are shown below (not shown here). Estimates in this form can only be broad approximations but they serve to show the high cost of even low category routes”.

What nonsense what about some actual figures!

Little imagination was put into thoughts of cost cutting or increasing revenue on lines designated to close

Page 18 is devoted to almost a rant about how economies can never be made to make branch lines and stopping services profitable. Many routes were still operated in a manner befitting Victorian working practices, using 2 sets of rolling stock where one would do, and were labour intensive and over provided with signal boxes, crossing loops, good sidings etc. The report ignores any discussion of this. The York to Hull line via Beverley was about to undergo modernisation with most of its double track removed and operating costs slashed, including all the level crossings becoming automated. This was cancelled and figures produced to show closing it would save money, based on the assumption that most people that used it were travelling end to end and that they would continue to use the train via the longer Selby route. Rail buses were dismissed as being too expensive to purchase. The report said that 60% of the costs were the 500,000 or so employees. No thought was made to how create efficiencies here, closing stations, and lines and sacking them was the answer, not doing with fewer of them. The concept of growing traffic was also completely ignored.

There was to be no questioning of the conclusions

The closure hearings done by the TUCC could only consider cases of hardship arising. It was taken as read that the lines were unprofitable and the figures supplied accurate. The utmost lengths were gone to stop any discussion of costs and efficiency without closure. The report itself dodged publishing any figures that could be questioned; every stat in the report was a national figure or estimation with the reader denied its workings. The Inquiry Chairman said it was not in their remit and refused public demands for the British Railways Board to produce actual evidence. It was as though BRB was running scared of what proper scrutiny might produce. The hearing for the three remaining lines

converging on Brecon were told by the Inquiry Chairman that those lines lost £290,000 a year and the Mid Wales line alone £150,000 of it. No supporting evidence was supplied. A common trick was then to state that expensive repairs were needed in the next couple of years; subsequent analysis showed that the normal renewals budget for the next five years were just added up together to give these massive supposedly out of the ordinary repair bills. In the report itself three examples were given showing how lines were unprofitable. It was unclear if any freight costs were lumped in with the supposedly passenger only ones given: freight revenue was ignored and it was also unclear whether cost had been pro rated or double counted, when these lines shared tracks with other routes, and of course the workings to how each cost heading was reached were absent. The report claimed the 42 mile double track line between York and Hull via Beverley with more intensive services than in Mid Wales cost £150,000 a year to provide. If the Brecon Inquiry Chairman was correct the 48 mile (or 60 to Brecon) lightly used single track between Three Cocks Junction and Moat Lane Junction must have cost in excess of the Beverley line to run per annum if a loss of £150,000 was made after revenue was deducted. Credible?

Looking on from 2010 the data and techniques are certainly dodgy beyond and below A level Maths standard. The guesstimates used leave so many margins for error that every figure used has to be taken with a huge pinch of salt. Therefore no one can seriously support the hypothesis that it saved the railways by rigorous statistical analysis. One can only sensibly conclude that the reports conclusions and recommendations were potentially wrong, based on inaccurate, misused or missing data.

So what did it say about the Cambrian? I've reproduced the maps for Mid Wales from the report's appendix. Remember the survey week results from w/e 23 April 1961 were assumed to be the yearly average. A non holiday non summer week! The main body text does not mention the Cambrian at all, apart from listing routes to be closed or have services modified. The commentary in the main report states that broadly the usage will determine the viability of a line. Generally speaking the maps showed usage in three categories, usually only higher category lines or stations survived but this was by no means a hard and fast rule. There are numerous instances throughout the country of lines with high usage being selected for closure or downgrading. The duplicate lines theory stated that traffic would transfer to the parallel line that stayed open. Receipts would be kept and costs lowered.

As can be seen from Figure 1 generally the passenger traffic in Mid Wales was apparently almost exclusively in the lower two categories; however close examinations reveals some surprising results. Traffic was allegedly higher north of Welshpool to Oswestry than toward Shrewsbury, the line between Dovey Junction and Aberystwyth was in the lowest category as was the line to Carmarthen. However we then have to believe that the Vale of Rheidol line carried in a non holiday week over 5000 passengers, with just three trains a day in operation at the time! Up the coast the traffic north of Barmouth to Criccieth appears as a straight line of more than 10,000 passengers per week. OK school traffic you say but with just 8 trains a day in operation an average of at least c.100 passengers per train out of the holiday season? Only 1 train each way carried school children. There were plenty of other rural lines with schools traffic but no continuous line on the map such as between Talerddig and Newtown. The maps don't indicate where in the bands the traffic levels were. Figure 3 shows the passenger receipts from origin station not destination; Aberystwyth was in the highest category despite no one using the standard gauge lines to it! As expected the town stations were busier than the village ones.

Freight (Figure 2) is all in the lowest category though south of Aberystwyth was busier. The Central Wales line still had a healthy level of freight traffic no doubt being

used as a through route from the industrial areas around Swansea and Llanelli. And that is it apart from listing the lines to be closed and stating that the Cambrian main line was to have services modified and be run exclusively from Shrewsbury. Why Aberystwyth, Borth, Dovey Junction, Machynlleth, Newtown and Welshpool were to stay open along with all stations on the coast is not stated. Note Caersws was scheduled for closure. Perhaps we had the most extreme geographically disparate example of duplicate route thinking applied, subsequent books tell us that the Cambrian main line was selected as the only one of the four routes to Cardigan Bay (the branch to Cardigan itself was not counted!) to remain presumably on the basis of Aberystwyth's receipts and a higher level of traffic? The duplicate theory stated that displaced traffic from the other routes would transfer onto the Cambrian mainline. The whole thing was looked at from a profit and loss perspective therefore it's interesting to note that if the report kept a line open it was deemed that it would be profitable! For decades we've heard bellyaching about loss making rural lines but if the report was right then the remaining ones shouldn't be. OK the Heart of Wales was saved from closure but this was deemed unprofitable anyway.

In the early 1990's when the cabinet papers from the era were looked for by historians under the 30 year rule they had conveniently disappeared. The lack of any detailed workings on cost and what could be done to reduce cost is the clincher for me, surely if all these lines were hopelessly unprofitable the easiest thing to do would have been to publish accurate figures on a line by line basis with current running costs and then what could be done by attempting savings amply demonstrating the hopelessness. Nor 50 years on are the figures used for individual lines in the public domain apart from a few isolated examples. There's just too much of a bad smell around it to come to any other conclusion that there's some sort of cover up. Was this cover up to hide the incompetent way it was carried out or the road lobby conspiracy or perhaps both?

The thinking of the day was that the lorry, bus and car would be taking over anyway and the railways were in terminal decline. Much of the rhetoric in the report was along these lines. The reality was that passenger rail traffic in the early 60's was as high as in most of the 50's and general demand for travel was increasing with rising incomes. Some lines that had been electrified had the seen the sparks effect and rising usage. The year the inept survey was done 1961 saw 1.025 Billion passenger journeys made, it was 2003 before that level was reached again. Traffic fell away after the Government announced the committee looking into closures not before it.

I'm left with a number of images that maybe some surveyors went native on the coast of Mid Wales and made the stats look better, the image of the Cardi- that native penny pinching occupant of Ceredigion is forever destroyed with Aberstwyths ticket receipts "your most expensive ticket please" for the lines with no passengers. Departures from the old Vale of Rheidol terminus must have resembled Indian railways with room on the roof only and perhaps the school children on the coast ran around and were counted more than once!

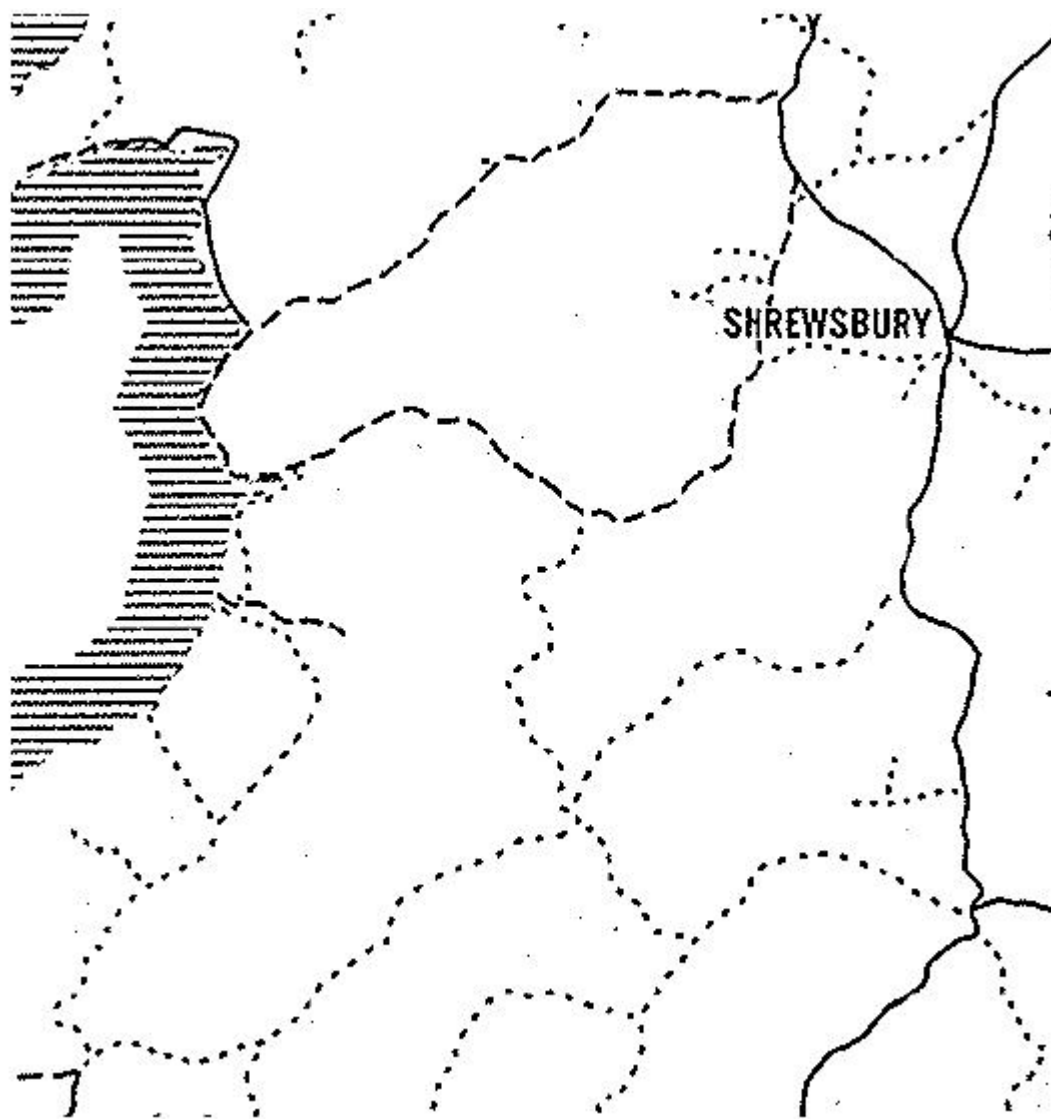
Oswestry appears to have been particularly hard done by, in the higher receipts category and two of its three lines in the hatched over 5000 passengers a week category. The key thing is of course the message the report sent out – railways were in decline and were no longer needed. Traffic both freight and passenger bled away from the whole system that remained intact. In addition the absence of rail heading from closed stations and lines undermined the profitability of what was left. Far from retaining a profitable core the report and the closures undermined the whole systems ability to generate revenue.

Could the stations and lines closed in Mid Wales stayed open?

Find out in Part two.

Fig 1. Density of Passenger Traffic for lines in Mid Wales Copied from Figure 1 Part 2 Maps. The Reshaping of British Railways 1963. British Railways Board.

Key :-
Dotted lines 0-5000 passengers per week
Hatched lines 5000 to 10000 passenger per week
Continuous line over 10000 passenger per week, line becomes thicker the greater the number.

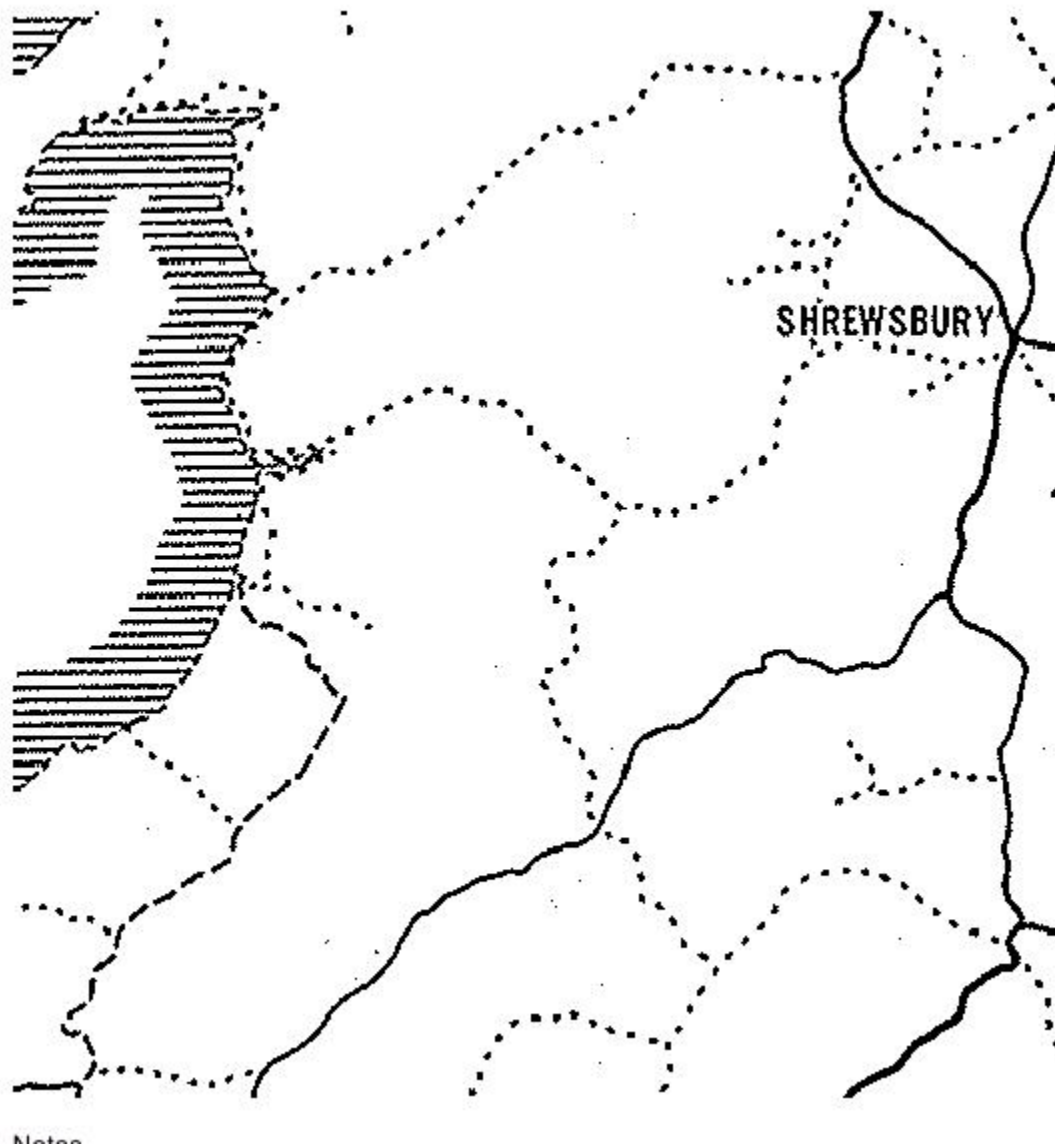


Notes

1. Traffic survey was undertaken week ending 23 April 1961; hence some lines that were closed prior to 1963 are shown.
2. Some reference to a railway atlas of the time might help as only Shrewsbury is marked if you are unfamiliar with the area.

Fig 2. Density of Freight Traffic for lines in Mid Wales Copied from Figure 2 Part 2 Maps. The Reshaping of British Railways 1963. British Railways Board.

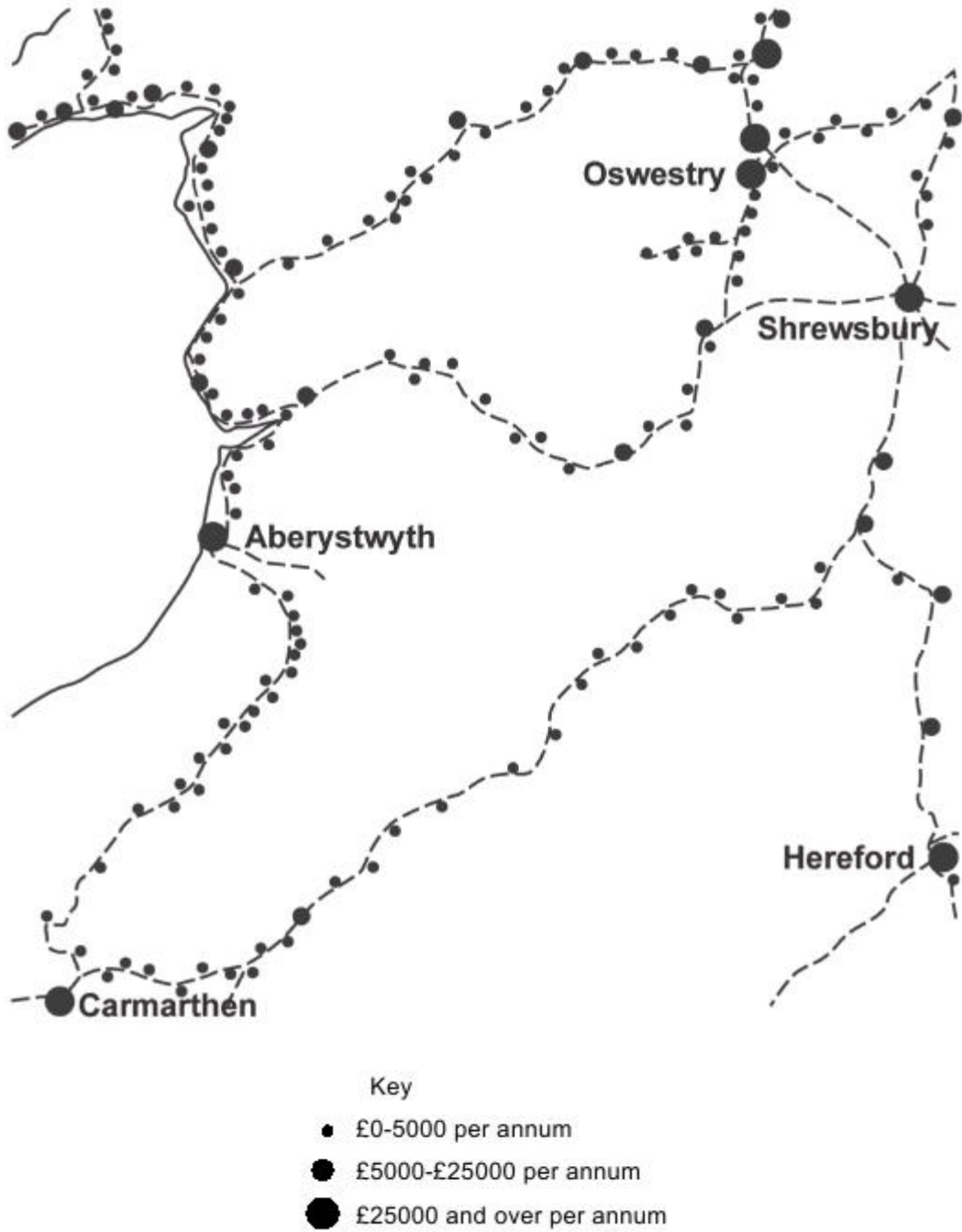
Key :- Dotted lines 0-5000 tons per week
Hatched lines 5000 to 10000 tons per week
Continuous line over 10000 tons per week, line becomes thicker the greater the number.



Notes

1. Traffic survey was undertaken week ending 23 April 1961; hence some lines that were closed prior to 1963 are shown.
2. Some reference to a railway atlas of the time might help as only Shrewsbury is marked if you are unfamiliar with the area.

Fig 3. Distribution of Passenger Traffic Receipts for lines in Mid Wales Copied from Figure 3 Part 2 Maps. The Reshaping of British Railways 1963. British Railways Board.



WAG Express Mk 2

A press release from the Welsh Assembly Government reads:

The express rail link between north and south Wales is to increase to two return services a day, the Deputy First Minister, Ieuan Wyn Jones announced today (Monday 17 January). Thanks to £3.5 million support from the Welsh Assembly Government, Arriva Trains Wales is developing plans to lease additional rolling stock to operate the extra services from Holyhead to Cardiff. By paying to lease the trains up-front for seven years, as opposed to an annual basis, the Assembly Government will save the taxpayer £350,000. Arriva Trains Wales have secured the timetable slots for the second service and they will now develop a procurement process to obtain the rolling stock. Once this process is complete, further announcements will be made on when the service is due to begin.

Mr Jones said: 'The North-South express rail link plays a vital role in not only linking north and south Wales but also rural and urban communities. With extra funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, plans will now be developed to increase the service and provide an alternative transport option to the car. This is part of our commitment to encourage sustainable transport and improve links between the north and south of the country. I'm delighted that not only are we planning to increase the frequency of this service – a route that has already been enjoyed by thousands of commuters, shoppers and tourists – but also secured a considerable saving to the taxpayer by being smarter in the way we negotiate our contracts.'

This story seems to raise more questions than it answers, but we understand that the plan is to run a second train from Holyhead later in the morning than the current very early start, with a later return from Cardiff than the current train. Odd, perhaps, as one might perhaps have expected a service for the denizens of the south to spend a day in the north. We are hearing talk of Class 67s as proposed haulage, and a controversial non-stop run between Llandudno Junction and Chester, but the actual information is not to hand. 'If this is an express service then I'm a kangaroo' says North Wales AM Eleanor Burnham in a surrealistic mood. 'People are having to travel to Bangor to catch these trains, which then stop at Chester, Crewe and Shrewsbury. It should avoid stopping in England rather than along the North Wales coast.'

We also hear cries from the Wrexham contingent, as the second train, like the first, is apparently to run via Crewe rather than reversing at Chester and serving Wrexham. Wrexham Council leader Aled Roberts explained to the press that the authority had campaigned for the present express to stop in the town. He added: 'Despite numerous requests for a timetable regarding the doubling of the track to Wrexham and the re-routing, in the meantime there has been no action by WAG. This announcement needs to be reversed – it is diabolical the people of Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire are being treated in this way.'

The timings of the additional service are roughly two hours behind the 1st one, meaning they come through Shrewsbury in the gap between Cambrian trains and are no use for people from Mid Wales - so much for "One Wales". It would also be interesting to know how the fares collected for these WAG services are distributed. Do they go into the pot to reduce the public subsidy, or contribute to Arriva's profits?

The view from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

“Cheer up Dusty it’s election year” said the Memsahib. However our small Siamese friend is worried at the delay at implementing the hourly service on our line and looks out the window, depressed at the slow progress of something so simple and easy. Let’s face it: it’s not rocket science and never has been. So why do so many pretend that it is something complex, and why do so many of our so-called leaders get suckered in by this so called advice? Network Rail has declared the study into reopening the Amlwch Branch as far as Llangefni “tough”- What? If the heritage sector had that attitude – well it wouldn’t exist. The sort of things Network Rail have complex studies for and gob smacking costs for, are routinely carried out by a collection of overweight middle age volunteers who drink too much beer, spotty youths and a small dog called Colin over a weekend. The planning and the business case are done in the pub the night before. It works far better than anything that the non heritage rail industry can come up with.

So what can we expect from our election for Cardiff Bay this May? The Nationalists must feel their rail policy decision in November was justified by the January fare increases, and how the TOC’s portrayed themselves. Plaid Cymru proposes that on the expiry of the current Wales and Border franchise, instead of re-letting it as a franchise again, it becomes a not for profit company based on the Welsh Water model. Their theory states that the £10 million per annum or so of profit ATW currently makes will be re invested in Welsh services and not go to shareholders, or to modernise regional services in the Ruhr basin. However this scenario has the same problem as the Tories and Lib Dems in Westminster: longer franchise terms and less micro management in return for an investment programme theory. It has to wait till the end of the Wales and Border franchise in December 2018, and realistically it will be 2020 before we get to find out if any improvements are delivered. Still, we could always carry on moaning that London doesn’t give Wales enough money. The chances of the coalition government in Westminster acquiescing to this compensation for historic crimes/under funding policy is about as likely as Dusty moving away from her blanket near the radiator this winter.

There are two brave and bold things that could be done. In now looks like Wales could end up with the enhanced rate of EU funding for 2014 to 2020 as our GDP may still be beneath 75% of the EU average. The ERDF regional development fund (infrastructure) has amounted to around £650 million in each of the last two funding periods; the railways have got around 5% of that. The current station improvements scheme and the reopening of the Ebbw Vale line are the two prime examples of what’s been done with it. Instead of chopping up the funds around lots of sectors why not commit the bulk to a railway electrification scheme? Let’s face it: Westminster wants Wales to contribute to the electrification of the Great Western Main Line and we can easily play the “bringing the backward transport links of the only country in Western Europe without a mile of electrified railway line up to date” card in getting EU approval. £650 million sounds a lot but when it’s split into smaller amounts over several sectors across the country it soon dissipates into lots of smaller barely noticeable schemes. The reality is there isn’t enough of it for everyone to have a slice of the cake and to make a real difference with it. Rail electrification is one area it could actually make a national impact.

Secondly, if Wales votes Yes for more devolved power following this year’s referendum will it have enough legislative clout to terminate the Wales and Border franchise early? If so plans for re-franchising or creating a not for profit company hopefully integrating Network Rail in Wales in place could be brought forward. This would be a most logical use of primary legislative powers, enabling what’s widely regarded as a

bad deal (the Wales and Border franchise) to be swept away and start addressing the worst aspect of the 1993 Railways Act – fragmentation. You don’t have to sit on your

backside waiting on someone else to do stuff for you – get off it and do it yourself is my message to the politicians of all parties heading for Cardiff Bay, and please please please don't listen to all that so called advice about how doing anything has all those insurmountable barriers.

Three Cocks Cottage February 2011



Snow comes early to the Cambrian. Welshpool, 7th December 2010. Photograph:-Angus Eickhoff.

Provisional SARPA Meeting Schedule for 2010-11

We try and meet monthly at venues that are close to the stations on the line and at times convenient to travel by rail. All venues are booked in advance for some time but we have suffered from changes of ownership and booking records being lost, venues closing down and engineering work disrupting travel in the past. Any alterations will appear in subsequent Newsletter and on our website.

Saturday March 5th	1145	Aberystwyth	The Cambria Pier St
Tuesday April 5th	1915	Welshpool	Royal Oak Hotel. Jacobean Suite
Saturday May 7th	1145	Tywyn	Narrow Gauge Museum Wharf Station
Tuesday June 7th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St
Saturday July 2nd	1200	Borth	Railway Inn
Saturday August 6th	SARPA Summer Trip, likely to involve travel on 1 st UP train from Aberystwyth. Details nearer date.		
Tuesday September 7th	1900	Caersws	Caersws Village Club
Saturday October 8th	1130	Machynlleth	AGM Venue TBC
Tuesday November 1st	1800	Aberystwyth	Venue TBC
Tuesday December 6th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St.

Websites

**Our website <http://sarpa.info> email address:- sarpa@linuxmail.org
Webmaster Angus Eickhoff.**

Website host is now Red Box Internet:- <http://www.redboxinternet.com>

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site
traintimes.org.uk/

Arriva Trains Wales www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

LondonMidland www.londonmidland.com/index.html
Virgin Trains www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp) www.acorp.uk.com

Wrexham and Shropshire company www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

North Wales Coast Railway www.nwrail.org.uk/

Circular tour of North Wales by rail www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/

Ffestiniog Railway timetable www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Talylyn Railway timetable www.talylyn.co.uk/timetable/2009

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51

Fairbourne Railway www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene:-
railphotos.demeseo.com/

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

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

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Fax. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

Wrexham and Shropshire: Great Central House, Marylebone Station, Melcombe Place, London NW1 1JJ. Tel. 0845 260 5233

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Rail Franchise Performance Manager Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6849

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

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