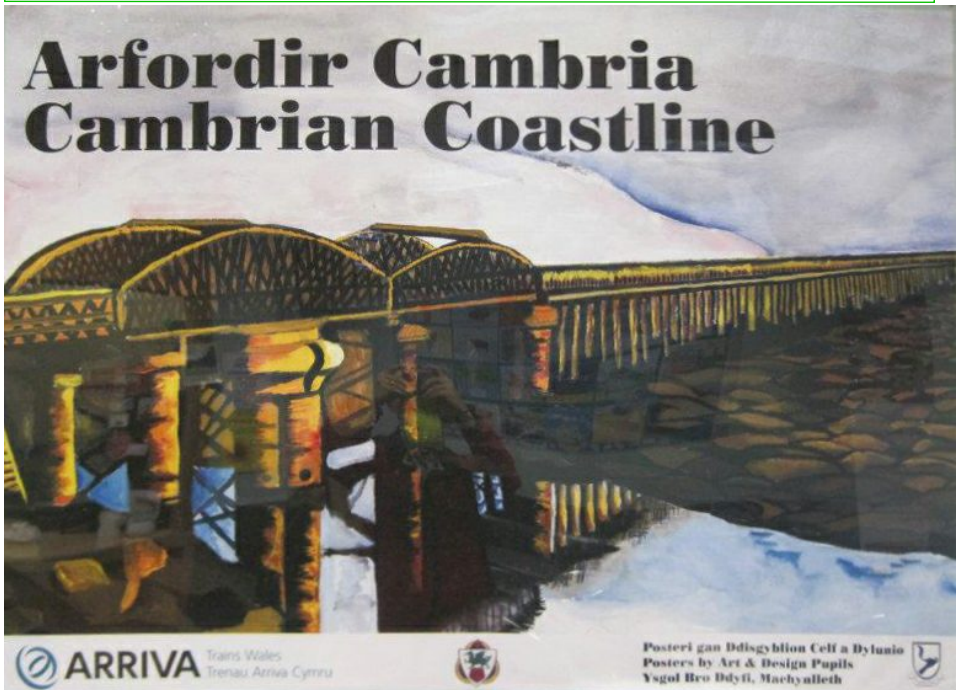


Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
No. 56
JANUARY 2012



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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 and its Officers 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. Whilst the Chairman contributes articles always published under his name he is not involved in the selection process of other copy for publication.

Want to Join SARPA?

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

If I could wind back the clock I'd stop Central Trains and the WDA unleashing the "hourly service to Aberystwyth". In December 1999 the cat was let out of the bag. Over a decade has been lost where any thought of incremental service improvements or addressing individual problems have been answered with the "hourly service will address that". Stakeholders and the press love it as it's short and sweet but as I've outlined before it's lost as no one articulates what it's about, apart from running extra trains at extra cost. A number of sources in South Wales tell me it's seen as lots of extra cost and with ATW getting a staggering £1.4 million per annum out of WG to run a handful of extra trains to Fishguard,

a price tag of over £4 Million for the Cambrian hourly has apparently been floated. Another South Wales source goes on to tell me that the old pre-Deutsche Bahn owned Arriva were happy to tell the Welsh Government it would all be new additional cost (and extra profit for ATW), when in reality a fair amount of the cost could be met out of re-jigged diagramming of existing units and crew. In essence it's been hijacked and inertia has resulted. It has also become in people's minds the one and only issue for the Cambrian, which is far from the case.

So let's get the agenda firmly back on a proper footing that addresses real issues with a clear focus. I'm sending the hourly service to Room 101.

The glaring deficiencies on the Cambrian are not the lack of a daytime hourly train service (whatever that is) but:

- Lack of a commuter train into Shrewsbury in the middle of the AM peak.
- Lack of connections between the coast line and Aberystwyth (and vice versa).
- Appalling connections at Shrewsbury with destinations in the northbound direction (Crewe, Manchester, Wrexham, Chester).
- Lack of Cambrian peak time capacity all the way to Aberystwyth and at the Shrewsbury to Birmingham end of the service on a daily basis in the AM and PM commuter peaks.

What's wrong with coming up with solutions to these issues rather than chasing the hourly service? The hourly service doesn't actually address a number of those real issues anyway. The hourly service is wrapped up in public funding, politics, unions, business cases and inertia: back in 1997 we came up with something that would have been self funding.

The Newtown to Shrewsbury shuttle if it had gone ahead wouldn't have involved spending £millions on infrastructure. We just pathed a single car Class 153 starting at Machynlleth in the morning in the gaps in the then timetable; it ran to Shrewsbury and then came back to Newtown and back to Shrewsbury repeating half a dozen times before going back to Machynlleth for the night. The timetable wasn't clockface, and of course it didn't go to Ceredigion, but should have made some space on trains going further west from Newtown. I have a nice letter from Central Trains costing it at £400K per annum. With the then average rail journey generating around £4 in revenue it would have had to attract around 100,000 new users. Fanciful? Each extra train ran would have needed just 28 passengers to break even. People sucked their teeth and wondered if rail use could grow back then. According to the Office of Rail Regulation the existing service on the Cambrian mainline as it turns out has grown by around 30,000 per annum between 2000 and 2010.

Services on our line currently run 2200 unit miles per weekday. The current timetable sees 8 trains the whole length of the line, 6 of these have an extra 2 carriages between Machynlleth and Shrewsbury, there's also an additional 3 each way movements between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth. That's the equivalent of 13 two carriage trains running the entire length each day. The train leasing, track access and running costs would all be the same. I don't believe for one second that we couldn't be more creative with those 2200 unit miles: the current pattern may be simple and operationally convenient for the operator, but some intelligent planning could deliver some key benefits without increasing the costs too much. As for crewing I'm also told that the drivers' diagrams in particular are very inefficient at the moment, and people claiming to be drivers at Machynlleth depot have posted message on web forums complaining that they're fed up with sitting around and want to drive trains! I'm also told it's down to the ASLEF union intransigence that anything new always has to be accompanied by new drivers (and new union members). I have it from a reliable source that if better diagramming was introduced the hourly service could be met out of existing staff.

Why don't we be smart instead of tying ourselves in multi million pound knots? Someone needs to bang some heads: after all we've got all that infrastructure sitting there waiting to be used.

Gareth Marston
Newtown, Montgomeryshire December 2011

News in Brief

Arriva buys Grand Central

Grand Central, an open access operator, has been added to Arriva's portfolio of Arriva Trains Wales, Cross Country and Chiltern Railways franchises, and their concessions to operate the Tyne and Wear Metro, and as a joint venture, London Overground.

Cosford Station

Cosford station is to be rebuilt in a £2.1 million project. There will be new platforms and waiting shelters, new lighting and customer information screens. The work started on 31st October and is hoped will be completed by the end of March 2012. During reconstruction the station will be closed, and road transport provided from Albrighton station.

Tywyn Area Local Bus Service

A revised bus timetable came into force w/e/f 31/10/11 following cessation of Arriva from the Machynlleth/Tywyn/Dolgellau route. Lloyds Coaches have implemented a reduced service in the daytime only, from Machynlleth to Tywyn, with the first and last only continuing to Bryncreg & Llanegryn. Those travelling to Tywyn by train should note that THERE IS NOW NO BUS CONNECTION FOR TYWYN FROM THE 18.46 TRAIN INTO MACHYNLLETH. There remains of course the train to Barmouth on Fridays only. The last bus from Machynlleth leaves there at 17.15, almost in the shadow of the 17.06 train. [From Bill Redfern]

Customer Information Screens

Customer Information Screens have been installed at Caersws, Welshpool and Dovey Junction.

The Cambrian Line Website

The Cambrian Line website (www.thecambrianline.co.uk) has been revamped. It now has more functionality, a more vibrant layout and design, and very shortly we'll have a fully functioning accommodation finder and attractions and events guide on it as well. It is also now linked with a facebook and twitter page: www.facebook.com/cambrianline

Newtown

The scaffolding that has covered the Royal Welsh Warehouse/Pryce Jones building next to the station has at last been removed after over 12 months work. The owners with grant

aid have spent £2 million renewing the roof, windows and sand blasting the exterior. The external condition is the best it's been for a number of decades. Stonework on the front reveals the buildings links to the railway with a stone carving of a Cambrian Railways locomotive clearly on view. The Warehouse was built in 1879 and extended in 1886/1887. A further building on the other side of the road known as Agriculture House completed in 1902 according to several sources though the building bears 1895 in large lettering on it.



Newtown draper Pryce Jones started the World's first mail order business in 1859 and his company provided a thriving parcels trade that the railway dealt with. It was taken over by larger concerns in 1938 and subsequently had several name changes. The upper floors of the building were operating as a catalogue call centre up into its closure in January 2011. The 1979 working timetable for the line showed a parcels train running down to Newtown in the morning and returning empty to Shrewsbury. Conversations with older members of the community reveal it was being used as a returns centre for Kays Catalogue at that time. What happened to the returned goods? The buildings still house several retail companies and members of the public can walk in and browse. The top floors

of the original building are not accessible and the call centre is still there with desks and computers in situ. Shop Direct apparently have the lease until the end of March 2013 and seem to have mothballed the facility.

Welshpool

A customer information screen has been installed and is due to be operational by the New Year. That doyen of accurate and impartial information the *County Times* published a piece at the end of October claiming that the station footbridge will be resurfaced.

It was claimed by a *County Times* (30/12/11/) columnist that a mother and young toddler had been refused access to a train due to overcrowding and left to wait on a following bus in freezing cold conditions. No date or time was given.

Caersws

A customer information screen is due to be installed by the New Year.

Machynlleth

The Department for Transport has announced under its "Access for all scheme" funding of £1 million to construct a lift and footbridge between the 2 platforms. Further moneys will be contributed by Welsh Government to complete the scheme but with continued lack of investment in what the all will be accessing is it really worth the money if trains are still too

infrequent or short formed and the fares too expensive to be attractive to the all? SARPA's own disability focus group comes up with the same issues as other passengers on overcrowding, connections etc. Perhaps we should make these a "disabled" issue and see if money is showered?

Dovey Junction

A customer information screen is due to be installed by the New Year.

Aberystwyth

A multi million plan scheme to enhance the station frontage and bus station has commenced but little detail on it or any public consultation appears to have taken place.

How fast is your train?

Average speeds of services radiating from Shrewsbury, Dec 2011.

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth	42.5 mph.	81.5 miles	6 stops
Shrewsbury to Pwllheli	31 mph	117.5 miles	29 stops
Shrewsbury to Newtown	48 mph	33.75 miles	1 stop
Shrewsbury to Chester (Holyhead to Cardiff trains)	46 mph	42 miles	4 stops
Shrewsbury to Crewe (Manchester to Cardiff trains)	68 mph	32.75 miles	Non Stop
Shrewsbury to Crewe (semi fasts have Wem, Whitchurch, Nantwich calls)	52 mph	32.75 miles	3 stops
Shrewsbury to Crewe (all stations service).	38.5 mph	32.75 miles	6 stops
Shrewsbury to Hereford (fast Ludlow, Leominster only)	58 mph	50.75 miles	2 stops
Shrewsbury to Hereford (all stations)	51 mph	50.75 miles	4 stops
Shrewsbury to Birmingham (ATW)	47 mph	43 miles	4 stops
Shrewsbury to Birmingham (London Midland)	38 mph	43 miles	10 stops
Shrewsbury to Swansea (Heart of Wales)	30 mph	121.5 miles	31 stops
Shrewsbury to Swansea (via Cardiff)	47 mph	146 miles	10 stops

Pete goes to Wellington

Pete, a regular commuter from Newtown to Shrewsbury, received a surprise trip one morning in the autumn. Pete uses the 0625 departure from Newtown and is in the habit of staying onboard the train at Shrewsbury whilst it waits between 0711 and 0731. He can't get into his place of work nearby until at least 0800 and the train is warm and dry. He often listens to Radio 4 on his mobile phone headset. One morning the train arrived at Platform

4 instead of the usual Platform 5. Pete was in the rear unit and failed to notice the two units being uncoupled.

Pete looked up in horror to find he was now heading back out of Platform 4 onto the Wellington line at 0720! He found out that the rear unit of the 0514 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International supposedly going forward from Shrewsbury at 0731 was now commandeered to be the very late running 0631 ATW service from Shrewsbury to Birmingham International! He got off at Wellington and was not charged by understanding ATW and London Midland staff to get back to Shrewsbury.

Very little benefit to commuters from Shropshire to the West Midlands would have arisen as the 0647 and 0714 London Midland trains from Shrewsbury would have picked up any passengers for the 0631, and the 0731 ATW train was left short-formed no doubt much to the disgruntlement of many. The 0809 International St to Aberystwyth would have been run as normal from Birmingham New St thereby the operator would only be fined for part cancellations between New St and International.

New Years fare rise shocker

The headline rise may have been an average of 5.9% but certain fares display a variance to that. The Anytime return fare from Aberystwyth to Birmingham "only" rose by 3.9% whilst the Anytime return from Newtown to Shrewsbury has gone up by 7.4% and the Off peak Newtown to Cardiff by 7.5%.

The usual weasel words about paying for investment were waffled.

Miscellaneous

Severn Tunnel Junction signal box, built in 1903, is set to continue in service until at least 2030. It is now the largest lever-operated box in the world, with 180 levers.

Timber trains are now running between Teignbridge in Devon to Chirk. The trains are being loaded at Heathfield, on a branch from Newton Abbot which has been out of use many years.



Four of the pieces of Artwork for the Cambrian lines. The dramatic painting of the Bar-mouth Bridge is on our title page.

Llangollen Railway extension to Corwen

The Llangollen Railway announces progress with the track extension to Corwen

Phase 1 progress during the summer months has seen the trackbed between Corwen and the half way point at Bonwm (site of a former halt) securely fenced and gated along a length of four miles overall. In addition existing track west of Carrog has been upgraded with flat bottom rail.

A licence for replacement of culverts and underpasses has been applied for from the Environment Agency to secure drainage into the River Dee, which is one of the most heavily regulated rivers in Europe.

During the autumn period a detailed survey of the site of the temporary platform at Corwen and the associated disabled access ramp will be undertaken and the designs finalised. Now that the leaf fall is underway a programme of tree works on the embankment, or as required elsewhere for the safe operation of trains, will commence.

On going consultation with ecologists ensures the Railway provides for mitigation of issues arising from the rebuilding of a railway through an area designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest/Special Area of Conservation and the protection of flora and fauna. A preliminary survey indicates the possibility of bat roosts in an occupational over bridge where the arch requires repairs.

Closer examination of the trackbed bordering the River Dee indicated signs of erosion may be taking place and a survey of the river bank has been commissioned to identify the remedial work required.

It remains the Llangollen Railway's intention to have track down as far as the site of the former Bonwm Halt in time for the Steel, Steam and Stars 3 gala planned for 21-29 April 2012, and proceeding to Corwen Phase 1 temporary platform by the end of 2012.

Llangollen Railway is considering the operational requirements for trains in 2013 when a shuttle service will operate on the extension west of Carrog.

The car park at Corwen makes it a new and attractive western terminus for the Railway and opens up a different market for passengers accessing from the Snowdonia region and the popular North Wales coast area.

Looking forward to Phase 2 and building of the ultimate terminus facility on the embankment adjacent to the town's car park, it has been acknowledged that this will require heavy constructional engineering involving contractors. The station design costs are to be revisited in the light of work done in Phase 1 to bring the railway to the outskirts of Corwen. Options for funding the design study have been discussed with representatives from Denbighshire County Council, Assembly Members, the Member of Parliament and Corwen town interests with an initial objective to raise sufficient money to finalise the Phase 2 scheme.

The appeal by Llangollen Railway Trust for donations to support the matched funding for Phase 1 of the project remains open and those wishing to see the trains return to Corwen are asked to make a financial contribution to the work which is underway.

Llangollen Railway Trust Chairman, Jim Ritchie, said, "We are encouraged by the progress made by our volunteer workforce during the summer period and the continued interest in the project by the many visitors to Llangollen Railway.

However we also have to acknowledge the various constraints to rapid progress and the eventual achievement of our aim. Further work is dependent upon our compliance with the many regulations governing rebuilding of the railway through an environmentally sensitive area and on receiving additional financial support in these difficult times."

George Jones, For Llangollen Railway Trust

Cambrian Railway Partnership hopeful of positive announcement in December

From <http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk/news/> 21 Nov 2011

The Cambrian railways main line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury could be set for a major step forward towards an hourly service says the Cambrian Railways Partnership's Development Officer Rhydian Mason.

According to Rhydian, who has over the past few weeks been lobbying Assembly Members in Cardiff, and seeking support from Members of Parliament at Westminster over the issue, an announcement is imminent in early December which will finally reveal what developments are in store for the important line which connects mid Wales to the rest of the UK.

"I spoke personally to Carl Sargeant, the Minister for Local Government and Communities at the Senedd very recently, and he indicated that progress was being made that would be revealed in an announcement he would be making during the next few weeks," said Rhydian.

"Having spoken to one or two other AM's that have been involved in the discussions, there is a strong indication that there will be some good news for us which suggests that we will get some additional much needed services for the Cambrian main line.

"Such a service would have great potential for business, leisure and commuting for all areas on the Cambrian main line, as well as providing better connections for the Cambrian Coast line. We fully believe that a more frequent service would change the way that people view and use the train, and as a result, we're confident that we'll see more patronage throughout the year."

Glyn Davies, Conservative MP for Montgomeryshire was also keen to see improvements in the frequency of services across mid Wales on the Cambrian line. He said, "An hourly service on the Cambrian Line has been an ambition of Mid Wales train users for many years. It would bring great benefit to businesses across the whole Mid Wales area. More trains into mid Wales would be particularly helpful to our tourist industry, which comprises such a big part of the local economy. The train is a convenient and economical way to travel, and an hourly service would create opportunities of all sorts along the main line and also along the Cambrian Coast."

Plaid Cymru Mid and West AM Simon Thomas said that an hourly service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury would be a step forward for the region on many levels: "The potential benefits to business, tourism and for commuters would surely bring new opportunities to the area, and could help change people's perception of the railway as an efficient and convenient mode of travel."

Contrary to some rumours circulating, an hourly service will not be introduced on the Cambrian line in 2012. "Such a service is entirely dependent on the Welsh Government's decision in December," added Rhydian Mason. "Once they have made their position clear, the rail operator – in this case Arriva Trains Wales – then needs to make the necessary arrangements to put the service in place. This could mean the need to source additional staff, and additional carriages, as well as incorporating the additional services into a suitable timetable. The Welsh Government will need to approve all these changes therefore a definite timescale is at this point difficult to pinpoint."

The view from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

An apology it appears a version of my last column full of typing errors was published. Dusty and I in-between saving lots of money on rail fares and sticking two fingers/paws up at the Government's extortion policy have been gathering information on the bizarre goings on with our world class transport system. We haven't had to try too hard to find some glaring examples of complete stupidity, double standards and waste.

Business Cases – don't believe a word

We've all heard about business cases: we're often told that a particular scheme hasn't got one or occasionally we hear that a scheme such as High Speed 2 has. However once and a while the nitty-gritty of how they're worked out is made available, and in the case of Carno station a distinctly sour taste is left in the mouth. TraCC commissioned consultants Capita Symonds to look at the business cases for reopening Carno and Bow St Stations and some funny results fell out the woodwork, exposing the inputs chosen for the methodology as suspect. The success or not of schemes appears to be rigged by what's chosen as its inputs.

You'll remember that the estimated benefits of a particular scheme expressed in monetary terms are divided by the estimated cost of providing the scheme. The greater the resultant ratio is in the positive the more chance the scheme has of being approved. Historically getting a ratio somewhere near 2.0 was seen as in the green light zone, i.e. the cost of doing it was around about half the cost of the benefits. Sounds great doesn't it? Carno's station came out at a sickly 1.15 - nowhere near green light status. Carno Station Action Group obtained the report and found the following suspect assumptions used by the consultants:

1. Nearly 4000 existing journeys per annum will no longer be made on the line. The two minute slowing down of the schedule to stop at Carno will put these folk off travelling according to the consultants and the lost revenue was counted as a cost: c£25K.
2. The annual maintenance cost of the station would be a staggering £35K.
3. The station car park would need to be raised 1.5m out of the floodplain at a cost of c£250K.
4. Vehicle operating costs saved i.e. the cost saved by folk not driving assumed petrol prices rise at 0.2% per annum.

It's not too hard to question these. Will 2 minutes in the schedule really have any difference on someone making the decision to travel from Aberystwyth to Birmingham? Is the station to have its own full time caretaker with a generous paint allowance? No one who lives in the village can recall the allocated field for the car parking flooding in living memory. Is raising it therefore necessary? Petrol costs have risen by an average of 3% per annum for the last decade, and are expected to continue in this vein, therefore the real savings would be far higher than the consultants' assumed value and so beneficial to the case.

It looks like the good old fudge - find additional costs and knock down the estimated benefits to make sure the scheme you don't like doesn't have a business case. CSAG calculate that assuming no passengers are lost, a sensible maintenance cost, no rising of the car park and using real petrol costs, the BCR is around 1.7.

Still not good enough? Well consider this: the *Western Mail* reports that the cost of the Welsh Government's own favourite pet transport project, the dualling of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road, has risen so much since the BCR for it was first estimated, that if a reassessment was made today which included the reality of falling traffic levels and hefty rises in insurance and petrol the scheme wouldn't even hit a BCR of 1.0!

WG didn't even deny it: a spokeswoman said "Dualling this road will help improve safety, shorten travel times for commuters and businesses and contribute to the wider regeneration of the region," adding that benefit-to-cost ratios (BCRs) formed only part of the decision-making process. "The overall appraisal needs to take account of all of the costs and benefits of schemes, such as their economic, environmental and social impacts." As anyone with any common sense knows (which clearly the silly girl in the press office doesn't) these are already factored into the BCR calculations!

Which makes you wonder why BCR is used at all, if you're in control it seems you just plough ahead with your 35 year old out of date and irrelevant Welsh Office roads masterplan, even if scores of railway station reopening proposals are whopping your business cases behind.

The irresponsible bus/rail interchange walkway

SARPA members in Welshpool were astonished to receive a reply from Powys CC claiming it would be irresponsible of them to co-ordinate bus and rail timetables, and anyway this was something done on the continent not in the UK. Recent changes to the times of the major routes through Newtown confirmed this anti-integration stance with the T4 service moved away from the station and X75 and X85 routes all timed so as to not connect with the train. It would appear that some officials in County Hall don't share this view, when this summer a six figure sum was spent creating a clearly designated walkway between Newtown's bus and rail stations. As far as can be ascertained nobody has actually used this stunning piece of European structural funds spend for its intended purpose: after all the buses don't connect with the trains and vice versa.

Only in the UK would this happen, and remember a £1.2 million bespoke bus lane was installed near the station around 10 years ago. Outstanding isn't it?

A modern history lesson

When the Welsh Government published details of all expenditure over £25,000 some journalists at the BBC noted a monthly payment to Barclay's of just under £300K per month. Further questions revealed it to be a PFI – Private Finance Initiative payment dating from the time of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (wound up in March 2001). It transpires we're all still paying for something called Lloyd George Avenue, a piece of dual carriageway roughly ¾ mile in length paralleling the line from Cardiff Queen St to Cardiff Bay.

Despite castigating PFI in opposition, the coalition government through the DfT is still planning to buy its ineptly specified Intercity Express Train using PFI. The folk of Derby will also be pleased to hear that their grandchildren's taxes – if they have a job that is - will be used to pay the PFI deal brokered for the Thameslink rolling stock contract awarded to Siemens.

When it's free it's cheaper

Ever since BR days there has been a free shuttle bus between Chester Railway station and the City Centre: a sensible way of encouraging visitors to the city to travel by train. Into privatisation days the service has continued with sponsorship from Chester City Council and the TOC's that serve Chester. Apparently some 450,000 journeys per annum are made. However bus bandit Aintree Coaches have applied to run a commercial route from the station to the city centre from the 21st November.

All very well but some obscure bit of the bus deregulation law called Section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 means a subsidised route cannot compete with a commercial one and the free bus must go. Aintree Coaches will charge £1 one way. Furthermore as an

estimated 100,000 journeys per annum on the existing shuttle bus are English pensioners over 60, the coach firm can claim a £1 a journey from the council to carry them, meaning whereas the free bus cost £38K per annum for the council it will now have to find potentially up to £100K per annum. Council taxpayers and hard pressed local services are no doubt ecstatic and having to find another £70K per annum in these hard times.

Completely bonkers! Of course the Thatcher era legislation was designed to line private operators' pockets at everyone else's expense: could you see this happening anywhere else?

How hard is it to catch a bus?

Up until recently hard working WG Civil servants were provided with a free of charge exclusive shuttle bus between the old Welsh Office building in Cathays Park and the Senedd in the Bay: a sensible arrangement which required civil servants laden with important and not so important papers just to flash their staff pass. However in an attempt to save money WG has chucked Cardiff Bus a bung to extend its No 6 Baycar route to Cathays Park (every 10 mins). All well and good until it transpired a 2500 word guidance document had been produced instructing civil servants on how to catch the bus and obtain a staff pass from reception.

The Baycar is of course a public service, and despite strict instructions to remain incognito the public servants can easily be identified as they're the ones moaning about how silly the system is and how obstructive their own reception staff are at issuing passes, as I found out to my astonishment when taking the Memsahib to the theatre just before Christmas. As someone who grew up with careless talk costs lives it made my monocle pop out! However if catching a bus between two set points on a very frequent route is such a strain down at the Welsh Government it perhaps explains a lot.....

Build my bypass now!

Back on the theme of BCR the hapless hacks at the *Montgomeryshire County Times* picked up upon the *Western Mail* story on WG road schemes. Ignoring most of the story to feed their own prejudices, they spotted that some of the rural roads such as the fabled Newtown bypass had initially been assessed with very good cost benefit ratios. Conclusive proof that the road should go ahead they cried. The hacks ignored the fact that road schemes face a triple whammy of rising vehicle costs, declining levels of traffic and massively inflated construction costs since the BCR was worked out.

Would they be jumping for joy if the real costs of today were used?

The Olympics- not for me

Over on Eastern Region the new franchise holder was discovered to have won its bid to run Greater Anglia services based on giving up 75 odd coaches. Great news for taxpayer said the new transport secretary. If you're a regular commuter in the area you will be scratching your head in incomprehension. Just wait for the Olympics to start next summer!

Needless to say the memsahib and myself will be watching it on TV and not trying to travel anywhere near it.

The world is indeed mad and the only thing world class the UK has to shout about is its incompetence!

Three Cocks Cottage December 2011

Artwork for Machynlleth Station

Students from Ysgol Bro Ddyfi School in Machynlleth have created new and vibrant artwork for the station at Machynlleth.

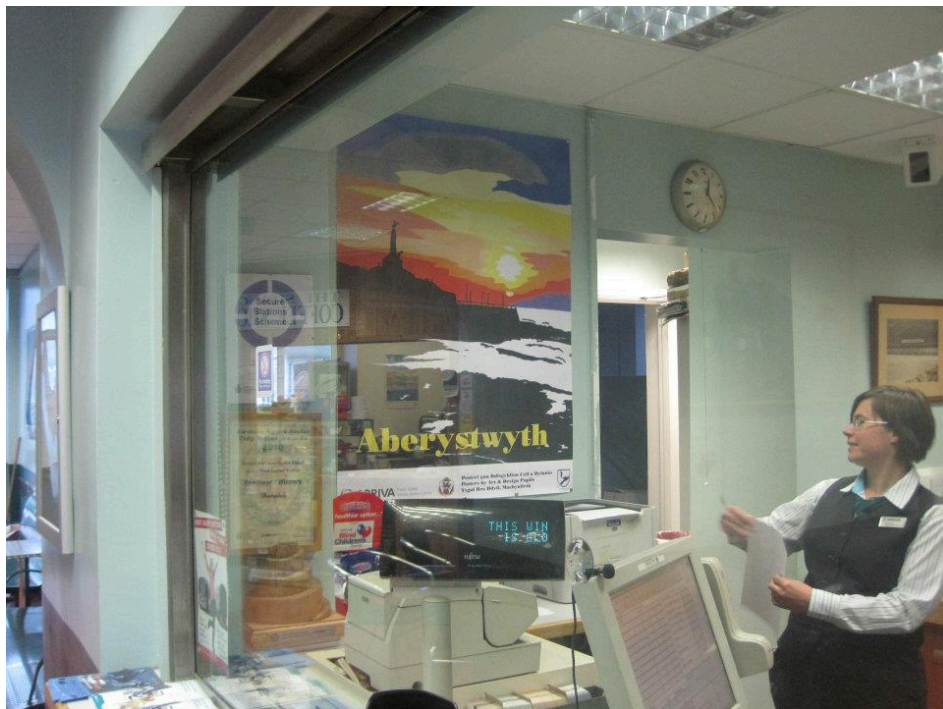
The project, in conjunction with Arriva Trains Wales and the Cambrian Railways Partnership has culminated in 8 pieces of art created by students at the school depicting various destinations on the Cambrian Lines.

"These pieces of art have certainly added some vibrancy to the station waiting room," said Cambrian Railways Partnership development officer Rhydian Mason. "They currently take pride of place in the station, and a number of passengers have commented on the striking images that are quite evocative."

David Crunkhorn, Station Manager said that this project was a fine example of how a community or schools based project can inject so much colour into a station. "Putting their artwork on display like this has really made a great difference to the atmosphere of the waiting room. The pupils have created unique pieces of art which are of a very very high standard indeed. We're very proud to be able to put them on display, and they are a very fitting advertisement for passengers, business people and tourists about the fantastic locations that you can visit on the Cambrian Line."

The eight images are on display at the station in Machynlleth, and visitors are welcome to come and see the growing collection of artwork prepared by local people at the station. That below is in the booking office.

[from the Cambrian Lines website]



More on the Cheshire Cat Tour

Further to the report of the Cheshire Cat tour on 18th August (*Newsletter No.55*, p.19), Roger Whitehouse of Tywyn, who was on the train, has written that:

"Because they must observe lower speed restrictions to avoid damaging the track and bridges, trains hauled by locomotives are bound to take longer to Shrewsbury than the lighter multiple units used on the normal public services. On this occasion, one locomotive developed a fault on the climb to Talerddig, causing a stop of 15 minutes to attend to it, following which one locomotive was doing most of the work, so taking longer than scheduled. We passed a train for Aberystwyth waiting at the end of the new double track section approaching Welshpool. Further delay at Crewe, changing as planned to another pair of locomotives, left us an hour late by the time we headed east from Manchester.

On the return journey, we reached Shrewsbury at about 9.10 p.m., having regained about 40 minutes of the late start from Durham. If on time, the 7.30 p.m. train from Aberystwyth would already have left Welshpool, and we would have seriously delayed the 9.42 p.m. service train to Aberystwyth had we preceded it. We were allowed to enter the single line as soon as the latter had cleared Westbury (where there has been no loop for many years). The further wait at Machynlleth for the service train to return from Aberystwyth was probably because of the latter's single platform.

The origins of the lateness of this service were thus a faulty locomotive and delays at Crewe, exacerbated on the return by the limitations of a single line railway: nothing whatever to do with the new signalling system.

The delays, though annoying, did not for us spoil a very enjoyable day out. We hope they will not discourage patronage of further such excursions."

A view from the Coast

More on two topics from last time, in the form of two cheers and several brickbats.

Are you in the right portion?

Two cheers first! This Autumn I happened to be at Telford Central and Birmingham New Street when portioned Cambrian trains were due. On each occasion, the automated announcements and displays included the coast portions in the right order. At last! (or so I thought ...)

However, more recently my wife has joined trains at Newtown and Wellington. At Newtown, the display and announcement had the portions in opposite orders: the conductor, as usual, was excellent in checking and moving everybody into the right portions before Machynlleth. Wellington display identified the Coast portion as the front two coaches, but showed the train dividing at Dovey Junction. The station announcement stated that the train divided at Machynlleth.

For stations to disagree with each other is bad enough, but conflicting information at a station is a disgrace.

Another brickbat goes to a down train which I crossed at Harlech, on which the destination indicator read 'Aberystwyth'.

Station names

The announcements [at Wellington this time] still mispronounce 'Talsarnau' and 'Abererch', as 'Talsarnoo' and 'Aberurch', the latter rhyming with 'church'.

Roger Whitehouse

Journey Check

Checking train service in real time

From The Cambrian Line website:
www.thecambrianline.co.uk

Arriva Trains Wales has just launched an improved real time train service information system called **Journey Check**. This enables you to instantly see that the train you intend to travel on is running according to schedule, or should problems arise, if delays are expected.

JourneyCheck is a dedicated website page which displays all current service and line running information including:

- Services running on time & to schedule.
- Details of any disruption to your selected route or train
- Station arrival and departure times
- Reported incidents impacting on services
- Planned disruption caused by Network Rail track engineering works impacting the Arriva Trains Wales network.

It gives you all the real time service information you need on your intended journey, helping you to make the best decisions to arrive at your final destination in good time & by the most convenient route. Arriva Trains Wales Journey Check is a FREE service that is available to everyone. There is no need to register – simply visit

www.journeycheck.com/arrivatrainswales

to get up to the minute updates on your favourite Arriva Trains Wales services.

Bookmark this site NOW in your web browser to get instant access to this NEW Arriva Trains Wales service. Arriva Trains Wales Journey Check - your fastest and best source of pre-travel information from the convenience of your computer or Smartphone. Now you can always know before you go!

NEW - Journey Check iPhone App

Arriva Trains Wales has launched a new way for customers to obtain train running information with the introduction of a FREE iPhone App providing live updates of train services on the Arriva Trains Wales network.

It gives an immediate impression of the status of all Arriva Trains Wales lines of route, with each of the 24 lines showing either Good Service, Minor Disruption or Major Disruption. In extreme cases the status could also be Amended Timetable, Road Replacement Transport or No Service. Travellers can also see details of individual trains e.g. if they are on time, delayed, cancelled or are subject to any alterations.

The details are consistent with the train service information available on the Arriva Trains Wales Journey Check website and in addition to providing real time updates, the App can be navigated to discover more details about a particular delay or line problem.

Information available via the App includes:

- Any train service disruption including cancellations, significant delays and alterations to the scheduled service.
- Line problems which are causing disruption on one or more routes - including updates on the likely extent of any delays and disruption.
- Also available are details of any planned engineering works that are scheduled to affect services on each route.
- Where services are running normally an indication of 'Good Service' to provide reassurance to customers.

iPhone users can download the free App by searching for ATW Journey Check in the App Store. The App is also compatible for the iPad. Download it to your iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch NOW and get access to the latest and best Arriva Trains Wales service information where ever you are, whenever you want.

Beyond the Wales and Border franchise - Questions and more questions

In early November the BBC ran a piece questioning the £170 million that Arriva receives from WG every year to run rail services - the ex Transport Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones told us that the franchise deal was flawed. Somehow I think we knew that already, the question as the late Charles Williams would have put is "what's being done about it?" To ordinary passengers the experience of rail travel is often being on an old, overcrowded train having paid what they consider over the odds for an expensive ticket. Sources in Cardiff tell me that breaking out of the current franchise arrangement has been looked at, but has been deemed too hard to achieve as the franchise agreement is so poorly written that it gives no reasonable get out clause for the WG and the cost of buying out Arriva would be horrendous.

In Wales two of our main political parties are suggesting that when the current franchise expires in December 2018 it will be replaced with a not-for-profit one modelled on the Welsh Water/Dwr Cymru example. So what is a not-for-profit franchise? Presumably the Wolmar question has been cracked. The transport journalist repeatedly asks "What is a franchise for?" so if variants are the answer the purpose of one must be clear, Yes/No? Well the theory goes that all the money creamed off as profits can be reinvested and the business can focus on Wales and its transport needs rather than foreign shareholders. Arriva's profit making activity and attitude have clearly got the backs up of many and whilst the profit they take each year could in theory be reinvested in improved services, the reality is that the amount freed up maybe doesn't match the expectation of showing the naughty state owned capitalists the red card. Roughly £10-12 million per annum is what it could be, however the question of the £170 million subsidy remains as it will still have to be made to create the surplus for investment. How do you create a surplus for investment and address the chronically increased costs in the privatised railway? How does not-for profit reduce costs?

What exactly is the long term plan after this not-for-profit franchise is achieved? The same can be said of 1948: having placed the railway in the hands of benign state rule what was the plan for the railways after nationalisation? Roll the clock forward to 1993, having removed the dead hand of state control from the railway and subjected it to the discipline of the markets, what was the plan for the railways after privatisation? Of course proponents of nationalisation and privatisation told us that the railways would skip happily through the flowers for evermore in their perfect new ownership structure. We all know it didn't work out that way. The one and possibly only good thing about hanging around until 2018 for change is that there is a long lead time in which to debate and influence such policies, and groups like SARPA will be very active in lobbying and persuading in the run up to it. No one wants a repeat of 2003.

Here's a starting point for a plan. ATW's rolling stock fleet and the replacement year by class assuming a 35 year lifespan.

Unit Type	Qty	Coaches	Year Built	Replacement Yr
Class 142	15	30	1985	2020
Class 143	15	30	1985	2020
Class 150	36	72	1986	2021
Class 153	8	8	1988	2023
Class 158	24	48	1992	2027
Class 175	27	69	2000	2035
LHCS WAG Express				
Stock 4 & 19 unused		Early to mid 1970's		2005-2010

It's very obvious that rolling stock replacements will feature highly in any post 2018 franchise regardless of other factors.

We know that:

- The Great Western Main Line to Cardiff will be electrified by 2017 and though currently the DfT say there's no business case to extend to Swansea with just one InterCity train an hour, but if local trains and freight hauled by electric traction were factored in the case could be made.
- The Cardiff Valleys are being seriously looked at as a follow on project, not only to continue the synergy benefits of electrification equipment and teams, but also as complete rolling stock replacement is on the cards anyway. As well as being life expired the 1980's BR DMU's also fall foul of disability legislation, which means that large sums would need to be spent on them to keep them running with DDA modifications after 2020 anyway.

So a South Wales focus becomes very clear by default. So what will be the plan be for West, Mid and North Wales plus the Marches? Every passenger knows every line is screaming out for more rolling stock now on existing services, and there are of course numerous instances of enhanced service plans that are on hold. We could rerun 2003 again by pretending that the long term upward growth in rail usage which has been with us since 1982 (not 1997 as some would have us believe) will go away or we have to come up with a coherent plan to address it.

Will that plan be?

1. A late life extension for the Class 150 which can then run local services away from South Wales freeing up 158's/175s for longer distance work?
2. Will cascades of modern DMU's from England/Scotland be an option?
3. Will we have to bite the bullet and buy new DMU's?
4. If so who else is buying them so we can combine orders to save money with a quantity build?
5. Also should we be moving away from leasing and PFI deals to fund rolling stock? As the franchise is not-for-profit should it be funding profits for ROSCO's?

Any of the above suggests that we need a route by route plan to quantify what's needed. So what's the plan? The Wales and Borders franchise runs three routes into major English cities. Chester to Manchester via Warrington, Shrewsbury/Crewe to Manchester via Stockport and Shrewsbury to Birmingham via Wolverhampton. With rising

demand for services into these cities will a not-for-profit franchise with a Cardiff focus be focussed on these routes or not?

The Heart of Wales, Pembroke Dock branch, Conwy Valley and Wrexham to Bidston lines will all have life expired, non DDA compliant stock on them in 2020. A clear plan is needed long before Dec 2018, yet more questions.

A coherent long term plan is needed for Wales and the Borders beyond the current franchise term, and this needs to be discussed out in the open with all involved, including the very knowledgeable rail user groups across the area - starting now.

Lets get the ball rolling – SARPA has some embryonic plans to organise a RUG conference on “beyond the Wales and Border franchise” in 2012. Further details to follow.

Subscriptions reminder for 2012

Please remember that the membership year runs from January to December, making subscriptions now due. It is still only £7 a year for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome. Our effectiveness is to a large degree dependent on our available funds. Please send your subs (and donations) including name and address to:

SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Newtown, Powys. SY16 2LH

SARPA email network is free to members: if you wish to be included please forward your email address.

SARPA Meetings in 2012

Tuesday February 7 th	Welshpool	TBC	TBC
Saturday 10 th March	Aberystwyth	Cambria Bldgs	1130
Tuesday April 3 rd	Newtown	Sportsman	1830
Saturday 5 th May	Tywyn	Tallyllyn Railway	1145
Saturday 2 nd June	Machynlleth	White Lion Hotel	1100
Saturday 7 th July	Borth	Railway Inn	1200
Saturday 4 th August	SARPA Summer	Trip detail TBC	
Tuesday 4 th September	Newtown	Sportsman	1830

AGM

Saturday 6 th October	Shrewsbury	Station	1300
Tuesday 6 th November	Aberystwyth	Cambria Bldgs	1745
Tuesday 4 th December	Newtown	Sportsman	1830

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is mid-wales.net

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

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
www.talylyn.co.uk/

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

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

Fairbourne Railway
www.fairbournerailway.com/index.htm

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene
<http://railphotos.fourecord.com/index.php>

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

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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